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**Using inquiry based learning to study inclusive education:
an evaluation of the 'School Based Inquiry and Development'
course unit, MEd Special and Inclusive Education, 2005/6**

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Summary

This article evaluates a recent initiative within the MEd in Special and Inclusive Education programme, in the University of Manchester's School of Education. In October 2005 students were provided with an opportunity to carry out collaborative research tasks in four Manchester schools, all of which were involved in the 'Manchester Inclusion Standard'. The research tasks were carried out as part of a 15 credit course unit entitled, 'School Based Inquiry and Development'. When the course unit had been completed and assignments handed in, the Programme Director conducted a series of interviews with key staff in schools, with the Consultant for Social Inclusion for the Manchester City Council, and with the student groups. The evaluation set out to address the following questions:

1. What is necessary to make inquiry-based learning successful?
2. What are the difficulties and how can they be addressed?
3. What is the impact of this approach in the schools and on the students?

The MEd student group is extremely diverse, with representation from Asia, Africa, Europe and America. Summarise findings: students learnt a great deal about collaboration, about English school culture, reflected on their own educational experience in their home countries, etc.

The Masters Programme

The main aim of the MEd Programme in (Special and) Inclusive Education is to prepare students to evaluate current developments, both in the UK and internationally, in relation to their own present and future practice. In addition the Programme aims to provide students with the opportunity to engage critically with the history and current thinking in the field of special and inclusive education, and with global issues of inclusion; and to analyse ways in which governments, local authorities, schools and local communities can reduce barriers to participation and learning for all children.

The majority of the MEd students come from outside the UK, most have never been to the UK before, and for some it is the first time they have lived far away from home. The cultural adjustments necessary are enormous and difficult for academic staff to fully comprehend. A typical cohort of students includes approximately one third from various towns in the north west of England, one American, a small number from South Asia, several from English speaking former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, and a diminishing number from Greece and Cyprus.

There is a strong emphasis on learner independence and assignment titles are negotiated between tutors and individual students to ensure that the course of study is tailored to individual professional and research interests. Students are expected to be flexible in their approach to learning, to develop good time management skills, and to demonstrate initiative and autonomy in completing tasks.

Inquiry based learning

Preparing students to be more effective in the real world situations in which they work, and to return to their places of work with the skills and knowledge they need to develop policy and implement change, is the main essence of this Masters programme. We therefore aim to create a teaching and learning environment in which students can learn through a process of inquiry, both in lectures and seminars, and in the 'real world'. Therefore there is a strong emphasis on team work and the development of good inter-personal skills.

This approach to collaborative and co-operative inquiry (Reason, 1998) has been developed over a number of years through university contacts in various schools in the North-West of England.

The most recent version of this course, '*School based inquiry and development*' began in 2005 and enables students to conduct a small-scale collaborative study in a local school. Working in teams of three to four, students were expected to design and conduct a small-scale inquiry in collaboration with key members of school staff. Within a very short time students are exposed to some of the complexities involved in introducing inclusive practices in schools with diverse populations, situated in communities facing considerable economic deprivation.

In addition to school-based methods of research and inquiry and an introduction, where appropriate, to the English education system, topics covered in lectures include: action research approaches; observation skills; working collaboratively; challenges in urban education; management of change; and evaluating the impact of innovation.

Students make a valuable contribution to the schools by finely integrating and combining the collection of primary data in schools with an analysis and synthesis of relevant literature on the subject of the inquiry while using action research principles. This is, in effect, a form of apprenticeship or coaching.

For a culturally diverse group of students who have just arrived in the UK for the first time, and who are unlikely to have carried out any formal research, this is a demanding task. Students are expected to establish and maintain relationships, both personally and professionally, and demonstrate tact and diplomacy, and manage their time effectively. Their challenge is to collaborate with their student group and with school staff in an unfamiliar context, and solve problems efficiently by identifying key issues, analysing relevant information and applying and monitoring solutions.

The context

The Manchester Inclusion Standard (MIS) consists of a set of evaluation tools for school improvement, developed in collaboration by the University and the Manchester City Council. Schools collect evidence from pupils and other stakeholders which they then analyse and reflect on. Pupil outcome targets are written in response to the issues arising from the evidence.

All schools are encouraged to achieve MIS status (gold, silver and bronze) in the same way that they are encouraged to achieve 'Healthy Schools' status. Each school is required to spend four school terms (16 months) completing the MIS process.

