

Inclusive Education in Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities



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Overview

- The inclusive vision
- Capacity/Knowledge
- Dilemmas of difference
- Access/Ambition/Achievement
- The challenge



The inclusive society

- 'The merit of such (inclusive) schools is not only that they are capable of providing quality education to all children; their establishment is a crucial step in helping to change discriminatory attitudes, in creating welcoming communities and in developing an inclusive society. A change in social perspective is imperative. For far too long, the problems of people with disabilities have been compounded by a disabling society that has focused on their impairments rather than their potential'
- Salamanca statement (UNESCO) p. 6-7.

Irish policy & legislation



- EPSEN (2004) Vision of inclusive education: *to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs*
- Education for children with disabilities to be
 - ❖ appropriately supported, and effective
 - ❖ in mainstream settings where appropriate for the child, and as far as is practicable; 'as resources permit'



Key issues

- Two key themes
- System knowledge & capacity
- School knowledge & capacity



System knowledge & capacity

- System at all levels still developing comprehensive understanding of disability/SEN (Kenny et al., 2008)
- Policy/legislation not rights based (Shevlin & Rose, 2008)
- Linkages between DES and DOH not sufficiently developed to support implementation of EPSEN Act (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009)
- Variations in experiences across disability groupings – sensory, physical, autism, behaviour (Shevlin et al., 2008)



School knowledge & capacity

- Lack of expertise in SEN (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009)
- School staff resistance to inclusion was attributed to lack of preparedness/skills related to SEN
- Can children with marked levels of certain disabilities (ADHD, Autistic Spectrum Disorders) be included?
- Parental uncertainty around appropriate levels of support (Kenny et al., 2003)

Dilemmas of difference



- Basic dilemma:
 - 'whether to recognise and respond or not to recognise and respond to differences, as either way there are some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection or denial of relevant and quality opportunities'
 - (Norwich, 2008: 1)



Dilemmas of difference

- What is the balance between individual needs and the needs of the majority?
- How far inclusion is about the active participation of children and to what extent is it about inclusion as 'done to' children?
- Is inclusion a state of affairs or an on-going process?
- How is inclusion related to exclusion?
- (Campbell, 2002: 13)



Access

- *You were always cap-in-hand, as in I'm not entitled or she wasn't entitled to the same treatment and it's the same thing about approaching schools. We did it but for a lot of parents it's a very difficult thing to walk up and say 'I have a child who has a disability, Will you take her?' You're very vulnerable and if anyone says a wrong word you bring it to the grave with you.*
- *(Shevlin et al., 2009: 37)*



Ambition

- One teacher kept driving me the whole way. Kind of 'put it in a context, fair enough you have a disability but - throw it away from you and continue on' like. From that day on I've never looked back. It was the best thing ever that, to stand up for ourselves.
- A few teachers took me aside and went through things with me. We had to work in the canteen; there was nowhere else. Classmates were astonished at me - spending time with a teacher! If they knew what they were talking about they'd know I needed the extra help.
- **OUTCOMES MATTER !!**



Achievement

- *I don't think I should be treated any different because I have Asperger's Syndrome. At my school I would definitely get help with work such as planning and good content. My teachers want the best for me and they encourage me. She (LSA) taught me how to understand the ways in which my Asperger's will affect me in my school life. Before I knew I had Asperger's my junior schoolteachers thought I was a bad boy. The other children teased and bullied me and it was a horrible time. Now I am more confident because more people understand me.*
- (Shevlin & Rose, 2003)



Observations

- Wide variability in practice across schools
(Drudy & Kinsella, 2009, Shevlin et al., 2008)
- Attitudinal shift in culture & practices required
- Moved from:
- Will we include? to
- How do we include? and
- Are there some we cannot/will not include?



The challenge

- It would become *normal, just everyday life* and people would be able to understand it, ‘ah sure we don’t even know what that is, we just know it’s a normal thing [he’s] like everyone else’.
- When it comes like that *we would get good jobs...* (Kenny et al., 2000)