Irish Learning Support Association

I.L.S.A.

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Readers are invited to submit papers to be considered for inclusion in the 2011 issue of LEARN. Papers should reach the Editorial Committee, LEARN, ILSA, c/o Drumcondra Education Centre, Drumcondra, Dublin 9, by January 31, 2011. Papers should be relevant to some aspect of Learning Support and should not exceed 3,000 words. For information on electronic submissions please contact the administrator on our website at *www.ilsa.ie*

The Association is concerned with the education and support of children who experience difficulty in learning, whether in special or inclusive settings, and those for whom English is an additional language. Its aims include promoting co-operation between all involved in Learning Support and Resource Teaching and enhancing the quality of the service they offer, through the provision of resources, conferences, lectures and seminars.Besides the journal LEARN, a newsletter is published for members.

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Editorial

> *Given the international agreement that the key factors for a successful transition to the knowledge economy are improved education and appropriate funding for research and development in basic and applied sciences, it is quite clear that education has to be a key part of the solution to the economic difficulties now facing this country.*
>
> Drudy (2009, p.44)

In recent years we have seen a welcome growth in Irish educational research which has the potential to provide relevant, contextualised feedback and to inform the development of our practice and policy. Educational research, as with all research, is fundamentally concerned with making a contribution to knowledge (Rose & Grosvenor, 2001) but unfortunately that is not always so and it is perhaps timely to reflect and consider why.

In some cases the educational implications of research are not properly or fully interpreted. In others, it remains inaccessible or is only disseminated to other researchers rather than to classroom practitioners. Sometimes the topics selected arise from expediency or ease rather than from any genuine quest for knowledge and therefore have little to share on completion. Often, where research has findings to offer policy makers, they, perhaps driven by other imperatives, do not have it readily available to them, do not have established access channels or do not consider it within their particular planning processes. Woodhead (1998) maintains that 'there is too much to do in the real world with real teachers in real schools to worry about methodological quarrels or to waste time decoding unintelligible prose to reach (if one was lucky) a conclusion often so transparently partisan as to be worthless'. Relevance, context, application, accessibility, abstraction and partisanship are serious concerns to be addressed by researchers if their work is to be of any real value. The researcher must continuously ask questions about their own assumptions and underlying beliefs. The interactions and structures which allow abuses of power and inequalities within education need to be understood, discussed and challenged. Continuous, critical reflection and self awareness are vital to ensure that biases or assumptions do not influence outcomes and deductions, either inadvertently or through the choice of particular methodology. In the positivist, largely quantitative, approach to research, validity is established where results can be replicated by another researcher should the project be repeated (Hughes, 2001). The validity is not therefore influenced by the researcher's involvement. The interpretivist, largely qualitative, tradition believes that the social world is created by our shared cultural understanding of situations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Interpretive researchers are interested in the richness, complexity and diversity of human interactions. They tend not to generalise from their research and to use smaller sample sizes than positivist researchers. 'For the interpretivists, knowledge is valid if it is the authentic and true voice of the participants' (Hughes, 2001, p. 36). Identifying the voice and its truth are serious and challenging responsibilities.

Hargreaves (1996) perceived the fatal flaw of educational research as 'the gap between researchers and practitioners'. The pragmatics of classroom practice and an appropriate flexibility of response to pupil need are often perceived as

incompatible with the demands of rigorous research. In many instances, research is seen as being too far removed from the realities of school life and teachers' immediate priorities tend to win out over longer-term research goals. McGettrick (2009, p. 266) presents the value of teachers themselves as researchers, declaring that 'it is necessary to support teachers in establishing a research tradition which will help them research their own practice and improve it and thereby lead to a significant improvement in education'. Ainscow (1998) would hold that the development of research that directly involves teachers working alongside experienced researchers is a productive path to understanding how best educational contexts can be further enhanced to support the needs of all pupils.

All research requires ethical consideration but where it involves children and those with special needs, the responsibility of the researcher is particularly onerous. There is a complex relationship in such research between the participation of vulnerable individuals on the one hand and their protection from risk on the other hand (Coady, 2001, p.68). In a respectful research relationship the child or young person is viewed as someone who has a valid and worthwhile perspective to offer on events that affect their life where the researcher does not limit and constrain the child's potential and possibility because of age or perceived ability. 'The biggest ethical challenge for researchers working with children is the disparity in power and status between adults and children' (Morrow & Richards, 1996, p. 98)

The importance of context is high-lighted by McConkey (1997) who points out that despite their wide usage, IQ tests are not infallible, universal instruments and warns us about the perception of 'the norm', which can vary from class to class, school to school, region to region and country to country. Leadbetter and Leadbetter (1993), Singleton (1997) and famously Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) *Pygmalion in the Classroom,* identify the threat of self-fulfilling prophesy, demonstrating the powerful effect of teacher expectation on student performance and intellectual growth in both positive and negative directions. Through the use of child-centred and purposive contexts, Donaldson's (1987) work with young children pushed out the boundaries of our understanding of Piagetian cognitive development theory, bringing about a shift in perspective on what had previously been undisputed. Bruner's description of education as 'a sharing of culture' emphasises the need to ensure that all participants in educational research share or have access to that culture or, alternatively and crucially, that the researcher will access or share in the culture of the participant. More than ever before, cultural diversity in terms of socio-economic, ethnic, gender, ability or disability difference is a key factor in observing, examining, understanding and commenting on what happens in our schools. The more complex it becomes, the more alert we have to be in reviewing the research.

Bearing all this in mind, I commend ***Learn 2010*** to everyone interested in education, particulary inclusive and special education, and while the views expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect those of ILSA, we celebrate their contribution and the debate they may stimulate.

Máirín Barry
Editor of *Learn*
June 2010

Partnership – What teachers think: An Investigation into Teachers' Attitudes towards Parental Involvement

Brian Mac Giolla Phádraig

Abstract
Since at least the 1960s educational research identifies parents as a key influence on children's education, (Douglas 1964, Rutter 1979; Tizard & Hughes 1984; Edwards and Redfern 1988; Bridgehouse &Tomlinson 1991). The thrust of the evidence presented is that, by virtue of their central role in children's lives, parents are in a position to act as a potent influence on children's attitudes towards school and on their achievements within school. This evidence has been used by policy-makers within education, both nationally and internationally, to advocate that schools enter into a partnership relationship with parents and thus afford them a meaningful role both in their child's education and in the life of the school.

Within the Irish context partnership with parents has been advanced at two levels. At one level a high degree of parent involvement in the education process, both in their own homes and in schools is seen as an essential component of schemes to combat social exclusion, (Kellaghan et al 1995). Thus partnership with parents is an integral part of programmes such as the Rutland Street Programme, Breaking the Cycle, Giving Children an Even Break, the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the DEIS initiative (Archer & Shortt 2003, Archer & Weir 2004).

At another level partnership with parents is promoted as an 'essential strategy of educational policy and practice' for all schools (Department of Education and Science 1991), and thereby the Education Act pledges that the education system will be conducted 'in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff and the state,' (Government of Ireland 1998). Partnership is promoted as a 'key issue' (Primary School Curriculum, 1999). Furthermore, the requirement of schools to focus on their relationship with parents has become a legal necessity in that schools are now required to publish and regularly up-date a school plan, one section of which

must be devoted to the home-school area. Furthermore parents must be involved in the process of school planning, and all parents must receive a copy of the school plan, (Government of Ireland 1998, Section 2 1iii). However while the term partnership is consistently promoted within education, its meaning is rarely, if ever clearly defined and has evolved over time.

Evolving Understanding of Partnership with Parents

Initial understandings of partnership with parents were built on the basic assumption that children's academic achievement is fostered by continuity of expectations and values between home and school. This approach acknowledged the continuous interchange between home and school and recognised the necessity for the teacher to establish and maintain an ongoing relationship with parents. However in describing the relationship between parent and teacher Cunningham and Davis (1995) referred to the process of 'transplanting' whereby teachers viewed themselves as having expertise and part of their expertise is usefully uprooted and "transplanted" into the care of the parent. Overtly or covertly the teacher selected objectives, teaching and assessment methods and corrective strategies. Parents were viewed as relevant to the process of education and they were perceived as willing to help their children, appropriately placed to do so, but in need of the skills that would enable the child to progress educationally. In describing the role of parents in this model of partnership Vincent (1996) referred to 'supporter learners' as their main function was to support the teacher by assimilating their values and behaviour. The parents' role included encouraging their children to succeed in school and transmitting values, attitudes and skills that characterise those who succeed. Manifestations of this understanding of partnership in the Irish context can be seen in curriculum involvement programmes that aim to promote specific targeted involvement of parents along pre-determined lines. Curriculum innovations that came to prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Stay Safe, Alive O, R.S.E) all contained specific home school links which provided explicit instructions to parents as to how best interact with their children. The essence of these approaches to partnership was a desire to make the home function like the school, where parents were encouraged to structure their interactions with their children in ways that teachers considered "good practice." (Vincent, 1996). This understanding of partnership was essentially product-based, focusing on enabling parents to work with their children in specific ways so as to improve children's attainments across a range of curricular areas. However attention began to focus on the process of partnership itself with educationalists arguing that the *process* of involving people in a partnership with one another was of value itself irrespective, to an extent, of the outcome. Chapman (in Poster & Day, 1988 p. 50) emphasised this aspect when he claimed that "partnership is about means not ends, a vehicle for a journey not a destination." Harland (1988) also stressed the process aspect to partnership when he noted that the significance of introducing partnership programmes lies not just in their outcome but in the very act of introducing them.

This focus on process led Pugh and De'Ath (1988) to identify key elements to the process of partnership and in their work they referred to a 'working relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate.' The essence of these points is that partnership should involve parents and teachers working together towards the same ultimate goal, enjoying a high element of 'personal relatedness' and sharing knowledge and decision-making with each other. Of these three elements McConkey (1985) emphasised the area of joint decision-making which he deemed as central to the process of partnership. Potts (1982) agreed and argued that unless partnership embodied a process of joint decision-making it became a matter of 'window dressing on the part of the professional.' This understanding of partnership effectively underpinned the approach adopted by the Department of Education and Science in the Home School Community Liaison scheme, which was based on the theme of partnership with parents and described as 'a preventative strategy… which is concerned with establishing partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning.' (Department of Education and Science, 1997) It is also very much emphasised in the Department's programme for Educational Inclusion, DEIS (Department of Education and Science 2005)

However some commentators have criticised the effectiveness of partnership programmes based exclusively on the three principles of a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to negotiate. (Wragg, 1989; Easen, Kendall & Shaw, 1992; David 1993; Merthens & Vass, 1993). Their criticisms focused on the fact that this approach does not take into account the very real inequalities in power that exist between teachers and parents. The imbalance in power structures is often accentuated for specific cohorts of parents who experience a significant dislocation between the cultural framework of their own lives and that of the school, (Vincent, 1996). This has led to a redefining of partnership in terms of power and power structures. Work in this area draws heavily on the writings of Freire (1972) who emphasised the need for participants in an educative process to engage in authentic dialogue with each other with the ultimate aim of empowering people and transforming their reality. Based on this philosophy Block (1987) conceptualized partnership as being connected to one another 'in a way that the power …. is roughly balanced' and Conaty (2002) sees partnership as a process whose 'salient characteristics are vision, goal orientation, solidarity, communication, empowerment and transformation.' Thus while initially partnership with parents effectively meant 'parents helping teachers to achieve goals specified by teachers in ways specified by teachers' (Sharp & Green 1975), its current understanding is closer to a process which 'can initiate change and growth leading to an empowerment of groups and communities…which in turn can facilitate transformation, which is the central tenet of partnership.' (Conaty, 2002)

Teachers' Attitudes towards Partnership

As well as a lack of clarity concerning the meaning of partnership traditionally little consideration has been given to teachers' attitudes towards partnership and the impact that these attitudes can have on the success of partnership initiatives. Initial work in the area of teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement argued that teachers may have a somewhat idealised notion of parents and family life. Douglas (1964) speaks of the notion of the "good family." His research shows that many teachers equate the good family with a family which fosters attitudes and values similar to the teacher's, and which consequently results in the child being brought up in much the same way as the teacher would / does bring up his / her own children. The concept of the "good family" is also very class based. It is linked to a concept that the reason why middle class children are the main achievers in school is because their parents give greater encouragement and show more interest in their education than parents from working class homes. Similar to the good family Sharp and Green (1975) constructed the model of "good parent" after interviewing teachers and parents. A fundamental part of this concept is to have an overtly positive attitude towards the school, to encourage the same in the child and to avoid interfering by questioning the school critically, or expressing opinions on educational or pedagogical matters.

However even when parents do conform to these idealised notions, there is evidence to suggest that teachers do not welcome their involvement in primary education. Fine (1990) provides practical examples of such unfavourable attitudes from teachers when he reported that in some teachers' views parents are incompetent and intrusive. Sharpe (1991) investigated pre-school teachers and parents in Singapore and found that while teachers and parents viewed involvement as desirable, teachers did not appear to want parents in the school other than as providers of resources and materials. While Boylan's (1995 p. 109) research findings concur with the claims that teachers welcome parents as providers of scarce resources and materials, she concluded that in general teachers' perception of parents is that they are sources of problems. She maintained that teachers felt that parents should only be entertained by the school on the teachers' arrangements and agenda. The thrust of this evidence suggests that the culture, values, attitudes and norms of teachers does not lead to their having a strong practical conviction about the importance of partnership with parents. However teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement can be crucially important in determining the success or otherwise of partnership initiatives as 'the teacher is the medium through which the change must pass, otherwise the change may be resisted or shaped in an unintended way,' (Conaty, 2002).

In light of the importance of teachers' attitudes for the success of partnership initiatives the remainder of this paper describes the results of a survey of teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement, conducted as part of a larger

study of parental involvement in primary education, (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2002).

Method

Instrument Design

The research instrument utilised was a questionnaire, divided into three sections, A, B, and C. Section A dealt with demographics, B dealt with teachers' values and C with their perceptions. Four specific areas are reported on here; parental rights and responsibilities, information provision, parental access and parental involvement. The section on parental rights asked teachers to ascribe importance to five rights and six responsibilities of parents in education. The rights mentioned were the right to be an active participant in their child's education, to be fully informed about their child's education, to be fully informed about school procedures and policies, to send their child to the primary school of their choice and to have the final say in all decisions affecting their child's education. The responsibilities mentioned were the responsibility to attend parent-teacher meetings, to read written information sent from school, to inform the school about issues that affect their child's school work, to ensure their child's homework is completed and to ensure that their child has the correct materials for each school day. In both cases respondents recorded their responses on a five-point scale ranging from 5 – great importance to 1 – no importance. The follow up section in section C concentrated on parental responsibilities and asked respondents to rate the extent to which parents in their own school fulfilled each of the six responsibilities. Responses were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 5 – extremely well to 1 – very poorly.

In the section on information provision to parents respondents were asked to detail the importance they attached to schools providing information to parents on issues relating to their child, the school and the Board of Management. Issues relating to their child included their child's behaviour, educational development, social development and test results. School related issues were information received prior to enrolment and information received on the school curriculum, school procedures and policies, routine activities and affairs of the Board of Management. Respondents indicated the degree of importance they attached to information being provided on the topic by circling a number. 1 was the lowest number and indicated that respondents attached no importance to information on the item. 5 was the highest number and indicated that respondents attached great importance to information being provided on the topic. The follow up question in section C asked respondents to indicate their perception of the information that parents received on each of the items listed. Respondents were given four options to describe the information provided to parents: none, some but not sufficient, sufficient and more than sufficient.

In the section on values towards parental access respondents were asked to indicate the freedom of access that they felt parents should enjoy to the class

teacher, school principal, their child's school work and their child's school record. They were provided with five options, at any time, by appointment except in emergencies, by appointment only, at formal meetings only and never.

In terms of perceptions respondents were asked how frequently they felt that parents in their school can speak to the class teacher and principal regarding their child's behaviour, educational development and social development. They were also asked to indicate how frequently they felt parents can see their child's school work and record and how often they can speak about school policies to the class teacher, the school principal, members of the Board of Management and members of the Parents' Association. In answering these questions respondents were provided with three options, 'as often as necessary' 'at formal meetings only / sometimes' and 'never'. Respondents were also asked to describe the work of the Parents' Association, Fund-raising Committee and Board of Management of their school as 'partnership with staff and management' 'directed by principal'. 'Directed by Chairperson of Board', 'Independent of principal / chairman' or non-existent.

The section on parental involvement looked at involvement in specific activities and involvement in policy formation. In the former section respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which parents should be involved as classroom assistants, playground supervisors, helping with sports / swimming, helping with school tours and helping with school secretarial work. The options provided were 'not involved', 'involved under the direction of teachers' and 'involved as partners with teachers'. In terms of school policy formation five areas were covered; general school policies, information brochures, codes of discipline, formal curriculum and special programmes (stay safe, RSE etc.). Respondents were asked to identify what level of involvement they felt should be open to parents in primary schools and were provided with five options as follows: not involved, kept informed by the school, consulted by the school, involved under the direction of teachers and involved as partners with teachers. In section C in dealing with involvements in the actual activities respondents were asked whether or not parents in their school could become involved in each of the activities listed and secondly whether or not they actually did become involved in their particular class. They were to identify the nature of parental involvement that occurs in policy formation in their school and were provided with five options as follows 'I don't know if the school has one,' 'the school has one I have never seen it,' 'parents receive a final copy,' 'parents receive a copy and are invited to comment' and 'parents are involved in writing it.'

Sample Selection

The sample selection was based on a sample frame as follows:

Table 1: Sample Frame

	SMALL SCHOOLS	MEDIUM SCHOOLS	LARGE SCHOOLS
Disadvantage Status			
Non Disadvantage Status			
Gaelscoileanna			

The categories in the sample frame (table 1) are defined as follows. Small schools are schools with between one and three mainstream class teachers, medium schools as schools with between four and six mainstream class teachers and large schools as schools with seven or more mainstream class teachers. Schools with disadvantage status are all schools officially recognised as disadvantage status schools by the Department of Education and Science and Gaelscoileanna are defined as all schools officially recognised as gaelscoileana by the Department of Education and Science.

In selecting the sample a process of stratified sampling was used. Stratified sampling involves dividing the population into homogenous groups, with each group containing subjects with similar characteristics. (Cohen and Mannion 1980 p. 99) In this case the total population is the total number of primary schools on the Department of Education and Science database for 1999 / 2000. (N = 3172) The groups into which the total population is divided are the nine cells in the sample frame, small disadvantaged, small non-disadvantaged, small gaelscoileanna etc.

Schools in the master data file were sorted according to the nine cells. Schools were then selected using a random, fixed interval selection procedure. The schools chosen in each cell in the sample were selected in order that the percentage of schools from that cell in the sample would be in some way proportionate to the percentage of schools from that cell in the total population.

However some modification needed to be made to the numbers selected in certain cells, gaelscoileanna and small disadvantage schools in particular, in order that a sufficient number of returns would be received to facilitate analysis. The effect of increasing the number of schools in certain cells in the sample can be counterbalanced by a process of weighting the returns received. Weighting the returns is carried out to ensure that the results received reflect the population from which the sample was drawn and is facilitated by a process of stratified sampling.

The final sample structure is as follows:

Table 2: Final Sample

	TOTAL SCHOOLS	TEACHERS SAMPLE
Small:		
• Disadvantage	72	21
• Non Disadvantage	1816	81
• Gaelscoileanna	33	15
Medium:		
• Disadvantage	67	12
• Non Disadvantage	373	21
• Gaelscoileanna	14	12
Large:		
• Disadvantage	171	15
• Non Disadvantage	563	27
• Gaelscoileanna	63	21
Totals	**3172**	**225**

Questionnaires were sent to senior infant teachers, fifth class teachers and principals respectively in one-third of the schools in each cell.

Distribution and collection of questionnaires
The questionnaires were posted directly to the teachers at their school address. Initial contact was made with the school principal by phone and the nature of the research was explained, general agreement to participate in the research was sought and when this was forthcoming the names of the relevant teachers were obtained. The questionnaires were then mailed directly to each teacher, and they were requested to return the completed questionnaire directly to the researcher. A stamped return envelope was provided for this purpose. A two-week time period was allowed initially for the completion of the questionnaires. Following this two further letters were posted to each teacher, at two week intervals. These letters were designed both as expressions of appreciation for the receipt of completed questionnaires and encouragement to those who had not yet returned their questionnaires to do so.

Returns
The responses received, as shown in table 3, were sufficient for meaningful analysis

Table 3: Percentage responses to mailing and reminders

RESPONSES	**SAMPLE N = 138**
• Initial Mailing	40.0%
• First Reminder	12.9%
• Second Reminder	8.4%
• **Total**	**61.3%**

The sample was designed to provide sufficient parents and teachers in mainstream primary schools, gaelscoileanna, small, medium and large schools and disadvantage and non-disadvantage status primary schools in order to make meaningful comparisons between the different categories. Table 4 shows that the returns received from teachers were representative of the national profile in terms of mainstream / gaelscoileanna or disadvantage / non-disadvantage status. Teachers from small schools were under-represented in the returns however and teachers in medium size schools were over-represented. Nevertheless the numbers in each category (small = 45, medium = 48, large = 45) were sufficient to make valid statistical inferences.

Table 4: Description of sample and returns for the questionnaire, showing percentage breakdown by school type, size and disadvantage status

CHARACTERISTIC	SAMPLE N = 225	RETURNS N = 138
Type:		
• Mainstream	78.7%	80.4%
• Gaelscoil	21.3%	19.6%
Size:		
• Small	52%	32.6%
• Medium	20%	34.8%
• Large	28%	32.6%
Disadvantage Status:		
• Yes	21.3%	26.8%
• No	78.7%	73.2%

For the purpose of analysis some categories on the original questionnaire were combined. The resulting demographic characteristics of the teaching population are shown in Table 5. The size of the cohorts were sufficient for statistical inferences.

Table 5: Demographics of the 138 teachers who responded.

CHARACTERISTIC	%	CHARACTERISTIC	%
Age:		**Experience Teaching:**	
21 – 30	13.0	1 – 10	15.2
31 – 40	22.5	11 – 20	23.9
41 – 50	38.4	21 – 30	37.7
51+	26.1	30+	23.2
Gender:		**Status:**	
Male	35.5	Principal Teacher	63.8
Female	64.5	Teachers who are parents	68.1
School Hinterland:		**Classes currently teaching:**	
Rural	52.2	Lower Primary	30.4
Small Town	13.8	Upper Primary	48.6
Large Town	12.3	Non-teaching principals	15.9
City	21.7		

The high proportion of males that responded reflects the high number of principals in the sample. Overall 52% of all principals are male, although only 20% of national teachers are male.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Parental Rights in Education

In any area, classifying an issue as a right ascribes a particular importance to the issue which enables it to over-ride pre-existing priorities and to decrease the weight of any dissenting views. Thus establishing that parents have *a right* to information about their child's school is a more powerful statement with much greater implications for action, than an assertion that parents *should be* given information about their child's school. Rights and responsibilities are also associated with the process of partnership in that Arnstein (1969) argues that informing people of their rights and responsibilities can be an important first step on the road to partnership. Table 6 shows the mean scores of respondents to items relating to parental rights in education.

Table 6 Mean score of teachers for items relating to parental rights in education

PARENTS HAVE A RIGHT TO:	MEAN SCORE N = 138
• Be fully informed about their child's education	4.8
• Be fully informed about school procedures and policies	4.8
• Be active participants in their child's school	4.4
• Send their child to the primary school of their choice	4.4
• Have the final say in all decisions affecting their child's education	3.5

(Based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, great importance, to 1, no importance. Data is weighted.)

The responses to the first four rights, the right to information about the child's education and school, the right to participation in the school and the right to choice of school indicates that teachers attach high importance to all of these rights.

Teachers were not as definite however about the importance of parents' right to have the final say in all decisions affecting their child's education. At one level this response could raise questions as to the extent to which teachers subscribe to the idea of parents as 'the primary and natural educator of the child' who enjoy 'inalienable and imprescriptible rights' in regard to their children's education (Government of Ireland 1937). However, at another level teachers' responses here could be taken as an assertion that they, as professionals, should have some input into decisions affecting children's education. This position is quite compatible with a partnership approach to parent-teacher relationships as Potts (1982) and McConkey (1985) have both argued that unless the decision-making process is shared between both parties then the relationship cannot be classed as a partnership.

Teachers' Values and Perceptions Regarding Parental Responsibilities in Education

Table 7: The mean scores of teachers for items relating to their perceptions of the extent to which parents fulfil their responsibilities.

DUTIES:	**PERCEPTIONS N = 138**
Very Well:	
Attend parent-teacher meetings	4.4
Support school rules	4.2
Read written information sent from school	4.0
Moderately Well:	
Inform the school about issues that affect their child's work	3.6
Check their child's homework	3.6
Ensure their child has the correct materials for each day.	3.2

(Based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, extremely well, to 1, very poorly. Data is weighted.)

Teachers' returns suggest a distinction between three responsibilities which they perceived parents fulfil quite well and three responsibilities which they perceived parents fulfil only moderately well. Those responsibilities that teachers perceived parents as fulfilling quite well are: attending parent-teacher meetings, supporting school rules and reading written information sent from school. The responsibilities that teachers perceived parents as fulfilling only moderately well are the responsibilities to inform the school about issues that affect their child's

work, to check their child's homework and to ensure that children have the correct materials for each school day.

This distinction represents a general differentiation between passive non-process based responsibilities and active process-based responsibilities. The responsibilities to attend parent-teacher meetings, support school rules and read written information sent from school do not in themselves have any implications for direct parental action. Parents are merely required to attend meetings, read information or support rules.

However in fulfilling the responsibility to inform the school about issues that effect their child's education parents both have to make judgements about what issue is of relevance to their child's education and then take steps to inform the appropriate school personnel. In checking their child's homework parents have, at the very least, to involve themselves in some way with their child's learning. In ensuring their child has the correct materials for each day parents have to both be aware of the requirements of each school day and take steps to ensure that children have the necessary equipment for that day. Thus there may be a general indication in teachers' responses that parents fulfil their more passive non-process based responsibilities in a better way than they fulfil their active process-based responsibilities.

However it may also be the case that there are quite specific reasons why parents are not fulfilling the three active responsibilities to the same degree as the passive responsibilities. In regard to the responsibility to inform the school about issues that affect their child's work it may be the case that parents are unsure as to what information may be of educational relevance, who within the school they should inform and what mechanism they should utilise in order to pass on the information. In regard to homework it may be the case that it is not always clear to parents what actual homework the child has, particularly in instances when the child is responsible both for writing down their homework and taking home all the necessary materials for homework. In relation to materials for each school day parents may not always be aware of daily school-based activities and thus may be unaware of what actual materials are required.

All of these reasons highlight the centrality of clear channels of communication to relationships between parents and their children's schools. They also question the advisability of relying exclusively on children to deliver information between home and school. Thus while it may be the case that teachers differentiated between the extent to which parents fulfil their more active responsibilities there are practical reasons that prohibit parents from fulfilling these responsibilities adequately. Furthermore it may also be the case that schools and teachers may be best placed to remedy some of these practical difficulties.

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Information Provision to Parents

The area of information provision by schools to parents has long been emphasised in official government policy. The seminal Report of the Primary Education Review Body (Department of Education 1990) calls for a free flow of information between schools and parents, while Circular 24 / 91 of the Department of Education (Department of Education 1991) identifies the provision of information to parents as one of three areas in the field of parental involvement where they required schools to take immediate action. Specifically this circular instructs schools to give parents as much information as possible on all aspects of their child's progress and development. Information provision is also centrally linked to partnership. Munn (1993) and Purcell (1995) both argue that the sharing of information is central to a partnership approach to parental involvement. Arnstein (1969) maintains however that when the emphasis in information provision is placed on a one-way flow of information then the relationship cannot be classed as a partnership relationship. Table 8 shows teachers' responses to both value and perception based items relating to information provision.

Table 8: Mean score of teachers for items relating to information provision to parents

INFORMATION	MEAN SCORES FOR IMPORTANCE N = 138	MEAN SCORES FOR SATISFACTION N = 138
Child Based:		
• Behaviour	4.8	3.0
• Educational development	4.9	3.1
• Social development	4.8	2.9
• Test results	4.3	3.1
School Based:		
• Curriculum.	4.2	2.6
• Procedures and policies	4.8	2.9
• Routine Activities	4.6	3.3
• Enrolment Brochure	4.5	2.9
• Affairs of the Board of Management	3.1	2.4

(Values based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, very important, to 1, not important. Perceptions based on a four-point scale ranging from 4, more than sufficient, to 1, none. Data is weighted.)

Teachers placed a very high importance on information provision to parents regarding children's behaviour, educational development and social development and on school procedures and policies, routine activities and pre-enrolment information.

However while teachers felt that it was important that schools provided information to parents on children's test results and the school's curriculum, their scores were appreciably lower than their scores for all other topics, excluding affairs of the Board of Management. The indication here is that while teachers feel that it is important to provide parents with information on test results and the curriculum, they do not attach the same priority to them as they do to other child and school related issues. A further, and more marked distinction was made by teachers in relation to the importance of information on affairs of the Board of Management. For this topic there was a noticeable difference between their response to this item and their response to all other items. Their mean score indicated that it was only of moderate importance to teachers that schools provide information to parents on management affairs. Thus in fostering relationships with parents, teachers attached a high degree of importance to most child and school related issues. However while they valued information provision to parents on test results and school curriculum there was a feeling that it was not as important to provide this information to parents as it was to provide other child and school based information. It was also the case that teachers were not that affirmative about the importance of providing information to parents on Board of Management issues.

