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Cumann Tacaíochta Foghlama na Éireann

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Researchers, academics, ILSA members, post-graduate students and their lecturers/ academic supervisors are invited to submit papers to be considered for inclusion in the 2023 issue of LEARN, which is peer reviewed journal. **The final copy of papers, preceded by an abstract and accompanied by a short biographical note about the writer(s)** should be submitted as **PDF documents** and emailed to **learnjournal.ilsa@gmail.com** with **Article for inclusion in LEARN 2023 in the subject line by May 31st 2022**. Papers **must** conform to the guidelines detailed at the back of this journal and **must use Harvard referencing style**. Guidelines are also available on **www.ilsa.ie**

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ILSA is concerned with sharing knowledge to support teachers. Its aims include promoting cooperation between those concerned with Special Education Teaching and enhancing the quality of service given by special education teachers. It does this through Spring and Annual Conferences, through LEARN Journal and resources on the ILSA website **www.ilsa.ie**

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The views expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect those of ILSA.

A Note from the Editor

Previous editions of LEARN Journal are available on our website **www.ilsa.ie**

The Editorial Board of LEARN is very grateful to those academics listed below who have agreed to act as reviewers of one or more manuscripts. The Board greatly acknowledges their assistance and learned comments. Their professionalism and their support for both authors and the Editorial Board are much appreciated.

The current volume, Volume 43 (2022), is also available online. The first two articles in this issue are concerned with a new departure in education in Ireland. The articles by Des Aston and Orla M. Slattery are of great importance in the domain of educational justice and bring Ireland into line with the UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD 2006). The third article by Ciara Barry may be a world first – related to teaching a child with Acromicric Dysplasia. Teacher concerns and students' voices are heard in the articles by Johanna Fitzgerald, and Fionnuala Tynan, Margaret Nohilly, Deirdre McCann and Miriam Colum, respectively. Research on robust vocabulary instruction is the theme of the article by Órla Ní Bhroin and Niamh Sloane. The article – Educational Research - concepts and terminology – by Dunleavy and O'Brien may inspire and support young researchers in taking the interesting pathway of research.

The Editorial Board of LEARN warmly recommends this volume and proudly offers its contents to researchers, academics and professionals in the wider community.

Pauline M Cogan PhD
Editor

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Transitions to Adulthood: A Case Study of Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Des Aston

Abstract

It is well established that people with intellectual disabilities (ID) are more likely to be unemployed, more dependent on social welfare, and experience an increased risk of living in poverty. A shift in policy at a national and international level – the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006) has meant a significant increase of students with ID are attending mainstream secondary education in Ireland, though few students successfully transition from the school system to further/higher education or employment. While policy and professional practice continue to play cat and mouse with one another, wider societal attitudes and lowered expectations continue to impact negatively on the opportunities presented to young people with ID when leaving school. Facilitating transitions to post-secondary education and employment for people with disabilities should be informed by the raised ambition of all stakeholders, and a fundamental belief in the capacity of these individuals to make a meaningful contribution to society. This paper explores the relationship between policies designed to make society more inclusive and the problems currently experienced by students with ID attempting to transition from school to adulthood. A case study of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities is presented as a solution-focused, evidence-based practice for supporting students with intellectual disabilities to successfully transition into, and out of, an innovative educational and work readiness programme for people with an intellectual disability.

Introduction

Education is concerned with the formation and holistic development of young people, and thus consideration of equality and human rights must involve a range of stakeholders including students, their parents/guardians, and educators (Gannon and O'Shea, 2015). International policies and guidelines campaigning for education as a human right have been developed over time, attempting to combat both economic and social inequalities across the globe (Hoskins, D'Hombres and Campbell, 2008). It is widely accepted that education is a gateway to many other human rights, for without education, a person is less likely to take up meaningful paid employment, likely to be without decent housing, more dependent on social welfare and not playing a meaningful role as an active citizen (Hoskins et al., 2008). Becoming an active member of society for a person with an intellectual disability requires society to fully embed

all support services that have traditionally been segregated, or operated as parallel systems, into the mainstream systems and societal structures that are in place for all other citizens (Shevlin et al., 2020; Uditsky and Hughson, 2012).

Advancements within international policies and guidelines (Council of Europe, 2006; United Nations, 1993; UNCRPD, 2006) suggest that societal structures, including education systems at primary and secondary level, are becoming more inclusive for young people with diverse learning needs (Forghani-Arani, Cerna, and Bannon, 2019; Scanlon et al., 2020). In the Republic of Ireland, the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) was introduced as the primary policy document which stipulates a constitutional right to be educated up until compulsory schooling ends at 18 years, when it is expected that an individual will enter into adult services. Little progress has been made in supporting pathways from post-primary education to further/higher education opportunities for young people with special educational needs – and more specifically, those with an intellectual disability (O'Brien et al., 2009). Eighteen years on (at the time of writing) from the introduction of the EPSEN Act, students who were entering the education system at the time of enactment are now coming of age where they will be transitioning out of the school system.

Under Irish law, the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 provides a legislative basis for the introduction of an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for all students with SEN. The Act stipulates that it is the responsibility of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) to convene a group to provide advice in relation to the IEP to the students, their parents/carers, the principal (or a nominated teacher on behalf of the principal), and other professionals such as counsellors and/or therapists where necessary (NCSE, 2006). Haase and Byrne (2005) found a worrying trend with a lack of professional guidance provision and person-centred approaches to the transition process for students with intellectual disabilities in Ireland. As per the official guidelines, transition planning for school leavers in Ireland should take place one year in advance of the young person leaving school i.e. fifth year, within the senior cycle (EPSEN Act, 2004). This is contradictory to more recent research which argues for the planning process to begin as early as first or second year of secondary school (Doyle et al., 2017; Scanlon et al., 2015). Working in a multidisciplinary team is encouraged, which can include a partnership approach with representatives from both FE and/or HE providers. Good practice in developing and implementing an IEP is defined as endorsing a tailored approach to the individual needs of the student and supporting parental involvement in the IEP process (NCSE, 2006).

The IEP is a system of identifying where the student is performing academically, where he/she is going, how he/she will get there, and how to tell if the journey is successful (NCSE, 2014, p. 1). While IEPs were not fully mandated under the Act, they are widely considered best practice (NCSE, 2006; Howe and Griffin, 2020; King, Ní Bhroin and Prunty, 2017). The failure to fully commence the

EPSEN Act is contradictory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), which is underpinned by a rights-based philosophy (Howe and Griffin, 2020). Recent Irish research showed that 80% of school principals that were surveyed reported the use of IEPs in their respective schools, although less than 50% of those in the study reported using the IEP for the purpose of post-school transition planning (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021). While the impact of the IEP is dependent on the quality of the professionals implementing the tool (Rose et al., 2012), Howe and Griffin (2020) highlight how the IEP *"can also be used to feed into the flexible integration model of provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN), to share a holistic view of the child between all relevant stakeholders"* (p.51).

Furthermore, it could be reasonably argued that the IEP is an appropriate apparatus to facilitate a robust post-school transition plan in conjunction with a multidisciplinary team. Grigal et al. (2014) sets out three components that are essential to facilitate successful post-school transition to education/employment opportunities, which include:

1. High Expectations (Blacher, Kraemer and Howell, 2010)
2. Person-centred approach to planning an individual's post-school goals (Scanlon et al., 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2000)
3. Collaboration with external stakeholders (Noonan et al. 2008; Wehman, 2010)

The IEPs which appear to be widely utilized within Irish schools, have the capacity to fulfil these recommendations. However, high expectations are drastically affected by wider socio-political norms and a perceived lack of viable post-school opportunities for this cohort.

Critical transition periods can prove stressful for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Transition, in this context, is defined as the process of moving from the protected life of a child to the autonomous and independent life as an adult (Leonard et al., 2016). A large part of this process is acquiring a fulfilling and meaningful occupation. Engagement in the world of work further facilitates social engagement, personal skills development and growth, and a feeling of connectedness to others and belonging within one's community (Mark and Lyons, 2010 as cited in Hammell, 2014). People with intellectual disabilities often struggle to find meaningful employment opportunities, with 6% of this population in paid employment in the Republic of Ireland (McGlinchey et al., 2013). They are at an increased risk of living in poverty (Watson et al., 2017) and have little expectation to progress to further and/or higher education (Doyle, McGuckin and Shevlin, 2017; NIDD, 2017; NASS, 2019) as a result of the competitive nature of the Leaving Certificate examination and the Central Application Office (CAO) points system. Grigal, Hart, and Paiewonsky (2010) report that people with intellectual disabilities are rarely differentiated from those with other types of disability in the literature in

the United States. It is often assumed that most people with intellectual disabilities are unlikely to gain the academic requirements for university admission; therefore, they are unlikely to succeed or belong in such an environment (Eisenman & Mancini, 2010; Hart, Grigal & Weir, 2010; Kubiak et al., 2018).

The general consensus is that, as employment has become increasingly skills and knowledge based, it is expected that some form of post-secondary education and/or training (such as apprenticeships or internships) is a minimum requirement to equip the future workforce with the necessary skills to gain and sustain meaningful employment. People with intellectual disabilities have historically been restricted from accessing mainstream education and training (INHEF, 2019; Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021; Kubiak et al., 2018; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018; Shevlin et al., 2020; WALK, 2015). Those individuals miss out on acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge required to gain meaningful employment and progressive career opportunities. They are further disadvantaged by a lack of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) that is associated with a further/higher education certificate or degree. The elitist nature of tertiary education institutions has been challenged in recent times by a variety of minority groups and under-represented students. Internationally, nations are attempting to act on recommendations of the UNCRPD to increase participation of students with disabilities in tertiary education. Example of nations to so act are the United States of America [Americans with Disabilities Act (1991), the Higher Education Opportunity Act (2008)], Australia [Disability Discrimination Act (1992), Disability Standards for Education, 2005], the United Kingdom [Disability Discrimination Act, 2005, Equality Act, 2010].

This paper begins by exploring the relationship between policies designed to make society more inclusive, and the problems currently experienced by students with intellectual disabilities attempting to transition from a highly structured compulsory school environment, as an adolescent, to the wider society while entering adulthood. The paper will then go on to explore international best practice and policy guidelines for transition planning from school to post-secondary education/training. Lastly, this paper will focus on the evidence-based approach employed by the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities as an effective exemplar for supporting students to transition into, and out of, a bespoke higher education programme.

Assume, Presume, and Expectations

Since the introduction of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004), young people with a disparity of special educational needs have been attending mainstream schools across Ireland, along with their siblings and peers (McConkey et al, 2016). With the help of inclusive national and international policies [Education Act, 1998; Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004; Equal Status Act, 2000; Report of

the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, 1996; UNCRPD, 2006], Irish society is steadily raising the bar in terms of (i.) the opportunities we expect our communities to offer our citizens with intellectual disabilities and (ii.) the ability of those same citizens to offer back to their communities in meaningful ways. Representation of minority groups is often discussed within feminist and/or race paradigms, and even in terms of physical disabilities -yet- *'invisible disabilities'* have historically been unrepresented within our mainstream education systems and often segregated within special education schools. This segregated practice has been associated with Ireland's shameful legacy of institutionalisation and industrial schools (Brennan, 2007; O'Brien and Bonati, 2018).

While the pros and cons of both special and segregated inclusive learning environments are debated within the literature (Howe and Griffin, 2020; McConkey et al., 2016), the fact is that the stigma of disability is still very much at large within society once these young people leave the school environment as a child, and enter into adult services. This lowered expectation for people with intellectual disabilities, once they leave school, leads to a lack of education and/or training opportunities for a meaningful career trajectory (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021; Doyle, McGuckin and Shevlin, 2017; McGuckin et al., 2013, Pallisera et al., 2018; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018; WALK, 2015). There is evidence internationally that broader cultural expectations influence lowered expectations of educators and guidance professionals in particular, which impact negatively on a student's chances of a possible transition to further/higher education or employment (Daly and Cahill, 2018; Shandra and Hogan, 2008; Wehman, 2006).

As Irish primary and post-primary schools evolve to be more inclusive and are proving capable of supporting students with intellectual disabilities socially and academically, this has raised the expectations of these individuals and their parents to seek more ambitious post-school opportunities (Doyle, McGuckin and Shevlin, 2017). These young people want to follow similar paths as their non-disabled peers upon graduating from secondary school (Scanlon and Doyle, 2018). Furthermore, Scanlon and Doyle (2018) report that parents of young people with intellectual disabilities pointed out that a full guidance service should be provided by the guidance counsellor in the school. After all, guidance counsellors are professionally trained to ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices (NCGE, 2011).

Inclusive Transition Planning: A Collective Effort

At the school level, there appears to be a blurring of professional roles between the guidance counsellor and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) in relation to who is responsible for supporting students with intellectual disabilities to plan their exit route out of the school system (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021). It is clear that the transition planning for this cohort

needs to be much more tailored, and requires individualised input from professional staff that know the student well (McGuckin et al., 2013). Strong student support teams that begin in the first year of a student's junior cycle are recommended by the National Educational Psychological Service (2014) as an example of best practice. This practice aligns well with literature recommendations advising that post-school transition planning for this cohort begins early in high school/secondary school. In doing so, students can begin to consider their post-school goals in collaboration with their parents/guardians, school faculty and other support staff where appropriate (Doyle et al., 2017; McCoy et al., 2014; Scanlon et al., 2015; Smyth, 2016). Student support teams are intended to encompass a range of supports that cater for the learning, social, emotional, and behavioural needs of students (Department of Education and Skills, 2014). A strong student support team emphasises an equity-focused approach to student supports and involves a multidisciplinary team, including a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), support teachers and/or special needs assistants (SNA), a guidance counsellor, and strong inclusive leadership such as a head-teacher and/or a principal/deputy.

Grigal et al. (2012) amongst others, set best practice criteria for facilitating a successful post-school transition to education/employment opportunities: i.e. high expectations (Blacher, Kraemer and Howell, 2010), person-centred approach to planning an individual's post-school goals (Scanlon et al., 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2000), and collaboration with external stakeholders (Noonan et al. 2008; Wehman, 2010). Early transition planning requires a commitment from the student, school staff, and families in developing a plan that enables the student to develop skills they will need to pursue in their post-secondary education and/or employment (Doyle et al., 2017; McGuckin et al., 2013; Scanlon et al., 2015). The main challenge here is securing the commitment from all stakeholders. With the ever-increasing administrative burden on the role of educators, finding the required time to develop such a plan can be difficult and time-consuming (Grigal and Hart, 2010; 2012).

Zhao, Rose and Shevlin (2021) acknowledge the evolving role of para-professional supports in Irish schools. As increasing numbers of students with diverse learning abilities attend mainstream school environments in their local community (McConkey et al., 2016), there has been pressure on the education system to dramatically evolve to deliver more inclusive learning environments. Thus, the rapid expansion of various school support systems such as support teachers (also known as resource teachers), and special needs assistants (SNAs) have 'outpaced' the Department of Education and Skills efforts to regulate the delivery of such supports (p.184). Despite the narrow definition of the role of the SNA as 'caretakers' (p.196) within educational policy, SNAs, or inclusion support assistants (ISAs) as they have been re-named, are now recognised as playing a much more holistic role in supporting the academic, social, and emotional development of students with special educational needs. Under the

new allocation model, ISAs will receive additional training to support a variety of supports and therapies for students with special educational needs and severe medical needs (NCSE, 2018a).

Rose and Shevlin (2021), among others (Abbott, 2007; Burton and Goodman, 2011; Göransson et al., 2015), report a general understanding that the SENCO and the support teachers are expected to undertake a wide variety of professional responsibilities with a vague policy guideline for the role. Often, support teachers view their role as 'low status' and 'operational' (p.95) with little influence towards a whole-school inclusion approach (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021; Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017; 2020; Rose and Shevlin, 2021). Accordingly, at a school level, there is a common conception that the support teacher is better positioned to act as a specialist advisor in all matters relating to special education. Consequently, support teachers are often perceived as operating a parallel system of education for students with special educational needs, which absolves general class teachers from taking responsibility for the teaching of these students (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017; Klang et al., 2016; Rose and Shevlin, 2021). Similarly, when it comes to advising students with intellectual disabilities on post-school transitions, guidance professionals are often not consulted, and what's more, guidance professionals routinely see this work as outside the realm of their responsibility – citing the SENCO as a more qualified expert in all things disability-related (Aston, Banks and Shevlin, 2021; Scanlon and Doyle, 2018).

