International Journal of Inclusive Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tied20

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Julianne Moss

Published online: 10 Nov 2010.

To cite this article: Julianne Moss (2002) Inclusive schooling: representation and textual practice, International Journal of Inclusive Education, 6:3, 231-249, DOI: 10.1080/13603110110091599

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603110110091599

INT. J. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, 2002, VOL. 6, NO. 3, 231–249

Inclusive schooling: representation and textual practice

JULIANNE MOSS

(*Originally received 18 September 2000; accepted in final form 4 May 2001*)

This paper reports on a larger study carried out in the island state of Tasmania, Australia, between 1996 and 1998. The research reviewed the impact of the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy (ISDP) within the government school system. The qualitative study describes the interpretations of five key informants: a parent; two teachers—a support teacher and a class teacher—a policy-maker and a university academic, during the early period of the implementation of the ISDP. The visual and literary 'data stories' of the research are woven together to narrate inclusive schooling in the Tasmanian context as a 'detective story' of the special education knowledge tradition. Drawing from poststructuralist methodology and narrative theory the multi-voiced text is a deliberate attempt to enter into conversations with the reader rather than *tell* the story. Researching inclusive schooling policy through representation and textual practice, I question dominant research practices in the special education field and populist slogans of 'inclusion'.

Opening

The story I tell, a narrative of inclusive schooling, asserts that inclusive education recognizes a broad and plural conception of education and weaves into the cultural fabric of schooling threads of difference, social position and need. The paper uses the organizing frame of narrative to interlace a series of stories about inclusive schooling in Tasmania and suggests there are many voices to be heard in the 'big story' of inclusive schooling. In the literature of inclusive schooling, research has largely followed prescriptions of the medical and psychological traditions of the special education knowledge tradition, perpetuating realist tales. Inclusive education provides us with the opportunity to raise questions about educational and social research, particularly issues related to representation and textual practice.

To develop my arguments, I have engaged with textual forms, tales from teachers, visual images, policy documents and talk, producing a multi-voiced text. This is my methodological attempt to understand and interpret inclusive schooling as a cultural story of many layers and attend to 'the uncertain trajectories of meaning in contemporary times' (Stronach

Julianne Moss is an Assistant Head of School at the Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania, Box 252–66 7001, Australia; e-mail: Julianne.Moss@utas.edu.au. Currently she is responsible for the Bachelor of Teaching programme, a graduate pre-service teacher education programme. Her research and teaching are directed towards the development of critically informed practice that considers all students. She also teaches Master of Education units in inclusive education. Her education background is wide, having taught in the Northern Territory as a secondary art teacher, as an art and generalist teacher in a District K-10 school and a support teacher, as well as being a special school principal.

International Journal of Inclusive Education ISSN 1360–3116 print/ISSN 1464–5173 online © 2002 Taylor & Francis Ltd
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI: 10.1080/13603110110091599

and MacLure 1997: 96). In the paper, I struggle with the interactivity of the text and the social processes of being a reader and a writer of the text—telling and retelling, troubling the intertwined problems of authority/authorship/reflexivity and making familiar materials strange. As Denzin (1989: 47) indicates: '[b]ut readers create texts, for meaning is not just a text or in a word; it arises out of the interactions between texts, writers and readers.'

To produce research which is generative, provisional and creates spaces 'from which a different science might take form' (Lather and Smithies 1997: 127), I acknowledge the importance of experiential specificity and local practice. My research adds to the literature that reflects on education as socially constructed and opens the possibilities for methodological and epistemological understanding in the development of theory and practice in the field of inclusive education. I conclude the paper by arguing that post-modernist thinking,[1] which is the basis of my researcher's loom, offers possibilities little explored in the special education field and offers important theoretical openings for educational research and policy development.

The context

The study, researched through narrative theory, reflects on what I perceive to be an enduring tension in schooling, 'the never ending struggle for social justice' (Lather and Smithies 1997: 50). In telling this tale, I reflect on how my career has lived out the politics of social justice in the schooling system and now the academy. I began my career as a secondary school art teacher working with aboriginal students in remote central Australia. Teaching in rural and urban areas of Tasmania followed this period. I became a credentialled special education worker in 1980 and laboured as a teacher and principal within special and ordinary schools. As mother's help in my children's classrooms during parenting leave from my paid work, I found out what it was to be 'parent' rather than 'professional' in a classroom. Now I am a member of the academy working in teacher education. Finding the spaces to enable our future teachers to implement education programmes that are inclusive of all learners rather than the reproduction of existing social inequalities is a continuing struggle. I draw on feminist theory and postpositivist thinking in these efforts to understand life as not a neat plot, but rather a narrative that is 'multiple, contradictory, changing and differently available, depending on the social forces that shape our lives' (Lather and Smithies 1997: 125).