In terms of teachers' perceptions of the information that parents currently receive from schools, table 8 indicates that teachers felt that parents receive sufficient information on all topics excluding affairs of the Board of Management where they recorded an appreciably lower mean score. However within the school-based category teachers, and to a lesser degree parents, recorded a slightly higher mean score for their perception of the information provided to parents on routine school activities than they did for the other areas. This finding supports the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) contention that schools have traditionally placed a great emphasis on providing information to parents on routine activities (INTO, 1997). It also shows that, in teachers' perception, the strongest focus for information provision to parents is on an organisational issue and not on an issue directly related to children's education.

Teachers also perceived that parents receive sufficient information on their child's test results[1]. This was in some contrast with the relatively low importance that teachers attached to information provision on test results. However the comparatively high perception for this item may be related to the more widespread availability of standardized tests for primary schools (Sigma T, Micra T, Drumcondra Reading Tests, Drumcondra Mathematics Tests, Drumcondra Reading Profiles, B.I.A.P. etc.) and the more recent requirement of the Department of Education and Science that standardised test results be used to

1 This study was carried prior to the issuing of circular 0138/2006 which requires schools to ensure that standardised testing is implemented in all schools on an annual basis for specific classes and that the results are reported to parents. (Department of Education and Science 2006).

support any application being made for additional learning support resources, psychological assessments or interventions. These factors combined contribute to a climate where tests are being administered and information regarding their results communicated to their parents more frequently.

Parental Access

Affording parents full access to school personnel and children's work and records within the education system is a policy objective both of the National Parents' Council (NPIC, 2000) and the European Parents' Association (EPA 1991). It is also closely linked to models of parent-teacher relationship. Vincent (1996) sees a clear connection between facilitation of access, particularly access by groups of people who have been traditionally excluded from the decision-making process, and a partnership model of parent-teacher relationship. She argues that the broadening of access is an essential element in the promotion of partnership between two groups within a system. Equally she argues that partnership cannot exist in situations where one or other groups seek to restrict access.

Table 9 shows teachers' values in relation to parental access

Table 9: Mean score of teachers for items relating to parental access (Values)

ACCESS TO:	MEAN SCORE N = 138
People:	
The class teacher	4.1
The school principal	4.0
Written material:	
School work	3.4
School record	2.9

(Based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, at any time, to 1, never. Data is weighted.)

Teachers made a clear distinction between the freedom of access they felt that parents should enjoy to people and the freedom of access they felt parents should enjoy to written materials. For the class teacher and school principals teachers felt that parents should enjoy access by appointment except in emergencies whereas they felt that access to written materials should by appointment only. In relation to access to people, teachers made no effective distinction between access to the class teacher and access to the principal, however there was a noticeable difference between the scores for access to schoolwork and access to school records. This suggests a desire among teachers to exercise a greater control over parental access to school records than to

schoolwork. However the implication can also be made from this data that teachers view children's schoolwork as more relevant to parents than school records.

Teachers' values in relation to access to written material in general and school records in particular, may be interpreted as a lack of willingness to facilitate such access outside of pre-scheduled appointments or as a reflection of practical, administrative difficulties in facilitating such access or as a combination of both. Equally teachers may view children's school records as more sensitive than schoolwork.

Teachers' Perceptions

Table 11: Mean score of teachers for items relating to parental access (Perceptions)

PERCEPTION OF ACCESS TO:	TEACHERS N = 138
The class teacher about their child's:	
• Behaviour	3.0
• Educational development	2.9
• Social development	2.9
The school principal about their child's:	
• Behaviour	2.9
• Educational development	2.8
• Social development	2.9
See their child's	
• School work	2.6
• School record	2.4
Speak about school policies to	
• The class teacher	2.5
• The school principal	2.7
• Members of the Board of Management	2.3
• Members of the Parents' Association	2.3

(Based on a three-point scale ranging from 3, as often as necessary, to 1, never. Data is weighted.)

Teachers perceived that parents enjoy access as often as necessary to the class teacher and to the school principal to discuss all child-related issues and to see their child's school work. Teachers also felt that access to see children's school record was subject to a greater level of control than access to discuss child-related issues or to see the child's schoolwork. This could be a manifestation of teachers' values in relation to access to school records (table 10) and an

indicator that access to records may be somewhat sensitive for teachers and school authorities. Teachers perceived that parents enjoy occasional access to the Board of Management and to the Parents' Association to discuss school policy matters. The formal nature of these two bodies and their relative infrequent meetings may explain teachers' perception of occasional parental access. However the data may also raise questions as to the effectiveness of the mechanisms that schools employ to foster relations between the Boards of Management and parents and between Parents Associations and parents.

Parental Involvement in Policy Formation

The promotion of parental involvement in the education of their children has been a central part of educational policy in Ireland. From as far back as 1991 schools were required to establish as part of the school's overall plan a clearly defined policy for parental involvement (Department of Education, 1991). More recently, the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) requires schools to adopt a programme of activities which will promote the involvement of parents in the operation of the school. The question of parental involvement is also closely linked to models of parent-teacher relationship. In an analysis of the policies and programmes that schools adopt in order to promote parental involvement Mills (1996) notes a clear division between programmes that involve professionals controlling and organising parents on the one hand and those that involve parents in decision-making and organising on the other. This demarcation reflects the evolving understanding of the concept of partnership from a relationship dominated by professional control to a relationship where the power structures are more finely balanced.

Teachers' responses

Table 12: Mean score of teachers for items dealing with values and perceptions in relation to parental involvement in policy areas

	VALUES N = 138	**PERCEPTIONS N = 321**
General School Policies:		
Code of discipline	3.2	3.5
Special programmes	3.1	3.1
School policies	3.0	3.1
Information brochures	2.8	2.6
Academic Affairs:		
Formal curriculum	1.8	2.6

(Values based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, involved as partners with teachers, to 1, not involved Perceptions based on a five-point scale ranging from 5, involved in writing it, to 1, I don't know if the school has one. Data is weighted.)

Teachers expressed a desire for consultation between parents and schools in regard to issues of general school policy: codes of discipline, special programmes, school policies and information brochures. In regard to these four areas teachers were slightly more affirmative of parental involvement in codes of discipline and special programmes, which could suggest a greater openness to parental involvement in these areas. Teachers made a noticeable distinction between their desired involvement in issues of general school policy and in the formal curriculum of the school, and their mean score suggests that informing parents of the formal curriculum of the school is their preferred level of parental involvement. However in the cases of both issues of general school policy and academic affairs of the school there was no evidence to suggest that either parents or teachers are anxious to foster active parental involvement in policy formation. In this regard the values of both populations are somewhat at odds with official policy requirements.

In regard to school discipline circular M33 / 91 of the Department of Education and Science (Department of Education IRL 1991 b) states that it is important that parents "be involved in the process of drawing up a code of behaviour and discipline." Parental involvement in special programmes such as RSE is clearly envisaged by the Department of Education and Science. In the interim curriculum and guidelines for primary schools on Relationship and Sexuality Education (Department of Education 1996 p. 8) the "collaborative involvement of parents, teachers and the board of management" is seen as central to the design and delivery of the policy. In the revised primary school curriculum schools "are encouraged to involve parents, the board of management and the wider school community in the planning process." (Government of Ireland 1999, p. 64) Thus in all of these cases the tenor of official policy is that parents be actively involved in the formation of aspects of school policy and curriculum with teachers and others in the school community. However the data suggested that teachers' preference is for a process of consultation with parents on these areas as opposed to any form of more active involvement.

In their perception of the level of involvement that parents currently enjoy, teachers indicated a perception that parents receive a final copy of the policies. Teachers were slightly more confirmatory in regard to their perception of the level of parental involvement in codes of discipline and special programmes and slightly less confirmatory in regard to their perception of levels of parental involvement in information brochures and the formal curriculum. This suggests that the formation of codes of discipline and special programmes are two areas where schools have a degree of parental involvement.

Overall teachers' perceptions of current levels of parental involvement were in line with their values, particularly for general school policies, information brochures and special programmes. In these three areas teachers wished for a

degree of consultation with parents and perceived consultation as the main mechanism of involving parents at present. Some slight differences emerged between teachers' values and perception in relation to codes of discipline and formal curriculum. In both cases teachers perceived a slightly greater level of parental involvement than they wished for. However, the differences were mainly differences of degree. In the case of codes of discipline it was a difference of degree of consultation and in the case of the formal curriculum it was a difference in degree of informing.

Parental Involvement in Personnel areas

Respondents' values towards the involvement of parents in personnel areas of school life are detailed in table 13. The data suggests that teachers valued a role for parents in all of the five areas mentioned above. In all cases however their preference was for this involvement to be under the direction of teachers.

Table 13 Mean score of teachers for items relating to parental involvement (personnel) in education (Values)

	MEAN SCORE N = 138
School secretarial work	1.7
Classroom assistants	1.9
Playground supervisors	1.9
Helping with sports / swimming	2.2
Helping with school tours	2.1

(Based on a three-point scale ranging from 3, involved as partners with teachers, to 1, not involved. Data is weighted)

Thus while there was no evidence to suggest a desire for a partnership approach to parental involvement in any of the five personnel areas, there was some indications that both parents and teachers were more pre-disposed to parental involvement in helping with sports and swimming and in helping with school tours. Equally the data indicated relatively less enthusiasm for parental involvement in school secretarial work. The slight distinction between parental involvement in what can be classified as extra-curricular activities (sports, swimming and tours) and parental involvement in aspects of school administration (secretarial work) suggests areas that teachers are most open to facilitating parental involvement and also areas where involvement is least likely to succeed.

Perception of the work of the Parents Association, Board of Management and Fund-raising Committee

Respondents were asked to describe the work of the Parents' Association, fund-raising committee and Board of Management in their schools, and were also

teachers were given the option of indicating whether or not their school had a Parents' Association.

Respondents who answered the question were provided with four options to describe the formal bodies in their school: independent of principal / chairman, directed by chairman, directed by principal and partnership with staff and management. Responses were as follows:

Table 14: Mean scores for items relating to the work of parents' association, fund-raising committee and Board of Management.

	MEAN SCORE N = 138	
	N	**Mean Score**
Parents' Association	97	4.0
Fund-raising committee	84	4.0
Board of Management	136	4.3

(Based on a five-point scale ranging from 1 Not Applicable to 5 Partnership with staff and management. Data is weighted)

Table 15: Percentages of schools that don't have a Parents' Association analysed according to school type, school size and disadvantage status

SCHOOL TYPE		SCHOOL SIZE			DISADVANTAGE STATUS	
Mainstream N = 111	Gaelscoil N = 27	Small N = 45	Medium N = 48	Large N = 45	Yes N = 37	No N = 101
34.2	11.1	51.1	29.2	8.9	37.8	26.7

The numbers of teachers that indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association suggests that almost 30% of schools operate without Parents' Associations. This in effect means that parents in nearly three-tenths of schools do not have a formal body which can foster relationships between parents and their children's schools, or which can provide parents with a formal structure to articulate their concerns or coordinate their initiatives. This finding must be placed in the context of the formal requirement of the Department of Education and Science that all schools "establish an active Parents' Association" (Department of Education, 1991). While this requirement was made in 1991 the evidence here suggests that nearly 30% of schools have ignored it. When those schools that do not have a Parents' Association were analysed according to type, size and disadvantage status it was apparent that certain categories of schools were less likely to have Parents' Associations than other categories.

In regard to school type over one-third of teachers in mainstream schools indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association while slightly over one-tenth of gaelscoileanna indicated that they did not have a Parents'

Association. The indication here is that gaelscoileanna are more likely to have Parents' Associations. This may be related to the prominent role that parents play in the establishment of gaelscoileanna, thus many of these schools effectively have a parents' committee before they formally open (Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2003). In the case of mainstream primary schools however it is unlikely that Parents' Associations played any role in their establishment, thus in all cases proactive measures by parents or school authorities, within an existing school environment, were necessary in order to establish Parents' Associations. For this reason Parents' Associations may be more prevalent in gaelscoileanna than in mainstream primary schools.

When teachers were analysed according to school size, over half of the teachers in small schools indicated that their school did not have a Parents' Association, while less than one-tenth of teachers in large schools said that their school did not have one. The clear indication here is that Parents' Associations are far less prevalent in small schools than in large schools. This may be connected to the more intimate community associated with smaller schools, which because of its smaller nature may not require formal structures such as Parents' Associations to foster parent-school relationships or to structure parental involvement in the schools to the same extent as large schools do. A higher percentage of teachers who teach in disadvantage status schools indicated that their schools did not have Parents' Associations in comparison to teachers in non-disadvantage status schools. While the differences were not as pronounced as between the other cohorts in table 15, nevertheless the indication is that Parents' Associations are less prevalent in disadvantage status schools than in non-disadvantage status schools. There may be an indication here that the formal structure of bodies such as Parents' Associations are less attractive to particular cohorts, specifically those in areas of economic disadvantage, than to others. This may point to a need for parents' associations to vary their structures according to the needs of the parent population of the school. When the responses of the teachers that did not indicate that their school did not have a Parents' Association or Fund-raising committee were analysed there was a general consensus that the work of Parents' Associations, fund-raising committees and Boards of Management were best characterised as 'directed by principal.' This testifies to the central role that the school principal plays in school organisational and administrative matters, and supports claims made by Swick (1989) and Berniger (1989) that the principal plays a central role in schemes to involve parents in primary schools.

Summary and Conclusion

Amongst educationalists understandings of partnership between parents and teachers have certainly evolved from a relationship which cast parents in a subordinate role to the teacher in a way described as 'parents helping teachers to achieve goals specified by teachers in ways specified by teachers' (Sharpe and Greene, 1975) to a relationship characterised by 'vision, goal orientation, solidarity, communication, empowerment and transformation' (Conaty, 2002).

However the evolution in understanding amongst educationalists has not been matched by a similar progression in teachers' values and attitudes towards partnership, and the evidence presented here suggests that teachers' attitudes in this regard act to support the more traditional understandings of partnership and have not progressed to an empowerment centred one. For example while teachers support many of the traditional rights afforded to parents in primary education, slight reservation was expressed about affording parents the right to 'have the final say in all decisions affecting their children's education.' Equally more importance was attached to providing information to parents on school-based organizational matters than on children's test results, curricular areas and affairs of the Board of Management. In terms of parental access there was evidence of a desire to restrict access by parents to school records. In relation to involvement in policy related issues, no desire was expressed to involve parents as partners, even in areas such as Codes of Discipline where parents traditionally enjoyed some involvement. There was also a marked lack of enthusiasm about involving parents in the formal curriculum. The preference for the involvement of parents 'under the direction of teachers' in personnel areas, the absence of a Parents' Association in almost 30% of schools and the description of the work of the Parents' Association as 'directed by principal' all support the contention that teachers' attitudes and perceptions act to reinforce more traditional understanding of partnership.This disparity has contributed to a situation where on one hand educational theory has emphasised the role of parents, however in reality 'educational practice has lingered behind' (Conaty, 2002). How best can this be dealt with? At one level there is some evidence to suggest that teachers initially need time and space to explore issues related to parental involvement at school staff level before they can constructively engage with parents. Stacey (1991) and Munn (1993) both argue that internal staff development is a necessary precursor to developing effective relationships with parents. It is also the case that many of the processes whereby school staffs reflect on their attitudes towards parental involvement are quite akin to elements of a partnership process. Fullan and Hargreaves, (1992) and Swap (1993) cite the necessity for schools to be characterised by a positive team spirit and a supportive culture in order to be effective in meeting current challenges. They also point to the process of collaborative planning as an essential process for teachers in modern society. There is also evidence to suggest that one of the most effective means of counteracting some of the firmly rooted traditions of teaching that mitigate against active parental involvement is to provide teachers with positive experiences of such involvement. Ramsay, Harrold, Hawk and Marriot (1992) and Michael, Arnold, Magliocca and Miller (1992) both reported that teachers came to view their own job and the role of parents within the system in a more positive light as a result of various initiatives to increase parental involvement in schools. They also found that an increased number of parental involvement programmes within the school had added 'knock-on' benefits for the life of the school, such as greater number of staff development programmes and increased teacher self-confidence.

Finally just as Stacey (1991) argues that teachers need time and space to reflect on issues so too parents, as a group, need to be given the opportunity to challenge many of their traditional assumptions regarding schools and teachers. Vincent (1996) suggests that parents should be encouraged to explore their own feelings regarding schools and teachers in small, informal group settings. In providing for this exploration Macbeth (1989) suggests that parents' associations as opposed to teachers or school managers should act as facilitators for this work and that it should focus on the relevance of traditional attitudes towards teachers and schools for today's world.Thus a combination of internal staff dialogue about the role of parents and the relationship between parents and teachers, piloting of partnership-based initiatives and a facilitation of parental reflection and exploration of their own roles within the system may be necessary to deal with the mismatch between educational theory and practice in the field of parental involvement.

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Delivering Learning Support Programmes in a Community-based Setting

Thomasina Cosgrave

In the following article I will set out to look at the role of the community-based adult language support system and show how it differs from the school-based system. However, it will be evident that there is a considerable overlap between the role of the language-support teacher in school and that of a community-based language-support teacher. In both settings the work involves:

- A teamwork approach
- A programme which is flexible and adjusted to student need
- Assessment leading to IEP
- A person-centred holistic learning plan
- Independent learning methods
- Building on learner strengths

The Centre

Harold's Cross Adult Learning Centre is located in Dublin 6W, 30 minutes walk from Dublin city centre. The Centre is situated on ground which belongs to Our Lady's Hospice Ltd., a well-known healthcare facility held in high esteem by local people. More than 130 local adults have enrolled for classes at the Centre in the current academic year. The five programme choices available to students include accredited and non accredited programmes. These are:

1. A small number of beginners receive one-to-one tuition from one of the volunteer tutors on hand on Monday to Friday mornings.
2. Another group work independently on computer based English grammar and vocabulary programmes.
3. A third group receive tuition in Conversational English in preparation for FETAC certification Language Module EF0164.[1]

1 FETAC (Further Education and Training Accreditation and Certification) Foundation level Language Module covers oral and written communication work related to activities of daily living.

4. The fourth group follow the Junior Cert Foundation Level English programmes.
5. The fifth group have registered for Open Learning, visiting by appointment to avail of material loan, work correction, personal guidance etc

Literacy provision and teamwork

The Centre is a recognised CDVEC[2] adult literacy provider. A limited number of tuition hours are provided by CDVEC. These classes are available to both Irish nationals and "newcomer" Irish. The Centre management is supervised by the Religious Sisters of Charity[3], who provide equipment and staff as required. FÁS provides a part time administrator under the Community Employment scheme. Ten volunteer tutors (retired religious teachers) are available to support students. In contrast to many other literacy centres, Harold's Cross Centre is community-based rather than school based.

Flexible access

Constraints on Students who wish to access ESOL class

The Centre offers free classes at beginner level to ESOL learners who are unemployed. At the time of writing (February 2010) unemployment figures among non nationals have risen (81,395 non-Irish nationals are on the live register with 3,876 foreigners having joined in January 2010 alone) and many unemployed find themselves housebound and without money.[4] Many immigrants often seek to improve their language skills as a step towards getting back to work and when they approach FÁS they are referred to our Centre for free tuition as they cannot afford to attend ESOL programmes in CDVEC schools which are prohibitively expensive to people in this socio-economic bracket. There may also be other issues which constrain this group from participating in mainstream classes.

Eligibility constraints (EU citizens)

- E.U. citizens must pay for English classes. Exceptions are made for citizens of the Baltic countries and Eastern European nationals (as English was not taught as a school subject under Russia).

- Non E.U. nationals require a work/visitor visa if they wish to remain in Ireland. This temporary visa is for one year only. Those who have secured work may renew the visa for a second term and so on. Those who have

2 CDVEC (City 0f Dublin Vocational Education Committee) administer on behalf of DES adult literacy services.
3 Congregation founded by Mary Aikenhead in 1815 to serve the poor.
4 Irish Independent Sat. 6 February 2010.

worked for 5 years may apply for residence. Only those who become resident may access CDVEC tuition on regular English courses on the same basis as do Irish nationals.

Initial Needs Assessment

Eligible applicants are required to fill in a self assessment questionnaire[5] regarding each one's level of language skill. Relative mastery of reading and writing tasks is assessed as individuals reflect on their practice, e.g.:

Which of these can you do?
(a) Never
(b) Sometimes – with a little help
(c) Always – no help needed

This is the first requirement. Profiles of individual learners will illustrate the difficulty encountered by low level learners who wish to study English. As will be evident, regular attendance at class and daily practice of listening to, speaking, reading and writing English are prerequisites for successful language acquisition.

Case Studies

Case studies of successful students illustrate the need for prolonged exposure to mixing with English speakers. Two of the students presented at A0 level (Complete Beginner) on the European Language Proficiency Benchmark Scale[6]. Two others had word-recognition skills insufficient to support them as they wished to contribute to life and work in Ireland.

Person-centred holistic learning plan

Case Study 1

Lena, 32 years, a Moroccan national, had lived in Ireland for three years. Her husband, an Arabic speaker, accompanied her for assessment prior to enrolling for classes at the Centre. Lena could read and write her name, address and date of birth. That was the limit of her language. All activities for daily living which required interaction with others were done on her behalf by her husband.

After her needs assessment was carried out, a programme of intensive full time study, one-to-one tutorial support and forty hours of group tuition was arranged for Lena. I.T.-based learning activities for homework were included, as were referrals to places where Lena would meet with other learners e.g. *NALA* Student Day and Museum visits.

5 The Literacy Development Client Profile is an initial self-assessment questionnaire. Information is gathered regarding the student's reading and writing patterns on a range of tasks ranging from writing one's own name to writing a review of a book.

6 An internationally- recognised language performance indicator scale.

Independent learning

Lena soon came to terms with the sound/symbol system which is used to communicate the written word. She used **multi sensory** learning methods whilst she worked from the programme "*ENGLISH PRONUCIATION IN USE*".[7] She matched the sound with the symbol as she listened to the tape and read the text. Lena needed to understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning herself, her family and her immediate concrete surroundings. Word/sound matching exercises using "*FIRST THOUSAND WORDS in English Pack*[8]" (tape and text) was helpful in providing vocabulary re: family, food etc. An English/Arabic dictionary was used for comprehension. Lena learned to interact in one-to-one conversion with other learners and with tutors who supervised her learning. All were prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and to help her formulate what she was trying to say.

Building on learner strengths

In order to extend her language learning ability, Lena an eager learner was happy to avail of learning opportunities irrespective of location. Together with her friends from the centre, she attended *Fáilte Isteach*[9] meetings and *NALA*[10] meetings. She spent many hours at home listening to taped stories, e.g. *Black Cat*[11] Readers loaned from the Centre.

Having attended daily for five weeks Lena could use simple phrases and respond to simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics e.g. Question/ "How long do you hope to stay in Ireland?" Answer/ "at live." meaning "all my life."

Lena's next learning goal, i.e. to enrol for a ten week ESOL Beginner Level Class at the Local CDVEC College was achieved recently. Her classes there will be part-time and she will continue to attend here as an OUTREACH STUDENT, availing of material loan etc. whilst continuing to work towards achieving a FETAC award in communication.

Case study 2

Ian, our second beginner, a 41 year old Polish national married to Spanish-speaking Emilia who came to work in Dublin last year. Their son remained in Madrid with his granny whilst Ian joined Emilia here. On arrival Ian commenced his studies. Like Lena he too had found himself a prisoner in the

7 Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org
8 Usborne Ed Mairi Mackinnon www.usborne.com
9 An organisation founded by Mary Nally in Summerhill, Co. Meath. Volunteers meet with "newcomer" Irish and help them integrate into local society. Language sessions are held in Rialto Community Centre. D8 each Tuesday.
10 NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) gathers to serve on student committees and students organise regular functions and Student Days.
11 Series of Reading and Training readers with audio CD.

home, alone with lots of time on his hands while Emilia was at work.
Over the nine weeks of intensive study there was no let up for Ian. Each evening Emilia supervised homework and whenever he became discouraged at the slowness of progress reminded him of how their little son had needed repetitive work in order to learn to read. Television Programmes with English subtitles and lots of video material e.g. READ WRITE NOW 2 (CD version) were used and over time Ian became confident in asking and answering simple questions e.g. How long have you been in Ireland? "Four months". Ian's ambition is to access work as a chef. He currently has a new job as a waiter.

Case Study 3

In contrast to Lena and Ian, twenty year old **Nayat** had some experience of school English before enrolling for ESOL class at the Centre. Since 2007 her father had lived here and through the good offices of the Irish Red Cross, his wife and children were allowed to join him here in October 2009. We have supported three family members since their arrival in Ireland. Nayat is working towards Junior Cert. English (F) certification, her father Ian completed a FETAC language programme and accessed work while her younger sister recently enjoyed her fortnight's Transition Year Work-Experience Placement from her Secondary School. Nayat worked on listening, reading and typing *STARSPELL*[12] programme. She enjoyed printing out her work on the worksheets given for revision work. She gained confidence in meeting with English speakers. She also prepared graded instructional materials for the students.

Nayat presented with considerable oral skills. She could understand phrases and highest frequency vocabulary in areas of the most immediate personal relevance e.g. she accompanied her younger sister on a visit to the doctor and found her way on her own to the Learning Centre, Libraries etc. As she could read very short simple texts, she enjoyed using stories on CD/tape and working with the text and exercises and completed the language Module (FETAC EF0164) in ten sessions.

Although her written skills are improving as she works on her Junior Cert programme Nayat has a continuing need to activate both the subject knowledge and the range of appropriate Language to go with it .When she sat her mock English exam recently she had difficulty in expressing herself appropriately in the range of language categories under examination e.g. comprehension, functional writing, personal writing, writing about fiction, drama, poetry and media.

She lacked time management skills. She activated her ideas but expressed herself in a disorganised way, failing to edit her work in the time provided e.g. "they

12 Starspell is available from Fisher-Marriott Software, e-mail: Info@fishermarriott.com

need to people support and they tooked to another monks" (referring to *Vikings plundering Irish Monasteries)*. NALA's programme will enable her to develop her self-editing skills. She will have lots of opportunity to check the tenses of verbs and prepositions and to use words and phrases as a basis for constructing the text. She will practice organising and sequencing information appropriately e.g. *using conventions of paragraphs* to sequence her ideas. She will learn to link different parts of her answers and to practice using a range of language styles as she prepares for her exam.

Case Study 4

Our fourth student, **Varein**, is thirty two years old. He is an I.T. Software Programmer from Rome. Unlike the former students, Varein choose a short course rather than an extended period of intensive language learning. His need was for oral fluency and he experienced feelings of panic every time the phone would ring. Despite his superior intelligence and having set up his own website, he feared that he would misunderstand any instruction given to him by a prospective employer. His experience to date has confirmed that poor literacy skills are a real obstacle to securing entry into the employment market. Varein continues to attend the *Open Learning Centre* for support etc. and works as a volunteer with a Dublin charity as he continues to improve his language skills.

Volunteers

The fourteen volunteers[13] currently tutoring have between them given more than 2,000 unpaid hours to the students over the past 6 years. Duties have included:

- One to one tutoring
- Small group tutoring
- Providing administrative support
- Data recording needed by VEC

An important aspect of this work is the attitude of the volunteers. In response to the question posed to volunteers "How do you explain your committed service?" comments back have included "I love teaching" "You get to know the student as a person" "I wouldn't miss coming for the world." In would seem that skilled professionals enjoy the work they do.

School-based programmes such as this often require both the tutor and student to fit into its system. We recognise, however, that continuity of service to marginalised groups is, for a variety of reasons, difficult to maintain. Our tutors find that the community-based setup allows them freedom to respond appropriately to students if and when changes of timetable, location of lesson

13 Including ten retired teachers.

etc. are called for. Within the security of the student/tutor relationship adults tend to find ways around the constraints encountered in the school system where individuals have of necessity to "fit in" and to observe rules laid down by others. Tutors are happy to be accountable to the student rather than to the institution. Four of our volunteers support the paid VEC tutor and compile figures of attendance needed for student profiling.

Inclusion in group activities also permits the tutor to feel part of the larger learning community at the Centre. "We must keep the show on the road" said one volunteer who had travelled across town at great personal inconvenience to attend her small group session. Because the tutors see that their professional competence is recognised and valued, they willingly become involved in whole centre activities and approaches e.g.:

- Chatting with colleagues over the daily "cuppa"
- Attending social events i.e. celebrations during visits from past pupils
- Participating in group discussion re management issues
- Recruitment issues

Students

Sixteen students evaluated how they had experienced their ten-day Language Module EF0164 course. Information was gathered on the following aspects of the work:

- Previous experience of learning English
- Learning outcomes at end of course
- Degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the learning experience
- Suggestions re where to go from here
- Possible improvements to learning experience

When we remember that persons seeking refugee status, students on work/visitor visas and the unemployed can seldom follow costly courses in Language schools it is scarcely surprising that 50% of the group reported that this was their first time to study English as part of a formal learning group. Marginalised adults from Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Eastern European backgrounds need access to structured and scaffolded ESOL services as many of them have to begin at the very beginning, e.g. learning the letters of the alphabet and how to read from left to right.

