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## Preparing teachers for inclusive education: using inclusive pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for all

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As the concept of ‘inclusive education’ has gained currency, students who would previously have been referred to specialist forms of provision, having been judged ‘less able’, are now believed to belong in mainstream classrooms. However, it is often argued that teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to work with such students in inclusive classrooms. This paper reports findings of a study of a new initial teacher education course that starts from the premise that the question is not whether teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms, but how to make best use of what they already know when learners experience difficulty. The theoretical rationale for the development of the course is outlined and examples of how teachers might engage in more inclusive practice are presented.

**Keywords:** inclusive education; teacher education

### Introduction

In Britain as elsewhere, classroom teachers are increasingly faced with the challenge of teaching learners whose differences vary across many dimensions. As the concept of ‘inclusive education’ has gained currency, students who would previously have been referred to specialist forms of provision, having been judged ‘less able’, are now believed to belong in mainstream classrooms (Ferguson, 2008; Ofsted, 2004; Thomas & Vaughn, 2004). However, it is often argued that teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to work with such students in inclusive classrooms (see Ofsted, 2008; Scott, Vitale, & Marston, 1998). Schools often exclude, or refuse to include, certain students on the grounds that teachers do not have the requisite knowledge and skills to teach them (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). This sense of being unqualified or not prepared to teach all students in inclusive classrooms raises questions about what constitutes ‘necessary knowledge and skills’, and different views about what classroom teachers need to know and how they might be prepared to work in inclusive classrooms have been explored in the literature (Abu El-Haj & Rubin, 2009; Fisher, Frey, & Thousand, 2003; Kershner, 2007; Pugach, 2005; Stayton & McCollum, 2002).

This study of an initial teacher education course that aims to prepare mainstream classroom teachers for inclusive education starts from the premise that the question is not what teachers need to know or whether they have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms, but how to make best use of what they already

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know when learners experience difficulty. The study explores how student teachers engage with key aspects of what we term ‘inclusive pedagogy’, or the ‘inclusive pedagogical approach’ that underpins the Inclusive Practice Project (IPP), a teacher education research and development project at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland (UoA). Inclusive pedagogy focuses on extending what is ordinarily available as part of the routine of classroom life as a way of responding to differences between learners rather than specifically individualizing for some. It represents a shift in thinking about teaching and learning from that which works for most learners along with something ‘different’ or ‘additional’ for those who experience difficulties, to an approach to teaching and learning that involves the creation of a rich learning environment characterised by lessons and learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available to everyone so that all are able to participate in classroom life (for an in-depth discussion see Florian, 2010; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2010; Florian & Kershner, 2009). The inclusive pedagogical approach suggests a way of working that is reflected by this shift in thinking from ideas of ‘most’ and ‘some’ learners to everyone. For the purpose of this study, the inclusive pedagogical approach is specifically exemplified by the concept of ‘transformability’ as articulated in *Learning without limits* (Hart, Dixon, Drummond, & McIntyre, 2004).

### **The Inclusive Practice Project**

Funded by the Scottish Government, the IPP aims to develop new approaches to training teachers to ensure that they:

- have a greater awareness and understanding of the educational and social problems or issues that can affect children’s learning; and
- have developed strategies they can use to support and deal with such difficulties (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/education/ipp/index.php?id=2>).

To this end, the UoA School of Education Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) Primary (5–11) and Secondary (11–17) programmes have been combined into one single initial teacher education programme with an enhanced university-based curriculum designed to ensure issues of inclusion are fully addressed within the core of the programme (for details see Florian & Rouse, 2009; Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010). The task of teacher education for inclusive education, as it is being conceptualised at Aberdeen, is not to defend the need to accommodate learner differences but to challenge complacency about the wherewithal, or lack thereof, that teachers have to do this. The current emphasis is on changing the way that teachers think about the problems of inclusion (for an extended discussion, see Florian et al., 2010).

Our approach to preparing ‘inclusive practitioners’ has been guided in part by two insights that further underpin the inclusive pedagogical approach. One is that reviews of ‘what works’ in special needs education have shown that the teaching strategies used in mainstream education can be adapted to assist students identified as experiencing difficulties in learning (Davis & Florian, 2004; Lewis & Norwich, 2005; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Indeed, attempts to define what is ‘special’ about special education generally acknowledge that effective practices in special education often originate in mainstream education, and effective practices in special education are often found in mainstream education (Hegarty, 2007). Therefore it is difficult to sustain the argument that students who have been identified as having special or

additional support needs require teaching methods and approaches that are pedagogically different to those that are used with most learners. It is also difficult to argue that teachers do not have the requisite knowledge and skill to teach all learners. Teachers may feel uncertain about how to respond to particular difficulties, or they may not feel confident in making adaptations, but this is not the same as lacking teaching abilities, knowledge or skills.