Support teachers, SENCOs, and SNAs are well-positioned to help facilitate a successful post-school transition plan in consultation witha student support team.Their role(s) require them to support students with additional needs in smaller groups and often on a one-to-one basis. This involves building rapport with the student and getting to know them on a deeper level so as to advocate for their needs and accommodations. The very nature of the role means SETs/SNAs adopt a person-centred approach and an equity-focused model of supporting their students (Aston, 2020, Rose and Shevlin, 2021). Additionally, the role calls for planning and implementing effective teaching strategies, liaising with parents, staff and other relevant professionals (Kearns, 2005; Klang et al., 2016) – all of which are attributes required to aide and inform a robust post-school transition plan with the student at the centre of the process (Grigal et al., 2014; McGuckin et al., 2013). Transition planning for this cohort of students can be complex and multidimensional, requiring a collective effort from a multidisciplinary support team. Implementation of a whole-school inclusion agenda from school leaders, where individual subject teachers take responsibility for inclusive pedagogical and curricular issues to include students of varying abilities through a continuum of support model (Department of Education and Science, 2007) can help to foster an inclusive ethos within schools. Complementary to this is the whole-school guidance framework, which requires co-operation between the guidance department and the special education team (NCGE, 2017).

A Case Study of the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID)

Research has demonstrated that learners with intellectual disabilities who participate in inclusive post-secondary educational programmes experience increased self-esteem, self-respect, interpersonal relationships, self-determination, and social inclusion (Hughson, Moodie, and Uditsky, 2006; Kleinert et al., 2012; Uditsky and Hughson, 2012). The Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID), formerly known as the National Institute of Intellectual Disability (NIID), has been offering inclusive third level opportunities to learners with intellectual disabilities since 2005 (Kubiak, 2005; Kubiak et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2009; O'Connor et al., 2012). Originally, the NIID developed an inclusive Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL). The programme aimed to promote *"full citizenship for students with intellectual disabilities through the development of learning and social networks, as well as career opportunities"* (O'Brien, O'Keeffe, Kenny, Fitzgerald, and Curtis, 2008). The CCL was later adopted by five other Irish higher education providers (Dundalk Institute of Technology; Mary Immaculate College Limerick; St. Angela's College Sligo; University College Cork; Waterford Institute of Technology) in an attempt to address the lacunae in third level provision for this population. In 2014, the TCPID was re-located to the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the CCL course was reconceptualised. The new and innovative education programme known as the Certificate in Arts, Science and Inclusive Applied Practice (ASIAP) had its first intake of students with intellectual disabilities studying towards a Level 5 accreditation, awarded by Trinity College Dublin, in September 2016. TCPID was established to facilitate access and engagement in a higher education to enable young people with intellectual disabilities to achieve a viable qualification leading to enhanced employment opportunities.

Bypassing Systemic Barriers to Higher Education

The application and transition to higher education has always been a near-impossible feat for students with intellectual disabilities within the state (INHEF, 2019; O'Brien, 2009). The aforementioned traditional route to higher education involves the competitive race to outperform one's peers to gain the required CAO points to access a higher education course. Young people with intellectual disabilities who do not complete a full Leaving Certificate upon graduating from post-primary school, cannot apply to the CAO system, and therefore have to seek alternative pathways should they wish to progress to higher education (such as post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses, further education and training (FET) certificate courses, and/or apprenticeships/traineeships) (NCSE, 2014; NCSE, 2018b). Alternatively, the mature student route is becoming an increasingly popular pathway to higher education for applicants over the age of 23 years (Citizens Information Board, 2019). Access and foundation courses are available, and application to these initiatives is primarily interview-based, and values life experience as recognition of prior learning, rather than academic attainment alone. Similarly, application

to the ASIAP programme is interview-based and participation in group activities is assessed to determine a candidate's suitability for the course. However, applicants are asked to demonstrate the ability to study at the equivalent of level 3 on the Irish National Framework of Qualification (NFQ) (See Figure 1). Established in 2003, the NFQ describes qualifications in terms of what learners know, understand and are able to do. It also sets out qualifications pathways from one NFQ level to the next. The NFQ gives employers, education providers and learners a simple, transparent frame of reference for qualifications in Ireland (QQI, 2018).

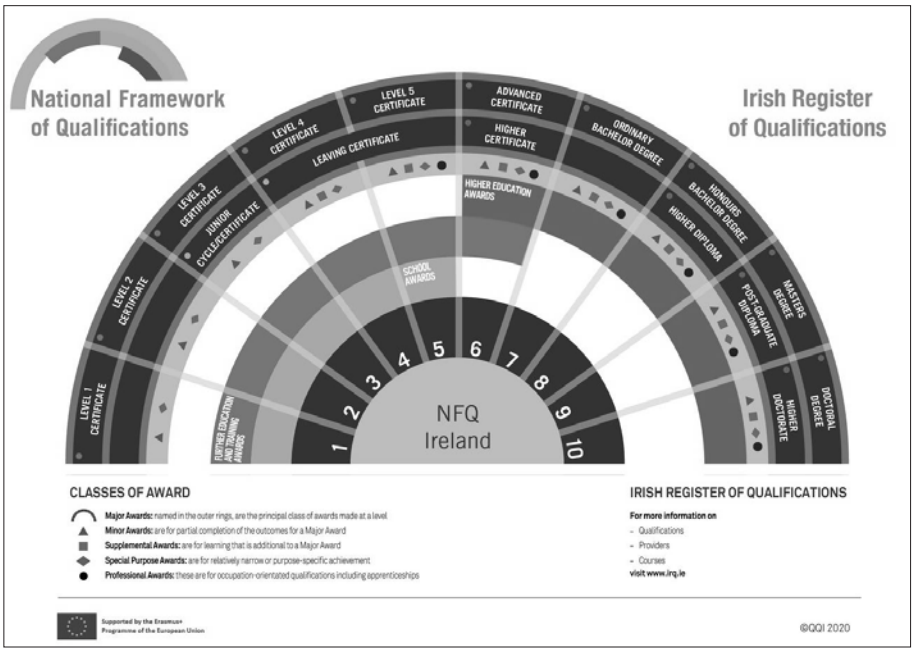

Figure 1: The Irish National Framework of Qualifications

Unlike the various access and foundation courses, the ASIAP course is not an access route to higher education. The ASIAP is an evidence-based academic programme, embedded within Trinity College Dublin, that offers students with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to fully engage with all that university life has to offer. Furthermore, young people with intellectual disabilities do not need to wait until they are 23 years of age to apply for the ASIAP, with many students beginning to plan their transition directly from mainstream/special education to TCD at the age of 18 years. Although, since the reconceptualisation of the course, a number of past pupils of the CCL programme (O'Brien, 2009; Kubiak, 2012) have returned to complete the 2-year ASIAP course with the aim of gaining the level 5 accreditation. Figure 2 below highlights the positionality of the ASIAP certificate in terms of the NFQ

which offers the added appeal of structured employment opportunities and lifelong learning progression.

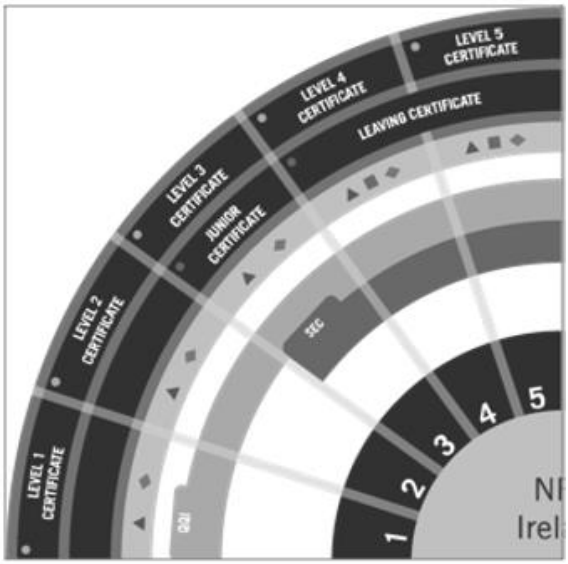

Figure 2: Level 1 to 5 on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications

The ASIAP course is the only level 5 Certificate programme offered to students with intellectual disabilities from an Irish university. Despite not being formally recognised on the NFQ as "higher education", the ASIAP programme offers students much more than a level 5 qualification. Students on this programme can avail of everything that TCD offers to all students (e.g. a high quality teaching and learning environment; peer mentoring; supports and services). There is anecdotal evidence that students with intellectual disabilities who do not engage with a suitable education/rehabilitation programmes between the ages of 18-23 years are likely to regress and forget many of the skills and competencies they acquire during post-primary schooling (Harris, 2021).

Pre-Transition: TCPID Summer School

Since 2018, TCPID has been offering potential students from the age of 16+ the opportunity to attend a Summer School on the university campus. The Summer School is open to anyone with an intellectual disability who is considering third level education opportunities on completion of their post-primary education. Summer School students are welcomed onto the historic 400-year-old university campus and gain first-hand experience of life as a university student at Trinity College Dublin. The attendees experience trial introductory classes that are offered from the ASIAP curriculum by lecturing staff from across the university. Summer school participants also have the

opportunity to engage with many of the student support services across the campus. The Summer School allows individuals with intellectual disabilities to participate in university life within a controlled and structured manner. For students who find change difficult, it is an opportunity to visit the campus and familiarise themselves with the classrooms and buildings on the campus before they make any decisions to apply for the ASIAP. Summer School participants are asked to have a parent/guardian escort them to and from the university campus. Where possible, participants are asked to attend the Summer School independently. This can be a significant challenge for both the participant and their families/carers as they step into new and uncharted territory. The participating group are supported by a multidisciplinary team, including Occupational Therapist(s) from TCPID while on campus. Initiating this process permits students to familiarise themselves with some of the lecturers and administrative staff (Thoma et al., 2009). Ultimately, a pre-transition programme such as this can help to ease the first-day anxiety experienced by all incoming year-one students across the campus.This can be particularly daunting for students with intellectual disabilities who are moving from a highly supported school environment to a more challenging, self-reliant environment (Aston, McGuckin and Shevlin, 2019; McGuckin et al., 2013).

The Summer School also encourages all components that are essential to facilitating a successful post-school transition to education/employment opportunities set out by Grigal et al. (2014) and Thoma et al. (2009). The provision of the Summer School encourages young people, and their circle of support, to raise their expectations in terms of possible post-school outcomes as they begin to envisage a viable pathway (Doyle, McGuckin and Shevlin, 2017; Blacher, Kraemer and Howell, 2010; Kraemer and Blacher, 2001; Wagner et al, 2007). Additionally, preparation to attend the Summer School often involves several administrative and logistical planning exercises with the student placed at the centre of the process, to aid them to make informed decisions (Agran & Hughes, 2008; Scanlon et al., 2015, Thoma et al., 2009; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Lastly, the Summer School encourages collaborative relationships between TCPID and a range of stakeholders to ensure vulnerable attendees under the age of 18-years are supported appropriately by the core TCPID team while on campus (Noonan et al., 2008; Repetto et al., 2002; Wehman, 2010) and to arrange for learners to meet with representatives from the receiving institution who are experts on topics such as academic supports and services (Thoma et al., 2009).

A Continuum of Support through Universal Design

The ASIAP academic curriculum is underpinned by the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is proving to be an increasingly popular teaching and learning philosophy within the tertiary education sector. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn, including students with disabilities (CAST, 2018; Scott and Puglia, 2018). UDL aims to improve the

educational experience of all students by introducing more flexible methods of teaching, assessment, and service provision, to cater for the diversity of learners in our classrooms and lecture halls (AHEAD, 2017). A continuum of support model is utilised to ensure the course content, teaching materials and assessments are accessible to all learners. This means that individualised accommodations are less necessary and the majority of students can have a successful learning experience without additional support – although individual accommodations are negotiated between the student, a senior Occupational Therapist (OT), and teaching staff where appropriate. Using the UDL principles, the teaching team adopt various teaching techniques such as collaboration and group work and the use of multimedia (pictures, audio, videos), as well as a range of creative assessment formats such as presentations, projects and portfolios.

The ASIAP course offers students a high academic standard of learning, with teaching staff from the School of Education and subject specialists from across the Trinity academic community. The course objective is to realise the full potential of the students and help to develop a broad range of skills across a comprehensive curriculum, equipping students with transferable skills to work in diverse employment settings (Kubiak et al., 2018). A key element of student success is by virtue of regular occupational therapy sessions built into the curriculum and additional one-to-one therapy throughout the two-year programme. Scanlon and Doyle (2018) recommended the provision of a transition module, with a dedicated curriculum for transition planning as best practice. Occupational therapy is incorporated as a core principle within the ASIAP curriculum and is implemented from an educational lens through dedicated modules such as: 'Learning Theory and Practice'; 'Personal and Self Development', and 'Preparing for Transition'. TCPID's OT team work closely with students in developing a personal transition plan and developing their self-determination. Self-determination is widely recognised as a critical construct for people with intellectual disabilities given its correlation with a significant enhancement of quality of life (Mumbardó-Adam et al., 2017; Mumbardó-Adam, Guàrdia Olmos and Giné Giné, 2020).

Pathways to Employment

The TCPID is unique in its approach to establishing pathways through education to meaningful employment opportunities for graduates with intellectual disabilities. TCPID has developed a substantial network of business partners through a dedicated Pathways Coordinator who works alongside the students and the Occupational Therapy team to identify specific industries, or organisations, that might suit their particular interests, skillset, and personalities. In year two of the ASIAP, students undergo a student work placement module in which they gain academic credit but also gain real-life work experience in one of the TCPID Business Partners (Kubiak et al., 2018). Through generous business partner contributions and competitive philanthropic funding the TCPID has developed an innovative, award-winning graduate internship

programme. This successful graduate internship programme, primarily supported by the Occupational Therapy team and the Pathways Coordinator, offers ASIAP graduates an optional year of paid internship opportunities within the TCPID Business Partner Network. A method of job carving is utilised to identify suitable internship placements for ASIAP graduates that will suit their skills and personalities. Job carving is defined by Griffin and Targett (2001) as the process of breaking down a job to determine the key components that could be successfully performed by individuals with disabilities and then reassigning these components of the job to these individuals. As this process involves a person-centred approach, there has been a wide variety of roles and responsibilities undertaken by ASIAP graduates. Sample roles to date include receptionist, events management, marketing, data analysis and reporting, general administration, facilities management.

Internships vary in length from three months to six months, depending on availability and suitability within organisations. Graduates are often supported to take up more than one internship in different sectors, developing a range of diverse skills and competencies. Like any internship, extending an individual's internship is based on the capacity of the organisation, the need for a specific role to be filled, and most importantly, the merit of the individual. Since its conception in 2016, the TCPID has supported 29 graduate internships, of which 12 have converted to permanent contracts of employment that are no longer supported by TCPID. Additionally, some graduates are employed on rolling internships (Shevlin et al., 2020).

Pathways to Continued Education

While the majority (close to 90%) of ASIAP graduates strive towards securing paid employment within the network of business partners, other graduates look to continue their formal education upon graduation. The TCPID has built up a network of like-minded organisations interested in progressing education and employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. On a case by case basis, TCPID support graduates to identify specific education opportunities that would lead them to their future goals, whether they be personal life aspirations or career goals that are not directly supported through the TCPID graduate internship programme. Graduates have been either indirectly or directly supported by the centre to successfully pursue specific certificate and degree programmes of interest to them in both further and higher education upon completing their level 5 Certificate in Trinity College Dublin.

Final Reflections: From the Classroom to Policy

It is evident that there is an appetite for inclusive third level education programmes that are tailored for students with intellectual disabilities across the Republic of Ireland. The complexity of creating seamless transition pathways from the school system to higher education for this cohort is complicated by the number of different stakeholders that are required to construct a shared ambition for citizens who have an intellectual disability. While TCPID's

academic programme is demonstrating a sustainable, meaningful pathway to employment for graduates, the ASIAP programme has been designed as a response to the lack of 'mainstream' pathways for school leavers with intellectual disabilities.

Within schools, the roles of paraprofessionals need to be further defined at the policy level. School leaders have an integral role in promoting a whole school inclusion approach to encourage the continuum of support model. Whereas individual educators also have a personal responsibility to identify supports and resources they can employ to ensure all students can have a meaningful learning experience in their classroom. Likewise, an overall inclusive school environment endorses a whole school guidance approach, where all stakeholders within a student support team are of equal importance to the process. There are long-standing prejudicial attitudes regarding what these learners cannot do, with a renewed focus on what they can attain.

