

'Restricted Recognition' Teachers in the Irish Education System – A Barrier to Inclusive Education?

by

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“All good research is for me, for us, and for them. It speaks to three audiences . . . It is for them to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes . . . it is for us to the extent that it responds to concerns for our praxis, is relevant and timely . . . [for] those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is for me to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher’s being-in-the-world” (Reason and Marshall, 1987: 112 – 13).

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Abstract

The last twenty years has seen burgeoning activity in the area of ‘special education’ in the Irish jurisdiction. The more recent focus of attention has seen increased recourse to the concept of ‘inclusion’ in lawmaking and education policymaking. The outcome is expressed in the recently published Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 and accompanying circulars which issue from the Department of Education and Science and which speak of the right to ‘inclusive’ education and the entitlement of all children to be educated alongside their peers.

However, the approaches adopted by official bodies directed towards the achievement of inclusive educational practice have not reflected an appreciation of the perspectives of teachers who are charged with the task of ensuring students’ full participation in the education system. Specifically, policy-makers have failed to have regard to the perspectives of that curious creation of the DES – the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher – who in many instances has been involved in the education of disabled students long before the Department of Education and Science was forced to concede its position and recognise the legal entitlement of all children to full and meaningful participation in the education system. This research asks: Why, if teachers are known to be the single most important factor in the successful inclusion of students, does the DES ascribe the status of ‘restricted recognition’ to those teachers most closely involved with disabled students? What are the implications of this practice for the creation of inclusive school cultures?

The research focuses in particular on Circular 02/05 and investigates teachers’ responses to the introduction of the new General Allocation Model for the Allocation of Resources to Students with Special Needs in Mainstream Schools. A principal aim of the research is to gain an understanding of the type of barriers which impede effective inclusive educational practice and result in the creation of new forms of segregation which inhibit the development of inclusive school cultures. The study offers an analysis of current arrangements for the provision of education to disabled students from the perspective of teachers who work in both mainstream and special school settings. It shows how

measures concerned with the allocation of resources, which purport to be directed towards inclusive practice, have been formulated without any appreciation of the importance of the values of diversity and difference and the concomitant need for resource allocation to flow from diversity. The study concludes with the suggestion that the failure of policymakers to grasp the crucial importance of the values of diversity and difference in education represents one of the most serious barriers to the development of inclusive educational practice in Irish primary schools.

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Abbreviations

DES	Department of Education and Science
FQT	Fully Qualified Teacher
MT	Montessori Teacher
RRT	Restricted Recognition Teacher
SEN	Special Educational Need
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SP ED	Special Education

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Chapter 1 Introduction:

The question of how far and to what extent Ireland can move towards inclusive educational practice for all students turns on the degree to which policy and legislative frameworks reflect a view of inclusion founded on a true appreciation of diversity and difference. While Irish education policy increasingly deploys the concept of ‘inclusion’ in relation to the organization of schools and the allocation of resources to disabled students – there is little to suggest that any serious attempt is being made to address the ‘deep structures’ which underpin the provision of education to many students who continue to experience marginalization within the education system.

This thesis suggests that inadequate attention is given to understanding the role played by professionals in defining and maintaining professional-disabled people relations in Irish education. Focusing on the curious anomaly of the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher, the question is asked: Why, if teachers are known to be a key factor in the successful inclusion of students, is the status of ‘restricted recognition’ ascribed to many most closely involved in ensuring students’ inclusion? What are the implications of this practice for students with additional learning needs?

Chapter 2 offers a brief review of the literature which relates to the development of inclusive educational policy. It begins by considering the emergence of the principle of inclusion in the context of educational reform. The broader issue of ‘inclusion’ as a human rights issue underpinned by principles of social justice and equality is then raised.

Drawing on the work of disability theorists, the review points to the implications of failure at policy level to conceive of disability and education for children with differing learning requirements as an equal opportunities issue. Factors identified in the literature which impact upon the successful inclusion of all students are highlighted and lay the basis for consideration of the impact of government policy which accords differentiated role and status to teachers employed within the Irish primary school education system.

Chapter 3 describes the ideological and methodological reasons which inform the research which is broadly located within the interpretative research framework. The research strategy and design are outlined and the arrangements for the collection and analysis of data described.

Chapter 4 outlines the historical background to the structure of the Irish primary school system and locates the arrangements for the provision of education to disabled students within this framework. Against this backdrop, regard is had to the creation of the category of 'restricted recognition' teacher by the DES in 1999 and the reasons which underpinned the decision of the DES to move away from existing policy to give eligibility to teachers, other than those trained in the national teacher training colleges, to teach disabled students in mainstream national schools. The arrangements which govern the newly introduced General Allocation Model for the provision of educational support to students who experience special educational need in mainstream schools are then outlined and the implications of the new arrangements for students and 'restricted recognition' teachers is then briefly addressed.

Chapter 5 considers the issue of the exercise of professional power which constitutes a significant force in the perpetuation of exclusionary practice and the continued marginalisation of disabled people across all sectors of society. The role played by professionals in defining professional-disabled people relations is outlined and the issue of professional dominance in the field of education considered having regard to modern theoretical construction of disability. The creation of the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher and the newly introduced arrangements for the deployment of such teachers within the educational system is introduced as a case in point. The chapter points to the role which the education system plays in perpetuating and creating new forms of segregative practice. The need for reconfiguration of the power relations which underpin educational provision in the interests of the development of truly inclusive school cultures is then addressed.

Drawing on the experiences and perceptions of both ‘fully recognised’ and ‘restricted recognition’ teachers, Chapter 6 investigates teachers’ perspectives in relation to the implementation and workability of the inclusive educational mandate. Teachers’ interpretations of the meaning of inclusion are considered and their experience of segregated educational provision explored. The chapter focuses attention on teachers’ perceptions and interpretation of the concept of resources, the structure of support, the legitimization of knowledge, skills and expertise and factors which inhibit the development of more responsive forms of educational provision.

Chapter 7 investigates ‘restricted recognition’ teachers’ perceptions of themselves as educators capable of meeting the learning needs of a diverse student population. Some of the factors identified by ‘restricted recognition’ teachers consistent with the development and creation of collaborative inclusive school cultures are then addressed. In the final chapter, key aspects of educational policy and practice which may be seen to reproduce disabling relations are reviewed. The thesis concludes with some reflections on the operation of existing policy which seeks to maintain a hierarchy of professional-disabled people relations which it is hoped may point the way for future action in the realm of policy-making more consistent with inclusive educational ideology.

The definition of disability constitutes a significant issue within the field of disability studies which in turn impacts upon the deployment of appropriate language in this work. While the literature predominantly refers to ‘students who experience SEN’, the need for a new language which enables policy-makers, teachers and all involved in education to address the specific needs of any student who presents in the classroom but which does not draw distinctions between categories of students is recognized at one and the same time. This work is no more exempt from the difficulties associated with the limitations of the language currently used in relation to the subject under study. For the most part reference is made to ‘disabled students’, and ‘students who experience SEN’ except in those instances where reference is made to official documentation. In such instances the language deployed within the relevant documentation is duplicated. Verbatim quotes from teachers have been presented as contributed and no attempt has been made to impose ‘current day’ terminology on the extracts which have been included in the work.

Chapter 2 ‘Restricted recognition’ teachers – a barrier to inclusive education?

The emergence of ‘inclusion’ as a programmatic principle of education

The emergence of ‘inclusion’ as a programmatic principle of education in the last two decades, reflects growing international recognition of the right of all children to a common education in their locality, irrespective of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. The principle, endorsed by 94 senior government representatives and 25 non-governmental organisations at the World Conference on Special Needs in Salamanca in 1994, reflects a view which considers that access to educational opportunity for all students is best served by placement in the mainstream school setting.

As expressed in the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994*, education policy underpinned by the principle of inclusion has as its central focus, the provision of good quality, community based education for *all* learners which enables full participation, teaches to diversity, supports learning and responds to individual needs. (Salamanca Statement, 1994). As an education programmatic principle, it is directed towards ensuring that values of diversity and difference are both catered for and positively celebrated within the school community. It aims to ensure that all students are enabled to access ‘. . . the full complement of social and educational opportunities offered by the school including the national curriculum, planning, assessment and recording of attainment, decision-making in relation to grouping of students, teaching

methodology and classroom practice, sport, leisure and recreational opportunities'. (Booth, 1999, p 79). While initially conceived with specific reference to the elimination of all exclusionary education policies and practices in relation to disabled students, current educational discourse reflects a growing rejection of the disability-specific dimension of the principle. Inclusion is increasingly understood to constitute a process of educational reform which '... is concerned with overcoming barriers to participation which may be experienced by any pupils'. (Ainscow, 1999: 218).

More recently, the principle of inclusion is understood to fall within the broader ambit of human rights. (Nirje, 1985; Wolfensberger, 1989; Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000). The introduction of a number of UN initiatives and international human rights instruments directed towards ensuring effective participation in economic, social and cultural life, provide a framework within which restrictions placed on citizens' effective participation in economic, social and cultural life and the denial of rights to exercise the full complement of civil, political and social rights of citizenship may be challenged. (*Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, United Nations 1994).

Against this backdrop, disability theorists make a number of important connections between the development of educational policy and practice and the wider socio-economic and political forces and relations which foster disabled peoples' social exclusion as children and later, as adults. (Klasen, 2001). Lack of educational opportunity, low expectations, poor educational attainment and non-completion of

tertiary education have a profound impact on employment rates, earnings, periods of unemployment and the permanent detachment of disabled people from the labour force. (Walraven et al, 2000). Exclusion of disabled people from the labour market constitutes an important factor which contributes to disabled peoples' persistent economic and social disadvantage due to impairment. (Barnes, 1997; Barnes et al, 2002). Lack of earnings generated by poor education contributes to the experience of poverty which in turn fosters disabled peoples' social exclusion. (Klasen, 1998). Thus, it is argued, linking the provision of inclusive education to the broader political project of social inclusion requires the development of an educational system which eliminates categorical special needs programmes and eliminates the historical distinction between regular and special education. (Carrington, 1999).

The construction of disability and the theoretical dimension of 'inclusion'

The organisation and restructuring of schools required to achieve this goal represents a significant challenge, not least because education policy-making has historically been underpinned by very particular views as to the nature and meaning of disability and the role of disabled people in society. Outcomes which have resulted in the exclusion of disabled people from education, mainstream or otherwise, have consistently reflected social, economic and political actions and decision-making processes which overtly or covertly discriminate against disabled students. Segregationist approaches to the provision of education which include the construction of the segregated school system, the practice of grouping children on the basis of 'categorised' impairments premised on

the notion of 'individual deficit' and concomitant decision-making practices as to appropriate school placement are but some of the many ways in which disabled students have been rendered 'different', 'other' and 'inferior'. (Priestley, 1998).

In official discourse and lawmaking, interpretation and the construction of disability most commonly reflects a conceptual model of disability based on a 'personal tragedy' view of disability. (Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2002). This medicalised approach to disability constructs disability in 'corporeal' terms as the outcome of physical or mental impairment. (Hughes, 2002). Accordingly, the approach locates disability within the disabled individual and legitimates a view that disabled people are themselves the 'problem'. Any social 'mal-adaptation' or 'disadvantage' experienced by disabled people is said to be due to their impairment or biophysical abnormality. (Barnes, 1991). Terms and descriptors used to define disabled people are traditionally rooted in medically based categories of impairment and are informed by 'medicalised' identification, judgment and definition and a notion of normality which is consistently drawn upon to justify the exclusion of disabled people from ordinary social environments. The pathologisation of impairment both shapes and frames a view of disability as a 'sickness' to be defined, diagnosed, controlled, avoided, eliminated, treated, regulated and classified by the medical profession (Barnes and Mercer, 2001), which results in the 'framing' of disabled people as victims of personal tragedy, (Oliver, 1990), persons to be thought of in terms of 'confinement and 'incapacity', (Hughes, 2002), and as people in need of 'care' and 'protection'. (Oliver, 1992).

Oliver (1990) argues that a particular view of the disabled individual is also the result of the construction of the category 'disability' as a particular kind of social problem. Definitions of disability, rather than being rationally determined are socially constructed. What becomes a disability is determined by the 'social meanings' individuals attach to particular physical or mental impairments (Albrecht and Levy, 1981) which meanings are heavily influenced by policy responses and the activities of powerful groups with vested interests.

Within the medical model, the social construction of disability is closely allied to the exercise of power by professionals. Indeed, professional-disabled people relations have historically been defined by professional dominance over disabled people (Hugman, 1991; Swain and French, 2001), the establishment of powerful professional groups in society and the creation of a symbiotic relationship between experts and the state founded on a discourse of 'expertism'. (Troyna and Vincent, 1996). In this context, Swain and French (2001) argue that the establishment of 'occupations' as professions serve to mystify, define and control the qualifications and credentials that define who is and is not a 'recognised' professional. In this way the exercise of professional power serves as ' . . . a basis for defining the boundaries of the profession with other professions' and ' . . . provides the foundations for power exercised by the professionals in relation to the users of the service'. (Hugman, 1991: 83).

Any move towards the development of inclusive practice therefore, requires that account be taken of the complexities which attach to the exercise of professional power and the

issue of teacher identity in a changing school context. (Jones, 2004). As it is teachers who interpret and mediate state policies both in and outside of the classroom setting the factors which influence the ways in which teachers respond to the principle of inclusion are of particular relevance. (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

Teacher attitudes towards implementation of inclusive practice

A wide body of literature deals with the influence of teachers' life experiences, beliefs, attitudes, and values on teachers' commitment toward educating children with special needs in the general classroom setting (Karge et al. 1995; Clough, 2000), and are critical to ensuring the success of inclusive practices. (Norwich, 1994). Teacher attitudes to inclusion have been found to vary across contexts depending on the type and severity of special needs involved (Ward et al, 1994), the amount of experience of inclusion (Villa et al, 1996), the degree of personal responsibility for the implementation of inclusion, (Ward et al, 1994; Villa et al, 1996) and the professional background of teachers. (Centre and Ward, 1987). Vaughn et al's (1996) study into mainstream and special teachers' perceptions of inclusion indicate that strong, negative feelings about inclusion were held by the majority of teachers who were not currently participating in inclusive education programmes. Factors which teachers believed would affect the success of inclusion included class size, inadequate resources, the extent to which all children would benefit from inclusion and inadequate teacher preparation. Contradictory findings are reported in other studies in which teachers *had* experience of inclusion. (Villa et al, 1996; LeRoy and Simpson, 1996; Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). The results of these studies

tended to indicate that gaining the professional expertise needed to implement inclusive programmes resulted in increased teacher confidence and commitment to teach children experiencing SEN.

Included amongst the teacher related variables found to have an influence on teachers' attitudes to inclusion are gender, age-teaching, experience, grade level taught, experience of contact and training; (Berryman, 1989; Center and Ward, 1987; Clough and Lindsay, 1991; Forlin, 1995). The findings from a number of studies indicate that teacher acceptance of children with disability is linked to the number of years' teaching experience – with newly qualified teachers found to be more receptive and to hold more positive attitudes to 'integrating' children with disability than teachers with more experience. (Center and Ward, 1987; Clough and Lindsay, 1991). Experience of contact with children experiencing SEN is also emphasized (in a teaching as opposed to a social context) as well as the acquisition of knowledge and specific skills in instructional and class management which have also been found to be key factors in producing favorable attitudes to inclusion of students. (Leyser et al, 1994; LeRoy and Simpson, 1996).

Knowledge about students experiencing SEN gained at training and in-service stages are also important factors in improving teachers' attitudes to inclusion (Dickens-Smith, 1995). The findings from a number of UK and USA studies support the view that special education qualifications acquired from pre-or in-service training courses are associated with less resistance to inclusive practices. (Center and Ward, 1987; Avramadis et al , 2000; Avramadis and Norwich, 2002). So too are teachers' teaching styles and

adaptations. Jordan et al (1997) found that teachers who assume that a disability is inherent in the individual student differed in their mode of teaching instruction from those teachers who attributed student problems to an interaction between the individual student and his/her environment. The least effective interaction patterns were found to exist in relation to the former group whereas in the case of the latter, there was an increased number of interactions between student and teacher and greater attention was given to constructing student understanding. (Avramadis and Norwich, 2002).

