

Becoming an Inclusive Practitioner

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Abstract

The first part of this paper provides a brief, selective literature and policy review examining the concepts of inclusion and social justice within the context of Scottish civic discourse and Scottish schools in particular. I then focus on four key areas of policy and standards, that contribute to the creation of the framework Scottish teachers work within, drawing attention to discrepancies in emphasis on matters of social justice and inclusion that exist between them. In part two, I outline my active engagement with Vygotsky's concept of The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in an effort to create an inclusive classroom learning environment. I explore the tensions I encountered between theory and practice and how, through a process of critical reflection, I came to a deeper understanding of the possibilities of combining aspects of formative assessment with sociocultural theory, to form a basis for continued professional development as an inclusive practitioner.

Part One*Introduction*

In order to carry out their crucial role as inclusive practitioners, prospective and existing teachers face what can appear to be the challenging task, of defining terms and their own positions in relation to a number of problematised issues. The most cursory review of the available literature highlights that there are no uncontested definitions of educational inclusion or social justice (Scott and Mooney, 2009). For some it can mean improved access to a deliberately stratified education system by effectively identifying, what are perceived as, inherent enhanced cognitive capacities within individuals (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). For others social justice is achieved by a society "eliminating such inequalities as have their source, not in individual differences, but in its own organisation" (Tawney, 1931, p9). If there is a lack of agreement on the meaning of these terms, there is further divergence on how teaching and learning can effectively ameliorate the educational conditions that will further both causes. From Michael Gove's focus on raising standards for all through more effective collection of performance data and inspections (Forsyth, 2014), to Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy stance on the need to develop the critical consciousness ("conscientization") of learners in order for them to challenge, rather than adapt to, the social conditions that cause injustice (Freire, 1970, p55).

In reviewing how these concepts inform Scottish education policy, Ridell (2009, p283) describes how 'social justice, equality and inclusion are complex and inter-linked concepts and feature prominently in Scottish social policy rhetoric'. In an attempt to provide some clarity on the complex conceptual relationships highlighted by Riddell, Benjamin and Emejulu (2014) concur with her identification of two key theoretical positions, referred to as the 'redistribution and recognition paradigms' (ibid, p37). *Redistribution* focuses on disparities between defined groups caused by processes of economic and material distribution. The *Recognition* paradigm highlights how differences related to factors such as race, gender and disability can impact on the life chances and outcomes of people identified as belonging to these groups. Though there can be debate as to the extent each of these paradigms contributes to social injustice for the groups involved, most theorists will agree (Burchardt and Craig, 2008) there are no clear either/or factors to explain the causes for social exclusion, but rather an intricate interplay between the two that can all too often lead to cycles of marginalisation and

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alienation that can prove difficult to break. Education has a dual role in the social justice equation as both *a causal factor* -through the creation and adherence to institutional processes and practices that reinforce existing patterns of exclusion and inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bernstein, 1975) and the possibility of being *a mitigating factor* – by implementing inclusive practices based on a recognition of the wider social forces that shape the lives of students (Young, 1989; Dewey, 2012).

In a critique of the often vacuous use of the term ‘inclusion’ in political and social policy discourse, Thomas and O’Hanlon (2004, iv) argue how it ‘...has become often merely a filler in the conversation.....with insufficient thought about the nitty gritty mechanics. .’ In the remainder of part one of this paper, I aim to provide a critical assessment of the some of the background factors and policy initiatives relevant to inclusion and social justice in Scottish education. By examining the implementation of policy and assessing its impact on teaching practice, I aim to identify how the ‘nitty gritty mechanics’ of inclusion and social justice, play out in relation to learning and teaching in Scottish schools.

International Policy Initiatives

Two key international agreements have had a significant influence on the development of national policy related to inclusion and children’s rights. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989) was instrumental in formulating specific agreed standards for defining children’s rights and has had profound implications on how signatory nations deal with issues relating to participation and inclusion. All forty two of the Convention’s articles have some connection to social justice. Those with direct relevance to education and inclusion include:

Article 2: The Convention applies to all children, whatever their race, religion or abilities; whatever they think or say, whatever type of family they come from. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 23: Children who have any kind of disability have the right to special care and support, as well as all the rights in the Convention, so that they can live full and independent lives.