Secondly, if the view is taken that the learning difficulties experienced by children are challenges for classroom teachers, then the expertise of colleagues who specialize in learning difficulties, and those from related disciplines can be used to support teaching and learning in the mainstream classroom. There is enormous value for trainee and beginning teachers to have opportunities to work collaboratively with specialists as part of their professional development, building confidence and broadening their repertoire of responses to the difficulties students experience in learning. Indeed, if teachers are to be considered (and consider themselves) capable of teaching all children, those who prepare them must help them to develop how they think about their practice and what they are making generally available to the whole class as opposed to seeking the support of specialists to individualize teaching for 'problematic' students. As many commentators have argued, it is *helpful* to view difficulties in learning as problems for teachers to solve rather than problems within learners (Ainscow, 1999; Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson, 1999; Hart, 1996). Such a view discourages teachers from seeing themselves as 'unprepared' or 'not qualified' to teach children who are identified as having special or additional needs. Rather teachers are empowered to work with their colleagues in ways that address the demands that different subjects, topics or tasks make on different learners.

### ***Learning without limits***

Within the reformed PGDE programme at Aberdeen, students are required to undertake a course in further professional studies (FPS). The FPS course provides an opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of an aspect of the topics covered in the professional studies element of the PGDE. The aims are to:

- encourage personal and professional commitment to life-long learning; and
- extend and deepen student teachers' knowledge, understanding and expertise in one professional area of personal interest.

Students choose one of 13 available FPS courses, which range from addressing specific areas of the school curriculum, such as 'Modern languages in the primary classroom' or 'ICT for learning and teaching' to broader topics such as 'Thinking skills'. All FPS require a notional student effort of 50 hours, 25 hours of which are tutor directed (including 14 hours contact in taught sessions) and 25 hours of which are student directed. A key component of FPS is a peer-assessed project for which students are required to work in a collaborative group and present at the student-led conference at the end of the PGDE.

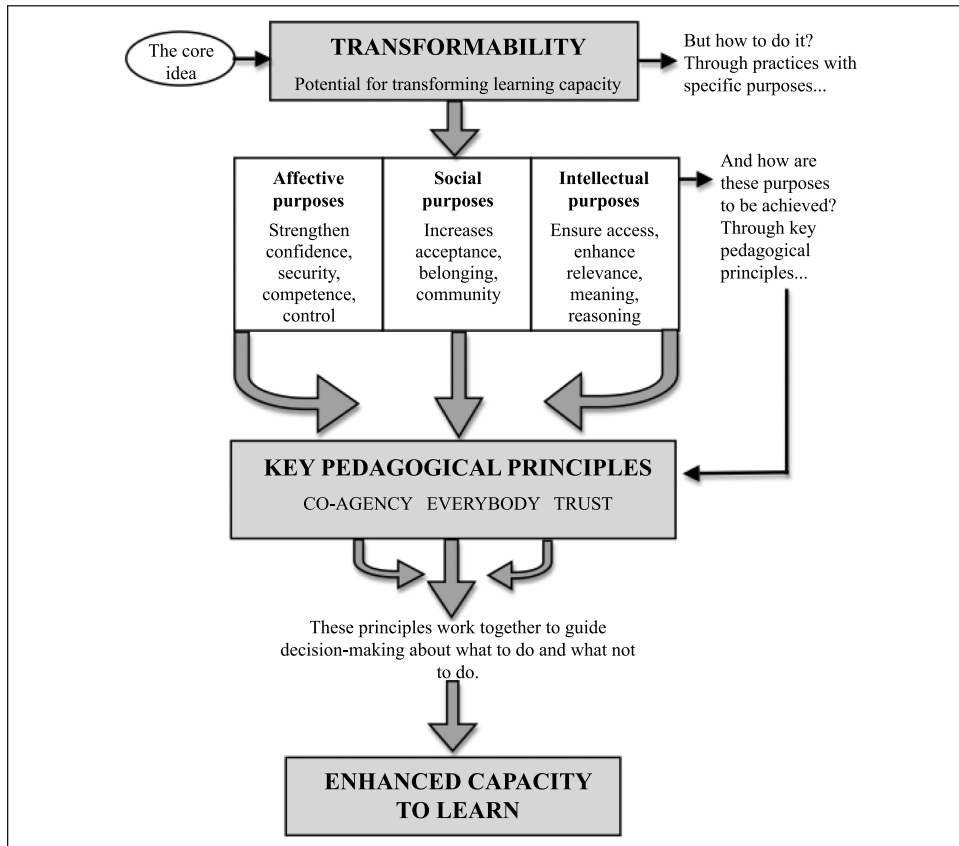
The FPS course 'Learning without limits' was inspired by the book *Learning without limits* (Hart et al., 2004) as a means of exploring how it is possible to create inclusive learning environments without relying on ability or attainment as organising principles for teaching. While the book is used as a core text supporting the PGDE, the FPS course offers an opportunity for more in-depth exploration of the approach

described in the book as a detailed example of inclusive pedagogy. The book describes the relationship between teaching and learning in terms of the core idea of *transformability*. *Transformability* asserts the principled belief that ‘all children’s capacity to learn can change and be changed for the better as a result of what happens and what people do in the present’ (p. 166). This informs thinking about the relationship between teaching and learning in two ways: that the present is the future in the making; and that ‘nothing is neutral’ (p. 170). With this understanding of the interdependence between teaching and learning and its effect on achievement, it becomes unacceptable to predict or predetermine a learner’s ability or capacity to learn. Instead, learning is achieved as a result of relationships within communities as expressed through the practical pedagogical principles of *co-agency*, *everybody* and *trust* as follows:

- *Co-agency*. The notion of *transformability*, and the principle of ‘nothing is neutral’, demands the responsibility for learning is shared between teacher and learner. A central assumption of transformability is that teachers cannot do it alone. They are powerless without the participation of learners.
- *Trust*. For learners to take up the invitation to *co-agency*, teachers must trust that they make meaning, and find relevance and purpose through their experiences. Learners need to know that they are the ones who can tell the teacher about how they learn. Trust enables a shared responsibility for the *transformability* of young people’s capacity to learn – and the sharing is seen in the *coming together*, not the *dividing* of responsibility.
- *Everybody*. *Transformability* and the practical principles of *trust* and *co-agency* demand that there is also the ‘ethic of everybody’: teachers have both the opportunity and responsibility to work to enhance the learning of *all*. It is useful to remember that the opposite of the concept of everybody is not ‘no one’ but ‘some people’ (p. 261). In the relationships that support teaching and learning, ‘nothing is neutral’: whatever the teacher does will have an effect, positive or negative. Teachers are in a privileged position to act to change things for the better. Choosing to plan opportunities for learning that will be part of a shared experience establishes an understanding of achievement through participation in a community, and equity is demonstrated through unity, not ‘sameness’.

These principles emphasise that it is in the process of making pedagogical decisions that teachers can act to enhance children’s capacity to learn, as opposed to relying on notions of fixed ability (see Figure 1). We used this framework for pedagogical thinking as a tool to exemplify our ideas about inclusive pedagogy and to provide a clear framework for student teachers to think about their experiences on school placements.

The FPS course ‘Learning without limits’ was designed to develop students’ understanding of inclusive pedagogy. Part of this involved developing their appreciation of the uses of ability labelling in learning and in schools with particular reference to the influence of ‘the normal curve’ on expectations for educational attainment, and how these ideas are embedded in many current educational policies in the UK. The course argues for a concept of inclusive pedagogy that rejects the need for such deterministic thinking, acknowledging that it is not only socially and educationally divisive but that the opportunities for teaching and learning which result may have the unintended consequence of *limiting* learning for all children (Hart et al., 2004).



Source: Hart, Dixon Drummond, and McIntyre (2004) *Learning without limits* (Figure 13.3, p. 179). Reproduced with the kind permission of Open University Press. All rights reserved.

Figure 1. The core idea of transformability and the key pedagogical principles.

The design of the FPS course is such that taught sessions are spread across the academic year, punctuated by students' placements in school. Initially students undertake independent research: observing practice in schools, paying particular attention to when and where judgements are made about children's ability to learn, and the impact this has on achievement. They then reflect on how, as teachers, they might make alternative choices or decisions – how they might act to further enhance all children's learning. The course has been developed to respond to the many possibilities and limitations in practice, acknowledging that students' school experiences are diverse, and there is variability in how they will encounter and understand the challenges and problems of meeting the educational needs of all learners when on placement in schools.

For example, the understandings, attitudes, and dispositions held by class teachers towards the idea of 'inclusive practice' vary and these will affect the student teachers' experiences. Not all class teachers sympathise with the demands of inclusive practice. In such situations, student teachers may be restricted in the opportunities they have to explore the alternative pedagogical implications of *transformability*. Rather than judge this as a problem, we considered this an opportunity to explore the principles

described in *Learning without limits* and students' experiences of a wide range of scenarios in both primary and secondary schools. Students were encouraged to use each other's professional experiences to reflect on how the decisions teachers make affect children's achievement, and to consider the pedagogical choices they might make to enhance *everybody's* opportunities for learning. Students were asked to consider how they could use the key principles to understand the decisions they made. They gathered and used evidence from their time in school to reflect on experiences, making connections with the principles and theoretical concept of *transformability* in and through practice. This approach was supported by activities in the tutorials (an example of which is displayed in Table 1), which placed significant emphasis on students' development as reflective practitioners, and made explicit links with the broader professional studies element of the PGDE.

## Method

The study reported here is part of a larger mixed method programme of research on the reform of the PGDE that asks a series of questions relating to the key challenges associated with preparing teachers for inclusive education. As part of the larger project, qualitative data were collected by audio-recording the tutorial sessions and class discussions from the 2007–2008 course cohort. Verbatim transcripts were analysed using both deductive and inductive procedures for evidence that the course reforms have been embedded in the curriculum, to search for contradictions in the reformed curriculum, and to identify areas that might benefit from future development work (for further details see Florian, et al., 2010). This study presents an inductive analysis of data from the FPS 'Learning without limits' that was undertaken to identify key themes for discussion and self-study as the course was being developed. We were interested in exploring how the student-teachers engaged with the principles of inclusive pedagogy as they reflected on the concept of *transformability*; how they responded when they encountered pupils experiencing difficulties in learning; and how they worked collaboratively with others, particularly colleagues who were committed to ability grouping as a means of differentiating teaching. Because the focus of the study was on how the students were engaging with and using the ideas presented in *Learning without limits* as an example of inclusive pedagogy, the decision was taken to focus on analysing the stories students told about their experiences while on school placements. This provided rich descriptions of practice that reflect how the students engaged with the theoretical ideas of the course.