Higher education offers young people an opportunity to form transferable skills and capabilities that will support them on their journey to adulthood while creating a network of social and professional relationships (O'Brien, 2019). Despite recent developments within the ASIAP programme, there are still a number of challenges that need to be considered to fully embed the programme into the institutional structures and the higher education landscape as a whole. Firstly, the ASIAP programme, and others like it, should be recognised as a legitimate higher education programme, despite the non-traditional NFQ level of study typically awarded by Irish universities. What is of utmost importance here is the appropriateness and suitability of the programme and environment to the individual, and not the level towards which they are studying. This should be reflected, and mandated for, within legislation in the state. Formal recognition of these programmes would open up further collaboration between further and higher education providers to allow students to seamlessly transition between education systems based on their own educational/career goals, rather than being obliged to follow a path defined by nominal accreditation criteria.

Secondly, there are currently no official targets set by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) to monitor access and progression of students with intellectual disabilities within higher education. Currently, students studying on the ASIAP programme, and other inclusive higher education initiatives within Irish higher education providers (see INHEF, 2019) are not counted in the HEA datasets and go undetected within the system.

Lastly, progression pathways for students with intellectual disabilities attending higher education need to be explored on a national level. Accreditation is a key driver to quality assurance in convincing potential employers to move beyond their preconceived notions of disability – informed by a deficit model – to realising the full potential of all citizens and the benefits of an inclusive, diverse society.

Evaluation and Limitations

This article is primarily concerned with practice-based evidence employed by the Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities (TCPID). This pragmatic approach attempts to link previous research, knowledge and policies to the responsive activities of TCPID to overcome barriers to accessing tertiary education for students with intellectual disabilities.

TCPID was one of seven projects included in a 3-year formal evaluation project initiated by Rethink Ireland's Education Fund. The evaluation was conducted by a team of researchers from the National University of Ireland, Galway that utilised a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Framework. The SROI calculated that for every €1 that was invested into each of the education projects, a social return on investment of €12 was achieved. Despite this, a specific and rigorous theory-based evaluation of the different components/ activities of TCPID is required to further investigate and improve uptake of research-based knowledge in practice.

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Inclusive higher education for persons with intellectual disability at Mary Immaculate College

Órla M. Slattery

Abstract
The impetus to include people with intellectual disability (ID) in higher education (HE) represents the confluence of different ideological viewpoints, including social, political and educational paradigms. In recent years, there is growing consensus that access to higher education for people with ID is a significant human rights issue and a number of different initiatives have emerged to provide pathways to higher education for people with ID in Ireland. In this article, I provide an overview of inclusive higher education in the Irish context, focusing on one model of provision; the Certificate in General Learning and Personal Development (CGLPD) at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) in Limerick. I explore some of the barriers and facilitators to including people with intellectual disability in higher education and explain how these have been addressed in the context of the CGLPD programme. I will discuss the interrelated strategies which have been employed to support the holistic learning development of people with ID and suggest areas for further research and investigation.

Key words: *Intellectual disability; inclusion; inclusive higher education.*

Introduction

People with ID have a well-documented history of occupying marginalised identities within the landscape of higher education (HE) in the Irish and broader international context. The impetus to include people with ID in HE represents the confluence of different ideological viewpoints, including social, political and educational paradigms. In recent years, there is growing consensus that access to higher education for people with ID is a significant human rights issue and a number of different initiatives have emerged to provide pathways to higher education for people with ID in the Republic of Ireland. In this article, I provide an overview of inclusive higher education in the Irish context, focusing on one model of provision; the Certificate in General Learning and Personal Development (CGLPD) at Mary Immaculate College (MIC) in Limerick. I explore some of the barriers and facilitators to including people with intellectual disability in higher education and explain how these have been addressed in the context of the CGLPD programme. I discuss the interrelated strategies which have been employed to support the inclusion of people with ID

at an institutional level and highlight the inclusive teaching and learning techniques which have been incorporated to enhance the quality of the student learning experience and holistic learner development.

One of the primary aims of this article is to raise awareness among policy and change makers about the importance of creating real and meaningful opportunities for people with ID and to share some of the learnings which have emerged from one model of provision that has supported people with ID in HE since 2010. I will also highlight some of the systemic and sectoral barriers which exist in the Irish context and suggest areas for further research and investigation.

Inclusive Higher Education in Ireland

People with ID have a well-documented history of occupying marginalised identities within the Irish educational landscape. While there has been a predominant focus on inclusion in early childhood care and primary and post-primary educational settings over the past two decades, comparatively minimal progress has occurred in the context of HE (O'Connor et al., 2012). While access to HE is more widely accepted for students with general learning and physical disabilities, research indicates that 'access for people with intellectual disabilities has taken longer to gain traction' (O'Connor et al., 2012: 248). With more learners accessing HE in Ireland than ever before, and access policies opening up third level institutions to marginalised societal groups, people with ID continue to be under-represented and as Corby et al., (2019) note, a minority group, within a minority.

The impetus to include people with ID in HE represents the confluence of different ideological viewpoints, including social, political and educational paradigms, which have positively conspired to create a context for inclusive higher education in Ireland. This has arisen from demands for greater social justice, calls for civil rights, prohibition of discrimination in legislation, educational research and from the voices of service users and their families (Kinsella & Senior: 2008). The growing recognition that people with ID have a fundamental human right to further their educational goals is providing universities with an important ethical mandate and gradually bringing about meaningful change in the sector. Such a mandate has been driven largely by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD 2006) and the recent 2018 ratification which seeks to ensure 'an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning' (UNCRPD 2018).

Social and economic considerations are also drivers of change, and combating exclusion is regarded as being essential to ensure that economies can develop while those most at risk, i.e. people with disability, can become part of the knowledge society (Osborne, 2003; Stodden & Mruzek, 2010). Many universities and colleges have typically adopted more inclusive policies and practices to support the enrolment, progression, and subsequent employment of people with disabilities. There is also growing empirical evidence which attests

to the importance of continuing education for people with ID and its role in providing a pivotal pathway to employment (Watson et al., 2017), as well as real and meaningful societal participation (Aston, 2019, O'Connor et al., 2012).

Within the current higher educational landscape in Ireland, many universities and colleges have adopted more inclusive policies and practices to support the enrolment, progression, and subsequent employment of people with ID. In recent years, a number of initiatives designed to support the inclusion of people with ID have emerged within third level settings in the Republic of Ireland.

Barriers to including people with ID in HE

While it can be argued that inclusive higher education is underpinned by a strong ethical imperative, the process of including people with ID in HE can often present a unique array of challenges to institutes of higher education (Corby 2012; Goss 2001; Tagayuna et al., 2005). Shevlin et al., (2004) have identified a number of obstacles to access and participation for people with disabilities including: the physical environment, a paucity of accessible information, complex admissions procedures, assumptions of normality and low levels of awareness and understanding. Research is also highlighting the nature of the practical challenges which people with ID often face in trying to access HE which include: the lack of opportunities for independent choice making, suitable accommodation and appropriate transport to get to and from College (Shevlin et al., 2004: pp.18-19). In addition, a lack of accessible teaching and learning methodologies, appropriate learning supports, and the need for flexible assessment of student learning are among the unique challenges that people with ID may face on entering HE (Corby et al., 2012; Shevlin et al., 2004).

One of the central barriers to inclusion for people with ID entering into HE is identified by Corby (2012) as the expectation of integration into existing degree courses. Corby comments that, if 'education providers assume a position that only allows for students to take courses at particular levels' this will invariably 'present an insurmountable difficulty' for people with ID and act as a prominent barrier which can often inhibit the inclusion of this cohort [2012:78]. It can be argued that the expectation of integration does not embrace an authentic inclusive ethos; the latter advocating for a person-centred approach and the systematic removal of barriers to teaching and learning. In this vein, inclusive education is often regarded as a philosophical position which seeks to distance itself from special education and the associated trappings of the 'medical' or 'deficit' model of disability. Hornby notes that inclusive education 'is generally considered to be a multi-dimensional concept that includes the celebration and valuing of difference and diversity, consideration of human rights, social justice and equity issues, as well as of a social model of disability and a socio-political model of education' (Hornby 2015: 235).

The noted expectation of integration can therefore impose an additional obstacle for learners with ID, aiming to progress to mainstream higher

education, many of whom may be disadvantaged by a low level of prior educational attainment, as well as the challenges associated with having to engage with and 'fit into' existing college curricula. One of the ways in which providers of inclusive higher education in Ireland have sought to overcome this potential barrier, is through the creation and implementation of inclusive learning initiatives designed to address the specific needs of persons with ID which aim to support their holistic development in inclusive higher educational settings.

While research shows that there are a variety of different models of inclusive educational practice within the Republic of Ireland, a tripartite classification system proposed by Hart et al., (2006), as shown in Fig. 1, provides a useful framework of the types of models which are typically offered.

Mixed/Hybrid Model	Substantially Separate Model	Inclusive Individual Support Model
Students participate in social activities with students without disabilities and also participate in classes with other students with disabilities.	Students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities. Students may also have the opportunity to participate in social activities on campus with the college community.	Students receive an individualised service which is based on a collaborative approach via an interagency team.

Fig. 1 Tripartite classification of inclusive educational initiatives in HE for students with ID (Hart et al., 2006)

A report published by the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum (INHEF) in 2019, confirmed that during the academic year 2018/2019, a total of 11 programmes of inclusive higher education were in operation in the Republic of Ireland. The study revealed that the mixed/hybrid model was the most prominent, with six HEIs offering programmes of this type. The substantially separate model was the least prominent, with two programmes of this type in operation, while a further three HEIs were found to offer the inclusive individual support model.

Within the Irish context, a variety of different models of inclusive higher educational provision exist across universities, colleges and institutes of technology, which attest to the rich diversity of offerings that are currently in place.While there are diverse models in different settings, a number of areas

of commonality have been highlighted with respect to curricular and interdisciplinary themes such as personal development; understanding the world around us and work-related skills (Aston, 2019). Through an expansion of these themes which underpin curricular design, students are given the opportunity to engage in programmes of study which reflect their learning needs, while preparing them for future educational opportunities and career development.

The Certificate in General Learning at MIC

The CGLPD at MIC is a model of inclusive higher education which was introduced within the faculty of education at MIC in 2010. It is a fully accredited two-year certificate programme which aims to enhance the social, personal and academic development of people with ID. The central objective of this inclusive educational initiative is to provide a pathway to higher education which empowers people with ID to achieve their educational and employment life goals. The main aims of the programme are:

- To promote lifelong learning for individuals with intellectual disabilities,
- To promote inclusion in the third level environment,
- To develop skills for modern society,
- To develop social skills through peer interaction,
- To fulfil personal educational interests,
- To enhance individual employability,
- To develop full citizenship and self-determination,
- To broaden horizons for individuals with intellectual disabilities, and
- To fulfil the personal educational interests of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The central values of the CGLPD programme reflect a commitment to the core principles of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2005) and reflect a belief in the capacity of individuals with intellectual disabilities to self-actualise. The programme is underpinned by a respect for individual difference and the contribution of individuals with intellectual disabilities as well as a central belief in equality of opportunity for all learners. In addition, there is a high expectation for each of the students on the programme to achieve their academic and individual goals. The programme is designed to enhance the holistic development of participants and to enable them to foster a sense of purpose and increased confidence. During their time on the course, programme participants are encouraged and supported to develop the following graduate attributes:

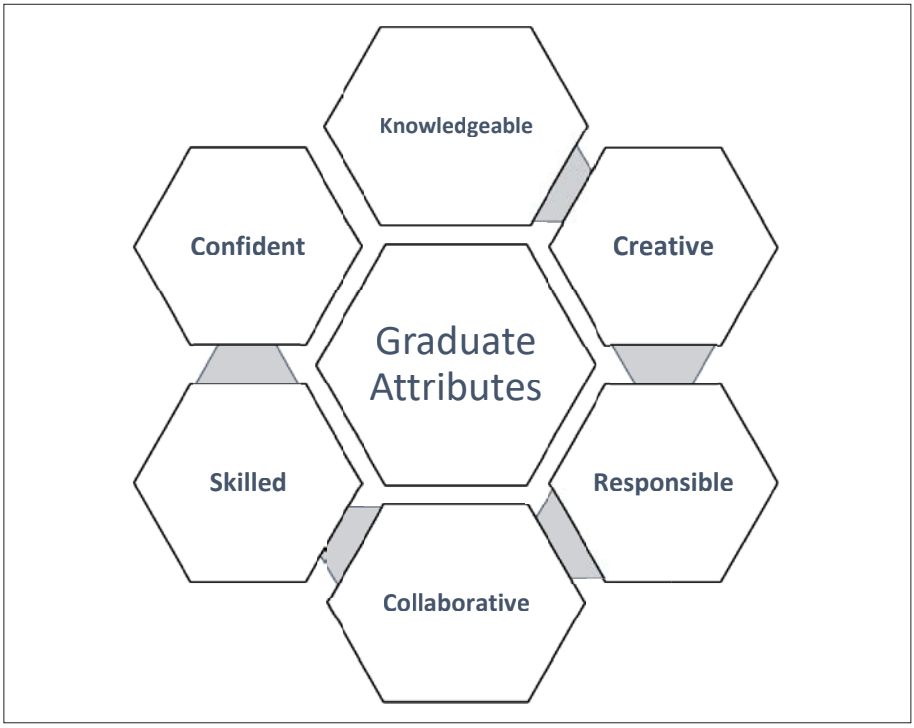

Fig. 2 CGLPD Graduate Attributes

Since the introduction of the CGLPD programme at MIC, this programme has evolved to encompass elements of each of the three models outlined in Hart's triumvirate classification system (2006). Through the development of a series of programme strands, and flexible learning pathways, learners have the opportunity to select their own individual learning pathway, which typically involves a mixed/hybrid approach wherein learners participate in social activities with students without disabilities and also participate in classes with other students with and without disabilities. Participants can also select an individualised learning pathway, which operates in partnership with the agency sector, whereby learners receive an individualised service and attend mainstream undergraduate lectures. All learners on the programme are encouraged to become actively involved in all aspects of college life and participate in a variety of social activities on campus with the entire college community.

With a view to ameliorating some of the challenges associated with including people with ID in HE, and removing the systematic barriers which can inhibit inclusion, three interrelated strategies have been implemented to support the development and institutional embedding of the CGLPD at MIC.

Interrelated Strategies to Support Inclusion

Community Partnership

Since the inception of CGLPD, the programme has been developed in partnership with a wide variety of communtiy stakeholders, to facilitate the successful transition of learners with ID to third level education. Collaborations have been established with sectoral partners such as Enable Ireland in Limerick, the Brothers of Charity in Clare and St. Joseph's Foundation in Charleville, with a view to desiging and implementing individual support packages to support individual care needs and transportation requirements, where needed. MIC has also established a formal partnership agreement with Further Education and Training (FET) Sector, through a collaboration with the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board (LCETB) to faciliate the accreditation of the CGLPD programme as a Level 4 QQI award. While the process of obtaining formal accreditation for programmes of inclusive higher eduaction is a salient challenge for providers, sectoral partnership continues to facilitate high quality outcomes for people with ID and ensures that appropriate supports are in place to overcome some of the practical barriers which can inhibit full and meaningful access to and participation in College life.

Governance Structures

The CGLPD is housed within the department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education (EPISE) at MIC. In order to ensure effective programme governance, the CGLPD management committee was established to oversee the development of the programme, at an operational and strategic level. This forum is composed of CGLPD teaching staff representatives, college faculty and management, as well as participants from the CGLPD programme, in the form of elected class representatives. This committee works to represent the interests of people with intellectual disability in the college, while also aiming to embed structures at a operational and strategic level which support inclusion, and remove systemic barriers. This committee operates within the overall governance structure of the institution, and provides a critical pathway and a reporting structure to college management.

Accreditation and Quality Assurance

The CGLPD, gained formal accreditation through Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in partnership with the LCETB. As an accredited programme, students with ID experience the same equity of outcome, in terms of obtaining a recognised qualification, and a level 4 award on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Learners on the CGLPD can select to undertake a major certificate award, consisting of 9 components, or a series of accredited certificates in subject areas which respond to their individual interests. Linked to the NFQ this programme provides a progression pathway to further education and training options for programme graduates. An overview of the programme modules together with the CGLPD Programme Module and QQI Accredited Outcomes are presented in Fig. 3.

