Exploring inclusive practices in primary schools: focusing on children's voices
PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

7 authors, including:

Gill Hughes
University of Hull
10 PUBLICATIONS **44** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Lisa Jones
University of Hull
10 PUBLICATIONS **95** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Kyriaki Messiou
University of Southampton
23 PUBLICATIONS **350** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Patricia Shaw
University of Hull
3 PUBLICATIONS **26** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

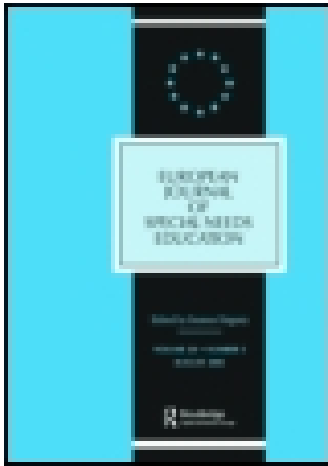**Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:**

Project

Reaching the 'hard to reach': Inclusive responses to diversity through child-teacher dialogue (Erasmus+, 2017-2020) View project

European Journal of Special Needs Education

Exploring inclusive practices in primary schools: focusing on children's voices

Rebecca J. Adderley[a], Max A. Hope[a], Gill C. Hughes[b], Lisa Jones[a], Kyriaki Messiou[c] & Patricia A. Shaw[a]

[a] Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Hull, UK

[b] School of Social Sciences, University of Hull, Hull, UK

[c] Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK
Published online: 01 Oct 2014.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Exploring inclusive practices in primary schools: focusing on children's voices

Rebecca J. Adderley[a], Max A. Hope[a]*, Gill C. Hughes[b], Lisa Jones[a], Kyriaki Messiou[c] and Patricia A. Shaw[a]

[a]*Centre for Educational Studies, University of Hull, Hull, UK;* [b]*School of Social Sciences, University of Hull, Hull, UK;* [c]*Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK*

This paper reports a small-scale research project which took place in one primary school in the north-east of England. The study aimed to listen to children's views about how the practices of teachers helped and/or hindered their sense of inclusion in classrooms. Inclusion was understood here in a broad sense rather than specifically relating to children with special educational needs. Participatory research tools were used as part of group interviews with children from three different year groups. Even though the children were mostly happy with their school experience, it was noticeable that there were some areas for concern for some children that related to four interconnecting themes: unfairness, shouting, loneliness and seating plans. All of these themes seemed to be connected with children's interpersonal relationships – with teachers and with each other – and can be seen as crucial in terms of understanding inclusion in schools and further developing existing practices.

Keywords: inclusion; participative research; children's voices; interpersonal relationships

Introduction

In the drive to enhance the educational experiences of young people, children's voices have been utilised in research as a means to both explore and further develop inclusive practices in schools (Ainscow and Kaplan 2005; Fielding 2001; Messiou 2006, 2012a, 2012b; Messiou and Jones 2013). This paper reports on a research project which took place in a primary school and focused on listening to children's voices about teachers' practices that both promote and hinder inclusion. The project grew out of a university research group's commitment to understanding inclusion in context; this group consisted of experienced and early career researchers and formed the 'we' in the later discussion. Members of staff from the school were part of the planning group, and though not directly involved in the data gathering, they were keen to develop their school's inclusive practices. This primary school was located in a small, relatively affluent village on the peripheries of a large city in the north-east of England.

*Corresponding author. Email: Max.Hope@hull.ac.uk

Our initial research questions were as follows:

- What are children's views about the ways in which teachers promote or hinder inclusion in classrooms?
- How can the use of various tools facilitate an engagement with children's views?

In order to address these questions, the central method of data collection was group interviews with children from three year groups, each utilising participatory tools. The sample chosen featured children identified by teachers based on the school's particular inclusion focus, namely those children perceived to be 'invisible' (that is observably less engaged, vocal or participative) as well as the few black and minority ethnic children within the school. In addition to these children, the group interviews included other children who did not fall into either of the above groups but were children who, the teachers thought, might be vulnerable to marginalisation. Some of these children were receiving free school meals and therefore were a minority group in this particular school. Others had experienced recent problems with social relationships. These decisions were offered to the teachers to allow them some ownership within the process, valuing their particular knowledge of the children in their class.

The findings in this paper relate to the first question and especially those aspects which the children perceived to undermine inclusion. The second question is dealt with through the choice of qualitative methodology and methods. As with other research (for example McIntyre, Pedder, and Rudduck 2005), the children's contributions were, in the main, reassuring for the teachers. Nonetheless, this paper adds to the existing body of knowledge about inclusive practices using a range of innovative research tools which go beyond the veneer of children's apparent contentment at school. Although the vast majority of children in the sample expressed satisfaction with their school experience, a closer analysis of data indicated a range of matters which troubled children across the year groups. We have chosen, in this paper, to focus on themes that were of concern, in order to stimulate thinking with regard to what can be improved in school contexts. The findings are reported within four main themes which we classify as 'unfairness', 'shouting', 'loneliness' and 'seating plans'. Importantly, we argue that these issues could sit within an overarching framework of interpersonal relationships, thus demonstrating that the issues raised by the children pertaining to their understanding of inclusion were hindered when their interpersonal relationships and exchanges were problematic. This paper illustrates this claim with evidence from the children's concerns.