An overview of the school-based inquiry process

A group of eight primary schools were identified in July 2005 on the basis of their involvement in the Manchester Inclusion Standard (MIS). For the first time, in 2005, this was carried out in collaboration with Manchester City Council (MCC) and schools were selected by the Manchester City Council's Consultant for Social Inclusion, our main contact person. Selection of schools was based on the extent of their involvement in implementing the Manchester Inclusion Standard (MIS), the issues they were focusing on and their proximity to the city centre. In October the final selection of four schools was made on the basis of the numbers of students registered for the course unit and the final commitment made by the schools to be involved. One had to withdraw because of an imminent Ofsted inspection, for example, while others were no longer needed because the student group was less than twenty. Two of the four schools selected had completed the MIS process, and so had carried out the improvements based on targets set, while the other two were mid-way through the process.

Schools were encouraged to identify a person, or even a team of people who would take responsibility for working with the students on the research task. It was the responsibility of the school team to work with colleagues to identify a problem, an issue of concern, or a question they would like to address. Ideally the role of the MCC contact person was to work with the schools to think through the 'problem' they identified, and so act as the 'problem-broker'. However, this only happened in those schools with which the Consultant was working particularly closely at the time the research was being conducted.

The diverse nature of the MEd student group is both a tremendous strength and a considerable challenge in all teaching and learning contexts, but this is perhaps felt most strongly in this course unit. The students were divided into groups of three and four in the second week of term in early October, based on minimal knowledge of their abilities and personalities. Extra care was taken to ensure a balance of cultural background, languages spoken and computer skills. Consideration was also paid to the cost of the journey students had to make and to concerns from a racial point of view of travelling to certain parts of the city. The group was so diverse that each member of the four groups came from a different cultural background and educational tradition. One group, for example, included students from India, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and the Netherlands – representing three different continents! Another group included students from Greece, USA and Zimbabwe. All three of the British students were from a range of South Asian backgrounds.

The groups' first collaborative task was to arrange a preliminary meeting at the school by mid-October. By the end of October the students had completed their initial fact-finding visits to the schools, and discussed the 'research task' with relevant members of staff. It was at this point that they began to formulate their research questions. They presented a summary of their initial findings and a brief outline of their research plan as the first part of the formal assessment. This task, as with all the tasks in this course unit, was carried out collaboratively, and students were assessed on their collaborative skills and team working ability. The students spent at least five days in the schools researching the problem they had identified in collaboration with school staff.

In December students made a formal presentation of their findings, in their research teams, at the University. This was the second part of their formal assessment. The presentations included the problem they faced, their research plan, research methods used, their findings and recommendations, and some reflection on the difficulties encountered and lessons learnt.

Interestingly none of the topics identified by the four schools (lunch-time procedures; pupil motivation; inclusive play; and boys' underachievement) were directly associated with topics traditionally associated with 'special education' or even with what many practitioners associate with 'inclusive education'. From the course tutors' point of view this was a highly desirable outcome as it highlighted the complexity of inclusive education in the multi-cultural context of the city of Manchester and so challenged many of the pre-conceptions held by students from other cultural contexts about the meaning of inclusion.

Formative and summative assessment of the presentations was carried out by peers and staff (the Programme Director and the MCC contact person). Four key points were identified (content; teamwork; involvement of audience; and distinctive features) against which students and staff made written comments and allocated a mark. The peer assessment was taken into account when the two assessors moderated the final marks.

In January the students handed in a report, written collaboratively by the research team, as the final part of their formal assessment. The reports outlined the problem, the research process, the limitations of the research, ethical issues and recommendations.

Following the formal assessment process for the MEd programme, all schools were offered the opportunity of a formal presentation by students in a staff meeting, and short summary reports (two to three pages) were prepared for the schools, although some schools requested the full reports, which were on average twenty pages in length.

Researching the inquiry based approach

A series of interviews were conducted with key staff members in each of the four schools. Short discussions were held with three head teachers and a

telephone discussion was held with a deputy head in the fourth school. Interviews lasting at least one hour were conducted with the key members of staff in three of the four schools. Group interviews were also conducted with each of the student groups by the Programme Director and the MCC contact person. The students' presentations and school reports provided additional information about, and insight into, the school based inquiry process.

There are two distinct levels to the research reported here: the findings of the research conducted by the team of tutors about the school based inquiry process; and the collaborative student-led school based research. The main focus here will be on the tutor-led research of the process as a whole, although information is also drawn on from the student-led research. The results have been broadly divided into factors that make inquiry-based learning successful, with some attention paid to addressing the difficulties, and the impact of this approach, in keeping with the original questions. The schools will be referred to in this paper as A, B, C and D.