Reasons given by learners who had chosen to study at the Centre included "on at a suitable time," "friend had recommended the Centre" "Need to meet a lot of people," "I want to learn English and to communicate with each other," Those who had previous experience of other centres had moved to our centre because "There [*sic*] was expensive for me". Other comments included "I can't go to a Language school every day because I have small children" and "it was too difficult a level for me [*in the other school*]".

Students reported that they had learned:
"more correct writing and speaking", "words to help me speak with the people", "useful English" and "A little grammar" as well as noting that "different country culture [*of Ireland*]. I learned a lot".

There was a 100% satisfaction rating for the Centre. Reasons given included "Good teachers", "I can make a lot of friends", "Good place", "Friends because I think it helps to speak English", "Because it is very good for the beginner have a possibility for to speak and learning grammar", "the teachers and the way to teach are marvellous", "the classes are small working in the groups", "because it's helpful and useful. We will learn a lot", and "here are very good teachers, method and team".

Reasons given by those who liked coming to the class included "I can meet people who are very kindly. After I met them I become happy", "I have opportunity to talk with others and good explanations", "for learning and for meet my colleges", "every day I learn something new", "the teachers are teaching English honestly".

Where to next?
Only two students had achieved their goal of learning English. There was an acceptance that, to quote the words of one respondent, "I think that I have to learn much more". No suggestions were given as to how this could be carried forward and this is certainly a work in progress for those of us working in the Centre.

Conclusion
One suggested improvement made "to give more hours because I was only one month on the course". The range of needs provided for on the course and the flexibility of the community-based system points up the lack of 'student-centred' learning in a school-based setting. Accommodating learner needs at this level is better achieved by maintaining and extending the community-based system. All language support teachers could easily transfer their skills into this area of learning (community-based system) if required and could facilitate many more potential learners who normally get lost or left out when they cannot access mainstream services.

THOMASINA COSGRAVE

Sr. Thomasina Cosgrave has given trojan service to the Irish Learning Support Association over many years since its formation in the 1970s. She maintains the archive of the association and is currently a member of ILSA National Executive. Her deep commitment to education and the support of those with educational needs is evidenced by her steadfast work at the Harold's Cross Adult Literacy Centre.

The Developing Role of the Special Needs Assistant Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Irish Mainstream Primary Schools

Rohana Mohd Salleh

Introduction

The increasing deployment of special needs assistants (SNA) in Irish mainstream primary schools demonstrates their importance in providing support to children with special needs. However, to date, the Department of Education and Science (DES) has not issued comprehensive guidelines to schools in relation to the roles of SNAs (INTO, 2003, p. vii). This paper reviews the literature concerning the role of SNAs supporting pupils with special education needs (SEN) looking at international perspectives and emerging issues in mainstream primary schools.

SNAs are defined as non-teaching staff who support pupils with special educational needs in the education setting. The duties of an SNA are of a non-teaching nature and include both child-specific assistance and general assistance in the classroom or school (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007, p.250). There is an increasing number of SNAs supporting pupils with SEN in mainstream primary schools and this is significant in terms of the improvement in the delivery of service in special education. By December 2006, the number of SNAs had increased to 8,200 compared to 300 in 1998 (Ireland, 2006).

> Special Needs Assistants (SNA) are recruited specifically to assist in the **care** of pupils with disabilities in an educational context…..to assist school authorities in making suitable provision for a pupil or pupils with special **care** needs arising from a disability. The allocation of special needs assistant support may be made on a full- or part-time basis (e.g. an hour or more per day), and may be shared by named pupils for whom such support has been allocated.
>
> (Department of Education and Science, 2002, Circular SP.ED 07/02)

Issues

SNAs are increasingly engaged in duties of an educational nature (Logan, 2006; Lawlor & Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004). Lawlor & Cregan (2003, p. 82)

investigated the expanding role of the SNA and found that it had evolved 'without clear definition, adequate preparation, specific training or appropriate induction'. They noted that the duties outlined for the SNA (DES, Circular SP.ED 07/02) are an exact reiteration of the duties as set out in the previous circular in October 1976 (DES, Circular SP.ED 10/76). There appeared no regard for changes and developments in education that had taken place during the intervening twenty six years. Similar research (Logan, 2006; Carrig, 2004) would agree with Lawlor & Cregan's (2003) suggestion that the DES should review the current guidelines for SNAs. Additional research (Logan, 2006; Bergin, 2004) strongly suggests that it is time for Ireland to examine best practice and policy implementation in other countries and adapt to maximize the utilization of existing special needs resources.

A study commissioned by the National Disability Authority, Ireland (NDA, 2006) into education provision for children with disabilities and special educational needs in primary school was conducted between September 2004 and February 2005. The study identified a number of significant changes to provision in special education policy, including new legislation in the Education of Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) and the establishment of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), (NDA, May 2006 p.4). One of the key findings was a widespread uncertainty about the role and responsibilities of SNAs. It further identified the following:

- A lack of official recognition that within school administration there was an increased workload involved in managing additional personnel such as SNAs.
- An absence of structures to ensure effective integration of new personnel resources (particularly of personnel classified as non-teaching) within the school team.
- A lack of time for team planning and collaboration.
- An increase in responsibilities for developing and implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) required under the new legislation.
- The complexity of the primary school timetables generated by factoring in support for SEN – a new phenomenon at this level which has a major impact on school and classroom management.
- The need for whole school training in approaches to inclusion.

(NDA, 2006 p.10)

The study also found that class teachers identified a lack of knowledge and information about individual children who enter the class, and also as to how to meet their needs professionally. Teachers welcomed classroom assistants, but felt that they needed new skills to manage situations in which more than one adult is working in a classroom (p.24). Inadequate training for teachers and SNAs is

another important issue in this report. The teachers felt hands-on training to be essential rather than the short courses and in-service days provided at present by the teacher professional development agencies. It is also reported that the majority of resource teachers had received no training in special education (p.25).

In terms of teamwork involving SNAs, resource teachers were positive but reported that there were no structures for this and felt that the respective roles of class teachers, learning support and resource teachers, needed to be clarified by the Department of Education and Science (DES).

The assignment of SNAs to individual children, referred to as the "Velcro" model, was felt to encourage over-dependency on the SNA rather than a desired development of independence by the child (p.27). SNAs felt more secure in their role when they had a defined work programme and were supported and monitored by the class teacher. However, some class teachers were uncomfortable working with another adult within the classroom (p.28). There was also the issue of career structure. SNAs lack job security. When the support is withdrawn or the child with SEN left the school, then the SNA was no longer employed (DES, Circular 15/05).

Overall, schools were positive about the role of SNAs supporting the inclusion of children with SEN. However, schools reported that they often ignored DES guidelines on the employment of SNAs (care role). They reported that many SNAs help with teaching even though they are not trained for this (p.28). Schools expressed concerns about the qualifications for the post as there were no available courses and no career increment when accredited courses (organized and financed by school management) are done.

These findings are consistent with those of other studies (Lawlor & Cregan, 2003; Carrig, 2004; Logan, 2006) that found the role of the SNA in Irish schools is changing and the need for clarity on the role within schools and the contribution of SNAs to the learning environment is crucial (Carrig, 2004, p.125). As Lawlor & Cregan (2003, p.91) conclude :

> Having journeyed with the special needs assistant, whose voice has not previously been heard, and with the class teacher and the school principal through the complex changing dynamics of support partnership in the education of the child, it is suggested by this research that the evolving role of the special needs assistant has the potential to become a stifling threat or a very valuable resource to be embraced and developed for the benefit of all involved in the education of the child with special needs.

Implementation of IEP

Another important task carried out by the NCSE is to present guidelines of good practice in relation to the preparation, implementation and review of IEPs as outlined in the EPSEN Act 2004. The contents of the guidelines include the overview of the Act, planning, writing, implementing and reviewing an IEP, transition requirements in the IEP, parental and student involvement and finally, roles and responsibilities of people involved. However, Part 6.2 in Chapter 6 questions the limited 'care role' involvement of the SNAs.

Defining the Role of the SNA

SNAs are sanctioned by the Department of Education and Science with duties of a non teaching nature (Circular SP.ED 07/02). Their work should be supervised either by the principal, class teacher or SEN teacher. The allocation of special needs assistant support may be made on a full- or part-time basis (e.g. an hour or more per day), and may be shared by named pupils for whom such support has been allocated.

Those duties involve tasks of a ***non-teaching nature*** such as:

1. Preparation and tidying up of classroom(s) in which the pupil(s) with special needs is/are being taught.
2. Assisting children to board and alight from school buses. Where necessary travel as escort on school buses may be required.
3. Special assistance as necessary for pupils with particular difficulties e.g. helping physically disabled pupils with typing or writing.
4. Assistance with clothing, feeding, toileting and general hygiene.
5. Assisting on out-of-school visits, walks and similar activities.
6. Assisting the teachers in the supervision of pupils with special needs during assembly, recreational and dispersal periods.
7. Accompanying individuals or small groups who may have to be withdrawn temporarily from the classroom.
8. General assistance to the class teachers, under the direction of the Principal, with ***duties of a non-teaching nature. (Special Needs Assistants may not act either as substitute or temporary teachers. In no circumstances may they be left in sole charge of a class).***
9. Where a Special Needs Assistant has been appointed to assist a school in catering for a specific pupil, duties should be modified to support the particular needs of the pupil concerned.

By way of contrast, the NCSE recognizes the potential of the SNA to contribute to the development and implementation of the IEP and maintain that the SNA has a direct involvement in supporting the child with special education needs and, therefore, will have valuable information relevant to the development of the IEP. Guidelines developed by the NCSE maintain that it is important for SNAs to be given the opportunity to:

- share information with the IEP Co-ordinator about the child's talents, strengths and needs;
- support the implementation of targets relating to the care and access needs of the child;
- provide feedback which will contribute to monitoring and reviewing the child's progress.

(Guidelines on the IEP Process, NCSE, 2006, Chapter 6, 6.2 p. 64)

The Role of Assistants: International Overview

Empirical evidence regarding actual and appropriate roles and responsibilities for classroom assistants in an inclusive classroom is minimal (Minondo, Meyer & Xin, 2001, p.114). Role clarification which includes both identifying appropriate duties and responsibilities of the classroom assistants and differentiating between them and the teachers is critical. They state as follows:

> There is general consensus in the field that any such instruction provided by paraprofessionals should be based on professionally prepared plans given appropriate training and supervision. That is nice rhetoric, but too often it does not match reality.
>
> (Giangreco & Doyle, 2004, p. 195)

In Canada, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation Canadian Union of Public Employees (2001) as cited in Calder & Grieve (2004, p.118) states the specific roles and responsibilities of teachers and classroom assistants and some which they share. They include the following:

- The teacher should design instructional programmes
- The teacher and classroom assistants (CAs) together should discuss learner strengths and weaknesses and the CA can contribute information to assist the teacher in developing an IEP.

In the UK, learning support Assistants (LSAs) are defined as 'paid non-teaching staff in schools who support the work of teachers in the classroom with individuals and groups of children (Her Majesty's Inspectorate [HMI], 1992, p.7, as cited in Mistry, et al.,2004, p.127)'. LSAs 'are those who work with children who have been diagnosed or formally identified with special educational needs (Mortimore et al. 1994 as cited in Mistry, et al., 2004, p.127). In the current climate in education, the 'old ancillary role' of the classroom assistant is changing to the new teaching role of LSAs as they are supporting children's learning more (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997, cited in Mistry, et al., 2004, p.127). Mistry et al. (2004, p.127) further point out that the role of LSAs is varied and diverse, depending upon the requirement of the establishment and its pupils. The Department of Education and Employment (DfEE, 2000, in Mistry et al., 2004 p. 127) emphasises four aspects to the role that LSAs have to play :

1. Support the pupil.
2. Support the teacher.
3. Support the curriculum.
4. Support the school

(DfEE, 2000, p.8)

Mistry et al. (2004, p. 127) suggest that the 'Government's current thrust on increasing the number of LSAs in the classroom (in the form of teaching assistants), is that the support they give to the teacher will increase in terms of taking responsibility for larger groups of children, and also doing part of the teaching themselves.' The teaching role of the LSAs has lead to two issues argued by Mistry et al. (2004, p. 128):

- The salary that the LSAs are paid needs to increase if it is to reflect the higher level of professionalism and the more active teaching role that the Government wants.
- LSAs need time to discuss with the appropriate members of teaching staff the monitoring and evaluating of various learning targets, but this can only happen when the LSAs and the teaching staff are available.

The solution to these issues is to 'change the contract of LSA staff so that they are in school earlier to communicate with the teaching staff involved.' However, the 'cost implications in terms of their earlier start to the school day is a concern' (Mistry et al., 2004, p.128)'.

In Finland, the role of a classroom assistant is described in terms of assisting children with special needs in their studies and in coping with various situations at school (Takala 2007, p.50). Helsinki City Education Department (2006 as cited in Takala, 2007, p.50) states that 'the main goal of their work is to assist and support the child during the learning process.' Takala also points out that assistants in Finland do not have good employment security and receive low salary. Appointments are usually short term which is one school year and they are unemployed during summer (2007, p.51).

In Scotland, Calder & Grieve (2004, p.116) found that Classroom Assistants (CAs) learn on the job with no direct instruction and that teachers were not clear themselves as to the assistants' role. CAs for example carried out a number of administrative roles which included:

- Taking the register of pupils who are present and recording the names of those who are absent;
- Responding to requests for information from the senior managements of the school or from outside bodies;
- Preparing resources for teaching;

- Preparing the classroom for lessons and tidying up afterwards;
- Constructing a forward plan;
- Completing reports to parents;
- Recording pupil progress;

(Calder & Grieve, 2004, p.116)

Calder & Grieve (2004, p.116) discuss the conflict and confusion in the area of shared tasks between teachers and assistants in The Classroom Assistants Implementation Guidance (Scottish Office Education Department, 1999). They argued, "role clarity is essential and decisions must be made about how we define "teaching" and "supporting". They claimed: "Teachers seem to feel threatened by the idea that a CA, after some training, might be capable of performing some of the actions which, up to now, have been considered as "teaching" (p. 116-117)." Calder & Grieve (2004, p.117) point out two problems for both teachers and assistants working together:

(i) Some teachers rely on the information about children's learning and progress which is given to them by the CAs. This information, however, is being collected by an untrained eye; may not be checked by the busy teacher and, therefore, must be suspect.

(ii) Some teachers may not consider the that a CA may hold vital information which could influence the teacher's view of the child; do not ask the classroom assistant's opinion and therefore, the information is lost.

This is consistent with the findings by Ashbaker & Morgan (1999) as cited in Etscheidt (2005, p.74) who state that "decisions regarding which duties are assigned to paraprofessionals must be guided by legal and ethical considerations, as well as the preferences of the students, the parent, the teacher, and the paraprofessional." These decisions need to come from at least two sources: state and local standards and the needs of teachers and students (Hilton & Gerlach, 1997 in Etscheidt, 2005, p.74).

The Changing Role

The involvement of SNAs in both care-type and educational roles has made their job more challenging. The issues of the importance of professional development and training for SNAs have been discussed in the Report of the Irish National Teachers' Organization (INTO, 2003) on supporting SEN in schools. They recommend:

- that SNAs be appointed to all classes in special schools, as required;
- that appropriate training be provided for all SNAs pertaining to their role in the school and taking into account the various categories of disability;

- that inservice be provided to teachers regarding their role in working with SNAs;
- that appropriate qualifications for appointment as an SNA be introduced.

(INTO, 2003, p. 20)

- that professional development and training be available to all SNAs in relation to their role;
- that a module on working with SNAs be included in professional development and training courses for both class and special needs resource teachers;
- that SNAs be included in team meetings to discuss curriculum programmes and progress of children with special needs as appropriate.

(INTO, 2003, p.60)

In the UK today, assistants play an integral part in classroom instruction providing direct service for pupils with SEN. As assistant numbers have increased, their roles and responsibilities have also transformed from a classroom 'helper' to being more specifically directed to support the teaching and learning process (Groom, 2006, p. 199).

Further to this, Giangreco & Broer (2003, p.3) claim: "in the past, para-educator roles are often focused on support functions such as preparing materials, taking attendance, supervising students in the lunchroom or on the playground, and monitoring bus arrivals and departures'. However, they recognize that roles have evolved and expanded simultaneously (Doyle, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997 as cited in Giangreco, et al. 2002, p.3). 'Now they are more integrally involved in providing instructional supports to students with and without disabilities' (Demchak & Morgan, 1998; Welch, Richards, Okada, Richards & Prescott, 1995, cited in Giangreco et al. 2002, p. 3)

However, Ashbaker & Morgan (2004, p.2) remind us : "when paraprofessionals have not been appropriately trained to know the limits of their roles and the necessity of working under the direction of a teacher – and when teachers are unaware of their responsibility to direct the instructional activities of the paraprofessional – concern escalates regarding their qualifications and the appropriateness of instruction." Vasa et al. (1982 in Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004, p.2) found that students in special education were spending up to 80% of their time with an assistant rather than a certified teacher. The same issue has brought Giangreco et al. (2007, p.429) to address three important questions in their study:

- What are appropriate roles for teacher assistants to support the education of students with disabilities in an inclusive service delivery system?
- What is the emerging role of the classroom teacher with students who have disabilities and their teacher assistants?

- How does the assignment of teacher assistants affect the personal/social aspects of schooling for students with disabilities?

In the UK, it is recognized that 'LSA should have a more active role in the teaching aspect of the curriculum, thus allowing teachers more time for making preparation' (Mistry et al. 2004, p.126). However, research by French (1998), Giangreco & Doyle (2002), Marks et al. (1999) and Riggs & Mueller (2001) as cited in Etscheidt (2005, p.74) clarified that assistants should support a student's educational programme but must not be expected to assume full or independent responsibility for the student's IEP.

Lacey (2001, p.165) identified areas of difficulty for assistants supporting pupils with Severe and Profound General Learning Disability (S&P GLD). Her findings report:

- LSAs were not likely to know what they would be supporting until a lesson started.
- The time-consuming need for teachers to plan for (or preferably with) the LSA is possibly an unwelcome extra burden to teachers.
- LSAs had to plan on their own.
- LSAs had excessive responsibility noting the lack of an appropriate pay structure for the specialized job of supporting pupils with S&P GLD.
- Teachers expected them to take complete responsibility for the child.

Lacey (2001, p.165) argues 'whether pupils with S&P GLD are receiving the standard of teaching to which they are entitled in inclusive setting, whether their needs are being met and whether the pupils really are included.'

More recent arguments against the deployment of special needs assistants have been summarised by Blatchford et al. (2007). In their findings, the assistants' roles are categorized in two ways: direct, in the sense of interacting directly with pupils and affecting pupil learning directly, and indirect, in the sense of aiding the teacher (p.13). The results show that the assistant's role is predominantly a direct one and in this sense their role is predominantly pedagogical.

Giangreco et al. (2007, p.437) conclude that assistant support to pupils with SEN is at a 'crossroads'. This is because 'there is no international consensus about the extent to which teacher assistants should be utilized, circumstances that warrant their involvement, the duties they should appropriately perform, or what constitutes adequate training and supervision.'

Supporting Teaching and Learning – Enabling Skills

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has structured Curriculum Guidelines for pupils with Mild/Moderate General Learning

Disabilities (M/Mod GLD) which focus on language and communication, pre-academic skills, life skills and enabling skills. Cross-circular skills will be developed within an enabling curriculum that is oriented towards life skills (NCCA, 1999, p.25). The enabling skills are attending, responding and interacting. They will be developed through :

- responding to and interacting with people and objects
- social interaction with others
- taking part in group activities
- focusing on tasks
- understanding, collecting and organizing information.

'It is important that teachers work closely with their assistants and provide them with a sense of direction. The teacher's role is to design appropriate learning programs and to enable the assistant to implement them' (NCCA, 1999, p.23).

In examining the enabling skills being practised by assistants in supporting pupils' learning. Fox (1993, p.13) points out that the assistant's role is 'not to do the task for the pupil, but to enable the pupil to do that task for himself or herself by providing the necessary tools for the job'.

Supporting Social and Personal Development

Fennell (2008, p.77) points out that the presence of an adult facilitator (SNA) brought about changes to pupils with SEN in relation to their participation in break-time play. In another study, Quilty (2007, p.187) reports that assistants could be effectively taught how to write and implement 'Social stories' that function to help students in reading, understanding and formulating appropriate responses to social situations for pupils with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The findings were consistent with those of Martella, Marchand-Martella, Miller, Young & MacFarlane (1995) and Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005) as cited in Quilty (2007, p.187) who found that assistants were effective in changing student behaviours when they received appropriate instruction and support.

However, Giangreco et al.(1997) as cited in Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005, p.18) remind us that "one of the biggest problems with the use of paraprofessional support is that unnecessary close paraprofessional proximity can have an unintended negative social effect on students with disabilities. Examples of paraprofessional proximity are as follows:

- Maintaining physical contact with the student
- Sitting directly by the student
- Accompanying the student everywhere in the school setting

Supporting Reading

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the evolving role of the SNA in supporting pupils with early reading and spelling. Savage, Carless & Stuart (2003) and Savage & Carless (2005) explore the assistant's performance in enhancing literacy development for children with reading difficulties. Their findings suggest that trained assistants can deliver effective early preventive programs for literacy difficulties.

Supporting Numeracy

Houssart (2001, p.11) examines the role of the classroom assistants supporting children in numeracy and identifies ways they might assist children with counting difficulties. She suggests that assistants should have some training for the mathematical aspect of their role. Secondly, there should be opportunities for assistants to feed back specific information to teachers about what they have noticed (p.15).

This is consistent with the study by Aylen (2007, p.109) who highlights the development of children's learning at school : "Discussion with other children and with adults is one of the principal ways in which children check their concepts against those of others and build up an objective view of reality."

Germain (2001, p.185) points out that 'despite the strong emphasis given to whole-class teaching by the Numeracy Task Force, the class teacher made it clear that the pupil's inappropriate behaviour made it difficult for him to be included in the whole-class 'oral maths'. Germain (2001, p.182) examined how a mainstream teacher can most effectively support a pupil with Down's Syndrome in numeracy and evaluated both withdrawal and whole-class provision. Findings showed the pupil completed most tasks during individual teaching sessions and tasks were most appropriately matched to the pupil in individual or group settings.

Managing and Supporting Assistants

Successful deployment of assistants will depend on the quality of the partnership between assistant-teacher and assistant-school. Butt and Lance (2005) and Groom and Rose (2005) in Groom (2006, p. 201) list the key factors as:

- School valuing the work of the teaching assistant and recognizing the contribution they make;
- Involving teacher assistants as much as possible in planning and review;
- Good channel of communication-regular meetings;
- Professional development opportunities;
- Opportunities for collaborative work and sharing of good practice.

However, Moran and Abbott (2002 in Groom, 2006, p. 201-202) identify that this 'can only be effectively achieved when there is a consistent and coherent whole school approach and structure that clearly identifies roles and responsibilities.'

Balshaw (1996, as cited in Mistry et al., 2004, p. 129) suggests that not only should all schools recognise the need for assistants to have clearly defined and understood job descriptions, but there should also be a system of monitoring and evaluating how well it is, or is not, working in each situation. As assistants are a 'whole school resource, anyone working with them should be regularly reviewing their practice' (Mistry et al., 2004).

Farrell, Balshaw & Polat (1999, p.3) provide in-depth research on the issues that arise in the management of classroom assistants. They are :

- Currently, there is virtually no career structure for LSAs. The majority can work for several years in a mainstream or special school with little or no prospect of promotion or significant rise in salary.
- Most LSAs have job descriptions though many do not refer to them and, in non-resourced mainstream schools in particular, they frequently undertake work that is completely unrelated to their job description.
- The issue of contracts and pay remains a source of great concern. Levels of pay are seen as being far too low when set against the work that LSAs undertake and the responsibilities they are given. Many contracts are temporary and tied to a pupil with a statement. LSAs in some schools are on different pay scales although they do very similar, if not identical jobs.

Working with Assistants

The research by Farrell et al (1999, p. 3-4) is in line with Etscheidt (2005 , p.77) pointing out the importance of having guidelines in working with assistants:

> Guidelines for working with paraprofessionals emphasize the importance of teacher-planned and teacher-supervised activities, including "teacher-planned instructions under direct supervision of such persons" and "implementing behaviour management plans developed by the teacher."
> (Center on Disability and Community Inclusion, 2004)

Moran & Abbott (2002 as cited in Woolfson & Truswell, 2005, p. 64) draw attention to the 'unresolved issues of training, status, qualification and career structure for the assistants. This finding is consistent with an earlier study (Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997, cited in Woolfson & Truswell, 2005, p. 64) that identified lack of training and inadequate career structure as a barrier to the effective use of assistants.

One of the service delivery models in managing assistants is the model of special educators as an itinerant consultant to classroom teachers and as a manager of assistants (Giangreco & Doyle, 2007, p. 435). However it is argued that the implementation of this model creates the following problems:

(a) classroom teachers functioning primarily as hosts to students with disabilities ;

(b) extensive utilization of unqualified assistants as primary instructors;

(c) isolation, stigmatization, or marginalization of students with disabilities within the classroom, and

(d) overextended working conditions for special educators (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002)

Mistry et al. (2004, p. 130) argues that 'clear line-management structures need to be provided because " messages from different sources can be contradictory and confusing" (DfEE 2000 as cited in Mistry et al., 2004, p. 130). They conclude that the 'management structures have not been sufficiently flexible to cope with the changing role of the LSA.'

To have effective deployment of assistants, Mortimore et al. (as cited in Mistry et al. 2004, p. 129) identify five areas of effective management of assistants:

(1) Clear job descriptions that identify specific duties according to the age phase of the children.

(2) Improved communication through regular briefing and regular team planning meeting.

(3) Increased involvement through attending meetings at convenient times of the day.

(4) More opportunities for relevant training.

(5) Some form of appraisal system for LSAs.

Balshaw (1996 as cited in Mistry et al. 2004, p.129) mentions that it is vital that all schools should recognize the need for assistants to have clearly defined and understood job descriptions. This view is supported by Mistry et al. (2004, p.129):

> Not only must a clear definition of the role be set out to begin with, but there should also be a system of monitoring and evaluating how well it is, or is not, working in each situation.

Importantly, the DfEE (2000, as cited in Mistry et al., 2004, p. 129) remind us that 'this is a whole school issue, as LSAs are a 'whole school resource, and anyone working with them should be regularly reviewing their practice'. It can

be argued that the system may be at fault when the LSAs become less effective in their work. Mistry et al. (2004, p.128) state: "…without the support of the school in terms of teamwork and collaboration, the role of an LSA can sometimes be ineffective when asked to adopt a wider support role."In terms of appraisal system or performance management, Mortimore et al. (1994 as cited in Mistry et al. 2004, p. 130) point out that 'the performance of LSAs needs to be measured against some sort of targets'.

Mistry et al. conclude:

> Essentially, management systems and structures within the school need to be revised to ensure the changed roles and responsibilities of those who assist teachers within the classroom can be more effectively valued and deployed. Training needs are twofold: LSAs need to develop the skills for the additional tasks, and teaching staff need to be capable of managing other adults in the classroom (2004, p. 136).

Collaboration and Teamwork

To enhance effective collaboration, teachers require additional skills in the management of other adults within the classroom. The skills in the 'managerial' roles are to lead and organize; to direct; train; coach; motivate; and supervise (Calder & Grieve, 2004, p. 123).

Bines, 1986 (in Thomas, 1992) as cited in Jerwood (1999, p. 127) reported that "it is not always easy to work with other adults in a classroom as they, at times, seem to threaten the class teacher's autonomy." Thomas (1992) suggests that specific roles and tasks be given to staff during lessons while the class teachers maintain focus on the group. Gerschel (2005, p. 73) mentions that ' not all teachers plan with their TAs and not all the TAs feel confident enough to approach teachers and ask for lesson plans.' She highlights that 'allocated time for planning is necessary.'

Classroom Management

Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, and Stahl (2001 as cited in Giangreco & Doyle 2004, p.188) underlined seven areas of skill competencies for teachers directing the work of paraprofessionals:

- Communication with paraprofessionals
- Planning and scheduling
- Instructional support
- Modeling for paraprofessionals

- Public relations
- Training
- Management of paraprofessionals

However, Wallace et al. (2001) reported that 'teachers, who did not demonstrate these important competencies, cited lack of preservice preparation or professional staff development opportunities as primary reasons'. A similar finding in earlier research by French (1998 as cited in Giangreco & Doyle, 2004, p.188) found that some teachers were reluctant to supervise paraprofessionals and reported that they were not trained to do so. This view is also consistent with the early study by Lorez (2001 as cited in Mistry et al., 2004, p. 13) that highlighting the concern that if class teachers do not know how to "use LSAs to best effects, then there is little point in training LSAs only." Additional training is necessary if teachers are to acquire the necessary skills and confidence in classroom management and working with LSAs, (Ainscow, Logan & Malone, 1998; Jerwood, 1999 as cited in Rose, 2000, p.194). However, Rose (2000, p. 195) draws our attention to his conclusion that 'the allocation of LSAs to named individual pupils may lead to the creation of dependency and the denial of opportunities to develop independent learning skills'.