Using children's voices to promote inclusion

In the UK, inclusion is often synonymous with special educational needs; however, a refocus situates it within a wider context (e.g. Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006a; Messiou 2006). This is based upon the view that exclusion from, and marginalisation within, the educational system can happen as a result of many issues. For instance, Booth and Ainscow (1998, 2) argue that:

> Inclusion or exclusion are as much about participation and marginalisation in relation to race, class, gender, sexuality, poverty and unemployment as they are about traditional educational concerns with students categorised as low in attainment, disabled or deviant in behaviour.

Hall et al. (2004, 801) state that inclusion 'involves all learners participating in the learning' and similarly, Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson (2006b, 295) argue that schools should develop ways of 'increasing participation and broad educational achievement of all groups of learners', particularly those who are at risk of experiencing marginalisation. Indeed Rose and Shevlin (2004, 160) argue that by listening to children's voices, it 'enable[s] us to reflect upon how future developments may afford greater opportunities to those who have been previously denied'. It was this understanding that encouraged us to explore the views of the children.

Central to our argument is the understanding that inclusion is a dynamic process and not a static position: it happens at the interface between teacher and pupil, pupils and peers and pupil and school environment. Therefore, practices, cultures and environmental factors within schools must be monitored to assess their impact on inclusion. We concur with the position that all types of dialogue are important in the process of uncovering practices which might promote or hinder inclusion within schools, but we go further in arguing that it is a dialogue with the pupils themselves, which is mostly helpful in revealing these particular practices, especially in arenas in which they usually have little input. This resonates with Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson's (1999) position, which suggests that children can be seen as 'hidden voices' that can facilitate the development of more inclusive classrooms and schools. Children should be involved in, but more importantly central to, dialogue that involves decisions which will ultimately affect them and their recommendations upon which action should be taken (Casey 2005; Todd 2007).

There is a growing body of literature which links school effectiveness with the quality of interpersonal relationships within a school (Anderman 2002; Baumeister and Leary 1995; Geddes 2006; Hope 2012; Wetz 2009). Such relationships with teachers and peers can impact upon their ability to engage in meaningful learning. This aligns with the discourse of connectedness promoting good health and education outcomes and less risk-taking behaviour if children feel connected into their school (Blum and Libbey 2004).

We believe that building good relationships with children and listening to their views is an extremely important part of inclusive practice, mainly because it is children who experience first-hand, the impact of inclusive or exclusive practices (Messiou 2002). In other words, pupils have a role in supporting the move towards more inclusive school systems (Rose 1998). Although, historically, the emphasis of research involving children has been a *research on* children, we have tried to undertake *research with* children (Greene and Hill 2005; O'Kane 2008). This is in line with Article 13 of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which moves towards engaging with children's views as 'a moral perspective on the role and status of children which respects and promotes their entitlement to being considered as persons of value and persons with rights' (Greene and Hill 2005, 3).

Although all dialogue with children is important, we consider that it is valuable to make the distinction between dialogue with children related to *adult-initiated* topics, and dialogue which is *child initiated* and about issues which they deem to be of importance. This second type of dialogue could be viewed as being more inclusive because children's voices are seen to be a 'challenging starting point for the creation of more inclusive practices within schools' (Messiou 2006, 314). As such, more importance is placed on the views and ideas of children because their contributions are seen as a starting point for moving towards more inclusive practices rather than just having a viewpoint on issues that adults consider to be of importance. Our

research placed high importance on child-initiated contributions related to inclusive practice (as we will discuss in our methodology below) because we believe that issues at the root of marginalisation for some learners may not be uncovered unless emphasis is placed on listening to the views of children (Messiou 2012a, 2012b).

To be clear though, in this study, the topics for consideration could be seen as *adult initiated,* in that adults chose the overarching research focus. Nonetheless, as the children were offered the space to contribute their ideas on inclusion and the tools used were varied and open, it enhanced our practices in terms of working 'with' rather than 'on' the participants. As a team, we were fully committed to a participatory research approach; however, ethically, we were mindful that this was not a full-scale participatory project with everyone involved in determining the agenda; it was a layered approach, which committed to following the values as closely as possible, whilst recognising the limitations.

We took the position that children are social actors (Christensen and Prout 2002) and are thus active participants within a research process. Despite our interest in classroom practices, the children continually strayed into other areas, for example, outdoor issues, which contributed in practice to a partial determination of the agenda. For reasons of time, however, we were not able to give them the opportunity to be involved with analysing data and generating themes and arguments.

Children were asked to consent to their own participation in the research. Good practice guidelines (Morrow and Richards 1996; Shaw, Brady, and Davey 2011; Thomas and O'Kane 1998) were also followed by asking for explicit consent from parents. This further acknowledges our commitment to the values of participatory research but with recognition of the limitations within the study.

In the next section, we discuss the methodological approach of this study, highlighting how we attempted to facilitate engagement with children's voices.

Methodology

For this project, a qualitative research methodology was adopted, in order to collect rich data, that it is multiparadigmatic in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992). This interpretivist position is concerned with the understanding of the social world through an examination of the perceptions of that world by its participants (Bryman 2012). In this way, we, the researchers, came to our interpretation of the school environment as seen from the children's perspectives.