Educational environment-related variables found to have an influence on positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion include the availability of support services at classroom and school levels including both physical and human resources; (Centre and Ward, 1987; Clough and Lindsay, 1991). The receipt of necessary and sufficient support has been found by Janney et al (1995) to increase teachers' receptivity towards students who experience SEN; The provision of adequate appropriate and where necessary adapted equipment and teaching materials, (LeRoy and Simpson, 1996) and classes of reduced size (Center and Ward, 1987; Clough and Lindsay, 1991) have also been found to contribute to the development of positive attitudes to inclusion.

As the inclusive educational agenda implies the involvement of a variety of professionals who come from diverse professional and institutional backgrounds (Ebersold, 2003), cohesion constitutes a vital component of inclusive practice amongst all participants. The importance of a 'collaborative culture' is cited in the literature as being crucial to the development of genuine collegiality in supporting integrated education and promoting

and sustaining authentic change within school communities. (Hargreaves, 1994; Lipsky and Gartner, 1996). The findings from a number of studies show that the elimination of rigid role boundaries among school staff is essential to achieving equity, reciprocity and mutual respect among participants, (Friend and Cook, 1996; Rainforth and York-Barr, 1997) if the kinds of ‘collegial norms’ for interactions (Glickman, 1993) that characterize the collaborative cultures found in inclusive schools (Paul et al, 1995) are to be established and maintained.

Support from specialist support teachers is also found to be an important factor in shaping positive teacher attitudes to inclusion. (Kaufmann, Lloyd and McGee, 1989; Janney et al, 1995). In Clough and Lindsay’s (1991) study, special education specialist teachers were found to be important co-workers in differentiating the curriculum and providing advice to subject specialist teachers in relation to making specific subjects accessible to children who experience SEN. Wong (2002) found that resource class teachers became consultants for general class teachers and played a significant role in facilitating the exchange of information and strategies for handling individual students while Centre and Ward’s (1987) study indicated that working with itinerant teachers positively effected the attitudes of class teachers towards inclusive practice.

The differentiated role and status of teachers in the Irish education system

However, notwithstanding the stated commitment to the development of inclusive practice in Ireland (EPSEN Act 2004; Special Education Circular SP ED 02/05), schools

continue to be organised in ways that support and maintain differentiated role and status among teachers. Teachers who work within the system are variably labelled ‘fully qualified’ teachers, ‘teachers with provisional recognition’ and ‘restricted recognition’ teachers with ‘fully recognised’ teachers holding mainstream class teaching positions while those to whom the label ‘restricted recognition’ applies are exclusively assigned to teach students identified as experiencing special educational need. With the recent introduction of a new arrangement for the allocation of resources to cater for students experiencing SEN in mainstream schools, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers employed in mainstream schools are exclusively assigned to teach students identified as experiencing special educational need arising from a newly created category of ‘lower incidence disability’. (Circular SP ED 02/05).

In its interpretation of teaching resources, the DES stresses the importance of ‘flexible deployment of teaching resources in primary schools’, ‘automatic response’, ‘resource teaching support in accordance with level of assessed need’, ‘a staged approach to assessment, identification and programme planning’ and wherever possible the provision of additional teaching support for pupils in the mainstream classroom or in small groups. (Circular SP ED 02/05). Nowhere is there evidence of any attempt to square the practice of differentiating between teachers on the basis of ‘recognition’, restricted or otherwise, with the principles of diversity and difference which underpin inclusive practice. Nor is any attempt made to address the operation of ‘exclusive principles’ and complex ‘processes of exclusion’ which, to quote Clough ‘. . . are no less at the co-structured heart of ‘organism and organisation’ than are inclusive intentions’. (Clough, 2000). To what

extent, for example, does the practice of differentiating between teachers impact upon teachers' capacities to adopt the kinds of collaborative teaching arrangements required to support the learning needs of all children in general education classrooms? Does it vest responsibility for disabled and other marginalised children in one group of teachers while other teachers are absolved from such responsibility? Does it contribute to the creation of 'cultures of teachers with the tendency to exclude'? (Clough, 1999). Does it represent a form of segregative practice based on a social construction of disability which derives from an entrenched medicalised perspective and does it serve to legitimate the continued segregation of disabled students in Irish schools?

Summary: The seeds of a research project

The importance of recognising that the organisation and provision of education can itself be a vehicle for perpetuating and indeed, promoting social injustice and inequality, especially for those children identified as experiencing SEN is well documented in the literature. (Tomlinson, 1982; Oliver, 1990; Slee, 1996; Barton, 1997). If educational equity and social justice is to be achieved for all students, restructuring of mainstream schooling in a way which emphasizes the notion of diversity (Turner and Louis, 1996), and which is embedded in the broader context of difference and similarity is required. (Carrington, 1999). Such exploration ought not focus solely on the needs of students with disabilities but ought rather to extend to an understanding of the cultural and institutional setting and the beliefs and values of teachers and others who deal with a diverse range of students in the school community. (Carrington, 1999).

However as Sarason (1996) notes, historically reforms directed at supporting diversity among students have become altered to fit existing values, beliefs, and structures. Notwithstanding the deployment of inclusive rhetoric by policymakers, no attempt has been made to investigate, the workability in practical and procedural terms of achieving educational equity for a diverse group of learners when policy draws a line of demarcation between professionals – on the basis of the degree to which the state ‘recognises’ the teachers it employs. Nor has any attempt been made to explore the impact of such practice on student attainment and other student outcomes; Thus, the question is asked: Why if teachers constitute a key factor in the successful inclusion of students with SEN, is the status of ‘restricted recognition’ ascribed to considerable numbers of teachers who work most closely with these students? What are the implications of this practice for students with additional learning needs?

The question can be answered in part with reference to the volume of research generated on the medical and social construction of disability. However, the above review of the literature suggests that an understanding of the concept of power and its role in the relationship between professionals and disabled people (Swain and French, 2001) is crucial to the development of ‘emancipatory’ practice in education. This, according to Thompson, requires us to recognise that professional practice can ‘. . . either condone, reinforce or exacerbate existing inequalities or they can challenge, undermine or attenuate such oppressive forces’ (Thompson, 1998: 38). Any assessment of the workability of inclusive education in the Irish context requires therefore, that account be taken of the power structures and power relations which define the relationship between professionals

and disabled people within school environments which includes the control which is exercised over the interpretation, structure and allocation of resources and the legitimization of knowledge, expertise and skills. (Mittler, 2000; Thompson, 1998).

To date, little attention has been paid to the perspectives and experiences of teachers who work with students experiencing SEN in the Irish education system. The views of 'restricted recognition' teachers appear particularly important for a number of reasons: Firstly, significant numbers of these teachers are responsible for implementing policy initiatives which purport to be directed to the inclusion of students in mainstream school settings. Secondly, significant numbers of 'restricted recognition' teachers are employed in segregated special school settings, special classes and pull out programmes. Consequently, their occupation of a position where they stand between the state and disabled people, acting as 'agents of the state' and 'arbiters of need' merits particular consideration. (Oliver and Sapey, 1999). Thirdly, the different professional training received by many teachers with 'restricted recognition', is in many cases rooted in specific 'child-centred' as opposed to 'book-centred' pedagogy which may have important implications for the development of an educational system which seeks to successfully educate *all* children. In short, the curious anomaly of the 'restricted recognition' teacher can inform our understanding of the power structures and relations which underpin the provision of education to disabled students. In what ways, for example, does the separation of teachers contribute to the creation and reproduction of inequitable structures in education? How is the separation of teachers constructed and what factors inform the assignation of identity to teachers with 'restricted recognition'?

How is teacher role and status linked to the separation of special education from mainstream education? To what extent does policy emphasis on teacher difference 'distance' 'restricted recognition' teachers from 'fully qualified' teachers? Do teachers with 'restricted recognition' perceive themselves to belong to a specialist field of teaching and if so to what end? To what extent and in what ways do teachers with 'restricted recognition' assert self-designated identities in relation to their work? In what way does the creation of the 'restricted recognition' teacher category influence teachers' responses to professional developments with other teachers, the school setting and the student population? How does the creation of the 'restricted recognition' teacher category link with the principles of diversity and difference and what are the implications, if any, for policy making?

Chapter 3 The research: Investigating the missing perspective on inclusive educational practice

General methodology

The previous chapter has suggested that the arrangements which govern the deployment of teachers in the Irish education system, while couched in inclusive rhetoric, overlooks the implications of failing to look at the ‘deep structures’ which underpin the provision of education to disabled students. (McDonnell, 2003). In deploying ‘recognition’ as the means by which teachers are identified, separated and assigned to work with specific categories of students in special school and mainstream school settings, the DES promotes and maintains an approach to resource allocation, the basis of which is very unclear. Interestingly, the DES has never sought to know or to find out about the extent to which teachers in mainstream and special schools view the workability of providing inclusive education to students having regard to the line of demarcation which education policy draws between them. This raises the question: Does policy making directed towards ensuring the inclusion of students support the development of school reform in a manner consistent with inclusive practice?

The review of the research literature reveals that teachers constitute key factors in the successful inclusion of students in mainstream schools. It also highlights the fact that inclusive practice necessitates structural reform across all aspects. This research study aims therefore to develop knowledge with and for teachers about barriers embedded

within institutional practice which impede and limit teachers' capacity to deliver on their commitments to inclusive education.

A number of assumptions underpin the research rationale: (i) that it is not possible to facilitate the inclusive education of students without having regard for the structural context in which education takes place; (ii) that research founded on reflexive practice and directed towards bridging the gap which exists between theory, research and practice 'can lead to the improvement in the quality of peoples' organisational . . . lives' (Calhoun, 1993: 62); (iii) that the development of understanding of existing power structures and structural reform processes is more likely to emerge through a research relationship where the researcher works in collaboration with practitioners rather than in the capacity of 'researcher as expert'; and (iv) that 'new forms of practice which might become accepted social policy' directed towards reducing the social exclusion of groups within society can be achieved through local 'action-oriented' inquiry. (Town, 1978: 161-162).

These assumptions tell something of the philosophical basis and the epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches which inform the research study. My approach can be described as interpretivist. That is to say – it reflects a belief in the social construction of reality and a belief that there are multiple subjective realities to be known and understood through individuals' everyday experiences and understandings, which interpretations are themselves context-dependent. Within this view, all partners in the education process are considered to have their own situation-specific interpretation of

events and activities which yield a range of diverse perspectives – each as meaningful and as valid as any held by any other partner in education.

If the questions raised in this study are to be addressed, an investigation of the perspectives and experiences of teachers as practitioners is warranted. The need for practitioners to do research in education has long been recognised (Elliott, 1991; Middlewood, Coleman and Lumby, 1998). The impetus behind practitioner research rests on the belief that it is the practitioners who really know what research requires to be done in order to produce the knowledge relevant and useful in their field. (Gomm, 2004). To this end, an approach based on ‘a collaborative problem-solving relationship’ between researcher and researched which aims at both ‘solving a problem and generating new knowledge’ is favoured. (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). In addressing the perceived gap between theory and practice, reflexive critique and a ‘bottom-up’ approach in which the involvement of all relevant interests is viewed as ‘an expression of an essentially democratic spirit in social research’. (Carr et al, 1986: 14) is considered to be central to the inquiry. On this basis, the study set out to adopt a ‘policy-oriented’ action research focus directed towards the generation of reflexive knowledge for and with teachers, in their capacities as ‘practitioners’. This was to involve a collaborative cyclical process ‘of diagnosing a change situation or problem, planning, gathering data, taking action and then fact finding about the results of that action in order to plan and take further action’. (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005: xii). In so doing participants might be enabled ‘to study their own action in order to change or improve the working of some aspects of the system . . .’ (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005: xii).

The adoption of a policy orientation focus reflects my appreciation of the fact that ‘all social research is unavoidably a political activity’ (Finch, 1981: 232). As a teacher who has been fortunate to have had the opportunity to teach a diverse range of students in diverse school communities abroad, I find it difficult to accept the fact that return to my country of origin to teach, goes hand in hand with acquisition of a ‘label’ – the acceptance of which has a number of implications for my own practice and for the students with whom I work.

In adopting a collaborative research focus I hoped to achieve two main things therefore; Firstly, I hoped to address the relationship which exists between those who make and mediate policy as well as those who receive it. In so doing, I hoped to engage both myself and research participants in the issue of the power relations which define professional-disabled people relations in education. This would enable me to explore the issue of ‘motivation’ more closely and would, at the same time, facilitate some degree of examination and evaluation of the status quo. Secondly, the research might enable myself and research participants to identify the types of structures and processes which are *not* consistent with inclusive educational practice and in so doing reveal more about the disjuncture which lies at the heart of current educational reform. Thirdly, it was hoped that involving both myself and participating teachers in the cyclic processes of planning, acting and evaluating praxis directed towards inclusive practice might contribute to learning for professional development.

Research strategy and research techniques

This study aimed to investigate the views and perspectives of teachers in relation to education policy which supports and maintains a distinction between teachers on the basis of ‘recognition’. As stated in the previous chapter, the research sought to investigate why, if teachers are known to be a key factor in the successful inclusion of students, the label of ‘restricted recognition’ is accorded to many teachers who work most closely with students experiencing SEN. What are the consequences of this practice for disabled students in the Irish education system? In addition, the study sought to give ‘voice’ to the unheard experiences and opinions of teachers who seek to ‘study their own action in order to change or improve the working of some aspects of the system and study the process in order to learn from it’. (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005).

In order to be able to fulfil the aim of the research and elicit the perspectives, opinions and feelings of teachers in relation to the differentiation of teachers, data needed to be collected from both ‘fully recognised’ teachers and ‘restricted recognition’ teachers which would elicit the essence of teachers’ experiences and illuminate the impact of this practice upon students experiencing SEN. The research strategy employed therefore, needed to have regard to the fact that:

- (i) not all teachers who participated in the study might be able to frame their experiences within an ‘inclusive education’ framework;

- (ii) the use of the focus group method might require minor adaptation with the group of restricted recognition teachers some of whom I have prior acquaintance, in order to ensure that participants saw beyond the set of concerns that may dominate that set of acquaintances;
- (iii) focus group participants may have wanted to talk about ‘solution strategies’ prior to identification of the nature and breadth of the problem;
- (iv) in seeking to be able to ‘frame and select a project from a position of being close to the issue’, (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005) my own position as a ‘restricted recognition’ teacher might represent a potential source of bias which could result in the collection of unreliable data;

Data collection

It was originally envisaged that data would be collected from three different data sets which included: (i) a series of focus groups, (ii) a questionnaire and (iii) a limited number of in-depth interviews. The aim of the focus groups was to collect data which would be directed towards exploring teachers’ experiences and perceptions of education policy which draws a line of demarcation between teachers on the basis of ‘recognition’. The focus groups would also aim to elicit teachers’ experiences and perceptions of the impact of this practice on students with differing learning requirements. It was envisaged that a series of five focus groups each comprised of eight participants would be held during April and May 2006. Participants would be purposefully selected to reflect various contexts of practice for purposes of comparison and for purposes of providing

contradictory, contrasting and confirming interpretations. It was intended that relevant and willing teachers who work in mainstream/special school/special class settings would be selected to participate to facilitate the collection of perspectives and opinions on the organisation and deployment of teachers within the school system;

A single focus group comprised solely of teachers subject to the 'restricted recognition' label and trained in a specific child centred pedagogical approach was to be conducted in the first instance. It was intended that the researcher and participants would immerse themselves in the research situation 'in order to construct a tentative picture of the context, and main issues . . .'. (Leeds Module 4 Unit 7:6). A secondary aim of this focus group was to be the pre-testing of an interview guide to be used in subsequent focus group meetings with other teacher groups which would enable attention to be placed on the logical and sequential flow of questions and on the use and ability of probes to elicit the information desired. (Krueger, 1994). Thereafter, one focus group interview was to be conducted for each of four teacher groups having regard to break characteristics of mainstream / special school / 'restricted recognition' teachers / 'fully qualified' teachers; Selection of participants was to be on the basis of 'convenience' and 'snowball' sampling. Finally, it was intended that a limited number of in-depth audio-taped conversations with 'restricted recognition' teachers would provide the most suitable means of collecting primary data on experience and perspectives of 'restricted recognition' teachers while employed within the Irish education system. Many of the teachers who made up the research group and of whom I had prior acquaintance have worked abroad in a range of school settings with a diverse range of pupils. Their

perspectives on professional practice, structures for support, consultation and collaboration were to be sought and used for purposes of comparing and contrasting what is 'happening on the ground' in the Irish context. The approach used was to be 'reflective inquiry' around a specific few key questions. The interviews were to be unstructured, taped and transcribed.