Ainscow and others (Logan and Malone, 1998; Jerwood, 1999 as cited in Rose, 2000, p.194) suggest that highly developed skills of classroom management are required by all teachers. Thomas, Walker, and Webb (1998 as cited in Rose, 2000, p.194) pointed out that: 'a flexible interchange of roles between teachers and LSAs worked well in facilitating the effective management of pupils with SEN: It provided pupils with variety in terms of personnel and that it created a picture of the LSAs as being available to support the whole class without singling out a pupil with SEN.'

Professional Development

Giangreco & Doyle (2004, p.193) claim that 'it is preferable, though still uncommon, for paraprofessionals to receive initial generic training in beginning their employment.' They add:

> Since most paraprofessionals typically are offered training after they begin working, it is essential to provide it as soon as possible. It can go a long way toward demonstrating respect for paraprofessionals to offer the training during their scheduled work hours or to pay them for time they spend outside their contracted work day.

Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren (2005, p.442) also highlight that a short and low-cost assistant training program could 'provide an immediate and potentially long-lasting positive impact on the interaction rate of students with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms'. They suggest that 'without proper training,

paraprofessionals can act in ways that unwittingly isolate and segregate the students whom they support. However, in a study by Farrell et al. (1999 as cited in Mistry et al. 2004, p.130) assistants complained that 'training had no impact on salary or career progression for the LSAs.'

Assistants in Dilemma

The roles of paraprofessionals have shifted from primarily non instructional tasks to increasingly instructional roles although there are different opinions in literature about which roles are appropriate (Minondo, Mayer & Xin, 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). Three factors that lead to dilemma for paraprofessionals are:

(1) Inappropriate utilization of paraprofessionals.

(2) The use of paraprofessional has emerged as 'the way' rather than 'a way' to operationalize inclusive education.

(3) Excessive paraprofessional proximity.

(Giangreco, Smith & Pinkney, 2006, p. 216)

Assistants are often delegated duties that would extend beyond the support-only role (Etscheidt, 2005, p. 74). Downing, Ryndak and Clark, 2000 in Etscheidt (2005, p. 74) reported that assistants were assigned 'behavioral support, lesson engagement, and adaptation or modification of curriculum'. However, Marks, Schrader and Levine (1999) argued that 'having paraprofessionals assume sole responsibility for inclusion was not an acceptable practice because it negated the importance of shared and collaborative decision making'.

Conclusion

Studies (Logan, 2006; Lawlor & Cregan, 2003; Carrig 2004) have identified that the increasing numbers of SNAs is now an integral part of the Irish education system. However, findings report that this role has evolved without clear definition, adequate preparation or appropriate training for SNAs to promote inclusion.

The developing role of SNAs in supporting pupils with SEN in mainstream school is welcomed by class teachers other teaching staff, pupils with SEN, parents of pupils with SEN, schools and the community. Lawlor & Cregan (2003, p. 87) found that eighty-four percent of SNAs reported being involved mainly in an educational role. Ninety-five percent of them were involved in educational tasks through literacy and numeracy activities. Teachers responding to the questionnaires stated that SNAs were involved in assisting with group work, assisting in reading, writing, mathematics, and tasks involving computer work.

The educational role of the SNA is in contrast to the roles outlined by the Department of Education and Science (DES SP. ED 07/02). As a result, SNAs

lack clear guidelines about roles and there are inconsistencies in practice. SNAs were reported to have different experiences regarding teamwork and collaboration with teachers. Logan (2006, p. 96) identifies that almost half of the teachers did not involve SNAs in planning and lack of time was identified as the main barrier. SNAs will have more challenges in the future especially when the anticipated full implementation of required IEPs is put into practice. The NCSE should develop a co-ordinated and nationally recognised programme of training of SNAs, not only to support the learning environment but also one that would link to career progression (Lawlor & Cregan , 2003).

International research is largely consistent with the emerging issues pertaining to the developing role of assistants in Irish schools. In their work in the USA, Giangreco & Broer, (2003, p.22) strongly remind us that 'we need to focus on the factors that have contributed to the expanded and inappropriate use of paraprofessionals'. They conclude with the advice:

> *… hire more qualified individuals, clarify roles, implement appropriate training, provide professionally prepared plans, ensure supervision, demonstrate appreciation, and improve compensation. Something about assistants playing a dominant role in teacher-type activities just doesn't fit.'*
> Giangreco & Broer, (2003, p.23)

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Good Teaching and EAL Students in Post-primary Schools

Zachary Lyons

Abstract

At a time when migrant student numbers are still growing, funding for English language support has been reduced and this is having a disproportionate impact on those schools with a high concentration of EAL students. In many ways, EAL students are like the "barium meal in the X-ray" showing up deficiencies in the schooling system that affect the progress of all students.

However, good practice in language support is evident in our classrooms as teachers strive to ensure that each EAL student has sufficient language skills not only to benefit from but also to contribute to the educational activities taking place in the school. This article looks at the background to this issue and discusses the work of the English Language Support Programme. It concludes by outlining some examples of good practice for teaching EAL students.

Background

The changing demographics of Irish society in recent years have had a major impact on the Irish education system at all levels. While in-migration and minority ethnic groups "*have been a reality in Ireland long before the moral panics created by the arrival of a relatively small number of asylum seekers in the 1990s*" (Lentin 2000, 8) the economic boom of the 1990s and a rise in the general East-West and South-North migrations resulted in profound changes in the volume and categories of migrants to Ireland. As a consequence of these migratory changes, a significant segment of students in post-primary schools in Ireland are now language minority studnets from multiple language backgrounds who are acquiring English as an additional language (EAL) to access the curriculum.

The figures show that the number of migrant students has risen from 17,000 in 2006 to 24,500 (or 8% of the school population) for 2008-2009.[1] Over 160 nationalities are represented (DES 2008) with 150 different languages being spoken by these students (DES 2007). Most post-primary schools are now linguistically and culturally complex social institutions (OECD 2009). All of this

1 John Curran, TD. Speaking at launch of the ESRI report "*Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students*," June 3, 2009.

is taking place against the backdrop of recent budgetary cuts which have seen, as outlined in *Circular 0015/2009* (Meeting the needs of pupils learning English as an Additional Language), the level of language support "*reduced to a maximum of two teachers per school, as was the case before 2007*". This has led to a decrease in language support teachers at post-primary level from 560 in the 2008/09 term to 365 for 2009/2010.

The challenge, then, is to find ways to effectively educate these migrant children at an age when the development of academic language skills becomes increasingly consequential and knowledge of subject matter content ever more critical. The difficulty of achieving this goal is made clear by the fact that in country after country children from migrant backgrounds typically perform markedly less well on standardised tests of academic knowledge and skills than do others (OECD 2006). There is evidence to suggest that this difference persists even after their socioeconomic background has been taken into account (OECD 2006, 2009).

Linguistic minority children and the curriculum

Since 2007, the Trinity Immigration Initiative English Language Support Programme for post-primary schools (ELSP), Trinity College Dublin, has been working closely with nearly 100 post-primary schools and has documented the understanding, attitudes, and daily practices of language support teachers in dealing with the increasing diversity in classrooms.[2] The ELSP also provides resources and activities for use in post-primary schools at both junior and senior cycles by language support, learning support and mainstream subject teachers and their students as well as INSET in schools nationwide.

Our research would suggest that the challenge at post-primary level is particularly acute for a number of reasons, including:

- The older EAL learners are the more academic language must be learnt in order to catch up with their English-speaking peers. Research by Collier (1987) suggests that 12-15 year-old EAL students experience the greatest difficulty in accessing the language of instruction. According to Cummins (2001), it takes five to nine years for a student to become proficient in the English language. EAL students might sound fluent in English within one or two years, as they can converse socially with others. However, it takes much longer for them to reach a level of academic fluency that is on the same level as their native-English-speaking peers.
- The academic English as used in textbooks and in the classroom is more difficult to understand and much more cognitively demanding for

2 The interim report (2007-2008) of this research can be accessed at www.elsp.ie or by contacting the author to obtain a hard copy.

students at this age. Academic English requires students to use linguistic skills to access higher-order thinking, to interpret, infer, and synthesise information; to pick out the main idea; to relate ideas and information to their background experiences; to recognise the conventions of different genres; and to recognise text structure. Students are progressively asked to use more academic English in increasingly more difficult and demanding ways.

- The post-primary curriculum is delivered by subject specialists whose formation has not prepared them to take account of EAL students in their classes.
- Whereas the Department of Education and Skills (DES)[3] funds teaching posts at primary level, it only pays for additional teaching hours at post-primary level. In some schools EAL language classes are assigned to teachers who do not have a full timetable, which can mean that such support is both marginal and haphazard.
- The final issue is the lack of adequately trained and supported EAL teachers within the system and a growing tendency for EAL to be conflated with SEN and/or resource teaching.

As Vygotsky (1962) points out, language is the most important mediation tool for learning. For education and learning to achieve their objectives, it is critical that students understand the academic language of school (Vollmer 2009). An inappropriate mastery of the language can hinder learning even in subjects such as mathematics. I use the following example during in-service training to illustrate this:

> *What gre der 3 grootste aantallen that dan gordt gamaakt using the cijfers 3, 4, 6, and 7? Elk cijfer must be used ngly een en elk aatallen. Merk uw antwoord.*
>
> *A. 7643*
> *B. 3467, 3476, 3647*
> *C. 7634, 7643, 7463*
> *D. 34, 36, 73*
> *E. 764* *And the answer is ……*

Invariably, a roomful of post-primary teachers (including mathematics teachers) can get this question wrong despite their own mathematical knowledge and the fact that *this is a question taken from a 4th class primary school level book*. The problem is simply one of language and this becomes evident when the question is translated back into English:

3 Formerly the Department of Education and Science, renamed Department of Education and Skills in March 2010.

What are the three biggest numbers that can be made using the digits 3, 4, 6, and 7? Each digit must be used just once in the number. Put them in order.

A. 7643
B. 3467, 3476, 3647
C. 7634, 7643, 7463
D. 34, 36, 73
E. 764

*And the answer or course is C (as most of us will also bring our mathematical knowledge to bear and recognise that to put in order usually means to put in **increasing** order).*

The complexity of the language used in teaching mathematics is evident even in the manner we choose to express something as simple as 4 times 4. It can be written, using symbols, as

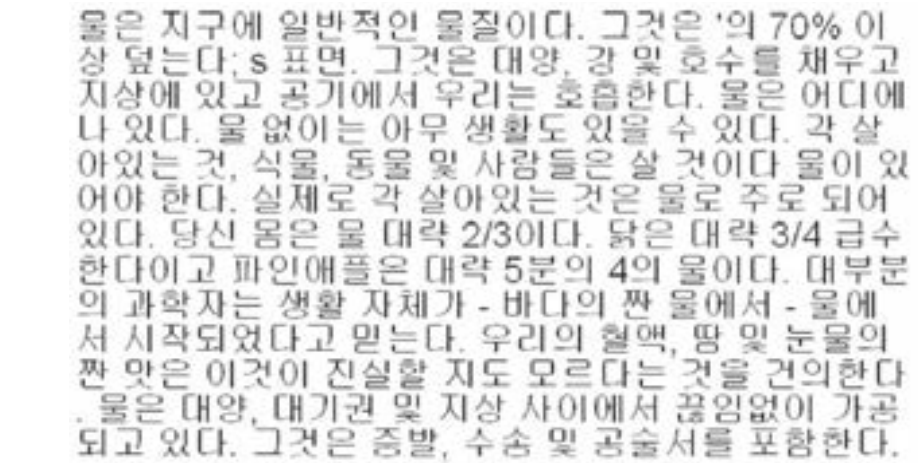
- *4 x 4*
- *4 . 4*
- *4 * 4*
- *4 X 4* (using a capital 'X')

or, in words,

- *4 by 4*
- *4 multiplied by 4*
- *4 multiply it by 4*
- *4 times 4*
- *four fours*
- *etc.*

While they all mean the same thing and will all amount to 16, for a language learner they are all separate phrases and each phrase may have to be taught to the student.

Although the link between linguistic minority children and educational underachievement is not a simple one, the language issue for students for whom English is not their first language is consistently identified as one of the biggest challenges (OECD 2009). An example I use when working with teachers will illustrate this. Essentially, the curriculum asks many linguistic minority children to move from something which can appear inaccessible such as this block of Korean text below (which is a direct translation of the English text) to the standard of language as used in the Geography textbook which follows it:


물은 지구에 일반적인 물질이다. 그것은 '의 70% 이
상 덮는다; s 표면. 그것은 대양, 강 및 호수를 채우고
지상에 있고 공기에서 우리는 호흡한다. 물은 어디에
나 있다. 물 없이는 아무 생활도 있을 수 있다. 각 살
아있는 것, 식물, 동물 및 사람들은 살 것이다 물이 있
어야 한다. 실제로 각 살아있는 것은 물로 주로 되어
있다. 당신 몸은 물 대략 2/3이다. 닭은 대략 3/4 급수
한다이고 파인애플은 대략 5분의 4의 물이다. 대부분
의 과학자는 생활 자체가 - 바다의 짠 물에서 - 물에
서 시작되었다고 믿는다. 우리의 혈액, 땀 및 눈물의
짠 맛은 이것이 진실할 지도 모르다는 것을 건의한다
. 물은 대양, 대기권 및 지상 사이에서 끊임없이 가공
되고 있다. 그것은 증발, 수송 및 공술서를 포함한다.

Water is the most common substance on earth. It covers more than seventy per cent of the earth's surface. It fills the oceans, rivers and lakes and is in the ground and in the air we breathe. Water is everywhere. Without water there can be no life. Every living thing, plants, animals and people must have water to live. In fact every living thing consists mostly of water. Your body is about two-thirds water. A chicken is about three-quarters water and a pineapple is about four-fifths water. Most scientists believe that life itself began in water - in the salty water of the sea. The salty taste of our blood, sweat and tears suggests that this might be true. Water is constantly being processed between the oceans, the atmosphere and the ground. It involves evaporation, transportation and deposition.

Literacy, then, is the ability to recognise and use the print language of school textbooks and exam papers in cognitively demanding ways with increasing complexity. Teaching EAL requires teachers to apply literacy pedagogies that help the language minority student to make connections between content and language. This must involve a process that is sequential, systematic and cognitive. Time alone, i.e., simply being exposed to English at school, does not ensure academic English learning. Language minority students need explicit support.

As mentioned earlier, there is a considerable difference between the language required for academic purposes and that required for daily conversation. This distinction between basic communication skills and the more cognitive/academic language processing skills required to access the curriculum has important policy and teaching implications. In terms of programme planning, it is important to realise that adolescent EAL students in schools may take five to eight years, on average, to become as proficient in using English in an academic context as their peers for whom English is their first language (Cummins 2001). While recognising that it is clearly not feasible for EAL students to receive

special withdrawal teaching for this extended period until they reach native-like proficiency in academic English, it behoves DES to urgently review the two-year cap on language support for students and to investigate alternative classroom practices rather than withdrawal.

This distinction is also at the root of my findings that many language support teachers express concerns about EAL students who speak English but still exhibit difficulties with class interactions and literacy tasks, which leads some to suspect SEN. To EAL specialists, this conflation of language support with SEN indicates that schools lack knowledge about the length of time and complexity of skills required in reaching full competency in English. Teachers must be taught to recognise and understand various language stages with a view to developing ways to address the needs of students at varying levels of language and literacy skills.

The ELSP website (www.elsp.ie)

EAL students are like the "*barium meal in the X-ray*" (Bourne 2003, 5) showing up deficiencies in the schooling system that affect the progress of all students. One example of transforming the way we teach post-primary subjects is the innovative curricular language approach taken by the ELSP and delivered through its website at www.elsp.ie (Figure 1 below). For each subject at both Junior and Senior Cycle, the contents of the most commonly used textbooks were scanned into a computer. The next step involved the use of a specialised software programme which extracted all the keywords and grammar unique to each particular subject. This process is called *corpus linguistics*. Finally, nearly 300 language support activity unit booklets for different topic areas for most of the Junior and Senior Cycle subjects were developed, with each booklet running to 25-28 pages. These booklets and a host of other materials are freely available for download from the website.

Figure 1: The English Language Support Programme homepage

Teachers have been using these materials in language support classrooms and in SEN and mainstream subject classrooms since January 2009 and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. As well as encouraging students to activate their previous curricular and language knowledge (and, in particular, their first language), the materials allow the teacher to focus on the language required to convey the content. The utility of this approach can be seen in the example below (Figure 2) which shows how teaching the keywords can form an initial bridge between the '*inaccessible*' text we saw earlier and the content of the topic (in this case, the Water Cycle) with our knowledge of the topic being activated as certain words are recognised in the text.

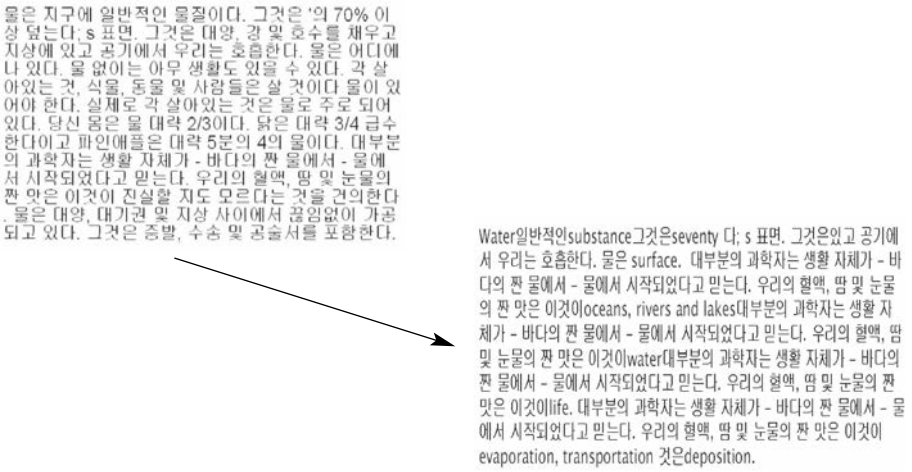


Figure 2: Keywords in the Water Cycle text.

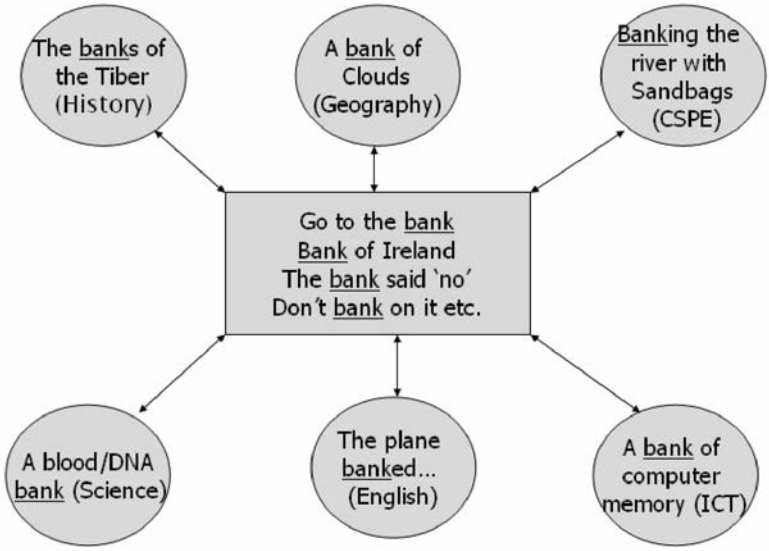
Teaching and assessment approaches that work

The challenge with EAL learners is to scaffold their comprehension of both the textbook and the teacher's instructions, to make visible the role language plays in the subject and to tap into the learner's relevant background knowledge. It is important to stress that in the last three years working in schools I have witnessed exemplary good practice. Some great teaching is taking place in our schools. To finish off this article, I would like to outline some of the elements of this good practice I have recorded.

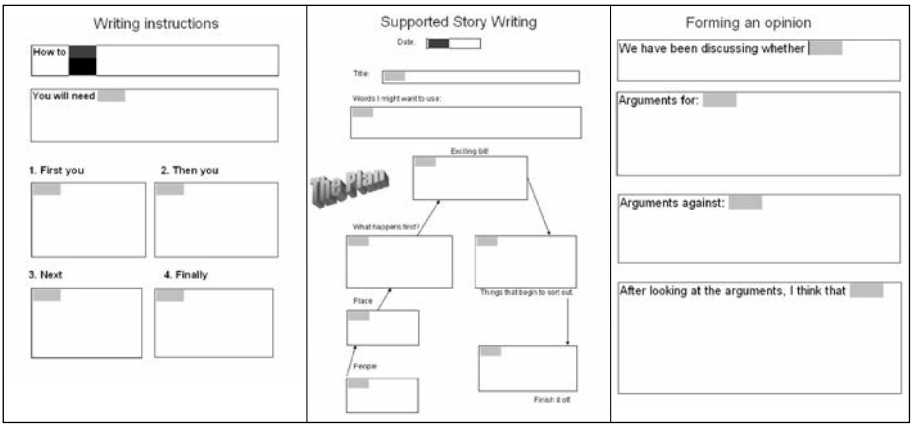
First off, good teachers recognise that the child learns by unconsciously generating rules and that their errors often indicate that learning is taking place. They learn language in meaningful, supportive, and communicative settings and they may understand more than they can say and will go through a Silent Period (as its name suggests, the student will not respond). They will also require a lot of time to become fluent in the academic language required at this level.

Teachers of EAL students should:

- Announce the lesson's objectives and activities, and list instructions step-by-step.
- Identify main principles, achievable objectives and key vocabulary.
- Provide frequent summations of the salient points of a lesson and always emphasise key vocabulary words.
- Pre-teach vocabulary.
- Repeat information and review frequently. If a student does not understand, try rephrasing or paraphrasing in shorter sentences and simpler syntax. Check often for understanding but do not ask "*Do you understand?*" Instead, have students demonstrate their learning in order to show comprehension.
- Simplify the language used to explain the content, not the content itself.
- Try to avoid idioms and slang words.
- Enunciate clearly, add gestures, point directly to objects or draw pictures when appropriate.
- Write clearly, legibly, and in print—many students have difficulty reading cursive.
- Access and build upon students' prior knowledge and their first language(s) if possible.
- Ask appropriate questions to facilitate student interaction about their prior knowledge and experiences.
- Extend wait-time for their oral responses to questions (this is more difficult than you can imagine!).
- Make ample use of Bilingual dictionaries as well as use of visuals such as maps, charts, graphs and pictures.
- Create vocabulary cards and make sure that students have vocabulary notebooks.
- Teach vocabulary before, during, and after reading from the textbook.
- Key vocabulary should be emphasised across all content areas (to take one example, the word 'bank' below)



- Utilise peers to facilitate learning and sharing ways of thinking.
- Implement paired and buddy reading activities.
- Teach through cooperative learning activities.
- Encourage native language support from peers and parents (or adults from the language community in question).
- Get the student to **WRITE, WRITE** and then **WRITE** some more. Make appropriate and consistent use of writing frames to support writing (such frames as those below are freely available online).



- Revisit and review previously taught lessons and vocabulary.
- Use fair and appropriate assessment strategies.
- Use a variety of assessment strategies tied to instructional strategies.
- Recognise student success overtly and frequently. But, also be aware that in some cultures overt, individual praise is considered inappropriate and can therefore be embarrassing or confusing to the student.
- Be easy on the red pen with emergent English writers, focusing on message rather than form.
- Provide systematic and explicit instruction on whatever component skills are deficient: phonics, fluency, vocabulary, reading comprehension strategies, etc.

Finally, language development is an active process and students learn English most effectively when they are actively involved in the process of communicating with you, the teacher, and with each other. Working with their native English-speaking peers is very useful and is to be encouraged. And remember, what is good for EAL students is good for all students as good teaching is, after all … good teaching!

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Using corpus linguistics, he and his team have designed Junior and Leaving Certificate curricular-driven keywords, grammar and associated language support materials (worksheets) for curricular subjects which are available free for download from www.elsp.ie and his report along with Prof. David Little into English language support provision in post-primary schools "*English Language Support in post-primary schools in Ireland: Provision, Challenges and Deficits*" was published in May 2009.

The role of Education Centres in delivering ICT in SEN as part of a Continuing Professional Development programme for primary and secondary school teachers.

John Phayer

"We've come so far, we've reached so high,
we're still so young and we hope for more".

Abstract

The primary purpose of this article focuses upon describing the important role which Education Centres play in promoting and providing Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Special Educational Needs (SEN) courses and discussing ways that these centres can enhance their ICT in SEN support service. This theme evolved from findings provided by teachers who participated in an ICT in SEN course focusing on specialised educational software used in a classroom context. The data for this study was extracted through the medium of questionnaires and interviews. The ICT in SEN course was delivered as part of a Continuing Professional Development programme organised in both an Education Centre and a post primary school over two blocks of 5 weeks (i.e. 10 weeks in total). Initially twenty one teachers signed up for the course of which fourteen fully participated in the programme. One of the main findings of the study was that the location, the number and types of courses offered by Education Centres could be a contributing factor in a more positive uptake of them by teachers. Teachers also indicated being unfamiliar with many of the most popular applications used in the field of Special Educational technology. There was a strongly held view by the participants that the medium in which courses are advertised and promoted is critical for their continued interest. Being able to make more practical use of the software, achieving a good working guide of ICT and identifying the most appropriate software to suit student needs are areas which emerged as being quite important traits of a technology course from a teacher's perspective. Providing more appropriate ICT in SEN training seminars that are target specific for teachers in the use of this technology on a regular basis, possibility providing an information service which compare and contrast different types of other Assistive Technology and how they are

used in a school setting and offering appropriate sources of journal type information could be used as a reference point. The possibility of offering mailing list / blogging / online chat facilities or even a drop in facility could be the key in increasing teacher interest in taking up these courses and enhancing their knowledge in this field. Education Centres could examine their ICT in SEN service currently delivered and identify additional areas of further support where necessary.

Introduction

The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE, 2000: 4) once stated that the interest amongst teachers in using Information Communication Technology (ICT) for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was extremely high. It is a well known fact that as more computer software is being developed and marketed in the field of ICT in education, there is an important requirement for all those in the teaching profession to update their ICT skills. Although ICT is used to engage students with information, the real interest is in focusing on how it can be made to improve learning. Some of the difficulties expressed by teachers in relation to Special Educational technology include (a) seeking assistance in making efficient decisions in purchasing this technology (b) acquiring appropriate knowledge and sufficient resources to use this technology in not just SEN, but in all areas of education (NCTE, 2000: 4). By examining this theme more deeply, one way in which many teachers needs have been addressed is with the evolution of Education Centres established well over a quarter of a century ago. Education Centres continue to support the needs of the individual teacher by delivering an assortment of Continuing Professional Development courses. Fullan (1991, cited in Second Level Support Service (SLSS: 2002)) once stated that 'as long as there is the need for improvement, namely, forever, there will be a need for professional development'. The research reported in this paper responds to findings made by primary and post primary teachers who participated in an ICT in SEN course focusing on specific special educational technology. It attempts to emphasise the importance of how these centres can provide more of these courses and also outline how they can possibly enhance their ICT in SEN service for teachers.

Primary Research Question

In approaching a survey to examine how Education Centres deliver ICT in SEN courses for teachers, a primary research question was established which asked "How can Education Centres continue to enhance the delivery of ICT in SEN courses specialising in Special Educational technology software for primary and secondary school teachers?"

Secondary Research Questions

Within this primary research question, a number of secondary questions emerged which included:

- What are teacher's views about participating in ICT in SEN courses?
- What types of ICT courses have teachers participated in the past?
- What other areas of ICT in SEN courses would teachers be interested in participating in the future?
- What difficulties do teachers encounter in obtaining information about specific Assistive technology software for Special Needs students?
- How can Education Centres improve their role in delivering additional ICT in SEN courses?
- What additional supports and services could be made available to these support teachers in the area of ICT in SEN?

This article attempts to address such questions and in the process emphasise the important role which Education Centres play in promoting ICT in SEN courses for teacher professional development.

What is Continuing Professional Development in Education?

Gray (2005: 5) states that the term Continuing Professional Development (also known as CPD) was coined by Richard Gardner around the 1970's. The phrase 'Professional Development' is a term that is used interchangeably with other such terms like 'staff development', 'in-service', 'skills training' and 'continuing education' (Bredeson, 2000: 387). The SLSS (2002: 4) organisation state that many definitions exist to explain Continuing Professional Development, 'given the complexity of the task' (SLSS, 2002: 4). The SLSS organisation (2002: 3) makes the suggestion that 'the professional development of teachers is about teachers enquiring into their own practice'. Taking this concept on board, Gray (2005: 5) claims that Continuing Professional Development embraces the idea of individuals aiming for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job. In relation to teaching, this type of development was referred to 'in-service training' or INSET whereby the emphasis was placed on the 'delivery' rather than the 'outcome'. One specific definition outlined by (Bredeson and Johansson, 2000, cited in SLSS, 2002: 4) suggest:

> 'Professional Development refers to learning opportunities that engage teacher's creative and reflective capacities to strengthen their practice'

The **Training Development Agency for Schools (TDA, 2009)** offer their perspective of Continuing Professional Development which 'consists of reflective activity designed to improve an individuals attributes, knowledge, understanding and skills' and continue to state that it 'supports individual needs and improves professional practice'. Interestingly, *Section 39 of The Teaching Council Act 2001* offers its remit on CPD as to 'advise the Minister in relation to ... the professional development of teachers' and further states:

> 'it shall promote the continuing education and training and professional development of teacher; conduct research into the continuing education, training and professional development of teachers; promote awareness among the teaching profession and the public of the benefits of continuing education, training and professional development; review and accredit programmes relating to the continuing education and training of teachers; perform other such functions in relation to the continuing education, training and Continuing Professional Development of teachers as may be assigned to the Council by the Minister' (Teaching Council, 2009).

