

## DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE PRACTICES IN THE CLASSROOM

*Why do we engage all students in inclusive practice behaviours?*

### INTRODUCTION

As a relieving teacher, I often go to classrooms where students sit with peers who belong to the same ethnic or ability group. I notice that there is very little or no racial mixing in the room. Europeans sit with Europeans, Asians with Asians, Pasifika students with their Pasifika peers, Māori students with other Māori students and so on. Neither there is mixing according to different abilities. High achievers tend to sit together, while students with special needs and less engaged students sit in their own groups. In addition, not only do students sit separately but many of them only listen to the contributions of peers from their own ethnic or ability groups. When others, who belong to a different group, start speaking, I notice students might begin to fidget, talk, go onto their mobile phones or start writing in their books.

The pedagogical challenges involved in teaching in such diverse classrooms, and in classrooms where similar segregation and exclusion happens, can be enormous. How do we as educators create opportunities for students to be with each other in ways other than their usual, habitual engagement and to help them challenge the assumptions that support segregation from each other? What needs to change in order for students from different ethnic or ability groups to feel comfortable sitting in mixed groups and paying attention to each other, independent of which category group they think they belonged to? These questions are important to ask as there are real-time consequences for students who experience the outcomes of exclusionary practices. Winslade and Williams (2012) provide a range of examples from a secondary school of responses to differences that can exclude certain students from full membership of a class. A student with red hair is told to dye her hair, one with artificial limbs is often kicked in the leg and called “legless”, another student is called “too fat to fit in a car”, a student using a wheelchair is called “handicapper” and his orthopedic shoes are often kicked, another student, who is accused of looking at others inappropriately, is called a faggot and one is called “vertically challenged”. Unsurprisingly, most of the differences targeted relate to bodily morphology: an unusual hair colour, being under or overweight, too short or too tall, using a wheelchair and so on. The punishments of students who are ‘othered’ in these very familiar ways, in Winslade’s and Williams’s examples, can include stealing their books and pens, spreading rumours about them,

jumping on their backs, punching and kicking them, laughing at them, and issuing threats of beating up.

This chapter argues that use of skills based approaches that focus on either the kind of teaching strategies teachers use to better meet the learning needs of students with disabilities or on upskilling students with special needs so that they can participate in the daily activities of regular classrooms, are not enough to overcome barriers to inclusion. In order to achieve the successful inclusion of students with disabilities, special needs and other differences in regular classrooms teachers also have to engage *all the other students* in reflecting on the kind of assumptions, values and norms that shape classroom behaviours, interactions, relationships and attitudes towards difference and diversity. Such reflection would support what I would term ‘identity work’. Here it is noted that this work should not replace teachers’ skill development or the use of specialist interventions, such as adaptations of the regular curriculum in order to make it more accessible to students with physical or intellectual impairments. Neither should it replace the teaching of life and social skills to students with special needs. What this kind of work can do is enable both teachers and students to develop the skills necessary to authentically provide possibilities for developing inclusive environments that are capable of bringing all students with disabilities, and any other differences, ‘in from the margins to the center’ (Biesta, 2004; Lenz-Taguchi, 2009) of classroom life.

### **DOING IDENTITY WORK**

Successful inclusion in any classroom community – seen as students authentically responding to the reality of difference and diversity – is said to largely depend on how the students concerned take up their identities. This factor has been emphasised by a number of researchers and theorists of inclusion, most prominently in relation to minority students’ cultural identities (Bishop & Berryman, 2006, Noguera, 2008; Wearmouth, Glynn & Berryman, 2005). For example, Wearmouth, Glynn and Berryman (2005) argue that inclusion can be interpreted “as the extent to which students are able to participate in the school community on the basis of who they are, without having to leave their cultural identity at the gate” (p. 70). Although these theorists and others, see for example Blair (2004), Noguera (2008) and Osborne (2004), view identity as multiple – simultaneously being a learner and a member of a particular ethnic group, among other things, – and a product of two-way interactions between communities and individuals, the terminology used when speaking about identity does not always make such distinction obvious. The phrase ‘leaving identity at the gate’ can be interpreted to mean that identity is a possession or a thing that can be taken or left by the person having it.

