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# Practices of exclusion in cultures of inclusive schooling in the United Kingdom

Prácticas de exclusión en culturas escolares inclusivas en Reino Unido

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## Abstract

A tension has emerged in the United Kingdom over the last 30 years between policies designed to achieve educational excellence and policies seeking to achieve inclusive practice. The introduction of devolution across the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom has led to differences in practices developed from what were originally a common set of cultural and historical values and beliefs. Policy changes in England in particular have resulted in perverse incentives for schools to not meet the needs of students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and which can result in their exclusion from school. We illustrate the working of perverse incentives through a cultural historical analysis of the ways that professionals from different services may have different object motives. We argue for practices of inter-professional co-configuration and knotworking in order to meaningful relations and patterns of communication that join services around young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

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Keywords: School exclusion, social exclusion, inclusion, special educational needs, Vygotsky

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## Resumen

En los últimos 30 años ha surgido una tensión en Reino Unido entre las políticas diseñadas para alcanzar la excelencia educativa y las políticas que buscan promover una práctica inclusiva. La descentralización y consiguiente traspaso de competencias a las cuatro jurisdicciones de Reino Unido ha llevado a diferencias en las prácticas desarrolladas a partir de lo que originalmente era un conjunto común de valores y creencias culturales e históricas. En particular los cambios de política en Inglaterra han resultado en incentivos perversos para que las escuelas no satisfagan las necesidades de los estudiantes con necesidades educativas especiales y discapacidades y pueden terminar en su exclusión escolar. Ilustramos el funcionamiento de estos incentivos perversos a través de un análisis histórico cultural de las formas en que los profesionales de diferentes servicios pueden tener diferentes motivos de objeto. Abogamos por prácticas de co-configuración interprofesional y el trabajo en nodos con el fin de lograr relaciones y patrones de comunicación significativos que unan a los servicios para jóvenes con discapacidades y necesidades educativas especiales.

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Palabras clave: Exclusión escolar, exclusión social, inclusión, necesidades educativas especiales, Vygotsky

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## Introduction

For the last 30 years in the United Kingdom (UK) there has been a great deal of research, lobbying and policy development that was intended to make the integration and support of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) more effective and build more inclusive practice in mainstream settings (Cole, Daniels, & Visser, 2012). Attention was directed to the development of: a cohesive multi-agency approach in assessment and subsequent formulation of provision; early intervention; better structural and organisational accountability; specialist teacher roles in each school to coordinate supportive arrangements and systems that valued parental input (Norwich, 2014). In addition, special classes and units were to be attached to, and to function within, ordinary schools wherever possible. Successive legislation introduced a number of regulations and rights which supported the development of these forms of practice and witnessed the shift from individual acts of integration to the develop-

ment of inclusive practice. However, alongside these moves which were designed to enhance responsiveness to diversity came the introduction of policies and practices of competition between schools driven by measures of attainment (Ball, 2003).

In the aftermath of this wave of policy development, a nascent tension between policies designed to achieve excellence and those seeking to achieve inclusive practice emerged. Just as is the case with the autonomous regions of Spain so the introduction of devolution across the jurisdictions of the UK has led to differences in practices developed from what were originally a common set of cultural and historical values and beliefs (Daniels, Thompson, & Tawell, 2017). Whilst the devolved parliaments in Scotland and Wales have continued to try to give priority to inclusion in education, in recent years these tensions in England have intensified and there is growing concern about the ways in which schools are managing the contradictions between these two policy streams. There is widespread public and political unrest about the variety of ways in which young people with SEND, who may be seen as a threat to a school attainment profiles, are being removed from the system either through formal exclusion from school or other, more invisible, means. School exclusion in the UK is defined either as fixed-period exclusion involving temporary removal from a school or permanent exclusion where the student is expelled from a particular school.

