

Reflective teaching, inclusive teaching and the teacher's tasks in the inclusive classroom. A literary investigation.

The broad purpose of this literary investigation is three-fold. One, to continue the process of giving credence to reflective teaching, which is integral to effective teaching and learning. Two, to make explicit the connections between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching. Three, to infer key tasks for teachers in the inclusive classroom.

Single searches of keywords and phrases took place during a selected month of the year. Searches occurred during the first, third and last weeks of that month. Through a process of winnowing and the use of various search criteria, relevant articles were selected for inclusion in the review.

The literature review reveals that the following features of reflective teaching connect with and are fundamental to inclusive teaching: giving careful consideration or thought; questioning personal assumptions, values, and beliefs; taking initiatives; using intuition; taking part in development and change; and the use of journal writing. Examples of teachers' tasks in the inclusive classroom include giving careful consideration to what is to be taught and how it is to be thought—rather than who is to learn; considering the learning needs of all students—not just those with additional needs; questioning beliefs and rejecting deterministic and associated ideas; reflecting on the classroom situation; constantly seeking out and trying new things to support all learners; discussing with colleagues new initiatives in order to receive feedback; examining, framing and attempting to solve dilemmas of the classroom; using journals to track students' learning; and taking responsibility for one's professional growth and understanding.

Keywords: Inclusion in education; inclusive pedagogy; reflection; reflective teaching and learning; special educational needs

Introduction

In recent decades, the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) in the regular classroom has become an area of research interest and debate. This has led to terms such as inclusive teaching—which Rafferty, Boettcher and Griffin (2001) define

as the process of educating students with disabilities in the regular education classroom—and inclusive pedagogy, inclusive education and inclusion in education. The works of Florian for example, Florian and Linklater (2010), Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) and Florian and Spratt (2013) have been frequently cited and contributed to a developed understanding of inclusive teaching. These and others of Florian's work are extensively referenced throughout this paper.

The need to be inclusive has also impacted the education and training of teachers. Teacher education providers must now equip student teachers to function in inclusive classrooms and school environments (Lambe, 2007). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), through its Salamanca Statement in 1994, also helped to drive interests in inclusive teaching in the classroom and give it importance. The statement uses the word 'change' a number of times. It points out that for inclusion to occur, this will involve changes in curriculum, lesson content, teaching approaches, structures and strategies for all students.

Reflective teaching, on the other hand, has not only emerged as a dominant form of teaching but is perennial and worldwide. See for example Schön, (1983) and (1987); Valli, (1997); Zeichner & Liston, (1996); Ghaye & Ghaye, (1999); Spaulding & Wilson, (2002) and Minott, (2009). Despite the importance of reflective teaching and inclusive teaching, there are few writings which clearly and vividly connects these two teaching approaches and display the role of reflection in inclusive teaching.

To aid in filling this seeming literary shortage, I carried out an investigation of literature on both subjects. The main question occupying my thoughts throughout the investigative process was, 'What is the connection between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching?' Providing answers to this question also aid in continuing the process

of giving credence to reflective teaching as being integral to effective teaching and learning.

The results of the literary investigation revealed that there are features of reflective teaching that connects with and are fundamental to inclusive teaching. This paper outlines and discusses the finding of the investigation and the inferences made about the tasks of teachers in the inclusive classroom.

Literature search and selection procedure.

During March 2017 article searches took place. Single searches took place during the first, third and last weeks of the month. This was done with the hope that new articles added during that month would be captured. Unfortunately, no new articles appeared.

The library browser includes many databases. Among these are Elton, B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), British Education Index (BEI), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Australian Education Index (AEI), JSTOR, Wiley, and Directory of Open Access.

Each time a search occurred the following actions and results followed. Using the advanced feature of the library browser, I typed in the following key terms Reflective Teaching, Inclusive Pedagogy, Inclusive Teaching, Inclusion in Education and Inclusion in Teaching and Reflection. This combination of keywords resulted in 367 articles. To select relevant articles, they had to be published between 2007 and 2017. I wanted to review recent studies. This added search parameter brought the total articles retrieved down to 344. The articles also had to make specific reference to reflective teaching and inclusive teaching or pedagogy. This added parameter returned 2 articles. While these were important to the investigation, others addressing general teaching practices in inclusive teaching and reflective teaching were consulted.