CGLPD Modules	QQI Accredited Certificates
Year 1 1. Creative Art Appreciation 2. Interpersonal Communication skills 3. Social Studies 4. Information Technology Skills **Year 2** 5. Career Development 6. Work Placement 7. Research and Study Skills 8. Maths and Financial Management I 9. Maths and Financial Management II	• *Communications 4N 0689* • *Cultural Studies 4N 3400* • *Visual Art Practice 3N 0591* • *Personal and Interpersonal Development 4N 1131* • *Problem Solving Skills 4N 4331* • *Work Experience 4N 1168* • *Information Technology Skills 4N 1125* • *Teamworking 4N1169* • *Functional Mathematics 4N 2138*

Fig. 3 CGLPD Programme Module and QQI Accredited Outcomes

Inclusive teaching and learning on the CGLPD

The CGLPD places a large emphasis on supporting the academic learning development programme participants. A range of curricular and teaching materials have been developed based on Universal Design for Learning principles, with a view to removing some of the teaching and learning barriers we have been noted in relation to including learners with intellectual disability in higher education (Corby 2012). In line with the UDL framework, learners are offered multiple means of representation, engagement and expression, with a view to making the curriculum accessible to different learning styles and preferences (Kumar & Wideman 2014).

The implementation of UDL at a curricular level, enables learners with ID to overcome one of the prominent barriers to engaging successfully with teaching and learning in higher educational contexts, namely the expectation of integration into existing degree courses. In addition, all of the instruction which is offered to learners on the CGLPD, is at level 4 on the NFQ, whereby learners have the opportunity to engage with a level of learning which responds to their individual learning needs. In conjunction with inclusive curricular design, a series of supports and targeted interventions, shown in Fig. 4, have been implemented with a view to scaffolding the learning development of students on the CGLPD programme.

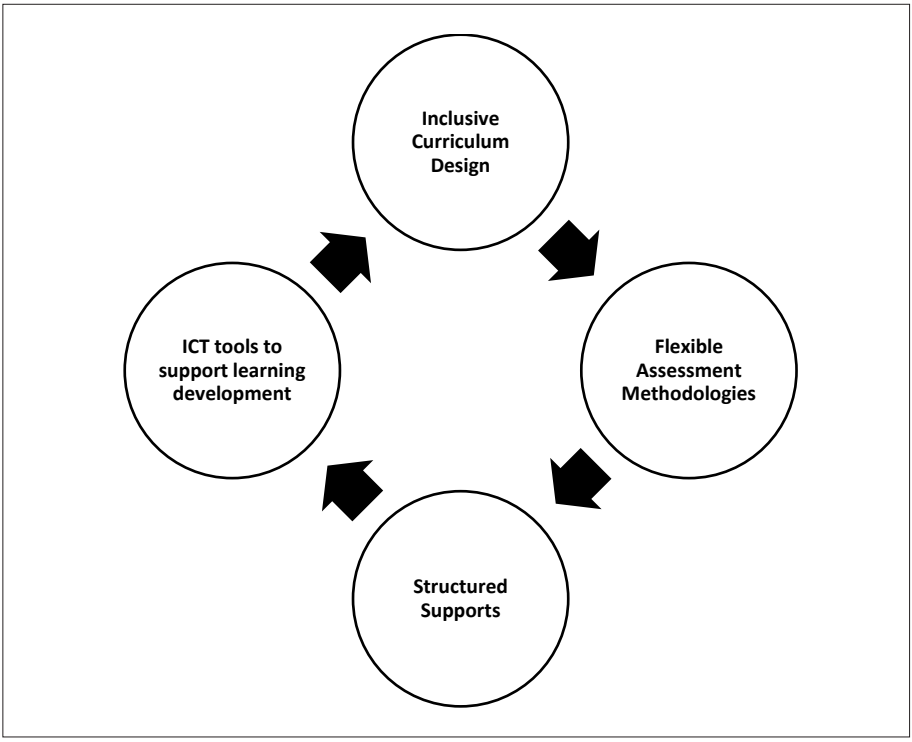

Fig. 4 Targeted Supports Designed to Scaffold Learning Development

Flexible assessment methods: As higher education assessment methodologies often present an insurmountable barrier to learning for people with intellectual disability [Healey et al., 2006], the CGLPD programme offers a range of flexible assessment methodologies and reasonable accommodations to support formative student assessment. Learners are given additional time to complete in class assignments, and have access to a range of assistive technological supports which enable them to complete course work. A variety of different assessment methodologies are offered, which aim to cater to a broad range of learning styles, including: skills demonstrations; presentations; portfolio creation; video diaries; written projects; poster projects and reflective learning journals.

Structured Supports: Peer mentoring has been identified as one of the progressive practices which supports the learning development of learners with intellectual disability (Hart et al., 2010). A peer-mentoring programme works in conjunction with the CGLPD, to provide a range of learning supports to learners with intellectual disability. Mentors are drawn from the faculty of education and provide a range of individualised in-class learning supports. As a model of reciprocal skill development, the mentoring programme aims to enable all programme participants to enhance teaching and learnings skills through

peer interaction. This support strand ensures that all learners are engaged in active learning during in-class activities (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

ICT tools to support learning development: *A* range of Guided Interactive Study Objects (GISOs,) have been developed to support student learning development (Campbell & Slattery, 2015). The design framework for these resources is based on the 'Gradual Release of Responsibility' of GRR Model, in which the aim of guided instruction is to guide students towards using different skills, strategies and procedures to scaffold learning development and enhance the capacity for independent study (Fisher & Frey 2008). These electronic interactive learning materials enable learners to undertake revision activities, designed to reinforce in-class learning. Available through the College's online Moodle platform, GISOs are designed to enable learners to develop independent study skills and become active learners, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

Inclusive higher education is an emerging phenomenon in the Irish context. It has arisen from greater calls for social justice and the growing recognition that people with ID have a fundamental right to further their educational and life goals. The impetus to include people with ID in HE is driven largely by an ethical imperative which promotes a rights-based model of access to education for all citizens. Inclusive higher education represents the confluence of different ideological viewpoints, including social, political and educational paradigms, which have positively conspired to create a context for inclusive higher education in Ireland. Many institutes of higher education are responding positively to the challenge of including people with ID in HE, through collaboration with the INHEF forum and the introduction of initiatives designed to support the inclusion of people with ID in inclusive educational contexts and learning environments. Inclusive higher education presents both challenges and opportunities to higher education providers and I have considered how some these challenges have been ameliorated in the context of one model of provision in Ireland; the CGLPD at MIC. It is important to note that one of the most salient challenges associated with provision for students with ID in HE, is the current lack of sustainable core funding, which presents an ongoing threat to the sustainability of programmes like the CGLPD and other models of provision in the Irish context (Aston 2019). While there is a growing body of research which captures the voices of people with ID, avenues for future investigation could examine the lived experiences of people with ID and document their perceptions of inclusion within and exclusion from post-secondary education in Ireland.

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Teaching a Child with Acromicric Dysplasia in a Primary School in the Republic of Ireland

Ciara Barry

Abstract
Acromicric Dysplasia is an extremely rare genetic condition. Although it has no effect on intelligence, it can cause secondary issues which have lasting effects on learning and cognition. This article reports on a case of an eight-year-old girl, Laura (pseudonym), with Acromicric Dysplasia and a co-existing visual impairment. Although Laura has been able to keep up with the curriculum in the same way as most of her peers, the co-existing visual impairment has begun to impede her performance in school and seems to have more of an effect as she has progressed to second class. This paper is written by the Special Education Teacher working with Laura. Due to the rarity of Acromicric Dysplasia, no research exists in Ireland, or on a broader international scale, to explore and document effective teaching approaches and methodologies which have supported children with Acromicric Dysplasia at school. Interviews, conducted with school personnel who have worked with Laura, as well as remarks from Laura and her mother, are presented in order to develop an over-arching view of how to best support a pupil with such a rare genetic condition in primary school.

Keywords: Acromicric Dysplasia, Visual Impairment, Effective Teaching Approaches

Introduction

Acromicric Dysplasia is a rare bone dysplasia characterised by short stature, short fingers and toes, typical intelligence and mild facial malformations (Faivre et al., 2001). It was first reported by Maroteaux and colleagues in 1986, where they describe a novel bone dysplasia in six unrelated children who presented with short stature, average intelligence and mild dysmorphic features. Since then, medical research has expanded and become more widely available. However, due to the rarity of the condition many questions remain as to how best support children with Acromicric Dysplasia throughout their schooling.

Children who are born with Acromicric Dysplasia are born at a normal height. However, they fail to progress through the height centiles over time (Wang et al., 2020). Allied with this, recent research has also shown that persons with Acromicric Dysplasia have frequent ear, tracheal and respiratory complications (Faivreet al., 2001). The exact cause of such a rare genetic condition remains

largely unknown, but some emerging research points to both inheritance and sporadic cases. Acromicric Dysplasia is an autosomal dominant condition which means that one gene in each cell is sufficient to cause the condition. While most cases result from new changes of the gene, and occur in people with no history of the condition in their family, some cases have shown that the affected person inherited the gene from one of their parents, who is also affected by the condition. Upon further exploration, most cases have been shown to be associated with changes in a specific gene, the Fibrillin 1 (FBN1) gene (Klein et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2020) similar to genetic changes shown in Mafan syndrome, a common connective tissue condition.

While multiple studies and publications (e.g. Dietz et al., 2005; Gelb 2006; Hofman et al., 1988) are available pertaining to Marfan syndrome and how to support children with Marfan syndrome at school, no such research could be found for Acromicric Dysplasia. While both conditions are related insofar as they relate to the connective tissue and do not impact intelligence, Marfan syndrome can result in persons with a diagnosis having long arms and fingers whereas Acromicric Dysplasia results in stunted growth, poor fine and gross motor skills and distinctive facial features. Due to the marked differences between the two rare conditions, caution must be exercised as research on Marfan syndrome may not apply to persons with Acromicric Dysplasia.

Supporting Children with Acromicric Dysplasia

Children who present with rare genetic conditions in primary schools need to be supported by their teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs), if appropriate. However, the lack of information and training available in how to best support children with such rare conditions often leaves teachers and schools returning to previously written medical reports or internet searches.

This paper is based on the case of Laura, a 2nd class pupil in a primary school in the Republic of Ireland. In this particular case, Laura was placed on Stage 3 of the Continuum of Support (National Educational Psychological Service [NEPS] 2007) and the author of this paper was appointed as the Special Education Teacher to her mainstream class. Despite multiple attempts at searching the literature, no guidelines or explanations on how to effectively teach the child were forthcoming and, while returning to her medical reports was in some ways beneficial, they were outdated and did not provide any insight beyond what the author already knew. The lack of evidence-based practices to support a child with Acromicric Dysplasia became apparent.

Allied with this challenge, Laura also presents with a deteriorating visual impairment which had begun to impact on her learning in the classroom. While some evidence exists for the co-existence of genetic conditions and visual impairments, no such research in the field pertaining to Acromicric Dysplasia and vision has been conducted to date. However, some evidence shows the symptoms of Acromicric Dysplasia includes an abnormally narrow opening

between the upper and lower eyelids (palpebral fissures) which may be a contributing factor to visual development in Acromicric Dysplasia (Winter et al., 1989), and may indeed be the case for Laura. A distinct lack of information was evident as the author began to try and gain a deeper understanding of Laura's needs and investigate how she could go about supporting Laura in the best possible way at school.

Methodology

The paradigm chosen for this research was the social constructivist paradigm. The social constructivist approach does not proscribe or prescribe any specific way of conducting research, but rather focuses on a search for understanding of a phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011). The qualitative research design implemented in this study complements the chosen paradigm. Qualitative research is a process for understanding and exploring the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to an experience (Creswell 2009). Agreement exists in the literature that the researcher holds a central role in qualitative research and therefore the researcher is often considered to be the primary data collection instrument (Creswell 2009; Robson 2011). In this particular case, as the Special Education Teacher (SET) assigned to the child in question, the author was also an active participant in the study as she reflected on her own practice, beliefs and aimed to better herself as an educational practitioner in a special education setting.

This study took place during the 2020/2021 school year in an Urban school Delivering Equality of Opportunity in School (DEIS Band 1) in the Republic of Ireland. The pupil, Laura, was then in 2nd class and had begun to show minor signs of difficulty in terms of her participation in certain class activities due to fine and gross motor skill issues and also due to her deteriorating visual impairment.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff and other relevant professionals to gain a better understanding of teaching methodologies that would best suit Laura to support her in reaching her full potential. In total, the views of ten persons who either currently work or who have previously worked with Laura were sought. Questions remained very general and were underpinned by the following three guiding questions:

1. What do you know about Laura's needs?
2. How can we best support Laura at school?
3. What has worked well for Laura at school thus far?

Laura took part in this study insofar as providing examples to the author about what she likes best about school and what issues she is encountering. This data was collected by the researcher through completion of the "My Thoughts About School" checklist by the National Educational Psychological Service

(NEPS 2010). It is school policy that each child on the Continuum of Support must complete this with a Special Education Teacher. However, parental consent and child assent were obtained in order to use this information for the purposes of this research and this paper. Table 1 below sets out a list of persons whose views were sought for this particular research:

Participant	Role in Relation to Laura
Participant 1	Laura
Participant 2	Laura's mother
Participant 3	Previous Mainstream Teacher
Participant 4	Previous Mainstream Teacher
Participant 5	Current Mainstream Teacher
Participant 6	Previous Special Education Teacher
Participant 7	Previous Special Education Teacher
Participant 8	Previous SNA
Participant 9	Current School Principal
Participant 10	Professional from an outside agency who works with Laura

Table 1: Participants in this study

Data Analysis

Data analysis largely took the form of thematic analysis. Semi-structured interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed. Conforming with Braun and Clarkes's (2006) method of thematic analysis, each interview was read and re-read several times in order to develop a familiarity with the data. These were then initially coded to reveal emergent themes and to provide a broader picture of both the methodologies that have worked for Laura but also to reveal the understandings and difficulties faced by educational practitioners in terms of working with children who have rare genetic conditions. Each piece of data allocated to an emergent theme was re-read in order to determine if sufficient data existed for each theme. Themes were identified and are presented below:

Theme 1: Physical Development

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning

Theme 3: Support from Outside Agencies

Theme 4: Assistive Technology

Key Findings

Theme 1: Physical Development

Impacts on Educational Participation

Interviews revealed that, while Laura was currently progressing well at school, worries existed as to how long this would be the case. Many participants believed that life would become difficult for Laura as she got older and had worries about how she would cope. Laura's mother stated that:

> *She loves school and is very happy at school but sometimes I see other children in the class and I think that they are way bigger than her. I wonder will they develop into much bigger children or teenagers as they get older and Laura will be left behind.*

Furthermore, Laura's mother revealed that she is always honest with Laura about her condition and added that being honest with Laura about her physical stature has helped her to accept it:

> *We have always been honest with her…I have always told her that yes, she is small and she will always be small…I suppose we are hoping that she will accept it and not dwell on it if we are matter of fact about it.*

This worry about balancing Laura's physical stature and not wanting to be over-protective of her was also to the forefront of the thoughts of her current class teacher who felt that:

> *She is such a beautiful child who has a great sense of humour…I just wonder when time moves on and the class begin to mature a bit, will she feel different? The class are a lovely bunch but I do feel even when we are doing PE, that I have to be so careful as we have some very strong kids in the class and I am afraid that they will topple her over…*

In line with this, issues pertaining to inclusion and how difficult it can be in practical terms were echoed by a previous SET:

> *Sometimes in the yard she is getting stuck in playing or running very fast and I am almost biting my lip as I don't want to interfere with her playing but I also don't want her to fall over or get shoved around by other much stronger kids…as time goes on I do think this will be a bigger issue…*

Having said that, a previous SNA made an interesting point about Laura:

> *I suppose I felt that I had a job of looking after her care needs as her SNA. However,I didn't want to be "othering" her either…I know that if she falls she will get back up again and it is her attitude that gets her through a lot, I think that is so so important…*

Similarly, an outside professional who works with Laura compared her to other children that who have similar conditions. She was concerned that as Laura gets older she may have difficulty coping with her condition:

> *As time goes on, I really begin to see the kids themselves notice how life becomes difficult for them…teenagers get self-conscious and some students really get down about their impairments…I know Laura has such a bubbly personality and I hope this will enable her to cope as she gets older…*

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning

Effective Interventions to Date

Research and support for effective interventions for children with Acromicric Dysplasia and co-occurring visual impairment could not be found. Therefore, for Special Education Teachers previously involved with Laura at school, a combination of approaches were used:

> *I always found it difficult…not because Laura is in anyway difficult, she is a beautiful child, but I felt that cognitively she did not need any literacy or numeracy support…At that time, she had no assistive technology so I worked on her fine and gross motor skills…I remember doing lots of fundamental movement skills with her…*
>
> *(Participant 6 – Previous SET)*