One of the explicit aims of this research was to experiment with participatory tools to engage with the views of children in group interviews. This enabled participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, expressing how they regard situations from their own view. As such, the group interviews could be perceived as 'a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard' (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007, 349).

The decision to use participatory tools was an attempt to challenge traditional adult-controlled power dynamics and to equalise the power relationship between researchers and children – to give voice to the voiceless (Visweswaran 1994). As researchers, we believe that it is important to recognise the voice of the child, thus avoiding categorising them as immature, opening their opinions to dismissal (James and Prout 1997; Mason and Fattore 2005).

As a team, we concurred strongly with the position of Morrow who argued that 'If we are going to listen to children (which is innovative in itself), then we are going to have to be innovative about doing so' (Morrow 1999, 213). The participatory discourse ensures that the adopted ontological practices and tools allow the inclusion of a range of people, some with different languages or levels of literacy allowing for diversity within groups and across generations and so forth (Chambers 1983; Cornwall 2011; O'Kane 2008). This is achieved by selecting a range of tools offering flexibility to elicit the views of the children appropriate to their developmental level (Robert-Holmes 2005). In all, at least 10 different tools were used, across the year groups. These included 'blob trees', where the children chose representative figures which aligned with their perceived place in the classroom from a range of both happy and sad figures (see Figure 1). Drawings were also employed as opposed to written work, which is discussed by O'Kane (2008, 131) as one
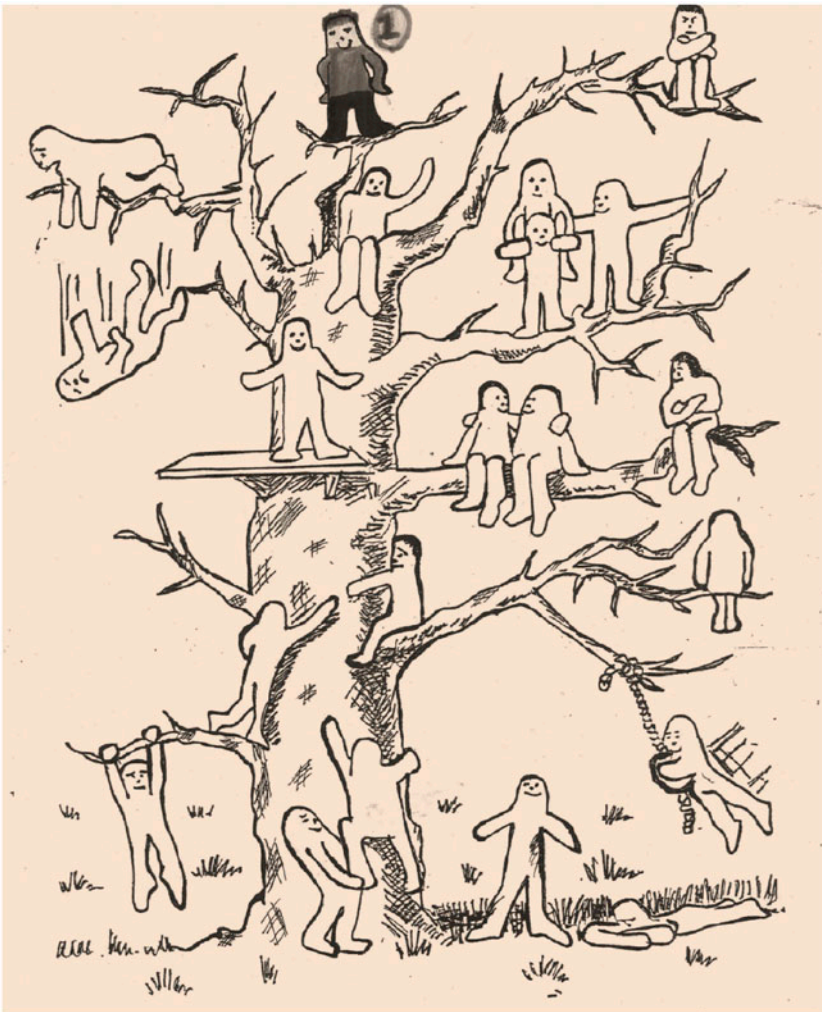

Figure 1. Example of blob tree.

'alternative form[s] of communication'. She cites Veale (2005) on drawing as '[one] method of creating a methodological frame that children could fill with their own meaning'. Being mindful of ways to communicate appropriately is crucial to gaining quality data. A further tool, a missing words game, allowed the children to complete a sentence; it required thoughtful consideration of the nuanced meanings of words, for example: 'the best thing about this school is …?' Other tools included a discussion on photos of classrooms, post-it note activities, message in a bottle paired discussion and whole group discussion. The beauty of utilising a diverse range of tools allows children with different fortes to contribute to the research, therefore not privileging those who are more able to communicate verbally or in writing. It also allows triangulation through multiple means to elicit similar information. The adoption of such tools supports the interpretation of qualitative research 'as a bricolage. Its choice of practice, that is, is pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive' (Nelson, Treichler, and Grossberg 1992, 2). The chosen method is therefore dependent upon both the questions asked and the context.