Guskey (2002: 382) makes the point that the main reason which attracts teachers to professional development is that it is their strongly held belief that 'it will expand their knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth and enhance their effectiveness with students'. The NCTE (2009) state that the professional development of teachers has been widely recognised as being the main factor in allowing for the most effective method of integrating ICT into schools.

What is an Education Centre?

An Education Centre is the main location where Continuing Professional Development programmes are delivered for teachers. Specialised courses focusing on the area of ICT and Special Needs are organised and developed by the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) aimed specifically at teachers and are delivered through the medium of these Education Centres (NCTE, 2009) which play an integral role in facilitating local requirements (NCTE, 2009). Currently, there are 21 full time Education Centres and 9 part time centres (Department of Education and Science; DES, 2009) in Ireland. The Education Act (1998: 33) offers a comprehensive definition of an Education Centre as being:

> 'a place in which services are provided for schools, teachers, parents, boards and other relevant persons which support them in carrying out their functions in respect of the provision of education which is recognised for that purpose by the Minister…'

Principal activities of the Education Centre

The role of the Education Centre has become an ever evolving and diverse place over the past number of years. The Education Centre was originally called a 'Teachers Centre' (Association of Teacher Education Centre of Ireland, ATECI, 2006) and these centres acted as a location which organise the local delivery of national programmes of teacher professional development on behalf of the Department of Education and Science (DES). The term 'Teachers Centre' changed in the *1998 Education Act* and was renamed as an 'Education Support Centre' which refers to the

> 'new and wider remit of centres to reach out and forge links with the wider school community in the context of the promotion and enhancement of teaching and learning'

The Department of Education and Science (DES, 2009) also point out that under their leadership, Education Centres deliver programmes relating to curriculum reform and support services that focus on delivering a range of issues related to the area of teaching and learning. The DES (2009) also states that Education Centres mainly provide a range of supports and services to address the needs of teachers and schools in various locations within a region. The Second Level Support Service (SLSS: 2002: 12) describe another role of an Education Centre as providing leadership at local level and also having a widening contribution in the national scheme of things which could encompass organising different activity programmes for teachers, school management and parents (ATECI, 2006). Other roles of the Education Centre entail acting as a meeting place for primary and post primary teachers and providing an opportunity for them to discuss issues / difficulties related to their work. The centre also acts as a resource centre which enables teachers to prepare and construct equipment and other materials for use in their school and amongst other schools in the locality as well as arranging in-service courses (ATECI, 2006).

In-service course studies

Kavanagh (1993: 93) states that the need for good in-service is highly important, because it enables teachers to acquire the attitudes and skills needed for successfully implementing a changed curriculum and that 'once off events are not effective' (Kavanagh, 1993: 52, cited in SLSS, 2002: 8). One study carried out in Ireland, by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS, 2002: 1) aimed at examining in career development of teachers and investigated some of the issues involved in providing in-service courses as well as how teachers needs were being addressed from a principals perspective (SLSS, 2002: 3). The study targeted twenty-four principals through the medium of questionnaires and in-depth interviews with five of these principals (SLSS, 2002: 1 and 3). The impact of this survey was that (a) it would establish a base line indicator of the professional needs of teaching staff as perceived by principals (b) inform the work of in-service programme planners (c) inform future practice of in-service provision (SLSS, 2002: 2) and (d) inform the design of further more comprehensive research (SLSS, 2002: 3). A wide variety of results emerged from the study. Firstly, 83% of respondent principals indicated they had two or more programmes on offer in their school which indicated that the level of programme provision entailed a large commitment to in-service for schools involved. Next, 42% of principals identified new programmes as the basis of professional development for their schools to date (SLSS, 2002: 8). Principals indicated priorities for additional areas of in-service especially in the area of IT and in other areas related to student learning needs. (SLSS, 2002: 10). The

majority of responses also believed that continuing professional development programmes were very important in all cases and indicated they really valued the potential of in-service for effecting change and enhancing school provision (SLSS, 2002: 10). Finally, principals also showed a commitment to the field of continuing professional development and expressed high satisfaction rating with the quality of support received to date (SLSS, 2002: 16).

Organisation and timing of Programme

Both of the ICT in SEN classes were delivered on a Wednesday afternoon and a Thursday night which lasted 2.5 hours in duration over two blocks of five weeks each (i.e. ten weeks in total) in an Education Centre and a classroom of a post primary school. Although the course was aimed to teach teachers how to use the different Assistive Technology applications, other themes were covered like demonstrating and providing specific resources for teachers in using this technology in a classroom environment. The course commenced with the tutor / researcher providing an overview of Assistive Technology software used in the field of Special Educational Technology using Microsoft Powerpoint. This was followed by the teachers learning to use one particular special educational technology program chosen by the tutor which was believed to be a good starting point to introduce these teachers. The tutor designed supplementary handouts containing screenshots so that the teachers did not rely too heavily on text for explanation of the programs features and to help those participants who were not too competent using ICT A ten minute break was taken after one hour class which was then followed by an introduction into the next type of software. A record was kept for each class which contained information on the themes / features covered, problems encountered by the participants or even suggestions made by teachers to look at other areas of Special Educational technology. This approach was adapted for the following weeks' lessons. Each session commenced with an opportunity for the teachers to outline any problems / difficulties which they found with the previous weeks topic. Problems were addressed by the researcher and were recorded for future planning purposes.

The Teachers

Each of the participants were either Learning Support or Resource teachers at primary or post primary school level and were in the age groups between 25 years old to 60 years of age. Four participants were mainstream teachers while there were 12 females and 2 males. The teachers informed the researcher they had roughly between 3 - 4 students who had a variety of Learning Difficulties including those with Dyslexia. All the teachers stated they were not fully knowledgeable or skilled enough in making comprehensive use of ICT in the classroom and felt apprehensive about using the software in the course. In the Education Centre, each teacher was assigned an individual computer to operate the software in the laboratory, while the eight teachers in the post primary school shared three laptops between themselves in a mainstream classroom.

Research tools used in the study

Questionnaires

The first format of this survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire fully completed by 14 out of 21 teachers. As the SLSS (2002: 3) declares this method was used to provide a collection of both qualitative and quantitative findings which 'could be used to enhance and authenticate it'. De Vaus (2002, cited in Lyons, 2009: 49) claims that questionnaires 'have the advantage of reaching more people within the school community'. The range of questions examined issues like (a) general information about the numbers and types of ICT in SEN courses attended; (b) teachers viewpoints about participating in these courses and aspirations about future courses related to ICT in SEN; and finally (c) the means which these teachers obtained information about the course in question.

Interviews

The second format which this survey took was through the method of interviews. Silverman (2001, cited in Lyons, 2009: 50) states that although questionnaires have the advantage whereby they can target larger groups of individuals; they are restrictive by means of not allowing for clarifications of meanings. Interviews have this benefit of allowing for clarifications between the interviewer and interviewee. The interview also allowed the researcher to search for 'depth of response and to seek honesty and candour which are the hallmarks of qualitative data' (SLSS, 2002: 4).

Findings

This article specifically aimed at discussing the important role which Education Support Centres play in promoting and delivering specialised ICT in SEN courses focusing on Special Educational Technology as part of a Continuing Professional Development programme and how they can possibly further enhance the Special Educational technology service for teachers. This was achieved by describing the issues and problems facing teachers related to participating in ICT in SEN courses through questionnaires and interviews. Specific themes being examined here include: (a) general information about the numbers and types of ICT in SEN courses attended (b) teachers opinions about the benefits of participating in these courses and aspirations about future courses based on the same idea (c) the different mediums in which teachers obtained information about the ICT in SEN course. In this study, 14 out of 21 (N = 14) teachers participated in the programme and the following results depict their views as follows.

The study commenced by asking teachers to state when **"they attended the last in-service course" (Fig. 1**)

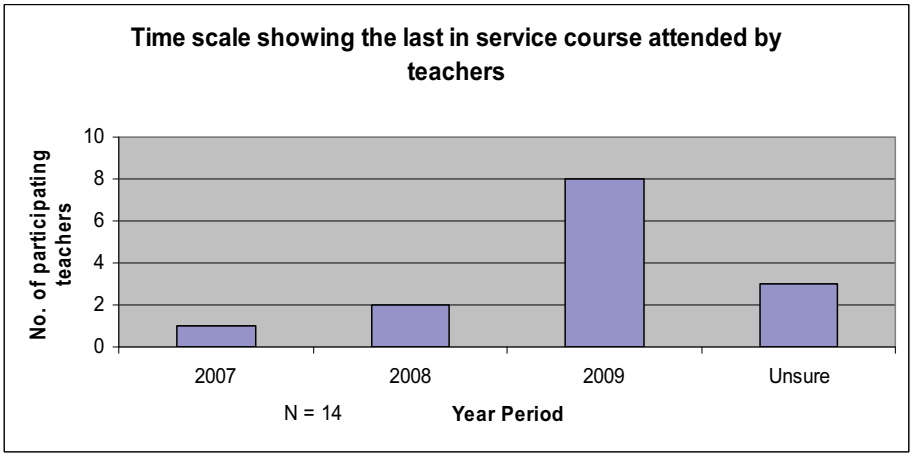

Fig. 1: Time scale showing the last in-service course attended by teachers

From the findings, 57.14% of teachers attended a course during the current academic year, while 14.28% indicated in 2008, while 7.14% indicated 2007 and interestingly 21.42% indicated they were unsure. One teacher, BOC (Questionnaire, 2009) indicated 'last summer of 2008'. On a similar note, the next question asked participants to state **which provenience teachers attended their ICT in SEN course in? (Fig. 2)**

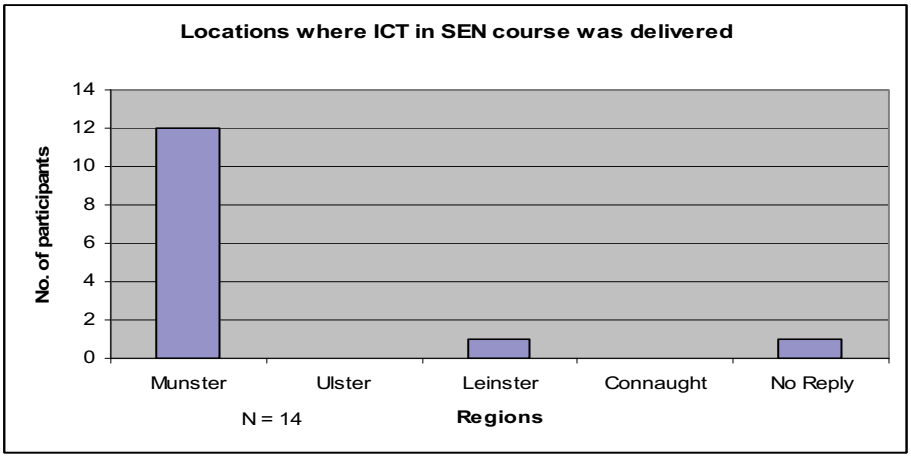

Fig. 2: Locations where ICT in SEN courses was delivered

The results demonstrated that 85.71% of teachers partook in the in-service course in "the Munster region", 7.14% of teachers indicated Leinster and 7.14% of teachers indicated "no reply". No important commentary was provided for this question. The next important element of the study asked teachers **"how many ICT in SEN courses have they attended / participated in the past?" (Fig. 3)**

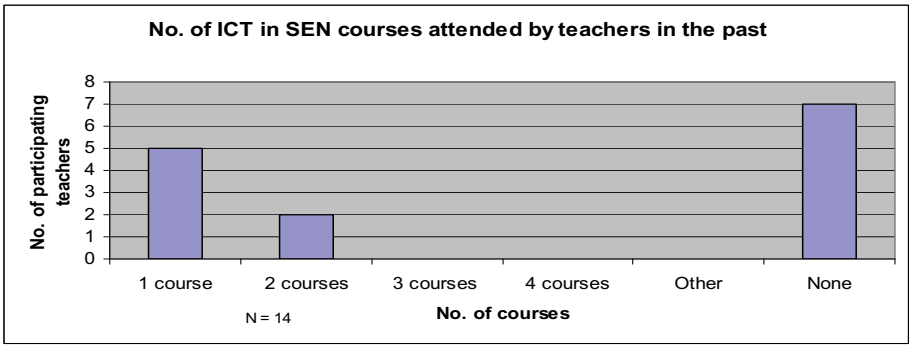

Fig. 3: Number of ICT in SEN courses attended by teachers in the past

From the findings, 35.71% of teachers indicated 1 course, 14.28% of teachers indicated two courses while amazingly 50% of teachers indicated "none". No specific commentary was provided about this question. As a follow-up to this question, teachers were asked to indicate **"the types of general / ordinary computer classes that they attended in the past".** Two teachers BK and AMM (Questionnaire, 2009) indicated 'they attended none' while interesting comments emerged from AOD (Questionnaire, 2009) who stated "Computer classes were provided as part of secondary and third level education" and WS (Interview, 2009) stated she attended "lots of courses going back to initial courses about 10 years ago". MM (Questionnaire, 2009) stated "she attended approximately two ECDL courses" while MC (Questionnaire, 2009) stated "she attended a term of computers which was a ten week night class course on basic computers that lasted three hours, one day a week". BN (Questionnaire Date) "she attended several types based on ECDL, another one which was part of a Grad Dip Ed (Business) in a third level university". One teacher JF (Questionnaire, 2009) indicated "none – I am self taught" while AMM

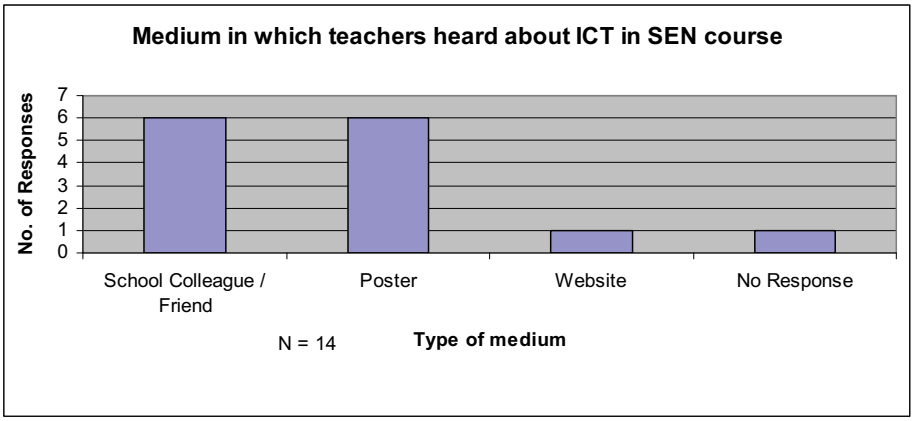

Fig. 4: Medium in which teachers heard about ICT in SEN course

(Questionnaire, 2009) indicated "classes on Powerpoint, Whiteboard, Microsoft Word, an on-line course with the NCTE and a course in an Education Centre – 3 or 4 in total".

The next question focused upon asking teachers **"how they heard about the course?" (Fig. 4)**

From the findings, 42.85% of teachers indicated "school colleague / friend" while another 42.85% of teachers indicated a 'poster', 7.14% indicated a "website" and another 7.14% of participants indicated "no response" Amazingly, one teacher indicated she "saw this course advertised on the education centres website" LJ (Questionnaire, 2009). No specific commentary was provided about this question.

One of the most critical questions to be examined as part of delivering this special educational technology course was **"identifying what the teachers would like to achieve as a result of participating in the course"**. Responses such as identifying what software is available, becoming more confident using the technology, further enhancing ICT skills evolved as the most important findings to this question. A broad range of comments emerged like: BB (Questionnaire, 2009) stated she "would like to improve her ICT literacy", while MM (Questionnaire, 2009) stated that "she would like to have a few basic and inexpensive programmes that she could use with her pupils" while LJ (Questionnaire, 2009) stated "she would like to know what software is available" while WS (Questionnaire, 2009) stated she "would like to be able to make more practical use of Assistive Technology in the classroom environment". Two teachers who were of a similar opinion like BK, (Questionnaire, 2009) states "she would like a good guide to ICT filter through what is good and bad" while BOC (Questionnaire, 2009) stated "she would like to *familarise* herself with software that is available and the *best choice* of software". One teacher MM (Questionnaire and Interview, 2009) indicated "she would really like to become proficient in the software available to her rather than software she will probably be unable to purchase (due to lack of funds) especially StarSpell and Clicker. Another teacher LJ (Questionnaire, 2009) stated "it feels like a taster for the few programs we used".

The next question to be examined asked **"teachers what other areas of ICT in SEN courses would they like to learn about in the future?"** Providing a working guide to ICT and filtering through what's good and bad, being able to make more practical use of Assistive Technology, becoming more confident in using the technology, enhancing ICT skills and identifying the most appropriate software to suit the needs of students predominated as additional areas of ICT in SEN that teachers would like to learn about in the future. From the findings, three teachers did not provide any commentary regarding this point, but interestingly the other teachers remarked a number of comments such as MC

(Questionnaire, 2009), stated "I am not sure of *what* other courses are available. I would be interested in other courses". AOD (Questionnaire, 2009) remarked that "she would like to learn more about an ICT in SEN course related to ADHD and Autism" while BB (Questionnaire, 2009) she "would like to participate in an ICT in SEN course regarding sentence structure development and paragraph building". MM (Questionnaire, 2009) stated that "she would like to learn about software that deals with digital photos and combining these with word processing" while LJ (Questionnaire, 2009) stated that "she would like to learn techniques in setting up ICT tutorials".

The final question asked teachers to indicate **"if they were subscribed to a particular mailing list to obtain notifications about further training courses relating to ICT and Special Needs?" (Fig. 5)**

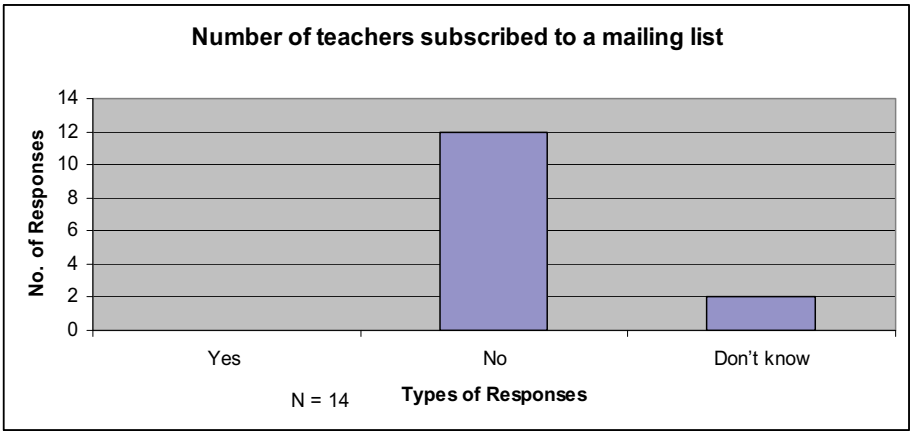

Fig. 5: Number of teachers subscribed to a mailing list

From the findings, 85.71% of teachers indicated "No", while 14.28% indicated "Don't know". Interestingly, two of the teachers that indicated "No" stated "they would like to be subscribed to a list".

Conclusion

The above article concentrated on examining how Education Centres could improve the promotion and delivery of ICT in SEN courses and possibly identifying ways to enhance their ICT in SEN service for primary and post-primary teachers. This was followed by outlining the primary and secondary research questions being examined in this document. The topic of Continuing Professional development was examined which was closely followed by discussing the term Education Centre and its principal activities. A study showing the uptake of teacher in-service courses was also provided which was then followed by outlining the timing, organisation and delivery of the

programme. A brief description was provided about the research tools used in the study. The document finally concluded with a detailed description of the findings that evolved in the study. Special measures in the way which Education Centres can improve their ICT in SEN service for teachers can take the form of (a) provide more ICT in SEN training seminars on a regular basis that are target specific for teachers in the use of this technology, (b) provide a drop in service to inform teachers about latest technologies (c) provide online service that can provide teachers with latest information about special educational technology or create discussion group service e.g. blogging / chat facilities (d) work with conference organisations in obtaining up-to-date information about cutting edge technologies (e) provide more appropriate sources of journal type information as a reference point for teachers. Education Centres have played a highly important and successful role in delivering many professional courses for teachers at primary and post primary level in the past. It must be constantly remembered that teacher's needs are forever changing. At the same time, teachers must try to educate themselves and research about the latest technologies used in this field. It is vital that all Education Centres continue to focus on examining and delivering appropriate ICT in SEN training to support teachers at all levels as part of a CPD programme in addition to Education Centres reviewing their programme service to suit the needs of teachers. As Guskey (2002: 381) states quite aptly 'high quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education'.

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Developing Effective Instructional Strategies for Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms

Donna McGhie-Richmond, Kathryn Underwood and Anne Jordan

Abstract

The skills for effective teaching were investigated among elementary teachers working in inclusive classrooms to determine whether the appearance of 'constructivist' skills are independent of, or follow from the mastery of teaching behaviors that are more transmissive in nature. The data were extracted from the Classroom Observation Scale (COS) (Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998) based on half-day observations of 63 teachers.Using a canonical discriminant functions analysis, a set of COS items distinguishing effective from less effective teachers was identified. The sequence of instructional practices appears to be cumulative rather than differentiated. Patterns of teaching behaviours were consistent across the range of students in the classrooms, with some evidence that academically 'at risk' students received less teacher attention and differentiated instruction than students with and without disabilities.

Inclusion is now the recommended service delivery policy in most educational jurisdictions in Canada. Furthermore, a growing body of research evidence speaks in favour of an inclusive approach to the education of students with learning difficulties (Ainscow, 1999; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Villa & Thousand, 2000). The heterogeneous nature of today's classrooms means that the responsibility for teaching an increasingly diverse group of students falls largely to the general education classroom teacher. Teachers are not only required to meet rigorous curriculum standards, but also to respond to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. While many teachers support the philosophy of inclusion and believe it is both academically and socially beneficial to students with special needs, as well as their peers (Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997), others have expressed skepticism and mixed opinions about the potential benefits, as well as an expectation of the problems inherent in inclusion, particularly when it comes to classroom implementation (D'Alonzo, Giordano, & Vanleuven, 1997). Elementary teachers are generally unwilling to adapt their instructional practices to include the breadth of learner differences in their classrooms, although they are more likely to do so where such adaptations can be incorporated into the overall classroom routines than when they are specialized to accommodate the needs of individual learners

(Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Karns, & Phillips, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon, & Rothlein, 1994; Schumm, Vaughn, Haager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Saumell, 1995). It may be the case that teachers learn to develop such skills as a result of considerable classroom experience and only after mastery of other skills, and that only the most proficient teachers reach this level of development.

The study reported here lies at the intersection of two areas of research: effective instruction in elementary regular education classrooms in general, and the nature of instruction provided to students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings. There has been limited analysis of the instructional experiences of students with disabilities and students at risk for school failure in regular or inclusive settings. Considerable research has identified specific teacher behaviours as predictors of student achievement (Brophy & Good, 1986; Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992). In addition to classroom and time management elements, much of this research examines the process of teaching; how teachers structure their lessons, ask questions, and provide feedback to students (Brophy &Good, 1986; Rosenshine &Stevens, 1986). Several studies subscribe to the importance of a social constructivist view of learning primarily evidenced in teacher-student interaction through dialogue in advanced placement classrooms (Henderson, Winitzky, & Kauchak, 1996), in mathematics (Muijs & Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds & Muijs, 1999), in science (Lapadat, 2000; Roth, Anderson, & Smith, 1987) as well as in reading (Mariage, 1995; Pressley, Hogan, Wharton-McDonald, & Mistretta, 1996).

Based on Vygotsky's (1978) work, teacher-student dialogue is considered to be at the heart of knowledge building in the classroom. Teachers who are considered to be effective, "apprentice students in the language, dialogue, and actions of the skilled problem solver" (Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992, p. 72).Wells (1998) refers to this mediating role of dialogue in building knowledge as 'dialogic responsivity'. Through dialogue, effective teachers are able to calibrate their instruction according to their students' responses in a sequence of teacher-student interactions and thereby meet the range of learner needs in their classrooms. Thus, according to 'constructivist pedagogy' (Brophy, 2004), effective teachers are presumed not to transmit knowledge, but to co-construct it with their students through dialogical interaction. On the other hand, students with disabilities are known to benefit from direct instruction in which teachers transmit skills and knowledge in a structured sequence designed to make explicit the steps required to reach mastery (Swanson, 1999; Swanson, Hoskyn, & Lee, 1999). Indeed, the lack of opportunity for direct instruction in regular classrooms is often claimed as a reason to place students with learning disabilities in special education settings.

The literature on instructional characteristics in general education classrooms reveals a prevalent assumption that teachers who assist their students to construct knowledge are more effective than those who transmit it. The more extreme of these claims holds that the two styles of teaching are mutually

exclusive, and are derived from fundamentally different sets of epistemological beliefs. Torff (1999, 2003) and Torff and Sternberg (2001) claim that teachers who are constructivist in their teaching style view learning as centered in the development of skills and knowledge in the child, while those who are transmissive are focussed on the delivery of curriculum and on the efficiency of information flow to the learner. Olson & Katz (2001) claim that curriculum-centered, transmissive techniques of instruction that maximize the flow of knowledge to the learner are derived from several teacher beliefs. These beliefs include (a) knowledge is fixed and external to the knower and (b) learning and ability are psychological characteristics or traits that are internal to the learner and not likely to be changed through learning. Likewise, some teachers view disabilities as fixed, internal characteristics of learners, unlikely to be affected by learning (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003, 2004). Torff (2003) claims that novice teachers engage in direct instruction by transmitting content knowledge "based on the belief that learning is tantamount to memorization" (p. 563). As teachers develop expertise, their skills increase for promoting higher order thinking with a simultaneous decrease in the emphasis placed on covering content. According to Torff, experienced teachers do not automatically develop such expertise. Torff asserts that the instruction of some teachers tends to show a decrease in content knowledge while failing to increase techniques that promote higher order thinking skills. In research on instructional practices that assist learners with disabilities, one of the most frequently cited criticisms is the lack of constructivist pedagogy that leads to higher order thinking skills (Trent, Artilles, & Englert, 1998). In this study we examine the evidence for such claims using an empirical database of classroom observations conducted with 63 general education elementary classroom teachers.

The Classroom Observation Scale (COS) (Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998) is comprised of instructional skills and techniques derived from the literature on effective teaching (Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992). The 27 items on the COS comprise constructivist and teacher-directed elements, as well as a broad array of classroom and time management and lesson presentation skills. If the claims described above are accurate, there will be different patterns in the instructional techniques that high-scoring and therefore, more effective teachers, use predominantly in their elementary classrooms compared to lower-scoring, less effective teachers and those who are novices. Instructional patterns should emerge as distinct clusters of COS items, some relating to constructivist skills which promote higher-order thinking, and others to transmissive elements in which the teacher manages the flow of information. If Torff and colleagues are correct, teachers with high scores on the COS would show a predominance of constructivist elements with very few transmissive elements in their teaching repertoire compared to lower scoring teachers, who will show the opposite pattern. Any differences in instructional patterns should also differentiate novice teachers from those teachers with longer teaching experience. If this proves to be the case, it suggests that teachers may acquire instructional skills along a

developmental sequence that is not simply cumulative, but represents a switch in emphasis from transmission to constructivist techniques at some point along the career span of those who excel.

In addition to examining teachers' instructional patterns with the class as a whole, we took a 'child's eye view'of instruction, by examining what specific instructional interactions took place between the teacher and each of two students in each class; one designated as exceptional, and one who was identified by the teacher as academically at risk. Students were designated as exceptional if they were on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and were rated by their teachers as being substantially below the class average. By monitoring the quantity and type of instruction received by two such students in each class, we investigated whether the instructional style that each teacher customarily used with the students in the class as a whole was also used with students who are exceptional and at risk, or whether such students received a different instructional treatment. We speculated that novice and less effective teachers, with their focus on delivering curriculum, might direct their instruction to the overall class and pay little attention to the students at the low end of the range of achievement in the class, whereas effective teachers, who presumably subscribe to a social constructivist view of learning, would be more likely to adapt their instruction to meet the academic needs of the two students whom we monitored. It should be noted that teachers were not aware of which students were being monitored. The rating of instruction received by two specific students can therefore inform us about the breadth of instructional adaptations of teachers, and whether there are differences between teachers in relation to their predominant teaching patterns with the class overall and with adapting instruction for individual students.

Specifically, our research questions were three-fold:

1. Is there evidence that effective teachers (as indicated by those who score high on the COS) use instructional techniques that can be described as constructivist and do these techniques discriminate them from less effective teachers? Conversely, does a predominance of transmissive instructional techniques discriminate the teaching practices of less effective teachers (as indicated by those who score lower on the COS) from those of more effective teachers?
2. Is length of teaching experience related to differences in styles of teaching practice? That is, do effective teachers differ from less effective teachers and in turn differ from novice teachers on the types of instructional techniques they use?
3. Are there differences in the types of instruction received by students with exceptionalities and by those designated as being academically at risk, compared to the class as a whole? Do any differences relate to the teachers' scores on the COS, or to differences in their predominant instructional patterns?