> *I really enjoyed her personality and we did a bit of reading and a few Maths problems but what could I do in terms of helping her at school? Very little if I am honest…she is a clever child, she didn't really need my support in curricular areas…*
>
> *(Participant 7 – Previous SET)*

Interestingly, this year's class teacher had other ideas, focussing on wellbeing and resilience which complement the views of the visiting teacher presented previously:

> *I think perhaps we should be focussing on some well-being things…not because she would be in need of them now, but into the future, I want her to have perseverance and not become a victim to her diagnosis…Above all else, I want her to be resilient…She will face barriers in her life due to her condition and I want her to know that she can be a fantastic adult…*

One SNA and one Special Education Teacher spoke about fine-motor skill interventions and ideas:

> *As specific programmes do not exist for such a condition, I did work on life skills which was effective…things like opening bottles, lids, yoghurts etc… However she struggled with these because of her short limbs and her underdeveloped fingers…I suppose it did work in some respects because we*

> *used to open the bottle tops by pressing them between her arm and her tummy and try to use one hand to get it off…small little knacks like that…*
>
> *(Participant 6 – Previous SET)*

> *I used to do some beading and threading but I felt that she had developed some compensatory strategies already…I don't know if this is necessarily true but do persons with that condition make progress in terms of their limbs? I didn't think so…I suppose maybe it built up some muscle tone*
>
> *(Participant 8 – Previous SNA)*

In terms of teaching and learning, the views of a mainstream class teacher in terms are interesting to note:

> *One thing I did find was that the colour of the whiteboard did affect her… I mean the background colour…I had read something online about it and I played around with the board one day and kept asking Laura which colours she could see best…Something simple but helpful….*

Stemming from this helpful adaption, the class teacher also began to realise:

> *Small tweaks made ahuge difference to her…like when photocopying I was always putting her things on A3 paper until one day she said to me, half-joking, that her page was so big it would take her forever to colour compared to the other kids…It was a penny-drop moment for me, I thought a bigger page was being supportive whereas that's not how she viewed it! I think the biggest lesson was to ask her more what suits her best…*

However, despite receiving larger print text books from the National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI), perhaps this could have been done in a more organised way as an SNA pointed out that:

> *It's great that the text books come in large print but the page numbers are all over the place…I mean if the class are on page 40 of the Maths book it might be in Volume 2 page 55 of Laura's big book…The pages also start half way down so, for example, in a normal book, each page is a new page, however one page of that book might be two and a half pages in the enlarged book and it is so hard to find where one page starts…*

Similarly, the class teacher also commented on the enlarged print books that:

> *They are so big and heavy…She is only a small child who would struggle to bring them home for homework and the like…I never send them home because she can't carry them but then when she brings home her normal textbook she can't see them, so now I have resorted to photocopying the pages from the enlarged textbooks for homework so her bag doesn't weigh a tonne… I have to be organised…It can seem a bit counter-productive getting the large books and then photocopying them*

Theme 3: Support from Outside Agencies

Support from outside agencies featured in interviews from participants. One major theme was relating to how some participants didn't know who to contact in relation to Laura:

> *I don't know if it is the ophthalmic surgeon or the paediatric doctor? I know she was getting Occupational Therapy for a bit too, but that has finished… She doesn't have a NEPS Assessment because she doesn't need one…While NEPS Psychologists are easily contactable due to being assigned to a school, doctors and therapists are not, and can be hard to contact for information.*
>
> (Participant 4 – Previous Teacher)

Interestingly, Laura's mother also found the lack of awareness and information surrounding Acromicric Dysplasia to be an issue for her:

> *I do think we are getting more support for the visual side of things rather than the dysplasia…The NCBI are very good to deal with…Maybe because each child with Acromicric Dysplasia is so different that doctors and nurses can't really give a straight answer because they do not know what this condition will hold for Laura…*

Multiple participants echoed this view:

> *I know she is under the care of the Visiting Teacher for the Visually Impaired and has gotten a lot from that…I have seen that person in the school a few times, but we don't really know anything about the condition and what is the best thing to do…*
>
> (Participant 3 – Previous Class Teacher)

Equally, links between medical professionals and schools are sometimes not as straightforward as liaising with other educational based professionals:

> *I did feel certainly that I could pick up the phone to the visiting teacher or email her questions or concerns and she would be there for me as a teacher but I haven't a clue where to turn for information on the Acromicric Dysplasia…I remember googling it at the time and being bamboozled by the medical terminology with no real key points on providing practical support at school…*
>
> (Participant 4 – Previous Class Teacher)

While information was difficult to attain, Laura's mother also pointed out that:

> *It's (the condition) like a jigsaw…each person with it is different and it's just trying to figure out how it will impact Laura…I think this is the reason for such little information on it, it is like a jigsaw for each person with it and it can be so different for each person who has it…*

Theme 4: Assistive Technology

Of interest to many of the participants in this study was the provision of assistive technology to support Laura. This interest primarily stemmed from the fact that she was granted and received assistive technology at the same time this research was being undertaken. However, despite the influence this new piece of technology may have on school life for Laura, the Principal of the school commented:

> *We applied for that piece of equipment last February (2020)…Schools closed in March 2020…When we came back to school in September 2021, we were advised to re-submit the application…You (the researcher) completed it and sent it off…It was not until February 2021 that the equipment actually arrived…That's a full year…I acknowledge school closures were unforeseen but it shouldn't have been that long…*

The equipment the Principal alluded to is called a Reveal 16i, and was purchased through a company in the United Kingdom, Humanware. While the machine was excellent, it largely fell to the Special Education Teacher (the author of this paper) to order it and set it up. Due to the lapses in time outlined above, the machine was then subject to Brexit tax of almost a thousand euro which had not been factored into the original quote when sought from the Department of Education. In the end, the school had to absorb the cost of the Brexit tax from its already stretched budget and grants. The current class teacher also pointed out that:

> *That machine was brilliant…it magnified everything…and she loved it but I do remember that you (the author) had to bring that home and play around with it in order to understand how it worked. I think that more teacher training or time to do that kind of thing at school should be made available…We should have all gone to a course or had somebody come in to show us how to set it up and use it…*

Despite issues with the assistive technology, it is important to note that Laura herself found the machine to be extremely useful:

> *I love it…it folds up…the camera on the other one kept moving and I would have to keep my hand on it, this one is ok…I can just press the button and it will come on…the picture is so clear…*

While having a clear and crisp camera built into the machine for magnification, the iReveal 16 also has the capacity to download books directly onto it. However, when the author of this paper went about trying to do this, Irish publishers had not yet featured in the available book library. Despite assurances that talks about this were underway, at the time of writing, this had yet to be completed. Having the books directly on the device may alleviate some of the issues discussed earlier relating to large print text books.

Limitations and Recommendations

This study was conducted based on the case of one child with Acromicric Dysplasia and a co-existing visual impairment. The prevalence of Acromicric Dysplasia in the Irish population remains extremely low and thus expanding the study was not possible. While the co-existence of both acromicric dysplasia and a visual impairment may have overshadowed the acromicric dysplasia itself, it was impossible to separate one from the other.

This research merely skims the surface of a complex condition, and it is hoped that it would provide support to teachers and schools in Ireland, but also across the world, who work with children with Acromicric Dysplasia, as no such studies exist in the field to date. It is hoped that some guidance or specialised helpline or email be available to support teachers and school personnel who work with children who have rare genetic conditions. The provision of assistive technology has the capacity to enhance teaching and learning. However, the time taken to obtain the technology and to set it up correctly should be examined across the education sector as a whole in order to best support pupils in their learning. Enhanced communication and co-ordination between publishers, the NCBI and schools would be helpful for children who use assistive technology. The need for a well-being programme specifically designed to support children with rare genetic conditions is timely and necessary. Further research should examine the development of such a programme and provide necessary support to teachers on how to discuss the condition with the student and at what stage this would be deemed appropriate.

Conclusion

Acromicric Dysplasia is an extremely rare genetic condition. This paper takes the case of one 2nd class pupil, Laura who attends a mainstream primary school in Ireland, and who has the condition along with a co-existing visual impairment. This paper highlights the challenges for Laura's teachers in striving to best serve her educational needs at school. The perspectives of current and past teachers and SNAs, as well as Laura's mother and indeed, most importantly, Laura herself are presented through thematic analysis. It is hoped that the findings of this paper can support teachers and begin to start necessary research into supporting pupils with co-existing needs and pupils who have rare genetic conditions in schools.

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The Critical Role of SENCO Leadership for Inclusive School Improvement

Johanna Fitzgerald

Abstract
This conceptual paper explores the leadership potential of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), the teacher usually tasked with leading the school's inclusion policy and considers models of leadership which can facilitate inclusive school improvement in mainstream schools. SENCO roles exist in various forms across jurisdictions. In Ireland the role has evolved organically in response to inclusive education and until recently, with little policy guidance to support role enactment. In the absence of a formal conceptualisation of the SENCO role significant variation in practice and working conditions exists. The role is complex and isolating, but SENCOs derive satisfaction from working with children and young people with additional and diverse needs. The importance of leadership to the SENCO role in facilitating a whole-school response to inclusive and special education, where SENCOs are repositioned as pedagogical leads is considered, and the paper draws on the empirical, policy and theoretical literature to argue for a leadership model in schools which is distributive, collaborative and sustainable in attempts to integrate inclusive and special education provision with whole school improvement. The SENCO role in the Irish context forms the focus of this paper, but conceptual arguments may be relevant elsewhere.

Keywords: SENCO; Distributed Leadership; Inclusive and Special Education; School Improvement

Introduction

The role undertaken by SENCOs is determined by the coalescence of political, theoretical, and professional factors within their individual school contexts (Hallett 2021). Often tasked with leading and championing inclusive and special education in schools (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; Tissot 2013), SENCOs arguably maintain important and strategic roles in schools (Ekins 2015; Pearson et al., 2015) irrespective of formal leadership posts of responsibility. Inclusive education requires wholesale investment (Mitchell 2018) and is reliant on the collective and collaborative efforts of the entire school community working towards a shared vision aimed at maximising learning outcomes for all students (Harris and Jones 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020). This paper examines the place of SENCO leadership in this context. The

relationship between leadership and organisational innovation is unequivocally evidenced in the literature (Harris and Jones 2020; Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris 2014), as is the complexity of the change process (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012). Distributed leadership as a framework to scaffold positive organisational growth and improved outcomes for all students, but especially for those with additional and special educational needs and disabilities, is argued for in this paper (Harris and Jones 2020; Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane 2012). The role of SENCOs in leading inclusive whole-school approaches to learning, teaching and assessment is considered, which critically discusses the complex interplay between SENCO leadership and school improvement (Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Fitzgerald 2021; Hallett 2021). Fundamentally, the paper argues that every school needs a SENCO leader with skills, knowledge (both practical and theoretical), and competencies in inclusive and special education pedagogies and in systems leadership, management, and coordination of a whole-school response to student diversity.

The Policy Context

The controversial and problematic concept of inclusive education (Hornby 2020; Mitchell 2018; O'Brien 2020; Thomas and Loxley 2007) has dominated educational policy reform internationally for the past three decades (Buchner et al., 2021) and the place of special education has been questioned (see Armstrong 2017; Florian 2019; Hyatt and Hornby 2017; Kauffman and Hornby 2021; O'Connor 2013). Inclusive education is considered a right for children with additional and special educational needs and disabilities and is enshrined in law in many jurisdictions, including Ireland, as evidenced in The Education Act 1998, The Education (Welfare) Act 2000, The Equal Status Act 2000, Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 and the Disability Act 2005 (Government of Ireland 2000, 2004, 2005). National reforms are influenced by international declarations such as the Salamanca Statement (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1994), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations (UN) 1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006). Promotion of inclusive agendas and increased awareness and assessment of needs have resulted in an increase in the number of students identified with diverse needs in mainstream schools. Despite this, a parallel system of mainstream and special education prevails in Ireland (Shevlin and Banks 2021) with an increase in the number of special schools and special classes both in Ireland and in Europe (Buchner et al., 2021; Ebersold et al., 2019; NCSE 2019).

In Ireland and elsewhere, a paradigmatic shift away from a psycho-medical perspective on disability and additionality towards a psycho-social response to understanding differences is under construction and a bio-psychosocial theoretical perspective (National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) 2007, 2010) underpins policy (Shevlin and Banks 2021; National Council for Special Education (NCSE) 2019). This paradigm shift is evident in the Special

Education Review Committee (SERC) Report (1993), the Education Act (1998), the EPSEN Act (2004) and in the recently adopted Special Education Teacher Allocation Model (SETAM) which prioritises a need-led approach to additional resource allocations to schools (Curtin and Egan 2021; Department of Education and Skills (DES) Circulars 0013/2017, 0014/2017; NCSE 2014). SETAM replaced a system of resource allocation entrenched in psycho-medical and categorical models of understanding disability and pathologised children and young people with their over-reliance on labelling (NCSE 2014; Rose, Shevlin, Winter and O'Raw 2015). The SETAM also emphasises a whole-school collaborative approach and underlines the significance of school self-evaluation in relation to the measurement of progress and review of outcomes for students with additional needs. This unified allocation model of resourcing aims to address inequities in the system (NCSE 2014) through school-generated and data-informed whole-school profiling of need, thus diminishing the requirement for individual diagnoses and labelling (DES Circulars 0013/2017, 0014/2017). The SETAM seeks to facilitate the flexible deployment of teaching supports as needs emerge (NCSE 2014). However, while the SETAM engenders greater levels of teacher autonomy in how to 'manage and deploy additional teaching support' (DES 2017, p.2), Curtin and Egan (2021), in their examination of the SETAM to support inclusion in primary schools in Ireland, found that the demands arising from this autonomy levelled greater accountability and responsibility on teachers to identify and prioritise students with the greatest level of need, and to allocate resources accordingly. Limited research on the impact of the SETAM on the SENCO role exists, and following four academic years of implementation, research in this area is timely.

Special education has been transformed in Ireland in the past three decades (Rose and Shevlin 2021). This significant paradigm shift in how additionality and difference is understood is arguably still under construction, and will continue to evolve as the perspectives and experiences of those it directly affects are increasingly invited to share their voice. Categorical and entrenched deficit views of disability are being replaced by socially responsive approaches to inclusion of children and young people with diverse needs. Such a shift necessitates a repositioning and reconceptualisation of the SENCO role, from one involved in remediating the curriculum for children and young people unable to access it, to a role which assumes key pedagogical leadership to enable and empower school communities to maximise opportunities for these students (Hallett 2021).

From Isolation to Integration: SENCO role evolution

Internationally, extensive empirical research on the role of the SENCO exists, with consensus about the nature of a role that is complex, challenging and contextually bound (see for example Curran and Boddisson 2021; Emanuelsson 2001; Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; Hallett 2021; Poon-McBrayer 2012; Struyve et al., 2018). Substantial variation in SENCO role enactment exists

across and within jurisdictions as the role continues to evolve (Emanuelsson 2001; Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). In the Irish context, while the role has received some welcome attention from researchers, practitioners, school management bodies, and teacher unions in the past five years, with calls for greater support for and recognition of the work undertaken by SENCOs (see for example Doyle 2021; Fitzgerald and Radford 2017, 2020; Martin 2019; O'Hara 2021; Walsh 2020; Walsh 2021), it continues to evolve in a policy vacuum (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; 2020). Further, a lack of clarity about role expectations has created challenges for SENCOs (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). This may be because of the diffused nature of the role (Busher and Harris 2000), which appears boundless (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). With no job specification for SENCOs in the Irish context, in addition to a lack of formal role recognition, much of the work of SENCOs is invisible and misunderstood, with many reporting feelings of isolation (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Martin 2019; O'Hara 2021; Walsh 2021).

It is also argued that SENCOs work in 'atheoretical and professional bubbles', disconnected from systematic responses to school improvement, executing roles in response to mandated policy directives and procedures which are devoid of philosophical and theoretical critical discourse relating to special education and disability (Hallett 2021, p. 2). Demands for transparency, accountability and evidence of the 'value-added' dimension of additional resource allocations have resulted in greater administrative and bureaucratic workloads for SENCOs (Doyle 2020; Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Hallett 2021; Walsh 2021). Hallett insists that while procedures and paperwork are important aspects of the SENCO role, they must not define the role, and warns that 'to follow that route is to accept that meeting the needs of all learners, including those with SEN/D, is predominantly a paper exercise' (Hallett 2021, p.2). Furthermore, increasing administrative tasks associated with planning, procurement of resources (including applications for Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), assessment, including standardised testing, reasonable accommodations, individual education planning, timetabling, and school policy development (Curran and Boddison 2021; Doyle 2021; Rosen-Webb 2011; Walsh 2020), all place excessive demands on SENCOs' time, leaving limited time for collaborative planning, action and reflection which are proactive, theoretically underpinned and data-informed.