The negative consequences of school exclusion, including social exclusion, subsequent disengagement from the labour market, mental illness, sexual exploitation, and violent crime and grooming by drug gangs have also caused alarm in public and policy domains (IPPR, 2017; Scottish Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2015; Riddell & McCluskey, 2013). In addition to high levels of permanent and fixed period exclusions, there are also fears about 'hidden' forms of exclusion (Education Select Committee, 2018; Ofsted, 2018; IPPR, 2017). While the immediate causes of school exclusion are well-documented, very little is known about the system-level factors that lie behind the numbers. The significance of these factors is evident in wide variations in the latest reported year of official levels of exclusion across the UK in 2016/17 e.g. 7,720 PEX in England (10 per 10,000), 165 in Wales (4 per 10,000), 33 in Northern Ireland (NI) (1 per 10,000) and only five in Scotland.

This paper argues that policy changes in England in particular have resulted in perverse incentives for schools to not meet the needs of SEND students and which can result in their exclusion from school. We further argue that the development of a 'common sense' of exclusion in the 'everydayness' of school cultures arises as institutions struggle to resolve the dilemmas and contradictions that are formed between the perverse incentives of different policy frameworks.

## School exclusion and send in England

Recent years have seen growing concern about the rising numbers of students being permanently excluded from secondary schools in England (Parsons, 2018; Children's Commissioner, 2017) and the use of exclusion as a reaction to poor behaviour in schools (Ofsted, 2018). Despite continuing scepticism about the accuracy of some official data (Children's Commissioner, 2012; Vulliamy & Webb, 2001) it is clear that the likelihood of exclusion is associated with 'risk factors'. Young people with SEND experience a layering of disadvantage. They are more likely than their peers to live in single parent families, in poverty, and in conditions of material hardship with poorer health outcomes (Daniels & Cole, 2010; Thompson, 2017). Their families are more like-

ly to be in debt and living in rented accommodation. Additionally, the mental health needs of young people both at risk of exclusion and currently excluded are substantial. A high proportion have undiagnosed disorders, many of which are treatable if young people are able to access services in a timely manner (Fazel, Hoagwood, Stephan, & Ford, 2014). We know that young people who are excluded from school are more likely to engage in offending behaviour and that the offending behaviour of those that do offend is likely to worsen with permanent exclusion trajectory (Berridge, Brodie, Pitts, Porteous, & Tarling, 2001). Exclusion from school disproportionately affects children and young people with SEND in England. For example, in England in 2016-17 students with SEND accounted for almost half of all permanent exclusions (46.7 per cent) and fixed period exclusions (44.9 per cent) and had a permanent exclusion rate six times higher than the rate for pupils with no SEND (Department for Education, 2018).

There are structural and related interactional features of the perverse incentives to exclude students with SEND which are in operation in England. Across the UK, structural policy reforms have been underpinned by dual-commitments to school accountability for the progress of their students, and the inclusion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with special needs and disabilities. However, in contrast to Scotland, and to some degree Northern Ireland, Wales, commitment to accountability appears to override practices of inclusion in England (ADCS, 2018). Moreover, policy discourse in England has tended to individualise reasons for exclusion rather than develop an understanding rooted in the wider context of education, social and health policy (Mills, Riddell & Hjørne, 2014). The Children's Commissioner for England (2013) has argued for a greater understanding of the ways that conflicting policy motives may in practice form 'perverse incentives' for schools to exclude students. Ball (2003) has drawn attention to the dilemma of promoting practices of inclusion, whilst also deciding between incentives of excellence through competition on the basis of maximising mean examination performance. This may be all the more problematic when, for economic reasons, access to support for meeting additional needs is highly constrained (Marsh, 2015). Exclusion – both official and 'hidden' – can be seen as part of a political economy of schooling through which institutions seek to manage students disruptive behaviour in the context of increasing levels of accountability, an emphasis on high stakes testing and the proliferation of 'alternative' forms of provision to which 'troublesome' students can be outsourced. Increasingly these alternative forms of provision have floated free of local political control and in the process of creating a 'market' for possibilities of removal from mainstream education. The attainment driven competition between schools results in incentives to remove low attaining students and at the same time a new private sector of alternative provision competes for marginalized students and offers the means for achieving different forms of exclusion.