Students themselves often tend to think of their identities as singular and static, for example they might select one aspect of their identity when deciding who they prefer

to be, – being black and not white – over other aspects, such as being a learner, a friend, a son/daughter or a classmate. Noguera (2008) found that some students might feel compelled to privilege their cultural identity, in the face of real or perceived threats from a racially hostile school system. This can result in an *either/or* rather than a *both/and* approach, with students refusing to perform behaviours that support learning. If students validate their preferred identities by defining what or who they *do not* want to be, then it is likely that they will reject rather than accommodate certain differences. Rejection can manifest in relationship practices ranging from ignoring to more serious acts of hostility or bullying towards those who are seen to possess unwanted differences. In Noguera's study African-American and Hispanic students regarded learning behaviours to be representations of whiteness, and subsequently as undesirable and unnecessary practices for their identities. However, in doing so, these students did not only disassociate themselves from those they considered 'geeks' or 'nerds' but they also unintentionally colluded in their own underachievement. Challenging the normative standards that inform a school's and students' dominant relationship practices *and* the ways students perform their identity work will make a difference for how inclusive classroom relationships are developed.

Further, if identity is defined as one's membership in distinct and fixed category groups, for example being able bodied or disabled, and Māori or Pakeha, then an individual's differences from others become important. In this scenario, some differences will be classified as desirable and others as non-desirable in relation to them. Less significance will be given to the interactional dynamics that might open or close possibilities for persons to take up particular category memberships. If, however, difference is defined as the capacity for becoming something other than before, and categories of identity as flexible, (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), then the space for mechanisms of exclusion to operate will be limited. This point is returned to under the headings 'normalisation' and 'becoming'.

Physically placing disabled students or students with special needs in regular classrooms is relatively easy to do. With most buildings having disabled access nowadays, the physical obstacles to inclusion have been removed. However, it seems that attitudinal barriers to inclusion still exist. Some schools employ subtle and more obvious tactics that encourage disabled students' enrolment elsewhere (Kearney, 2009). Conceptualising identity as if it was something fixed, or more like a personal attribute or possession, can support the belief that in order to achieve successful inclusion it is enough to locate individual students' bodies in the school and /or the mainstream classroom (Biesta, 2004). Taking students into the centre from the margin will also guarantee that students' identities will be transported with them wherever they go as they are located inside them. Less attention will be paid to the relational production of identities and the role others might play in students' taking up their preferred identities. Lenz Taguchi (2009) argues that instead of placing students in the centre inclusion is more likely to be achieved if the boundaries of the centre are stretched.

This chapter argues that the taking up of preferred identities is the product of complex interactional dynamics between all members of a learning community. It is claimed that the concepts of *normalisation* and *becoming* can usefully illuminate how the members of communities can engage in relationship practices that reduce possibilities for exclusion. These concepts offer a view of identity that is shifting and mobile rather than fixed, and multiple and changing rather than singular and coherent. Subjectification is the more often used term to denote the process of taking up identities, with a focus on what a person can or cannot become in particular contexts (Davies, 2006; Lagermann, 2014; Lenz Taguchi, 2009). I will keep on using the term identity because of its familiarity but I hope to be able to show that identity is never static and singular. Rather, it emerges through persons' ongoing participation in processes of both normalising and becoming. In the following I outline what the concepts of *normalisation* and *becoming* can offer for understanding and doing relationships in classroom communities that strive to limit possibilities for exclusion.

## **NORMALISATION**

Normalisation or normalising is the term used to describe the processes and practices that together produce some categories of identity as accepted, recognised and normal within a community, while other categories come to be considered as 'abnormal' (Davies, 2013). As all categories depend on their opposites or binaries for their definition, it is the socially more accepted and valued pair of any binary that will be considered morally superior, while its opposite will be deemed undesirable. Most people would consider being able bodied and healthy more desirable than being disabled. Some student groups would aspire to become thin and they would punish those who are overweight by name calling. Permanent teachers might be more valued and treated with more respect than relievers by some students. What standards of appearance, behaviour, position in the organisational hierarchy or values are idealised in a place, and thus believed to deserve recognition, usually depends on what moral order the most powerful members of the community support or accept as desirable. Any differences that they deem valuable are accepted but others might be rejected, sanctioned and punished (Davies, 2013; Davies, De Schauwer, Claes, De Munck, Van de Putte, & Vertichele, 2013). This explains why some schools enroll all students who live in their zone while others list reasons to parents, in subtle ways, why their child in a wheelchair or with developmental delay might benefit from enrolment at another school. Students identifying as LGBT might openly claim their differences in some schools while in others they do not feel safe to publicly acknowledge them.

Judith Butler (2004) and Bronwyn Davies (2006) propose that norms create the conditions of possibility for particular identities and lives. When a norm or normative category becomes more socially valued than other categories, people will voluntarily

comply with its prescriptions by regulating their bodies in order to fit the ideals that the particular norm prescribes.