Working in pairs, researchers planned and facilitated six groups of eight children (48 in total) from Years 1, 3 and 5 (approximately aged 5, 7 and 9). The sessions were recorded by dictaphone and fully transcribed, which was complex due to the nature of group work with multiple voices; however, playback allowed reliving the experience as an aide-memoire.

The tools used enabled a more relaxed relationship to form between ourselves and the children. For example, when using the post-it notes, children were asked to think about things that they liked that were happening in their classroom and school and things that they did not like and then post the notes on a large piece of paper. Children were given the freedom to move around and discuss their ideas with others in the group, which created a relaxed atmosphere. By adopting a more fluid design, it became possible to alter the research tools according to the responses from the participants.

Although the main focus of the research was about how teachers promote inclusion in the classroom, this terminology was not used with children. Instead, we explained that we wanted to know about their experiences in the classroom, when they felt happy or unhappy, and anything that the teachers did that they found helpful or unhelpful, such adjectives were used in relation to more specific questions in order to explore inclusion. The vast majority of children had a positive experience at this particular school, for example, 'I chose that one because she is really happy and I am always happy' (from blob tree). It is important at this stage, to reiterate that some children could not think of anything negative to discuss.

Once the activities were complete, and the recordings transcribed, the data were analysed by the researchers, including any visual images/materials that had been created through the drawings and other tools. The paired researchers applied thematic analysis on their year-group findings; all researchers then met together to collectively analyse the data. Flip chart paper and pens were used to write up all of the elements which were then organised into similar categories and as the process of sorting and aligning continued, it became clear that there were overarching themes to delineate the data. During the analysis process, it became apparent that when the children were given free reign over the process, their conversations frequently strayed from the topic of inclusion in the classroom to their own agenda, befitting, as discussed, a participatory approach. In particular, they wanted to talk about playtime, lunchtimes and issues within friendships – in short, the importance of social

relationships. This suggests that children's main interest in school may not be what is happening in the classroom which is consistent with findings from other research (e.g. Allan 1999; Messiou 2002).

The overall impression emerging from the children was one of positivity; however, through transcript analysis and discussion, we attached significance to the four themes of unfairness, shouting, loneliness and seating plans. Quotations from children and examples of situations were chosen to illustrate these themes and are discussed below. All names used throughout this paper are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

The inclusion dialogue: engaging with children's voices

In this section, we introduce the four themes which emerged in relation to aspects that potentially hindered inclusion. The themes can be seen as derivatives of relational encounters which, we would argue, hold relevance for examining teaching practices for inclusion.

Unfairness

Unfairness drew out strong feelings of inequality rooted in power relations between children and teachers, their roles and access to resources. The unfairness centred on the differential in rules, such as teachers receiving preferential treatment accessing a variety of drinks within the confines of the classroom. The quotation below demonstrates this:

Thea: I wish that my teachers would … let us have drinks, not just water, they get Pepsi, Dr. Pepper, Coke, tea and we don't; they get biscuits and we don't. All we get is water.

Unfairness was also present in the perception of allocation of parts in school plays, which were seen to go to the same people each time. The children thought that those selected were given an advantage if they had access to resources outside of the school, thus increasing their propensity to achieve inside school, perhaps seen as higher stock of cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

School food also warranted a mention in that it was perceived that younger children gained earlier access to the food queue and were therefore allocated larger portions:

John: you can see that they have a bigger meal at lunchtime. With the puddings and stuff you know they get in first, we have a really small pudding, but they have a big one and they don't even finish it and it just gets thrown away and it's just a waste when we could have eaten it.

This perceived unfairness in the distribution of food appeared to cause a fracture in relationships between children and lunchtime supervisors and between the different age groups of children.

In addition, use of equipment seemed to be used as a collective punishment for individual misdemeanours which was felt to be unfair treatment and a mode of regulating behaviour which conferred a responsibility of self-management and management of others through group reward or punishment:

Alastair: when someone is on the equipment on the wrong day and then the whole class gets their equipment taken away and I don't think that's fair because only the one person should get that equipment taken away not the whole class.

In another example, the entire group talked emotively of what might be seen as a miscarriage of justice, where one child was in trouble – and the majority of the class protested their innocence – yet they were still not believed. We were struck by the strength of feeling for this issue and that it was the classmates not the child that protested loudest:

Joanne: because it was [XX] and [they are] a really scary teacher so that's why he didn't tell [them] I told [the teacher] but [they] didn't believe me. So he [Phillip the wrongly accused pupil] had to miss his playtime. Poor Phillip!

Thus, the perception that teachers or school practices were not always fair was of key concern for children across all three year groups and has clear implications for inclusive practices. Perceived unfairness undermined the teacher–child relationship and peer relationships.

Shouting

Positive relationships between teachers and children are underpinned by respectful communication (Meyers 2009). In the main, children at this school did not raise any concerns about the quality of their communication with teachers or with each other. Nonetheless, one important issue was raised by some children across all year groups; this was related to 'shouting'. On the occasions when teachers shouted, children were clearly affected – some more significantly than others.