Broadly, the research responds to the problem of what has inclusive schooling contributed to school reform? The argument, constructed from the Australian educational context and my understanding of schooling in Tasmania, during the early years of the implementation of the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy (ISDP) (1995), highlights that in Australia between 1975 and the mid-1990s, while we have witnessed numerous legislative initiatives, international covenants and policies aimed at proclaiming anti-discrimination legislation,[2] injustice is more

prevalent than social justice and [injustice] continues to be mirrored in the organizational cultures of schools.

The sett[3] of the paper

The paper is a sampler of the larger study and unfolds the range of textual forms and representations woven into the research during the three-year period 1996–1998. The Inclusion of Students with Disabilities Policy (ISDP) was released in 1995. My intersection with the policy came through the request by the Department of Education to run a professional development unit for support teachers active in the implementation of the ISDP. What follows in the paper are 'texts', the distinctive order of social relations of inclusive schooling as understood within the Tasmanian context. First located in some 'factoid boxes' (Lather and Smithies 1997: xvii) is a summary of the ISDP. This is followed by a description of my researcher's 'loom' and methodological (dis)position. From this point, 'data stores' (Lather and Smithies 1997: 34), made from visual intertexts, teacher stories, policy talk and 'texts' unfold. Finally, the paper reflects on how dialogical research method unsettles the 'inclusion' story and offers from the metaphor of fibre and textile arts a way to understand future practices.

Inclusion and inclusive schooling in Tasmania

The ISDP (1995) statement reads:

> **Policy Statement**
> Placement of students with disabilities in regular schools is the preferred educational option in Tasmania. To the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities should be educated in the company of their age peers while also being provided with curriculum and support to meet their needs.
>
> **Definitions**
> *Inclusive schooling* is the outcome of attempting to provide for all students, including those with disabilities, in regular schools. Inclusion implies providing for all students within the educational programme of the regular school. The emphasis is on how schools can change to meet the needs of students with disabilities. *Integration* is the process of introducing students with disabilities into regular schools from a setting in which they have previously been excluded. Integration implies that students that have been excluded can be introduced into a regular school. The emphasis is on how the student can fit into the existing school structure.
>
> **Special Education Services and Resource Model**
> Special education services in Tasmania have been divided into those which are 'specialist' (Category A) and those which are more 'generalist' (Category B). This distinction forms the basis for the current services and the funding model, which is described in the Equity in Schooling Policy and the Support Materials for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities.
> *Specialist Services* (*Category A*) are provided to students with low incidence disabilities (e.g. hearing impairment, visual impairment). Early special education services are also included in this category as the number of students is small and the type of service provision is significantly different from other areas.

Students requiring specialist services:

- are relatively easy to identify, i.e. there is usually no argument about their disability;
- are usually known to have needs at an early age, i.e. prior to school occur in numbers that can statistically be predicted on a state-wide basis, according to prevalence rates;
- occur in small numbers i.e. the numbers are too small to accurately predict numbers in each district;
- are randomly distributed throughout the state;
- often have specialized teaching needs, such as interpreters, braillers, therapy input, specialized seating and equipment, building modifications, and so on;
- will often require ongoing intensive support throughout their school career; and
- should have first priority for special education funding.

Generalist Services (*Category B*) are required for students who have 'problems with schooling' in a more general sense. These are the students with 'mild' and 'borderline' intellectual disability, learning difficulties, social and emotional difficulties, and behavioural difficulties.

Students requiring generalist services:

- have needs which are not very different in kind from those of other children;
- are usually not defined until they begin school, and experience problems with schooling;
- are difficult to identify, in that they do not have obvious disabilities and are the subject of assessment debates;
- occur in numbers which expand to fit the funding available and the vacancies in special schools;
- occur in large numbers across the state—too many for them to attract special education funding; and
- occur in all schools, and which can be predicted from indices of socio-economic disadvantage.

My loom

To design and produce my study, I use the loom as an active metaphor from fibre and textile arts to understand the process of doing research. In conceptualizing the research design, I first drew up a glossary of weaving terms. I listed terms such as chain, drafts, sett, tie-up, warp and weft, and defined each term according to the weaver's way of working. Next I drew up a 'threading and tie-up draft', my research plan. The plan, a set number of warps and wefts, was arranged to a straight twill threading draft. The loom is 'dressed' with warps, so that I can pass weft stands back and forth to interlace the narratives. The warp is my methodological positioning. Represented as critical, ethnographic, qualitative feminist and poststructuralist threads, I attempt to write a story of many stories that offer both realist and deconstructive understandings of the culture of inclusive schooling (Lather 1991 a).

The weft was threaded by the visual and literary accounts of five key informants: a parent, two teachers—a support teacher and a class teacher—a policy-maker and a university academic, over a three-year period between 1996 and 1998. The literary narratives included stories from the key informants, accounts of teacher professional development practices, historical documents, memos from the bureaucracy, and my journal notes over a

three-year period. Also threaded into the weft as additional strands were the issues of representation, validity, interpretation and reflexivity.