Article 28: Young people should be encouraged to reach the level of education of which they are capable.

(UNICEF, 1989)

The application of the UNCRC does not come without issues, and it is important for teachers to be aware of any potential unintended consequences caused by its implementation. For example, the necessary process of identifying and labelling children with a disability, in order to provide the support required for Article 23, can impact on the ‘level of education’ they are thought ‘capable’ of achieving in Article 28. This issue has been highlighted by Crawford and Vignoles (2010) in England and Riddell (2009) in Scotland. Through their development as inclusive practitioners teachers need to be aware of their professional responsibility ‘to ask critical questions of educational policies’ (GTCS, 2012, p5), in this case to avoid the formation of the ‘self-fulfilling prophecies’ identified by Merton (1948), that can impede the cause of social justice rather than improving it.

The 1994 Salamanca statement produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1994) advocated mainstreaming becoming normal practice, stating that:

We call upon all governments and urge them to adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.

(UNESCO, 1994)

The UK and Scottish governments are signatories to both these agreements and they have influenced the development of national policy related to recognising children's rights and adopting inclusive practice in education. I will now focus on the development of these policies within the Scottish context.

Social justice, inclusion and Scottish Education Policy

Since the inception of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the governing parties in the Scottish Executive and subsequent Scottish Government have identified social justice and inclusion as key priorities. This was highlighted by the creation of the cabinet position of a dedicated Minister for Social Justice, and one of the first actions of the first Executive being the publication of a report; *Social Justice ...a Scotland where EVERYONE matters* (Scottish Government, 1999), which had the stated intention:

to harness the efforts of many to the greater good of all, and establish social justice as the hallmark of Scottish society.

(ibid, p1)

The evocation of social justice as a defining characteristic of Scottish civil society and public life has continued to play an important role in policy making and political rhetoric (Scott and Mooney, 2009; Scottish Government, 2014), and the Scottish school system has been seen as one of the key institutions that both embodies and, with appropriate adaptation, can further embed and enhance that agenda. The development and continued existence of a commonly shared 'myth' about the inherently egalitarian and democratic nature of Scottish Education has been well documented (Bryce and Humes, 2008; Munn and Arnott, 2009). The substance, and to some extent the creation of the myth, is epitomised in the 'lad o' pairts' characters from the sentimental late 19th century Kailyard (cabbage patch) school of Scottish fiction (McCrone, 2001, p96). These tales detailed how boys (notably not girls) from humble rural backgrounds, improved their lot in life by having access to a Scottish educational system that provided opportunities for all, based on merit rather than social status. The subsequent development of mass public education in Scotland through the 20th century can be characterised as furthering a uniformly accessible comprehensive system that has been described as "an expression of social unity enabling the vast majority of youngsters to share a broadly similar education prior to entering the adult world" (Bryce and Humes, 2008, p33).

It is important for Scottish teachers to have an awareness of the wider historical context that may inform current pre-existing conceptions of the inclusive nature of Scottish education, in order to develop a critical understanding of their role as inclusive practitioners. The comprehensive nature of educational provision in Scotland does not in itself result in comprehensive and uniform outcomes for the children who have universal access to the system. Some have argued that the meritocratic tradition in Scottish education has been overstated (Smout, 1986), and teachers should guard against any potential complacency that may arise from a belief that the institutional framework that they work within, automatically lends itself to providing equality of learning outcomes and furthering the cause of social justice.

The disparities in educational outcomes in Scotland were highlighted in a 2007 report produced by the influential Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007). This highlighted a number of strengths in Scottish education but also drew attention to two key challenges, both directly related to issues of social justice. In relation to the later stages of primary and early secondary education the report stated:

Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide.