Method

Instruments

1. The Classroom Observation Scale

Observation Items.

The Classroom Observation Scale (COS) (Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998) was used to measure teachers' instructional behaviours. The COS was developed from a synthesis of effective teaching skills published in 1992 by Englert, Tarrant, and Mariage as a series of teacher self-rating checklists. The checklists were based on a synthesis of the research conducted from 1970 to 1990 on teaching factors known to be effective, both in terms of student achievement (Brophy&Good, 1986; Gage and Needels, 1989; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986), as well as the more recent 'social constructivist'factors and principles of community-based learning (Hogan & Pressley, 1997; Marshall, 1992). From these items, 27 were chosen as being possible to score by observers (Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). The COS observation items span the spectrum of teaching behaviours from classroom organization and time management to engaging students in one-to-one dialogical interactions, such as responsive questioning and elaborating student responses. The 27 observation items comprise common indicators of teaching effectiveness within three categories: (a) classroom management (8 items), (b) time management (8 items), and (c) lesson presentation (11 items). Each observation item is rated on a three-point scale: Not in evidence (0), Inconsistent (1; observed only once or twice), or Consistent (2; observed 3 or more times), with a total possible maximum score of 54.

Predominant teaching style (total class). In addition to the 27 items, the COS contains a 7-point rating scale on which the observer records the teacher's predominant teaching style with the total class during the seatwork portion of lessons. The scale ranges from 0, indicating that no academic interaction with students has taken place during seatwork to 6, indicating that the teacher consistently elaborates student responses. Mid points on the scale indicate that the teacher checks students'work and moves on once or twice (i.e., Inconsistent = 2) or more than twice (i.e., Consistent = 3) and that the teacher delivers or transmits instruction once or twice (i.e., Inconsistent = 4) or more than twice (i.e., Consistent = 5). Each teacher receives the score on this scale that represents the highest point reached during the lessons observed. For example, a teacher who consistently checked students' work during seatwork usually without giving feedback, but who did provide feedback once during the lesson in the form of telling a student how to improve his/her work, would receive a score of 4 – transmits inconsistently.

Predominant teaching style (two included students). The same 7-point scale used to rate the teaching style of the teacher with the total class was also used to rate the teacher's interactions with two students in the class; one exceptional and one academically at risk. The teacher was not told which two students were being

rated during the observation. These ratings addressed research question 3 by providing an index of the breadth of instructional adaptations that the teacher used to accommodate the diverse needs of students in their class.The COS therefore provided four measures of effective teaching behaviour both at the class level (1. total score on observation items, 2. Predominant teaching style with total class) and at the level of individual students included in the classroom, (predominant teaching style 3. with an exceptional student, and 4. with a student designated academically at risk).

Participants

As part of a larger series of studies that spanned four years, half-day classroom observations were conducted with 63 elementary regular classroom teachers, teaching in inclusive classrooms in five schools in a suburban Catholic school board and four schools in two public school boards, one rural and one urban, in Ontario. The schools had a strong mandate for inclusion of students with exceptionalities. A not-for-profit independent school that had no provision for identifying students as exceptional nor for withdrawing students for remedial support also participated with its entire staff of seven teachers. It is important to note that the data collection spanned several years, and that the scales of teaching style with the two included students were added part way through the data collection. Thus, the total number of teachers who provided the data for the observation of teachers' interaction style with two students, one designated as exceptional and one 'at risk', was 25, drawn from the suburban Catholic school board and the independent school. In order to select the individual students for observation, the teachers ranked all the students in the class for whom parental permission to participate had been received, on three dimensions: relative to the overall class, the academic progress each was making, extent of behavioural difficulties, and extent of instructional accommodations and/or modified curriculum required. Students were designated as exceptional if they were on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and were rated by their teachers as being substantially below the class average on two or more of the three teacher-rated criteria.

According to Ontario policy, an IEP can be developed for a student even if they have not been formally identified as exceptional through the province's Identification, Placement, Review Committee (IPRC) process. Students who are placed on an IEP are receiving special education provisions through their IEPs, and in the case of these schools, are in the regular classroom. Students who were considered to be 'at risk' were those students whom their teachers rated as below the class average on two or more of the three teacher-ranked scale, but who had not yet been designated as needing an IEP.

Procedures

For the observation, teachers were asked to conduct at least two expository lessons in core areas of the curriculum, language arts, mathematics or science.

The observations consisted of between one and four lessons that took place during a three-hour period, or a half-day of instruction. Two trained researchers independently conducted the COS by observing and coding the teachers' practices, and rating the teachers on the scale of Predominant Teaching Style. In 25 classrooms, the observers also simultaneously monitored the specific instructional opportunities received by two students in each class, one who had been designated as having an exceptionality, and one deemed by the teacher to be academically 'at risk'. The observers selected the students to observe from the rankings supplied by their teacher, using the criteria described above. The teacher was not aware of which students were the focuses of the observation. The inter-rater reliability between the two observers was 94% agreement. The 63 teacher observation results used in this analysis are the mean ratings of the two observers on each of the measures. The teachers reported the total number of their years of teaching experience.

Analysis

Discriminant functions. To examine the first two research questions, an a priori analysis of the items in the COS was conducted. Those items that fit a curriculum-centered, transmissive conception of teaching, were distinguished from those that contained elements of a constructivist conception of teaching (see Table 1). Items were assigned to the constructivist category if they featured teacher-student dialogical interaction, such as activating students' prior knowledge relevant to the topics and skills to be learned, and providing frequent questions to evaluate students' mastery of lesson concepts. Assigning items that were transmissive in nature posed a greater challenge. Assisted by Englert et al.'s (1992) commentary that supports the scales, elements of scaffolding instruction, such as modeling, self-talk and think-alouds were designated as transmissive, although some authors claim that they are constructivist techniques. Elements of direct instruction of learning skills and strategies were also characterized as transmissive teaching. The purpose was to see if the sets of items classified as characterizing transmissive compared to constructivist instruction would emerge as discriminating high- from low-scoring teachers using step-wise canonical discriminant function analysis. The total scores of the teachers on the COS were divided into eighths. The item scores of each member of these eight groups were entered into the analysis to see which COS items emerged as accounting for differences between groups.

Table 1: COS Items Designated "Transmissive" or "Constructivist"

Transmissive	**Constructavist**
A4. Consequates rule compliance quickly; cites rule or procedure in responding to disruptive behaviour	C1. Provides review of previous day's concepts at beginning; actively tests students' understanding and retention of previous lesson concepts.
B2. States expectations for seatwork in advance.	C2. Provides a clear overview of the lesson: States the purpose and objectives of the lesson. Explains in terms of teachers' and students' actions. Tells students what they will be accountable for doing
B4. Gains students' attention at the beginning of the lesson and maintains it during instruction at 90% level	C5. Provides frequent questions to evaluate students' mastery of lesson concepts.
C3. Actively models and demonstrates concepts, learning strategies and procedures	C6. Evaluates students' understanding of seatwork tasks and cognitive processes by asking "what, how, when, why" questions.
C7. Maintains high accurate responding rate in teacher-led activities: – repeats practice opportunities until students not making errors – delivers instructional cues and prompts – provides error correction procedures – uses prompting and modeling following errors.	
C8. Provides error drills on missed concepts and reviews difficult concepts	
C9. Gives summary of lesson content and integrates lesson content with other lessons and experiences.	

Predominant teaching style (total class). Using discriminant function analysis the contribution of each item to the overall scores on the COS was estimated and the clusters of items that discriminated groups were determined. We hypothesized that items in the Lesson Presentation section of the COS that relate to teacher-student dialogues and the extension of students' thinking would discriminate the highest scoring groups of teachers from the lower scoring groups. We also anticipated that skills relating to student engagement in

the lesson, and classroom management skills would add to the discriminant functions for mid-scoring groups, indicating a possible developmental sequence of skills mastery.

Predominant teaching style (two included students). The two scale scores for each of the two students, designated as exceptional and as academically at risk, were correlated with the teachers' total COS score, and with a later variable, 'student engagement', that was identified from the analyses described below.

Results

One significant function emerged from the discriminant functions analysis, accounting for 95% of the variance, consisting of five items (see Table 2). This function was named "student engagement" since the theme common to all of the five items was the teachers' efficient use of time to engage students in learning and to maintain their attention in the instructional component of the lesson. Teachers informed students of the expectations and time frames for lessons, and maintained a high degree of student attention during large-group activities and during seatwork. Student engagement significantly discriminated the eight groups of teachers as shown in the relationship of the function to group centroids (see Table 3). The reader will note that the loadings of this function for each of the eight groups increases in direct relationship with the rank of each group on the COS total score. This suggests that teacher skills in student engagement, as represented by the five COS items listed in Table 2, lie at the heart of teacher effectiveness. Further functions had eigenvalues of less than 1. A comparison of the items derived from the a priori division of items into transmissive vs. constructivist groups (see Table 1) with those items that contributed to the subscale for student engagement resulting from the discriminant function analysis (see Table 2) show little correspondence. That is,

Table 2: COS Items in Discriminant Function 1: Student Engagement

Function 1 - Accounts for 95% of variance N=63, eigenvalue = 6.93
B2 States expectations for seatwork in advance
* B3 Establishes clear lesson routines that signal a beginning and an end
B4 Gains students' attention at the beginning of the lesson and maintains it during instruction at 90% level
B5 Monitors transitions by scanning and circulating among students
C7 Maintains high accurate responding rate in teacher-led activities: – repeats practice opportunities until students not making errors – delivers instructional cues and prompts – provides error correction procedures – uses prompting and modeling following errors
*denotes not used in the analysis

the core items that distinguish teacher effectiveness do not characterize the constructivist approach, but contain a mixture of classroom and time management skills which allow students to participate fully in the lesson expectations, as well as one item that designates teacher-student dialogic interaction in the constructivist mode.

Number of years of teaching had no relationship with either the COS total score, nor the subscale score for student engagement. The predominant teaching style rating with the class as a whole was correlated with the COS scale total score (n = 32, r = .66, p < .001) and with the subscale score for student engagement (n=33, r = .599, p<.001). These provided evidence of the concurrent validity of the COS-derived and rating scale measure of teaching style. The relationship of the rating of teaching style for each of the two included students with the COS measures and the predominant teaching style rating provides a more complex picture. The teaching style received by the student who was designated as exceptional was similar to the style used by teachers overall. That is, the teaching style received by this student correlated with the teachers'COS total score, (n=24, r = .55, p < .001); with the predominant teaching style rating (n = 25, r = .69, p < .001); and with the subscale score for student engagement (n = 24, r = .42, p <.01).

Table 3: Loadings of the 'Student Engagement' Discriminant Function Factor on Each of the Eight Teacher Groups

Teachers grouped by COS score	N	Function
Lowest		
1-12.5%	8	- 5.46
13 – 25%	8	- 3.93
25 – 37.5%	8	- 2.78
38 – 50%	7	- 1.39
50 – 62.5%	8	.49
63 – 75%	8	1.57
75 – 82.5%	8	2.39
83 – 100%	8	2.88
Highest		

On the other hand, the teaching style received by the student who was designated as academically at risk did not correlate with either the predominant teaching style or the student engagement measures. Thus, a relationship was found between the measures of quality of teaching and the instruction received by the student designated as exceptional, but not the instruction received by the student at risk for academic failure.

Discussion

The results of the analysis indicate that the highest scoring teachers in our observation used a skillful blend of instruction involving classroom management, modeling, scaffolding, as well as questioning routines. However, the elements that were common in the function which discriminated them from lower scoring groups were the provision of organizational frameworks for lesson delivery and the effective use of instructional time, resulting in high levels of student engagement. A set of elements defined as constructivist did not emerge as a distinctive feature of the teaching repertoire of the high-scoring teachers, if by these is meant the flow of information generated primarily in dialogical interactions between students and teacher or in student peer groupings. There were, however, instances of instruction that promoted higher-order thinking, although these did not discriminate lower- and higher- scoring teachers. Some of these stemmed from teachers directly describing and modeling the component strategies and skills of the lesson, a set of techniques often associated with the early stages of scaffolding, and classified by Englert, et al. (1992) as transmissive. On the other hand, there was ample evidence of teaching techniques that were responsive to student-initiated ideas, or which resulted from questioning routines that featured "what, how", and "why" questions. It appears that the highest scoring teachers had mastered techniques that included both maximizing instructional time by keeping students aware of lesson requirements, and conducting teacher-led explanations of concepts and learning strategies.

Thus, rather than discriminating the highest scoring group of teachers from the other groups on the basis of items that exclusively targeted teachers' use of constructivist skills to engage students in cognitively extending dialogues, the highly predictive items in the student engagement factor suggested a broader set of skills. This set marks the ability of teachers to engage their students in the lesson and to maintain student engagement by such techniques as gaining and maintaining their attention, moving the lesson along at a brisk pace and involving students in anticipating how the lesson material will relate to future lessons. This set of skills seems to be acquired gradually by teachers in our sample, with little evidence of it among teachers with low overall scores and increasing in relation to increasing scores in classroom and time management and lesson presentation. Moreover, the student engagement set of skills typically seems to be built upon mastery of the skills characterized by classroom and time management skills, dimensions of effective teaching that have been criticized by some authors as mechanistic and transmissive, and detracting from social constructivist principles. Thus, teachers appear to master and use certain mechanistic and transmissive teaching practices *in order to* be able to engage students in the lesson. The results suggest that a part of the skill of fostering extended dialogues that lead to higher-order thinking in their students is the ability to gain and hold students' attention. Gaining and holding students' attention is achieved through effective classroom organization and management skills.

The results also reveal that teaching style was consistent across the range of students in the class, except for some evidence that the students deemed to be academically at risk may have received less frequent attention and instruction that was less responsive to their levels of knowledge than did other students in the class who were designated as exceptional or not.

Of interest is the finding that length of teaching experience was not a predictor of teaching style. Indeed some teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience scored high on the COS and on the student engagement factor, while some teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience scored low. This suggests that something more than experience contributes to the development of effective teaching practices. We have suggested elsewhere that one component of such professional development might be for teachers to experience the breadth of student characteristics in an inclusive class and be encouraged to develop the skills necessary for accommodating diverse needs (Stanovich & Jordan, 2004).

A fractious debate exists today about the development of teaching quality. Brophy (2004) warns about the dangers of extremism associated with polarizations such as transmission vs. construction of knowledge. Borko (2004) cautions against the dangers of over-generalizing prescriptions for practice from a single conceptual framework. Others have questioned the relevance of importing socio-cultural theories of learning as knowledge construction into prescriptions for teaching (Wells, 2004). Three of Heward's (2003) faulty notions that hinder the effectiveness of special education concern the direct instruction vs. constructivism debate; that structured curricula impede true learning, that drill and practice limit students' deep understanding and dulls their creativity, and that teaching discrete skills ignores the whole child. The claim prevails that direct instruction is undesirable, not student-centered and antithetical to the development of higher order thinking skills in students, if not potentially damaging to them. Contrary arguments suggest that the use of teaching techniques that focus on constructing knowledge are tantamount to "postmodern malpractice" and that the only hope for effective service for students with disabilities is in special education classrooms (Kauffman & Sasso, 2006). The results of this study generally support the concerns expressed in the literature that there are dangers in over-generalizing prescriptions for practice.
The finding that students at risk received less instructional intervention than either those designated as exceptional and those who were not at risk is alarming. One premise of inclusive education is that students can best be prevented from sliding into major difficulties if served in a regular classroom with differentiated instruction. Yet these students appear to be at risk of falling between the cracks, and this was apparent in even the most effective classrooms. Processes and techniques such as the development of an IEP, appear to support teachers in attending to the needs of students who are designated as exceptional. However, the lack of attention for those students considered to at risk and the potential for their continued failure is cause for concern. With the exception of

the results concerning the students at risk, the results make it apparent that teaching in an inclusive classroom is possible if teachers are able to master skills of effective instruction, and that doing so benefits not only those with identified difficulties, but all students. The range of skills used by the high scoring teachers in this study was broad and often innovative, and defy a simple classification as constructing vs. transmitting knowledge. Moreover, the skills of engaging students in learning were made possible in the context of classroom and time management practices that ensured that maximum time was devoted to instruction, with little time spent on managerial and procedural routines, and that students were full participants in the instructional process.

In summary, three main conclusions can be drawn from this research study.

1. There appears to be a sequence of instructional practices that may reflect the development of teaching skills in general education elementary classroom teachers. This sequence of instructional practices is cumulative rather than differentiated, and results in a wide repertoire of teaching practices that consist of both transmissive and constructivist elements. This finding throws into question recent criticisms of process-product skills in teacher development as well as the current educational theory that students learn exclusively through teachers' use of constructivist pedagogical techniques. The emphasis on the benefits of student-centered learning and constructivist pedagogy (Torff, 2003) are not supported by these data. The findings also affirm the importance of direct instruction as a set of teacher-led skills that engage students in learning.
2. Teachers may need to master the fundamental mechanics of classroom management and maximizing instructional time in order to develop skills of student engagement.
3. The skills that teachers use with their students in general are used for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Effective teaching practices that can benefit all students focus on high levels of student engagement, together with excellent managerial and time management skills, in order to maximize the instructional time which teachers are able to provide to individuals and groups during lessons. Indeed, the findings of this research study support those of others (Englert, et al, 1992; Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Larrivee, 1986; McGee, 2001) that teachers who are generally effective are also effective with students who have special learning needs. Teachers' classroom organizational and management skills appear to play an important role in their ability to maximize time spent in elaborative individual student-teacher instructional interactions. Teachers who are effective at including students with disabilities in their classrooms use organizational and management skills to manage their instructional time, and to adapt and modify their instruction for individual students.

There are limitations of this study that need to be considered. The focus of this study was on elementary-level teachers. The results cannot be applied to secondary-level classroom teachers. Although the sample size for the analysis of the COS items was large, the sample from which observations were made of specific students with disabilities and at risk was smaller, being introduced into the data collection part way through the study. Further investigation of how teachers work with specific students would contribute to the literature on inclusive classroom practices. Finally, although teachers were not told which students were being monitored, our presence in the context of a study on inclusive education might lead them to assume that the students with disabilities were of interest to us. They may, therefore, have paid more attention to these students when we were in the room than is typically the case. This may have contributed to the findings and to the discrepancy between teachers' interactions with students with disabilities compared to those at risk.

Taken as a whole, however, the findings of this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge about what teachers know and do in inclusive classrooms (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001, 2003; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998), as well as the use of classroom observation as a means of inquiry into teaching practices (Brophy & Good, 1986; Good & Brophy, 2000; Hattie, 2003). The results shed light on the debate concerning constructivist and transmissive teaching practices, suggesting that there is a need for multiple instructional approaches when teaching diverse students in inclusive classrooms. Given the significant and direct role of teaching behaviours on student learning outcomes, both research and teaching practices should remain focussed on both the teaching practices that target the whole class, as well as those that target individual students in inclusive classrooms. In this way we are beginning to understand how teachers address diverse learner needs, the factors that influence their teaching practices, as well as how teaching practices evolve over time.

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Inclusion: lessons from the children

Phyllis Jones

Introduction

Early Years Childcare Development Partnerships (EYCDPs) have a remit to meet Government targets in England for the delivery of good quality affordable childcare for naught to 14-year-olds and good quality free early education for all four- year-olds and for 66% of three-year-olds. An EYCDP represents a wide range of professionals, providers and users of children's services and activities that support parents. Members are drawn from private, public and voluntary sectors. The Partnership itself does not run services or activities; it has a limited number of workers and limited additional finances to resource new or existing work. It is, therefore, dependent on individual members to deliver specific targets within the plan. The strategic principles that govern the development of early years services are reflected in an EYCDP plan. The EYCDP that was the focus for the work described in this article had an intention to raise the profile of inclusion. Partners wanted to create a 'Charter for Inclusion' that would hopefully influence the practice of members in the Partnership. They invited three external consultants to help them with this process. An analysis of the wider process of the development of the Charter for Inclusion is reported in Jones (2003) and this article pertains only to the endeavour to gather views from children in the Partnership. This work was carried out by myself and two other external consultants.

In the work that we carried out with the EYCDP, we accepted that notions of inclusion relate to the social model of disability where the onus is on accepting and valuing all people in society and understanding the impact of the community on disability (WHO, 2001). Inclusion demands a process of change for the whole community; this in itself transcends the notion of integration as proposed in the Warnock Report of 1974 (Reiser & Mason, 1992). Inherent in the process of inclusion as a prerequisite is the need to listen to people who are directly involved and who experience the services. The concept of inclusion moves beyond individual services and is pertinent to the development of society in a global context (Mittler, 2000). We wanted the children of the Partnership to influence any development of a Charter for Inclusion and we chose to develop a picture booklet that depicted what we considered to be fundamental elements of inclusion. The pictures represented the active participation of 'joining in' an activity with others and the physical and intellectual sharing of a 'learning together' activity. We felt these were quintessential demonstrations of participation and belonging, which are evident as essential components of inclusion (Ryndack, Jackson & Billingsley, 2000).

The value of listening to children

It is becoming much more accepted that it is, indeed, important to listen to the perspectives of children. The ethos of listening to children is clear in the Children Act (DoH, 1989) while the *Special Educational Needs Code of Practice* (DfES, 2001) establishes the principle of actively seeking the views of children. The growing body of research available in this area reveals the valuable contribution that children and young people can make to a debate (Lewis, Maras & Simmonds, 2000; Murray & Penman, 1996). Work by the disability movement supports the need to listen to the perspectives of children in relation to developing inclusive services; services that reflect individual civil rights rather than individual needs. A recent Save the Children report tells us we still have a long way to go to move our piecemeal and welfare-based efforts at listening to children towards a more rights-based and cohesive process (Save the Children, 2002). So much has been learnt from the first-hand experiences of disabled people, as has been highlighted by the disability movement. These voices play a significant role in changing the attitudes and perceptions of society towards disability (Oliver, 1993). At a conference on inclusive education, one child with a learning difficulty articulated the following wise words:

> *'We believe that the best people to talk about having a learning difficulty and our rights are those with learning difficulties.'*
>
> (Souza, 1996, p. 55)

Writing related to the perspectives of children suggests that many assumptions are made concerning disabled children that they are unhappy about (Murray & Penman, 1996). These assumptions tend to be negative, concentrating on the disability rather than personal strengths, and do not appear to contribute anything positive to the experiences of the young people. One boy with cerebral palsy describes how others assume he is helpless and unable to understand anything. They talk to people beside him about him rather than addressing him directly. It is their pity he appears most irritated about:

> *'Many people feel sorry for me, which I don't think is right. I'm stuck with it and people feeling sorry for me isn't going to do anything for me or for them.'*
>
> (Somogyvary, cited in Murray & Penman, 1996, p. 30)

In the design of children's services, the role of the adult is dominant, often to the detriment of the perspective of children. Stacey (2001), an advocate of youth partnership, shares her concerns:

> *'In our society, it is adults who have most say about what happens to people. They make decisions about lots of things in young peoples' lives. Sometimes these are helpful decisions, sometimes they are not. Many times, adults make decisions without checking how young people feel or what they think about them.'*
>
> (p. 253)

Considering the concern about adults' perceptions and attitudes to disabled children and young people, this confirms the need for young people to be increasinglyinvolves in decision making. There are examples of initiatives that show the positive impact of ascertaining and including the views of children and young people with disabilities (Gordon, 1996; Rose, Fletcher & Goodwin, 1999; Rose, 2002). The success of these initiatives makes such endeavours essential.

Methodology

Intention of the booklet

The children's booklet was designed in order to develop some insight into how the children the EYCDP understood and viewed inclusion. It was an attempt to listen to, and act upon, the views of some of the children and young people whom a Charter for Inclusion would directly affect. It was essentially intended to give the children's views an essential role in the developmental work for the Charter for Inclusion.

The process of researching the views of children

Methodological issues relating to the process of designing sensitive processes to gather the authentic views of children (including those children with disabilities) are a major focus of current research (Whittles, 1998; Greig & Taylor, 1999; Aitken & Miller, 2002). The emerging research tells of the difficult methodological issues that need to be considered (Lewis, 2002; 2004). This is a relatively young area of research methodology and there is much to learn about the processes and strategies researchers employ. However, collaboration between charitable foundations and academics is a distinctive characteristic of much of the current research. Ann Lewis, one of the leading researchers in the field, calls for researchers to maintain rigorous methodological processes that increase confidence in the ethical, authentic, valid and reliable dimensions of the research (Lewis, 2002; 2004). In attempts to involve children in the research process, alternative methodologies are developing. Interviews move away from a researcher and interviewee talking at length about abstract concepts to a shared dialogue that has additional material (pictures, artefacts, videos, cue cards) to support a child's increased understanding and access to the interview (Lewis & Lindsey, 2000; Swain, Cook & French, 2001). As the body of research grows, we see attention being paid to particular aspects of the methodological process of interviewing children. For example, the use of questioning has always been a central concern of debates around interviewing (Fontana & Frey, 1994) and this concern strengthens when interviewing children with and without disabilities.

Research highlights the complexities of the use of questioning as an effective research tool for children (Brick, Ceci & Hembrooke, 1998). It has even been suggested that the use of questioning should be replaced by the use of statements to increase the accurate response rate from children (da Cunha Rego,

2003). The project reported in this article adopted the use of pictures as a supportive medium of access for the children. We also reflect upon the process of introducing children to issues in a general, and then personal, perspective. This approach has been successfully employed in religious education teaching where children are encouraged to respond to abstract concepts in a general and then personal way.

The design of the picture booklet

A booklet was designed with three sections, each relating broadly to the themes of 'Having Fun', 'Joining In' and ' L e a rning Together'. Having Fun was introduced as a warm-up activity to ease the children into the use of the booklet. The children were told that this was a 'practice' section, which would not be used by us and would focus upon something fun the child had experienced. This was intended to improve the comfort level of the children when completing the booklet. The latter two themes of Joining In and Learning Together were chosen as being inextricably linked to the discussion of inclusion by reflecting active participation and joint learning (Ryndack et al., 2000). Each section had two pages. On the first p age was a photograph chosen to depict an aspect of the theme. A list of questions asked the child to think about what was happening in the picture. The second page had an 'over to you ' focus where the child was asked to think about something from their experience that linked to the picture. Figure 1 illustrates this format from the Joining In section of the booklet.

Figure 1: Extract from the Joining In section of the booklet

Joining In
Discussion:
Look at the picture.
What are the children in the picture doing?
How do you think they feel?
Are they happy or sad?

(continued opposite)

Is he (pointing) happy or sad? Or does he feel something else?
Where do grown-ups fit in?
Your turn:
How does it feel to join in with others?
When I join in with others, doing something I like, I feel…
What does it feel like to be left out of something?
When I get left out, I feel...
When you feel left out, what would help to help you join in?
These things would help me join in:
What can you do to help you join in?
What I could do is…
What can other children do to help you join in?
What other children could do is...
What can adults/grown-ups do to help you join in?
What adults or grown-ups could do is...

Open questions were included in the range of questions used in the booklet and were intended to keep the dialogue as child-focused as possible. This is supported through the work of Dockrell, Lewis and Lindsay (2000), who highlight the importance of using open questions with children. The strategy of moving from the general to the individual was adopted to establish some discussion about the issues before asking for a personal response and hopefully to improve the comfort level of the child. The first section, Having Fun, included a picture of two children riding and laughing on a Fairground ride. The Learning Together section had a photograph of two pupils working on a task in a classroom context, including one boy with Down's syndrome. The Joining In section included a picture of a group of children playing on a carpet in a nursery setting and one child on the outer edges of the nursery looking on. Thus, the pictures were intended to span the age range of potential child participants. The booklet was designed for independent completion by the child or with help from a parent or supportive adult. Adults were told that if they were writing down what the children we re saying, it was important to read back their notes to the children to check for accuracy. This had the benefit of building in support for the children if they needed it. It was, however, acknowledged that the presence of an adult might impact upon the responses of the children (Ceci, 1991). Thirty people attending a general meeting about the Charter for Inclusion underwent simple training in the use of the booklet before they took it away to share with children. Some adults took more than one copy of the booklet. During this session, the booklet was demonstrated and the role of the adult as potential recorder of the children's views was discussed. We also initiated an exchange on how the adults could talk to the children about the ethics of the project. Adults were asked to encourage the children to reflect on how effective the booklet was as a process for collecting their views and to jot down anecdotal notes on the last page. They were encouraged to include their own reflections as well.

Ethics

Researching the views of children brings great ethical concerns (Denscombe & Aubrook, 1992; Rose & Grosvenor, 2001). These were particularly pertinent as this project gathered the views of children who might be asked their perceptions about a policy issue very infrequently. A code of ethics was drawn up, shared and agreed with adults in the wider consultation to enable a sense of security to be established. This code of ethics accompanied each booklet and included the need for adults to tell children why they were responding, how their responses would be anonymous and what would happen to the completed booklets. Adults volunteering to share the booklets with children in their care were asked to talk to the children and receive consent from them (and parents where appropriate) before introducing the booklets.