## Findings

Not surprisingly, the students' stories were closely linked to the key concepts taught on the course. However, as we began to analyse the transcripts, certain interrelated themes recurred. These were:

- Developing an appreciation of the impact of ability labelling.
- New ways of thinking about teaching.
- Responding to individuals and offering choices.
- Taking risks, adapting the curriculum, and being surprised.
- New ways of working with others.

Table 1. Teachers committed to transformability...

Teachers committed to transformability don't	Teachers committed to transformability do	In the classroom I would expect to see/hear
Manage classroom activities through the imposition of authority	Give pupils the responsibility and <i>choice</i> for their own learning and teaching activities: Selection of activities Own class rules – made up themselves (scaffolding) Contextualise learning – own experiences	Suggestions boxes > topics Collaborative learning & choice learning conversations & noise Children motivated in their learning and focused on the activities
Respond to individuals on the basis of categories of perceived ability	Ask the child where they perceive they are up to, and how to move forward Interests, friendship groups Self esteem, encouragement, ambitious	Cognitive/affective Collaborative learning Learning conversations Possibly individual journal of progress
Write off anybody, ever, no matter how intractable the situation seems	Believe that everybody can learn Always believe in the child's potential to learn, and learn better	Teacher experimenting and striving to use different strategies to help children learn Not allowing difficulty in one area to affect progress in another Children being encouraged to try different activities
Conduct classroom interaction on the basis that teaching and learning requires the passing of knowledge from teacher to the learner	Teacher acting as facilitator for knowledge, the children taking responsibility for their own learning	Activity learning: learning by doing Learning and talking partners Peer and self assessment
Overtly differentiate between young people in tasks or activities	Encourage children to choose the level of work they want to do. Also, to move between different groups depending on whether they finish or not Allow children to move between levels and build up their self-confidence	Might hear a lot more conversations in which children ask each other questions and interact to work out answers There would be lots of movement where children would be deciding what level to attempt Learning discussions with children identifying their level of need



Table 1. (Continued)...

Teachers committed to transformability don't	Teachers committed to transformability do	In the classroom I would expect to see/hear
Routinely use ability-based grouping or grouping by similar attainment	Encourage group work based on interests, friendships, trust, strengths they perceive, support, etc. and whom they think they would learn most effectively with... so that they can learn from one another Random groups!?	Discussions between children to form groups Different seating arrangements with the different groups that children would form More sociable groups, children interacting better through being in a variety of different groups. Lots of interaction and discussion about tasks More 'mixed ability' groups as pupils perceive certain pupils to be more knowledgeable

Note. 'Teachers committed to transformability don't...' is taken from Hart et al. (2004, pp. 208–209, Table 14.1). 'Teachers committed to transformability do' and 'In the classroom I would expect to see/hear' are transcriptions of student input in FPS: LwL session 5.

By examining how the students articulated their own understanding of the themes over time we were able to document how their emergent understanding of inclusive pedagogy developed, and this enabled us to answer our research questions. Each theme is discussed below.

### *Developing an appreciation of the impact of ability labelling*

Early in the course, students' reflections on the use of ability labelling in schools were often descriptive – involving the structure of the exam system; which work books, or schemes of work were followed by class teachers, and so on. By engaging with the arguments in *Learning without limits* they began to reflect on the functional and strategic aspects of teachers' practice and the consequences of the pedagogical decisions that underpin provision – for example, *how* and *why* classes and groups are organised into ability groups, or according to 'curriculum levels', and how this impacts on children's learning, for example, in terms of which exams children were enabled to take.

Just from the placement I was on... information collected from school teachers all the way from primary school about kids... levels of attainment within that system, and using that to differentiate learning, the learning – which is what we've been told to do – you should differentiate learning, not necessarily making learning different but making it more appropriate... (Helen, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 1)

With support from tutors, students developed sensitivity towards how these observations link with educational theory, in effect 'bridging' theory and practice (McIntyre, 2005). For example, as they observed how teachers differentiate classroom activities, formally and informally, they became aware that judgements made by class teachers about certain children might be different to those they formed for themselves. From there they began to hypothesise about why such differences in understanding occur.

I think what you were saying – about teachers' perceptions and tolerance – applies whether a child has been diagnosed or not. And, that's something I really struggled with at my placement. Because people react in such different ways that labels children, whether it is high or low. It's not just about ability but also about behaviour, based on their perception of how they think children should behave for them. Their perception might not be everybody's feeling. (John, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 2)

Steve: ...have you seen those little magic moments, where their abilities seems to be far and above? So for example there is a lad at the school where I was at this week, and he has Tourette's, but he learned a script in two minutes...

Tutor: But having Tourette's doesn't mean you can't memorize

Steve: Absolutely, but he would have been very high ability but because of this other label he is put in special learning. (UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 3)

Data analysis also revealed how student teachers grappled with the negative consequences of ability labelling (as illustrated by Steve, above), but the student teachers were also sensitive to how organising teaching in groups according to attainment is sometimes welcomed by learners.