(OECD, 2007)

And in relation to the senior stages of secondary education they found:

the need to build on the strong platform of basic education through socially broader and more successful participation..... Inequalities in staying-on rates, participation at different academic levels of national courses, and pass rates in these courses are a concern.

(ibid)

Figures from the Scottish Government on average tariff score for qualifications ranked by deprivation (Figure1) show the link between educational attainment and the socio-economic status highlighted by the OECD report.

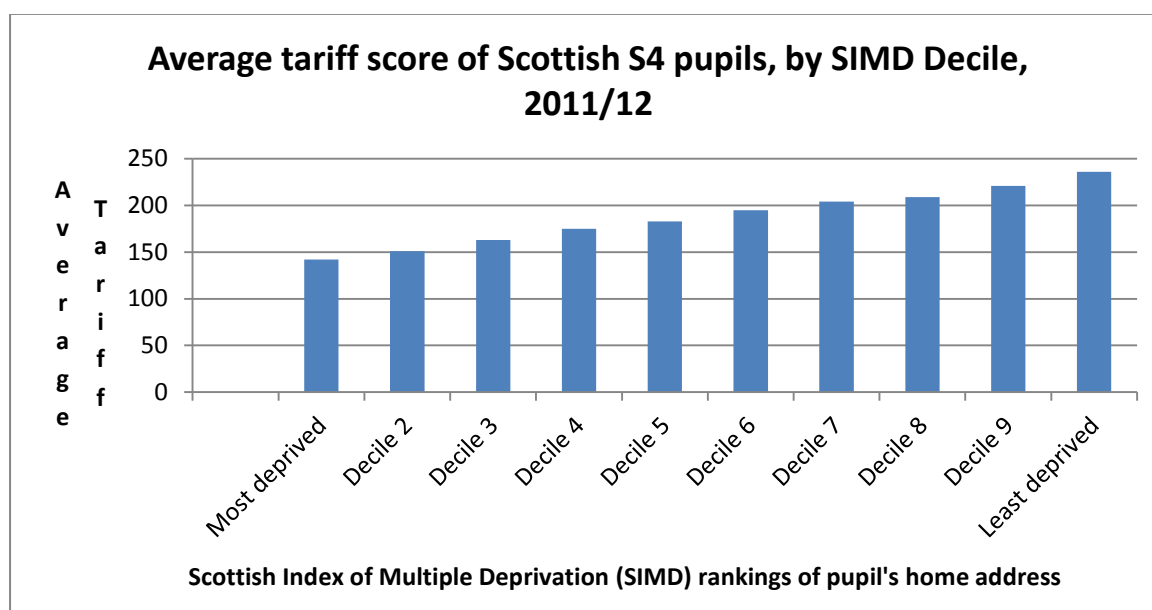


Figure 1. Data Source: The Scottish Government. Attainment and Leaver Destinations Supplementary Data. Available: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Datasets/attainmentandleavers> [Last accessed 29th November 2014]

The policy initiatives introduced by the Scottish Government over the last decade can be seen as a recognition of and response to the issues highlighted by the OECD report. I have identified four initiatives that have had significant impact in creating the framework within which teachers work towards developing as inclusive practitioners.

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE)

The aim of CfE as described by Education Scotland, the government agency responsible for the delivery of education policy, is:

.... to achieve a transformation in education in Scotland by providing a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum from 3 to 18.

(Education Scotland, 2014a).

Through this transformation CfE aims to produce young people who have four key capacities: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors' (ibid). In outlining the values they saw as underpinning the purposes and principles of CfE, The Curriculum Review Group stated that:

It is one of the prime purposes of education to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based and so help them to establish their own stances on matters of social justice and personal and collective responsibility. Young people therefore need to learn about and develop these values. The curriculum is an important means through which this personal development should be encouraged.

(Scottish Government, 2004, p11)

The document went on to add that:

In essence, it (the curriculum) must be inclusive, be a stimulus for personal achievement and, through the broadening of pupils' experience of the world, be an encouragement towards informed and responsible citizenship.