Saltmarsh and Youdell (2004) term the normalisation processes working in a particular school 'educational triage', which includes resource and space allocation and organisational practices that benefit those students who fit a school's notion of the ideal student subject. They provide examples of educational practices from a school that clearly privilege those students who fit the category of identity, and can demonstrate those personal qualities and skills, that the school aspires to develop in its students. Students who are good at sport, and consequently can contribute to growing the positive reputation of the school through their sporting achievements, receive more teacher attention and have the privilege to use purpose built training spaces in contrast to students with special needs, who are relegated to play cricket in a hot, unshaded quad in the summer heat, while also having to watch they do not break any windows.

Categories of normality are usually arbitrarily selected and therefore the categories that are recognised as normal and desirable might differ in different locations. The same differences can be accepted as desirable one minute but found undesirable and a basis for exclusion the next. Davies (2009) provides the example of a young boy and girl who, despite their gender, ethnic and social class differences play happily together at home, using a bed as if it was a trampoline. However, the boy refuses to play with the girl at school because she sniffs, in spite of him also being a sniffer. At school the children are unable to transcend their different categories of gender and race. Those categories work as a normalising force, keeping them separate from each other. This example suggests that both norms and category membership can be unstable, unpredictable and shifting, or as Shildrich (2007) would say 'leaky'. Anyone can end up either accepted or rejected for the same attributes or behaviours.

Davies (2011) proposes that various forms of bullying, ranging from name calling to extreme forms of physical violence, can be considered "an excessive and misguided defence of a fixed and dominant normative moral order" (p. 278). The boundaries of normal are policed when an arbitrarily established, unwritten norm becomes the moral code and the benchmark, against which people's appearances and behaviours are judged by those who occupy powerful positions in their community. Those who satisfy the criteria of 'normality' are recognised but those who are seen to digress from these criteria are punished, by various forms of bullying. In Davies's example some girls beat up a Somali boy who thinks he can join the 'catch and kiss game' they are playing. He is judged to fall outside the category of acceptable persons and he is punished by his head being hit against the wall. The examples from Winslade and Williams (2012) at the beginning of this chapter also demonstrate how the policing of normal can play out in schools by punishing differences.

Schools, communities and societies create norms and rules that prescribe both acceptable conduct and the qualities of the kinds of persons who are judged to be

normal or proper citizens. Norms also create a desire to belong to and to be recognised as belonging to accepted categories. Butler (2004) argues that we all depend on norms or categories for our existence and need to be recognised as belonging to them. Our humanity and very existence rely on recognition. Those who are repeatedly recognised as falling within normative and socially valued categories can have a viable life. Those who are repeatedly seen to fall short become abject 'Others', who are relegated to the group of undesirable and often invisible subjects.

The desire to fit normative categories creates two kinds of vulnerabilities. On the one hand, we are dependent on others for recognition, as it is others who will decide whether our behaviours constitute compliance and whether we deserve to be acknowledged or not. On the other hand, we can also be vulnerable to our own judgement as we internalise norms and want to live according to their specifications, constantly measuring whether we have lived up to them or not (Davies et al., 2013).

Every community engages in processes of normalisation. School and classroom communities are no exception. Even when a school claims to be inclusive, it might be possible to find students there who are locked in one or more negative, and socially undervalued or dismissed categories. Possibly most of us have been deemed to be undesirable on a few occasions, due to our differences in weight, hair colour, friendship choices, abilities or disabilities. Being judged to fall outside categories of normality becomes a problem when a student is permanently locked in a singular negative category and his or her movement is blocked (Lagermann, 2014). When a student is prevented by others to transcend their negative category membership, for example they are viewed as naughty, violent, or dumb all the time and their positive qualities are not acknowledged, then mechanisms of exclusion are at play.

Norms provide certainty and safety and the knowledge necessary to know how to act in particular situations. Communities would not be able to function without policing at least some boundaries of what they accept as normal. Teachers and students have to agree on what behaviours they consider supportive of teaching and learning, and thus acceptable in the classroom, and what behaviours should be 'policed' as unacceptable because they undermine learning or because they respond disrespectfully to differences. However, it is also important to identify those relational practices that in spite of having exclusionary effects on some students or student groups, still manage to become the habitual way of relating in a classroom or school community. It is important to explore who benefits from such practices, who is disadvantaged, and who can be himself or herself if she or he repeatedly performs or feels obliged to perform them.