1. What is necessary to make inquiry-based learning successful?

Some key lessons from the experience of teaching the School based Inquiry and development course unit will be outlined here. These are, of course, factors which we have concluded have made inquiry based learning successful in the context of higher education in the Manchester context. The findings can not be generalised, but they may shed light on such initiatives in other higher education contexts. Although this section is divided into two main parts, 'the student perspective' and 'the school perspective', there was a great deal of overlap between the issues highlighted by the students and by the schools. Many of the difficulties or barriers, highlighted in the interviews, held the key to making inquiry based learning about inclusion a success. Clear communication, for example, is important for success, but when it didn't take place it was a cause of many difficulties.

• The student perspective

The following indicators have arisen from this research as key to the success of such an initiative, and they relate both to the development of a strong student group and to the student group's attitude to, and relationship with, the school:

- Students commit themselves to developing a collaborative team
- Students are clear about their role
- Students demonstrate a commitment to work with school staff
- Students communicate clearly with the school
- Students keep appointments and are punctual
- Students keep staff well informed throughout the process
- Students have a professional and knowledgeable approach
- Students are competent and confident researchers
- Students work with minimum support and supervision

In exploring these indicators, I will highlight some of the difficulties which arose and possible ways of addressing them.

Establishing a strong student group

The key to success from the student perspective was the *development of a strong and well functioning student group* within which each student had a clear role and took equal responsibility. One of the groups identified the difficulty they had experienced in *balancing friendship with professionalism*: “We were already friends and this made it difficult sometimes”. There were some advantages to the fact that they enjoyed each other’s company, but they recognised that this had also had some distinct disadvantages as they had adopted a rather casual approach to the task. They had also functioned more as a collection of individuals rather than as a collaborative group.

Developing a cross-cultural understanding between members of the student group was a major challenge, given their cultural diversity and assumptions about, and previous experience of, teaching, learning and research. Some groups failed to establish a set of group norms or *ground rules for working collaboratively*. As a result telephone calls to the school were not always coordinated and information was not always fed back to the whole group. This meant that schools sometimes received multiple unnecessary phone calls and students did not always arrive at the school together.

First impressions are very important and one group of students acknowledged that they had started ‘on the wrong footing’ and hadn’t always collaborated well as a group, which had made the whole process more difficult. This school reported that the students had inconvenienced the school on some occasions by changing the timing of their visits and appointments. Different attitudes to time-keeping was a challenge for some groups, while there were strong gender splits within some groups, due in part to different cultural attitudes to the idea of men and women working together on an equal basis. Clearly each group needs to establish its own way of working which make the most of the strengths of each individual member.

Clarifying roles and clear communication

Most schools are used to student teachers being placed in schools on teaching practice, but they are less used to students spending time in their schools as researchers. Some misunderstandings arose because of the lack of clarity about the students’ role, and although the students need to take some responsibility for this, efforts need to be made in future to make the students’ role clearer to the participating schools.

Although the students had been warned that teachers are extremely busy, discussions and interviews could only take place by prior arrangement and therefore it is extremely important to be punctual and keep appointments, many did not really believe it until they had experienced it for themselves. They had come from much more relaxed education systems, where teachers do not have such rigid time pressures. In one of the schools a misunderstanding had arisen over a delayed deadline for the initial research plan and this had adversely affected their working relationship. It is likely that this situation arose as a combination of factors: the teachers’ lack of flexibility as a result of the pressures they face and a lack of respect and professionalism shown by the students.

Approach to research

Some students tended to take a more traditional view of research involving data collection, rather than seeing it as an opportunity to enter into a more collaborative partnership with teachers who know their schools so well. One of the students expressed surprise that they had been expected to share their findings as the research progressed, rather than saving everything for a final report. This was partly due to preconceived ideas of what constitutes research, and partly due to insufficient emphasis in teaching sessions on the importance of action research principle of sharing the responsibility for research with key stakeholders.

There was a strong emphasis on “learning by doing” which complemented the more theoretical perspective presented in lectures. One student had felt very unprepared and inadequate in learning in this way, and had found the whole experience frightening. He even felt that the students hadn’t helped the school because they didn’t know what they were doing. More preparation could have been done to help students feel more competent, but a feeling of helplessness in the workplace is also a common experience. The imposition of a more formal and prescribed research structure may also have been counter productive to this inquiry based exercise.

