

SPRING 2003

Inclusive Leadership; Leadership for Inclusion

Using evidence from case studies of leadership practice in schools in three countries (England, Portugal and the United States), this report addresses the implications of reforms calling for inclusive education.

Judy W Kugelmass, New York State University

Introduction

Using evidence from case studies of leadership practice in schools in three countries (England, Portugal and the United States), this report addresses the implications of reforms calling for inclusive education. What the three schools had in common were diverse populations of students that included children from racial and ethnic minorities, the children of immigrants, refugees and/or asylum seekers, children from families of low socio-economic standing and children identified as having 'special education needs'. In each school all children were educated in general education classrooms.

Case Study Summaries

■ USA: Betsy Miller School

'Betsy Miller' is an elementary school of 350 children located in a small city in New York State. Although slightly more than half of its students are white and from middle-class families, the overall population of the school is diverse. Approximately one third of the students are African-American, Asian or Latino. Approximately 15 per cent come from families in which English is not the dominant language and include children of recent immigrants and refugees; 20 per cent are eligible for free or reduced cost breakfast and lunch programs.

Classrooms generally have 20 students, including three or four who are classified as eligible for special education services and two to four others for whom English is a second language. Under a process called 'blended services', individual classrooms operate as teams headed by a lead teacher certified in elementary education. Classroom teaching responsibilities are shared with another half-time teacher 'collaborator' and/or para-professional.

The principal who headed this school for seven years and is associated with the development of the blended services model left in 1995. In spite of the fact that there has been a different principal every year since then, the staff at 'Betsy

Miller' sustained their commitment to this model of inclusive education. Although Federal and New York State statutes support diversity, regulatory mechanisms continue to reflect deficits models that conflict with the strengths-based and child-centred focus of this school, and its commitment to being what teachers call an 'anti-bias zone'.

■ England: Eastside School

The 'Eastside' primary school in London was designed as an inclusive setting for 420 pupils in the age range of four to eleven, plus the equivalent of 52 nursery places. Its student population includes approximately 70 per cent on free school meals, 68 per cent who are bi- or multi-lingual, including children who are immigrants and/or asylum seekers from east-Asian, middle-eastern or African countries. There is a 16 per cent mobility ratio among families, ie people coming and going, or being re-housed in the community.

The school has four wings, each of which has its own suite of interconnected, open areas. The school's buildings were designed to be fully accessible to all children, staff and members of the community, including those with physical disabilities. The aim of the school is to provide all pupils with access to the mainstream curriculum and everyone is regarded as a full member of the school community. Each wing operates with a multi-disciplinary team co-ordinated by a teacher who is known as the team leader. There is also a curriculum co-ordinator on each team monitoring the progress of children who have statements of special education need and supporting the four teachers and support assistants on her team in developing and adapting curriculum.

The overall emphasis of the school has remained one of providing support within the classroom, making use of natural sources of support, particularly the children themselves. Specialist personnel work in classrooms along with volunteer helpers, including parents. The school head has been at 'Eastside' since it opened in 1992. The deputy head serves as the school's special education needs co-ordinator (SENCO). Both support '... a shared vision which is one of developing relationships and a curriculum that ensures that everyone feels valued, respected and reaches a high level of achievement.'

■ Portugal: DaCosta School

'DaCosta' school serves an economically poor, culturally diverse district in Lisbon. It has a population of approximately 1,000 students in the age range of 10 to 16 years. Among these are growing numbers of non-Portuguese speaking children who have arrived from former Portuguese colonies or as refugees from other African, middle-eastern and eastern European countries. The student population also includes children with significant cognitive and physical disabilities. Although there is in Portuguese schools a noticeable acceptance of the rights of students with disabilities to attend their local schools, discrimination towards students from minority ethnic groups is evident in some schools. This is not seen at 'DaCosta', where a commitment to inclusive education in its broadest sense is clearly evident.

Special education support teachers and teaching assistants support children with special education needs in general education classrooms. Support teachers work with classroom teachers to modify and adapt curriculum, as well as working with individual children in the resource support room.

The administrative staff at 'DaCosta' are elected from among the ranks of permanently appointed teachers and are responsible for the school's overall operations. This 'executive council' is made up of the president and two vice-presidents who serve three year terms. Policy and program decisions are made collaboratively by staff through a committee system. In recent years the school has been part of a national action research project, focused on the development of inclusive practices. Teachers from 'DaCosta' have taken the lead in creating a network of local schools assisting one another in fostering more inclusive forms of education.