The concept of normalising can help identify instances of exclusion. When a particular student is repeatedly cited by others as naughty, disabled, angry, violent, ugly and so on, and they are unable to become someone other or different from their negative categorisation, then they are trapped within the boundaries of normative categories. If we wanted to establish inclusive classroom communities then educators

have to provide opportunities for young people to examine and begin to understand the power effects of such normative categories (Foucault, 1981). They have to develop students' capacity to critique the norms that shape their behaviours and relationships with others. Inclusive relationship practices are ways of interacting that open up category boundaries and allow students to transcend negative categories. Such relationship practices increase persons' capacity for becoming. In the following I will briefly summarise how the concept of *becoming* can usefully inform relationship practices that reduce the effects of normalising.

## **BECOMING**

The notion of *becoming* is based on fluid rather than fixed and rigid categories. Instead of categorical differences, it is *differenciation*, or in other words a person's capacity to continuously become something other and different from what he or she was before, that is important (Davies, 2009; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). When persons have the capacity for becoming, then they are able to unsettle the usual, habitual division of the world into distinct and familiar categories by interrupting persons' category maintenance work. Previously unpredictable and new configurations can be created along with new ways of being in and thinking about the world. In Davies's (2009) previously referred to example of the boy and the girl the space of the home opens up possibilities for their becoming something other than being the members of a particular gender and race. The children no longer "belong to a category, but more in the nature of an event, or a series of events" (p. 19). The school's space, however, shuts down opportunities for becoming someone new. The little boy only feels comfortable with taking up his identity from the familiar categories of being a boy and not a girl and being white. The children's categorical differences separate them, and the world as usual is re-inscribed as opposed to creating a different, previously unpredictable way of being together. In classrooms where there were opportunities created for becoming, the students from different racial and ability groups mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, would at least sometimes sit comfortably with each other and they would show interest in the contributions of different others. On those occasions they would belong to the event of engaging with different others rather than to categories of race and ability.

The notion of becoming can be useful to distinguish inclusive and exclusive relationship practices. Inclusive classrooms are spaces that open rather than shut down opportunities for becoming. Students in such classrooms are able to overcome and go beyond their usual category memberships and they are able to belong to an event rather than a category. In the remainder of this chapter I briefly describe, with examples from actual classrooms, how it might be possible to increase opportunities for becoming within the day-to-day activities of schools.

## TEACHING CHILDREN TO THINK

Davies (2011) claims that teaching students to think can help them understand their contributions to the normalisation processes that operate in their communities. If students can understand the harmful effects of normative categorisation, and at the same time they can critique norms, then the boundaries of categories of normality could be stretched and persons' capacity for becoming could be increased. Foucault's (1981) ideas can be helpful with the practice of critique that could be included in classroom discussions.

A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based... To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy. (p. 456)

Practices and behaviours that are dominant in a particular place at a particular time can usually be performed in a habitual manner, without much effort and thought. They can, therefore, become taken for granted and accepted as truths, which can make their harmful effects unavailable for reflection or any kind of scrutiny. Every time such a taken-for-granted practice is performed unexamined and unchallenged, it continues to disadvantage some students or teachers. When seating arrangements according to ethnic and ability category membership have become the norm or 'the way we do things here', they will not be seen by students as harmful or limiting. Neither will those arrangements be reflected on by group members. It is exactly because of how such normative practices manage to escape any kind of scrutiny that it is important for teachers and students to trouble them, and to expose how those practices separate particular groups from each other in ways that are not immediately obvious.

The norms that are maintained through habitual citations (Davies, 2008) or in other words, by repetitive performances of the same actions, behaviours and ways of relating also maintain a status quo that serves the interests of powerful groups and alliances. If this natural order of things remains unchallenged, then power relationships can become fixed and frozen. Foucault (2000) warns that fixed power relationships can turn into a state of domination, in which the oppressed party has no scope for movement or action. In Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, a smooth space, or in other words a space that supports opportunities for becoming, becomes more striated. I also teach classes where a small group of students who are disengaged from learning define the classroom culture. They usually spend the majority of lesson time, in spite of teachers using a range of behaviour management and relationship building practices, with activities other than learning, including talking and conducting their own business on social media. They frequently produce extremely high levels of noise, which can be very distracting for students who want to engage in learning. Yet, the engaged students are often scared to speak up, tolerating in silence conditions that are not conducive to learning. When asked how they can study in such a disruptive



environment, they say they had got used to it. They seem to accept that they cannot change the status quo and the power relationships in their classroom. Foucault (1981) emphasises the importance of critiquing and problematising such power relationships and the norms that support them.