Rationale for the investigation

There are four reasons why this investigation is important. First, both reflective teaching and inclusive teaching are important to teachers and students. Since its introduction through the celebrated works of Donald Schön, the literature which focuses on the reflective teaching approach has grown exponentially. The approach is now a dominant pedagogical approach and a perennial and worldwide topic. Increasingly, the application of inclusive teaching has become the dominant trend when addressing students' difference in the classroom (Florian and Linklater 2010; Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011; Florian and Spratt 2013; Mintz and Wyse 2015; de Boer, Pijl & Minnaert 2010 and Ferguson, 2008).

Second, the investigation is important because it contributes to filling a seeming literary shortage. There seem to be few local and international writings which explicitly address the connection. As indicated in the foregoing discussion, only 2 articles with combined reference to 'inclusive pedagogy or teaching' and 'reflective teaching' emerged during searches.

Third, the results of the investigation could be a useful teaching resource for lectures of both subjects and teachers in general. This is so because it makes clear what should be the tasks of the teacher in the inclusive classroom.

Fourth and most important, the investigation continues the process of giving credence to reflective teaching as integral to effective teaching and learning.

The investigation reveals 5 features of reflective teaching that connects with and are fundamental to inclusive teaching. These are outlined here and use as a framework to guide the discussion of the findings in the next section of this paper.

Feature of reflective teaching 1: Giving careful consideration or thought, being involved in disciplined intellectual criticism; combining balanced judgement with

knowledge of context (Minott, 2009). *Feature of reflective teaching 2*: Questioning personal assumptions, values and beliefs (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). *Feature of reflective teaching 3*: Taking initiatives and using intuition (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). *Feature of reflective teaching 4*: Taking part in development and initiating changes (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). *Feature of reflective teaching 5*: Utilising Journals (Clarke, 2004; Chitpin, 2006; Uline, Wilson, & Cordry, 2004).

Connecting reflective teaching and inclusive teaching

The essence of this paper is summarized in the thought that one way teachers improve and create classroom and school level practices for all students is via self-reflective and collaborative strategies (De Vroey, Struyf, & Petry, 2016).

This section displays, explains and demonstrates this idea by making clear the features of reflective teaching that connects with, and are fundamental to inclusive teaching.

Feature of reflective teaching 1

Giving careful consideration or thought

Giving careful consideration or thought is a feature of reflective teaching that connects with and is fundamental to inclusive teaching. This is so because, firstly, it is argued that to teach inclusively require teachers: shifting the focus from one that is concerned with only students who have been identified as having ‘additional needs’ to the learning of all children in the classroom, locating problems in the environment, rather than as deficits in learners, focussing on what is to be taught (and how) rather than who is to learn it and engaging in reflective responses to supporting difficulties students encounter in their learning (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011, Florian & Spratt, 2013). Teachers' ability to give careful consideration or thought is required if these facets of

inclusive teaching are to be realised. For it is only through the act of considering or thinking that a decision by the teacher to embrace these facets of inclusive teaching will be reached. This connects with reflective teaching when Elder and Paul (1994) and Halpern (1996) point out that, by carefully considering classroom issues, reflective teachers look for alternatives. The fact that alternatives are sought, imply an inclination or willingness—on the part of the reflective teacher—to shift focus, see things differently and embrace new perspectives.

Secondly, in the inclusive classroom the teacher locate problems in the environment—teaching style, the content being taught and how it's being taught and classroom arrangements—not in the child (Florian & Spratt, 2013). To achieve this requires not only a shift in thinking but also an understanding of the dynamics of teaching and the classroom environment. One key facet of the reflective process involves teachers' developing an understanding of the dynamics of teaching and learning and the classroom environment by using self-directed critical thinking and ongoing enquires in their practice (Calderhead 1992).

Thirdly, I can infer from the work of Florian & Spratt, (2013) that a reflective response such as a teacher's decision to help a child develop confidence in a subject results from the teacher's careful consideration and thought. The use of the phrase 'reflective responses' by Florian & Spratt, (2013) not only help to give credence to this thought but is also an indicator of the connection between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching. This is so because embedded in the phrase 'reflective responses' and central to the example cited is the idea of engaging in careful consideration or thought, recalling and evaluating information, and being involved in a process of disciplined intellectual criticism, which utilizes balanced judgement (Minott, 2009).

