Book Review by Alan Hurst

Radical Inclusive Education, Greenstein, Anat (2016)

Within post-school education, the terms **Inclusive Education** appear to have become synonymous with the development and application of the principles of universal design to the curriculum and to methods of teaching, learning and assessment. So, when I saw the title of this book I wondered what form a 'radical' approach might take and to evaluate the extent to which current efforts might bring about educational and social change. Then, on reading more about the book, I discovered that it claimed to make use of the work of Paolo Freire. This encouraged me to read the book for another reason. During my early years as a teacher in the late 1960s and early 1970s I had been inspired by reading books such as John Holt's 'How Children Fail', Ivan Illich's 'Deschooling Society, the School of Barbiana's 'Letter to a Teacher' - and by Paolo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. I wondered if I would experience the same feelings of excitement and exhilaration as I did then and feel a desire to change contemporary policies and practices relating to the enhancement of inclusion of disabled students in third level/higher education. I recognised that the pioneers mentioned above had their focus on what happens in schools but I think it is good practice to read widely and to draw upon a wide range of sources to gain new ideas, and to see if they are adaptable and applicable to my own work.

The book has two parts. The first is called **Setting the Scene: politicising education and disability and exploring the need for radical inclusive pedagogy**. The introduction presents the author's personal situation as a speech and language therapist and the impact on her of encountering the social model of disability. She also describes the history of school provision in England for children with 'special needs'. The importance of the disabled people's movement and the need to draw upon it and work with it are recognised. Having set the scene and outlined the structure of the book, Chapter One is about recognising disability as a political phenomenon and the rooting of policies towards disabled people in medical, psychological and deficit models. These resulted in the marginalisation of disabled people and the neglect of recognising what is defined as 'the norm' as a social and political construct. Greenstein suggests that a strategy to overcome this is to conceptualise people as positioned on a continuum from dis(ability) - ability which links to a subsequent notion of interdependence instead of independence. A simple illustrative example of this from the context of third level/higher education is the role of personal assistant (PA) and disabled students where the student depends on the PA for certain activities whilst the PA depends on the student for employment and income. I was also struck by a quotation from Reeve (2008) on page 29 '....people who require state funding .....have to satisfy strict conditions to prove their 'inabilities'. Isn't this what students experience when applying for Disabled Students Allowances in the UK?

Having suggested the dis – ability continuum, in **Chapter Two**, this is applied to schools with particular attention given to segregated provision for learners with disabilities. Even in the most recent policies in the UK the underlying assumptions of such policies 'continue to privilege ideas of competition rather than co-operation, independence rather than interdependence and personal accountability rather than social failure' (page 37). Greenstein moves on to consider school failure as an individual pathology and for me this serves to emphasise my conviction that there is a need to move away from using the term **learning disabilities**. Replacing this with **learning differences**

should demonstrate a significant shift from an individual/deficit model to a social/educational one. The consequence is that the responsibility lies with the trained professional to organise and structure learning so that it is effective in meeting the needs of a variety of learning differences. This contributes to the old notion that good teaching for those who have different needs is usually good teaching for all. The chapter ends with a discussion of the distinction between 'employment' and 'employability, the latter having a focus on individual deficiencies in the author's view. She is also concerned by the attention given to literacy and numeracy at the expense of other important social skills

Chapter Three looks at the disabled people's movement and its links to radical inclusive pedagogy. It is here that the work of Freire comes into focus. Freire is critical of what can be described as 'the banking model of education' in which the teacher is the source of what counts as knowledge and her/his role is to pass on this to the learners. Instead, Freire advocates concentrating on facilitating the learners' critical thinking, a process he calls **conscientisation**. Once this has taken place, individuals can reflect on their own social setting and to try to bring about change if they think it necessary, a stage Freire calls praxis which is about having the power and the knowledge on which to act. It is interesting to apply this approach to the position of disabled students in third level/higher education. One question is the extent to which the introduction of universal design for learning is likely to result in the two outcomes Freire desires. How does UDL work to promote **conscientisation** and **praxis**? **Is the concern still with the same blocks of subject-based knowledge?**

In the later sections of this chapter, Greenstein outlines three types of knowledge (page 58 onwards) and considers the ways in which these are useful in analysing the work of the disabled people's movement in involving as many disabled people as possible in the struggle for change. This has to mean ensuring that the movement is accessible and as inclusive as possible so that people with all types of impairment can become involved (e.g. facilitating the participation of those with intellectual and behavioural impairments).