The visual narratives that appear as image-based intertexts are photo-journalism accounts from the local history of education. The search began from the beginning of the twentieth century. What I had initially thought would be a long and tedious archival search, however, turned out to be the reverse. Restricting the search to newspaper and official Department of Education publications, photographic reocords of students with disabilities at school were difficult to find. The earliest official recordings begin from 1967. Looking back to the history of the special education tradition, the first visual recording was undertaken many years after the establishment of schooling for students with disabilities. The education of students with disabilities becomes publicly palatable from the end of the modernist period.

The art form: weaving together visual narratives and the voices of five key informants

In my research, I am not seeking to find the truth of inclusive schooling, rather an understanding of how the historical and truth effects are being produced (Lather 1991 a: 31). I use everyday texts to question dominant narratives. I read inclusive schooling as a 'cultural story' with a history, an archaeology; there are disparate voices, many layers, multiple meanings and subjectivities. Images and literary forms told through narratives are the 'data stories' (Lather and Smithies 1997: 34) of my research. Constucting a text with multiple strands and threads, I own up to my life history as a secondary school art teacher, my art school training and a familiarity with interpeting visual imagery. I am not intent on using visual texts as 'a new set of methodological tricks', rather I want to demonstrate that by adding visual narrative to our existing repertoire of research instruments and 'taking it seriously' exposes a current of social change which has implications for the practice (and politics) of social research (Walker and Lewis 1998: 162).

In weaving together the 'data stories' of the research, I position and juxtapose visual narrative and the voices of my key informants. The structure of the texts is a way to invite readers to move beyond a single subjectivity, to engage in reading and writing research that is 'more exclusively relational, webbed, arrayed, archaeological' (Scheurich 1997: 165). The pages of the research text are also presented in a range of formats. The development of an argument through multi-voiced texts is my methodological representation of the struggle of dialogical research. The theory/practice binary is made ever present through the many formats used in the research text. The juxtaposition of the academic commentary with the literary and visual narrative structures, and my ongoing reflexive readings of my non-innocent work as an educator, are the ways I have made sense of inclusive schooling as a dialogical, cultural narrative.

The first parts of the literary narratives were written in 1996. The second parts of these narratives evolved from my interactions with the

key informants in 1998. In between the stories, the reader is invited to engage with image intertexts. The narratives, the literary and the visual are read, after Foucault (1975, 1984 b), as a group of texts, which have accumulated meanings of inclusive schooling. The visual texts foreground other accessible sites for interpretations of the special education knowledge tradition and inclusive schooling.

Methodological (dis)position

My methodological position is to understand research as a critical and dialogic practice, both for the researcher and the researched. Here my struggle is one of the social embeddedness of discourse, 'what individual subjects do within and through discursive structures, rather than assuming that discourse forces us to behave in certain ways' (Mills 1997: 86). Threading multiple forms of storying, I argue that poststructuralist writing and research practice operates through illustration, juxtaposition, metaphor and subjectivity (Rhedding-Jones 1996).

In framing the methodological position of the study, I set about constructing method that was inclusive of my own constraints as a full-time worker. I was doing this research and other research while carrying out a full teaching load in a Faculty of Education that was living out the experience of downsizing and cross-campus restructuring. I understood from the recent literature that I ought to recognize that 'researching inclusion must proceed from comprehensive analyses of exclusion', and that research should be 'multidimensional to capture the experiential specificity and broader social structure' (Slee 1997: 11), and researchers ought to recognize the 'complexity and plurality of perspectives, voices and interests and the need for researchers to make them explicit' (Booth and Ainscow 1998). At the commencement of my study in 1996, there were few models or suggestions to shake the 'epistemological tree' (Slee 1997: 4) of the special education knowledge tradition.

As I moved further in to the reconceptualization of the research design, where I was to be the single researcher, I recognized I would need to pay close attention to issues of representation for both the researcher and the researched. Eventually, I came to understand that I was engaged with producing a cultural story of schooling, a story which had a history, many actors (parents, teachers, students, school principals, bureaucrats, politicians and university academics) and a growing circulation in the popular press of affirmative and negative debates: 'Integration has gone too far—teachers'; 'Disabled student policy strains schools' (*Mercury*, Hobart, 26/4/98); 'Forum urges parent cooperation'; 'Call for disabled to be in schools' (*Mercury*, Hobart, 24/8/96).