All participants were to be told that their anonymity and confidentiality would be preserved by the researcher at all stages during the research process; All participants were advised that 'I am a student completing an MA dissertation for the University of Leeds' and that 'I am interested in teachers' experiences of working with students experiencing SEN in the Irish education system; Accordingly, I am interested in eliciting information about how it feels to be a teacher working with students with additional learning needs, how teachers work with students and how teachers see the move towards inclusion of all students in primary schools'. All participating teachers were also told that as I am a student I am not in a position to help with individual problems, gripes etc – but that a copy of the research when completed would be made available to each participant should they so want; A time limit of two hours was to be placed on the duration of each focus group discussion which time limit was notified to participants at the outset. With the exception of one meeting which ran over time, all other meetings adhered to the original schedule. Each meeting was recorded by audio tape.

The teacher sample

Following discussion with my supervisor, considerations which related to time constraints led to a revision of the data collection strategy. Having agreed that the conduct of focus group meetings would provide the most appropriate means of collecting primary data on teachers' experiences and perspectives, it was decided to reduce the number of focus group meetings from five to three and to focus on the collection of data from three different teacher groupings. Thus, three focus groups were conducted in all – one with 'restricted recognition' teachers trained in a specific child-centred pedagogical approach, a second with a group of 'restricted recognition' teachers with differing teacher training backgrounds and a third with 'fully qualified teachers' who had received their teacher training in one of the national teacher training colleges. Participants in all groups were employed in either special school settings or in mainstream schools. Time constraints also prohibited the conduct of individual interviews. However, teachers' contributions in focus group discussions offered much, by way of insight, into teachers' feelings in relation to current arrangements for the provision of education to disabled students and their own employment within the education system.

Participants were selected on the basis of non-probability sampling techniques which were employed having regard to considerations of time, cost and labour. (de Vaus, 1990). Approaches to sampling included both 'convenience' and 'snowball' sampling which encompassed individuals chosen on the basis of their availability for the study and on the basis of the researcher's prior knowledge that cases were both useful and not extreme. In

some cases, participants were selected on the basis of referral. That is to say, informants identified individuals of interest to the study who were then approached by the researcher and included in the relevant focus group. Accordingly, no claims are made by the researcher in relation to the generalisability of the findings of the study.

‘Snowballing’ of contacts commenced in March 2006, so that prior to each meeting a minimum of eight participants for each focus group were secured. Initial contact to invite participation was made by telephone and written confirmation of the invitation to participate was then sent to each participant. (Appendix 1). In order to obtain some limited background data on all participants, a brief questionnaire was issued at the time of invitation which focused on (i) demographic and professional characteristics of teachers and student population; (ii) background information re work setting/context, student contact, professional responsibility; (iii) background information re didactic approaches eg teaching aids, differentiation etc; (iv) background information re organisation of service delivery, collaborative practices and (v) training, specific qualifications, additional training received, probationary processes, position on salary scale and involvement in other education initiatives for the provision of alternative or additional support provision to disabled students. (Appendix 2).

Focus group meetings were held in two regional Education Centres in Ireland on three separate evenings in May 2006 through prior arrangement with the Director of each of the Education Centres. Arrangements for completion of health and safety records were negotiated in advance so that the anonymity of participants could be preserved as agreed.

Dates were selected with a view to maximising the number of attendees – specifically before the additional obligations which arise for teachers in the summer term of school became too onerous. With the exception of the focus group scheduled for ‘fully qualified’ teachers, in respect of which three participants failed to show up on the scheduled evening, all other participants who had agreed to participate, arrived to the appointed venues, many travelling considerable distances, for which this researcher was enormously grateful! In total 21 teachers participated in the three focus group discussions.

On arrival participants were issued with the prepared interview guideline which outlined the issues to be covered and which guided the discussion. (Appendix 3). This was intended to enable participants to sequence their own thought processes throughout the meeting which it was felt would enhance the quality of the discussion. The design and use of the prepared interview guideline sought to replicate at least in a rough sense the type of social model questioning deployed in the BCODP questionnaire. (Oliver 1990). In deploying this strategy it was hoped that the emphasis on structural barriers embedded within institutional practice might be more clearly brought into relief. The issue of ‘restricted recognition’ status was given no greater priority over any of the other question areas by the researcher. Teachers were free to talk about the issues of greatest importance to them, not the researcher, which it was hoped would eliminate bias and the collection of unreliable data from teachers, who may, out of frustration or any other reason, consider the meeting to be a forum for ‘them’ and ‘us’ discussion. The direction of the group discussion was led by the researcher with minimal intervention and participants in all groups shared their views freely in relation to each of the sequenced questions. It must

be said, that this approach to eliciting views and perspectives represented a worthwhile, albeit extremely challenging task for the researcher, who had to work diligently to ensure that she remained as ‘detached’ as possible in the midst of such lively discussion! Following participation a letter of thanks was sent to each participant. (Appendix 4).

Analysis and interpretation of data

The questionnaires and audio-taped discussions constituted the data for analysis. In keeping with the interpretative research paradigm, data collection methods were chosen which were thought likely to bring the researcher as close as possible to the subjects of the study and enable participants to express in their own words the way they ‘really’ think, feel and act. (Taylor and Tilley, 1998). Emphasis was placed on approaching the collection of data as a social process in which both researcher and researched were engaged as fellow participants in producing, generating and validating meanings about phenomena under study. (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, cited in Mercer, 2002: 231).

The aim of analysis of teachers’ contributions was (1) to gain some understanding of teachers’ perspectives on their experiences in the Irish primary school system; (2) to capture teachers’ perspectives on the workability of inclusion within the current framework for the provision of education to disabled students and (3) to identify some of the existing barriers which teachers’ experience in their attempts to meet the learning needs of a diverse student population.

A qualitative approach was used for the analysis of teachers' contributions which involved identification of key themes within the data, identification of category headings to group units of information relevant to the research purposes and review and revision of units and categories of information generated in the first phase of data analysis. Coding categories generated for the first area discussed which related to teachers' training incorporated teaching methodologies, didactic approaches, factors crucial to meeting student learning needs, effective classroom management, and teaching and administrative responsibilities,

Teachers' responses to the second question, which was concerned with the right of students to inclusive education, were categorised into coding categories which included teachers' understanding of inclusion, awareness of the right to inclusive education, teacher deployment of discourses of 'specialness' and 'difference', orientation to segregated schooling, factors determinant of inclusion in mainstream school and factors bearing on the workability and implementation of inclusive practice.

Responses to the third question which focused on factors affecting the successful inclusion of all students included teachers' conceptions of support, existing arrangements for the allocation of resources and support, access to other professionals, processes of referral and assessment, the role of the curriculum and teacher planning practice.

Responses to the fourth question which related to the professional attributes/characteristics required to teach disabled students generated coding categories

of discourses of ‘expertism’, professional preparedness of teachers to teach students who experience SEN, acquisition of specialist skill-sets, availability of training opportunities, and opportunities for teacher consultation and collaboration.

Responses to the fifth question which related to the creation of the category of ‘restricted recognition’ teacher generated coding categories which related to rationale, justification, processes of ‘distancing’ and ‘embracement’ amongst teachers, and organisational factors as barrier to inclusive practice.

Responses to the sixth question which focused on responsive forms of educational provision for all students generated coding categories which related to the introduction of the general allocation model for the provision of support to students in mainstream schools, existing support levels, segregated schooling and collaborative practice.

While the study was initially conceived within a participatory ‘action-research’ framework, time constraints dictated that the necessary time for examination of specific problems, the devising of appropriate action and evaluation of their impact was beyond the scope of the study. However, insofar as the study has built ‘collaboratively constructed descriptions and interpretations of events that might enable people to formulate mutually acceptable solutions to their problems’ (Stringer, 1996: 143), it represents a first step towards the adoption of a more democratic and empowering approach to understanding the position of disabled students in Irish schools.

Chapter 4 The creation of the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher in the Irish education system

Introduction

The creation of the category of ‘restricted recognition’ teacher with differentiated status to that of teachers trained in national training colleges occurred as part of the development and provision of educational supports to disabled students in the Irish primary education system. More recently, policy-making directed to making possible the development of ‘truly inclusive schools’ limits the involvement of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers to certain disabled students and explicitly endorses the redeployment of such teachers to special school settings. (Circular SP ED 02/05; Circular 0036/2006). In tracking the policy-making role of the DES, this chapter aims to identify: (1) the reason why the DES saw fit to create a category of teacher to whom the label ‘restricted recognition’ is applied, (2) the rationale for recent policy initiatives which place further limits on the involvement of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers with disabled students in mainstream schools and (3) the main impact on students and teachers of education policy which endorses redeployment of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers to special school settings.

Historical background to the structure of the Irish education system

Formative influences which have shaped the structure and provision of education within the Irish primary education system laid the basis for education policy which recognises some teachers as 'fully qualified' while according a status of 'restricted recognition' to others. Ireland's State supported primary school system has its origins in the Act of Union 1800, which Act brought Ireland under the direct rule of the British government and specifically under the control of a State Board of Commissioners whose original intention it was to operate a non-denominational system of education throughout the whole country. (Coolahan, 1981). However, opposition to the operation of a non-denominational system of education mounted by the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Catholic Churches made the aspiration of non-denominational education rather more difficult to achieve in practice. (Daly, 1979). One of the most contentious issues to arise during the early 19th century related to the arrangements for the provision of training to teachers for the newly established school system. The establishment in the 1830s of a single teacher training college in Dublin in addition to a number of city based model schools, managed on a non-denominational basis, met with whole-scale rejection by the churches in Ireland and led to the establishment of two Catholic training institutions in the 1870s. Having established itself as a significant power in the education equation, the Catholic Church moved to a significant position of power giving rise to the current position where national schools in Ireland are de jure non-denominational but de facto most are managed by the Catholic Church. (Bennett et al, 1998).

With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, concern with issues of independence and nationhood led to an increased focus on the Irish language, revival of the Gaelic tradition and the Irish culture. (Breathnach, 1956; Coolahan, 1981). This resulted in the development of a teacher training framework which emphasised the teaching of Catholicism and Irish over all other considerations.

The provision of special education services to disabled students in Ireland

What little education was provided to disabled students in Ireland in the late 18th and 19th centuries was largely the result of initiatives undertaken by religious orders who established two schools for deaf and visually impaired children in the middle of the 19th century. (McGee, 1990; Hyland and Milne, 1992). For the most part, disabled students were excluded from participating in the education system which reflected a belief that such students were not educable and their participation within the school system inappropriate. Following Ireland's independence from Britain in 1922, the exclusion of disabled children from the national school system continued to be a commonplace occurrence. McGee notes:

“ . . . The new state was not affluent, primary education was poorly resourced and primary schools were given explicit responsibility for the establishment of national identity and a considerable, extra responsibility for the restoration of the Irish language. The two main partners in the system, the State and the Churches, seemed preoccupied by issues other than special educational needs.” (McGee, 1990: 3).

Subsequent developments in the provision of education to disabled students largely occurred as a result of the efforts of parents, friends and allies who were unwilling to

accept the non-provision of education to their disabled relatives and friends. (Byrne, 1979). The establishment of voluntary organisations in the early 1950s led to the establishment of schools which specifically catered for disabled students and which were subsequently recognised in the early 1960s by the government as 'special national schools'. (McGee, 1990). It was at this time that the DES and the AMI Montessori Teacher Training College agreed an arrangement whereby teachers completing the three year Montessori teacher training course, which included a module in special education would be awarded an additional Diploma, more commonly known as the Benincasa Diploma in Special Education, approved by the Department of Education, which recognised these teachers 'for the purpose of teaching mentally and physically handicapped children, emotionally disturbed children and hospitalised children'. (Benincasa Diploma in Special Education). In 1965, the *Commission of Enquiry into Mental Handicap* recommended the establishment of a network of schools for children identified as experiencing mild and moderate degrees of mental disability which recommendation led to the establishment of special schools in most counties throughout Ireland. Where special schools were considered to be impracticable, special classes were established in mainstream primary schools.

State initiatives in relation to the provision of teacher training directed towards supporting disabled students were minimal. A one year full-time diploma funded by the DES at St Patrick's College, Dublin, was introduced in the early 1960s and was followed some years thereafter by the *Certificate in Remedial Education*. (SERC, 1993). For the most part these qualifications focused on the provision of support to children who might

be deemed suitable to be integrated into mainstream school and reflected a move towards 'integration' rather than inclusive education. However, in 1983, publication of a Commission Report (more usually referred to as the "Blue Report") drew attention to the educational needs of students who experienced severe or profound mental disability. The Commission concluded that such students could benefit from education in special classes delivered by appropriately trained teachers. It recommended the establishment of such classes with a PTR of 12: 1. In 1986, nineteen teachers were appointed to teaching positions with responsibility for students with severe and profound disability. However, while the DES concluded in 1989 that the scheme was working reasonably well no further initiative was developed on behalf of this student grouping. Nor was any policy put in place which sought to achieve pupil/teacher ratios in line with the Commission's recommendations. The subsequent publication of the *Special Education Review Committee Report* in 1993 emphasized the extent to which Ireland lagged behind the US and the UK in provision of education to students who experienced severe and profound mental disability and addressed government failure to extend the scheme for classes for children with severe and profound general learning disabilities beyond the original nineteen classes initiated in 1986. (SERC, 1993).

Responsibility for the delivery of the services, such as they were, fell between both the Departments of Education and Health but there was no integrated departmental approach to the provision of service which had significant consequences in terms of the State's fulfilment of constitutional obligations to disabled sections of society. For the most part the State was content to play a minimal role in the organisation, provision and

supervision of services which it contracted out on its behalf to charitable and religious institutions.

It was the landmark decisions of *O' Donoghue v Minister for Health* [1996] 2 IR 20 and *Sinnott v Minister for Education* [2001] 2 IR 545, which placed the issue of education for disabled students firmly on the Irish political agenda and highlighted the extent to which the State had abdicated responsibility in relation to the constitutional right to education of all its citizens. Both cases concerned the exclusion of disabled students from the national school system. The constitutional right to education of all children was established in *O' Donoghue* which case also established in law the PTR ratio in relation to students who experienced severe and profound mental disability. However, in the eight years which followed the *O' Donoghue* decision, inaction on the part of successive governments led many parents to the Irish Courts to secure appropriate educational provision for their children. It was the case of *Sinnott* in 2001 which established the obligation of the State under Article 42, s 4 of the Constitution to provide for free basic elementary education of all children up to the age of eighteen years of age.

The creation of the 'restricted recognition' teacher category

The focus of attention on the position of disabled people within the education system in the late 1990s created a significant problem for the DES. The burgeoning number of students who had never received education but whose entitlement to education was now firmly enshrined in law required that a significant increase in the number of special support services be provided within the primary school system without delay. Supports introduced in the late 1990s took the form of additional appointments of significant

numbers of resource teachers, learning support teachers, special needs assistants and the establishment of special classes and units in both special school and mainstream settings.

As the State had never taken a pro-active role in the provision of educational services to disabled students, scant attention had been paid by the national teacher training colleges to the issue of education for students with additional support needs. Under serious pressure to deal with the massive provision requirements which flowed from *O' Donoghue* and *Sinnott*, the DES created the category of 'restricted recognition' teacher to meet immediate staffing needs. (DES Circular 08/99). Introduction of 'restricted recognition' gave eligibility to teachers, drawn from outside the pool of teachers trained within the national training colleges, to teach in certain categories of special schools, in certain categories of special classes in mainstream schools where Irish is not a curricular requirement. Eligibility was also given to such teachers to teach pupils with assessed learning disabilities in ordinary mainstream primary classes who were allocated resource teaching support in accordance with assessed level of need under the system for resource teaching allocation introduced in 1999. (DES Circular, 08/99). 'Restricted recognition' teachers were also given eligibility to take up positions in special schools for young offenders, in youth encounter projects and special education projects. (DES Circular, 08/99).