Ball (2003) and Connell (2009) have shown how the performative professionalism that arises in the kind of competitive practices that are often found in systems with high levels of accountability undermines the capacity of professionals to meet the needs of disadvantaged social groups. In such situations, students who do not submit to the rules (Lloyd, 2008) become 'collateral casualties' (Bauman, 2004), who find themselves locked in a process in which they are evacuated to the social margins of schooling (Slee, 2012). However, a recent study by Machin and Sandi (2018) suggested that there is a need for a nuanced account of the relationship between competition and exclusion, as exclusion is not always a means of facilitating better performance for autonomous schools in published league tables. They suggested that increases in school exclusions may partly be a consequence of disciplinary behaviour procedures that some schools elect to implement as well as increasing pressure by parents and

other bodies to ensure the school environment is protected from potential disruption. At the school level, Valdebenito, Eisner, Farrington, Ttofi, and Sutherland (2018) have shown that the first six months of school-based interventions can result in a small but significant drop in exclusion rates, but this effect was not sustained. Additionally, we know from our preliminary research that school level analysis does not show the full picture of school exclusions in any of the jurisdictions of the UK (Daniels, Thompson & Tawell, 2017). Persistent causes of exclusion are socio-historical, diverse and complex and intersect with each other in various ways to produce disparities in the social contexts of different jurisdictions (Cole, Daniels & Visser, 2003).

## Challenges to inclusive practices

Interactional manifestations of these structural perverse incentives become apparent when professionals from different services working with young people with SEND do not work together effectively. For example, Glisson and Hemmelgarn's (1998) work in the United States exemplified the complexities of relationships between service providers, users and the provision itself. They followed the progress of an initiative to improve outcomes of services for young people at risk of sexual and physical abuse through 'inter-organisational service coordination teams'. The focus of the initiative was tackling the perceived duplication of effort with a view to enhancing the quality and outcomes of services. Conversely, however, the research concluded that the opposite occurred and that the approach of the initiative (referred to as a 'process-oriented' approach) actually impeded successful outcomes for children; the more visible the role of the teams, the less responsibility caseworkers took for individual children and therefore, rather than improving the quality of services, the initiative limited responsiveness to problems and reduced discrepancy. Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) argue that effective outcomes for children in this case rested upon non-routine-based, individualised service decisions tailored to each young person – an approach they refer to as 'results-oriented' that allows caseworkers to respond to a child's particular needs and to be allowed to navigate bureaucratic hurdles according to the needs of the individual young person. This advanced form of professionalism could provide the basis for the reduction in difficulty that arises in settings riven by perverse incentives.

It is this aspect of the challenges to inclusive practice that will be the focus of the rest of this paper. The question here is how to overcome both the influence of perverse incentives in the system as well as the potentially different object motives of actors in inter-professional work in order to best meet the needs of SEND students. Young people with SEND often require support from a variety of different services. The formulation of this support should be needs driven and responsive to fluctuations in requirements over time if inclusive practice is to result (Slee, 2012). It has long been argued that problems which are in practice 'rounded' are often sliced into professionally bounded segments of practice which have great difficulty in communicating and acting in a 'joined up way' (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter, & Warming-ton, 2007). Present policy enthusiasm for developing 'joined-up solutions to joined up problems' has generated a plethora of terminology to describe the collaborative approaches required: 'interagency', 'multiagency', 'inter-professional', 'inter-sectoral', and 'partnership' being prevalent (Lloyd, Stead & Hendrick, 2001). Moreover, portmanteau terms such as 'interagency' and 'multiagency' may be used to imply a range of structures, approaches and rationales. Lloyd et al. (2001) offer useful, albeit tentative,

definitions that loosely encompass most of the structures and practices described in current literature. These working definitions include:

- Interagency working: more than one agency working together in a planned and formal way, rather than simply through informal networking (although the latter may support and develop the former). This can be at strategic or operational level.
- Multiagency working: more than one agency working with a client but not necessarily jointly. Multiagency working may be prompted by joint planning or simply be a form of replication, resulting from a lack of proper interagency co-ordination. As with interagency operation, it may be concurrent or sequential. In actuality, the terms 'interagency' and 'multiagency' (in its planned sense) are often used interchangeably.
- Joined-up working, policy or thinking refers to deliberately conceptualised and co-ordinated planning, which takes account of multiple policies and varying agency practices.