• The school perspective

The key factors in the success of inquiry based learning from the school perspective are:

- The school is clear about the role the students will play
- The school has a good understanding of the research task
- The school nominates a key member of staff who will work with the students.

The schools provided some very useful feedback on the experience of hosting student researchers. Some schools had found the experience more helpful than others, but all expressed an interest in being involved in future student-led research activities.

Communication and collaboration

Greater clarity about the particular role the students were to play would have helped make the process of inquiry more meaningful. Staff in School C said they had been unclear about the aims and objectives of the students’ time in school: “We were unsure of their agenda and their aims because they aren’t PGCE students”. They went on to say that, “We’re used to students. We like having students in school. But their role is very different from the student teachers”.

Although the research process had been very productive and useful in School A, the teacher reported that she had not felt part of the collaborative process. She would have liked to have ongoing dialogue and scheduled meetings. Instead, she reported that, “They didn’t tell us anything”. She had found this difficult, and made the following rhetorical statement: “Basically it’s our problem, isn’t it?” She saw no point in students coming in to a school for a few days to a school without sharing their findings throughout the process. The

school didn't want to wait until the end. When the interview took place she had not yet read the final report. She was curious to know "if there is anything we didn't know already – that's the acid test."

School D reported that they had experienced 'communication problems' with those students who used English as an additional language, and that they had needed 'language support' and 'mediation', especially when they were working with non-teaching staff. This group of students had struggled to establish a collaborative working relationship, although they were good friends. The student who spoke English as a first language took on most of the responsibility for liaising with the school and for writing the reports. None of the other schools reported any difficulties with the students' spoken English skills. In fact, school C was proud of the fact that language was not a barrier to inclusion and that as a school they were extremely competent in communicating with very young children who did not speak English.

Where a key member of staff had worked closely with the students in two of the schools, the standard of the work was much higher and the research of mutual benefit. This was the case in School B, where the key teacher had recently completed a higher degree and was very confident about research. She quickly established a good collaborative relationship with the student group. She recognised that this relationship was mutually beneficial: "I also think that they gained a lot from it as well ... they used to come for a day, and we used to build in the afternoon session for a way of analysing and reflecting upon what the outcome was ... they did that job very well for us."

Time-saving and efficient

In School A, the students' contribution was recognised as being valuable, time-saving and of mutual benefit: "It's the sort of thing you never really ever get round to because you haven't got the bodies." The school also appreciated the fact that the students were competent and self-sufficient and could be trusted to carry out the research with minimum support and supervision: "They had a very professional approach and they were very nice students... they came in and got a grip in a limited time. I thought they did quite well." The key teacher in School B expressed the fact that, "it was wonderful to have such committed people who want to find out about inclusion ... they were using me as a critical friend, and I was using them as a critical friend."

Some schools had very high expectations of the students, whereas others felt that they already knew a great deal about their own school and they were not very optimistic about the contribution the students could make. School C had asked the students to research 'play', yet they seemed very confident about their knowledge, "We know quite a lot about our playground dynamics". They expected the student researchers would bring a new and different perspective to the work of the school. However, in some cases, they were perhaps not so open to potentially unexpected findings: "We're self-sufficient enough to identify our own problems – but it was useful anyway".

Most teachers appreciated the fact that the students were professional and knowledgeable in their approach, and could be trusted to carry out the

research with minimum support and supervision. Only one of the schools commented on the students' inexperience as researchers and suggested that it would have been better "if the students had been more prepared for conducting interviews".

In School C staff had adopted a much less 'hands-on' approach than Schools A and B, as they regarded the students as competent and had decided not to 'interfere'. They commented that the students had, "integrated well into the classes" and "We didn't support them. We left them to get on with it. We didn't want to influence their research." This may have been because the staff were busy and didn't feel they could commit the time to working more closely with the students, or that they had not understood that this was intended to be a collaborative research project.

Developing a common understanding of the research task

The teacher who became the link person with the students in School B had recently completed a Masters degree and she suggested that schools without such a well qualified 'link person' would find the school based inquiry process difficult. On the whole, however, the teachers perceived the research as a positive intervention and didn't see it as threatening.

Students in School C were given a lot of flexibility by staff, whereas in School D, students claimed that their research plan had been 'edited' by a senior member of staff. The students could perhaps have entered into the spirit of collaboration with the school in this instance, but instead they felt that their research plan was being censored and interfered with. In the students' opinion, the school chose a 'safe topic' because they wanted the students to 'validate or verify the school's findings'.