Once I recognized that I was piercing together a 'big story' of many threads, I was able to collect data as part of my everyday work and interactions. I too was embedded in this narrative, as I selected, rejected and finger-printed the stories, images and documents, both old and new. In recent years, the academic community has read multiple meanings into the word *inclusion* (see Ainscow 1993, 1994, 1997, Booth 1996,

Booth and Ainscow 1998, Brantlinger 1997, Clarke *et al.* 1997, Heeden *et al.* 1996, Lipsky and Gartner 1996, Sapon-Shevein 1995, Meyen and Skrtic 1995, Meyer *et al.* 1996, Skidmore 1998, Slee 1996 a, 1996 b, Stainback and Stainback 1992, Udvari-Solner 1996, Thousand *et al.* 1994, Westby *et al.* 1994). My story was some fact, some fiction. Foregrounding the multiplicity of the tales from the academy and my stories reminds us that no 'true' story can be woven, and that the inclusion story is 'authored'.[4]

All together, the group of disparate texts I produced became subject to a reading of the discourses of inclusive schooling as a 'distinctive order of social relations' (Smith 1990: 214) and a system of dependencies (Foucault 1984 b: 118). Critical discourse analysis supported me to theorize inclusive schooling as multiply constructed knowledge, as an 'indication of working theory' (Rhedding-Jones 1996: 28) and the discursive constructions of power/knowledge.

In this paper, I have produced a sampler of the textual formats in my attempt to make accessible a different science that wrestles with 'double method'. I have abridged the stories and visual narratives, but I have represented all the textual forms that were part of the larger study. By

Image intertext 1

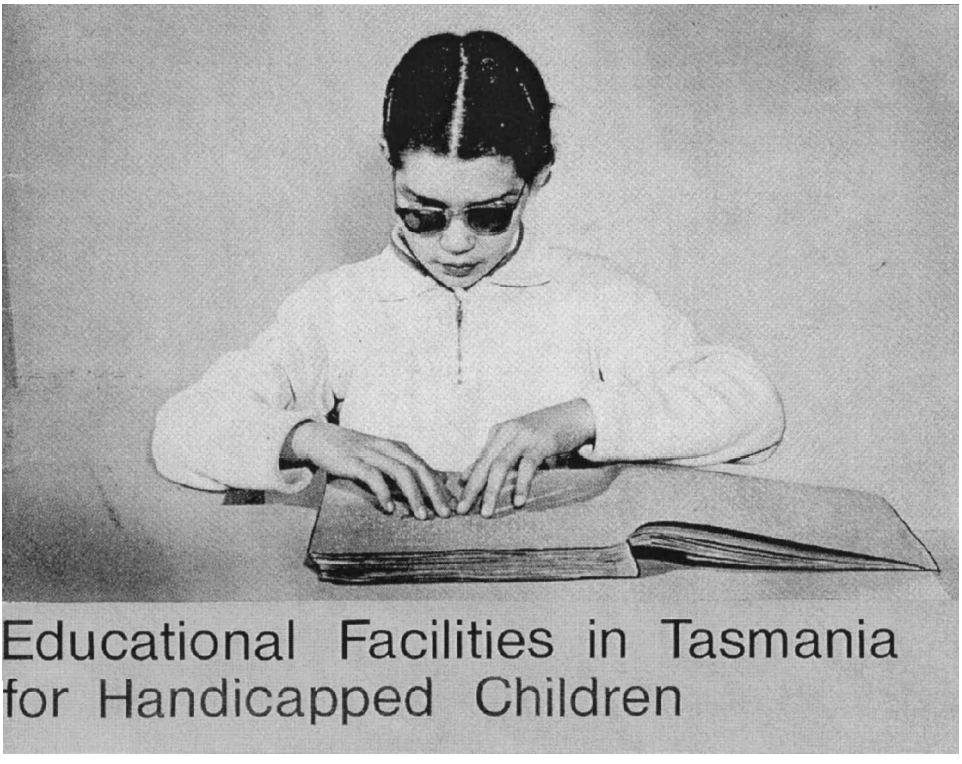

Figure 1. ***Educational Facilities in Tasmania for Handicapped Children*****, Department of Education, 1967.**

moving backwards and forwards between the pieces, the reader is faced with interpretations that are never stable. The framed, split and ribbon texts represent the construction of an argument as open to possibilities and opportunities to negotiate meaning and power, truth and politics. My textual method is my attempt to interact with standpoint, difference and situated knowledge through the research process. I am working with threads which when interlaced together, remind us that '[g]ood stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest . . . delicate hints about theme and thesis' (Barone 1997: 224).

Story series: Dee, 23 August 1996

'I am the mother of a 4-year-old boy. He attends our neighbourhood school, where he is in kindergarten. He has a brother in grade 1 and a brother in grade 5 at the same school. Another brother is in Year 7 at the local high school.

'My son has significant global development delay, complicated by poor muscle tone and fluctuating hearing loss. His language delay is severe, and he has a moderate intellectual disability. The cause for all of this is unknown. He receives six hours' aide time, and is at kindergarten for ten hours each week. He sees the district speech therapist once a month—illness, excursions and strikes permitting.