In many instances teachers accorded 'restricted recognition' status were already employed in special school settings – many for a considerable number of years. However, such teachers were precluded from teaching in mainstream schools and the reason for this

is commonly said to be the absence of a qualification for the teaching of Irish. Several teacher groupings fell within the ambit of the newly created category including teachers with a recognized primary teacher qualification who trained outside the State, teachers with a Montessori teaching qualification awarded upon completion of a three year full time course in the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) College, Dublin and teachers with the National Diploma or Degree in Humanities in Montessori Education from St. Nicholas Montessori College, Dublin.

In the face of the crisis precipitated by the increasing number of parents who sought educational provision for their disabled children and the public outcry which occurred in the wake of the *Sinnott* judgment, the workings of the Department of Education and Science came under intense scrutiny. In 2000, the Secretary General of the DES, commissioned an examination into the Department of Education and Science's Operations, Systems and Staffing Need on behalf of the Minister for Education and Science. The Review Report, published in October 2000, focused sharp attention on the inadequacy of the policy-making function of the DES. Mr Sean Cromien, author of the Report, stated in unequivocal terms:

“There is a vagueness, caused by the absence of clear structures, about where in the Department policy is formulated and whose responsibility it is to formulate it. We were struck by the absence in certain line sections of any obvious thinking about policy formulation, and indeed by their perception that they had no responsibility for such matters . . . ” (Cromien, 2000: 3).

The limited capacity of the Special Education Section of the Department of Education and Science to deal with the changing reality on the ground was also noted:

“... the reality is that the Section has neither the expertise nor the resources to meet the emerging demands of the system. Its involvement in the day to day delivery of services continues to be such that critical policy issues have remained unattended to. Accordingly there is a need to extricate the section and, indeed, the Inspectorate from involvement in individual special needs cases and to re-focus their attention on the core issue of policy development in the special needs area. This can be achieved only by both developing an alternative structure for processing individual cases and providing an expert research capacity to underpin policy development.” (Cromien, 2000: 31/32).

Introduction of the general allocation model for the provision of educational support in mainstream schools

Part of the alternative structure for processing individual cases was advanced by the DES in May 2005, in the form of a “general allocation model” of teaching support for pupils with special educational need. (Circular SP ED 02/05). The model is based on newly introduced categories of ‘higher incidence’ and ‘lower incidence’ disability. Students categorised within the ‘higher incidence’ disability category who experience dyslexia, mild and borderline mild general learning disability as well as students who require learning support now have their support needs met through an automatic allocation to schools granted on the basis of overall pupil numbers. (Circular SP ED 02/05). The model provides for an allocation of additional teaching time for what was previously allocated for learning support teaching as well as an allocation of additional teaching time for what was previously termed ‘resource teaching’ for pupils who experience special educational need arising from high incidence disabilities. (Circular SP ED 02/05). Provision for meeting the support needs of students who are categorised within the lower incidence disability categories such as visually impaired, hearing impaired or physically disabled students are now met on the basis of individual application to a separate

statutory body, the National Council for Special Education, established under s 19 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

The DES describes the general allocation model as ‘a means of developing, in a phased and transitional process, an equitable system for pupils with special educational needs’. (Circular SP ED 02/05). The stated intention behind the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools under the terms of the model is said to be that of making possible ‘the development of truly inclusive schools’. (Circular SP ED 02/05). According to the DES, the general allocation of teaching resources ensures that schools have a means of providing additional teaching support to pupils who experience learning difficulties and special educational needs arising from high incidence disabilities without having to make applications on behalf of individual pupils. (Circular SP ED 02/05).

However, the change in the arrangements for the provision of support heralded the introduction of new arrangements for the employment and deployment of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers within the primary school system. In relation to the qualifications required for posts that have a general allocation component, LS/RT posts (which include posts comprised of general allocation hours) may now only be filled by teachers who are ‘fully recognised’ and ‘fully probated’. (Circular 0036/2006). With effect from 2006/2007, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers are no longer eligible to apply for LS/RT posts, notwithstanding the fact that these teachers hold a special education teaching qualification approved by the DES. Exceptions to this new arrangement apply to ‘restricted recognition’ teachers who were employed in a fulltime resource teaching

capacity in mainstream schools at the time of the introduction of the general allocation model in May 2005. (Circular 0036/2006). Posts held by such teachers will continue until the posts in which those teachers are serving come to an end. Once the continuation of the fulltime post is no longer warranted, or indeed, the teacher leaves the school in which s/he is employed, the 'restricted recognition' teacher is to be placed on the Special National Panel for redeployment to a special school or special class setting or to a resource teaching post which comprises solely of part-time hours allocated in respect of students within the 'low incidence' disability category. (Circular 0036/2006). Notably, the DES states that introduction of the model will enable school principals to rotate the LS/RT posts which will facilitate deployment of 'fully qualified' teachers from one post to another within the school which is currently not possible in relation to 'restricted recognition' teachers who hold LS/RT posts but who are not permitted to teach in mainstream class settings.

The immediate impact of these arrangements include the withdrawal of support levels in respect of many disabled students, the non-regulation and supervision of the provision of support to students who fall within the lower incidence disability category, arrangements for which now fall to the newly established National Council For Special Education, the absence of any coherent framework for sourcing teachers to work on a part-time hours basis in respect of these students and the imposition of further limitations on the students and settings within which 'restricted recognition' teachers may now work.

Conclusion

The dominance of the Catholic Church and the promotion of nationalism constitute key factors which have shaped the structure of Irish education since the foundation of the State. The Church/State relationship laid the basis for the non-recognition of teachers trained in teacher training colleges other than the national training colleges and for subsequent policy-making which exclusively assigns ‘restricted recognition’ teachers within the system to teach disabled students. However, the new arrangements which govern the employment and deployment of this category of teacher, formulated within a ‘special educational needs’ mindset, is directly linked to the continuation of segregative provision and has a direct bearing on the type of educational experience afforded to students and the type and level of support made available to students in both special and mainstream school settings.

Chapter 5 Professional-disabled people relations – a hierarchy of professional relationships

Introduction

The development of a coherent approach to the provision of truly inclusive education requires a fundamental change in the concept of education which reflects appreciation of the myriad contributions, interactions and interrelationships of the different stakeholders which together constitute the inclusive process. (Ebersold, 2003). However, in spite of the consensus achieved at international level to reverse segregative practices, the question of “who is in and who is out . . . and who is consigned to the status of ‘others’ ” (Slee, 1995), continues to be a question which dominates the provision of education to disabled students in the Irish jurisdiction. Notwithstanding explicit articulation of a changing culture which moves towards inclusion, government policy continues to promote exclusionary practices which render disabled people, and by association, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers, ‘other’, ‘different’ and ‘inferior’.

The exercise of professional power which underpins the relationship between professionals and disabled people across all sectors of public life, constitutes a significant force in the perpetuation of exclusionary practice. (Swain and French, 2000). In the context of education, the exercise of professional power creates a hierarchy of disability and disability categories matched by a hierarchy of professional relationships which endorse the interests, perspectives and concerns of some members of the school

community over those of others. Thus, policy structures and processes which create and maintain differentiated status between teachers and which contribute to the construction of disability within school settings, constitute important issues which merit attention in Irish education. This chapter considers the role which professionals play in the construction and interpretation of disability. It identifies a hierarchy of professional relationships within school settings and points to the traditional alignment of students who experience difficulty with teachers whose role and status is conceived within a 'categorical' perspective (Emanuelsson et al, 2001), consistent with a medicalised approach to the interpretation of disability. Policy initiatives which provide for the deployment of 'restricted recognition' teachers to special school settings are considered against a legislative backdrop which provides for a right to inclusive education subject to a number of provisos. The absence of a framework for the provision of training opportunities to enable teachers to enhance their ability to meet the needs of a diverse student population is addressed and a model for the provision of inclusive education broadly outlined.

Social responses to disability and the construction of 'difference'

Modern theoretical construction of disability points to external structural barriers as the cause of disabled peoples' oppression and continued exclusion from mainstream society. The literature is replete with evidence of oppressive institutional, economic, social and cultural practices which have served to both construct and legitimate the continued stigmatization and exclusion of disabled people and shape the construction of disabled

peoples' personal and public identity. (Barnes, 1997). However, cultural materialist accounts of disability suggest that disablism may be as much the product of language, communication, socialization and cultural representation systems as it is the product of externally imposed barriers. (Thomas: 2001). Focusing on the cultural production of disability, materialist accounts emphasise the key role which culture plays in creating and sustaining cultural forms, values, and ideas which perpetuate the culture of the dominant societal groups and ensure their continued dominance. (Swain and French, 2000). Historically, the exercise of professional power, characterized by hierarchical power relations between professionals and disabled people, has constituted an important tool in the interpretation and cultural production of disability. According to French, the relationship is an unequal power relationship with the greater balance of power vested in the hands of the professionals. (French, 1994).

The domination of the medical profession in professional-disabled people relations underpins a conceptual approach to disability which locates disability within the disabled individual and legitimates a view that disabled people are themselves the 'problem'. (Barnes, 1991; Bury, 2000). Thus, for example, definitions of 'disability' produced by academics, policy makers and professionals, based upon a medicalised interpretation of disability, ensure reproduction at social, cultural and economic levels, of a perspective which views disability as caused by psychological or physiological 'abnormality' or 'impairment'. Such definitions serve to perpetuate the idea that disabled people are objects to be 'treated', 'cured', 'changed', 'improved', 'rehabilitated' and made 'normal'

(Barnes, 1991) and contribute further to the processes of segregation and institutionalization which ensure disabled peoples' exclusion from mainstream society.

Professional dominance rooted in medicalised thinking increasingly involves an extensive body of professionals in processes of identification and assessment which seek to define disabled peoples difficulties, identify their needs, determine appropriate intervention and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies prescribed. (Swain and French, 2000). The provision of services to disabled people are provided within a framework which ensures that it is professional workers who define, plan and deliver them while disabled people are cast in the role of passive recipients, with little opportunity to exercise control in matters which pertain to their own needs and interests. Professionals who operate within traditional paradigms, create and reproduce a set of social relationships from the outset in which disabled people are designated as inferior. Through discourses of 'need' and 'specialisation' located within an individualized medical tragedy model, the vested interests of the dominant societal group are promoted, endorsed and maintained. (Swain and French, 2000).

Professional dominance in education

Professional power is also deployed to define and control expertise and determine the boundaries of individual professions which in turn provides the foundations for power exercised by the professionals in relation to the users of their services. (Hugman, 1991). Accordingly, the exercise of professional dominance involves professionals and

professional organizations in the legitimization of knowledge, skills and expertise and the determination of who does what, where, when, how and in what circumstances. Thus, in the context of education, regard must be had to the policy context within which the power relations between professionals and disabled people are constructed, defined and maintained. Power structures which evidence the assertion of dominance by professionals over disabled people are supported by policies which determine arrangements for segregated educational provision, assessment practices, resource allocation, gate-keeping of services, curriculum delivery, and the deployment of rehabilitative and normalizing strategies in education which many disabled people experience as a violation of their own experience. (Abberley, 1997; Carrington, 1999; Carmichael, 2005).

Domination by powerful groups in society who, 'in pursuit of their own interests', define and control expertise and knowledge represents a further aspect of power relations in the professional-disabled people relationship. (Swain and French, 2000). Professional groups control qualifications and accreditation procedures and determine who will or will not be deemed to be a professional and/or in what prescribed circumstances – often in very haphazard ways. In the realm of education, so-called partners in the education process, such as teacher unions and management bodies play a powerful role in determining which students teachers teach, which teachers teach which students, what is taught, what is understood as knowledge and what knowledge is considered to be of most value. (Carrington, 1999). Power structures which support and maintain the assertion of dominance by professionals over other professionals in education, include the construction of professions within professions, the promotion of discourses of expertism

and specialism. (Troyna and Vincent, 1996) and the operation of processes of ‘distancing’ and ‘embracement’ between teachers (Snow and Anderson, 2001), which processes set professionals apart from each other.

Illich (1976) identifies a third aspect of professional power which relates to the exercise by professionals of practices which pathologise and locate within the individual, problems which have their roots in societal and economic practices. Wearing this hat, professionals stand between the disabled person and the State, interpreting policy and acting as arbiters of need. One particular consequence of the exercise of professional power exercised in all these aspects noted by Swaine and French, is the creation of an enforced relationship of dependency. (Swain and French, 2000). Thus, disabled people are forced to become dependent on professionals while professionals become dependent on disabled people who become the means of earning a livelihood and the basis for improving the material relations of their own lives.

Arrangements for the deployment of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers – a case in point

The creation of the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher category evidences a hierarchy of professional relationships in education which is directly linked to the teaching of disabled students in Irish schools. The category of ‘restricted recognition’ teacher conceived within a categorical perspective can be seen to contribute in no small way to the interpretation and cultural production of disability. Thus, the social relationships which

continue to dominate educational provision to disabled students reflect a viewpoint which promotes the vested interests of the dominant societal group over disabled students and as a consequence, the interests of ‘fully qualified’ teachers over other educators employed within the school system.

Against that backdrop a number of important questions arise in relation to the subject of this study. Does the presence of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers in the education system constitute a barrier to students’ full participation in meaningful educational experience? To what extent does the presence of these teachers facilitate continued practices of segregation? Does the introduction of the general allocation model for the provision of teaching support and the associated arrangements for the deployment of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers contribute to continuation of the status quo? Does teacher resistance to the model represent anything other than an expression of self interest on the part of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers who realize that the pool of students with whom they may now work is significantly reduced and their employment opportunities are now seriously curtailed? Crucially, is engagement with this topic a further manifestation of professional power relations located within a ‘special educational needs support’ mindset? While the answers to those questions require further consideration, it does appear to this researcher that ‘restricted recognition’ teachers may, by virtue of their ‘restricted recognition’ status, legitimately ask: Are the arrangements for the deployment of staff in special and mainstream schools consistent with stated commitment to the creation of inclusive school cultures?

Arrangements for the deployment of 'restricted recognition' teachers must be viewed against a legislative framework for inclusion which provides for a conditional right to inclusive education. Section 2 of the recently enacted Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004 provides that a student is entitled to inclusive education on condition that the provision of education is deemed to be in the best interests of the student and that the provision of such education does not interfere with the education of other non-disabled students. A similar 'get out clause' is located in the provisions of the Equal Status Act 2000, (as amended by the Equality Act 2004), which promotes equality and prohibits discrimination, harassment and related behaviour in connection with the provision of services, property and other opportunities to which the public generally or a section of the public has access. While the provisions of the Act are underpinned by a presumption of mainstreaming for disabled students, s 7 of the Act provides that a school will be exempt from the requirement to provide service to a disabled student only to the extent that to do so would (because of the students' disability) have a seriously detrimental effect on the provision of service to other students or would make it impossible to provide services to other students.

In this context it is clear that the entitlement to inclusive education is circumscribed by provisions which reference disabled students' entitlement to inclusive education to the education of other students. Of particular note however, is the fact that disabled students' entitlement to inclusive education is not referenced to the education of their non-disabled peers. It is arguable therefore, that the policy for the redeployment of teachers conceived within the existing legislative framework, lays the basis for a 'dressed up' version of

traditional practices which endorse and promote the transferral of students perceived to be 'difficult' to other teachers trained to deal with the 'problem' in segregated school settings or in separate 'pull out' support programmes.

Insofar as the deployment policy impacts on the development of shared teaching practice, a number of points require to be made. It is arguable that the policy serves to lock up within special class and special school settings the knowledge and acquired skill sets of 'restricted recognition' teachers such as to reduce the potential for pooling and sharing of knowledge and experience. As such it can be seen to enable 'fully qualified' teachers to exempt themselves from engaging with some of the complex issues which lie at the heart of inclusive school reform and inhibit the development of an interactionist approach directed towards the development of truly inclusive educational practice.