... the child was overjoyed when he found out he would be in the top set away from the disruptive element after Christmas; and I really felt for him. I'm sort of struggling with what does that mean for the others. (Jane, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 4)

Here the student's story showed a heightened awareness that when decisions about who belongs in which set are made by teachers based on judgements about ability, the outcome is not only a celebration of the 'progress' of the learner who has moved to the 'top set', but also a concern for those left behind in the 'lower-set' and the perception of these pupils as 'disruptive elements'. This story was used to explore the rationale for an inclusive pedagogical approach and the associated moral imperative to replace the idea of 'most and some' learners with a concept of 'everybody'.

### *New ways of thinking about teaching*

The practical pedagogical principles associated with *transformability* (co-agency, everybody and trust) were consistently used as a tool to develop student teachers' thinking about opportunities for teaching and learning, and difficulties that may have been encountered. In early sessions this was usually manifest by students relating storied-experiences about how they engaged with the idea that *all* children have the capacity to learn, and their responsibility as teachers is to act in ways that enhance this learning (even if they did not know what to do). Tutors used the vocabulary of *transformability* – particularly the beliefs that: 'nothing is neutral'; 'the present is the future in the making'; and the key pedagogical principles 'co-agency, everybody and trust' to model how the students' stories evidenced their engagement with the principles of inclusive pedagogy.

- Laura: There's this young pupil... who is disruptive, who generally likes to complain [but] if you... offer her 'why', and the benefits of the [lesson] you almost see the ... learning lights come on in her own eyes. And then you think for a moment, if I could just get more time with this child and give more positive reinforcement, find out a bit more about the child, perhaps we could set her off on a different path... Because of the reality of the situation, how it tends to go is two minutes later she's back into her old ways of being disruptive
- Tutor (N): The challenge for you in that situation is: what happened that made the light go on in her eyes for one second? That's the situation that you need to analyse. That's where maybe even using those steps... Asking yourself that set of questions about what was going on there: because you know you 'saw the light'. The job for you is to expand that.
- Laura: It was just picking on something she might have done in a group work, and why did she do that. And it was like: I don't talk about this now. They may be quite a few cognitive steps that we're going on in her mind, as to why she took the stimulus, but sort of idea what was that. And then she was distracted again.
- Tutor (R): Can you see how in the moment what you had was this principle of everybody where she was a really valued important part of the classroom, from your point of view. That you trusted that she could come up with a really good idea, and then you were going to make her a co-agent in it, that you were really interested in what she said – it's there...
- Laura: It's there. I get it! (UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 4)

Analysis of the students' stories revealed the way in which the concept of *transformability* and the key principles could be considered valuable tools for inclusive pedagogy because they provided a structure for students' understanding: about 'what appears to be the case' in the present of the classroom and 'what they could do next' in diverse situations. As the course progressed, students became increasingly confident using the key pedagogic principles as a framework for thinking about their

experiences in school. They used the language associated with *Learning without limits* (Hart et al., 2004) to justify how and why they made certain choices in their teaching.

Mine wasn't anything in particular, I just focused on group work, the trust with the jigsaw techniques, giving them the responsibility of being the teachers in a sense, they went into groups and they had to learn, about an environmental studies lesson... homes and things; so they became an expert in the area, and they had to research and decide what they wanted to research and discuss it in their groups and decided they wanted to learn about, and then I rearranged the groups just randomly, there wasn't any ability labelling or anything, and they had to feedback what their groups had learned. I think it was mainly trust that I was giving them responsibility of their learning, and it turned out really well. (Katie, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 5)

Although student teachers' use of the vocabulary associated with *transformability* was slow to develop they were starting to grapple with the principles through their stories of the experiences they had had in school, and their articulations of their ambitions for the learning of everybody. As the course progressed, students moved from merely descriptive to more reflective stories, and showed sensitivity towards the complexity of the relationships they were encountering in school. Often they would refer to 'histories' of individual children they were interested in, or how they observed particular children behaving in different ways in different lessons, or at different times of day. Students began to make reference to more theoretical understandings that they were developing elsewhere in the course.

Today it really hit me... from the lecture, and what I wanted to take forward to my next practice is how you properly include children who are doing other things in the class, rather than just giving them any old work and leaving them to it as they then start to disrupt the classroom. It's made me really think about just the one or two in each of the classes who behave like that, and why. (Nicola, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; Transcription 5)

Making such links gave them confidence to be more reflective when on placement in schools and take greater risks in their own practice in terms of planning lessons that were not necessarily replicating the practice they were observing.

This way of thinking together developed students' understanding of expertise and professionalism with respect to becoming a teacher. Being a teacher was not understood as being 'the one who has all the answers' but knowing how to access and use support as and when necessary. Students were encouraged to engage with how thinking about the relationship between their teaching and children's learning informed the decisions and choices that they were making as teachers, and the values and principles that underpinned this practice.