'We are a family with a commitment to the state school system, and have worked hard to support our state schools. I have always been a firm believer in equity, social justice and giving people a fair go. Had the inclusion policy not been in place, I would have actively worked for it. One of the questions I am most suspicious of is ''wouldn't your son be much better off in a special school?'' '

Parent politics: Dee's voice 1996–1998

Sam, Dee's son, was 6 years old when we began conversing and writing together. Drawing from a presentation Dee gave to an 'inclusion' forum organized by the local Department of Education in 1996, Dee has a strong understanding of social justice. Her story tells and retells the construction of a mother's experience during the early years of the implementation of the ISDP (1995). Her interpretations of the workings of justice draw from her many life roles—as a parent, partner, self-employed worker, household manager, local historian and member of the Tasmanian community. Sam is the youngest of her four sons. The second part of the story was written in 1998, three years after the release of the policy. Dee acts as a key informant. Using informants to produce data is part of an ethnographic technique to learn from someone who is a competent member of a setting (Smith 1990: 101). In Dee's tale she retells the many dimensions of navigating the inclusion policy. Her story includes the issues involved in becoming an eligible member of the category A register and, the recollection from Sam's first school when the kindergarten tale of 'he [Sam] and does naughty things' heard on approach to the school gate, was matched with the physical movement of shying away from Sam and Dee. The school gate story is contrasted with the description from Sam's present school, a small rural school of just over 100 students, and the annual Christmas play. Dee tells how Sam's teacher was insistent on him making an active contribution to the end of year celebrations. The annual Christmas concert lived up to the usual acclaim amongst the local community. The following day, the town

GP on his daily stroll in Henry Street greeted the proud father who the night before held his open arms backstage after the two-line performance. The words that exchanged were 'that is what inclusion is all about'.

Image intertext 2

Figure 2. ***The child Who Has a Mental Handicap. Educational Facilities in Tasmania for Handicapped Children*****, Department of Education, 1973.**

Teacher tales: Deb and Jo, 1996–1998
'Inclusion kids'.

'They agree with inclusion but not the lack of resources'.

'I agree with inclusion, but I recken we will see the full circle. I think that in ten years or so there will be special schools again'. (Principal, 1996)

Deb: I imagine it would have been just another policy that was waved, 'oh, another policy, put it on a shelf', and perhaps it was only when teachers learnt that they were going to be having an included student that perhaps then they thought, 'oh, gee, you know press the panic buttons, what does that mean?' (1998)

Julianne: The issues of curriculum, I guess you alluded to some of those in the secondary school, about that being the area that [work] needs to be done in, there are probably examples in the primary setting too . . . if you were looking at the two sectors, where would you see the efforts need to be directed? (1998)

Jo: I think secondary in terms of curriculum modification. With the resourcing and with support, I think primary teachers are doing it already. I mean, we are a lot more, I think we trained to do it perhaps even, we are able to adapt and give things at different levels of work with groups simultaneously, we just seem to have built that level of skills. Whereas at the high schools [there is] still very much traditional style. Very often just facing the front, you know, not very much interaction, you know, not a lot of attention to cooperative strategies or anything. (1998)

The 'data story' (Lather and Smithies 1997) of Deb and Jo

Deb and Jo provided for me what I came to understand as 'response data'.[5] Deb and Jo were two teachers who participated in an initiative developed by the local Department of Education in collaboration with the university to provide a professional development opportunity for teachers who were working in support teacher roles, in the newly created District Support structures. I was the course lecturer. District support services were developed following the restructuring of special education services in the early 1990s. During this period, some special schools were closed and support services such as guidance, speech pathology and allied therapy services were redefined. Support teachers were perceived to be important links in the implementation of the IDSP (1995). Deb and Jo's early story was developed from the assignment they prepared for the award-bearing course, EBA 720. The course modelled on the work of Ainscow (1993) included the engagement of course participants in understanding and implementing a small action research project. In the course guide, I wrote, 'You may wish to work as a team across the course and submit a group assignment'. Of the 26 course participants, Deb and Jo were the only two participants who responded to my invitation to extend the collaborative understandings evident in the course design to the required assessment task. I collaborated with Deb and Jo between 1996 and 1998. Recounting their edited text from 1996 through a semi-structured interview, we developed the final part of their story in the spring of 1998. In all stages of developing their tale, Deb and Jo checked and confirmed the evolving story. The story told the circulating discourses of 'inclusion', the authored story that the ISDP (1995) constructs.

Teacher tales: Deb and Jo's voices, 1998

Julianne: What was the sense of the comment, 'Our conditions are already worsening with inclusion kids, but I'd rather keep the same pay than keep more condition imposed'.