The importance of retaining the skills and knowledge of teachers with experience in the provision of teaching support within mainstream schools cannot be overstated. In the absence of a coherent policy on the provision of training and opportunities for professional development, there exists a wide gap between the experience of 'fully qualified' and 'restricted recognition' teachers. Significantly, one consequence of maintaining a distinction between 'fully qualified' and 'restricted recognition' teachers is that 'restricted recognition' teachers have had greater opportunities to work with disabled students than have their 'fully qualified' colleagues which is reflected in teachers' differing confidence levels in meeting the educational needs of a diverse student population. While 'restricted recognition' teachers reported that they did not consider

themselves to be experts or specialists, they noted the acquisition of valuable experience and specialist skill sets at both pre-service and in-service stages which enabled them to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Many ‘restricted recognition’ teachers reported having the benefit of study, training and work opportunities abroad in intercultural settings, where the arrangements for the provision of teaching support to diverse student populations was often more developed than in Irish schools. Teachers viewed access to and availability of additional training opportunities to be crucial to effective practice. Thus, for example, teachers considered that the provision of training in alternative communication systems such as the Pictorial Exchange Communication System (PECS) had enhanced their ability to teach to non-verbal students. Additional training opportunities had also enabled them to feel more confident about their teaching role. ‘Fully qualified’ teachers by contrast, perceived themselves to be less well situated to meet the needs of disabled students in their classes. Teachers in this group expressed considerable frustration at the failure of the DES to make appropriate provision for training to enhance their knowledge and skills. It would appear that for many ‘fully qualified’ teachers, training in support provision did not form part of the training received at the pre-service training stage and any training received since then has been undertaken at their own initiative and at their own expense:

“ . . . I’m eighteen years teaching. We didn’t have any training . . . There wasn’t any mention of special needs children. Our basic training was just the normal teacher training that you get and dealing with children maybe who’d be slow learners . . . unless you went off to do the remedial course, you didn’t know anything about assessments or anything like that. We didn’t do anything like that in college . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

“It does seem that they’ve put the cart before the horse with this whole inclusion thing. Like include them . . . but the teachers aren’t trained to teach them and the

supports aren't there for them . . . very much when I was starting out autism was the buzz word a few years ago so they started giving us the training for TEACH, the training for PECS but they're not giving the training *before* the child goes in. They're in there and the teachers are like 'what do we do?' and they're trying to train while they are in there. (MT Participant 3).

It is of note, however, that the 'normal' teacher training referred to by 'fully qualified' teachers reflects the establishment of teacher training colleges conceived in the model of the school as 'factory'. (Callahan, 1962; Bennett and LeCompte, 1990). In the main, the 'factory' model of schooling is informed by the 'efficiency' principle which aims to teach en masse, achieve uniformity and treat all students as if they were the same, hence the emphasis on whole group teaching, pre-established schedules, pre-established programmes, regulation, assessment practices and standardised testing procedures. The provision of inclusive education however, requires a different model of schooling and a different model of teacher training which reflects understanding of the broader social and cultural forces that shape education practices and which ought to inform the provision of education to all learners. (Carrington, 1999; Lloyd, 2000; Rose, 2002).

Achievement of educational equity and the process of educational reform

Restructuring of education consistent with inclusive ideology calls for reconfiguration of the power relations which underpin provision to ensure genuine equality of educational opportunity for all learners. If the education system is to honour the entitlement of all students to participation in meaningful educational experiences, it needs to be restructured having regard to very different considerations than those which inform current provision – not least of which include the assumptions which underpin current

organisation. In this regard, Stainback and Stainback (1990) view the integration of teachers within the system to be crucial to full inclusion:

“Full inclusion does not mean that special educators are no longer necessary; rather it means that special educators are needed even more to work with regular educators in teaching and facilitating challenging, supportive and appropriate educational programs for all students. However, special educators do need to be integrated into, and in effect, become ‘regular or general’ educators in the mainstream who have expertise in specific instructional, curricular, and assessment areas. (Stainback and Stainback, 1990: 4).

Rather than excising difference and diversity out of the equation, education policy which seeks to develop truly inclusive schools ought to reflect appreciation of diversity and difference as the means by which genuine progress, change and growth in knowledge can occur. (Skrtic, 1995). Accordingly, an explicitly stated agreement and understanding of the concept of equity is required. (Lloyd, 2000). In its truest form, equity in education requires full participation of all learners, an appreciation of diversity and difference as valuable resources and a democratic view of justice which promotes the development of mechanisms for the identification of unequal distribution of power within school settings. (Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994). Thus, a model for inclusive equitable provision will emphasise the development of collaborative cultures for all members of the school community and reflect the operation of processes which take full account of variations in interests, strengths, skills, learning styles, teaching approaches and differing cultural perspectives. (Lloyd, 2000). Collaborative cultures founded on these grounds will enable all members of the school community to take responsibility in relation to their own learning and to share responsibility in relation to the learning processes of others. Collaborative cultures consistent with an inclusive mandate will promote the development of problem-solving

approaches which will enable school communities to achieve genuine democratic governance based on awareness of cosmic interrelatedness, interdependence, appreciation of the value of uncertainty, critical reflective practice and a critical attitude towards 'received' knowledge. (Lloyd, 2000).

Conclusion

Reorganisation of schools in line with these considerations requires a move away from traditional conceptions of the student as 'empty vessel' towards a conception of the student as active learner at the very centre of the learning process. Such a shift in perspective requires schools and teachers to create barrier-free, flexible, learning environments which are capable of providing responsive forms of provision for all learners. The creation of school environments which enable all teachers to develop an understanding of the construction of student understanding, the role played by teaching styles and approaches, and the importance of providing adapted equipment and teaching materials to support learning experiences is therefore, critical to the development of truly 'interactionist' practice by all members of the teaching profession.

Chapter 6 Teachers' Conceptual Frameworks and Inclusive Education

Introduction

The ways in which teachers both interpret and mediate state policy bears heavily on the degree to which disabled students' entitlement to full participation in education is upheld. (Ward et al, 1994; Vaughn et al, 1996; Villa et al, 1996; Lloyd, 2000). Accordingly, particular attention must be paid to the conceptual frameworks which inform teachers' action and practice and which are drawn upon to justify or validate particular teacher positions. This chapter presents findings on some of the assumptions, theories and educational beliefs which underpin teachers' exercise of professional power in relation to disabled students. Drawing on material gathered in focus group discussion, teachers' thinking on 'knowledge' 'teaching' 'learning' and their role in relation to disabled students is considered and impediments to the implementation of inclusive practice highlighted.

Teachers' understanding of the inclusive educational mandate

At the level of language, discourses of 'specialness', and 'difference' which mirror the language of official discourse, underpin teachers' conceptual frameworks in relation to themselves, the students whom they teach, their relationships with other professionals and the school settings within which they work. A common factor illuminated by teachers' discourse was the deployment of extensive 'special educational needs'

terminology for recognising, identifying and defining differences between students which tends to suggest that categorisation processes remain deeply embedded within teachers' thinking. Teachers freely deployed language which served to define, group, label and categorise disabled students on the basis of individual impairment. There was much evidence of teachers converting newly introduced terms such as 'students within the low incidence disability category' into 'within student' versions such as 'low incidence' students, which references were mutually recognised by teaching colleagues. Much of teachers' discourse appeared to suggest that teachers interpret the pathologisation of impairment as a 'knowledge' form. For example:

“... We hadn't a clue of whether the child was autistic, whether they were ADHD, ADD, any of those terms we weren't familiar with and it's only in the last whatever, five, ten years that I would become aware of those terms . . . there should be a very specific special needs component with any course and we didn't get that . . .” (FQT Participant 3).

The historical distinction between mainstream and special education which permeated teachers' discourse suggested that teachers' understanding of the principle reflected thinking more commonly associated with an 'integrationist' perspective. (Pijl, Meijer and Hegarty, 1997; Vislie, 2003). Teachers' discourse reflected differing levels of awareness and understanding of the ideology and the central foci which underpin the principle of inclusion. Teachers' appeared to consider disabled students' involvement in mainstream schools as closely linked to students' ability to be assimilated into the existing mainstream school structure rather than reflecting understanding of inclusion linked to a belief that access to educational opportunity is best served in mainstream school settings. (UNESCO, 1994). The terms inclusion and integration were used interchangeably by

both teacher groups, often with reference to very different and distinct ideological concepts, as for example:

“Yes, I think inclusion is great . . . but I think the public and the education authorities need to be educated as to what inclusion is . . . it would be impossible for our children to go into a straight primary school but it should be possible for our students to be involved to some degree . . . join for certain events . . . dual placement in its broader terms . . . and it’s very important that our students go to their schools . . .” (MT Participant 5).

For the most part, ‘fully qualified’ teachers’ tended to reference the principle of inclusion to the disabled student him/herself rather than to the cultural, social and institutional settings and the beliefs and values which they held in relation to the students with whom they worked. While ‘restricted recognition’ teachers’ interpretation of inclusion was also referenced to disabled students, interpretation of the principle appeared to reflect understanding of inclusion as a membership issue. Teachers in this group located the issue of inclusion in education within the broader ambit of justice and equality and appeared to view the principle as extending beyond the needs of individual students to encompass all members of the school community, as the following extracts indicates:

“I think inclusion is vital. Inclusion is vital for all to be treated fairly, staff, pupils and parents; people don’t understand as to what inclusion is. I feel that we should all be included . . .” (MT Participant 1).

The link between the inclusive mandate, the goal of creating inclusive schools and the creation of cultures of difference was viewed somewhat differently by both groups of teachers with evidence of teachers drawing on different frameworks when addressing notions of ‘difference’ and ‘identity’. Both teacher groupings revealed a dominant and very strong orientation to segregated schooling and differentiated between students who

‘could’ and students who ‘could not’ cope within the mainstream school setting. Both groups appeared to share a perspective which viewed the provision of education in a special school setting as appropriate for some students. While both groups demonstrated awareness of the capacity of institutional structures to render disabled students ‘different’, ‘other’, ‘inferior’ and ‘inadequate’, ‘fully qualified’ teachers tended to locate students’ supposed incapacity within the student him/herself. Student difference was viewed as a factor which could, and often did, justify placement in a special school setting:

“I’d query is it tolerance after you reach . . . that sort of age of reasoning . . . are we excluding the children with special needs who have social/behavioural difficulties from mixing with similar type children who might have a similar interest to themselves by including them at mainstream – that’s a query I would have.” (FQT Participant 3).

By contrast, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers tended to link perceived incapacity to cope to both ‘within child’ and ‘within environment’ factors. While their discourse indicated awareness of the existence of cultural and institutional barriers which often make the mainstream school a hostile environment for students and school personnel, their discourse tended to reflect views of student difference grounded in understanding and experience of the non-homogeneity of the students with whom they worked. All ‘restricted recognition’ teachers interpreted the inclusive mandate as one which required them to teach to a diverse student population with a diverse range of learning needs within a context which implied the involvement of a range of different personnel.

While ‘fully qualified’ teachers acknowledged the benefits for all students of disabled students’ participation in mainstream education, the difficulties posed by some disabled

students enrolled in the mainstream setting were viewed as significant impediments which limited teachers' capacity to cater to the needs of the rest of the class group. Many teachers considered that the presence of disabled students resulted in 'suffering' on the part of other students:

“If you've a class of thirty one which I had up to Christmas, I had two low incidence children, two international pupils and one *very* disruptive child who wasn't in a higher or low incidence category . . . but the other children suffered because of that . . . now no matter what way you look at it, no matter how many SNAs you have in it, they do suffer . . . it's not politically correct to say that the other children suffer from it . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

Analysis of mainstream teachers' discourse revealed awareness of the right to inclusive education enshrined within the EPSEN ACT 2004 but teachers interpreted the right as 'implying' the provision of inclusive education rather than giving rise to any legal mandate. The parameters of the right to mainstream education were interpreted by 'fully qualified' teachers within a context which referenced disabled students' right to education to that of their able-bodied peers. This viewpoint was underpinned by an assumption that responsibility for neglect of education could be attributed to disabled students rather than to social, economic or cultural circumstances:

“. . . Until somebody takes a case saying my child's education is being neglected because of SEN pupils, nothing is going to be done and that case is coming down the road . . . hope it's not my school and every other teacher in the country is saying hope it's not my school, but it's going to come . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

'Fully qualified' teachers freely deployed 'needs based' terminology when articulating viewpoints which favoured 'case by case' decision making in relation to student placement. However, as the following extract illustrates, teacher practice occurs in the absence of any coherent approach to the assessment of individual student need. Equally

apparent is the absence of any explicit basis from which teachers might even begin to approach the question of when and in what circumstances students' right to education in a mainstream setting might be curtailed. Notwithstanding, it was the view of several 'fully qualified' teachers that the discretion to decide on the issue of school placement in the 'best interests' of the student ought to be that of the teacher.

“I certainly would be very strong on the fact . . . look . . . the bottom line is you have to do what's best for the child . . . and if the child's needs are being met in the school environment they are in, fine, but if they are not you might have to look elsewhere . . . and it mightn't be an either/or. It could be a combining of it because there has been talk of children attending special school and mainstream . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

“ . . . Who decides? I suppose in an ideal world in a case study situation, but I've never found they work anyway, we would all sit down and discuss what the needs of a child are . . . but I think, what needs to be made clear, and I suppose we can't do it because we haven't the right to refuse a child, is that when the child is enrolled there's an understanding there that this is going to be reviewed on an annual basis to see how well the child is doing, in the best interests of the child.” (FQT Participant 1).

Determining factors which 'fully qualified' teachers considered to be crucial to whether students should be included in mainstream schools were whether the student presented with challenging behaviour, the vulnerability of the student, class size and the availability of SNA support. Similar factors were cited by 'restricted recognition' teachers who expressed concerns surrounding student transfer from special to mainstream school settings. 'Restricted recognition' teachers noted the potential for students in either setting to experience isolation due to the involvement of multiple staff members during the school day, pull-out schedules, and arrangements which prescribe different locations for receipt of support services together with poor communication between class teachers and support personnel.

The issue of challenging behaviour was viewed by all teachers to be an issue of serious concern in respect of which little support or direction appeared to emanate from the DES:

“One of the huge areas that I find that there is no help on is challenging behaviour. There is NONE. You’re on your own. And we would have had a child with extremely challenging behaviour in our school this year who came from another school and we were able to kind of work on it ourselves only because there were a couple of experienced teachers who happened to have experience in that area but when we looked to NEPS for help . . . and on his report it was written that he would end up in a high incident unit if he didn’t get help. No help. None. Absolutely none . . . and it doesn’t need . . . you shouldn’t have to have an assessment to be able to get help for challenging behaviour because you’ve ordinary children who aren’t high or low incidence who have challenging behaviour . . .” (FQT Participant 1)

However, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers viewed the issue of challenging behaviour within a broader context and articulated a view which linked challenging behaviour to the learning needs of individual students. Teachers viewed challenging behaviour as a key which could enable them to understand more fully the type of support which a student required or the type of environmental modification which could create a more optimal condition for student learning. Thus ‘restricted recognition’ teachers’ understanding of challenging behaviour was linked to both ‘within child’ and ‘within environment’ factors. ‘Restricted recognition’ teachers did however, express concern about education policy which increasingly results in the ‘warehousing’ of students with challenging behaviour in special school settings. The deployment of what teachers referred to as ‘barbaric practices’ in relation to disabled students gave ‘restricted recognition’ teachers serious cause for concern in relation to the welfare of individual students enrolled in both special and mainstream school settings. The following extract from a teacher employed in a special school setting proves instructive:

“ I am experiencing at the place that I work a real difficulty with staff attitude as to what constitutes challenging behaviour and I see every day, several times a day, people being cruelly treated because of the perception of what behaviour is acceptable and what isn't . . . maybe because of our training we might be more in a position to track back and see what the trigger may be, but to witness on a daily basis, children being . . . really getting close to what I'm observing . . . children being harassed actually . . . I'm seeing people being excluded. I'm seeing children being harassed . . .” (MT Participant 1).

