

“Which one research paper, study or blog post on SEND and inclusion should everybody read?”

When I heard this question at a training event for Early Career Mentors, I immediately knew my answer: Lani Florian and Kristine Black-Hawkins’ work on inclusive pedagogy (2011). All too often, I see well-intentioned colleagues pitching their teaching to most of the class and then doing something different for some of the children; the “complex” ones. In our school, we call this “doughnut planning”: planning for most of the pupils, the typical edible circle, while leaving the non-typical SEND learners in the hole in the middle.

Allan (2006) and Slee (2010) describe this practice as “repetition of exclusion”, where the work that some learners are given is simplified to such an extent that they end up isolated.

I observed a science lesson in which an NQT, dedicated to inclusion, was teaching about pollination. After listening to an explanation of how flowers pollinate, the SEND learners completed a simplistic worksheet that failed to relate the new knowledge back to the learning objectives.

It became clear that this NQT’s lesson-planning template had a box separating tasks for her lower prior attainers. Not only did this limit her expectations of pupils with SEND, but it also inadvertently encouraged these pupils to disengage from the lesson’s learning objectives and the activities of the rest of the class. It concerns me that our understanding of how to “do” inclusion is still so fragile.

So, how can Florian and Black-Hawkins help? Their research advocates extending what is ordinarily available to all learners, rather than reaching for something “different”. It reveals that inclusion is more effective when teachers focus on **what** is to be taught, rather than **who** is to learn.

I observed another NQT. Her lesson-planning framework was taken from her initial teacher training resource pack and encouraged an approach more akin to that advocated by Florian and Black-Hawkins. Instead of a box labelled “differentiation”, this template asks: “What is to be taught and how do you maximise access and challenge for all?” And this was the question for every aspect of her planning. Perhaps this is the answer. If we place “differentiation” in a separate box, we are encouraging teachers to see it as something isolated from the work that they do with the rest of their students.

Research suggests that inclusion principles, poorly executed, can lead to exclusion in practice. But, if everybody was indeed to read Florian and Black-Hawkins, then I believe we would have a much better chance of making every teacher a teacher of every child.