Deb: Basically, I think people see that including the students as another condition of our work. It's like, you know, how we had to go back to school three days early and do this much extra professional development so we'd get our pay rise. People see it as being a worsening of conditions, that

whole comment was meant to suggest and reiterate the negativity, I think of the comment about the inclusion kids and the labelling. I mean, talking about it as a condition of work rather than as an aspect of work or something positive. It is not seen like that. For some people it isn't a problem, and I've seen people who are thrilled and more than happy to be working with these kids, and it really isn't a problem, but more often than not the comment that I hear is negative, of our conditions of work with inclusive kids. They see it as an add-on, something to make our lives difficult, you know someone sends out a document from above, someone sends over a few inclusion kids from South Park school, that's how it was.

Julianne: The other area, of course, is the teacher education and professional development needs. How would you rate that?

Jo: Terrible.

Deb: Yeah.

Deb: The particular teacher I'm thinking of she was given a tour of the school and met the class but she was offered no professional development last year. So prior to taking on these two students with very high needs, and even this year there wasn't anything offered, she was just expected to get on with the job and cope. So I think that is a really serious issue.

Julianne: In the beginning, you mentioned the introduction of the policy, the introduction of inclusion ... The sense we get from some of the comments thrown up from the teachers and the teacher in the special education unit is that they didn't feel involved with the policy-making, it came down on top of them. It was here, then you do it, little teacher voice in the process.

Jo: With our paper, we were wanting to highlight the process of change, just purely in its own right, change with anything, whatever it is. And we tried to parallel that at the end of our assignment there with an issue relating to inclusion and change, and I think that was summarized. I know that I read back through that and really felt that did summarize it for me, how I felt about it. Developing the awareness and knowledge about what inclusion, looking at the socio-political context that drives inclusion. Awareness of the research, of the problems that are going to be inevitable, the implementation and that is a process that takes place over time. It can't be expected to be instantaneous ... Awareness raising, whether that should be in classrooms or with the kids in our classes, or the parents in our community. People have a strong aversion, some people do have a strong aversion to people with disabilities, and even though that is unfortunate and we can look at that however we like, it still needs to be looked at as a problem in its own right.

Deb: If only there were opportunities for teachers to get to spend that much time together and discuss issues without the commitment of having a class or whatever it is. I mean it is the one stage in your teaching career where you are getting the practical side, you know ... it is a perfect opportunity to look at the strategies, and all those things that we just talked about. I think there is a lot more room for links between schools now and the needs of people and teachers of now and feeding that back to uni. I know it happens to some degree but I think there is a lot more that could be done there.

Julianne: Would either of you like to comment about what has been your experience, and in that you can relate it to your role as support teacher or your general impression about the implementation of the policy?

Jo: Well, my experience really I guess as [a] support teacher has been, it's been battling really in one word, and you feel like it is an uphill thing all

the time. That I don't feel like there is enough of me to offer the support that people want ...

Image intertext 3

Figure 3. Four females and one male 1998, copyright *Mercury*, unpublished photo, included with permission from the Mercury Davies Brother Group.

Lou: 1996–1998

Lou: Inclusion—what can I say? Probably, without doubt, the most controversial policy document in the education system. In many other states the inclusion policy has come as a result of parental concern and a desire for their children to be involved, students with disabilities to be involved in mainstream education. It would be true to say in the Tasmanian stystem that there has been a little more central initiative, but even so it is non-negotiable now because of Disability Discrimination legislation. The placement of students with disabilities in regular schools is the preferred education option [very important]. To the fullest extent possible, students with disabilities should be educated in the company of their own peers, while also being provided with a curriculum and support to effectively meet their needs ... Now it has become a social justice and human rights issue. The Department is committed to maintaining a range of options. If you ever hear people saying about closing special schools, you can say with confidence that it is not the case, this government is committed to maintaining a range of options, with the preferred option being education in regular schools. (1996)

Lou: In retrospect, I wished we had never called it inclusion ... I mean we've talked about that, I mean it is in the literature as well. I suppose we have broadened it, and when we talk about inclusive practice, people now think about aboriginals and disadvantaged, but if you just talk about inclusion as a word by itself, people just think students with disabilities. (1998)

Julianne: The National Strategy was due for review in 1998 but, of course, that was the previous government.

Lou: Never happened ... by that time, so many states ... were conservative, there was luke-warm acceptance of it. It was only because Keating was holding a big stick that they signed on. I mean, we haven't had any policy documents like that at a national level. Nothing.