But how can teachers make acts that are too easy, or have become accepted as the natural order of things, harder? Foucault (1972, 1981) invites us to reverse what is seen as the natural order by making undesirable the practice that has become the norm, while normalising an alternative practice that is either openly rejected or pushed out of conscious awareness altogether. In the previous example, a more quiet working environment would be shown as normal or useful, while the current natural order of extreme noise levels would be problematised. When teachers notice repetitious, habitual performances of practices that disadvantage, target for bullying or disrespectfully respond to some groups of students or teachers, they can facilitate classroom conversations about those practices. Seating arrangements according to ethnic and ability groups, turning the classroom into a noisy and chaotic environment, name calling based on differences in appearance, and ignoring relieving teachers' instructions implying that 'I only have to do my best for my real teachers' are just some of the habitual practices that are worth reflecting on because of their harmful effects on particular groups of students and teachers.

Kecskemeti, Kaveney, Gray and Drewery (2013) developed a process of circle conversation that they employed in such situations in a secondary school over three years. Their format of circle conversation actively seeks to surface and identify statements that not only describe but excuse those habitual practices in a classroom that respond to difference and diversity negatively. It is usually sufficient to start such conversations by describing what affected students and teachers have noticed, without giving their names, about what might be happening in the classroom and then ask everyone to tell what they think. From the statements that students share with their peers and teachers it is possible to infer those, usually hidden, norms, that maintain exclusive practices and/or make them seem reasonable and acceptable.

For example, if students repeatedly avoid sitting next to a student with disabilities or they mock them, a discussion can be started by stating "*I and other teachers have noticed that in recent weeks nobody in this class wants to sit next to Zoe and Ben. When I enter the class I see you walking past them without acknowledging them or even looking in their direction. When Zoe and Ben try to speak and contribute to discussions, most of you stop paying attention and start talking or fidgeting. What have you noticed and what do you think is happening?*" Every student in the class is given a turn to share what their view is on the problem. The teacher-facilitator has to be skilled in identifying themes in the statements shared and/or statements that infer to norms that justify the behaviours of non-disabled class members. Statements such as '*We usually sit in our friendship groups*', or '*We work with those who are doing the same assessment*' imply that one is only obliged to interact with those with similar worldviews or abilities

and it is fine to ignore anybody else who is different. Teachers can invite students to problematise such norms by using a particular form of deconstructive questioning. As a first step, a teacher skilled in formulating such a question would identify what the hidden norm might be (*I only have to interact with peers who have the same abilities as I do*) without verbalising it. Then the teacher would have to think of a different behaviour or way of relating, which could be the binary opposite of the norm, or it could be something else. The teacher would then introduce this alternative through a question: *When do you talk to / do things together with classmates who have different abilities or worldviews from yours?* or *What kind of classroom community do you want to be part of? One where students always communicate with those who are the same or one where people interact with or learn from those who are different?*

Such questioning problematises the practice of always engaging with sameness. It opens up a different perspective, making it possible to examine this practice from within a different regime of truth, one that might not have been available previously. The purpose of such problematisation is not to offer solutions, nor to decide the value of a practice by considering whether it is effective in producing certain outcomes. Nor is it carried out to support conclusions about a person's worth or place in the social hierarchy. Problematisation can, however, expose some of the hidden assumptions that make a practice seem rational and reasonable (Davies, Flemmen, Gannon, Laws & Watson, 2002). It can also bring into conscious awareness the practices that those same assumptions marginalise and keep hidden, in this case the potential usefulness of engaging with different others.

## CONCLUSION

Inviting students, through such questioning, to think about what has become the normative standard of relating to others in their classroom has changed behaviours in most instances in the secondary school mentioned previously. Habitual practices were exposed as potentially exclusive of some students and/or as harmful on particular groups. With other options introduced and students asked to articulate their stance on both habitual and alternative ways of relating, the dominance of particular norms was unsettled and options available to students were expanded. As a result, students, and frequently teachers also, became more open to the differences of others thus increasing opportunities for becoming and engaging in not-yet tried ways of being with each other. This kind of problematisation work is not easy. Under assessment pressures some teachers might also consider it an unwelcome distraction from subject teaching. However, in the secondary school where the previously mentioned circle conversation format had been developed, normalization processes quickly took over and possibilities for becoming were reduced, when norms were

allowed to escape scrutiny and critique over a longer period of time. For this reason, classroom conversations that invite young people to critique the habitual practices that disadvantage them or others would be worthwhile to regularly include in subject lessons. Such conversations could also usefully contribute to the teaching of key competencies.

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