(ibid)

From the prominence that the concepts of social justice and inclusion are given in explaining the values of the CfE in its launch document, it may seem reasonable to assume that they would feature as defining themes in subsequent CfE briefings and guidance for teachers, and in curriculum content and intended outcomes for pupils. However a detailed search of the attributes and capabilities linked to the four capacities (Education Scotland, 2014a), the Experiences and Outcomes document for all curriculum areas (Education Scotland, 2014b), and the five Building the Curriculum documents (Education Scotland, 2014c), show only one mention of the term 'social (in)justice'. This is in the Experiences and Outcomes for Religious Education in Roman Catholic Schools:

I have experienced opportunities to engage with issues of social injustice.

(Education Scotland, 2014b, p249)

Reference to inclusion is more prominent in the CfE literature, though there is no mention in the attributes and capabilities linked to the four capacities and little mention in the Experience and Outcomes document. The potential issue here, for teachers becoming and developing as inclusive practitioners, is not just one of a pedantic focus on the absence of specific terminology. Due to the demands of their role, teachers may be inclined to focus on adhering to the guidance and priorities outlined in official framework documents and particularly for secondary teachers, those directly relevant to attainment. Priestly (2013, p32) describes how the 'continued use of attainment data by local authorities, school managers and inspectors as a proxy measure for school and teacher effectiveness can focus the attention of teachers judged according to their success in raising attainment'. This emphasis on more visible success indicators may result in teachers choosing to focus on those aspects of CfE that more readily lend themselves to having a positive impact on those measures. If teaching and learning with a view to engaging with issues, and developing values related to social justice and inclusion are not made explicit as part of CfE, it may be the case that they are not prioritised.

There are aspect of CfE that, through effective implementation, have the possibility to improve aspects of inclusion and attainment. Assessment for Learning (AifL) is a key feature of pedagogical change focusing on formative assessment (Bryce, 2013) and forms the main thrust of the CfE document Building the Curriculum: A framework for assessment (Education Scotland, 2014c). The potential for improving attainment through more inclusive interaction between teacher and pupil has been shown by Black and Wiliam (1998). Beaton (2014) has highlighted how the strategies complement the development of agency and pupil voice. However Beaton also discusses how initial research findings indicate potential issues with Scottish teachers' depth of engagement with AifL strategies that may act as a barrier to their potential benefits for inclusion.

The General Teaching Council Scotland (GTCS) Standards

The GTCS is the professional body that all teachers in the Scottish state sector must be registered with in order to teach. The GTCS updated their standards for registration in December 2012 and in doing so reinforced the profession's strong commitment to social justice and inclusion. Included in the values and commitments seen as being core for teachers are:

- Committing to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in relation to: age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and belief and sexual orientation.
- Demonstrating a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future (GTCS, 2012, p5)

Here we can see a marked difference in the explicitness and prominence given to social justice and inclusion, in relation to teaching and learning, when compared to CfE. As the standards form the basis for the recently launched programme of Career-long Professional Learning being implemented for teachers, it will be of interest to see if this prominence is reflected in the development activities undertaken by Scottish teachers, or if development is guided more towards goals that are more readily measurable through SMART target setting procedures.

Additional Support for Learning (ASN) and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

Changes in education for children with ASN were brought about with the introduction of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. This introduced the term ASN as a replacement for special educational needs (SEN) which had been used since the 1980's. The change in terminology is important in understanding the underlying theory behind the new legislation. MacKay and McLarty (2008, p713) provide a summary of the difference between the terms:

(For SEN) the root of the special educational need was still the impairment, the physical or intellectual condition of the pupil.....The term ASN is intended to focus on the context that affects pupils rather than merely identifying specific conditions as problematic.

The change indicates how the Scottish government have incorporated aspects of the social model of disability into legislation. This model highlights that "the inability of people with impairments to undertake social activities is a consequence of the erection of barriers by the non-disabled majority" (Thomas, 2002, p38). The other shift in emphasis is that many children categorised as having ASN would not have been categorised as having SEN. Children may be designated as needing support for reasons ranging from motor or sensory impairments to being bullied (Moscardini, 2013, p797).