So what does this mean for the teacher in the inclusive classroom? This means that in the inclusive classroom the teacher should give careful consideration about what is to be taught, ‘how’ rather than ‘who’ is to learn, and to the learning needs of all students— not just those with ‘additional needs’, classroom environment as well as engage in reflective responses to support difficulties which learners encounter in their learning (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011, Florian & Spratt, 2013).

Feature of reflective teaching 2

Questioning personal assumptions, values and beliefs

Questioning personal assumptions, values and beliefs is another feature of reflective teaching that connects with and is essential to inclusive teaching. This is so because teaching inclusively requires the examination of beliefs and being able to reject some.

Florian & Spratt (2013), argue that to teach inclusively require that the teacher reject “deterministic beliefs about ability as being fixed and the associated idea that the presence of some will hold back the progress of others and believe that all children will make progress, learn and achieve”(p. 124 & 127). Zeichner and Liston (1996) stated:

If a teacher never questions the goals, values and beliefs that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches, or never examines his or her assumptions, then it is our belief that this individual is not engaged in reflective teaching (p. 1).

The connection between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching is obvious from the foregoing discussion. What then are tasks of the teacher in the inclusive classroom? One task of the teacher is to question his or her goals, values and beliefs that guide his or her work, the context in which he or she teaches and examine his or her assumptions. The other is to provide learning opportunities which require students to engage in

conversations, ask each other questions and interact to work out answers (Florian and Linklater, 2010).

Feature of reflective teaching 3

Taking initiatives and using intuition

Similar to reflective teaching, inclusive teaching involves taking initiatives and using one's intuition. This is because fundamentally, the very act of teaching inclusively requires creativity. For example,

creating learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life; extending what is ordinarily available for all learners (creating a rich learning community) rather than using teaching and learning strategies that are suitable for most alongside something 'additional' or 'different' for some who experience difficulties; and using a variety of grouping strategies to support everyone's learning rather than relying on ability grouping to separate ('able' from 'less able' students); and using formative assessment to support learning (Florian and Back-Hawkins, 2011).

The connection between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching can be seen in the fact that Markham (1999) stated that to teach reflectively requires the use of intuition, initiatives, values, and experience during teaching, and exercising judgment about the use of various teaching and research skills. This results in improved classroom encounters and activities for students.

Additionally, key features of inclusive teaching such as, seeking out and trying new things to support learners, working collaboratively with various colleagues and sharing ideas about teaching and learning (Florian and Back-Hawkins, 2011) are also important out-workings of reflective teaching. Markham (1999) also made the point that reflective teaching demands the sharing of ideas with others and engaging in various discourse as a part of a collaborative experience.

In the inclusive classroom, this means that the teacher should reflect on his or her classroom situation, constantly seeking out and trying new things to support all learners. He or she should also discuss with colleagues any new initiatives so as receive feedback (Day, 1999).

Feature of reflective teaching 4

Taking part in development and change

The idea of taking part in development and change is a feature of reflective teaching that connects with and is also fundamental to inclusive teaching. It seems to be a task of the teacher as a professional to seek to create space for inclusion and the activities in the classroom, which facilitate inclusion by clear articulation and demonstration of facets of the teaching approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The creation of space implies development and change. Development and changes which result from teachers in the inclusive classroom include: seeking and trying out new ways of working to support the learning of all children; working with and through other adults in ways that respect the dignity of learners as full members of the classroom; forming partnerships with teachers or other adults who work alongside learners in the classroom; engaging in discussions with other teachers and professionals outside the classroom, and experimenting and striving to use different strategies to help children learn (Florian & Linklater 2010 and Florian & Spratt, 2013)

The practical out-workings of creating a space for inclusive teaching—specifically the acts of seeking and trying out new ways of working, collaboration and experimenting with different teaching strategies— connects with reflective teaching in that reflective teaching involves teachers analysing, discussing, evaluating, changing and developing own practice (Bengtsson, 1993). Integral to these reflective processes are such

activities as trying out new ways of working and experimenting with different teaching strategies.