In order to try and discuss innovation and improvement of specific forms of such professional activity, Engeström, Brown, Christopher and Gregory (1997) developed from research on legal work a three level notion of the developmental forms of epistemological subject-object-subject relations within a Vygotskian cultural historical framework. They call these three levels co-ordination, co-operation and communication. Within the general structure of coordination actors follow their scripted roles pursuing different goals or objects (see figure 1). The term 'script' used here refers to actions assigned to various actors with specialised roles in particular settings. This remains a pervasive form of functioning across services which are provided in addition to those normally available in mainstream settings. They remain boundaried in their operational functions and often develop little or no awareness, understanding or enthusiasm for the work of their supposed colleagues in different services.

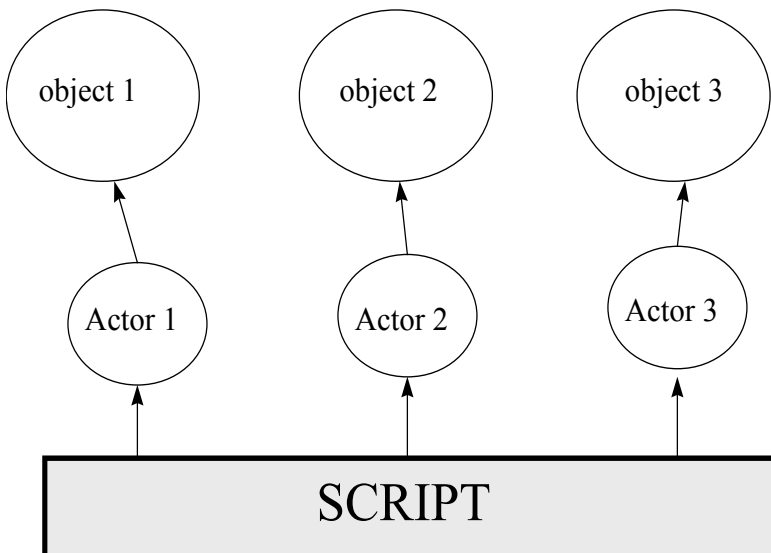


Figure 1. The general structure of coordination.

Within the general structure of co-operation, actors focus on a shared problem. Within the confines of a script the actors attempt to both conceptualise and solve problems in ways which are negotiated and agreed (see figure 2). The script itself is not questioned. That is the tacitly assumed traditions and/or the given official rules of engagement with the problem are not challenged. This is also a common feature of services regulated by strong lines of bureaucratic control. This results in cultures of compliance often at the expense of responsiveness to individual need. This issue is most pertinent in cases where there have been failures to protect young people from physical and/or sexual abuse. Munro (2011) was commissioned by the then Secretary of State for Education to undertake an independent review of child protection in England. In her report, she recommended:

A move from a compliance to a learning culture will require those working in child protection to be given more scope to exercise professional judgment in deciding how best to help children and their families. It will require more determined and robust management at the front line to support the development of professional confidence (p. 5).

Eraut (1994) drew an important distinction between reflection 'in action' and reflection 'on action'. Whilst reflection in action may well occur in co-operative and co-ordinated systems, reflection on action is more difficult to attain. Engeström et al. (1997) discuss reflective communication in which the actors focus on reconceptualising their own organisation and interaction in relation to their shared objects and goals (see figure 3). This is reflection on action. Both the object and the script are reconceptualised, as is the interaction between the participants. This form of practice lies at the conceptual heart of the Munro (2011) review.