The second part of the book is called **Envisaging Radical Inclusive Pedagogy: knowledge, relationships and power. Chapter Four** explores the need to rethink what constitutes 'knowledge' if radical inclusive pedagogy is to become effective. The underlying assumption is that knowledge is a social construct and that this has implications for power and control. Who defines what counts as 'knowledge' and what are the consequences of this? Putting this differently, what is being urged is a questioning of the 'takenfor- granted', a stance whose consequences are outlined so well by Alfred Schutz in a short paper called 'The Stranger'. Why is it that certain subjects are included in the school curriculum for example? What are the implications for subjects not included? Does subject content not matter and what education is about is preserving that status quo, a process achieved by what has been referred to as 'the hidden curriculum'? (e.g. the social learning that takes place such as obeying the teacher – and subsequently the manager in the context of employment). Schutz's 'Stranger' also raises questions about what is seen as 'recipe knowledge'. Using an example from third level/ higher education, the approach to academic assessment for students with specific learning disabilities (differences?) seems to be based on the allocation of additional time, usually in a formulaic way allowing an additional fifteen minutes per allocated hour of examination irrespective of individual variations and needs - but is this the only alternative?

Chapter Five called **Relations of Belonging: identity, difference and the ethics of care** looks at how community feelings can be developed and how this can be accomplished via inclusion. This connects easily with the final section, **Chapter Six**, which is about changing power relations. In particular, the focus is on resisting domination and seeking horizontal power relations. This returns to the theme of sustaining and promoting individual

autonomy whilst recognising the importance of interdependence as expressed by the dis-ability continuum. Towards its close, Greenstein reminds us again what radical inclusive pedagogy is:

> Radical inclusive pedagogy that starts from a dis-ability perspective is not about creating educational provision for disabled students, but about a diverse range of services, relations and support that can benefit different people at different times of their lives. It is about the freedom to move between services and change roles and relations. It is about being supported to impact, shape and change educational provision and relations (page 133).

That's the book summarised so what are my conclusions and recommendations?

The issues covered might seem to be intellectually challenging but Greenstein tries to support readers by her comprehensive introduction and by the summary of key points at the start of each chapter. For those readers coming new to the topics covered, it might be necessary to re-read sections and/or chapters – but there is no law against reading things more than once! The points I hope that readers would take away from the book are the concepts of the dis - ability continuum and of interdependence and how they might be applied in their situations. Also, I think it would be interesting to consider knowledge as a social construct and the challenges associated with questioning 'the taken-for-granted'. Is there a hierarchy in the study programmes in higher education? Certainly, at least in the past in the UK, academic subjects have been accorded greater status than those with a more practical focus.

Would I recommend that colleagues working to support disabled students in third level/higher education read this book? My answer is yes. It will not tell you how to undertake the tasks and responsibilities associated with your role and position – it is not a series of practical tips. However, what it will do is to cause you to stop and think about what you are doing and why you are doing it in the way you have chosen. Having done so, you might continue with your action unchanged – but at least you have stopped to reflect and think. Many years ago I was a tutor for the Open University in the UK. A key aim of the OU in all its modules and courses was the development of 'intelligent, informed sceptics'. Reading Greenstein's book could be an important step towards achieving this amongst staff working with disabled students in third level/higher education and thus contribute to their greater professionalization and professionalism.

References

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Prof Alan Hurst

Alan Hurst was Professor of Education at the University of Central Lancashire. He has published books and articles, lectured and led workshops throughout the UK and in many countries overseas, been a member of several significant and influential policy groups, chaired consultative groups for a number of research studies and projects, and been the recipient of a number of awards for his work on the creation of inclusive education for disabled students in universities. He was also a member and subsequently a trustee of Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities until its closure in 2011. He continues to be a member of the Editorial Boards of the journal 'Disability and Society' and is a free-lance consultant contributing to conferences and staff development programmes in a number of institutions.