The task of the teacher in the inclusive classroom is to examine, frame and attempt to solve dilemmas of the classroom and by so doing involve him or herself in classroom development and change which encourage inclusion (Zeichner and Liston, 1996).

Feature of reflective teaching 5

Journaling

Journaling is a feature of reflective teaching that connects with inclusive teaching. Florian & Linklater (2010) hinted at the use of journals as possibly useful in the inclusive classroom to note students' progress. Journaling, however, is featured prominently in reflective teaching. Writers such as Clarke (2004) and Chitpin (2006) argue that one means of facilitating and promoting reflective thinking is the use of journals. Riley-Doucet and Wilson (1997) state that journaling is a means by which students can scrutinize their own learning experiences and I will add teachers to this process of scrutinising own learning.

What does this mean for teaching in the inclusive classroom? It is possible, expedient and beneficial to students that teachers in the inclusive classroom use journals to track students learning and progress. However, to extricate the tracking of teachers' own learning via the use of journal would be a missed opportunity for professional growth and understanding.

Summary

Having said all this, what exactly is the connection between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching, and what are the tasks for teachers in the inclusive classroom? Answers to these questions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the research findings.

<p>This paper reveals that reflective teaching and inclusive teaching involve:</p>	<p>Tasks for teachers in the Inclusive classrooms.</p>
<p style="background-color: blue; color: black; text-align: center;"> </p>	<p style="background-color: blue; color: black; text-align: center;"> </p>
<p><i>Giving careful consideration or thought so as to shift focus, see things differently and support students' difficulties in a reflective manner.</i></p>	<p>In the inclusive classroom the teacher gives careful consideration or thought about: what is to be taught, (and how) rather than who is to learn and to the learning needs of all students not just those with 'additional needs'. They also consider the classroom environment and engage in reflective responses to support difficulties which learners encounter in their learning (Florian and Black-Hawkins 2011, Florian & Spratt, 2013).</p>
<p><i>Questioning personal assumptions, values, and beliefs which guides teachers work. Sometimes having to reject some beliefs.</i></p>	<p>One task of the teacher in the inclusive classroom is to question his or her beliefs and to reject deterministic beliefs and associated ideas (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Another task is to provide learning opportunities which require students to engage in conversations, ask each other questions and interact to work out answers (Florian and Linklater, 2010).</p>
<p><i>Taking initiatives and using intuition.</i></p> <p>Fundamentally, teaching inclusively requires creativity or initiative. For example, creating learning opportunities</p>	<p>In the inclusive classroom, the teacher should reflect on his or her classroom situation, constantly seeking out and trying new things to support all learners.</p>

<p>that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life. Reflective teaching also involves using one's intuition, initiatives, values, and experience during teaching, which can result in improved classroom encounters and activities for students.</p>	<p>Discussing with colleagues any new initiatives so as receive feedback (Day 1999).</p>
<p>Encouraging and enabling change in thinking, systems and structures.</p>	<p>A task of the teacher as a professional in the inclusive classroom is to seek to 'create space' for inclusion and the activities in the classroom which facilitate inclusion, by clear articulation and demonstration of facets of the teaching approach (Florian & Spratt, 2013).</p> <p>It is also the task of the teacher to examine, frame and attempt to solve dilemmas of the classroom and by so doing involve him or herself in classroom development and changes which encourage inclusion (Zeichner and Liston, 1996).</p>
<p>The use of journaling.</p>	<p>It is possible, expedient and beneficial to students that teachers in the inclusive classroom use journals to track students learning and progress. However, the tracking of teachers' own learning via the use of a journal is also expedient for professional growth and understanding.</p>

Conclusion

This literary investigation makes clear the connections between reflective teaching and inclusive teaching. In this sense, the aim of the paper has been achieved. Additionally, the broader purpose to continue the process of giving credence to reflective teaching as integral to teaching and learning has also been achieved.

Having said all this, it is the combined use of all five features of reflective teaching that make inclusive teaching possible. The fact that this conclusion can be supported by the findings in this investigation suggest that teachers are already employing these features of reflective teaching in the inclusive classroom, may be even unknowingly and without regards for the label under which such actions are placed. This occurrence is both positive and beneficial for all students irrespective of their learning and other needs.

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