The emphasis here is on reciprocal support for mutual understanding. Our argument is that the general structure of communication underpins effective inclusive practice. This general structure of communication may be seen within a practice which has been described as co-configuration (Victor & Boynton, 1998). Daniels et al. (2007) analysis of interagency working drew directly upon developments in Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which focus specifically upon the transitions and reorganisations within work settings that draw together multiple agencies (Engeström, 1999; Puonti, 2004). The form of work that emerges in complex, multi-professional settings has been characterised as co-configuration: a form of work orientated towards the production of intelligent, adaptive services, wherein ongoing customisation of services is achieved through dynamic, reciprocal relationships between providers and clients (Victor & Boynton, 1998). Daniels et al. (2007) argued that effective practices of inclusion were those that witnessed co-configuration. The definition of co-configuration is comparable with emerging forms of social provision in which a range of agencies and otherwise loosely connected professionals are required to collaborate with young people and their families to develop forms of support over extended periods of time.

Importantly, co-configuration is a participatory model, in which 'interagency' relationships include clients as well as professionals. Co-configuration is also characterised by distributed expertise and by shifts away from compact teams or professional networks. In short, professionals working with particular families and young people may not share a common professional background or values, or share a common physical location and may meet quite fleetingly in a variety of configurations. This distributed form of work has encouraged a shift away from team working to what Engeström (1997) describe as knotworking: a rapidly changing, partially improvised collaborations of performance between otherwise loosely connected professionals. Daniels et

al. (2007) found that in UK social provision, many agencies are operating on the cusp between the new co-configuration and longer established work forms. This is apparent in tensions between strategic and operational practice, in ambivalent attitudes towards distributed expertise.

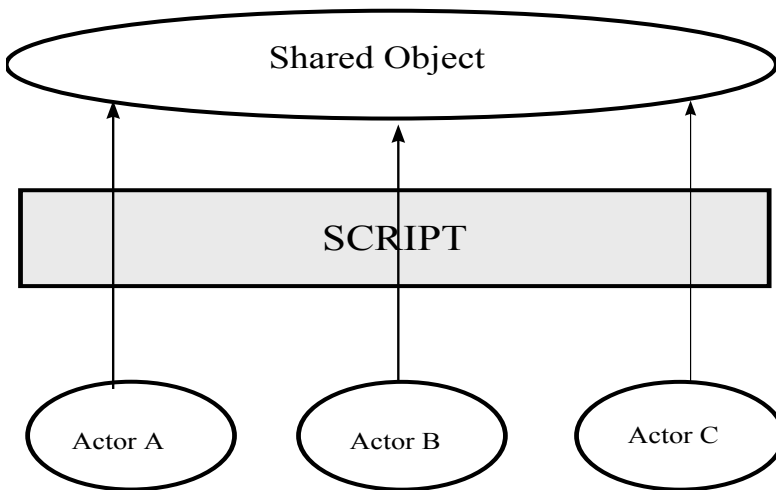


Figure 2. The general structure of co-operation.

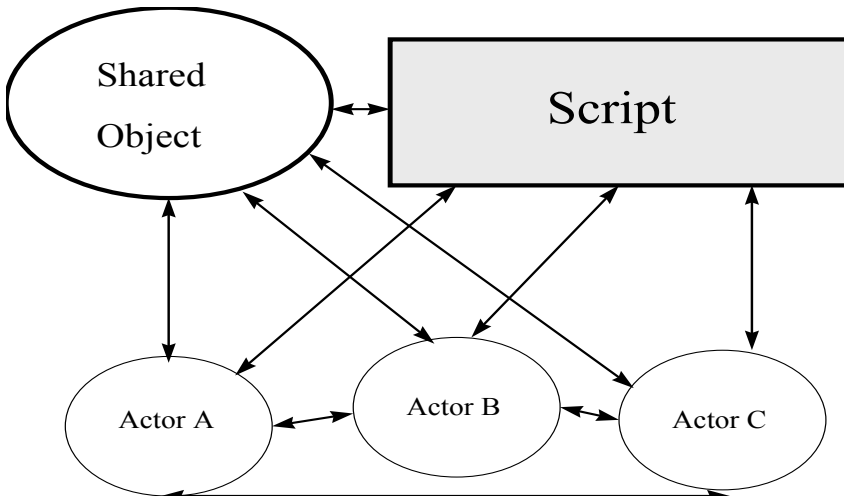


Figure 3. The general structure of communication.

