A new approach to supporting pupils with special educational needs

Joe Travers

DCU Institute of Education
School of Inclusive and Special Education
DCU St Patrick’s Campus
Focus of presentation

• Student learning (learning support and special educational needs)
• Teacher learning
• System learning
A decade of intense change: 1998-2008

- Change in attitudes
- Focus on the mainstream school for service expansion
- Legislative change
- Cultural changes in school practices
- Curricular change
- Changing population in special schools
New allocation model

• Rationale and necessity for change
• Advantages of new proposed model
• Potential difficulties
New approaches

• Breaking the link between resource allocation and labelling
• Using a staged approach based on profiles of strengths, interests, needs and concerns
• Increasing the emphasis on the outcomes and benefits of education
New approach

• A bio-psysho-social model: looking at the curriculum and the teaching and learning environment as barriers and opportunities for learning

• Leadership for inclusion- coordination and implications for middle management posts (Travers et al. 2010)
Post primary

- Use of resource hours
- Pooling of resource hours
- Use of special classes for students not identified with special educational needs
- Soft barriers to access
- Inappropriate curricular provision
Special Schools

• Facilitating rights to an appropriate education and inclusion at a system level
• Building a community of provision (Rix et al., 2013)
• Support for teachers in specialist positions
Increase in Special Classes

- Over 1,000 special classes in the system (NCSE, 2016)
- 0.5% of primary and 1.2% of post primary students in special classes (Banks et al, 2016)
- 5.1% of primary pupils with SEN and 13% of post primary (Banks et al, 2016)
- ASD classes 39 in 2001 and 627 in 2014
Special Classes

- Contribution towards inclusion
- Lack of clarity about purpose and function
- Pooling of resource hours at post primary to create special classes
- Junior cycle reform presents an opportunity for a more inclusive approaches
Outcomes for students today

• How are students with learning support/special educational needs doing in the system overall?
• GUI, PISA and TIMSS data

Large-scale longitudinal study of children (Office of the Minister for Children; part of the National Children’s Strategy)

- Two age cohorts are included, with data from two survey administrations completed:
  - **Infant cohort** – nine months and three years
  - **Child cohort** – nine years and 13 years
  - Around 8,500 children, their parents, teachers and school principals took part in Wave 1
  - These individuals completed questionnaires; children also took reading and mathematics tests; and a subset of families took part in qualitative interviews
  - Classification of SEN allowed for more than one area. Overall between 20 and 25 percent had a SEN (related to including medium risk SEBD or not)
Overall, children with SEN score two-thirds of a standard deviation lower on both reading and maths than children without SEN. However there is a lot of variation across the 12 groups. Children with physical and sensory disabilities have mean reading and maths scores that are not significantly different to the no-SEN group.
Comparison of teachers’ rating with children’s test scores

- Some differences between children with and without SEN might be expected, but when we compared teachers’ ratings with children’s test scores we find:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Underestimated by teacher</th>
<th>Overestimated by teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No SEN:</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN:</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No SEN:</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN:</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For reading, twice as many children with SEN than without SEN were ‘underestimated’ by teachers, and twice as many children without SEN than with SEN were ‘overestimated’ by their teachers. Neither source of info is invalid. Local (class) norms?
Children’s low liking of school and school subjects, by SEN group

Low liking of school is based on a three-level categorisation that took children’s liking of school, reading, and maths into account.
Pupil absences over the past year (> 3 weeks), by SEN group
Children’s scores on a measure of wellbeing (Piers-Harris), by SEN group (M=50, SD=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No SEN</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any SEN</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MED SEBD</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HI SEBD</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLD</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLD &amp; SEBD</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYS</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYS &amp; SEBD</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLD</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLD &amp; SEBD</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYS</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYS &amp; OTH</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures in **bold** = statistically significantly different from the no-SEN group mean (p < .01)
Figures in **green** = very low scores.
Report also examines the P-H subscales.

Pattern illustrates the additive impact of SEBD
PISA
Low-Performing Students
WHY THEY FALL BEHIND
AND HOW TO HELP THEM SUCCEED

Programme for International Student Assessment

OECD
Who is falling behind in learning?

- Evidence from PISA
- Results for Ireland are positive in relation to the percentage of low performers in literacy (9.6%)
- There is much room for improvement in relation to mathematics (16.9%)
Today: who is not benefitting from learning

Low achievement is still concentrated in areas of socio-economic disadvantage

Many children with special educational needs are not benefitting to the extent that they could be

Outcomes for Travellers are still very disappointing in the system
Traveller education

• Under the guise of inclusion many Traveller support services were mainstreamed or lost- for example the resource teacher for Travellers and the visiting teacher service for Travellers

• This represented a huge loss of Traveller specific knowledge in the system and of advocacy for Travellers in schools
Traveller education

• One of the dangers in inclusive education is what is called in the literature the “homogenisation of difference”- where all differences are treated equally

• In terms of equity we know that not all differences are equal
Present system

• Lack of legal framework guaranteeing support services following assessment
• Support from therapeutic services are vital for many children to access education and derive benefit from it
• It can be a prerequisite to ensuring the legal entitlement to an appropriate education
Challenge

• The lack of regional structures, the private patronage model, lack of legislation continues to hinder proper planning from preschool to further education for students with SEN
Present system

- EPSEN (2004) we must address any barriers outside of resources relating to implementation
- UN Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities not ratified by Ireland
Implications for teacher education
B.Ed and PME

- Four year B.Ed programme and two year PME
- Specialism in Special and Inclusive Education at undergraduate level
- Very exciting development across the sector
CPD

- Context: no undergraduate qualifications in ITE
- Increased and obligatory input in ITE but it is initial
- No requirement for additional qualifications for specialist positions (over time or in relation to complexity of need?)
Tomorrow: Teacher Learning

• From a quality assurance perspective and for the benefit of all students as learners and teachers as professionals should professional development for those in specialist positions be optional?

• If mandatory it should be fully funded, accessible to all and should carry an allowance
Special classes and CPD

• “These findings highlight the increased strain on teachers teaching in special classes where they do not have adequate qualifications and there is a lack of support from the school principal and colleagues working in mainstream classes” (Mc Coy and Banks, 2016, p.182).
Special classes and CPD

• “The findings also show however that teacher capacity greatly improved when they had access to additional professional support or had qualifications specific to SEN” (McCoy and Banks, 2016, p.182).
CPD

• Call from NCSE for the Teaching Council to develop standards in this area and a framework for CPD
• Cosán did not adequately address these issues in relation to special and inclusive education
A new approach at systems level

Teacher quality- preschool area. The area that has the most potential has received the least investment. We know that quality preschool is related to improved outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas.

Quality early intervention with a strong educational component

A community of provision to cater for the diversity of needs in the system

Social, emotional and mental health needs seen as important as academic needs
Mapping inclusive pedagogy, inclusive assessment, universal design for learning, personalised learning
• What would an inclusive learning system look like?
• Learning without labels or limits
References


Go raibh maith agaibh

joe.travers@dcu.ie