For my lesson I had a focus of co-agency and the lesson that I chose to implement this in was one in which the children were asked to write poems and it was based on a theme of winter. In order to ensure co-agency within the class, I ensured diversity in the tasks that I was giving the children by allowing them choice of what task: what style of poem they decided to do. I also involved them in peer assessment after the children had written the poems which allowed them to share the learning with each other and learn from each other – which is the main feature of co-agency as well. So instead of ability labelling in this lesson, I gave the children a choice of the tasks and the complexity of which they decided to do their poem. So the choice of tasks I gave them was sensory poem in which they can fill out about structure plan like this in which at the top here it said 'I hear/I see/I smell and I feel winter is' so it's very, very guided so the children who were not very

confident in writing poems could choose to use this very structured plan and I've got a nice example here, if anyone's interested, of one of the children's poems there.

Another poem they can choose to write was an acrostic poem, which is you know it's the words down vertically here and a wee [little] sentence or phrase for every letter and this was a favourite within the class I have to say and children were asked to choose how complex or how simple they make the poem they could use a word like 'ice'... with only three letters; or we have some more adventurous ones of snowflakes and things and they gave this task like go with that on their own. The third poem was a four line verse poem that they can choose and this gave them total free range of the poetry that they wrote, which some of the pupils take advantage of and went and use some pupils' poems there. So I think giving the children this choice allowed this to lift the limits of their learning because I wasn't segmenting them in their ability groups which they otherwise they would have been placed in.

But, one of the problems that I experienced was that usually in a writing lesson, the lower ability group are usually sent off to a working... which is for staff, totally separate from their entire class. So I asked the teacher if there was any chance of me involving these children more so we decided to compromise and gave the children the choice, so again choice coming in – the choice to either stay in the class and work more independently or if they wanted the extra support then they could still go through with the support staff. And lots of children were not very confident in poetry writing so four of the five children decided to go and get their extra help. But one of the wee [small] girls, who was in this group just jumped at the chance and really was excited to stay in the class and worked with everybody else. So I think that this had a remarkable effect in poetry writing... like just here, and she did prove herself too. The teacher was suggesting that I gave her just the usual sensory poem to work on her own but I decided to give her the same choice as everybody else and she proved herself there with writing this wonderful poem.

So, I believe that giving the children choice allows a higher quality of poems that we received and the learners were far more motivated in their learning and in their trying to write their poetry. So every child at the end of this lesson when I asked 'Would anyone like to show their poem or read their poems to class?' everybody [makes an excited sound] were so proud of their work and it was lovely to see that. So I don't think I would have got that same effect if I'd given them 'you must do an acrostic poem; you must do the sensory one' I don't think they would have had the same joy in what they created. So by implementing co-agency I believe that I included everybody because everybody had an equal choice and chance to succeed and I also implemented trust and just came about that the children trust, I trusted the children to choose work suitable for their confidence level and what they believe that they could achieve. (Jenny, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 7 – student presentation; transcription 13)

### ***Responding to individuals and offering choices***

As the course emphasised why a consideration of the principles that underpin a commitment to inclusive practice must be at the core of how teachers think about *all* children's learning, students' understanding of the potential for learners to surprise teachers became an important dynamic. In turn, this encouraged an understanding of achievement in learning that was not restricted to curriculum frameworks or tools for formal assessment but one that involves questioning and challenging the opportunities for learning that are made available to all learners. Through engaging with the core idea of *transformability* students developed their understanding of what 'inclusive practice' means – that it is not just for 'some children' who have been identified as having additional support needs, but for everybody. Students began to reject the notion that they should identify children who are not 'doing what they should be

doing' or conforming in terms of statutory and standardised learning outcomes, and to apply 'solutions' to fix that child.

Nicola: There are two children in the class that went to the base for English and maths and a lot of other things, they were out quite a lot and missed out a lot... And another wee [small] boy who had specific behavioural issues, violent, and he had to sit on his own in a back corner. And when I was there and during all my lessons I let him sit back at group... He got to join a group and he worked much better and his behaviour improved massively.

The class teacher said that that was unlikely to last and that she thought it was novelty value having somebody else there. I think it was just having somebody there who was interested in him that made the difference. And, the two [children] that got sent off to the base as well really benefited, achieved far more than they had, even more than in the base, they did halves and quarters and I was told they probably wouldn't even grasp halves. And we did it all practical... I saw on teachers TV this amazing thing, with paper cups, and they all just demonstrated until [they had worked] it all out. Over the four weeks I did a mini project with them and those 3 were involved in everything that they normally wouldn't be involved in and did all the same work. We just did lots of arty stuff and pictures, and words and not being fussy about spelling and tidiness. They were much more included.

Tutor: Your story about the child that the teacher said is a novelty and it won't last: that is where you see the judgment about the child's ability. What you're doing is trying to turn that on its head, create some other opportunity. (UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 6)

As students began to engage with alternative pedagogic thinking about teaching and learning, children were recognised as people as opposed to types of learners. In this way, the children themselves and their achievements in learning were prioritised over predictions about it.