In the current policy context the prevalence of policy and strategic literature that emphasises good practice models is unsurprising but tends to perpetuate the notion of interagency working as a virtuous solution to ‘joined up’ social problems and to under-acknowledge interagency working as a site of tensions and contradictions, rather than an ideal model of service delivery. In addition standard analyses of interagency practice too often equate interagency developments with ‘partnership’ tools and with systemic analyses of collaboration.



Strategic literature and good practice models offer little in the way of conceptual tools to enable understanding of dialogue, multiple perspectives and networks of interacting activity systems. Outside of the CHAT derived literature, organisational routines and forms remain the key research focus and there is little explicit emphasis upon tool creation or upon object-orientated analyses (Edwards et al., 2009). The development of coherent models of interagency working is dependent upon systematic analysis of new forms of professional practice, framed by understanding of the historically changing character of organisational work and user engagement. With regard to emerging practices around interagency working to counter social exclusion, there is a pressing need to identify and conceptualise the key features of learning and practice in work settings in which a range of agencies and otherwise loosely connected professionals are required to collaborate with young people and their families to innovate and develop forms of provision over extended periods of time.

## **The influence of perverse incentives on professional interactions**

We now draw on a study (Daniels et al., 2003) undertaken in the field of emotional and behavioural difficulty for examples of the ways in which perverse incentives may be witnessed in the 'everyday' professional interactions of operational practice (Cole, Daniels & Visser, 2012).

Example one. In an interview, a social worker recounted a story of a 15 year old girl who had been admitted to an adolescent psychiatric unit claiming to have taken an overdose of drugs. This was apparently the fifth time that this had happened. Working with the hospital social worker, the social worker tried unsuccessfully to persuade her old school to readmit her but they did not feel that they could take this risk without support from other agencies. Despite severe difficulties in the family home, the social worker was not able to enlist any help from other branches of the social services department and the consultant psychiatrist was under severe pressure to free the girl's bed for other patients. From the view of the social worker every agency was trying to avoid responsibility for this girl. This is an example of what Engeström et al. (1997) referred to as the general structure of coordination in which actors follow their scripted roles pursuing different goals.

Example two. A long term member of the senior management team in a secondary school claimed to have a detailed knowledge of one particular family. She was aware of her legal duties to report cases of suspected child abuse. She knew that a known abuser was staying in a pupil with learning difficulties' home and that the mother's lover was a person with a record of abuse of other children. When the child used graphic sexual language in the playground suggesting to this experienced teacher that abuse had happened, she contacted social services. She was not able to reach the appropriate officer but was promised a return call. She waited at school until 6 pm but no call was received. She rang again and discovered that her referral had been forgotten. When describing her fears to the duty officer, she was admonished for her 'middle class values' and no action was taken. As in other experiences with social service departments, she felt angry, let down and treated with disrespect. This compounded her distrust of social services. On other occasions she has pressed for intervention and seen her advice ignored, sometimes with proven physical injury of children by their parents ensuing. In one such case, she circumvented social services and sought help,

which she received, from the school's community pediatrician. Whether the detail of this example is completely accurate is unimportant for the argument presented here. What is clear is the strength of feeling of this key person against social services personnel and how difficult it would be to alter her perceptions. Here again is the suggestion of different incentives in play in a complex system which lacks good practices of communication.

There are many examples of distrust, divisions and lack of understanding between different individuals or branches of the same service and between different services. Interview data suggested the existence of a number of generalised negative features some of which are described in the ensuing paragraphs.

Social service interviewees noted that when problems arose, colleagues in other agencies tended to 'pass the problem on' rather than accepting joint responsibility for a problem and then blaming their officers for failing to solve intractable problems. Some schools were blamed by social service managers for resorting too readily to exclusion of some children, particularly those in public care and others for being unconcerned by some children being absent from schools for long periods. Many interviews suggested a lack of empathy for the difficulties confronting other agencies.