Although some children acknowledged that shouting might be triggered by doing something against the school norms and therefore felt to be warranted (Tony – below), for others (Bob), there was a sense that simply being him was enough to elicit such a response. This suggests possible issues around inclusion for some children; in the course of a conversation, a prompt question to the contention by the children that teachers shout drew out Tony and Bob's different analysis:

Researcher:
[in response to comment about shouting]Why does the teacher shout at you? …
Tony: When you have done something naughty.
Bob: Be me, because I always get shouted at.

There was a sense in which shouting could also be seen to represent collective unfairness cutting across year groups with stories about a teacher who shouted at the class when the mistakes were the teacher's own:

Nathan: [they do] not always change the date on the board, and when we put it in our book wrong, [they] then shout[s] at us for getting the date wrong … Then we get told off.

Collective unfairness was a recurring theme, as was being shouted at for losing something or for not changing shoes. Some children also reported being 'scared' to go to the teacher to ask them something as they found them unapproachable. The impact of shouting was different for each individual child. Some children seemed to

brush it off, but for others, it was far more significant. This response from one child illustrates, powerfully, potential impact which a teacher may not comprehend if they do not know them fully and/or are perceived as not approachable:

Susan: I hate it when my teacher shouts because I'm very sensitive to shouting. When my mum shouts or my dad shouts I cry. I really do cry and dad says 'don't do this to me' and then I start crying a lot more.

Home life is not left on the doorstep of the school; it enters with children and has the potential to coalesce or collide as demonstrated in this quotation. Therefore, with regard to inclusive practices, issues such as 'shouting' can potentially marginalise children for whom such encounters evoke negative aspects associated with their home lives.

Interestingly, the children were able to identify and articulate what they thought would solve the problem of shouting. Some of their responses were profound:

Aaron: I think our teacher could be a lot happier, because if [they are] really mad then it gets us sad, well not sad, but our work is a lot worse than it would be if [they were] happy. Our work would be better.

This clearly indicates that they were not only able to comment on their lived experiences but also to suggest possible ways to alter and improve these experiences.

Loneliness

It hardly needs pointing out that school is an important time for children to start building independent social relationships. However, for some, this process is more problematic than for others. Being lonely, or feeling left out, is an emotionally painful experience for some children.

When children were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences of school, many struggled to stay focused on experience within the classroom. Instead, they frequently talked about playtimes, lunchtimes and friendships. This suggests that classrooms might be a preoccupation of teachers and researchers rather than children themselves. For children, the more social aspects of school, both positive and negative, were of greater concern. This was reflected in the following quotations:

Bob: The best thing about this school is … playtime.
Peter: Yeah. I like it when you see people, and when they let you join in.
Lee: The thing that makes me sad is when I am walking out and no one actually wants to play with me and I walk around the whole time.
Sarah: It makes me sad … when I ask people to play with me and they run away.

This strongly suggests that feeling included or excluded does not necessarily happen in classrooms and this is therefore of key importance if schools are to consider issues of inclusion for children. There were, however, also examples of loneliness within the classroom:

Hannah: I feel lonely … when we have to partner up, sometimes people don't partner up with me and I have to pick someone else, and that makes me feel a bit sad.

Not all children involved in this research reported feeling lonely. Nonetheless, loneliness as a theme was apparent across all the year groups, all ages, all ethnic groups and both genders. There was not a pattern in terms of who had, or had not, felt lonely. Some children felt that this was an enduring and chronic experience 'I am always alone', whereas others felt that it was an occasional event 'sometimes I fall out with my friend, and my best friend, and then I have no one to play with'. Some children reported having never felt lonely 'I always have some to play with and I never feel left out'. For those who spoke of it, loneliness was clearly linked to being sad, upset and unhappy. This emphasis on loneliness – and feelings about this – is perhaps unsurprising, given the wealth of research about the importance of connectedness and belongingness in school (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Beck and Malley 1998; Geddes 2006; Osterman 2000).

Since loneliness appears to be more prevalent outside classrooms; attention needs to be paid by teachers and other school staff to what is happening in the playground. Pearce and Bailey (2011) examine children's understandings of their playground experiences. They posit that there is a lack of research in this area despite noting the amount of time that children spend outside in school time.

Examples were given where teachers had identified potential isolation and attempted to counteract it. One boy explained how he had joined the school mid-term:

> Charlie: I came in year 1 and [the teacher] on my first day asked if anyone wanted to sit next to me at lunch and everyone put their hand up.

However, the children were clear that addressing loneliness was not always in the 'gift' of teachers. One child commented:

> Charlie: They say they will get someone to play with you, but it doesn't work and you are still lonely.

Rather, children appeared to recognise that stopping loneliness was more in their own control. For example, when one child talked of not having anyone to play with at lunchtime, the immediate response from another child in the group was: 'I'll play with you'. However, this only appeared to be the response in certain cases. For example, in a different group, one child said 'I am always alone', and the response from another was 'You are not … You are never alone'. Perceptions of loneliness therefore appear to be personal, but are only responded to if they are also recognised and acknowledged by others.

Feeling lonely, left out and isolated is crucial in terms of inclusion. It is the opposite of inclusion; it is exclusion. Whether this is deliberate or accidental may not be important to the child; the key is how it leaves them feeling.