Policy as text

The final story in the text belongs to the policy-maker and myself. Together we live out the circulation of the ISDP (1995) and EBA 720, the award-bearing professional development initiative that Deb and Jo participated in. Lou at the time had responsibility for Equity policy and services. The ISDP (1995) was implemented shortly after the release of the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling (NSES 1995). This policy became the umbrella policy to the Tasmianian Equity in Schooling document. Within both policies, students with disabilities appear as one of the target groups of the policy. I invited Lou to conduct a session on the first day of the EBA 720 Support Teacher Skills course. Her story is developed from her presentation and was audio taped as a course resource. Following the approach used in the development of the parent and teacher tales, Lou's story evolved over a three-year period and concluded with a reflection on the early phases of the implementation of the policy and an assessment of the issues at the time of our interview in the latter part of 1998. In 1996 the Howard Liberal Coalition government succeeded the Keating Federal Labour government. The Keating government had implemented the NSES. My reading of policies as 'texts' seeks to understand the political construction and social constraints of the processes described as 'inclusive'. This position recognizes that policy implementation and the enactment through teaching may involve some additional purposes to schooling other than those of the quantifiable and measurable indicators of national benchmarking and individual student outcomes. Relying on rational solutions which have been unable to counter the narrative of disadvantaged students as deficit, solutions are now caught in a rhetoric which actively works against the kinds of sensibilities and cultural productions that are necessary in the times in which we live. In these 'new times' more voices should be able to be heard throughout a culture—the voices of women, visible minorities, the disabled.

Doubling our meanings

My methodological disposition, which I have textualized as loomed narrative research and double method, attempts to break apart the normative assumptions of policy and practice that pervade understandings of 'inclusion'. In this paper, I suggest that the ISDP (1995) and by implication *inclusion* is an example of the staying power of the special education knowledge tradition. Noel Gough, then Director of the Deakin Centre for Education and Change at Deakin University, through his account of 'fiction' in curriculum enquiry has led me to interpret the practice of inclusion as an example of an educational 'detective' story, 'a quest for *the* truth about some aspect of Curriculum, teaching and/or learning' (1998: 112).[6]

In the field of educational policy development, there has been an acknowledgement of the circulation of other voices and interpretations (Ball 1994, 1998, Weiner 1994, Slee and Weiner 1998). Taylor (1997: 24), referring to the literature of policy analysis, highlights the growing awareness and emphasis on issues to do with *meanings* contained in respective policy documents. She relates how there has been a shift towards exploring the *effects* of policy rather than on policy *intentions*. Almost a decade earlier, Fulcher (1989: 3), in her research on integration policies for students with disabilities in Victoria, highlighted the political struggles involved in developing and implementing 'integration' policy and the silence in the research findings of the politics of these struggles.

Reading policy as text, I understand 'policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as what is intended ... [p]olicy *as* practice is ''created'' in a trialectic of dominance, resistance and chaos/freedom' (Ball 1994: 10–11). Positioning policy within my feminist poststructuralist frame policy becomes an ongoing textual process, bringing into view the social relations in which texts are embedded. Students with disabilities are one of the target groups of the NSES policy. In recent years within some Australian states, inclusion policies have appeared in the edicts of educational authorities. Inclusion policies like the working definitions of inclusive schooling do not follow singular or consistently agreed frameworks. The policies are owned by the bureaucracies and have been developed without wide community consultation (Slee 1996a). Connell (1994) alerts us to the incapacity of western educational systems to redress educational inequities. He notes that despite the large number of reform efforts of the twentieth century that have aimed to confront the inequities of minority groups, these reforms are consistently described as failures.

In my narrative, I have constructed a 'big story' of inclusive schooling that does not promote singular meanings and closure. Postmodernist thinking helps me to understand that meaning is constructed within language and is not guaranteed by what the author intends, and that the knowledge that is produced as a truth is the knowledge that is linked to the system of power which produces or sustains it (Weiner 1994: 66–68). Theorizing inclusive schooling as multiply constructed knowledge, we can understand as Foucault has represented for us, 'author function' and the importance of re-examining the history of discourses: 'Perhaps it is time to

study discourses not only in terms of their expressive value of formal transformation, but according to their modes of existence . . . but to grasp the subject's point of insertion, mode of functioning and system of dependencies' (1984 b: 117–18). Understanding policy as 'texts' of implementation and circulation, the texts of our world bring into play conflicting histories and discourses and foreground the many possibilities in a narrative because of our particular cultural and discursive positioning.

Off the loom work: the game of cat's cradle

My reflection on the implementation and circulation of the discourses of the ISDP (1995) reads inclusive schooling as an historical knowledge of superimposed narratives. Rather than reading this as a populist story of 'inclusion' that privileges the policy-makers' reality and the detective story that begins and ends with the special education knowledge tradition, I want to be a part of a story that invites dialogical interactions and action within our localities. In exploring possibilities of how we may work, perhaps it may be useful to engage with some off the loom work, represented by the game of cat's cradle.[7] Cat's cradle is a game that is played all around the world, across cultures, social positions and need. My story invites us to be suspicious of tales where the privileging of practice and method and an unproblematic grouping of people by meritocratic stratification remains dominant. (Re)constructing our theory of inclusive schooling through cultural narratives of classrooms, curriculum and community—'witnessing'[8] multiple roles, the 'big story' questions the kindergarten tale, 'he does naughty things', the domination of female helpers, the continuing underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within education, tales of fear about disability, the privileging of policy-makers' reality and the status quo represented by the professional voice.