“They put them outside the door, scream at them . . . it wouldn't be everyone now, it would be a certain element who would be of the view that these children are 'bold', that that 'bold' behaviour will be only corrected if they're put outside the door, if they're withdrawn and not allowed go to PE . . . but that's exclusion on the hour! It's very shameful and it's very difficult to witness.” (MT Participant 1).

Significantly, however, while teachers reported witnessing demonstrations of extreme hostility towards individual students and knew that what they witnessed was wrong, they perceived themselves to be unable to address the issue. Of particular interest was the fact that teachers located their perceived incapacity to confront the reality of offensive practice in relation to disabled students in their own need 'to earn a living' and 'work in the job'.

Teachers' attitudes towards workability and implementation of the inclusive mandate

Both groups of teachers expressed frustration with what they experienced as a haphazard, 'ad hoc' approach to service provision. The following perspectives suggest that teachers' understanding of the inclusion-exclusion dynamic was more informed by their experience in their own classrooms rather than any orientation towards inclusion provided to them by the DES:

“What I’m observing as I walk through the hall on my business elsewhere . . . I see the attempt being made to include but I see the ‘exclusion’ . . . everybody is frenetically including everyone but it’s not being thought through . . .” (MT Participant 1).

“. . . and nobody is bringing the ‘exclusion bit to the fore because the buzzword is ‘inclusion.’” (MT Participant 5).

“I think it’s almost like the party line from some of the psychologists that you’re dealing with and the Department . . . that it’s like . . . we’ll just throw them in there like . . . and they’re being included, but none of the supports are going with that inclusion.” (MT Participant 3).

“Sometimes I find inclusion annoys me . . . because it’s a little word . . . oh, they’re included . . . but they’re not a lot of the time you know and they’re not a part of the group. . . and you find that once they come halfway through infants, up into first class, the divide has just started to just grow and grow and grow. The other kids don’t want to play with them ‘cos they see them as being different . . . and that’s not fair to the children either side . . . it’s not fair to the children with the special needs and it’s not fair to the children in the mainstream . . . because everybody is suffering.” (FQT Participant 2).

“. . . if the child is only going to be a body in the room that’s not inclusion. If all they’re going to be is in the corner doing their own set of work with the SNA . . . that’s not inclusion but that’s what’s happening a lot of the time.” (FQT Participant 2).

“For some kids it works, that’s without a doubt . . . but from my experience I just find that sometimes they are just a body in the room and you’re breaking your neck to get to them and include them and it’s not working . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

Teachers in both groupings viewed current arrangements for the organisation of schools as wholly inadequate to enable them to meet the needs of the students with whom they work. ‘Fully qualified’ teachers, focused particularly on those aspects of school organisation which they perceived impacted on the development of effective classroom management. Issues of concerns to ‘fully qualified’ teachers in mainstream school

settings included the absence of information on how to deal with disabled students in mainstream classes, the difficulties for principals of combining responsibilities for teaching and administration, teacher confidence levels, class size, multi-grade classes, lack of availability of SNA and SENO support, lack of advance notification of the arrival of students with SEN, parental expectation and support and the absence of the provision of training opportunities: The following extracts prove instructive:

“Next year I am going to have four SEN pupils and I’m a teaching principal. I also have to deal with discipline issues throughout the whole school. That has to take place during school hours. I’m going to have four bodies either coming with me or going to somebody else while I have to deal with that. That is not inclusion. That is insertion. I’m not sure we’re answering these children’s needs. It’s sort of a cure-all . . . a salving conscience for many many people.” (FQT Participant 3).

“Well I’ve had two special needs children for the last four years and I’ve had two SNAs and this coming year I have three special needs children and three SNAs in a class of 34 infants – juniors and seniors . . . This is where the inclusion is a bit of a joke . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

“. . . and it’s almost like the parents think if they get to mainstream it’s a cure-all and once they’re in there, by hook or by crook we’ll keep them there even if everybody around them is saying no this is not right . . . we’ve tried it . . . and we’ve had experience of this in our school . . . where this child is now in second class, has plateaued out and is . . . god love him . . . is just not able to manage . . . is not going to get any further and we have done everything and anything and the parents are finding it extremely difficult . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

“We can’t refuse . . . we can’t say no . . . and if they’re not able for a special class how in the name of God can they be able for mainstream?” (FQT Participant 2).

For their part, ‘restricted recognition’ teachers cited organisational factors as barriers to effective classroom management. These included lack of opportunities for teachers to meet with other personnel, the absence of any coherent approach to planning, recording and assessing pupil progress, scheduling concerns which relate to discontinuity and

interruption in instruction for both teachers and students (Emanuelsson, 2001), loss of class membership due to pull-out programmes (Wang, 1988), and teacher inability to determine the length of the work cycle based on the individual needs of the student. 'Restricted recognition' teachers perspectives on the relationship between the inclusive mandate and classroom management practices was clearly circumscribed by whether they were employed as class teachers in special schools in which they exercised some degree of autonomy in relation to the conduct of their class, or resource teachers who worked within a 'pull-out' support provision framework. For the most part, resource teachers reported working in separate physical spaces rather than in mainstream class settings with very little opportunity to ensure that support provided to students transferred into the mainstream setting in which students spent the greater part of the school day.

Identification of students with additional support needs

Both groups of teachers expressed dissatisfaction with processes of referral and assessment. Teachers criticised the absence of psychological services, speech and language services and physiotherapy services and considered that until those services were made available to class teachers the goal of inclusion amounted to 'a lot of hogwash'.

“A lot of the problem is we don't have the resources, to get a speech assessment you're waiting two years. To get a psychological assessment you're waiting another year and a half, two years, and when you do get an assessment the psychologist will not make a definitive decision and then you're left with . . . well he doesn't tick any of the boxes so he won't get the hours, he won't get an SNA and you're left with a child in your room and its up to you to cater to him . . . and that's our job . . . I mean I've no problem with doing that, but we need the resources and we need the help and it's not there . . . and until they have schools in clusters with every ten

schools who have their own speech therapist, that you can pick up the phone and say I need you tomorrow at ten o' clock; psychologist, I need you; occupational therapist I need you and I want my report in a week . . . until that happens I think . . . you know it's huge pressure on the teachers . . . it's not fair to any of the children in the room, not just the special needs children because you're tearing your hair out and the Department don't give a rattle! (FQT Participant 2).

“ . . . I think the speech therapist especially. It's huge. There should be a speech therapist assigned to so many schools. You know . . . this idea of handing a teacher a language programme . . . we're not speech therapists. It takes four years to become a speech therapist . . . there must be something in the training . . .” (FQT Participant 4).

Both groups of teachers noted wide variations in the quality and timeliness of psychological and speech and language assessment reports. Teachers appeared to assess the quality of reports under two heads: 'getting the resource hours' and the provision of 'helpful recommendations'. The arrangements for the provision of assessment under the National Psychological Service (NEPS) were viewed as wholly inadequate both in terms of the operation of a 'quota' and 'rationing' policy (which allots a certain number of assessments to a school on the basis of pupil numbers) and in terms of the length of time required for the conduct of the assessment. The increasing number of parents who opted to go the private route was noted, as were significant differences in 'turn around' speeds when assessments were conducted by psychologists who worked in a private capacity. Teachers also noted the difficulties associated with children who come to the school without a diagnosis and the level of work involved in attempting to have a student subsequently assessed and identified for purposes of resource allocation.

Workability of curriculum delivery to students with additional support needs

Both groups of teachers noted how experiences of failure reinforce the existing difficulties experienced by many disabled students. Teachers perceived that many students had extensive social needs which were not currently being catered for, or indeed addressed, within mainstream education. The role of the curriculum, its aims, range and required modifications, as well as issues of access, were addressed by focus group participants across all teacher groups. Teachers considered that students and teachers were constrained by a curriculum with a 'narrow academic focus'. The emphasis on the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in mainstream schools was viewed as a barrier to the inclusion of many disabled students for whom the acquisition of such skills might prove problematic. Teachers perceived the emphasis to contribute to students' sense of failure. In addition, the lack of focus on self-help, social and independent living skills was viewed as being detrimental to students' sense of well-being. Particular concerns were expressed in relation to the creation of peer relationships, the potential for students to feel isolated and the detrimental effect on students when the sense of belonging usually associated with the development of peer relationships did not occur. 'Fully qualified' teachers appeared to prioritise social skills over academic skills, as is apparent from the following extracts:

“ . . . I'm speaking from a background of many years ago taking in a Down's syndrome child into a mainstream school . . . The child went on and he got four, I think it was four leaving cert . . . you know whatever . . . the basic level, foundation level, but nevertheless he got as far as leaving cert . . . but I would have a major issue . . . what good is that if he doesn't have the social skills for getting on the bus, for getting his change, interacting with ordinary people who might talk to him on the street. We're not able to do that as national school teachers . . . we haven't the time . . .” (FQT Participant 3).

“That’s one emphasis that I’ve noticed moving from the mainstream to the special school . . . that the emphasis is really not on the teaching of life skills in the mainstream school . . . it’s just not.” (MT Participant 7).

There was however evident disagreement amongst ‘fully qualified teachers about whether the teaching and development of independent living and social skills fell within their ‘teaching’ remit as national school teachers. In contrast to her colleague, the teaching of life-skills was viewed by one ‘fully qualified’ teacher, currently employed in an LS/RT capacity to constitute a significant part of her job. Interestingly, this teacher linked determination of what was/was not part of the job to teacher confidence levels, as the following extract indicates:

“I don’t think we’re given enough confidence in ourselves to realise that that’s what we should be doing and it’s only when you’ve taught a couple of children and you have that experience that you’re able to question that . . . But you’re kind of on your own in thinking that . . . and saying ‘is this what we should be doing’ or ‘is that what we should be doing’ . . . there’s not enough guidance there on it . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

While teachers noted the introduction of draft curriculum guidelines for students who experience mild, moderate and severe and profound general learning disability (the status of which have yet to be clarified by the DES), the above view tends to suggest that the value of the curricular guidelines may be interpreted very differently by different teachers depending on prior experience, the students whom they teach and where and in what capacity they are located within the education system. The extract tends to suggest that in addition to a mainstream plus support curriculum and a differentiated curriculum for students who experience SEN, teachers may require, what Howarth terms, ‘a developmental curriculum’ which covers ‘selected and sharply focused educational,

social and other experiences with precisely defined objectives and designed to encourage a measure of personal autonomy'. (Howarth, 1988: 292).

'Fully qualified' teachers' discourse revealed little evidence of shared planning practice in the determination of the kinds of knowledge and skills and the styles and methods of delivery most likely to enhance student learning. In their discussion of daily practice 'fully qualified' teachers demonstrated little awareness of the importance of devising programmes which provide regular and systematic opportunities for students to select, decide, arrange, act on their own initiative and organise themselves. Nor was there evidence of awareness on the part of 'fully qualified' teachers of the importance of affording students the opportunity for growth towards responsibility, choice and control in the management of their education. (Howarth, 1988). While 'restricted recognition' teachers' discourse similarly revealed little evidence of shared planning practice which teachers in resource teaching positions linked to their 'sideline' status within mainstream schools, teachers appeared to engage with the issue of planning in a way which demonstrated knowledge related to skill acquisition, understanding of different learning and teaching styles and the need for learning styles to be matched by appropriate teaching styles.

Allocation of resources and support

For policy-makers to emphasise 'effectiveness', 'high standards' and 'flexibility of response' without identifying the means by which teachers are to achieve the goal of

inclusion is according to Slee (1999) to establish the provision of education on the basis of a divisive and discriminating ideology which completely ignores the social and political contexts within which schools and education providers function. In this context, focus group participants across all teacher groupings expressed frustration and feelings of being unsupported by the DES in terms of the jobs which they are employed to do:

“I think that some of the frustration as well is that we have to fight. Forget about the parents – their fight must be absolute hell, but as teachers, me as a principal, I have to fight the whole time with the Department . . . it’s this constant fighting and taking up time . . . I could spend my time in school, day and night and it’s the amount of paperwork and it’s all to do with special ed. It’s taking up so much time and it’s a classic example of the Department not having thought anything out . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

Resources which ‘fully qualified’ teachers believed would effect the greater success of inclusive practice included access to other professionals, additional SNA allocations, increased parental support, fair distribution of disabled students amongst all schools, quota restrictions on the number of disabled students in any one class and a reduction in paperwork:

“ . . . Speech therapists to come into the school, psychologists, psychiatrists whatever, all these professional people . . . the whole idea of the multi-disciplinary team being able to come into the school to help the child.” (FQT Participant 4).

“ . . . freedom to choose which is the best option for the child and to review it . . . I think we could all say . . . and I don’t know whether I want to be quoted on this one, but I think there are schools who are still not taking in SEN kids. They will always not take in SEN kids so it doesn’t matter what legislation is there . . .” (FQT Participant 3)

“ . . . I took one in twenty years ago and it worked because we had great parental support. We took in a second Downs syndrome child. We had great parental support, but there are other children in there and you do not have great parental support . . . you may as well bang your head against the wall, they take up meeting

after meeting after meeting. When are we supposed to have the meetings? I've two classes to teach. I'm a principal of the school and I'm supposed to be in on every IEP meeting . . . this is just not physically possible." (FQT Participant 3).

“. . . every class that has a special ed pupil in it should be assigned an SNA regardless because the other children, as you say, have needs . . . and you know the SNA can attend to them as well . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

Additional aspirations for resource and support provision, identified by ‘restricted recognition teachers included the existence of:

“. . . an environment that every child has equal access to . . . a multi-sensory environment, horticulture . . . every child needs that. I don't see that as being specific to children with special needs. I don't believe that a multi-sensory experience should be limited to a special school . . . the physical environment plus the emotional environment, the attitude of the adults working with all the children . . . that's a major barrier . . .” (MT Participant 8).

“. . . that the standard of teaching would be so excellent in the room that everybody would be learning and that nobody would be particularly aware of who had special needs. That the child with special needs would not even remotely be singled out as different.” (MT Participant 2).

“. . . Individual teaching where children would work at their level and not try to have a uniformity within a class . . . ‘we're ready to turn the page’ . . .” (MT Participant 5).

“. . . Confidence that the setting would not put you in any way under any pressure to understand at a certain pace.” (MT Participant 1).

“Collaboration, I think is huge, that's collaboration between all people, the team, teachers, caregivers, SNAS . . . that everyone is singing from the same page.” (MT Participant 8).

“I also think it needs a consultative collaborative approach from staff . . . a collaboration of colleagues . . . so that in fact we would try in a way to ‘buy’ the time for each other, in the absence of the correct resourcing and funding under the present circumstances. So that there would be a give and take between teachers . . . that that notion would be carried where we would try to create time, buy time, for another teacher to have time with a smaller group . . .” (MT Participant 1).

In the absence of clear guidelines which take cognisance of the complexities associated with the delivery of educational services, the presence of additional SNA support or the presence of additional adults in the classroom is not the panacea to the difficulties which teachers currently experience and represents a very limited conception of the concept of resources and support: Retention of a view of resource conceived within the ‘velcro assistant’ model brings its own problems as the following extract illustrates:

“... Then you end up managing the adults ... and with the best will in the world ... I don’t care how good they are ... they’ll end up chatting, talking, gossiping, bitching, whingeing, moaning ... did you see what she did now ... if you’ve one person in the room run ragged ... I’m run ragged anyway ... do you know what I mean ... So, you know it’s either have one person going hell for leather not having time for any of that because that creates its own problems ...” (FQT Participant 2).

Teachers’ experience clearly points to the need for reconfiguration of support provision through processes which fully explore what constitutes support provision and what principles ought to inform the provision of that support within an inclusive framework.