Seating plans

On the surface, the seating arrangement of children within a classroom appears to be a practical issue that lies within the jurisdiction of teachers. However, the data from children within this research project indicated that it is far more than this. It plays a role in children's abilities to form and maintain good working (and playing) relationships with their peers, including influencing their abilities to learn.

Figure 2.   Seating plans.

When children were asked to reflect upon their experiences in the classroom, many of them focused on the issue of where and with whom they sat. This was a preoccupation of children across all year groups. It was very concrete and was directly linked to teachers' practice. In one group, an activity enabled visual representation of a range of children's drawings depicting when they felt happy and sad in the classroom – three quarters of the drawings included a picture of seating arrangements (see Figure 2 for example). The narrative that accompanied these included the following comments:

Bob: I wish my teachers would … let us sit next to whoever we want to.
Danny: In my good picture, it has all the people sitting on the table with the white
        board and doing Maths on the board.

In discussing seating plans, most children referred to the desire to sit with their friends. However, some older children went further than this, arguing that it also connected with how they would learn best:

Molly: It is unhelpful when you know you are going to sit with someone you know
        you aren't going to work well with, so I think you should work with someone
        we would work well with.

Most children were willing to accept that the seating plans needed to be the best ones in order to help them to concentrate and learn and most accepted this did not necessarily mean that they would sit with their friends. What they did object to, however, was the rigid nature of seating plans. One child argued that 'I don't like the fact you stay at the same table that you picked at the beginning of the year'. In this case, the seating plan might constrain the ability of children to develop and change their friendships – or, in some cases, the friendship groups might be limiting the individual's ability to learn.

None of the children identified reasons for being seated in a particular way, other than suggesting that it was to enable them to work more effectively with their partner. They did not, interestingly, mention any grouping decisions based on ability, gender or special educational needs. This is significant, given the emphasis in research and literature on children's perceptions of grouping decisions (Boaler, Wiliam, and Brown 2000; Davies, Hallam, and Ireson 2003; Hall et al. 2004; Hallam, Ireson, and Davies 2004; Ireson and Hallam 2009).

Discussion

The complexity of the four key themes is such that we separated them to explore the subtleties of each element. However, the themes, unfairness, shouting, loneliness and seating plans, can be connected in a number of ways. The latter three might, for example, all be seen as components of unfairness, at least in the eyes of the child. However, the main thrust of argument in this paper concerns the importance of interpersonal relationships within inclusion, and therefore, we see the connection between the four themes as being about the importance of relationships.

Relationships are key to feeling a sense of connection and belonging (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Beck and Malley 1998; Geddes 2006; Osterman 2000). In turn, this is central to inclusion. This can be highlighted by who gets pudding first, teachers shouting unnecessarily, why teachers are allowed to drink tea in class and how seating plans are arranged. The impact of these (seemingly small) issues can be huge; children can feel scared, powerless, left out, lonely and unsure of where to turn.

Thus far, it has been outlined that the four themes emerging from the research have an overarching connection – issues regarding interpersonal relationships. Through the use of participatory tools, we intended to focus on children's perceptions of inclusion within the classroom, but it soon became evident that they wished to discuss other issues which were of at least equal, if not greater, importance to them. By enabling these views to emerge, we were reflecting the paradigm which facilitates the engagement of children in research and follows an ethos of participatory methodology, allowing children to determine their agenda. In this way, they are perceived as active participants and not simply as means by which adults can acquire information. By drawing from the voices of children, their engagement facilitates inclusion through valuing and foregrounding their place within the school, thus creating a sense of belonging and a recognition that what they say matters.

The analysis of data revealed that there were two sub-sections within the theme of relationships; between the teacher and child; and between the child and child. The first one of these is evident in the themes of unfairness, shouting and seating plans. Here, the children expressed their concerns about the teachers' unwillingness or inability to listen to their views. In the section regarding unfairness, the children identified the root cause of the problem as the power differential between the adult and child. This manifested in the teachers' ability to make choices about what they drank in the classroom, younger children being privileged by the lunchtime supervisors and collective punishment for individual misdemeanours.

Within the theme of shouting, there was interplay with unfairness concerning the children, which resulted from an unapproachable persona of one teacher, highlighting the issue of injustice and thus demonstrating a less than inclusive practice.

The theme of seating plans identified that in adopting the same seating plan for the year, children felt restricted in their choice of working partnerships, leading to feelings of marginalisation for some. At the same time, they recognised that the teachers chose whom they sat next to in order to maximise their opportunities to learn and concentrate. It could be argued, therefore, that if teachers give the option to students to sit with whomever they wish, on some occasions, (since this seemed to be one of their wishes) this demonstrates that their views are taken into account. However, it is interesting to note that the children acknowledged possible reasons as to why their teachers decided the seating plan.

The second sub-section to emerge was the relationship between the children themselves. This appeared in the sections concerning loneliness and again seating plans. The interesting point here is with loneliness, most of the issues raised pertained to *outside* the classroom and as such, it is important to look beyond the school building to evaluate inclusive practice (Pearce and Bailey 2011).