Themes related to inclusive education

In each of these schools, inclusion was defined as reform that supported and welcomed diversity among all learners. Inclusive education aimed to eliminate social exclusion that was a consequence of responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability. While the three schools selected for analysis operated in very different political and social contexts, each operated under publicly articulated mission statements reflecting this definition of inclusive education. The cultures of these schools shared the following characteristics:

- initial motivation for inclusion supported by external forces
- uncompromising commitment and belief in inclusive education
- differences among students and staff perceived as a resource
- teaming and a collaborative interactional style among staff and children
- willingness to struggle to sustain practices
- inclusion understood as a social/political issue
- symbolism (visual and linguistic) communicated ideals and spread commitments across the school and community

Themes related to leadership

These schools shared cultural features that provided the context for the leadership models that emerged in this study. Although given different titles, one individual held an official position of responsibility for the operation of his or her school. This was sometimes shared with one or two other formal leaders, identified as 'positional' leaders. In each school, additional staff also held specific leadership roles and responsibilities. All leaders were engaged in the kinds of collaborative leadership modelled by the positional leaders in their respective schools. Additional aspects of leadership found in each of these inclusive schools included:

- uncompromising commitment to inclusive education
- clearly defined roles, responsibilities and boundaries
- collaborative interpersonal style
- problem-solving and conflict resolution skills
- understanding and appreciation of the expertise of others
- supportive relationships with other staff

School culture, collaboration and community

The development of more inclusive approaches did not emerge from our studies as a mechanical process in which any one specific organisational restructure, or the introduction of a particular practice, generated increased levels of participation. Rather a theme running through our analysis of leadership practice is the importance of cultural factors in promoting and/or inhibiting participation amongst students and staff. By 'culture' we mean the norms, values and accepted ways of doing things that are reflected in observed practices. In each setting, central to both sustaining inclusive educational practice in general and leadership in particular was an uncompromising commitment to principles of inclusion – the values and attitudes held by school staff.

A second aspect of school culture across these three settings was the significance of collaboration. Collaboration was both a form of practice and a manifestation of the inclusive values of these schools as they attempted to create a community in which all individuals – staff and students – were valued. Within this context, leadership became redefined and distributed, reinforcing a sense of community and of mutual trust within which it was embedded. The collaborative nature of inclusive school cultures has clear implications for the nature of leadership and decision-making. First, it leads us to conclude that strong school leaders, committed to inclusive values, are crucial to promoting and supporting collaboration. The importance of collaborative processes point to the importance of distributed leadership and participative decision-making. The 'strong' leaders we met were supporters and enablers of staff as they engaged in a collaborative process of school development. They would not, however, hesitate to be autocratic when faced with decisions that impacted the foundation of their schools' inclusive cultures.

Research Associate Reports Available in Spring 03

Different Approaches to Sharing School Leadership,
Marian Court, Massey University, New Zealand

**Does Size Matter? Distributed leadership in small
secondary schools,** Mike Kimber, Deputy Headteacher,
Oaklands School, Bethnal Green, London

Inclusive Leadership; Leadership for Inclusion,
Judy W Kugelmass, New York State University

**Issues of ICT, school reform and learning-centred school
design,** Simon Gipson, Headteacher, St. Michael's Grammar
School, Melbourne, Australia

**Reservoirs of Hope: spiritual and moral leadership in
headteachers,** Alan Flintham, Headteacher, Quarrydale
School, Sutton-in-Ashfield, Nottinghamshire

**Were You Prepared? Findings from a national survey of
headteachers,** Tim Bright, Headteacher, Bourne Westfield
Primary School, Lincolnshire. Nick Ware, Headteacher,
The Priory School, Orpington, Kent

Summary and full reports of these and previous research
associate studies are available from the NCSL web site at
www.ncsl.org.uk/researchassociates

03

S P R I N G

The research summarised here is part of the NCSL Research Associateship Programme, which offers an opportunity for school leaders to contribute towards the College's research and development agenda. NCSL provides support for school leaders to undertake study, to engage in enquiry and to impact on practice. The programme includes:

- Study visits
- Team enquiries
- Bursaries
- Researchers in residence
- University project attachments

We welcome enquiries about the Research Associates Programme. For details, please contact Martin Coles by emailing martin.coles@ncsl.org.uk

For an information pack and application forms, please contact amanda.hatchett@ncsl.org.uk or telephone 0115 872 2040.

National College for School Leadership
Triumph Road
Nottingham
NG8 1DH

T: 0870 001 1155
F: 0115 872 2001

www.ncsl.org.uk