Role isolation arising from discrete or 'grafted on' (Shevlin and Banks 2021) approaches to education for students with additional needs is unsustainable for those tasked with the responsibility (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020).The cause of role isolation is multifaceted and complex. It may be perpetuated by SENCOs themselves, some of whom may be motivated by efforts to 'rescue' individual students or identify themselves as experts (Kearns 2005; Hallett 2021). Systemic level barriers to integrate approaches to inclusive and special education may also continue to isolate SENCOs (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). In Fitzgerald and Radford's small-scale mixed methods study with SENCOs and principals in

post-primary schools in Ireland (2017; 2020), SENCO expertise in special education pedagogy was identified as both a facilitator and a barrier to SENCOs' capacity to fulfil the role. On the one hand, developing SENCO expertise in special education was seen as imperative to empowering SENCOs in developing their leadership capacity. Their authority of expertise (Bush 2008) promoted their leadership status. On the other hand, it also served to increase their burden of responsibility and sense of isolation in relation to informed decision-making. A move away from viewing SENCOs as 'experts' responsible for educating children and young people with diverse learning needs is perhaps necessary to move towards integrated, collective and collaborative whole-school responses to the range of needs existing across a school community (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Steps to develop SENCOs as pedagogical leads (Hallett 2021), collaborators and co-leaders within an integrated system, providing a graduated response to a continuum of need will require, in the case of Ireland, formal conceptualisation and recognition of a role centrally positioned at the heart of whole-school improvement planning (Fitzgerald et al., 2021). Further exploration of factors leading to SENCO role isolation in the Irish context is warranted, with a view to exploring the role of SENCOs as pedagogical leads for inclusive learning, teaching and assessment.

International empirical research evidences a role for SENCOs that is under continuous reconstruction in response to political, theoretical, and professional drivers for change.SENCOs are increasingly leading the inclusive education agenda in schools and involved in strategic whole-school development of inclusive and special education policy and practice (Dobson and Douglas 2020; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Norwich 2010; Oldham and Radford 2011).

Historically in Ireland, SENCOs worked in discrete ways with students identified with additional needs and were referred to over the years as remedial teachers, learning support and resource teachers and more recently special education teachers. Now they are increasingly tasked with managing teams and resources, building digital systems to analyse, manage and disseminate student data, identifying professional learning needs of staff, providing professional learning, mentoring and coaching to colleagues, engaging in multi-disciplinary collaboration, in addition to teaching (Curran and Boddison 2021; Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; 2020; Walsh 2021). Arguably, the role of SENCOs as strategic, whole-school 'pedagogical leads' (Hallett 2021, p.2) is under construction.

In response to the incremental increases in workload and undefined expectations of the role (in the Irish context at least), it is unsurprising that empirical research with SENCOs raises concerns about the sustainability of the role (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Rosen-Webb 2011; Tissot 2013). A recent mixed methods study conducted by Doyle (2021) examining the work-related stress of Special Education Teachers (SETs) in Ireland (pre-Covid) found that almost half of primary SETs and more than half of post-primary SETs and

special school teachers surveyed (*n*=406) experienced moderate to high levels of work-related stress. Further, research conducted in the UK with SENCOs found that almost two-thirds of SENCOs surveyed as part of an extensive SENCO workload survey planned on leaving the role within the next five years (Curran and Boddison 2021). While Curran and Boddison identified career progression as one factor leading to an exodus of SENCOs, such findings justifiably raise concerns about the efficacy of the role long term and compel us to 'think beyond, rather than think differently' about the SENCO role (Hallett 2021, p.10) in the context of a whole-school collaborative and collective approach to inclusive and special education.

A positive development in Ireland in recent years has been the emergence of regional and online communities of practice/ professional learning networks for SENCOs and Special Education Teachers. These groups have been established with and by SENCOs, or in collaboration with Third Level Institutions. Others have developed in partnership with the Education Centre Network. School Management Bodies and the National Educational Psychological Service have also facilitated communities of practice across regions. The Mary Immaculate College SENCO Forum, as an example, was established in 2014 to provide professional support, collegiality, guidance and professional learning for sustainable change for SENCOs from SENCOs and has developed over time to embed the work of SENCOs within theoretical, empirical, legislative and political domains.

The benefits of these networks are expounded in literature relating to professional learning, growth and identity (Ainscow and Sandill, 2010; Lave and Wenger 1991; Netolicky 2016; Senge 1998). Lack of access to professional support and guidance were identified as threats to the sustainability of the SENCO role over a prolonged period of time by numerous studies (Curran and Boddison 2021; Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; O'Hara 2021; Walsh 2021). In a small-scale mixed methods study conducted by O'Hara in 2021 the impact of a post primary SENCO community of practice as a sustainable model of professional learning within one region was explored and SENCOs reported feeling less isolated, less anxious, more connected and experienced a greater sense of belonging and identity as a result of their involvement with the group. Further, Walsh (2021) in her mixed methods research, investigated the role of post primary SENCOs in leading and managing a systematic whole school approach to special and inclusive education in schools and also reported the positive impact of SENCO communities of practice on SENCOs' ability to grow, learn and connect with others fulfilling similar roles. Interestingly, Fitzgerald and Radford, in their research with SENCOs (2017) applied the theory of the Third Space (Whitchurch 2008) as a domain occupied by SENCOs, many of whom reported a lack of belonging in any particular school team due to the unique nature of the role. Whitchurch (2008, p.386) conceptualised the Third Space as an 'emergent territory between academic and professional domains' within higher education institutions, a space characterised

by fluidity, flexibility, creativity and a merging of identities where the dynamics may be harnessed in a positive way to help members construct unique and creative professional profiles (Whitchurch 2008). SENCOs comprise a hybrid group of subject teachers, and according to Fitzgerald and Radford (2017), they are being called upon to create their own role and occupy a space that is unfamiliar to them. From this perspective, the emergence of these regional and online networks and communities of practice represents a Third Space for SENCOs to collectively move from a position of isolation and uncertainty, to one which fosters connectedness, shared identity, networked leadership and positivity towards this fluidity, flexibility and uniqueness. Increasing opportunities for SENCOs to participate in and lead in the establishment of these networks offers collegiality, empowerment, sustainable professional learning, and more importantly, an authentic space for SENCOs to collectively reflect upon and 'think beyond' (Hallett 2021) their existing roles, to what possibilities exist for shaping a role which critically evolves in response to thoughtful consideration of all drivers for change, and positive growth and innovation.

SENCO Leadership for School Improvement: Collaborative, distributive and agentic

In terms of conceptualising leadership, Swaffield and Macbeath (2009) provide a helpful distinction between positional leadership (i.e. membership of the school's leadership team) and collaborative leadership (lateral and vertical teamwork by all members of the school community). Positional leadership in its simplest form requires a 'higher order set of abilities such as goal-setting, visioning, and motivating' (Pearson et al., 2015, p.48). Collaborative leadership is concerned with how members of the organisation are connected through relationships of responsibility, cooperation, and trust and where strong cultures of teamwork, networking and participation are embedded in practice (Hargreaves et al., 2007).

The importance of collaborative, whole-school and distributed approaches to leading learning are endorsed in Irish policy frameworks such as *School Self-Evaluation* and its accompanying *Looking At Our Schools Quality Framework* for Primary and Post Primary Schools (DES Inspectorate 2016a and 2016b). The complex nature of school environments was acknowledged as far back as 2008 in a seminal report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) entitled *Improving School Leadership: Policy and Practice* (Pont et al., 2008). In the Report, distributed models of leadership are advocated to mitigate against the heavy workload of school principals and enhance the teaching and learning experience for the entire school community. While the Report adopts a definition of distributed leadership as it applies to formal posts of responsibility (PORs) allocated within schools (i.e. positional leadership), some of its broader conceptual origins can be found in the work of Spillane (2012) and Duignan (2007) who argue for distributed leadership as a conceptual or diagnostic tool for thinking about school leadership for

instructional improvement (Spillane 2012). Collaboration and teamwork are fundamental to the theory of distributed leadership, whereby leadership is exercised at all levels, and where leadership is mapped to the skills and knowledge of those adopting leadership roles in the school in order to generate more opportunities for change and to build the capacity for improvement. Interdependent interaction and practice are promoted over individual and independent action associated with those with formal leadership roles or responsibilities (Harris and Jones 2020; Spillane 2012).

The development of systematic and whole-school collaborative approaches to provision for students with additional needs is argued for in this paper to enable greater levels of integration, fluidity, and flexibility in schools and to move away from discrete approaches to special education policy, planning and delivery (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Norwich 2010; Hallett 2021; Lindqvist and Nilholm 2011). In Fitzgerald and Radford's research, (2020) a conceptual model of the SENCO role was developed which reflected the depth and breadth of skills, knowledge and competencies necessary for SENCOs to fulfil a role. The conceptual model, while arguably aspirational, positioned SENCOs as strategic pedagogical leads supporting colleagues to develop inclusive instructional approaches to learning, teaching and assessment and also as specialist teachers equipped with pedagogical skills to meet the unique and complex needs of some students. The importance of leadership to developing SENCO agency and capacity to champion the inclusive education agenda in schools is acknowledged in the model. School context, culture, and processes of collaborative and collective school self-evaluation were also identified as critical contributing factors to positive organisational change (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) and enabling of SENCOs' ability to effect positive change and innovation at a whole-school level.

The closer leadership is to the site of learning, the greater the learning experience for all students (Harris, 2001), particularly when the quality of learning and teaching is the single most important factor contributing to student success (Leithwood et al., 2020). Therefore, harnessing the collective, distributive and individual leadership capacity of all teachers leads to positive organisational growth (Harris and Jones 2020). Building and embedding whole-school collaborative and reflective systems in efforts to reposition inclusive and special education at the heart of school improvement may embed the work of SENCOs and their teams in whole-school processes associated with school improvement and may enable and empower others to lead learning and teaching for all students, including those with additional needs (Fitzgerald 2021). Positioning SENCOs as pedagogical leads to promote inclusive practice requires SENCOs to develop their change competence (Tangen 2005) where they are competent and willing to serve as change agents, and to participate in and lead inclusive pedagogical innovation across the school. But this is not enough. Developing systematic approaches requires distributed models of

leadership which may in turn facilitate high levels of staff and learner engagement; collaborative planning; a commitment to continual professional learning and reflective practice (Fitzgerald 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Tensions exist in the literature relating to SENCO leadership. While much of the empirical literature advocates for formal positional leadership roles for SENCOs (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017, 2020; Tissot 2013), some studies found that not all SENCOs desire a formal leadership role (Curran 2019; Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). In Fitzgerald and Radford's study (2020), while SENCOs indicated that a formal leadership position supported them in their roles by elevating the status attributed to the post, it also found that the formal post created a barrier to developing team approaches to coordination of provision. For some SENCOs, the post of responsibility inhibited distribution of tasks to other SEN team members. In England, Curran's phenomenological study of the SENCO role in the context of reforms to special education, found that while SENCOs did want to lead, they did not necessarily want a formal leadership post, and instead used their extensive knowledge about SEN to act as 'covert entrepreneurs' (Curran 2019, p.85) to influence changes to inclusive policy and practice in their schools. Adding to the tension, SENCOs in several studies found that a substantial amount of satisfaction in their roles derived from their work with individual students and expressed concerns about increasing amounts of time being spent on procedural and strategic tasks, which took them away from direct work with students (Curran 2019; Dobson and Douglas 2020; Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Martin 2019). A self-limiting perspective is how Hallett (2021) describes this concern and argues that SENCOs are unlikely to be considered pedagogical leads by their colleagues if they are interested only in direct work with students with additional needs and/ or disabilities. This area warrants further empirical investigation to fully understand SENCOs' perspectives on and experiences of leadership.

Distributed Leadership in Schools as Learning Organisations

The importance of school culture and context as key determinants of schools' abilities to flexibly respond to the challenges encountered when including students with diverse and complex learning needs is well-documented in the literature (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Swaffield and Macbeath 2009). Key to cultivating inclusive cultures is the school principal (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020; Martin 2020; Walsh 2021). School leaders help to embed inclusive culture and practice in three ways, according to Riehl (2000); they promote new meanings about difference and diversity embedded in social responses; they facilitate and encourage inclusive practice for all teachers; and they develop collaborative and cooperative relationships within and between schools and the wider community to continually strengthen inclusive culture.

The empirical evidence base presents distributed leadership as a robust and empirically sound leadership model (Harris and Jones 2020) which is associated with positive organisational growth and innovation and improved student

outcomes (see for example: Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Gronn 2009; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane 2012). Distributed leadership as a theoretical framework may support the development of inclusive school culture and practice. Distributed leadership, as previously discussed, relies on the collective investment of all teachers across the school for wholesale school improvement (Senge, 1990; Spillane and Diamond 2007), and is no longer the preserve of formal school leadership. When leadership is distributed across the organisation, and when formal and informal distributions are based on patterns of expertise (Hulpia and Devos 2010), it has the potential to promote inclusive cultures of commitment, collaboration, and cooperation. For SENCOs, their 'authority of expertise' (Bush 2008) sets them apart as leaders of inclusive and special education (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017), an important factor in the distribution of tasks associated with the role. Further, when cultures of collaboration and socially responsive approaches to organisational improvement exist, they encourage both formal and informal distributed leadership (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012) and may enable the development of cohesive and integrated approaches to inclusive education in schools.

Arguably, a reconfiguration of schools as *learning organisations* (SLO) (Senge, 1990; 2014) aligns with distributed approaches to school improvement (Harris and Jones 2020). SLO underpins the Irish approach to school improvement which is reinforced by a policy agenda promoting collective school self-evaluation (DES Inspectorate 2016a; 2016b; 2017b; 2018). Learning organisations are defined as:

> Organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.
>
> (Senge, 1990, p.3)

Learning organisation theory recognises that leadership should not reside solely with school senior leadership teams and promotes distributed approaches (Kools and Stoll 2016; Senge 1990; Spillane and Diamond 2007) shared across a team (Gronn 2009; DES 2017; 2018). Learning organisation theory considers the interplay between leadership and learning, and how it might lead to leadership for learning when school leaders foster collaborative efforts to bring about purposeful change (Kools and Stoll 2016; Swaffield and Macbeath 2009). It considers learning as a situated, collective, and individual endeavour, and is a complex activity dynamically linked to leadership in an ongoing cycle of action, participation, reflection, and collective and collaborative practice (Swaffield and Macbeath, 2009). Theoretic frameworks such as *Communities of Practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998), *Adhocracies* (Skrtic 1991) and *Professional Learning Networks or Communities* (Harris et al., 2017) overlap in many ways with learning organisation theory (Harris and Jones 2020) and all emphasise the

importance of democratic and shared approaches to school improvement. Policy initiatives to embed collaborative processes of school self-evaluation in primary and post-primary schools aim to provide direction and scaffolding for schools to build communities engaged in collective cycles of evaluation, planning, action, reflection and learning. However, implementation of the school self-evaluation process in Irish schools is inconsistent and problematic (Skerritt et al., 2021).

The significance of principal leadership in promoting distributed leadership is emphasised in the empirical literature. Some have argued that the status attributed to the SENCO within the school context is determined by how the role is interpreted in schools (Mackenzie, 2007; Tissot 2013), which is largely influenced by principals (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020). While research evidence illustrating the efficacy of distributed leadership for school improvement is growing, it is not without its issues. Giving away of power may be challenging for some school leaders, especially within increasing performativity-driven agendas (Sachs 2001); it requires principals to trust in the skills, knowledge, values, and beliefs of their teachers (Bottery 2006). For SENCOs, the relationships they develop with their school principals is a critical factor influencing how they enact the role (Fitzgerald and Radford 2017; 2020; Martin 2019; Oldham and Radford 2011; Walsh 2021). Additionally, while the most effective patterns of distribution will differ between schools (because schools differ), the efficacy of distributed leadership in practice, according to Hulpia and Devos (2010), is influenced by 'the quality and distribution of leadership functions, social interactions, cooperation of the leadership teams, and participative decision-making' (cited in Leithwood et al., 2020, p. 13). An unambiguous and clearly defined vision combined with a concrete implementation strategy are essential to guide school improvement (Harris and Jones 2020) and the lure of simplistic frameworks will lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and inconsistent practice in schools.