All these issues which relate to interpersonal relationships, if explored and understood by schools in more depth, can lead to the development of more effective environments. As mentioned earlier, school effectiveness has been linked to the quality of interpersonal relationships in schools (e.g. Anderman 2002; Hope 2012). Therefore, interpersonal relationships should be given more attention in efforts to develop more inclusive contexts.

Conclusion

This research focused on an exploration of children's perceptions about how teachers' practices promote or hinder inclusion in schools and sought to use innovative research tools to explore beyond the initial veneer of children's apparent contentment at school. It seems that children's sense of feeling included and/or excluded is not contained solely within a classroom setting. In addition, and particularly for many of the younger children, a distinction is not actually made between inside and outside of the classroom and rather 'school' is what occurs during the school day. As part of a much wider educational research community, these points must be acknowledged, foregrounding children's perceptions to contribute to the development of inclusive practices.

Furthermore, although the role of teachers is crucially important, children's relationships with each other appear to also be of great significance. Their sense of connectedness to one another – as well as to teachers and to the school – is central to their sense of inclusion. The analysis of the data from this school indicates that some children, representing different year groups, do feel detached, alienated and isolated, even within a school where, in the main, children seem to be happy. It was interesting to note, given our research focus, which related to 'invisible' children and those from minority ethnic groups in particular, these issues were similar for several children across the spectrum in our sample – indeed, it might be suggested that some of the self-identified 'lonely' children did not present as invisible in their demeanour and narratives, so we did not identify any distinct patterns pertaining to perceived differences between the children. This relates to Messiou's (2006, 2012b) conceptualisation of marginalisation and the argument that it can be experienced by any child in school regardless of labels attached to them. Similarly, although isolation may only affect a small proportion of children, it is nonetheless significant.

Finally, our research, in drawing from the issues children raised, speaks to the current climate of schooling. In a system which is dominated by competition, academic standards and performance, with its culture of scrutiny and surveillance (Ball 2003; Perryman 2006; Troman 1997), it could be suggested that aspects pertaining to children's interpersonal relationships have been marginalised. This study with its small sample and in a school context where a number of positive features were identified by children with regard to promoting inclusion still had spaces of exclusion. However, paying attention to issues of detail, as the ones highlighted above, enables

us to further understand inclusion, as this is experienced by children themselves. More importantly, if such issues are acted upon, they are likely to lead to the development of more inclusive practices within schools.

References

Ainscow, M., T. Booth, and A. Dyson. 1999. "Inclusion and Exclusion in Schools: Listening to Some Hidden Voices." In *Inclusive Education: International Voices on Disability and Justice*, edited by K. Ballard, 139–151. London: Falmer Press.

Ainscow, M., T. Booth, and A. Dyson. 2006a. *Improving Schools, Developing Inclusion*. London: Routledge.

Ainscow, M., T. Booth, and A. Dyson. 2006b. "Inclusion and the Standards Agenda: Negotiating Policy Pressures in England." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 10 (4–5): 295–308.

Ainscow, M., and I. Kaplan. 2005. "Using Evidence to Encourage Inclusive School Development: Possibilities and Challenges." *Australasian Journal of Special Education* 29 (2): 106–116.

Allan, J. 1999. *Actively Seeking Inclusion*. London: Falmer Press.

Anderman, E. M. 2002. "School Effects on Psychological Outcomes during Adolescence." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94 (4): 795–809.

Ball, S. J. 2003. "The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity." *Journal of Education Policy* 18 (2): 215–228.

Baumeister, R. F., and M. R. Leary. 1995. "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation." *Psychological Bulletin* 117 (3): 497–529.

Beck, M., and J. Malley. 1998. "A Pedagogy of Belonging." *Reclaiming Children and Youth* 7 (3): 133–137.

Blum, R. W., and H. P. Libbey. 2004. "Executive Summary." *Journal of School Health* 74 (7): 231–232.

Boaler, J., D. Wiliam, and M. Brown. 2000. "Students' Experiences of Ability Grouping: Disaffection, Polarisation and the Construction of Failure." In *Curriculum and Pedagogy in Inclusive Education – Values into Practice*, edited by M. Nind, J. Rix, K. Sheehy, and K. Simmons, 41–55. London: Routledge Falmer/Open University.

Booth, T., and M. Ainscow, eds. 1998. *From Them to Us: An International Study of Inclusion in Education*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P., and J. Passeron. 1977. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.

Bryman, A. 2012. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Casey, T. 2005. *Inclusive Play: Practical Strategies for Working with Children Aged 3 to 8*. London: Paul Chapman.

Chambers, R. 1983. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*. Essex: Prentice Hall.

Christensen, P., and A. Prout. 2002. "Working with Ethical Symmetry in Social Research with Children." *Childhood* 9 (4): 477–497.

Cohen, L., L. Manion, and K. Morrison. 2007. *Research Methods in Education*. 6th ed. London: Routledge.

Cornwall, A., ed. 2011. *The Participation Reader*. London: Zed Books.

Davies, J., S. Hallam, and J. Ireson. 2003. "Ability Groupings in the Primary School: Issues Arising from Practice." *Research Papers in Education* [Online] 18 (1): 1–16.

Fielding, M. 2001. "Students as Radical Agents of Change." *Journal of Educational Change* 2 (2): 123–141.