Participants

Forty booklets were distributed to adults who attended group sessions for the wider consultation process for the Charter for Inclusion. Stamped addressed envelopes were also handed out at this time. The adults were parents or service providers for children in the EYCDP. Some were involved in schools (primary and secondary); some were involved in after-school clubs that catered for children with and without disabilities; and some were parents of children, some of whom had disabilities. We employed opportunistic sampling and asked the adults to use the booklets with any children with whom they came into regular contact. Fourteen booklets were posted back to the researchers. Not all the children contributed information about themselves but from those that did we can make some tentative assumptions about our sample. The age of the children ranged from six to 14 years. There was a mixture of male and female and some of the children declared that they were disabled. Most of the children who responded did so in after-school settings with a few being completed by parents and children together. It was difficult to ascertain if the children in the after-school settings had an adult supporting them.

Process of analysis

Once the booklets were returned, the data were organized according to the different sections of the booklet. As the first section was intended as a warm-up activity where the children were told the pages were included to familiarize them with the process of completing the booklet, the information from this section was not analysed. The raw data were managed following the processes suggested by Huberman and Miles (1994). This was intended to identify patterns or emerging themes. The three collaborators reflected upon the data; the themes that were emerging; and whether there was something potentially striking about the children's use of vocabulary in their responses. A more detailed look at the vocabulary was then carried out, which led to the final discourse analysis process with which we engaged. From the responses to the children's booklet, insights into the perceptions of the children may be gained and these are presented through the themes of Joining In and Learning Together. The responses of the

children were also grouped together and common themes emerged from these in relation to themselves and to others.

Joining In

Analysis of the children's responses in this section highlights the strong feelings of the children in relation to being left out. Table 1 illustrates the vocabulary the children used to express these feelings. In the booklets the children included these words in a sentence, for example: *'It makes me bored', 'I was sad'* and *'I feel useless.'*

Table 1: Vocabulary used by children to describe feelings related to being left out (in order of frequency of use)

Vocabulary	Number of children who included these words in their responses
Sad	*8*
Bored	*2*
Angry	*2*
Upset	*2*
Unwanted	*2*
Useless	*1*
Isolated	*1*
Lonely	*1*
Hurt	*1*
Not bothered	*1*

Note: All 14 children responded to this page in the booklet

Appreciation of the range and strength of these feelings suggests that this is a difficult area for all the children but, for some children, the experience of being 'left out' creates extremely negative and powerful feelings.

This is supported in other research where disabled children's responses reveal their wish to be an active part of their community (Swain, Cook & French, 2001). It can be assumed that the children in this current project feel an inherent desire to be included. The children we re asked to consider strategies and processes that they believed supported them to 'join in'. Twelve out of 14 of the children highlighted their own communication skills as being important for joining in. This was particularly evident when children talked about beginning and planning joint activities with others. Effective communication skills were also seen by the children to be important in dealing with

confrontation and problem solving. These were exemplified as being able to say 'no'; responding to the aggression of others; and repairing a problem situation. These issues we re also evident when the children considered the skills they felt other children and adults needed to develop to support joining in. This suggests that explicit teaching of social communication and collaborative skills to children may support inclusive practice. Five of the children highlighted the perceived attitudes of other children as important to joining in, particularly the need for them to feel accepted and valued. The impact of the perceived attitude of other children is affirmed in the literature as important. A young man recalls a story of his friend with cerebral palsy who was being bullied at school. His friend decided to make a speech to the school about his disability and the computer he uses for augmentative communication:

> *'People went up to him afterwards and apologised for what they had done and said about him. I thought he was very brave to do that and he shouldn't have had to. His disability has never made any difference to us.'*
>
> (Morrison, cited in Murray & Penman, 1996, p. 27)

This suggests the importance and value of helping all children to understand disability. In this instance, a small increase in understanding proved to be very successful in changing attitudes. The work of O'Brien (2001) shows that preparation is the key to effective integration experiences; preparation of children with and without disabilities. The present project supports this and highlights the need for the attitudes of children to be an explicit part of such a preparation process. While responding to the Joining In section of the booklet, the children also offered their thoughts about the important role of the adult as a helper or hindrance to joining in. The children feel adults have an active and important role as instigator, organiser or helper. However, some of the children suggested that they perceived the role of the adult to be potentially problematic in relation to their own joining in, particularly when there we re difficulties. A small number (three) felt strongly that the adult involvement was not helpful and prevented children from finding ways to problem solve themselves; one of these described how an adult might actually make things worse by embarrassing a child in front of another peer. This indicates that the adult factor in Joining In needs to be carefully and sensitively managed.

Learning Together

Children were asked to consider whether they learnt better on their own or with others. The responses from the children were mixed and balanced. This suggests the importance of being sensitive to the individual learning styles of children when planning and delivering a learning activity. The children were asked to describe what stops them from learning with others. The overwhelming message from 13 of the children was the negative behaviour of others towards themselves. Table 2 illustrates how the children described the negative behaviour that stops them from learning together with others. Again, the

children responded in short sentences, for example, *'When they are disturbing me'* and *'When there is talking or shouting in the room'* and from this we drew together the main vocabulary the children were using.

Table 2: Vocabulary used by children to describe negative Behaviour that stops learning together (in order of frequency of use)

Vocabulary	Number of children who included these words in their responses
Talking and shouting	*3*
No expectation to learn together (adults and peers)	*3*
Not listening	*2*
Disturbing me	*2*
Arguing	*1*
Interfering	*1*
Dominating	*1*
Being horrible	*1*
Messing about	*1*
Excluding me	*1*
Picking on me	*1*

Note: All 14 children responded to this page in the booklet

It is clear from this that appropriate behaviour management and discipline in the room is an essential component of effective learning together along with explicit teaching of collaborative and resolution strategies. Although varied in the ways they expressed themselves, the children highlighted a range of behaviours that seemed to be impacting on their feelings of well-being and self-worth. When thinking about what helped them to learn more effectively with others, the children had views about helping themselves and the role of adults as facilitators for learning together. In helping themselves, communication and interpersonal skills were again highlighted as important and the children we re able to build on their earlier contributions as to the nature of these communication skills.

Table 3 shows the vocabulary used by the children in describing what actually helped them to learn with others. It is clear that they were talking about a range of fundamental social skills that can be directly taught to individuals and small groups – skills that transcend one curriculum focus but will influence the quality of participation the children have across the whole school and wider community.

Table 3: Vocabulary used by children to describe what helps learning with others (in order of frequency of use)

Vocabulary	Number of children who included these words in their responses
Asking for help	*3*
Ignoring	*1*
Saying 'stop'	*1*
Talking	*1*
Listening	*1*
Making friends	*1*
Working together	*1*
Relaxing	*1*
Supporting each other	*1*
Patience	*1*
Collaboration	*1*
Working it out again	*1*
Giving help	*1*
Negotiating	*1*

Note: All 14 children responded to this page in the booklet

The need to develop and make use of strategies that help the children to negotiate and co-operate with others are again highlighted as essential. One child illustrates this:

> *'If someone had a really good idea I would probably do it but they'd have to put some of my ideas in.'*
>
> (Child 7)

As in the Joining In section, the children appeared to have strong views about the role of the adult in facilitating learning together. This affirms previous work by Wade and Moore (1993). This includes the adult being perceived as an active participator who is able to explain, show, offer advice, encourage and set appropriate tasks. The adult will also need to have effective group management skills, be a role model and have high expectations that the children will learn together.

Reflections on methodology

This was a small-scale project emerging from a consultation process that, in itself, placed constraints on the way we approached our work, particularly in relation to time. The children's booklet generated some important insights from

the children about Joining In and Learning Together. When the booklets were returned, there were a few anecdotal notes written on the back page. Although these comments about the booklet were overwhelmingly positive, they were general in nature, for example, *'I liked it'* and *'It was fun to do.'* The booklet seemed to support children's responses, through the use of photographs, and raised both general and personal issues related to the Joining In and Learning Together elements of their participation and feelings of belonging. The research strategy of beginning with a general focus which moves to a personal one is something that warrants further consideration. Through the project, some important methodological lessons were learnt. When we designed the booklet, the comfort level of the children was paramount to us and we designed the first warm-up section to support this. However, in the returned booklets we received some splendid insights about Having Fun that are pertinent to the present discussion. Because of the way we had set up the project, we were unable to use this wonderful data. It became very clear when we received the booklets back that we should have gathered information about the participating children in a more structured and systematic way. We also would have benefited from more information about the context for the completion of the booklet. Knowing where, and with whom, the booklet was completed would have helped to contextualise the children's responses more fully. This anecdotal information about the booklet could have been developed to include the rigour and structure that Lewis (2004) asks us to ensure we include in our research methodology. Once the booklets had been returned and we saw the rich responses a few of the children had made, we felt we had lost an opportunity to gather important feedback about the use of picture booklets as a research strategy. In relation to the choice of pictures in the booklet, an issue emerged in the Learning Together section. The majority of the children (ten), when responding to the photograph in this section, perceived the boy with Down's syndrome to be a passive recipient of help from the other child in the picture. Only two children described what each child was actually doing in a purely descriptive way (pointing and colouring). That such a negative image is held of disabled people is also echoed in the literature (Wade & Moore,1993). This suggests a need for disability equality training where the strength of disabled children is an integral element of the training. Inclusion should not be about helping disabled children to join in on preset terms and conditions. Rather, it should be about the celebration of diversity. This highlights the need to analyse carefully (and possibly pilot) pictures to evaluate possible interpretations of them.

We would suggest that discourse analysis be one of a number of analytical approaches adopted to interpret children's responses. The discourse analysis approach we adopted was helpful in clarifying trends and patterns of vocabulary use. However, we felt the approach led to too much data reduction, which impacted on limiting the contextual information of the children's responses. This was a small-scale project and the reliability of the findings is therefore

debatable regarding the wider population. The return rate of the booklets (14 out of 40) was low and suggests greater support is needed relating to the completion and return of the booklets, or a wider sample employed at the outset. Through circumstance, the booklets were disseminated to adults, but in retrospect it would have been better to distribute the booklets to the children and young people themselves. This would have given us an opportunity to explain more fully to the children the importance of their responses and to ensure that information was collected about the context for the completion of the booklets.

Conclusion

Through the responses to the children's booklet, the views of a small group of children and young people in relation to the issues Joining In and Learning Together gave an insightful perspective to the inclusion debate. For the developmental work of the EYCDP, it afforded a small, child's eye view providing insights into children's personal experiences and beliefs about the reality of inclusion. The findings from this project were disseminated to the steering committee for the Partnership in a report and a verbal presentation was made at a scheduled meeting. The need to continue to seek the views of children was a recommendation left with the Partnership, along with a firm reminder about the importance of addressing the issues raised by this small group of children. It was clear through their talk about being left out that there was, among the children who responded to the booklet, a strong wish to be included. Strong messages emerged about the importance of effective behaviour management and positive discipline for the well-being of the children in a Joining In, or Learning Together, context. This suggests that these issues must be more effectively managed in our classrooms and community settings if inclusive practice is to be further developed. They clearly have an important impact on the emotional well-being of the children. The children in this project were particularly insightful about the social, personal and interpersonal skills they believe they need to enable them to respond positively in inclusive scenarios. Through an analysis of the children's responses, it may also be suggested that there is a need for all children to participate in disability equality training that not only supports an increase in their understanding of disability, but also highlights the strengths and abilities of disabled children. The children in this project offer valuable insights into the role of the adult and the need for the adult to manage activities in a sensitive and skilled way. From this it may be assumed that the children believe that the 'personal adult factor' is crucially influential in the creation of successful inclusive services.

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The efficacy of phonological awareness training in a Speech and Language Class setting and in a mainstream class.

Jean Smyth

Phonological awareness (PA) refers to "the ability to generalize that words can be divided into smaller units" (Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow & Coleman, 2006, p.287) in the absence of written language. There is widespread agreement that PA plays a key role in learning to read and that good phonological skills in the early years, predict good reading outcomes later (Gillon, 2004). Indeed, numerous studies have documented the robust relationship between early PA and subsequent reading achievement (Catts & Kamhi, 2005; Gillon, 2004). Many authors hold that reading develops in recognisable, sequential and progressive stages/phases known as the logographic (attend to a printed word as they would attend to a picture or logograph), alphabetic (begin to associate letter names with corresponding sounds) and orthographic (patterns between the letters in the words) stages of reading (Frith, 1985; Ehri, 1991). Each of these theories demonstrates the contribution of PA to reading comprehension, writing, word recognition and spelling development.

Teaching Phonological Awareness

Teaching children to read is a complex endeavor for educators. The largest and perhaps most influential investigation to date into the relative effectiveness of different approaches to the teaching of reading has been done by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) in the U.S.A. where PA was included as one of a plethora of elements to reading success. A summary of the key findings from their analyses of over 100,000 studies is shown. Successful elements of instruction include:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

PA is an umbrella term describing various levels of sound awareness, ranging from knowledge of nursery rhymes, through onset/rime (e.g. in the word *peak* the onset corresponds with the initial consonant *p-,* and the rime corresponds with the vowels and final consonant *–eak*) and alliteration (identification of words which begin with the same initial sound and those that do not *e.g. bat, bag* versus *car, bag)* to its finest grained level of PA which is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness has been defined as "the ability to hear; identify and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in spoken words" (NRP, 2000, p.4). It is a phoneme that determines the difference between words like *dog* and *hog,* for example and between *look* and *lick* (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

The revised English curriculum was introduced in 1999-2000 (NCCA, 1999) attempting to provide an integrated approach to language teaching under the following four strands:

- Receptiveness to language
- Competence and confidence in using language
- Developing cognitive abilities through language
- Emotional and imaginative development through language

Within each of these strands, objectives are specified for oral language, reading and writing. The curriculum clearly establishes the early stages of reading and literacy in the child's general language experience, incorporating a balance model. The role of PA is included, with particular focus and emphasis on the role of onset-rime (DES/NCCA, 1999a). The guidelines provide 37 rimes that should be taught as part of the curriculum. Phonemic awareness, however, is omitted from the curriculum. Gleeson (2005, p.26) is critical of this omission when he states "…phonemic awareness training is completely overlooked, apparently on the basis that it is easier to segment 'syllables into parts greater than a phoneme'". One likely explanation for its omission, given its prominence in research literature, is that the curriculum emerged prior to the major findings of the NRP (2000) and subsequent writings of many authors of international repute, such as Gillon (2004) and Hatcher, Hulme & Snowling (2004), to name but a few. In an attempt to mitigate against the exclusion of prominent indicators of reading success, the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum Assessment) addressed this issue (on PA and phonemic awareness) through the work of a subsidiary body known as Primary Curriculum Support Service (PCSP), now known as the Primary Professional Development Service (PPDS).

Specific Speech and Language Impairment (SSLI) and literacy problems

Specific Speech and Language Impairment (SSLI) is diagnosed when a child's speech and/or language development is deficient or deviant for no obvious reason (Bishop, 2006). While there is no obvious explanation for their speech and/or language deficits in contrast for example to children with autism or

intellectual disabilities, studies have shown that SSLI appears to be a genetically transmitted neuro-developmental disorder, which causes the brain not to develop optimally for language.

Research has established that 50% of children with SSLI go on to develop difficulties with reading, despite literacy difficulties not being part of the diagnostic criteria (Catts, Fey, Tomblin & Zhang, 2002; Gillon, 2004). While previous studies have found positive effects of PA intervention with children with SSLI (Gillon, 2000; Laing & Espeland, 2005), no study has looked at the efficacy of PA programmes in Ireland, or at the attainment levels of Irish children attending Speech and Language Classes (SLC). The following section describes a study that set out to observe and examine the PA and literacy skills acquired by junior infant children with and without SSLI, who participated in an eight week PA training programme using the 'Sounds Abound' Programme (Catts & Vartiainen, 1993). It was expected that the seven children in the mainstream intervention class would make the most progress on PA, followed by the intervention children with SSLI. In addition, literacy attainments at word level were expected to increase post-intervention.

Methodology

This study aimed to evaluate a PA programme (see section 2.3) called the 'Sounds Abound' Programme (Catts & Vartiainen, 1993) with junior infant children who have SSLI and typically developing children in a mainstream class. The study assessed the reading attainments of three groups over an eight week period. Two of these groups participated in the 'Sounds Abound' Programme while the third group acted as a control group. The study assessed change across time for the three groups on scores and sought to observe and highlight the benefits and difficulties that children, particularly with SSLI, encountered in PA training.

Participants

Twenty one children, 11 girls and 10 boys participated in this study. The children had a mean age of 5.2 and an age range of 4.8 to 5.6 years with English as their first language.

Instruments

- Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT)
- Wechsler Individual Attainment Test – Second Edition UK – Reading (WIAT)
- Phonological Abilities Test (PAT)

PA Intervention Programme

The 'Sounds Abound' Programme was chosen as it was already in use by some resource teachers in the researcher's school. In addition, Hugh Catts, the author

is a distinguished and influential scholar on PA and literacy and this programme has been built on solid research findings (Santi, Menchetti & Edwards, 2004). The intervention programme consisted of 32 semi-scripted lessons delivered over an eight week period, four days per week. The lessons vary from 20 to 25 minutes.

Results

In an effort to increase reliability and validity the study controlled for ability using the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT, 2003) before the intervention. A one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed no significant differences between groups in terms of cognitive ability, F (2,18) = 0.18, $p > 0.05$.

Comparing pre and post intervention scores

A Wilcoxon signed rank test was done to examine for significant growth over time from pre- to post-test on the PAT assessment. Appendix 1 highlights that there were significant changes on four subtests (*Rhyme detection verbal*, *Word completion phoneme*, *Phoneme deletion of beginning sounds* and *Phoneme deletion of final sounds*) for both SSLI intervention and mainstream intervention groups, while the control group demonstrated no significant change over time on these. All three groups made significant progress on two subtests (*Rhyme Production* and *Letter Knowledge*). Finally, the mainstream intervention group was the only group to make significant gains on the *Rhyme Detection Non-Verbal* subtest.

Literacy Attainment Scores

All three groups made improvements on literacy attainments at word level which proved to be significant over time (see table 1 below).

Table 1: Comparison of means on the WIAT Reading (Word Level) assessment from pre- to post-test and Z Scores

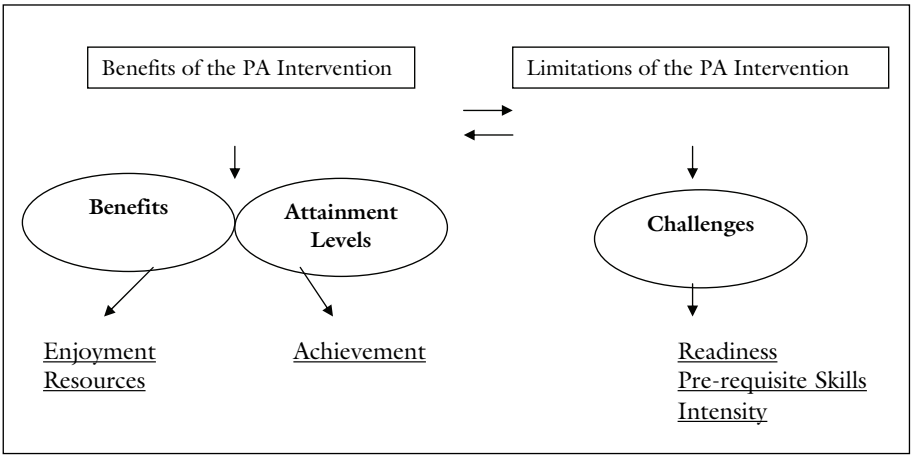
Measure	Group	Time	Mean	Z Value
WIAT Substandard Score	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	97.43	-2.37 *S
		2	115. 71	
	Intervention Mainstream	1	91.71	-2.37 *S
		2	104.86	
	Control – mainstream	1	95.71	-2.37 *S
		2	107.71	

*$p < .05$=significant S=Significant NS=Not Significant

Teachers' views on intervention

The teachers' views of the intervention were sought via individual interviews. Following a thematic analysis of the interview data, two main categories were identified and labelled: *Benefits of the PA Intervention and Limitations of the PA Intervention*. For the purpose of analysis, the paper now explores the teachers' responses in terms of these two interlinked themes.

Figure 1: Thematic Results of Findings



Benefits of the PA Intervention

As can be seen above (figure 1), enjoyment emerged as a theme where both teachers noted how the resources influenced this. Attainment levels are also discussed as improvements had been noted.

> *It was very obvious that the children did benefit from it…*
> (I1, L 24)

> *…it just it struck me what you can achieve in Junior Infants probably that a lot of teachers wouldn't attempt.*
> (I2, L 200-201)

Conversely, challenges such as maturation and readiness are also observe as seen in the responses below:

> *If the class were a little bit older. It probably would be more effective*
> (I2, L 126-127).

In brief, both teachers reported anecdotally the benefits of the programme and also the perceived enjoyment that the children gained from it. On the other hand, age appeared to be a negating factor where children's maturity levels were questioned.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study supports earlier research which showed that PA training directly contributes to gains in PA for children with language and/or expressive phonological impairments. It was hypothesised that the mainstream intervention group would make the most progress, followed by the SSLI group and the control group. All groups made progress on their PA skills (PAT scores) and on their literacy skills at word level (WIAT scores). Progress on all PAT measures was generally greater for the intervention groups where they demonstrated significance on the seven subtests listed below:

- Rhyme Detection Non-Verbal (mainstream intervention group only)
- Rhyme Detection Verbal
- Rhyme Production
- Word Completion Phonemes
- Phoneme Deletion of Beginning Sounds
- Phoneme Deletion of Final Sounds
- Letter Knowledge

The effectiveness of the intervention is evident from the fact that the control group displayed significant improvement on only two PAT subtests, namely, *Rhyme Production* and *Letter Knowledge*. Clearly the normal curriculum in offering pre-reading and early reading activities contributes to improvements in PA for the control group also, especially in raising children's letter knowledge. However, the fact that the SSLI intervention group made similar gains on the WIAT to the control group when they might otherwise have been expected to have fallen behind, as well as the fact that they made significant progress in six PAT subtests, attests to the benefits of the intervention programme. The *Word Reading* subtest of the WIAT may not be sensitive enough to measure the changes in PA, whereas the PAT subtests which focus on more specific skills are likely to offer the most sensitive measure of the fine-grained changes induced by the intervention. In addition, this study consists of very young children who are in the course of literacy acquisition and are most probably still in the logographic stage or in transition to the alphabetic stage. Thus, it may be that there is a ceiling effect on the WIAT scores at this point when children are not yet at the alphabetic stage, making it a less sensitive instrument in the very earliest stages.

The most important finding was the improvements made on the PAT assessment by both intervention groups on *Phoneme deletion of the beginning* and *final sounds* which proved to be significant. This differential change suggests that both intervention groups transferred skills taught from the programme to that on the PAT assessment without having explicit teaching in these skills and these are seen to be two of the more complex phonemic

manipulation skills (Muter, Hulme & Snowling, 2001). This is in keeping with the research (NRP, 2000) which states that the teaching of one or two phonemic skills is more productive than attempting to teach all and usually these skills are then generalized.

Furthermore, it must be noted that only the mainstream intervention group made significant progress on the *Rhyme Detection Non-Verbal* subtest highlighting how their inner representations appear to be robust without the verbal cue from the examiner as in the *Rhyme detection verbal* subtest. Thus, the lack of progress made by the SSLI group on the same subtest (*Rhyme detection Non-verbal*) despite intervention highlights their particular difficulty with this task and gives an insight into how their inner representations can be weaker than those of children without SSLI (Hesketh et al., 2000).

Limitations

Programme

The programme itself required adaptations in terms of content (e.g. rhyme required preparatory work as the Sounds Abound section on rhyme was perceived to be too difficult). The researcher changed presentation of content (e.g. puppet, hand movements, illustration of train, magnetic letters) in order to be more age-appropriate and to increase enjoyment levels for the children in the intervention groups.

Teachers' Views

Anecdotally, it was apparent from the teacher interviews that the children in this study enjoyed the intervention activities and the additional resources supported the children's learning. Teachers commented on how much the children benefited and how they surpassed their expectations in terms of what they achieved. Contrary to the teachers' opinions for a longer period of intervention, Catts & Kamhi (2005) recommend that future research should address even shorter intervention programmes and examine the outcomes given that we still do not fully understand the amount of time required for PA training. It is also interesting to note that diminishing gains after a 12 week period of PA intervention have been reported (Hatcher et al., 2006; NRP, 2000). Laing & Espeland (2005) demonstrated how improvements could be accomplished in a very short space of time (two 15 minute sessions over eight weeks). More longitudinal results (like Gillon, 2005) will need to be carried out in order to clarify whether the short-term gains (Laing & Espeland's study) can be maintained in the long-term.

Teacher Implementation

The ways in which differing teacher characteristics and implementation of the programme may have varied was not controlled for, thereby possibly affecting the results. However, every effort was made to counteract variation in content with semi-scripted lessons but there was limited training time from researcher to

mainstream teacher. Equally, the influence of the extra staffing in the mainstream intervention (resource teacher increasing the pupil/teacher ratio to 2:1) may have influenced the results.

Sample Size

Sample size was a further limitation allowing only for non-parametric statistics (Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test) to be performed. Ideally, a study should be able to conduct repeated measures ANOVA with one fixed factor (Mixed Design ANOVA) to compare change across groups and not just time, as in the present study.

CONCLUSION

This research sought to identify the efficacy of PA training with junior infant children with and without SSLI. The findings of the current study have highlighted many positives and supports earlier research (Gillon, 2005) which showed that a PA training programme directly contributed to gains in PA tests for children with expressive phonological impairments and/or language impairments. While it is more typical and effective (NRP, 2000) for PA intervention programs to be implemented in individual or small group settings, positive benefits were seen in the larger (mainstream) setting as well as the small group (SSLI) setting. The finding that group implementation of such an intervention yields significant improvements is particularly interesting and relevant to the Irish situation where teacher resources for individual work are likely to become less available.

While this is a small study, it did control for non-verbal cognitive ability and the results were encouraging, allowing a number of conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, given the results on the PAT for both intervention groups and based on others research findings (Gillon, 2005; Hatcher *et al.*, 2004), it might be predicted that the children will learn to read more readily than if they had not received the intervention. However, all three groups demonstrated significant increase in literacy gains (WIAT). This points to the effectiveness of the curriculum for typically developing children without language/literacy difficulties. As mentioned earlier, this study consists of very young children who are in the course of literacy acquisition and are most probably still in the logographic stage or in transition to the alphabetic stage. Therefore, it may be that there is a ceiling effect on the WIAT scores at this point when children are not yet at the alphabetic stage (which may mask the benefits of PA over such a short intervention period). The study set out to measure the effects of the Sounds Abound programme in terms of sub-skills (pre-reading skills) only as opposed to the ultimate effects on reading. The PAT assessment provides the most sensitive measure of the fine-grained changes induced by the intervention which focused on the pre-reading elements of PA and the gains made as opposed to the actual effects on reading achievement.

The benefits of PA as demonstrated in this study shows the importance of including focus on PA (in particular phonemic awareness) in the curriculum.

Gillon (2004) argues that being informed and cognisant of the contribution PA can make to reading and spelling means that teachers can "make a difference to the lives of many young children who are at high risk for reading disorder or who struggle with reading and spelling" (p.227) particularly children with SSLI whose phonological processing system is not robust.

This study may be viewed as a piece of action research with the intention to review future teaching practice in the light of findings. Further studies could also focus on follow-up data on the literacy skills of these children to examine any further gains. It is recommended therefore, that this study be replicated with larger numbers so findings maybe eneralized to the larger population, drawing children from the same population i.e., children with SSLI in a mainstream setting as well as children with SSLI in the small setting of a Speech and Language Class.

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APPENDIX

Mean scores for groups on Time 1 and Time 2 and Z scores on the PAT assessment using a Wilcoxon signed rank test.

Measure	Group	Time	Mean	*Z* Value	*P*
Rhyme Detection Non-Verbal	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	3.7	-1.45	.147 N/S
		2	5.86		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	4.71	-2.21	.03 *S
		2	7.29		
	Control – mainstream	1	3.00	-.58	.564 N/S
		2	3.14		
Rhyme Detection Verbal	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	5.14	-2.04	.04 *S
		2	8.00		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	6.71	-2.03	.04 *S
		2	9.71		
	Control – mainstream	1	4.29	-.73	.465 N/S
		2	4.86		
Rhyme Production	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	.57	-2.39	.02 *S
		2	5.29		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	2.00	-2.20	.03 *S
		2	5.71		
	Control – mainstream	1	1.00	-2.03	.04 *S
		2	3.86		
Word Completion Phonemes	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	1.571	-2.37	.02 *S
		2	5.86		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	4.43	-2.02	.04 *S
		2	7.86		
	Control – mainstream	1	1.14	-1.48	.140 N/S
		2	3.71		
Phoneme Deletion of beginning sounds	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	.43	-2.201	.03 *S
		2	4.00		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	0.00	-2.39	.02 *S
		2	6.14		
	Control – mainstream	1	0.00	-1.414	.157 N/S
		2	2.00		
Phoneme Deletion of final sounds	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	1.71	-2.38	.02 *S
		2	5.71		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	1.43	-2.41	.02 *S
		2	7.14		
	Control – mainstream	1	1.29	-.536	.59 N/S
		2	1.71		
Letter Knowledge	Intervention – Speech & Language Group	1	13.43	-2.37	.02 *S
		2	23.58		
	Intervention Mainstream	1	9.71	-2.37	.02 *S
		2	16.57		
	Control – mainstream	1	14.29	-2.20	.02 *S
		2	21.00		

**p < .05=significant S=Significant NS=Not Significant*

Empowering Pupils and Teachers Through The Establishment Of Teacher Learning Groups

Seán O'Leary, Laura Silke, Evelyn Jackson
& Caroline Ní Shé

Abstract

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms requires the active participation of teachers. The inclusive classroom challenges teachers to become learners themselves. Teachers must become aware of their own learning needs and engage in professional development so that they are in a better position to meet the diverse needs of all their pupils. This paper reports on teachers' experiences of exploring learning methodologies through school-based Teacher Learning Groups.