There was a little boy, he was in Primary 7... he has gone right through primary school without saying a word to the teacher... the only person who he would talk to is his best friend. And I came into the class and they were doing talks this day and then he actually, wouldn't move from his desk but... He read it out loud with his head down... the fact that he read it in front the whole class was amazing... The teacher had very high expectations for them doing their talks, they had to look at the class, make eye contact, whereas this boy... The whole class was so accepting of this... They were just so proud of him. (Mike, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 7)

We hear about differentiation in worksheets and see all the abilities within the class, and the class teacher was very much trying to keep the Primary 3s separate from the Primary 4s, so the 4s felt like they're older and smarter in a way. I tried to create my lessons so that they were all integrated. If they're all working as a class together they have to really learn from each other... It worked, and because they got to choose themselves I think they were far more motivated. (Liz, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 8)

### ***Taking risks, adapting the curriculum, and being surprised***

Student teachers' dawning realisations of how they, as teachers, could act to enhance children's learning became infectious – they related stories of how they were taking increasing 'risks' as they employed the pedagogic principles to their thinking about what was, or could be, made generally available. This was evident in the comparison of stories told by one student, Alison. In referencing the first 'risk-taking' at the

beginning of her second anecdote (below) she makes it clear how the two experiences are pedagogically connected: the children's willingness to converse in French had encouraged her to be more ambitious about what, and how, they might learn. Over time she was given increasing responsibility and opportunity to work with the children in alternative ways. Planning a series of lessons that involved making a DVD enabled Alison to develop a more sophisticated understanding of some of the children she had been teaching – and she was, again, surprised by what they could do.

... interested and motivated children, in their first year French class. I had been using some of the language to open the lesson and close the lesson, and little bits in the middle, and they haven't been used to it and I was sort of nervous about taking it further... I was absolutely stunned at how it changed the classroom environment. And it wasn't just with those that you might perceive... It was with all of them, they all started to speak back in French when they asked something. On Friday someone asked a question in French and I replied in French, and he said 'Merci' and I said 'De rien'; and he sort of looked at me and I could just see some of the others were beginning to look at me like I'd said *derriere* – bottom and I said 'no, no, no', so I went, and I wrote it on the board and I heard this rustling behind me, and they were all grabbing their vocab. books, scribbling it down... It is such a missed opportunity if you don't just try and do it, if you're too scared, and it didn't leave people behind. (Alison, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 3; transcription 9)

The last lesson I think it's out of first year class who had started speaking French... And I suddenly realised how much more they were capable of... I tried different things as far as the pace of the lesson, and introducing different ways of doing things, and then I introduced things like a favourite word... About the language not just about learning vocabulary, different things with homework that was optional... I said to them some of these things we have not covered but just use the materials that we've got... They all got everything right.

The last two weeks I was given a project to do with them, because they were far ahead... and that was when they made the DVD... And just had the freedom. And they did superbly well: they made scripts that they've read in French... And one of the boys from one of the groups went home and came back with a worksheet.

From the point of view of language it made me realize they can do so much more... and made me realize that I still wasn't scratching the surface of potential that they have...

They learned a lot, not necessarily a lot about French, but about how to be in a group and work together... it was much more imaginative in the end than we thought we would get, had we just dictated what should be in it.

... It was done with strengths. One girl was incredibly assertive... in terms of managing her group and I had never seen that at all in the classroom, it would not have come out at all. It wouldn't have come out if I had put her into a group... (Alison, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 10)

### *New ways of working with others*

Introducing students to pedagogic practice that seeks to challenge notions of fixed ability sometimes created conflict with other practices the students encountered when working in schools where existing practice relied on standardised curricula and assessment tools. Yet, despite this, students were encouraged to enhance all children's learning by 'lifting the limits' they perceived from their observations. In the choices they were making for their own teaching, students were sometimes circumventing other teachers' assumptions about how children should be taught. Students were aware of this and negotiated it in various ways:

One of the classes I was involved with was a S3 class... and there are quite a few characters that had caused problems throughout the school, and as they had gone on over the years...

On Friday we did a project... it was interesting to see them organise themselves, and doing a lesson they didn't have to sit down and work out of a text book. They were motivating each other. To keep on, we did that on a Friday. That really benefitted the Monday...once they had done that and we trusted them, they were a lot more willing to take part in the lessons than before.

Towards the end... I asked one of them to read out loud... And the principal teacher was sitting in and his heart was in his mouth when I asked him [the pupil] to do that, because normally that would be quite a barrier. But he did read really, really well. At the end I was walking through the school and I said to him 'How did you enjoy the lessons?' He said 'I hate substitute teachers, but you were alright!' (Tim, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 11)

Significant courage was demanded from some students when they encountered cultures in school placements that contradicted the teaching on the 'Learning without limits' course; in particular, the culture of sending children out of class to work with specialist or support workers during particular lessons 'because they wouldn't be able to cope with the same work as the other children'.

