

## Book Review

*The editors are pleased to receive notice of books written or edited by educationists in Wales, or with Welsh connections or with a Welsh educational interest.*

Andy Howes, Susan M. B. Davies and Sam Fox, *Improving the Context for Inclusion: Personalising Development through Collaborative Action Research* (London, Routledge, 2009), 198pp. £22.99, ISBN 978-0-415-47342-2.

The challenge of developing more inclusive practices in schools is one which has proved problematic at both policy and practice level in all countries. As this book argues, this is partly because *Inclusion* is a vaguely defined field with multiple interpretations in use. Howes, Davies and Fox build on the work of some key theorists in the field, such as Ainscow, Booth and Dyson, et al. (*Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion*, 2006) in arguing that any discussion of Inclusion must articulate core educational values and principles aimed at removing barriers to educational opportunity for all students. This position distances itself from deficit models of Inclusion which are constructed in terms of Special Educational Needs, vulnerable groups

or responses to disciplinary exclusion and which increase segregatory practices in schools.

This book reports on the main findings from a funded ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) project entitled 'Prosiect Dysgu Cydradd' (Facilitating Teacher Engagement in More Inclusive Practice'. The researchers focused on exploring ways of 'facilitating teacher engagement' (p.53) in six secondary schools, mostly in Wales, including two Welsh medium schools, but with two in England. Staff worked collaboratively on action research projects which aimed to develop educational inclusion related to pupil engagement with learning. Each school's Educational Psychologist acted as a facilitator and critical friend to the teacher group in the school whilst the authors supported, monitored and studied this process.

One of the more interesting aspects of the book is the way in which the authors develop what is described as an 'Inclusive values and principles'

approach and provide a way of contextualizing this in relation to the development of inclusive school-based practice. They argue that whilst this approach requires schools to work through the consequences of a commitment to an Inclusive ideal such as equality of opportunity,

there is little certainty as to the practices which might best embody inclusive principles and values. As a consequence a gap often opens up between the values rhetoric and the development of practice. (p.8)

The result of this is that practitioners are then required to take responsibility for applying the implications of this in their own settings. This is problematic since a values approach demands committed engagement in the processes of change. Academics and professionals involved in developing more inclusive practices in schools will probably recognize this tension. There is little clear linkage between discourses of inclusion and discourses of teaching and learning and without this it is challenging for professionals to clarify implications for practice development.

The author's research indicates that an effective way of supporting practitioners in developing inclusive practices is to enable them to find starting points for investigation which they identify as important and relevant to their practice based around an inclusive focus. This develops the findings from an earlier TLRP project (Ainscow et al., 2006) which identified action research as a possible way of driving inclusive changes in schools but had little success in engaging secondary school teachers. This earlier project identified that the

role of the facilitator or critical friend might be crucial to the success of such projects. Howes, Davies and Fox argue that supporting teachers' critical reflections on their practice through a facilitated and collaborative action research process, based on inclusive values but driven by the practitioners own concerns and interests can lead to initiatives which have a real impact on the lives of young people in secondary schools. In doing so they reject models of change which assume that schools are homogeneous or at least homogeneous enough to fit with the expectations and assumptions such models make about the nature of schools and teachers as professionals. The authors argue that such models, which often construct teachers as technicians or 'deliverers' of knowledge and skills, have failed to transform schools so that they enable learning for all. Rather, teachers need to be given the 'responsibility to make sense of . . . ideas for the benefit of the young people with whom they work' (p. 37). This is an important argument which needs to be more openly discussed in educational discourse – teachers are individuals working in a range of different contexts and settings with different communities. What works in one school will not necessarily work in another; we need to address the challenges of Inclusion and school improvement at a micro level of school and teachers.

This is an important and timely book which provides a practical approach to enabling teachers to engage with Inclusion in their schools and classrooms. It is relevant for both

schools and students working on  
Masters and Doctoral study.

Gallannaugh, F., Howes, A. and  
Smith, R., *Improving Schools, Developing  
Inclusion* (London, Routledge, 2006).

*Reference*

Ainscow, M., Booth, T., Dyson, A.,  
Farrell, P., Frankham, J.,

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Egan, B. (1990). 'Design and technology in the primary classroom: equalizing opportunities', in E. Tutchell (ed.), *Dolls and Dungarees*, Milton Keynes, Open University, 36–45.

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