For pupils and parents, there is sometimes a lack of continuity with the professionals dealing with their case. Professional turnover is often high. For economic reasons there are restraints placed on recruitment (psychiatrist and social services managers). Professionals and families alike often find that there is a lack of continuity across and within services. There is also a division between child and family services and adult services that is sometimes not understood by general practitioners in medicine. Children with behavioural difficulties and their families receiving specialist mental health interventions are often likely to encounter a succession of practitioners after their first appointment with a consultant. All of these factors make the establishment of relationships between both clients and professionals and between professionals in one agency and those working for other services difficult to forge even in situations where well intentioned attempts are made to refine the procedures and protocols of a general structure of co-operation (Engeström et al., 1997).

A lack of mutual understanding between agencies is often characterised by unrealistic expectations of the services that partner agencies could provide. For example, teacher-interviewees rarely had an appreciation of the difficulties under which social service departments operated or the extent to which social workers' time was occupied by compulsory court work. Several agencies, having experienced resource reductions, had been forced to similarly reduce their provision. This sometimes seems to be forgotten by colleagues in other services. Cumella, Williams and Sang (1996) discussed the notion of underlapping of services. They use this term to refer to the ways that services need to overlap if they are to meet the needs of clients with complex needs (i.e. SEND). However, in times of economic or other forms of stress they revert to a local understanding of 'core business' and do not overlap with their peer services. Thus education reverts to the attainments on which it is judged and mental health services only attend to clients who are self-harming etc. In this service clients are often faced with a situation which is an extreme version of Engeström et al. (1997) notion of co-ordination.

Professionals in different agencies often reveal a high level of distrust in interview. A medical doctor and an educational psychologist may have clear doubts about the efficacy of some psychiatric interventions. Some psychiatrists consider that many teach-

ers pay little attention to the emotional needs of their pupils. Some teachers doubt the abilities of some school nurses, while, as has been indicated already, many educationists were critical of social workers. Some medical professionals in consultant roles do not place trust in some local medical General Practitioner knowledge and competence in issues relating to mental health.

Many professionals complain that there is insufficient opportunity to reach multi-disciplinary solutions to clients' problems. This is allied to three difficulties: the lack of time to attend meetings; lack of effective inter-agency forums and the lack of a common language in services (child psychiatrist, General Practitioner, educational psychologist, social service managers and some teachers). Communication difficulties are further exacerbated by perceived failures to share and to feedback information for reasons of social service or medical confidentiality or perhaps lack of forethought or time. This could be a major irritant for representatives of every profession.

Doctors and social service managers frequently comment that their work is increasingly driven by the fear of litigation. This leads to excessive paperwork that stands in the way of working with clients. Fear of court proceedings could also lead to inappropriate referrals of children to residential care or a referral on to a psychiatrist, the effectiveness of whose intervention might be doubted as a sign that 'something had been done'. All these issues are driven by the deep seated structural perverse incentives which have already discussed. They all inhibit the general structure of communicative practice which underpins effective inclusion.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have argued from a cultural historical perspective that perverse incentives in the education system can work against practices of inclusion and instead promote the exclusion of young people with SEND who become victims of an institutional need to perform in examination league tables. At the same time the potentially different object motives of actors in inter-professional work can hamper their ability to best meet the needs of SEND students. In contrast, practices of inter-professional co-configuration and knotworking can create a general structure of meaningful relations and patterns of communication that join services around young people with SEND. In these practices, operational level workers help to 'tie the knots' and make meaningful relations and patterns of communication that join services around young people. Such work inevitably involves an amount of risk-taking in that these young people present challenges to services that rarely fall neatly into pre-existing categories (Munro, 2011). Following Munro (2011), responsive forms of social pedagogy require the professional freedom to go beyond standard formulations of provision (as in co-operation) in order to make meaningful engagement with those who run the greatest risk of exclusion. These advanced forms of professionalism, as identified in the inter-agency research (Daniels et al., 2007; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998) and the CHAT informed knotworking approach (Engeström et al., 1997), could help to identify and reduce difficulties in settings that are riven by perverse incentives. The structural and interactional features of these perverse incentives, if left unchecked, will serve to erode all the well intentioned work which has taken place over the past 50 years in the UK to develop inclusive practice. Practices which are labelled inclusive may lead to exclusion if the multiplicity and complexity of motivations and incentives are not considered with care and consideration for those most disadvantaged in our societies.

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