The students in School D felt that the school perceived the research as a 'nice thing', but that they "didn't really know what they wanted". This lack of clarity led, in turn, to difficulties in developing relationships and overall collaboration.

2. The impact of the inquiry based approach to inclusion

• Impact on the students

Learning to work collaboratively

Students appreciated the effort made to balance the groups to ensure a range of cultural backgrounds and skills. They reported that they had formed strong collegial friendships and working relationships which helped them in other aspects of their academic work. This also provided a strong foundation for some groups of students for the demands of the rest of the programme.

The students said they needed to take time to listen to each other's experiences and perspectives. All groups reported that they had learned to respect each other's opinions, and one group in particular had enjoyed their "disagreements". In addition to learning about teamwork and action research, they had also experienced cross-cultural learning, "It was very creative and there was good cooperation".

Some students said that "it took time to get used to each other", but that they "learnt a lot from each other". They also reported that there was no obvious

group leader and that each had played a key role depending on the task. However one group member had emerged as a facilitator. Interestingly, they became good friends as a result of the collaborative work. They felt that this would not have happened if they had not been expected to work together.

Learning about inclusion

Students come to Manchester with their own culturally and contextually determined concepts of inclusive education. For the majority, inclusive education is strongly associated with the 'special educational needs' of individual children rather than the way in which the education system is organised to respond to the needs of various groups of children. One of the students wanted to know, for example, "What did the research have to do with inclusion and special needs?" Clearly the experience of conducting research in a Manchester school which aspired to becoming more inclusive had challenged this student's perceptions of inclusion and inclusive education as fixed and uncontested concepts.

Developing researcher competence

Some students felt overwhelmed by the many complex issues they were expected to deal with all at once: research methods, inclusion in the English context and the research problem. In addition they had to learn to work collaboratively. With hindsight, however, they acknowledged that this confusion had been good as it had forced them to think deeply and to try out some of the theories discussed in lectures.

Other students commented that the Research Methods course unit had helped them in using grounded theory and analysing interview data in particular, and so helped them become effective school researchers. This is further evidence of the integrative learning that was taking place between different aspects of the programme.

Learning about English schools

One student commented that it would have been helpful to have had more information about the English education system before going into the schools. However the student acknowledged that it was good to have an "authentic learning experience" in the schools, finding out for themselves, rather than being told. Many students described the experience as a steep learning curve and complained that there had not been enough time to engage with the sudden increase in learning, which some students had found quite challenging, confusing and difficult.

The international students were puzzled by the concept of 'Lunch time organisers' and the problems associated with lunch time in English schools. Managing children during lunch time was a completely new issue and many struggled to see the connection between lunch time issues and inclusion, such as behaviour, lack of qualified staff supervising activities, absence of organised play activities, gender and culture splits in play.

The students realised that, in the age of league tables and OFSTED inspections, schools are very concerned about their image and sometimes seemed "over-sensitive". A great deal of effort was made by students to

ensure that staff were not “offended” by any of the written reports. In retrospect the students came to realise that the schools could have perceived them as being in a position of judgement over the schools, because they represented the University of Manchester.

All the students said that they had learnt a great deal about English schools and that this had helped them to reflect on their own educational experience in their home countries. There was also an additional, unexpected impact on the international students, who appreciated the fact that they had been compelled to get to know parts of Manchester they didn't know and were unlikely to visit. Studying in the UK can be a very isolating experience, but this experience had helped to lessen their isolation.

- **Impact on the schools**

Saving time

On the whole the schools had appreciated having students who could dedicate time to carrying out a piece of research, and they all expressed their willingness to have students conducting research in future. Research “is the sort of thing you never really ever get round to because you haven't got the bodies....It's really interesting – we don't do it often enough.”

The teachers are extremely busy and were appreciative of the time the students could dedicate to helping them “undertake the Inclusion Standard”. Without this help they would have struggled to complete the research tasks required of the MIS: “They actually came and carried out that data collection for me under my supervision, which was good ... and they were very independent, and they actually contributed to it greatly, so it cut my time factor down because otherwise I would have had to have done it, either at lunchtimes or whatever.”

Collecting evidence

In School A, the research was seen as being “relevant to the School Improvement agenda” and it was acknowledged that it “added another dimension to the school”. The student group was invited to make a presentation to eight members of the Senior Management Team (SMT). Copies of the report were made for each team member and they spent an hour discussing the research findings. The teachers commented that the presentation was ‘very slick’, and that their findings were consistent with their most recent OFSTED report. The SMT is now working on issues arising from the research: how can behaviour be improved, and how to evaluate the Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum. The report has been included in the school's inclusion file and in the school development plan.