The GIRFEC programme (Scottish Government, 2014) launched by the Scottish Government in 2008 is designed to provide the basis for a more consistent, integrated approach for agencies who work with all children and young people, including education. The focus of GIRFEC is on early identification and taking preventative measures for at risk children. Humes and Bryce (2008, p107) state that:

The capacity of children to benefit from schooling is profoundly affected by issues of housing, employment, poverty and health ...it is in the interconnection of these forces that solutions must be found.

Through teachers recognising and fulfilling their responsibilities within the framework of ASN and GIRFEC, they can develop a better understanding of the 'interconnected' social and personal factors that can influence and affect young people's learning. Teachers can make a significant contribution in fulfilling their professional commitment to social justice by developing welcoming inclusive

learning environments that will enhance all young people's capacity to benefit from their school experience. This may prove to be challenging, particularly in the existing public sector environment that is characterised by budgetary restrictions in many support services.

Conclusion

From my brief review of the related literature and policy, it is apparent that working towards becoming an inclusive practitioner with a commitment to social justice requires teachers to have a critical awareness of theoretical positions and the policy framework that relate to these issues, and an understanding of the tensions that can exist due to conflicting demands related to attainment and other performance measures.

In discussing the important distinction between learning and education Biesta (2012, p583) states that "The *educational* demand is not that students learn, but that they learn something and that they do so for particular reasons". I believe that by taking a similar position on teaching, the profession can strengthen their resolve and professional commitment to social justice. If the *educational* demand is not that teachers teach but teach *for* something, and social justice is emphasised as one of the *particular reasons* for teaching, teachers will be better placed to make a contribution to the goal of 'learning our way to a better society' (GTCS, 2012, p5).

Part 2

Introduction

In this section of my paper, I will provide a critical reflection on my teaching practice through focusing on a History lesson I created and delivered as part of my initial placement. I will reflect on how my practice fulfilled my commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment using the analytical framework of relevant aspects of the sociocultural theory of learning, with particular reference to the work of Vygotsky.

Sociocultural Learning Theory and Inclusive Education

In discussing the implications of Vygotsky's concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), one of the key thinkers in the field of sociocultural theory, Jerome Bruner, stated that:

If pedagogy is to empower human beings to go beyond their "native" predisposition it must transmit the "toolkit" the culture has developed for doing so..... Obviously not everyone benefits equally from instruction in the culture's toolkit. But it hardly follows that we should instruct only those with the most conspicuous talent to benefit from such instruction. That is a political or economic decision that should never be allowed to take on the status of an evolutionary principle.

(Bruner, 1996, p18)

In this statement Bruner highlights the influence of culture in teaching and learning and allows us to critically reflect on matters relating to social justice and inclusion. Bruner brings into focus the potential for political and economic forces to naturalise the fact that some groups in society, will have restricted access to 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) that would allow them to fully participate in the culture. Through this form of insight, sociocultural learning theory provides teachers with a cohesive theoretical lens through which they can view their inclusive practice and work towards, what Paulo Freire describes as, a form of "praxis" that facilitates their ability "to reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it." (Freire, 1970, p68). This transformation can take the form of attempting to create inclusive learning environments through acknowledging learners 'predispositions' and seeing them as starting points for development, not using them to make uncritical assumptions about what they are capable of.

As the name suggests, the sociocultural approach to learning gives prominence to both social and cultural influences in developing a theory of how humans develop and learn. In outlining Vygotsky's theoretical framework Wertsch (1993, cited by Lock and Strong, 2010, p107) identifies three main interlinked themes:

- (a) the use of a genetic, or developmental method;
- (b) the claim that higher mental functioning in the individual emerges out of social processes; and
- (c) the claim that human social and psychological processes are fundamentally shaped by cultural tools, or mediational means.