We had the topic of puppets... and we tend to link all our lessons and we had five children that had additional support needs, four of them had language difficulties and went out of the class to do language. This little boy was not integrated into the classroom at all, he had autism and ADHD... We were going to do puppet shows within the table groups... Write those scripts, and design... Starting from the beginning onwards, the children with language difficulties wouldn't normally be involved in something like that, I was keen to get them involved in this, so we did things like storyboards and lots of discussions and things so these children could actually get involved in it. And the little boy who usually doesn't get integrated into the class loved these puppets, and he got so involved that he actually managed to sit through a series of lessons. He's never actually done that before. It was a huge achievement. The kids chose the topics...it was great to see somebody relate to the topic so well and the fact that he was integrated in this through the curriculum...art, language, math, everything is involved in this topic. He actually sat through lessons and integrated with his peers through these groups. It was just fantastic to see, from Week 1 to Week 4 when he was just sitting without his PSA [support teacher] getting involved. It was a great feeling to see that happening. It was wonderful...he showed them; and then teacher couldn't believe it... the PSA was in floods of tears because she had never seen him sit through a lesson before – and he had; and he got involved in the group discussion and it was fantastic. Because this boy had been labelled he couldn't get involved in the classroom. It was really worthwhile. (Susan, UoA. PGDE. FPS: LwL session 4; transcription 12)

## Discussion

It is important not to underestimate how radical a call for inclusive pedagogy can be: students were prompted to make observations about the use of ability labelling in schools and to reflect on this in tutorials. They were then encouraged to use the core idea of *transformability* and the practical pedagogical principles of *co-agency*, *everybody* and *trust* as tools to guide and inform their own inclusive pedagogical decision-making. As Jenny's story illustrated, courage was demanded from some students when they encountered school cultures that contradicted the teaching on the course; in particular, the culture of sending children out of class to work with specialist or support workers



during particular lessons because of the convictions that the pupils would not be able to cope with the same work as other children. Jenny's story about a poetry lesson in a primary school (transcription 13), involved a very explicit negotiation with the class teacher that demanded high levels of courage and determination on her part. But, despite the constraints she was negotiating, Jenny's pedagogical commitment to teaching *all* children in her class was demonstrated through her determination to offer choice as a means of enhancing everybody's opportunities for learning. In justifying the pedagogical decisions that she made, and in reflecting on the learning that was achieved as a consequence of these decisions, Jenny specifically emphasised the interrelatedness of the key principles of *co-agency*, *everybody* and *trust*. By using the principles as a tool to guide and support her thinking, she was able to identify how her pedagogy addressed all of the principles, and demonstrated that she was confident that she acted in the best interests of *all* of the children she was teaching.

Alison's accounts of her experiences teaching French in a secondary school highlight how the framework for pedagogical thinking introduced on our course was used by student teachers to inform the risks they were taking in exploring new ways of working – that is to say, to teach in ways that were not being modelled for them in schools. Alison took courage from *transformability* as a theoretical, principled stance to reflect her professional commitment to all children's capacity to learn, and teachers' capacity to change things for the better. Responding to the children's interest and motivation, her commitment to *transformability* enabled her to decide to speak to the children in French despite being 'nervous about taking it further'. She reflected afterwards that not to have made this decision would have been 'such a missed opportunity, if you don't just try and do it, if you're too scared' (transcription 9). Similarly, Nicola's commitment to everybody empowered her to include children who ordinarily went to the learning support base for 'English maths and a lot of other things' (transcription 6) in whole class projects despite being told that the pupils would not be able to grasp the concepts.

Examples in the data have been interpreted as evidence of how the framework for thinking in *Learning without limits* supported students' realisation of the effect that teachers' decisions have on children's learning – that 'nothing is neutral' (Hart et al., 2004, p. 170). This is central to inclusive pedagogy because it empowers teachers to recognise that they do have the necessary knowledge and skills to support all learners. Our thematic analysis of the course transcripts enabled us to show how the student teachers' understanding of inclusive pedagogy emerged as they engaged with the concept of transformability that was taught on the FPS course. We were able to document some of their responses to pupils experiencing difficulties in learning.

The findings from this study suggest the possibility that the clear rigorous framework for thinking about the relationship between teaching and learning provided by the book *Learning without limits* has contributed to the kind of enhanced professionalism sought by the aims of the IPP. To this extent we have encouraged our student teachers to identify themselves as 'inclusive practitioners'. The course encouraged teaching in ways that actively created spaces for teachers to be surprised by how and what the children learned. This contradicts a culture more common in schools where teachers and student teachers are expected to teach to pre-determined 'learning intentions' or 'lesson objectives' with carefully differentiated expectations for some children. Of particular interest to our ongoing work we are beginning to document some of the strategies used by the student teachers as they work in respectful and collaborative ways with colleagues who remain committed to ability grouping as a means of differentiating teaching,

Finally, the study highlighted the potential for surprise and its importance in understanding the significance of teachers' thinking about how opportunities for learning are made available to all children; reflecting what Hart and her colleagues (2004, p. 166) expressed as:

... a firm and unswerving conviction that there is the potential for change in current patterns of achievement and response, that things can change and be changed for the better, sometimes even dramatically, as a result of what happens and what people do in the present.

The core idea of *transformability* as expressed through the principles *co-agency*, *everybody* and *trust* were a tangible way for students-teachers to recognise their capacity to teach all learners. Students who undertook the course Learning without limits used the core idea of *transformability* and the pedagogical principles of *everybody*, *co-agency* and *trust* to respond to the demands of their professional responsibility to act to enhance all children's learning, rather than focussing on learners' capacity to conform to predetermined standards for attainment, more traditionally reflected by learning intentions of the curriculum. In creating environments for learning where the opportunities made available were used to enhance achievements for all, newly qualified teachers become inclusive practitioners.

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