Conclusion

The reproduction of special education paradigms and rituals in regular education (Vislie, 2003), highlight the degree to which teachers talk about students failing to learn and teachers failing to teach, in ways which continue to draw distinctions between categories of students. ‘Categorical thinking’ facilitates the transmission and perpetuation of dominant discourses and practices which leave unchallenged the underlying issues of social justice and equality in education. Retention of a ‘special educational needs’ mindset as opposed to one which moves towards inclusive practice continues to facilitate

the allocation of students to different teachers, schools and programmes on the basis of impairment. In the absence of any coherent framework for guiding teacher practice, the implementation of inclusive practice remains subject to the vagaries of individual teacher positions and can hardly be described as supported by a clear policy underpinning and a shared understanding of the goal of inclusion.

Chapter 7 Towards a unified school system capable of accommodating diversity and difference

Introduction

The current framework for the provision of education can be seen to facilitate the transmission and perpetuation of dominant discourses and practices which leave unchallenged the underlying issues of social justice and inequality in education. Commitment to the development of inclusive practice requires a move away from a view of inclusion as a ‘student placement’ issue towards an understanding of inclusion as a process inextricably linked with whole school reform. (Skrtic, 1995; Gerber, 1996; Lloyd, 2000). Such an understanding implies the involvement of a diverse range of professionals who come from diverse professional and institutional backgrounds whose contributions, interactions and relationships require coherent action harnessed towards a common end. (Ebersold, 2003). On this theme it is suggested that to overlook the role which support plays in contributing to dispersal, isolation and dependence on specialist teachers, to say little of its effect on student and staff stress levels (Forlin et al, 1996), is to ignore the ways in which the provision of support can create new forms of segregation both inside and outside the mainstream school setting. (Skrtic, 1995). In the absence of an explicit approach to support provision, located within inclusive ideology, current arrangements may unwittingly hinder a students’ development, impede access to his/her individual culture and reproduce normalising strategies designed to make the student ‘fit in’ to an educational structure informed by the dominant school culture. (Mittler, 2000).

This chapter considers whether there is anything to be gained from the elimination of the rigid role boundaries which currently characterise the relationship between ‘fully qualified’ and ‘restricted recognition’ teachers in the Irish education system. Drawing largely on the perspectives of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers trained in a child centred pedagogical approach, the chapter identifies some of the educational programmatic principles which underpin teachers’ practice and which might inform future developments for inclusive practice in the Irish context.

Teacher experience of separation and independence within segregative educational settings

While the 1990s saw the introduction of a number of initiatives to enhance the provision of education to disabled students, many of the initiatives have been conceived within an existing ‘special education needs’ mindset as opposed to a mindset directed towards inclusive education provision. Provision continues to be characterised by medicalised models of disability rather than social theoretical models which focus attention on the institutional and cultural barriers embedded in society. Retention of an ‘integrationist’ as opposed to an inclusive focus is reflected in the absence of concern with pedagogy, student learning and classroom processes. (Mittler, 2000). On this theme, Halpin and Lewis (1996) suggest that the separation-independence dynamic which occurs due to the separation of special education from mainstream education and the segregation which occurs within mainstream schools gives rise to teacher experience of separation and independence which has the potential to promote further segregation within schools.

Teachers discourse revealed little evidence of working relationships linked to an ‘educational consultation’ model of service delivery. (Wagner, 2000; Carmichael, 2005). Relations with other professionals appeared to be conceived within a traditional referral-driven model of service delivery in which teachers are set up to hand what they perceive to be ‘the problem’ to another professional whose responsibility it becomes to solve. (Carmichael, 2005). ‘Fully qualified’ teachers expressed frustration at what they perceived to be ‘a push towards inclusion’ which they saw as ‘coming from psychologists’. Unsatisfactory working relationships with psychologists appeared to be related to psychologists’ lack of engagement with teachers and the provision of psychological reports which were often irrelevant and seldom suggested strategies of any particular benefit. ‘Fully qualified’ teachers’ involvement with other professionals often resulted in this group of teachers feeling de-professionalised and under-skilled, as is illustrated by the following extracts:

“ . . . I found everybody was talking at me and I wasn’t seen to have any expertise or professionalism at all. They were the experts and they were telling me what to do but nobody wanted to know from me, well what exactly do you cover in infants in english? . . . what do you cover in phonics? . . .” (FQT Participant 2).

“ . . . I suppose you do get the feeling that you’re not . . . the perception is that you’re not the most experienced person at that meeting . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

Professional relations between ‘fully qualified’ and ‘restricted recognition’ teachers

The potential influence of teacher identity on the development of inclusive practice, both within schools and in the planning and delivery of pre-service teacher education, requires

that attention be paid to the continua, tensions and boundaries which interplay within school cultures. (Jones, 2004). Demarcations drawn between teachers on the basis of the degree to which the State ‘recognises’ the teachers it employs represent significant factors which contribute to teachers’ ideas of being ‘different’ and ‘separate’ from each other. Teachers’ discourse revealed evidence of ‘distancing’ consistent with Snow and Anderson’s model of distancing and embracement which model provides a conceptual framework for analysing and understanding teachers’ views in relation to their work. (Snow and Anderson, 2001; Jones, 2004). Thus, as currently structured, the framework for provision requires ‘restricted recognition’ teachers to enact roles that imply social identities that are inconsistent to desired self conceptions. (Snow and Anderson, 2001). ‘Restricted recognition’ teachers experienced themselves as being set apart and marginalised within the national school system which feelings were linked to a sense of being ‘sidelined’ ‘undervalued’, and ‘underestimated’. Differences in terms and conditions of employment, non-recognition of previous teaching service given abroad for the purpose of incremental credit, and deployment initiatives conceived in the absence of consultation, contributed to a shared sense of being ‘used’ within the school system. Teachers linked the introduction of policy which imposed further restrictions on the students and settings within which they are now permitted to work to cultural representations of both disabled students and themselves, and viewed recent policy initiatives as an unfair exercise of professional power. This position was articulated thus by one teacher who asked:

“Is it because they think we are an inferior product . . . or is it because they think the children don’t matter?” (MT Participant 3).

‘Restricted recognition’ teachers’ sense of themselves as ‘different’ to their ‘fully qualified’ colleagues was also linked to receipt of training in ‘different’ teaching approaches and methodologies – teachers perceived themselves to be different, both in the work that they do and the way in which they do it. Contrary to findings in studies on teacher identity (Jones, 2004; Garner, 1994), ‘restricted recognition’ teachers did not consider themselves to be specialists or experts although their discourse revealed evidence of embracement to a specialist profession consistent with the notion of a ‘profession within a profession’. (Jones, 2002). All ‘restricted recognition’ teachers shared a view that the type of teaching in which they were currently involved required specialist skills and the development of specialist skill sets.

‘Restricted recognition’ teachers employed in resource teaching positions perceived that ‘fully qualified’ teachers in mainstream school settings viewed them as more ‘independent’ and ‘less constrained’ by not having the responsibility of a ‘full class’ to teach:

“... the resource/learning support teacher doesn’t have an idea what it’s like to teach in a classroom situation so it ends up at right cross-purposes . . .” (FQT Participant 3).

Notwithstanding that all ‘fully qualified’ teachers were eligible to apply for resource teaching posts which came available within a school before such posts became publicly advertised and therefore open to take-up by ‘restricted recognition’ teachers, it appeared that ‘fully qualified’ teachers considered ‘restricted recognition’ teachers to have ‘a cushy number’. Teachers perceived that ‘fully qualified’ teachers were often ‘threatened’ by the type of learning environments which they had created for students and the positive

learning outcomes achieved by students previously deemed incapable of progress. Teachers also noted that opportunities for shared discussion in relation to students were often resisted and minimised by ‘fully qualified teachers’. The absence of any framework for collaborative consultation between teachers resulted in ‘restricted recognition’ teachers feeling that the type of discussion and planning that ought to happen in relation to students more often than not did not occur.

Professional preparedness of teachers to teach students with additional support needs in mainstream and special schools

Arrangements for the provision of support within an inclusive framework, ought to be at all times directed towards helping schools and the education system to work more inclusively – which includes the provision of comprehensive professional development and support for the school staff working within it. (Lloyd, 2000). This view tended to be supported by ‘fully qualified’ teachers who perceived the acquisition of specialist skill sets and the development of a knowledge base to be essential if they were to be able to meet the changing pupil profile within the mainstream school setting:

“ . . . some teachers have a lot of confidence in working with a child with special needs and others don’t – they could end up being brilliant afterwards but it’s just that they don’t have the knowledge or the expertise and I think there has to be training there. There has to be release for those teachers to gain some of those skills. You just can’t have a child with special needs with a condition you’ve never dealt with before in your entire life, walk into your room without some sort of help or support . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

‘Fully qualified’ teachers expressed feelings of being ill-prepared to meet the inclusive mandate in the absence of any coherent framework for funding, planning, organising and

supervising training opportunities at both pre-service and in-service levels. One ‘fully qualified’ teacher currently employed in a LS/RT capacity noted that a lot of the difficulties she encounters relate to the fact that the class teachers aren’t able to understand the position and the difficulties that the student may have. Her view however, is instructive in that as a ‘fully qualified’ teacher, she appears to encounter the same type of resistance articulated by ‘restricted recognition’ teachers who seek to discuss student learning with their ‘fully qualified’ colleagues:

“ . . . it would be far better if they hear that on a course from an outsider . . . they might be more accepting of it than coming from me because I have them on a one-to-one basis and it’s very easy for me to start saying things . . . I do think that there is a need for some sort of specialist course . . .” (FQT Participant 1).

Teachers noted that additional training opportunities which had been made available to teachers employed in special schools and teachers involved in support provision in mainstream settings did not extend to ‘fully qualified’ teachers in mainstream schools. ‘Fully qualified’ teachers attributed feelings of being ‘ill-equipped’ and ‘less skilled’ in the provision of appropriate support in part to the absence of appropriate training opportunities and resented the fact that eligibility for training was restricted. The importance of policy which confines eligibility to participate in training programmes to certain categories of teachers cannot be overstated. In the main, professional development courses which have been made available in recent years have been directed to teachers of pupils with severe and profound learning disabilities, resource teachers, learning support teachers and teachers involved in the education of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. ‘Fully qualified’ teachers noted the existence of significant barriers to receipt of additional training offered in conjunction with the teacher education section of the DES

and funded by the government under the National Development Plan. Barriers included the requirement that teachers hold an existing resource or learning support post or expect to hold one in the next school year prior to application for a place on one of the training courses offered by the national teacher training colleges.

“ . . . the situation now is, you can't go and do any of the courses offered by the national training colleges unless you're in the job . . . so even if you have the interest and wanted to do it you can't. You have to get into learning support first and then apply for the course . . . it's so frustrating from that point of view because it would be nice if everybody was able to do the course when they wanted and when they had the interest.” (FQT Participant 2).

Additional training options offered through the newly established Special Educational Needs Support Service (SESS) (<http://www.sess.ie>), required teachers to compete with each other for funding for training which teachers' considered ought to be available to them as of right. Significantly, the impact of this policy position was perceived by teachers to represent a further barrier to the development of inclusive practice as it had the effect of preventing other staff members from acquiring additional teaching skills:

“ . . . once a person does the course they become immersed in the position for ever and a day. Nobody else on the staff can get the training . . .” (FQT Participant 3).

In the absence of a coherent framework for the provision of training in support provision, it was evident that some 'fully qualified' teachers valued training 'on the job' afforded to them by 'restricted recognition' teachers who had received training in subject areas which had never, and continue not to be, addressed within the national teacher training colleges. It was evident however, that sharing of skill-sets was highly contingent upon the degree

to which fully qualified teachers and school management bodies embraced and welcomed opportunities for the development of collaborative practice.

‘Restricted recognition’ teachers’ conceptions of factors crucial to the creation of inclusive learning environments

Focus group participants who fell within the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher groupings reported that they brought a variety of skills to their teaching roles which they had acquired through previous training and work experience, which in many instances included extensive experience gained abroad in intercultural settings. Professional backgrounds represented by focus group participants included backgrounds in science, computer studies, domestic science, English and administration. Teachers reported drawing upon their professional backgrounds to support student learning in a number of areas such as in the use of assistive technology, language acquisition, and the teaching of life-skills.

As a sub-group within the ‘restricted recognition’ teacher category, Montessori teachers whose teacher training was located in child centred pedagogy, identified themselves as feeling ‘well prepared’ to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Teachers perceived that the education programmatic principles which they brought to bear in the ways in which they structured support and could order their environments and their interaction with students could enable all students to participate fully in meaningful education experiences. Teachers expressed concern however, that the special education

Diploma approved by the DES and which laid the basis for their involvement in the national school system appears to have been approved by the DES in the absence of any formal procedures or audit of course content. Conversion of the qualification from diploma status to certificate status by the Montessori training college in recent years, in the absence of any consultation with the DES, gave teachers serious cause for concern, both in relation to the bona fides of the qualification awarded in the absence of the exercise of any regulatory function on the part of the DES and in relation to its current validity.

Notwithstanding, teachers spoke very highly of their training in Montessori pedagogy and cited a number of factors which they believed distinguished their training from that of teachers trained within the national teacher training colleges. Chief amongst them included an emphasis on respect for the student, a child-centred approach to education based on a conception of education as 'self formation' (Lillard, 2005), an emphasis on student interest as the key to student learning and the promotion of active involvement and engagement on the part of the student in his/her own learning process. (Montessori, 1967). Teachers viewed their role as one of supporting the student as learner in a process of self-education directed towards 'experience' and 'discovery'. This view underpinned teachers' apparent ease with the notion of working with students of different ages, with different abilities and aptitudes, different learning styles and different learning speeds. It also underpinned a shared view that different forms of teaching and the deployment of different strategies designed to enhance and optimise opportunities for learning are required.

“We have been trained to think. To have the courage . . . it’s not seen as a risk to depart from that . . . to say, you know what, I actually realise that I went about that the wrong way, attack it again, break it down, it needs a further step . . . that’s not a big deal for us to find out . . . that you know, you pitched the lesson too high, that you have to go back . . .” (MT Participant 1).

Teachers viewed their training as ‘a training to teach’ rather than a training geared towards making students fit into a pre-determined structure, informed by a view of education as narrow academic achievement. Emphasis placed in teacher training on observation of the student and student responses and the recording of teacher observations laid the basis for teachers’ critical reflective practice. This point is well made by the following statement:

“Today I was working with a child . . . a seven year old child with Down’s syndrome and this afternoon I just found myself pondering . . . who is teaching who here, because I certainly feel that she is all the time teaching me how to teach her . . . I think that the basis of Montessori is that as a teacher one is constantly observing and every day is a learning experience . . . there is nothing static about it and I’m certainly very grateful for that . . . just for that understanding.” (MT Participant 8).

Teachers stated that they deployed the continuous practice of observation throughout their work which enabled them to assist students in determining future directions for learning and goal setting, planning and decision-making. Teachers also noted that the development of observation skills enhanced their ability to feel confident about their efforts in guiding student learning in a supportive and constructive way. Methodological approaches underpinned by continuous observation enabled teachers to identify the need for timely and accurate intervention for students who required additional support or instructional adaptations to enhance learning opportunities.

Teachers emphasised the importance of movement in student learning processes and considered that freedom to move within the classroom setting enabled students to exercise informed choice at a range of different levels. Teachers considered the exercise of informed choice in relation to activities – what work to do, with whom to work, in what part of the room, on which table or in which floor space and for how long to work as crucial to the development of students’ sense of autonomy and developing independence. An emphasis on independent choice-making enabled students to locate themselves within the environment and trust their own power to interact with it in a positive way according to their own developmental needs. The following statement made by a teacher who works in a special school setting with students who experience severe and profound levels of mental disability is instructive:

“Choice-making is so vital for our children. All of our children would communicate through some sort of a device. The choice would be very limited and it’s a very limited choice because we’re actually choosing the two items that they are going to choose from but still, we’re allowing that. They might not want either of those two options . . . which then involves further observation and reflection on our part to be able to interpret and work out what it is that they do want . . .” (MT Participant 5).