In School B students made a “great contribution to the MIS work at the school” and in particular to the further development of ‘pupil voice’ as an approach.

Researching inclusion

Schools had a range of different ideas about the focus of the research, its main purpose, and how it related to their involvement in the MIS. In School B,

they expressed some of the difficulties they had faced with respect to the MIS agenda in general: “The biggest problem to us was highlighting to the staff that this was not just about special needs – it’s about identifying vulnerable groups in your class, and helping you to think through strategies to help them access the curriculum....because I think we are an inclusive school, and we always have been, so where we’ve been doing things for quite a number of years.” This quote highlights the dispute about the meaning of inclusion in the field and the subsequent difficulties involved in researching the issue.

Sharing experience across cultures

One of the unexpected outcomes was the quality of discussions which took place in some schools between staff and students. In particular, the teacher in School A appreciated the opportunity to share experiences: “They were a great group, the dynamics were good, very mixed ...I think that’s part of it, sharing expertise, and within schools you do have lots of expertise and experience”. Similarly in School B the teacher said, “I’ve enjoyed the experience, it’s been very positive and it’s been lovely to have the contact with the wider community and higher education. It benefits everybody. It’s a two-way process. We all learn. I learnt from them and they learnt from me”.

One of the teachers was particularly interested in the fact that the research experience carried out in Manchester may one day influence research and development in India. In other words, she saw the school inquiry process as having much wider impact than simply in the school in which she teaches: “It’s great to have those friendships and it’s great to have those connections to reach out to the wider community.”

Discussion

This article began by asking three broad questions: what are the necessary conditions to make inquiry-based learning successful; what are the difficulties and how might they be faced; and what is the impact on the schools and on the students. Inquiry based learning is about addressing problems and challenges in the real world. By working closely with schools, students on the MEd in Special and Inclusive Education gain a unique insight into the challenges to inclusion in urban schools in the north of England. At the same time, teachers can be engaged in an action research process in collaboration with a group of students who bring a theoretical outsider perspective to the school.

Of primary interest to the course unit tutors was the way in which the students gained first hand experience of the challenges and contradictions associated with the often contested concept of ‘inclusive education’ and in particular one local education authority’s efforts to promote a more inclusive approach to education. It was particularly interesting that none of the research topics identified by the schools (lunch-time procedures; pupil motivation; inclusive play; and boys’ underachievement) were directly associated with issues traditionally associated with ‘special education’ or even with what many practitioners associate with ‘inclusive education’. This was a highly desirable outcome as it highlighted the complexity of inclusive education in the multi-cultural context of the city of Manchester and so challenged many of the pre-

conceptions held by students from other cultural contexts about the meaning of inclusion.

The day to day reality of working in an inner city English school was also an important learning experience. Students could see for themselves that English schools are highly pressured, busy places, where teams of people manage a heavy workload within the school and increasingly unrealistic pressures from the government. Academic staff members are very conscious of this situation and yet we still feel that it is essential to create opportunities for students to conduct inquiries in schools, as this is so central to the aims of this particular MEd Programme. Without this practical experience, the theoretical discussions which take place in the university are at risk of being quite meaningless, especially for those who do not have any experience of inclusive education in the English school system.

Having access to schools in which to conduct inquiries and establishing a good working relationship with the schools are clearly two of the key factors in making an inquiry based approach successful. If this is to continue to be successful, collaborative relationships need to be nurtured on many levels. Primarily academic staff members need to continue to develop and maintain mutually beneficial working relationships with staff in schools. Meetings with head teachers in collaborating schools are planned as part of the follow up to this course in order to provide them with detailed feedback on previous research, but also to explain some of the benefits of becoming involved as research partners.

Perhaps the most fundamental challenge is that of supporting students to establish their own well-functioning collaborative student group. Academic staff can model a collaborative approach in the way they work and manage teaching and learning. However most students come from a more conservative educational tradition where they have been used to working as individuals in competition, rather than in collaboration, with peers, and inevitably some groups functioned better than others. Many preferred to join their individual efforts together rather than genuinely working as a team. The issue of team working, communication and collaboration can be tackled within teaching sessions to some extent, and emphasis placed on the marks assigned to team work, but for some students the experience was an alien one. Nevertheless this experience is undoubtedly good practice for the work place.