Schools are complex organisations (Forde et al., 2015) and an understanding of the dynamics of change is essential to promote positive organisational improvement and innovation (O'Connell 2021). The complexity of individuals operating in dynamic systems is rivalled only by the complexity and highly contested theory and practice of inclusive and special education. Inclusion involves lived complexity as well as conceptual complexity (O'Brien 2020). In seeking to understand the dynamics of change, facilitating meaningful participation in collaborative decision-making processes, while problematic, may stimulate individual ownership in relation to implementation of change and innovation (Ainscow and Sandill 2010). It may also support translation of research and policy aims, reflective of all stakeholder views, into authentic and tangible practice in schools (Armstrong 2017). Collaborative strategies enable stakeholders to meet, share, problem-solve and problem-pose towards a collective goal (i.e. achieving the best possible outcomes for all children and young people) and may bring about changes to inclusive cultures, which in turn affect inclusive practices (Ainscow and Sandill 2010).

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

Effective inclusion requires all staff to have a clear and shared understanding of the aims and expectations of inclusion within their school. It cannot depend on the interest and commitment of a minority of individuals.The importance of systematic collaboration to enable sharing of knowledge and learning within and across schools allows all staff to lead learning for all students, but especially for those with additional needs (Ainscow and Sandill 2010; Fitzgerald et al., 2021; Norwich 2010). If systems do not exist or do exist but are not embedded in whole-school practice, SENCOs and specialist teachers risk becoming singularly responsible for their learning and this is unsustainable (Fitzgerald and Radford 2020) and, it is suggested, can lead to piecemeal tinkering of a system in need of radical overhaul (Mitchell 2018). The imperative to align specialist knowledge, skills, and competencies to patterns of distribution in schools reinforces the critical role of SENCOs as pedagogical leads, championing innovation and inclusive pedagogy across the school.

Inclusive education is at a crossroads in Ireland (Shevlin and Banks 2021). This admittedly leads to uncertainty and fear. However, it also offers opportunities for growth and innovation. SENCOs in Ireland are driving change from the ground up and are harnessing their collective learning, knowledge and leadership to implement innovation to inclusive practice within and across schools through their various networks and communities of practice. This paper may offer a stimulus for further debate and discussion about the SENCO role both in Ireland, and across other jurisdictions, and represents an invitation to SENCOs, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to continue to critically discuss the SENCO role as it evolves within theoretical, professional and political domains, characterised by the fluidity, flexibility and creativity offered within the Third Space.

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‘I’ve Kinda Mixed Feelings About It’: Pupils’ Perceptions of Learning, Achievement and Differentiation within the Context of Wellbeing.

Fionnuala Tynan and Margaret Nohilly

Abstract
Children’s wellbeing has become a much discussed and publicised topic nationally and internationally. This article is based on a qualitative study conducted in a rural primary school in the West of Ireland. Focus group discussions were held with pupils from all classes in the school. The research aimed to explore pupils’ perceptions of wellbeing. This resulted in discussions about many facets of this complex concept including friendship, environment, pupil-teacher interactions and learning. This paper presents the findings in relation to the theme of cognitive wellbeing which encompasses pupils’ perceptions of learning, achievement and differentiation. It indicates that pupils identified learning as a positive aspect of school and saw it as necessary for adult life. Pupil wellbeing was enhanced when they were achieving well at school and when they experienced positive pupil-teacher relationships, particularly when teachers were supportive and encouraging. In addition, most pupils preferred academic tasks at their class level rather than having it differentiated to an easier level for them. However, some pupils highlighted the benefits of inclusive approaches such as differentiation by support. This paper broadens the debate about inclusive education and highlights the issues of differentiation when pupil voice is considered.

Introduction
Policy has cemented wellbeing in Irish educational discourse for years. The *Aistear* curriculum framework for early years (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA 2009), presents wellbeing as one of four central themes, which also includes Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking. Wellbeing was initially presented to Irish primary and post-primary schools as synonymous with mental health through the distribution of *Wellbeing in Post-primary Schools*: *Guidelines for mental health promotion and suicide prevention* (Department of Education and Skills (DES) and Department of Health (DoH) (2013) and *Wellbeing in Primary Schools: Guidelines for mental health promotion* (DES and DoH 2015). This is unfortunate as many teachers believe that they are unqualified to deal with mental health issues (O’Connor 2018). Ultimately, the discourse on wellbeing needs to be translated into a context-based language that can be understood and

accepted by educational professionals. Perhaps of greatest help to educational practitioners was the presentation of wellbeing through a 'continuum of need' model (DES and DoH 2013; 2015), with which schools were already familiar. It reminds practitioners that wellbeing needs exist along a continuum, from mild to severe and from transitory to enduring, thus enabling schools to review their policies, procedures and practices in supporting learners' social, emotional, behavioural and learning needs (DES and DoH 2013; 2015).

The Junior Cycle reform has introduced wellbeing as a subject area for post-primary students. It promotes the central role of schools in supporting learning *about* and *for* wellbeing. Perhaps most importantly, students learn about wellbeing through the hidden curriculum, when their experience of school life is positive (NCCA 2017, p.17). Most recently, in an effort to ensure wellbeing is embedded in all schools, the DES launched the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023* and the follow-up Circular 0032/2021, requiring schools to embeds planning for wellbeing through the school self-evaluation process by 2025. This entails a review of wellbeing by the school community, selection of priorities and action planning on agreed targets over a specific timeframe. Wellbeing has been conceptualised in this framework as encompassing four key areas: culture and environment, curriculum, policy and planning, and relationships and partnerships.

This sets the policy context for wellbeing in the Irish educational system. However, a review of the literature highlights some of the difficulties in the conceptualisation and implementation of wellbeing in education. This includes the lack of pupil voice which, once listened to, reveals much about other considerations in education such as inclusion and differentiation.

Literature Review

When defining wellbeing, it is important to present it holistically. It can be understood as a continuum, from wellbeing to ill-being, encompassing emotional, physical, spiritual, social and cognitive wellbeing (O'Brien and O'Shea 2017). Children interpret ill-being as part of the 'absence of wellbeing' and part of their understanding of wellbeing (Thomas 2016). However, particular consideration needs to be given to the skill development that is needed to promote a sense of wellbeing or alleviate ill-being in the school context. This is implicit in the concept of 'accrued wellbeing': "an individual's capacity to manage over time, the range of inputs, both constructive and undesirable that can, in isolation, affect a person's emotional, physical and cognitive state in response to a given context" (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015, p.143). Accrued wellbeing implies a growth mindset (see Dweck 2006), the idea that we can improve our wellbeing over time through the development of skills and competencies. Of particular interest to this discussion is the concept of 'cognitive wellbeing', which encompasses "learning, memory, educational attainment, intellectual successes and failures" (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015, p.142). This is rarely explored from a pupil's perspective.

A two-year longitudinal study by Buchanan et al., (2021) found that lower-attaining pupils are at risk of ill-being due to their own perception of poor academic achievement and the resultant experience of shame. Positive academic attainment is associated with pupil skill development, such as self-regulation and perseverance, which may need to be explicitly taught (Putwain et al., 2019). Learning is also influenced by classroom emotional factors (Bonfield and Horgan 2016). It is posited that the creation of a positive classroom climate influences the academic outcomes and wellbeing of learners (Renick and Reich 2020). Pupils who describe themselves as having a positive sense of wellbeing at school typically have positive experiences of teaching and learning (Thapa et al., 2013). This can happen when their achievements and efforts are positively reinforced (Bonfield and Horgan 2016). A sense of wellbeing is also dependent on strong pupil-teacher relationships with teachers who are deemed "kind, helpful, or approachable" (Renick and Reich 2020, p. 462). Research suggests that this in turn promotes better motivation and, consequently, enhanced learning outcomes (Marsh 2012; Spilt et al., 2012).

Teaching approaches and learning contexts impact the quality of pupil learning and wellbeing (Westwood 2013). There is anecdotal evidence that the use of ability grouping for literacy and numeracy has increased in Irish schools since the publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES 2011). Success of such an approach has generally been measured in terms of academic outcomes, through standardised test results. However, pupils' perspectives have been missing from this discourse. Tereshchenko et al., (2018) found that low attaining 11-12 year-olds (not including those with a SEN) valued mixed-ability practice, as it provided access to a less stratified curriculum, prevented social segregation, facilitated the development of a broader range of friends and provided scope for help from friends. Similarly, high achieving pupils were positively disposed towards mixed-ability groupings, believing them to support fairness, attainment and inclusion of lower-achieving pupils. However, some high achievers felt that, as individuals, they should be enabled to maximise their potential. This is typically done through differentiation (Westwood 2007).

Differentiation is defined by Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) as a teacher's response to learners' needs. There are many forms of differentiation including differentiation by content, activities and resources (Westwood 2007, p. 197). However, Rose and Howley (2007, p. 19) warn that what sometimes "passes for differentiation is no better than discrimination". Vehkakoski (2012) highlights the "paradoxical consequences of differentiation in the classroom for pupils and teachers" (p. 166). She found that lower-attaining pupils interpreted differentiated tasks as being associated with low teacher expectations and conversely, associated difficult academic tasks with high ability, which led to competition. However, there is a gap in the literature in relation to pupils' perception of differentiation in the context of wellbeing.

Research Design

This paper reports the findings of a qualitative study that sought to investigate the understanding and experiences of pupils regarding wellbeing in school. According to Green and Hogan (2005, pp. xi-xii) "qualitative methods are suited to enquiry into children's unique and individual encounters with their worlds". Well-collected qualitative data provide "a unique example of real people in real situations, … (and) can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253). The study is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm which acknowledges participants' interpretations and meanings of the topic under research (Ormston et al., 2014). The first author spent a day in the selected school. She examined the physical environment and allowed pupils to take her on a tour of the school as part of understanding the pupils' context. The school was chosen purposively. School details are referenced below.

Table 1: School Details

School Type	Classrooms and Class Levels	Pupils' Diagnosed Needs	Supports for Learning
• Rural • Disadvantaged-status • Co-educational • Enrolment from consistent geographical area	1: Junior and senior infants 2: First class to fourth class 3: Fifth and sixth class	• Dyslexia • ASD • Speech and language difficulties • Emotional/Behavioural difficulties	1 full time SET* 1 shared SET

* SET: Special Education Teacher

The authors obtained the appropriate ethical clearance from the overseeing Ethics Committee for the project. Following discussions with the principal who expressed an interest in the research, a letter was sent to the school to explain the research. With the principal's agreement, a letter was sent to all parents/guardians and pupils inviting the pupils to participate in focus-group discussions. Consent and assent forms were distributed to interested families. Parents were asked to read the information letter to their child and support them to fill out the assent form. Focus-group discussions were held with pupils from across all classes by the first author, with five focus groups held in total: infants, first class; second/third classes, fourth class, fifth/sixth classes. The focus-group questions concerned aspects of school life that were enablers or barriers to the pupils' wellbeing. The researcher used the responses of the pupils to develop the discussion. These were transcribed verbatim and anonymised. The transcripts were analysed thematically by both researchers individually using the Braun and Clarke (2012) model. Any discrepancies were discussed and agreed upon.

There are many ethical considerations when working with pupils, including their desire to please, vulnerability to persuasion, adverse influence and harm.

However, with both authors being primary-school teachers, this greatly aided the understanding of working with pupils. According to Hill (2005), the interpersonal style adopted by researchers and the research settings should reduce and not reinforce pupils' inhibitions and desire to please, which will otherwise limit the amount, value and validity of what they say. To this end, only one of the authors conducted the focus group discussions. This reduced the power differential that would have been magnified with two adults present. In addition, older children tend to have heightened sensitivities about self-image (Sieber 1992). To combat this, focus-group discussions were organised by class-level so pupils interacted with peers, whom they knew well. A total of 26 pupils were involved in focus groups of between four and six participants. The researcher and pupils sat around a table, on child-sized chairs, in one of the special education classrooms. Ground rules were agreed. To reinforce assent, the research purpose and parameters were explained at the start of each focus group. Pupils were invited to ask questions, reminded that their participation was voluntary and instructed that they could withdraw at any point (which one pupil did). Another pupil with parental consent decided, when it came to her focus group discussion, not to participate. Pupils were invited to respond to each question in turn, to say 'pass' if they did not wish to answer the question and to put up their hand to respond to a peer's contribution. The table below presents the details of the focus groups.

Table 2: Focus Group Compositions

Focus Group	**Class/Classes**	**Number of pupils**	**Number of pupils who left during the discussion[A] or did not participate despite parental consent[B]**
1	Junior infants Senior infants	4	1[A]
2	First class	6	
3	Second class Third class	5	1[B]
4	Fourth class	5	
5	Fifth class Sixth class	6	

This research has a number of limitations which need to be highlighted. The results presented reflect findings from discussion groups with pupils in one school only. The school was purposively chosen and it was known that wellbeing was considered important by the school staff. The results cannot be generalized, but they offer important insights into cognitive wellbeing.

Findings and Discussion

It is noteworthy that when describing what added or detracted from their wellbeing, pupils discussed aspects of cognitive wellbeing which is defined as learning, memory, achievement, intellectual successes and failures (Gillett-Swan and Sargeant 2015). This paper presents the findings in relation to three themes of cognitive wellbeing:learning, achievement and differentiation. Excerpts from the discussions are given to provide a true picture of the pupils' responses and to present them contextually and as authentically as possible. The findings indicate that pupils had better cognitive wellbeing when achieving academically and when teachers were supportive and encouraging. They showed awareness of teachers' inclusive approaches and most pupils preferred these to differentiation of tasks. However, differentiation was only discussed by pupils from second class upwards. In addition, most pupils preferred school work at their class level rather than having it differentiated to an easier level, although this was less evident in fifth/sixth class pupils. There is a clear development of thought and experience from younger pupils to older pupils regarding their cognitive wellbeing.

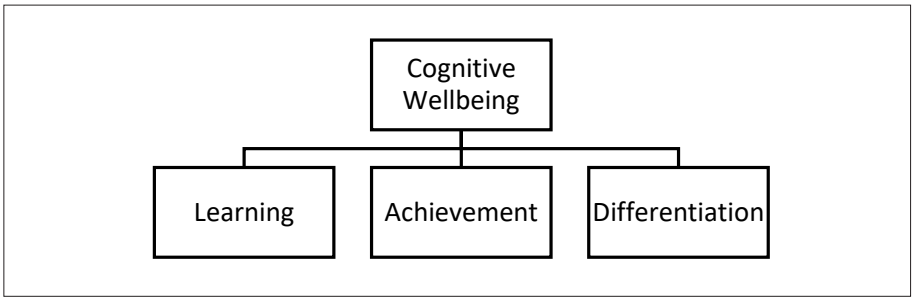

Figure 1: Subthemes of Cognitive Wellbeing

Theme 1: Wellbeing and Learning

In the discussions about wellbeing at school, pupils frequently mentioned learning experiences. This was evident with the youngest pupils in junior and senior infants(J/SI):

Pupil (P) J/SI: Sometimes it's boring at school and sometimes it's better going on holidays.

Researcher (R): What do you find boring?

P(J/SI): Sometimes it feels boring because … sometimes some work is boring.

R: What work is boring for you?

P(J/SI): Adding.

R: Why do you think your teacher asks you to do some adding?

P(J/SI): Just to see can we count numbers.

R: Do you think she should stop doing adding with you?

P(J/SI): No.

R: What would be a good way to solve that problem?

P(J/SI): I like it now.

R: Because you got good at it?

P(J/SI): Yes.

Despite some tasks being deemed 'boring' by this young pupil, she realised they were necessary and didn't believe they should be eliminated. It is acknowledged that academic boredom is a complex issue (Ozerk 2020), but this child also found the tasks less 'boring' when she was able to complete them. This in itself may be an early indicator of a pupil who needs support in a certain subject area or with a particular learning activity (Ozerk 2020). Teaching pupils to persevere with a task is an important skill for resilience, which can in turn enhance wellbeing (Ginsburg and Jablow 2015).

Pupils in first class (C1) also discussed learning experiences as illustrated in the following excerpt.

R: Do you think it's important to feel happy at school?

P1(C1): When you're happy you can do more stuff … like reading more books.