In my role as a student teacher I can see great value in adopting this approach to frame my practice, as it is theoretically robust, is supported by research (Durlak and Weissberg, et al, 2011), and provides a positive basis for exploring learning possibilities, through teachers developing a sense of agency to affect real change. The sociocultural model highlights the potential plasticity of the teacher, the pupil, and the learning environments that can be created. Through identifying the social processes and culturally mediated resources that are at play in the school environment, teachers can attempt to make conscious interventions, based on sound evidence and critical reflection that alter these in such a way that they lend themselves to more inclusive and deeper learning. As social arrangements, processes and institutions are created by human culture and interactions, this means they are not permanent or fixed. This allows the opportunity for the conscious reproduction of those elements of social practice that benefit human flourishing, and through a process of reflection, followed by action (Schon, 1983), the adjustment or curtailment of activities that impair or hinder human flourishing. In the words of the adult educator and social activist, Brian K Murray: "We can be the authors of our own individual and collective future" (Murray, 1999, p46). Through this process teachers in Scotland can work towards upholding the commitment outlined in the GTCS standards "to encourage learning our way to a better future." (GTCS, 2012, p5)

In analysing the lesson I delivered, I will focus on one particular element of sociocultural theory Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with some reference to Brunner's concept of scaffolding (1978).

The Lesson Context

The lesson I delivered was on the topic of The Lives of Ordinary People in Medieval Scotland. The lesson formed part of the History element of the S1 Social Studies course focussing on medieval history in the local area. The school where I completed my placement had a set programme of lessons that all Social Studies teachers were expected to deliver as part of the S1 curriculum. After approval from the Head of Department, I was given consent to create a new lesson that complimented the existing theme. The content of the lesson was designed with a view to acknowledge issues of social justice and inclusion from a historical perspective. Questions from pupils in a previous lesson about the charitable role of the church and royalty indicated a lack of understanding about the conditions and lived experience of ordinary people. I could see the potential for a lesson on this topic helping the class have a more complete picture of the wider social structures that existed. The lesson was also designed with the intention of pupils having the opportunity to develop group working skills.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The ZPD was defined by Vygotsky as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky, 1978, p33)

This description highlights Vygotsky's focus on the social nature of learning as development is mediated through the guidance of others.

I incorporated my understanding of the ZPD in the development of the lesson by drawing on my previous knowledge of the work of the class. My aim was to design a lesson based on concepts and topics the class were already familiar with; these included the historical period we were investigating and the advantages and disadvantages of different historical sources. Through this process I was trying to assess what Vygotsky refers to as the ZPD for the class in order to determine what they could do in order to further develop.

In reflecting on my ability to assess the development level of the class in order to 'pitch' the lesson at the correct level, I encountered one of the potential problems of using the ZPD as a basis for inclusive practice. The issue of determining the development level for a whole class proved to be more difficult than I anticipated. On a one to one basis it would be possible to form a detailed understanding of an individual learner's knowledge and understanding through discussion and observation and use this as a basis for further development, however this level of detailed formative assessment is not possible in a large class. In outlining the concept of the ZPD Vygotsky refers to the development of the 'child', not groups of children. Vygotsky's focus on the individual learner also caused me to examine the essential aspect of the ZPD that requires 'adult guidance or collaboration with more capable peers' (ibid) for children to develop their problem solving capacity. Again this appears to presume an individual learner with a defined problem solving task that is suited to developing, what Vygotsky describes as, 'those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation' (ibid), and that learner having the support of another individual. My interpretation of the ZPD as a learning theory that can be practically applied when focusing on the development of an individual learner, raised tensions between the theory and my ability to apply it in a classroom setting with twenty nine children. The practical use of the ZPD in a large group setting also raises issues on its use in creating an inclusive learning environment. The basis of the ZPD is that learners develop when the designed learning process is such that it stretches them with support from another. If however the learning process is set below the ZPD, referred to by Vygotsky as the 'actual level' or beyond it, then meaningful development is unlikely to occur. This process is more challenging with larger class sizes. The theoretical basis of sociocultural theory anticipates the issue of each learner having individual development levels. Each individual has a unique biography which has been determined by their immediate social and cultural setting, what C.W. Mills (1970, p15) refers to as their 'milieu', and wider social structures. Family background, social status within peer groups and access to books and information technology, are all mediating factors that influence the learner's current level of development in modern secondary schools.