Geddes, H. 2006. *Attachment in the Classroom*. London: Worth Publishing.

Greene, S., and M. Hill. 2005. "Researching Children's Experience: Methods and Methodological Issues." In *Researching Children's Experience, Approaches and Methods*, edited by S. Greene and D. Hogan, 1–21. London: Sage.

Hall, K., J. Collins, S. Benjamin, M. Nind, and K. Sheehy. 2004. "SATurated Models of Pupildom: Assessment and Inclusion/Exclusion." *British Educational Research Journal* 30 (6): 801–817.

Hallam, S., J. Ireson, and J. Davies. 2004. "Primary Pupils' Experiences of Different Types of Grouping in School." *British Educational Research Journal* 30 (4): 515–533.

Hope, M. A. 2012. "The Importance of Belonging: Learning from the Student Experience of Democratic Education." *Journal of School Leadership* 22 (4): 733–750.

Ireson, J., and S. Hallam. 2009. "Academic Self-concepts in Adolescence: Relations with Achievement and Ability Grouping in Schools." *Learning and Instruction* 19 (3): 201–213.

James, A., and A. Prout. 1997. *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. 2nd ed. London: Falmer Press.

Mason, J., and T. Fattore, eds. 2005. *Children Taken Seriously: In Theory, Policy and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

McIntyre, D., D. Pedder, and J. Rudduck. 2005. "Pupil Voice: Comfortable and Uncomfortable Learnings for Teachers." *Research Papers in Education* 20 (2): 149–168.

Messiou, K. 2002. "Marginalisation in Primary Schools: Listening to Children's Voices." *Support for Learning* 17 (3): 117–121.

Messiou, K. 2006. "Understanding Marginalisation in Education: The Voice of Children." *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 21 (3): 305–318.

Messiou, K. 2012a. "Collaborating with Children in Exploring Marginalisation: An Approach to Inclusive Education." *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 16 (12): 1311–1322.

Messiou, K. 2012b. *Confronting Marginalisation in Education: A Framework for Promoting Inclusion*. London: Routledge.

Messiou, K., and L. Jones. 2013. "Pupil Mobility: Using Students' Voices to Explore Their Experiences of Changing Schools." *Children and Society*. doi:10.1111/CHSO.12026.

Meyers, S. A. 2009. "Do Your Students Care Whether You Care about Them?" *College Teaching* 57 (4): 205–210.

Morrow, V. 1999. "It's Cool…'cos You Can't Give Us Detentions and Things, Can You?! Reflections on Research with Children." In *Time to Listen to Children: Personal and Professional Communication*, edited by P. Milner and B. Carolin, 203–215. London: Routledge.

Morrow, V., and M. Richards. 1996. "The Ethics of Social Research with Children: An Overview." *Children and Society* 10 (2): 90–105.

Nelson, C., P. A. Treichler, and L. Grossberg. 1992. "Cultural Studies." In *Cultural Studies*, edited by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. A. Treichler, 1–16. New York: Routledge.

O'Kane, C. 2008. "The Development of Participatory Techniques: Facilitating Children's Views about Decisions Which Affect Them." In *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. 2nd ed, edited by P. Christensen and A. James, 125–155. London: Falmer Press.

Osterman, K. F. 2000. "Students' Need for Belonging in the School Community." *Review of Educational Research* 70 (3): 323–367.

Pearce, G., and R. P. Bailey. 2011. "Football Pitches and Barbie Dolls: Young Children's Perceptions of Their School Playground." *Early Child Development and Care*. First published on 10 January 2011 (iFirst). doi: 10.1080/03004430.2010.529906.

Perryman, J. 2006. "Panoptic Performativity and School Inspection Regimes: Disciplinary Mechanisms and Life under Special Measures." *Journal of Education Policy* 21 (2): 147–161.

Robert-Holmes, G. 2005. *Doing Your Early Years Research Project: A Step-by-step Guide*. London: Sage.

Rose, R. 1998. "Including Pupils, Developing a Partnership in Learning." In *Promoting Inclusive Practice*, edited by C. Tilstone, L. Florian, and R. Rose, 95–112. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rose, R., and M. Shevlin. 2004. "Encouraging Voices: Listening to Young People Who Have Been Marginalised." *Support for Learning* 19 (4): 155–161.

Shaw, C., L.-M. Brady, and C. Davey. 2011. *Guidelines for Research with Children and Young People*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Thomas, N., and C. O'Kane. 1998. "The Ethics of Participatory Research with Children." *Children and Society* 12 (5): 336–348.

Todd, L. 2007. *Partnerships for Inclusive Education – A Critical Approach to Collaborative Working*. London: Routledge.

Troman, G. 1997. "Self-management and School Inspection: Complementary Forms of Surveillance and Control in the Primary School." *Oxford Review of Education* 23 (3): 345–364.

United Nations. 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York: United Nations.

Veale, A. 2005. "Creative Methodologies and Their Use in a Participatory Research Project in Rwanda." In *Researching Children's Experience, Approaches and Methods*, edited by S. Greene and D. Hogan, 253–272. London: Sage.

Visweswaran, K. 1994. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Wetz, J. 2009. *Urban Village Schools: Putting Relationships at the Heart of Secondary School Organisation and Design*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.