I have woven my story from dialogical practice, highlighting issues of representation and textual practice that draw from postmodernist thinking. Throughout all of this, I am alert to the politics of representation, the social and political struggle of the research process, including 'the romantic aspirations about giving voice to the voiceless' (Lather 1996 a: 15). Neither can I hide behind my own authorial inscriptions, rather my method seeks 'opening up possibilities for displaying complexities . . . in a text that accumulates meaning as it progresses' (Lather 1996 b: 532). Reading inclusive schooling as constructions of contexts, texts and politics, I have complicated the story by introducing the game of cat's cradle. I have endeavoured to understand how inclusive schooling *works*, not what it *is*. Playing the game of cat's cradle, the epistemological voices criss-cross and remind me that confronting different perspectives, interests and cultural meanings teaches me the partiality of my own position and the importance of crossings and overlaps in knowing what we do not understand in threading new practices of research.

What's your story?

Notes

1. I use postmodernism to describe the historical period following late modernism, linking my work to postpostivist educational theorists (Lather 1991 a, 1991 b, 1996 b, Luke and Luke 1995, Giroux 1990, Cherryholmes 1998, Apple 1995, Connell 1995). Luke and Luke (1995: 358), in reference to the Australian social science community, outline the differences between postmodernism and poststructualism. Poststructuralism links to the work of the French philosophers Foucault and Derrida, while postmodernism draws from the work of Lyotard and the sociologist Baudrillard. The distinction, by contrast, is not evident within the USA and Canada, where the term postmodernism is used as a group of techniques and knowledges loosely connected with the analysis and artefacts and phenomena of postindustrial culture and economy. My arguments and language draw from the interpretations generated by Luke and Luke (1995).
2. Recent policy, legislation and international covenants include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1975), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), Unesco Declaration on Race and Racial Discrimination (1992), International Convention of the Rights of the Child (1991), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), National Strategy for Equity in Schools (1994), Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools (1997), National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (1996–2002), Racial Discrimination Act 1975, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Sex Discrimination Act 1994.
3. Sett is the closeness or density of the warp. The sett determines how many ends per inch are used in the warp.
4. Foucault uses 'author function' to describe how discourses exist, circulate and function within a society: 'the manner in which [discourses] are articulated according to social relationships ... in the activity of the author function rather than in themes or concepts that discourses set in motion' (Foucault 1984 b: 117).
5. St Pierre describes response data as all those data that enter research uninvited. She suggests (1998: 2) that the research community should broaden its understanding of participants to include not only our samples, but also those who provide us with response data. Further, she suggests that we begin to systematically collect response data and also (as Lather has suggested to St Pierre) map how those data shift knowledge production.
6. Gough states: 'Indeed, I would argue that educational research has not even kept pace with developments in the methods of fictional detection that have accompanied the cultural changes of the late modern era. Scientific rationalism is still privileged even though its personifications in fiction—such as Sherlock Holmes and other heroes of the classic logic and deduction story—have long been displaced as models of how we can or should obtain reliable knowledge of the world' (Gough 1998: 112).
7. I recall playing the game of cat's cradle as a schoolgirl growing up in rural Tasmania. We would use strings and make our configurations from patterns that we learnt and shared from each other, often under our desks, believing that no one was watching us. We also played the paired game of 'elastics'. Elastics uses the same formations as cat's cradle, but needs large pieces of elastic and requires a child to anchor the game at each end. Donna Haraway explains how the game of cat's cradle can help us to understand how a feminist science can work: 'Making string figures on fingers is cat's cradle ... Relying on relays from many hands and fingers, I try to make suggestive figures with the varying threads of science studies, antiracist feminist theory, and cultural studies. Cat's cradle is a game for nominalists like me who cannot desire what we cannot possibly have. As soon as possession enters the game, the string figures freeze into a lying pattern. Cat's cradle is about patterns and knots; the game takes great skill, and the game can result in serious surprises. One person can build up a large repertoire of string figures on a single pair of hands, but the cat's cradle can be passed back and forth on the hands of several players, who add new moves in the building of complex patterns. Cat's cradle invites a sense of collective work, of one person not being able to make all the patterns alone. One does not ''win'' at cat's cradle; the goal is more interesting and more open-ended than that. It is not always possible to repeat interesting patterns, and figuring out what happened to result in intriguing patterns is embodied analytical skill. The game is played around the world and can have considerable cultural significance. Cat's cradle is both local and global, distributed and knotted together' (1997: 268).

8. Haraway describes 'witnessing' as 'seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to one's visions and representations. Witnessing is a collective, limited practice that depends on the constructed and never finished credibility of those who do it, all of whom are mortal, fallible, and fraught with the consequences of unconscious desires and fears' (1997: 267).

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