The creation of what teachers termed ‘prepared environments’ were cited as being critically important to effective teaching and learning. The structure of classrooms designed to foster active learning required re-organisation of classroom space in ways which facilitated different learning and teaching approaches. Teachers emphasised the organisation of a space characterised by a physical order which permeates all activities and processes available to students. (Lillard, 2005). Internalisation of ordered structures were viewed as critical to student construction of mental order and intelligence. Teachers considered certain material features of the prepared environment such as the ordered

enactment of tasks, the presentation of information in a conceptually organised way and the order inherent in all the teaching materials to be critically important if students were to develop their own internal sense of order. In addition, the order inherent in the environment assured students of the possibility of working at their own pace and undertaking complete cycles of activity which enabled them to become equal partners in teaching and learning activities. (Montessori, 1967).

The design and use of carefully designed didactic materials for the purpose of teaching concepts was viewed as crucial to students' active learning. For example, teachers referred to the provision of sensory training through the use of specially designed sensorial materials which underpinned the delivery of all subsequent activities across all aspects of the curriculum. (Standing, 1957). Learning through 'concrete' learning experiences provided firm foundations which enabled students to rise to more abstract levels of thought. Opportunities to access a wide array of carefully designed materials enabled students to develop powers of discrimination, problem solving abilities, negotiation skills, respect for other students and respect for the prepared environment which contributed to a shared sense of 'within class' governance. Incorporation of the principle of isolation in didactic materials together with a built-in 'control of error' which directed student activity, enabled a student to know whether s/he was correct and bypassed the need for corrective feedback from the teacher which reduced students' level of dependence on the adult. Authority for correction, assessment and evaluation was therefore not vested in the adult but in the student him/herself. The role of the aesthetics of the material in terms of inviting student activity was also stressed. Teachers employed

in mainstream school settings identified the receipt of in-depth training in phonics as an invaluable component of their training:

“ . . . The learning support teacher came and said that the MIST results were hugely improved . . . she felt that it was due to the work that was being done with the phonic booklets. But in contrast, when all of this was happening, there were two young graduates from one of the teacher training colleges who openly admitted that they hadn't been taught how to teach reading. They didn't know where to start . . .” (MT Participant 6).

“Every single member of staff at my old school had the same issue and I actually sat in the staffroom and taught them all phonics. . . the majority said ‘we don't know how to teach phonics’ and they all came to me because they wanted to know how it worked.” (MT Participant 7).

Teachers viewed the collaborative structure inherent in the Montessori classroom as central to student learning. Combined age groups, mixed ability groupings, opportunities for learning situated in meaningful contexts, opportunities for small group work, for learning by imitating models through peer tutoring and working together, opportunities for repetition to consolidate and maintain existing skill levels, and completion of cycles of activity were all viewed by teachers to be critical to the provision of deep, rich, direct and indirect learning experiences to students. Additionally, a power-sharing relationship based on respect for members of the class community rather than authoritarian teacher-centred forms of interaction were considered to be closely associated with positive learning and teaching outcomes for both students and teachers:

“I think for Montessorians there is that thing of the balance of power, where you don't feel that it's about stuffing facts into somebody. . . that you're not about . . . being 'in charge' isn't everything. In fact if anything, Montessori is at its best when in fact you can remove yourself off to the side . . . I think that's the point really there, that . . . em . . . that we're not afraid actually to stand back and watch the thing working on its own . . . in fact if anything that's a testament to how well we're doing . . .” (MT Participant 1).

Conclusion

The argument is made that traditionally regular education has deflected attention away from its own limitations and anomalies by removing or denying access to those students who appeared not to benefit or unlikely to benefit from the education provided. (Skrtic, 1995). Skrtic suggests that the effect of this has been to remove from the education system a valuable source of innovation. It might similarly be argued that the exclusion of teachers trained in alternative pedagogical approaches removes from the system a valuable teaching resource which might be deployed to good effect in the creation of inclusive school cultures. An education system conceived within an 'inclusive' mindset ought to be concerned with ensuring high standards while at the same time reducing barriers to student participation. On this basis it is argued, that to maintain and promote segregated provision on the backs of teachers to whom the status of 'restricted recognition' is accorded, is to continue to abdicate responsibility in relation to the provision of inclusive education to disabled students. To continue to retain this practice is to promote the learning rights and entitlements of some students within the Irish school system over others and reproduce exclusionary practice wholly at odds with stated commitment to the development of 'truly inclusive' schools. How education policy conceptualises difference and celebrates diversity amongst members of the school community will remain the ultimate acid test of the gap which exists between inclusive rhetoric and inclusion in practice.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis has been concerned with some aspects of education policy directed towards the development of inclusive educational practice in Irish schools. In particular, the study focuses attention on education policy which created a category of teacher accorded 'restricted recognition' status and which now seeks to limit the degree to which such teachers may work in mainstream school settings. The findings of the study highlight some of the problems with the workability of achieving educational equity for a diverse group of learners in the face of policy which seeks to maintain differentiated status as and between teachers themselves.

Significant barriers to student participation are located in policy-making which fails to address the broader cultural, social and economic importance of inclusion and the complexities which attach to the inclusive mandate which schools, management bodies and teachers are called upon to implement. Specific attention is drawn to the failure of the DES to legally define the fundamental concepts which underpin the principle of inclusion and which ought to lay the bedrock from which all other educational policy flows. Failure to render explicit the meaning of the concepts of 'inclusion' and 'equality of opportunity' undermines, at the very outset, the fundamental guarantee enshrined within the *Salamanca Framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994*. In the absence of conceptual definition, highly contentious concepts are open to a myriad of interpretations by policymakers, schools management authorities, teachers and other professionals, such as to make the values, priorities and desired outcomes which inform the delivery of

education to all students far from explicit. Crucially, the failure to promote the development of any shared understanding as to the meaning of inclusion, contributes to the quagmire of rhetoric which increasingly surrounds the issue of inclusive practice and obscures the complex matter of ensuring the creation of equal educational opportunities for all students.

The inclusive mandate requires that an attempt be made to determine the compatibility of traditional schooling conceived within the ‘factory’ model with the principle of inclusion. It also requires policymakers to determine in what way competing objectives can be unified within the wider framework of diversity, achievement and culture. Retention at a policy level of a conception of inclusion more akin to ‘assimilation’, serves to distort any true appreciation of the myriad processes which together constitute the inclusive educational process. There is little evidence that current policy-making is directed towards ensuring that what is made available in schools is relevant and accessible to the full spectrum of pupils in the school. Nor is there any evidence to suggest the development of a framework for support which actively engages all partners in education in the requisite processes for devising the means to ensuring that students’ entitlement to full participation is upheld. Coherent movement towards the development of inclusive practice requires policy-makers to have regard to all aspects of the workings of the system so that *all* members of the school community are enabled to be better qualified to meet the diverse learning needs of diverse student populations.

It is clear that at the fundamental level of official discourse – education policy continues to create and retain a hierarchy of disability categories which reflects a medicalised perspective which views disability as an ‘individual pathology’ located within the individual student him/herself. The promotion of SEN terminology by policymakers for recognising, identifying and drawing distinctions as and between students and professionals within the education system, constitutes a tool of significant power for the perpetuation of exclusionary practice. Recent policy initiatives directed towards the development of ‘truly inclusive schools’ clearly ensure that the use of such terminology is directly linked to teachers’ conceptions of students, which in turn shapes teachers’ conceptions of support, learning settings, knowledge and resources. As a consequence the gaze of professionals continues to be redirected towards the pupil rather than towards the organisational structures which impede students’ full participation in education.

Legislative measures, education policy, and newly introduced models of provision reflect a view of inclusion which is supported by structures and processes which maintain a segregative ‘mindset and continue to promote whole and partial segregation of students, staff and schools from each other. Policy which promotes the deployment of ‘restricted recognition’ teachers to special schools reflects continued endorsement of full-blown segregation, while partial segregation is actively promoted through the arrangements which accord a ‘sideline’ position to those who it would appear have the greatest amount of experience in the field of support provision.

The findings of this study suggest that ‘fully qualified’ teachers retain a conception of resource rooted in traditional models of service delivery which endorses the ‘exportation’ of student difficulties to other teachers and professionals trained to ‘deal’ with them. It is suggested however, that teachers’ conception of resources and resource allocation are inextricably linked to medicalised interpretation of disability. Little attention has been paid to the key factors which ought to inform the structure and provision of support, the role of decision-making in relation to the type of support required and indeed the importance of students’ perception on the support available. (Lloyd, 2000). It is suggested that to continue to provide support without identifying the means by which it will be ensured that the support provided meets learning requirements which flow from diversity and difference, is to reinforce a traditional referral model of service delivery which promotes an idea that support must derive from external sources rather than from within the school itself. (Mittler, 2000). To promote the provision of support within a framework which actively seeks to ‘sideline’ support teachers rather than seeking to develop a collaborative framework for creating optimal conditions for learning in regular education settings is to ensure the continued marginalisation of disabled students.

It is suggested that ‘restricted recognition’ teachers conceptions of support align more closely with an inclusive support model. However, the promotion of traditional models of schooling and arrangements for the provision of support conceived within a ‘special educational needs’ mindset limits the degree to which ‘restricted recognition’ teachers can fully embrace the inclusive mandate. According a ‘sideline’ role to ‘restricted recognition’ teachers in the absence of any attempt to determine the way in which the

role of support teachers is conceptualised, defined and realised is to devalue and dissipate valuable resources which could be deployed to inclusive effect.

Education policy underpinned by the principles of integration and inclusion as expressed in the *Salamanca Statement and framework for Action on Special Needs Education 1994*, ought to be directly concerned with issues of presence, participation and learning outcomes. Its aim ought to be that of ensuring that students enjoy full participation throughout their school-going years and are well prepared for effective integration into economic, social and cultural life as adults. As a reform process it ought to reflect continuous pedagogical and organisational development directed towards making educational institutions inclusive and responsive to the diversity of all students. While Irish education policy evidences some moves towards a broader conception of education, the failure at policy level to define, plan and co-ordinate a comprehensive policy agenda which has proper regard for social inequalities and principles of justice and equity is to perpetuate the dominant school culture and ensure the continued marginalisation of disabled students in education.

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Ireland 2004: Equal Status Act

Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, United Nations 1994.

Caselaw

O' Donoghue v Minister for Health [1996] 2 IR 20.

Sinnott v Minister for Education [2001] 2 IR 545.

Appendix 1

7 Fisherman's Wharf, Station Road, Adare, Co Limerick, Ireland
Phone 010 353 61 395104
miriamki@indigo.ie

Participant Name and Address,

2 May 2006

Re: Focus Group Discussion: Inclusive Education for Students with Additional Learning Needs

Dear,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the scheduled focus group discussion which aims to explore existing arrangements for the provision of education to students with additional learning needs in our schools.

The meeting will take place at the Laois Education Centre, Block Road, Portlaoise on Thursday, 10 May 2006 and will run from 7.00 pm – 9.00 pm. The Education Centre is located right beside the General Hospital in Portlaoise. To ensure that we make the best use of the time available to us, I would ask that all participants arrive at the Education Centre a few minutes before we are due to commence our discussion.

I hope that you will find the issues raised interesting and thought-provoking. On arrival, each participant will receive a set of discussion guidelines which will help develop various lines of thought. Our discussion will be taped which will enable me to then engage in subsequent analysis of the data. May I assure you, however, that the identity of all participants and their individual contributions to the discussion will be treated in strictest confidence. Accordingly, I hope you will feel free to express your thoughts and experiences and share your point of view which will add to the richness of the data produced.

I attach a brief questionnaire and would be grateful if you would complete it before we meet. The details which you provide will be combined with the data generated during the focus group meeting and will again be used solely for the purpose of the research study. Details relating to the dissemination of the research findings to you and the other members of the group will be discussed further when we meet.

Should you require any assistance with transportation to the venue or indeed wish to discuss any other matter in relation to the above please contact me at (061) 395104. Alternatively, I can be contacted on my mobile at (086) 1704124.

Thank you in advance for your much appreciated participation and looking forward to seeing you on 10 May 2006 at 7.00 pm!

Yours sincerely,

Miriam Kingston

Appendix 2

Participant Details

Focus Group Meeting: 1

Location: Laois Education Centre

Time: 7.00 pm - 9.00 pm

1. Name of Participant:		
2. Address:		
3. Telephone Number (i) Landline	4. Telephone Number (ii) Mobile	
5. E-mail address:		
6. Teacher training qualifications. If possible please include name of training institution and date qualification was received.		
7. Additional qualifications (if applicable).		
8. Briefly describe any additional training provided to you by the Department of Education and Science which you consider essential to the discharge of your current teaching responsibilities.		
9. Please indicate the total number of years teaching experience which you have gained to date:		
10. If you would like to give an indication of your current position on the salary scale, please feel free to do so.		

11. Please indicate if you are in receipt of any additional allowances and if so, for what?		
12. If you have taught abroad please indicate how many years teaching experience you have gained in:		
(i) A European country (other than Ireland)	<input type="checkbox"/> years	
(ii) North America	<input type="checkbox"/> years	
(iii) Australia	<input type="checkbox"/> years	
(iv) Asia	<input type="checkbox"/> Years	
13. If you have taught abroad, please indicate whether your teaching experience is recognised by the DES for the purpose of incremental credit.		
14. What is the nature of the position which you currently hold? Please tick as appropriate.	15. Please indicate whether your teaching post is:	
(i) Mainstream Class Teacher; <input type="checkbox"/>	Whole-time/permanent <input type="checkbox"/>	
(ii) LS/RT Teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	Whole-time/temporary/fixed term <input type="checkbox"/>	
(iii) RT Resource Teacher <input type="checkbox"/>	Part/time <input type="checkbox"/>	
(iv) Class Teacher in a special class in mainstream school <input type="checkbox"/>		
(v) Class Teacher in a special school <input type="checkbox"/>		
16. For how many years have you held your current post? <input type="checkbox"/> Years		

<p>18. If probated, please indicate whether your probationary inspection took place while you were employed in:</p> <p>(i) a mainstream class <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(ii) a special class in a mainstream school <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(iii) a class in a special school <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(iv) an LS/RT position <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(v) an RT position <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(vi) other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>19. Have you participated in a WSE since you commenced working in your current position? If so please indicate when this inspection took place.</p>	
<p>20. Have you ever participated in the Home Tuition Programme?</p>	
<p>21. If you have answered yes to the above question please indicate whether your participation in the programme occurred:</p> <p>(i) during the school year <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(ii) during the school year and during school hours <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(iii) during the school year but after school hours <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(iv) during the Christmas/Easter/Summer holiday period <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>22. If you have at any time participated in the Home Tuition Programme please indicate whether remuneration issued to you at a rate of remuneration:</p> <p>(i) comparable to your teaching salary <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>(ii) Otherwise known as the 'untrained' rate of pay. <input type="checkbox"/></p>	

Thank you for completing this form.

Appendix 3

7 Fisherman's Wharf, Station Road, Adare, Co Limerick, Ireland
Phone 010 353 61 395104
miriamki@indigo.ie

Interview Guideline for Focus Group Discussion

1. In your opinion what features distinguish the teacher training you have received from that of alternative teacher training options?
2. The newly introduced EPSEN Act 2004 provides for the education of disabled students in inclusive school environments – what are your feelings about inclusion?
3. What factors do you think affect the success of inclusive educational practice?
4. In your opinion does the education of disabled students constitute a specialist field of teaching? Do you think specific professional attributes/characteristics are required to teach disabled students?
5. DES policy creates a category of restricted recognition teacher exclusively assigned to teach students with additional support needs. Why do you think this is and what do you consider to be the impact of this policy?
6. In your opinion, does the practice of differentiating between teachers inhibit or enhance the development of responsive forms of educational provision for all students?

Appendix 4

7 Fisherman's Wharf, Station Road, Adare, Co Limerick, Ireland
Phone 010 353 61 395104
miriamki@indigo.ie

Participant name and address.

13 May 2006

Dear ,

Thank you most sincerely for participating in the focus group discussion on Wednesday 10 May, 2006. I very much appreciate the time you took to both travel to the venue and share your experiences and thoughts which made for very valuable contribution.

It was a very rich discussion and you and all the other participants have generated very worthwhile data which I will now begin to analyse. I expect to be in a position to share the findings of the study with you and the rest of the group within three months.

Please accept my sincere thanks and appreciation for the energy, interest and generosity of spirit which you brought to the meeting.

With every good wish

Miriam Kingston