Introduction

The concept of curriculum is a complex issue for teachers. It can include the content and purpose of an educational programme, combined with their organisation (Walker, 1990) in a plan of 'educational experiences offered by a school' (Todd, 1965, p.2). However, Sheehy *et al.* (2005, p. 50) considerably extend this concept of curriculum to include the total experiences of learners, where the curriculum is constructed by the interactions of pupils and teachers (Cornbleth, 1990), a view firmly linked with pedagogy (i.e. relationships between pupils, teachers and learning).

Inclusion is inextricably linked with decreasing exclusionary pressures (Booth, 1999) and the exclusionary impact of rigid curricula has been considered by Parsons (1999) where the problem is specifically located with the child rather than the curriculum. Therefore, inclusion requires the transformation of the whole school (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996), including the curriculum, pedagogy and classroom practice (Mittler, 2000, p.2).

Dadds (2002) highlights the importance of research in creating more empowering experiences for teachers as learners because teachers and teacher educators have a crucial bearing on the education chain. However, the type of discourse used in educational or inclusive research plays a critical role in inclusion itself. Dyson (1999) suggests that two groups of discourse exist in inclusive education (i) the rationale for inclusion involving rights, ethics and the

efficacy of inclusion and (ii) the realisation of inclusion involving political or pragmatic arguments, such as identifying inclusive teaching strategies.

Teachers need the time and opportunity to adopt a practical definition of inclusion that will work for them and their pupils. Second-level teachers must prepare pupils to achieve in examinations, which can leave them feeling that they have little time to creatively adapt their teaching for all pupils. Several studies have highlighted the importance of teacher attitudes in implementing inclusive educational practice (Waldron, 1997; Fox and Ysseldyke, 1997; Farell, 2000, p. 159). Clearly, there is need for professional development to empower teachers to learn new skills and engage positively with the inclusion process.

Building teachers' experiences as learners into their professional development acknowledges their right to participate in processes affecting their personal and working lives. In September 2007, the City of Galway Vocational Education Committee (CGVEC) launched the Learning Methodologies Programme in two post-primary schools and one college of further education. The overall objective of the programme was to promote the use of Learning Methodologies to improve (i) pupil engagement by increasing their awareness of the learning process and (ii) pupil confidence through highlighting their ability to learn. This programme overlapped in part with a professional development initiative co-ordinated by the Special Education Support Service in one of the schools. CGVEC established lead teachers in the three individual centres under the leadership of a Learning Methodologies Development Co-ordinator. The lead teacher became the leader in each centre to establish and support teachers that made up the various Teacher Learning Groups. This paper describes the perspectives of the three lead teachers in each of the centres as they researched and shared 'best practice' with their colleagues.

Methodology

In September 2007, small Teacher Learning Groups were established in the following centres in the CGVEC: Galway Technical Institute, Galway Community College and Coláiste na Coiribe. Teachers that formed part of the Teacher Learning Groups worked collaboratively to introduce and evaluate different learning approaches in their classrooms. In total 47 teachers in CGVEC volunteered to join Teacher Learning Groups. Learning group size in each centre did not exceed eight teachers.

Lead teachers were established in individual centres. The lead teacher provided support to teachers in their Teacher Learning Group. The schedule for learning groups was systematic and planned for the period from September 2007 to May 2008. Lead teachers delivered training sessions in learning styles, concept mapping, memory techniques and co-operative learning. Lead teachers also provided ongoing support for their Teacher Learning Group, liaised regularly with the Learning Methodologies Development Co-ordinator, and recorded feedback from individual teachers within their learning groups.

Before each lesson where a new learning methodology was being introduced, teachers submitted lesson plans to the lead teacher which reflected the use and effectiveness of the specific learning approach. After the lesson, teachers submitted evaluation sheets on the lesson and the effectiveness of the learning approach to the lead teacher. Teachers within each Teacher Learning Group met regularly (about every six weeks) to review progress.

An initial thematic analysis of the reflective reports of the three lead teachers identified the main headings or themes for analysis (Hamersley *et al.*, 2001 p. 72). In reporting these themes, quotations were used to enrich the information provided by the themes that emerged and to 'release' the voice of the lead teacher (Corbett, 1998, p. 59).

Teachers adhered to the core values and 'Codes of Professional Conduct for Teachers' as outlined by The Teaching Council throughout the process of planning, teaching and reflection.

Analysis

Thematic analysis of the reflective reports submitted by the lead teachers indicated two main themes related to effective teaching and learning in the classroom and to effective teacher professional development.

Effective teaching and learning

The learning methodologies used by the Teacher Learning Groups included concept mapping, mnemonics, co-operative learning and Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) approaches to teaching. The lead teachers expressed strong opinions about the effectiveness of these teaching and learning methodologies.

> *'PLC teachers have embraced teacher learner groups. What initially began as 7 volunteer teachers increased to 35 in the academic year 2007-2008. There is a new energy among the staff talking about teaching and learning. Through systematic reporting throughout the year, tutors have commented on classroom successes and limitations of the learning methodologies used. The teacher learner groups have recognised the importance of different learning approaches in raising teaching standards and how the adoption of learning approaches impact positively on teacher motivation and capacity to manage change.'*
>
> Laura Silke

> *'Efforts were made to ensure that each class had visual, auditory and kinaesthetic content. Very soon it was apparent that the students were responding positively……VAK encourages inclusion, which has helped reduce the incidences of disruptive behaviour from students who might otherwise have been disinterested….. During collaborative learning, students work together in small groups on an activity where each student is given a particular role. The*

teamwork involved encouraged tolerance and motivation, which is a very important part of a multicultural education programme.'

Evelyn Jackson

'Many of the students labelled as troublesome were actually kinaesthetic learners and the traditional method of 'sit still, look and listen' does not suit the type of learner they are. This knowledge alone was very useful and many of the 'troublesome students' have been re-valued as 'kinaesthetic learners'.'

Caroline Ní Shé

Lead teachers also felt that the 'new' learning methodologies did not just have a short-term impact on pupil learning.

'Not only have teachers perceptions changed but the students own perceptions of themselves have changed, for the better."

Caroline Ní Shé

'All of the learning methodologies develop skills which will be of benefit to students long after they have left school.'

Evelyn Jackson

'The efficacy of concept mapping as a flexible learning tool has proved itself to be very successful. In particular where students have experienced difficulties in thought organisation, concept mapping has been instrumental in helping them to organise and prioritise information for projects and assignments.'

Laura Silke

Effective Teacher Professional Development

Lead teachers and the Learning Methodologies Development Co-ordinator commented frequently on the impact of Teacher Learning Groups on teacher professional development.

'Although whole school presentations were useful initially, they had little impact on teacher motivation as there is no legitimate feedback process of reporting on practice for teachers. Participation from individual teachers was minimal due to size of audience and time constraints……The establishment of Teacher Learning Groups created a cohesive and effective method for transferring learning methodologies to learners in CGVEC. Teacher Learning Groups also provided an excellent medium to promote professional dialogue amongst teachers.'

Laura Silke

'Teachers feel that they are obtaining much greater job satisfaction because they can see that students are directly responding to and benefiting from the learning methodologies. Teaching skills are being enhanced as a result of the programme.'

Evelyn Jackson

'Our school has benefited greatly from the workshops. The teachers involved were very open to the different subjects posed and were willing, in as far as they were able, to try out new teaching methods. …..Overall, the workshops were very productive and all participants benefited from volunteering. The subjects are wide and varied and there are many more areas of active learning methodologies which could be explored to improve the life of the teacher and the student.'

Caroline Ní Shé

Discussion

The focus on teaching and learning methodologies to facilitate pupil learning agrees with the work of Ramjhun (2001) who suggests that teachers used pragmatic discourses when discussing inclusive education. Teachers want to know about teaching and learning methodologies that improve the lives of their pupils and enable teachers to cater for the diverse needs of pupils within inclusive classrooms.

Thomas and Glenny (2005) emphasise human rights and social justice as well as 'personal experiences' as a legitimate way of building knowledge. It is clear from the extracts reported here that teachers value opportunities to share practice for the benefit of their pupils as well as for their own benefit as practitioners.

Teachers need opportunities to become expert in classroom approaches, such as concept mapping and co-operative learning that enable all pupils to engage more fully in the learning process. Davis and Watson (2001) found that pupils not only picked up adult perceptions but 'mirrored adult discourses' in their descriptions of their ability and identity. In GCVEC, the establishment of Teacher Learning Groups allowed teachers to recognise that their students own perceptions of themselves could change for the better. Therefore, an inclusive classroom requires teachers not only to develop new skills and become more aware of the process of inclusion but also crucially to model positive attitudes toward pupils with special educational needs.

CGVEC established Teacher Learning Groups to provide opportunities for teachers to work and learn together within schools. In many ways the voices of the teachers reported in this paper speak for themselves. It is clear from these reports that Teacher Learning Groups have a role in facilitating greater teacher engagement in professional development. Teacher Learning Groups empower teachers to work creatively together on challenges by providing a safe environment where they can express different perspectives, reveal different teaching styles, engage in professional growth and discover a variety of teaching and learning solutions.

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Students' Experiences of Co-Teaching in a Post-Primary School in Ireland

Susan McNamara and Therese Day

Introduction

This paper describes a research study conducted in a mainstream post-primary school, where co-teaching was implemented in order to provide support to students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The research focused on management's, teachers' and particularly students' perspectives of this method of support. The study is set in the context of the international movement towards greater inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream classrooms and the growing recognition of the importance of children's voices in making decisions about their education.

The strategy of co-teaching currently receives widespread attention from the educational community as an option for meeting the needs of students with and without SEN who are experiencing difficulties in the mainstream class (Murawski and Dieker, 2004; Cook, 2004). The rationale for implementing a co-teaching model of support for students with SEN stems from concerns about segregation and labelling and reflects the current international view that many children with SEN benefit greatly from an inclusive education (King, 2006). The current evolution towards the provision of inclusive education for all pupils in mainstream schools reflects the thrust from society towards a rights-based model of social inclusion (Day, 2007). Inclusive education is supported by the human rights-based movement which demands equal rights and access to opportunities for all people irrespective of differences such as race, gender, disability and class (O'Gorman, 2007).

Description of School

The research site Ash College (pseudonym), with an enrolment of 937 students, 84 of whom have been assessed as having SEN, is an all-boy's school, set in an urban environment. Teaching support is provided by three full-time SEN teachers. A small group or one-to-one withdrawal model is predominantly used to provide support to students who are granted teaching-support hours. One of the SEN teachers has been assigned a number of hours to the administrative duties of co-ordinating SEN provision within the College. In September 2008 Ash College employed a new mathematics teacher to provide learning support to students with SEN. School management, in consultation with the SEN

coordinators, decided that a large part of the new teacher's timetable would involve co-teaching with teachers in the mathematics department.

The school management had concerns about the withdrawal model of support because of its potential for segregation and labelling of students with SEN. Additionally, withdrawing students at second level can present many difficulties such as timetabling problems and students missing out on academic and recreational activities. School management envisaged that a co-teaching model would alleviate some of these issues and result in greater numbers of students being able to access support. The learning support teacher commenced co-teaching with five mathematics teachers initially. This arrangement was reviewed regularly by the SEN coordinator and changes were made based on feedback received from teachers and students. It was clear that many challenges were encountered in attempting to provide a co-teaching model of support for students. When this research project began in January 2009, co-teaching was taking place with just one of the five mathematics teachers who had originally entered into the arrangement in September 2008. Where the co-teaching model had ceased, a small group-withdrawal arrangement was in place to cater for students requiring support.

Literature Review

Co-teaching may be described as a teaching methodology that is based on the philosophy of inclusive education and the principles of collaboration (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008). There are numerous definitions of 'co-teaching' in the literature with no internationally agreed definition of the term. The *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Post-Primary Guidelines* (DES, 2007) state that co-teaching denotes an arrangement whereby "two or more teachers work together in a collaborative manner with a class of students who have diverse learning needs" (p. 53). The Guidelines state that the co-teaching team will typically comprise the mainstream teacher and SEN teacher who will share responsibility for the planning and provision of instruction to the class. The Guidelines state that the SEN teacher usually pays particular attention to students with SEN, endeavoring to ensure that they experience success in their learning programmes. Numerous co-teaching models are described in the literature. Although it is not within the scope of this article to describe these models, O'Murchú (2009), in a recent LEARN journal, describes various forms of co-teaching.

Research Evidence

Research identifies numerous benefits for students, teachers and schools associated with the practice of co-teaching. A comprehensive evaluation conducted by Schwab Learning (2003), studied the impact of collaborative partnerships and co-teaching in sixteen Californian elementary, middle and secondary schools. Results indicated decreased referrals to intensive SEN services; increased overall student achievement; fewer disruptive problems; increased number of students qualifying for gifted and talented education and decreased referrals for behavioural problems. In addition, teachers reported

feeling happier and less isolated. These results reflected the earlier work of Walther-Thomas (1997) in which 23 schools across eight school districts found improved academic and social skills of low achieving students, improved attitudes and self-concepts reported by students with SEN and more positive peer relationships. Teachers reported experiencing professional growth, personal support and an enhanced sense of community within the general education classroom. One principal noted that co-teaching had helped to create a school-wide inclusive culture where students with SEN are no longer viewed as the "exclusive property" of the SEN department. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the creation of SEN departments and policies of withdrawal have disempowered many subject teachers at second level, allowing them to view students with SEN as "not our problem", and to hand over the responsibility for the educational attainment of such students to the SEN team. This attitude runs contrary to the inclusive educational provision outlined in recent legislation (Ireland, 2004). Research shows that co-teaching practices can counteract this attitude and create a more united staff team with fewer referrals for special education services (Basso and McCoy, 2007; Lawton, 1999; Schwab Learning, 2003).

Co-Teaching and Outcomes for Students with SEN

It should be pointed out that some authors have expressed concern with the co-teaching model, questioning whether the intensity of the instruction is sufficient for students with SEN (Fuchs cited in Lawton, 1999, p. 4). Observational studies (Baker, 1995; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2004) have claimed that the co-teaching model lacks the distinctiveness and intensity considered to be important features of special education. Friend (2007) points out that co-teaching is only one of several beneficial options for supporting students with SEN, arguing that "some students with disabilities need the structure and intensity of small group settings to raise achievement" (p.49).

Eliciting students' perceptions of co-teaching was an integral part of this research project. Rose and Shelvin (2004) state that when provided with an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences of education, students can offer insights into those procedures and actions which have either supported or inhibited their learning. Rose and Shevlin detail how the voices of young people from marginalised groups such as those with SEN have tended to be ignored in educational decision-making processes. Lundy (2007) draws attention to children's rights under Article 12 of the United Nations (UN) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UN, 1989), which gives children the right to have their views given due weight in all matters affecting them.

Research on students' perspectives regarding various models of additional support yields differing views in relation to withdrawal and in-class support. Vaughan and Klingner (1998) researched students' perceptions of inclusion and resource-room settings. Their findings revealed that students acknowledged the benefits of co-teaching and liked the inclusive classroom, saying it was easier to make friends. However, Vaughan and Klingner also claim that the majority of students with SEN, particular post-primary students, preferred to receive

support outside the general education classroom for part of the school day. These students perceived that they learned more in the resource room, received more help and were better able to concentrate, findings which were later supported by Norwich and Kelly (2004).

Contrary perspectives were reported by Albinger (1995) who found that students perceived the experience of having to leave their mainstream classes for SEN support as embarrassing. Students sometimes fabricated excuses to explain their departure from class; they expressed concern in relation to completing class-work assigned during their absence and some students reported being targets of name-calling. Results of a research study carried out by Marsten (1996) suggest that a combination of approaches proved most successful in terms of raising academic achievement, rather than an exclusive reliance on either a withdrawal or co-teaching approach.

Co-teaching is clearly an option with great promise for many students with SEN. Theoretically the co-teaching model is well aligned with the philosophies and practices of both inclusion and collaboration. However, the research evidence regarding co-teaching has not been firmly established and there is a lack of quantitative and experimental studies. Much of what has been written about co-teaching consists of explanations of it and advice on how to create and sustain co-teaching relationships. Whilst such information is valuable, it not evidence of effectiveness. Clearly more research is required to fully understand the co-teaching model and its impact on students, teachers and schools. Due to the lack of empirical research in relation to the effectiveness of co-teaching it is important for schools to examine their own co-teaching practices and look for evidence of effectiveness, particularly in relation to student outcomes.

Methodology

This research study explored co-teaching from the perspective of the key-stakeholders, the teachers and students who had experience of co-teaching as well as the school principal and SEN coordinator. A variety of qualitative research procedures were used within a case study design. Procedures included semi-structured individual interviews, focus-group interviews and observation of co-teaching practices. School policy documents were also analysed to gain further insights into the school's culture and ethos as well as practices and policies in relation to SEN.

As students are the key-stakeholders in the co-teaching arrangement, the research was conducted in a manner that optimised the opportunity for their perspectives to be heard. Three focus-group interviews were conducted to obtain a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in emergent patterns and responses. The groups comprised a second, third (Junior Certificate) and sixth year (Leaving Certificate) group. The second year group were still being taught mathematics using a co-teaching approach in a class of twenty-seven students. The third and sixth year group had experienced three months of co-teaching in

the first term. However, they had reverted to a withdrawal model of support. Table 1 outlines the research participants and procedures used.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this study indicated that school management and teachers perceived co-teaching to be beneficial to the general student population and to some extent to students with SEN in terms of social and academic gains. Teachers identified numerous factors that are required to forge successful co-teaching partnerships. Due to word length restrictions this article focuses predominantly on the voice of the students and their perspectives of co-teaching.

Table 1: Research Participants and Procedures

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews with School Staff				
Principal				
SEN Coordinator				
3 Mathematics Teachers who were involved in co-teaching				
Learning Support Teacher who co-taught with Mathematics Teachers				
Focus-Group Interviews with Students				
Yr Group	**Age Range**	**No. Students**	**No. SEN**	**Nature of SEN**
2nd yr	13-14yrs	7	2	Specific Learning difficulty (SLD) – dyscalculia Autistic Spectrum Disorder
3rd yr	14-15yrs	4	4	SLD, all had difficulties with mathematics Severe SLD, allocated laptop and specific software.
6th	18yrs	7	5	All had SLD in addition to other difficulties Attention Deficit Disorder Oppositional Defiant Disorder Non-Verbal Learning Difficulty
Observation of Co-Teaching & Planning Session				
Observed co-teaching on three occasions with 2nd year class. Hand-wrote narrative notes every five minutes for each forty minute class period, to document the activities of the SEN teacher, class teacher and students.				
Observed one planning meeting between co-teachers of 2nd year mathematics class.				
Analysis of Documents				
School enrolment policy			School prospectus	
Whole-school plan for SEN			Mission statement	
Confidential register of students with SEN			In-house mathematics examination results	

Students with and without SEN viewed the co-teaching model as generally beneficial and superior in some ways to the traditional solo teacher model. However, all students with SEN unanimously expressed a preference for a withdrawal model over a co-teaching model of support. They argued that the withdrawal model was more conducive to making academic progress as it facilitated more individualised and specialised support which they felt would not be possible to access in a co-taught class. Their perspectives are presented and discussed below in terms of the perceived advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching and of their preferred method of support.

Advantages of Co-Teaching as Perceived by Students

It was clear students with and without SEN perceived co-teaching as presenting many advantages which included: more help and one-to-one support, more opportunity for questioning, increased confidence, and less time wasted.

More Help and One-to-One Support

More help on a one-to-one basis was the advantage of co-teaching cited most frequently by students. They reported that help was provided quickly with little waiting time. A third year student explained: *"it helps you understand more because things get explained twice"*.

Similar findings were reported by Walther Thomas (1997) and Magiera and Zigmond (2005), who reported that students with SEN received significantly more individual attention during co-taught classes due to the reduced student-teacher ratio. A second year student with no assessed learning need attributed his increase in grades to co-teaching: *"last year I got 28% and this year I got 70%. Having two teachers meant I asked for more help, and got more help, worked harder and I got involved more"*. This finding supports Friend's (2007) assertion that "the structure of co-teaching provides excellent support to students with special needs, as well as to students who struggle but have never been identified as having special needs" (p.5). The finding also mirrors the thinking of Basso and McCoy (2007) who state that co-teaching leads to increased student enthusiasm and involvement. A second year student with an ASD who was initially unhappy about the co-teaching arrangement, outlined the advantages of co-teaching as he perceived them: *"work is faster, more help, they help you learn easier, work seems easier and you get more good advice"*. The second year students with and without SEN clearly felt they benefitted from co-teaching.

More Opportunity for Questioning

Students with and without SEN reported that they were more inclined to ask questions in a co-teaching situation rather than in a class with a solo teacher. They stated that it was *"less embarrassing"* requesting assistance and felt *"less self-conscious"* as the teacher did not have to stop teaching the class to answer a question. One sixth year student with significant learning needs explained "*like say if you didn't know something you'd be scared to put your hand up if [class-teacher's name omitted] was there on his own but if Miss [learning support teacher]*

was there you could just put up your hand". This finding is significant because it highlights the daily challenges students with SEN face in accessing the general curriculum and the important role a special education teacher can play in the mainstream class. This benefit of co-teaching was also highlighted in the literature by Mageria et al. (2005), Villa et al. (2008) and Basso and McCoy (2007), who noted that co-teaching results in increased participation of students with SEN during class.

Increased Confidence

A number of authors including Walther-Thomas (1997), Villa et al. (2008)s and Mitchell (2005), credit co-teaching with having a positive impact on the confidence of students with SEN. These authors state that co-teaching results in students viewing themselves as capable learners. Consistent with the literature, four students with SEN in the current study cited "*increased confidence*" as an advantage of co-teaching. A sixth year student explained: *"your confidence goes up and your general confidence in actually doing the task goes up. It gives you a much better understanding of maths.*" A second year student stated that: *"It helps you feel like you are good at maths".*

Less Time Wasted

The second year students stated that prior to the implementation of co-teaching the teacher had to stop the class regularly to deal with low level disruption. They felt that there was now *"constant work"* in the class and less opportunity for *"talking and being lazy"* they could not *"get away with messing"*. They all stated that home-work was being completed and to a higher standard as it was checked thoroughly. They stated that there were never any free classes as a result of a teacher being absent as the second teacher could teach the class. This finding confirmed research by Schwab Learning (2003) which found that co-teaching led to fewer disruptive problems and decreased referrals for behavioural problems.

Disadvantages of Co-Teaching as Perceived by Students

Second year students who were still being taught mathematics using the co-teaching method noted very few significant disadvantages of co-teaching. However, the third and sixth year students identified a number of disadvantages of co-teaching such as: conflicting teaching methods, tension between teachers and some felt it could be distracting.

Conflicting Teaching Methods

Conflicting teaching methods was the most frequently cited disadvantage of co-teaching by third and sixth year students. Students with and without SEN reported that it could be confusing when presented with different methods of solving a maths problem. One third year student with maths difficulties explained: "*you get confused more; I just think it would be better if they both taught the same way… if they learned which way works best and learn that off then there wouldn't be any opposing teaching methods I think*". Five of the seven Leaving

Certificate students reported finding conflicting teaching methods confusing. However two students in the group without assessed SEN cited it as an advantage to be presented with another teaching style and an alternative way of solving a problem *"When it comes to solving problems you are able to get two methods because they come from two different teaching backgrounds"*. Basso and McCoy (2007) share this viewpoint stating that some students appreciate having a variety of teaching styles.

Tension Between Teachers

The Leaving Certificate students were acutely aware of tension between the two teachers and cited it as a disadvantage of co-teaching. One sixth year student described the co-teaching class as a *"hostile environment…he would over-rule her in a sense, if you know what I mean like. Like if she was explaining something he'd go 'oh no this is the way we do it' if you know what I mean"*. Other students in the group agreed and described the relationship as unequal. This finding highlights the importance of the co-teachers having compatible personalities and a shared understanding of co-teaching. Mastropieri et al. (2005) note that when co-teachers are working well together, students with SEN are more likely to have successful experiences in the inclusive classroom.

Distracting

Two students with diagnosed attention deficit difficulties (ADD) reported that they found co-teaching distracting. One sixth year student with ADD stated: *"I find it distracting having two teachers in the class and a bit annoying to be honest"*. It was clear that co-teaching was not meeting their learning needs and may have been counterproductive to their learning. This finding highlights the importance of tailoring the support to suit the cognitive style and learning preferences of the individual student. It also highlights the need to plan, review and evaluate programmes of support regularly.

Preferred Method of Support

Students were asked which method of support they think would best meet their needs if they were having a lot of difficulty learning. All students with SEN expressed a preference for a withdrawal model whereby support is provided one-to-one or in a small group. While no student selected co-teaching as the preferred method of support, the second year students felt it was superior to having a solo-teacher. Reasons cited for a preference for withdrawal included fewer distractions, easier to concentrate, individualised support, no discipline issues, easier to ask questions and that lessons would be at a pace that suits them. Third and sixth year students perceived the learning support teacher as having a better understanding of their learning difficulties and reported that she provided distinctly different instruction than did their regular subject teachers. One third year student spoke about the withdrawal class: *" If we had a teacher like [name omitted] teaching that class it wouldn't have worked…you need a special type of person to teach a class like that you know, … someone who understands you and understands why you are not good at it, you couldn't have just anyone teaching it"*.

Students felt that the level of support they received through withdrawal could not be provided in a co-taught class.

The findings suggest that school management was justified in their fears with regard to the withdrawal model of support resulting in labeling of students with SEN. Whilst third year students espoused the benefits of the small group approach, three out of the four students acknowledged that they had concerns about labelling. One of the students explained: *"Yea, it's good what we have now [group withdrawal] it works and all but it kind of singles us out as the four who don't get it, you know"*. These findings are similar to those described by Albinger (1995) who reported that students perceived the experience of having to leave their mainstream classes for additional support as embarrassing.The sixth year group acknowledged that they were labelled by their peers when the co-teaching approach ceased and the learning support teacher withdrew a group of fourteen students. However, unlike the third years, the sixth year students did not appear concerned and laughed about the labels. They explained that they were focused on their exams and were very happy with the progress they were making in the smaller class. However they acknowledged that labelling could impact negatively on a student with low confidence.

These findings are similar to those of Vaughan and Klingner (1998) and Norwich and Kelly (2004) who found that most students with SEN, particular at post-primary level, had a preference for additional support outside the mainstream classroom for some time during the school day. Students in this study were very appreciative of the help provided to them by SEN staff in a withdrawal setting. They looked upon the SEN withdrawal model of support as a valuable resource that empowers them to reach their potential academically. Although students acknowledged that they were labeled, all students felt that the advantages the withdrawal class offered outweighed the stigma of being labeled. The findings suggest that while co-teaching possibly helps to reduce labeling it is still unclear whether it can address the academic needs of students with SEN. To implement a co-teaching model alone would be inconsistent with the student's voice on this issue in many cases. Given the advantages that co-teaching presents in terms of inclusion and the advantages the withdrawal model offers in terms of academic gains, perhaps a combination approach, as suggested by Marston (1996), whereby both models are used, would best serve the needs of all students.

Implications

The Student Voice

Vaughan and Klingner (1998) argue that although the issue of inclusion has been hotly debated by education professionals and parents, the voices of students, who after all are affected most by educational changes, have been heard less frequently. One of the strengths of this case study was that it allowed students with SEN to voice their opinions in relation to their preferred methods of support. The research showed that students had a powerful message to

convey. They offered valuable insights into their learning needs as well as the educational environments and teaching strategies that they felt best met those needs. An exploration of the perspectives of students with SEN revealed that their preferred model of support is a withdrawal approach. The findings suggest that some students have unique learning needs which cannot be adequately addressed exclusively within the mainstream class. Therefore, co-teaching as the sole model of support for students with SEN cannot be fully endorsed or rejected.

A number of limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this case study. Students in the study had limited experience of co-teaching. Furthermore, those experiences were with teachers who were unfamiliar with co-teaching and therefore unaccustomed to implementing this model of support. Interviews revealed that many of the teachers involved had not entered into the co-teaching arrangement willingly. Some stated that they were unclear about the rationale behind this model of support. Others had negative reactions and experiences. Therefore the findings cannot be generalized. However, despite these limitations, the study contains valuable insights that could be taken into account by other schools who are considering implementing a co-teaching programme of support.

The findings make an important contribution to research by showing how taking account of the perspectives of students has the potential to inform future SEN policy and practice within a school. This is not to suggest that the views of students alone should determine programmes of support offered. Clearly, insights of parents and educational professionals should be included in the decision-making process. However, students' views provide an additional data source to be considered when devising programmes of support (Norwich and Kelly, 2004). In keeping with Article 12 of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,* children's views should be listened to and given due weight in decision-making processes regarding their education.

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