With these concerns in mind, I considered pedagogical strategies that would mitigate my perceived issues with using the concept of the ZPD as the basis for planning and delivering the lesson. On reflection I came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to attempt to make a detailed assessment of the individual ZPD for each of the pupils and design and deliver a lesson on that basis. I then chose to focus on features of the learning environment I could influence, these being (a) the effective supporting guidance I could provide through the structure of the lesson, (b) adopting Bruner's concept of scaffolding based on the information I gathered from formative assessment.

In developing the structure of the lesson - me giving information; the class working in pairs on a related task one section at a time; pairs reporting back on their completed work - I was influenced by Lang's definition of the Russian word for education *Obuchenie*. In reference to the teacher's role in the ZPD Lang explains that:

unlike the English word which separates the function of teaching and learning (*Obuchenie*) instead means that there is a mutual dependence and intertwining of teacher and learner in one holistic process.

(Lang, 2012, p39)

On reflection I think I could have done more to create this environment of 'mutual dependence' as there was too much focus on me giving the class information through speaking, slides and laminate handouts, and not enough on the actual process of creating the speculative account of the life of the Mary, the name given to the fictional Medieval girl. This was evidenced by some of the pairs copying down just a few points from the information on the slide or laminate, then waiting for the next list of information. This indicated a one way dependence with the class waiting for my information, rather than me being seen as part of a community of practice that had the joint goal of producing the account of Mary's experiences. I believe I can enhance the mutual nature of the learning environment in future by attempting to involve the pupils more in the formation and agreement of learning intentions and success criteria. Though time constraints in the secondary timetable can limit the extent to which this is done, I will incorporate the practical strategies suggested by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007), who highlight the mutual benefits of teachers consulting pupils on matters related to teaching and learning. The development of pupil voice is of particular relevance to teachers' inclusive practice, as it can enhance learners' sense of agency and also addresses the rights of children to be involved in decisions that affect them, as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC (UNICEF, 1989).

Elements of the lesson structure that produced more positive results were those that focused on formative assessment. I chose to break up the task that formed the main focus of the lesson into three stages. After allowing time for each stage to be completed I brought the class back together to discuss their work. By choosing random pairs to explain some of the ideas they had recorded about the life of Mary, I was able to assess their progress in the task. By doing this in stages I was able to assess at an early stage those pairs that needed extra support – in Vygotsky's terminology those for whom it appeared the problem set was beyond their ZPD - and focus my support on them.

Another form of assessment that worked well in allowing me to ascertain who required support was the use of a green pen for one pupil in each pair. When each segment of the task was being completed I engaged with the class through walking round the room providing feedback on their work. The use of the green pens provided me with an effective visual tool to assess who needed extra support within the pair. This again allowed me to effectively target my support.

The incorporation of these forms of formative assessment were influenced by the work of Black and Wiliam (1998, p11) who provided evidence of the value of creating 'Opportunities for pupils to express their understanding' when designing teaching strategies. Bruner's description of scaffolding as:

the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some task so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring'

(Bruner, 1978, p. 19)

also helped me gain a better understanding of my role in identifying and offering varied levels of support in the class.

Conclusion

Through a process of critical reflection of the planning and delivery of my lesson, I developed an improved understanding of the interconnected nature of Vygotsky's concept of the ZPD and my role as teacher in creating an inclusive learning environment that facilitates the development of all pupils. My initial concerns about the suitability of using the ZPD in large group settings helped me engage more deeply with the concept of formative assessment as an effective process that supports the teacher's role in the ZPD, allowing me to better assess the development zones of individuals and groups in the class. The successful completion of the task by most of the pupils, and their effectiveness in working in groups indicated that these concepts provide a sound basis for my continued developing practice.

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