Here the pupil was equating wellbeing, or being happy, to being better able to engage in the learning process. This may be an indication of the pupil's subliminal understanding of a link between wellbeing, low anxiety and academic achievement. This, in part, explains Martin and Marsh's (2006) concept of 'academic buoyancy', a protective factor in relation to day-to-day school challenges. Academic buoyancy was also alluded to by two pupils (P3 and P4) in fourth class (C4) who described education as a long-term goal and important for adulthood:

R: Why is it important to be happy at school?

P3(C4): So you like it there and you want to go all the time.

R: Why is it important that you go to school?

P3(C4): To learn.

P4(C4): To get a good job.

It is insightful to note that primary-school pupils linked wellbeing to the concept of future earnings or occupation because socio-economic indices are frequently used to assess quality of life (Haq and Zia 2013).

In conclusion, the pupils in this school discussed how difficult tasks can be described as 'boring' which may be an indication that the pupil needs support. They described better engagement with learning when they were happy at school and this was important because the function of education could be linked to future success.

Theme 2: Wellbeing and Achievement

Pupils discussed the impact of achievement on their wellbeing from first class onwards. The manifestations of this varied across groups and the discussions became longer and addressed more complex issues with the pupils in senior classes.

R: What makes you feel well at school?

P(C2/3): When I do well in my work.

In response to the question 'Which feels better: if you notice your work is good yourself or if the teacher notices it?', all four pupils in the group said, 'When I notice it myself'. This highlights the benefit of pupil self-assessment whereby their work is not compared to the achievements of others. It provides them with the chance to appreciate their role in the learning process (Florian and Beaton 2018). The converse of this question was also asked:

R: What makes you feel not very happy or unwell at school?

P1(C2/3): When you do bad in your work.

P3(C2/3): I get some words wrong in my spelling test. I kinda feel disappointed.

The senior pupils also found academic achievement mattered for feeling good at school:

P6(C5/6): I like activities and getting a high score in a test.

R: Which is more important, for the teacher to tell you that you've done really well or for you to look at a piece of work and think 'I'm really proud of this myself'?

P6(C5/6): Proud of yourself.

P1(C5/6): I think the teacher to tell you 'cause they give you some support.

P3(C5/6): Like, if you think it's like really bad and you say,'Oh that's really bad', and you're not proud of yourself and you're down and you're in a bad mood, and then for the teacher to tell you a compliment, it just gives [sic] your hopes high that you can do better.

P4(C5/6): It depends what it is … if it's a subject I'm struggling with (I'd like someone to acknowledge it).

P5(C5/6): It depends what it is. If it's like school work I'd like the teacher to say and then I'd notice it too. If the teacher was to make a comment let's say like,'That was very good work, keep trying', you'd try harder any more [sic].

P2(C5/6):I'd say have more self-confidence, like I'd prefer if, say I did a piece of work and I looked at it and thought,'Oh that's really good!', then I'd have more self-confidence.

These senior pupils valued positive reinforcement which enhanced their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1982). They also highlight that self-assessment is limited, as sometimes they needed to be encouraged or supported to succeed. The teacher is important to pupils; giving praise and support is consistently recommended as a strategy to promote pupils' wellbeing in school (Bonfield and Horgan 2016; Tynan, 2018). Efthymiou and Kington (2017) concluded that the greatest influence on the educational outcomes of pupils with learning needs is "the behaviour and practices of the classroom teacher" (p. 1).

The first-class (C1) pupils linked wellbeing to public achievement. This included weekly awards presented for particular priorities such as handwriting. No other group referred to this. This had the potential to be a barrier or enabler to wellbeing for individual pupils. Pupils were asked how they felt if they worked very hard for the award but were not successful. Four of the six pupils felt badly when they did not 'win'. This aspect of classroom climate which is competitive has advantages such as increased motivation for pupils as they work for praise, recognition and/or success, and can lead to enhanced pupil achievement (Borich 1996). However, competition can cause an over-reliance on extrinsic motivation, which means pupils may be less likely to engage or participate in tasks with no reward (Tynan 2018). It can also negatively impact on the participation and engagement of learners with SEN (Tynan 2018). While pupils need not always be protected from failure, as learning to deal with disappointment helps to develop resilience and grit (Ginsburg and Jablow 2015), teachers should consider what will be rewarded and who can succeed.

In conclusion, achieving academically impacted on the wellbeing of pupils from first to sixth classes. Pupils appreciated positive teacher reinforcement regarding

effort and/or outcome, particularly for difficult tasks or to act as a motivator. The wellbeing of younger pupils was impacted by competitive elements of the classroom such as class rewards.

Theme 3: Wellbeing and Differentiation

The final wellbeing theme to be presented and discussed is that of differentiation. When pupils spoke about having a lesser sense of wellbeing due to poor academic outcomes, the researcher probed the issue and sought solutions from the pupils. It should be noted that the theme of differentiation only emerged from second/third classes (C2/3) and above.

R: Would you rather do the same spellings as everyone else and get five out of ten or do easier spellings, ones that you are able to do, but you get ten out of ten?

P3(C2/3): Easier ones.

R: But, would that not make you feel different?

P2(C2/3): Yeah.

R: This is the dilemma, so which would you rather?

P1(C2/3): Same spellings!

P2(C2/3): Well this is kinda like … but we already do like. Miss X puts us into different groups and gives us harder spellings maybe like …

P4(C2/3):[interrupts] One group gets harder spellings.

R: How do you think it is for people in the group with the easiest spellings?

P3(C2/3): Maybe it feels hard for them.

P5(C2/3): I don't really mind it because I'm in a group with my friend so I don't really care.

In this classroom, there was ability grouping for spelling. Pupils appeared comfortable with this arrangement and not overly concerned with which group they were in. However, having a friend in their group made a difference. Friendships are a protective factor for wellbeing (Løhre et al., 2014; Cuadrosand Berger, 2016). Indeed, there is a link between close social relationships and cognitive learning in classrooms (Moore 2013). Hargreaves et al., (2020) found that moving to ability groups in the classroom increased the feelings of isolation and inferiority by low-attaining pupils. This led them to feel

more detached from school. While some pupils are very comfortable with ability groups, it is important to consider friendship groups as part of such an arrangement.

Two of the five pupils in second/third class felt that learning different spellings made them feel different to their peers and would prefer for all pupils to learn the same spellings. This feeling of inferiority and difference has also been highlighted by Hargreaves et al., (2021). Feeling different can impact negatively on pupils' self-esteem (Tereshchenko et al., 2018).

Three out of the five pupils in the fourth class (C4) focus group expressed a strong preference for doing the same work as their peers rather than having differentiated, individualised work. One pupil described why that was the case for him:

P4(C4): If you had it [the same task as everyone else] and if you got it wrong, you'd learn from your mistake and you'd be able to do it maybe the next time. If you saw it on a test you'd be able to do it.

R: What would help you then to be able to understand it?

P4(C4): Maybe if they explained it like one step at a time.

R: What, for you, would feel so bad about being different?

P4(C4): People might think,"Oh they're doing easier work because they're not able to do our work".

R: Does it matter what they think?

P4(C4): I don't know, a bit.

Another pupil described his perspective:

P5(C4): [I'd rather doing the same work as peers] because then you see eventually you're not going to struggle like, so you're going to hit a point where it's going to make it easier like.If you're doing easy work all the time, it's going to be too easy and you're not going to be learning.

R: But, if it's too hard, are you going to be learning?

P5(C4): If you get them wrong sure, like,Miss X will help you.

R: Would you not get fed up of struggling with it?

P2(C4): We just ask Miss X and she explains because she's got some patience. She could stay there for an hour explaining the exact same thing until you get it.

This reference to the teacher's actions highlights, once again, the important role of the teacher. A two-year longitudinal study by Løhre et al., (2014) found that when boys received academic help from a teacher their school wellbeing was enhanced, even two years later. In addition, boys who felt that they had enough academic support from a teacher were two and a half times more likely to report school wellbeing in the longer term. However, the pupils in fourth class had the same teacher as the pupils in second/third classes, who described having differentiated spelling groups. Such groups did not appear to be used for their class, although this was not explicitly asked. It is also clear that feeling different is a significant implication of differentiation for pupils, which correlates with the findings of Tereshchenko et al., (2018). Findings also highlight the pupils' awareness of 'ability hierarchies' (Vehkakoski 2012) when they have differentiated work.

For pupils in fifth/sixth classes (C5/6), the theme of differentiation arose when they were talking about homework:

P3(C5/6): If you're bad at a subject and you don't get to finish, you shouldn't get loads of homework because of it, because then it'll just put you off the subject.

R: Does that sometimes happen?

P3(C5/6): Yeah, if you're slow [completing a task].

R: How do you pitch something appropriately, so everyone gets a challenge?

P3 (C5/6): Have different levels of … like don't have just a class where someone might be a bit behind and someone might be way ahead, have different levels as well in the class so like, the top level go off and works and the teacher helps them with the lower-down levels.

Here the pupil has described differentiation as a strategy to enable each child in the class to be challenged and presents a clear Vygotskian view of education in terms of pupils working in their zone of proximal development. The pupil has indicated the inequality in workload for those slower to complete work, it meant they had more homework. Hargreaves et al., (2021) found this outcome to be particularly prevalent among pupils who experienced difficulty with writing tasks.

Four of the six pupils described a preference for differentiated tasks but couched this in terms of a temporary arrangement, linked to the idea of flexible grouping by Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) in their model of differentiation.

P4(C5/6): I'd rather do something at my own level until I'm able to get good enough to join the rest.

R: Do you think it's important to join in with the others?

P4(C5/6): Yeah.

Another pupil also saw differentiation as a temporary support:

P5 (C5/6): I think if you're finding a subject hard and you didn't like it, then you do like a lower level that you're able to do, and then work your way up and feel really proud of yourself then, that you can actually do it now.

R: But do you think you'd feel very different?

P5 (C5/6): At the start, you would, because everyone would be asking you 'Why are you doing lower level?', and that's not fair and everything, but then as you get used to it, then you'd feel that it's alright and that, like, you're not different.

Again, this pupil perceives differentiation as a necessary but temporary support until he has worked his 'way up'. He acknowledges the emotional component of this for himself as a learner. The pupil's pre-empting of the emotions concerned with being in a lower-ability group shows emotional awareness. This acknowledgement of emotions is an important part of coping and supports pupils' resilience (Ginsburg and Jablow 2015). One pupil, by contrast, did not emphasise the temporary nature of the support:

P6(C5/6): I think you should start at a lower level so then you can build your confidence in that subject.

R: It wouldn't bother you that you were on something different to other people?

P6(C5/6): No.

Another pupil, when answering the same question, recommended a very specific differentiation strategy: differentiation by outcome.

P1 (C5/6): I think you should ask to keep at the 'normal' level, so you keep up, but ask for a bit more help like, and maybe if people had to write 20 questions that you'd only get 15, so you'd get time to do them and that.

R: That makes a lot of sense, what do you think [addressing P2]?

P2(C5/6): I've kinda mixed feeling about it, like … I'd want to get better and work my way up, but then again, I'd also like to stay at the same level as everybody else.

R: How could that be resolved then for you?

P2(C5/6): I'm not sure

In conclusion, it is clear from the discussions that differentiation is a complex concept and one that is highly individual for each of them. Some pupils were comfortable with ability groups and differentiation of tasks as a means to make progress, but having friends working at the same level created a better sense of wellbeing. This could be because their sense of belonging was reinforced. Pupils' sense of belonging at school is central to their psychosocial wellbeing and academic success (Chiu et al., 2016).

Differentiated tasks also made some pupils feel different which may negatively impact their self-esteem and, consequently, their wellbeing (Tereshchenko et al., 2018). Pupils highlighted the role of the teacher in supporting their learning and one pupil indicated that there was little need for differentiation of tasks once a teacher could provide differentiation by support. This pupil's insight highlights the need to consistently strive towards inclusive pedagogy, which is "an approach to teaching and learning that attends to individual differences between pupils but avoids the marginalisation that can occur when pedagogical responses are designed only with individual needs in mind" (Florian and Beaton 2018, p. 870).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the value of involving pupils in discussions about topics that affect their lives. The discourse on school wellbeing is richer for including the voices of pupils. Most research involving children concerns those aged twelve and over (Aubrey, Blackburn, Jones and Lowe 2017). The reported findings provide evidence that pupils from infant classes upwards can articulate their experiences and perceptions with clarity. As schools engage with evaluating wellbeing, it is essential that this process encompasses the voice of pupils as a central element.

The aim of this paper was to explore pupils' perceptions of wellbeing at school. Cognitive wellbeing emerged from focus-group discussions with pupils at all grade levels in one school. Three themes were presented: learning, achievement and differentiation.

Young pupils displayed an understanding that school encompassed learning activities that may be unpleasant but necessary, exhibiting a capacity for perseverance. This is a key skill for wellbeing (Ginsburg and Jablow 2015). The indication of learning activities as 'boring' may stem from struggle rather than disinterest by the pupil. Hence, understanding the language of pupils is crucial to providing appropriate support for learning. Pupils linked being happy at school with greater learning capacity. This is, in essence, the concept of academic buoyancy (Martin and Marsh 2006), a key element of wellbeing in schools. Pupils highlighted the value of a positive classroom climate and supportive pupil-teacher relationships for their wellbeing which are also key to inclusive teaching and enhanced learning (Rose and Howley 2007).

Academic achievement impacted on the wellbeing of pupils from first to sixth classes. Links between wellbeing and academic achievement demonstrate that achievement could be either personal or public. Pupils in younger classes had conflicting perceptions of whole-school awards: they valued the recognition, but it contributed to their ill-being when they didn't achieve the accolade. This sense of competition was motivating for some pupils but also exclusionary for others, which impacted on their wellbeing. While some competitive elements of classroom or school life can support pupils' resilience (Ginsburg and Jablow 2015), it should not be over-emphasised as it can mitigate against pupils with SEN (Tynan 2018). The discussion also raised the question of how pupils know if they are achieving. Teacher praise was particularly important for some pupils as it enhanced motivation and rewarded hard work. This may be related to the need for extrinsic motivators. Success could be measured by pupils' themselves through self-assessment. This was interpreted by some pupils as preventing comparisons. This finding highlights the importance of using a range of assessment modes (NCCA 2007), including pupils' self-assessment and teacher conferencing. This would enable pupils to become more adept at judging the quality of their work (NCCA 2007), while experiencing quality time with their teacher which also serves to build a positive pupil-teacher relationship.

One of the most important conclusions to be drawn from this paper is the central role of the teacher in promoting pupils' wellbeing. Pupils felt best when their teachers were supportive and encouraging. Some pupils described the efforts of their teacher to enable them to understand and learn. Relationships are at the heart of school wellbeing (Tynan 2018).

Pupils also discussed various experiences of differentiation. Some were very comfortable working at their own level, even if it was individualized. Others commented that inclusive approaches, with differentiation by support, did not make them feel different. They also expressed the value of differentiation being implemented as a flexible, temporary support. What is clear is that experiences and attitudes vary from pupil to pupil. Findings show that some forms of differentiation negatively impacted pupils' wellbeing and made them feel different. Thus, pupils should be involved in any decision affecting their learning and in choosing the supports with which they are comfortable. In conclusion, the discourse on inclusive education should consider taking the 'different' out of differentiation.

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Listen to Me: Hearing Children's Perceptions and Attitudes towards Irish Sign Language

Deirdre McCann and Miriam Colum

Abstract
This article examines the extent to which Irish primary school children perceive ISL as a language in its own right, their perceptions of the d/Deaf community's use of ISL and their attitudes towards learning ISL in school. Following an extensive literature review, quantitative and qualitative data was gathered through the distribution of anonymous questionnaires. The sample group consisted of thirty-two pupils from 3rd to 6th classes in a mainstream primary school in Dublin, Ireland. The children had some prior knowledge of basic ISL and Deaf culture. The findings highlight a positive perception of and attitude towards both ISL and the Deaf community. The majority of children perceived ISL as a legitimate language and recognised that it was a language used by the Deaf community. There was also a positive attitude towards ISL with children reporting that they enjoyed learning it and it wasn't too difficult to learn. The study adds to the current body of research around ISL and the Deaf community in Ireland and the value of listening to the many voices that exist in our classrooms.

Terminology
Sign language is natural visual-gestural language that uses the hands face and body (Lane 2005; Irish Deaf Society (IDS) 2021). Irish Sign Language (ISL) is the indigenous language of the Irish Deaf community and is unique to Ireland (IDS 2021). Throughout this paper the term 'd/Deaf' will be used when discussing both Deaf people who are part of the cultural Deaf community (capital D) and deaf people who associate deafness with the medical model (small d) and regard deafness as an impairment (Lane 2002). The Irish Census (Central Statistics Office [CSO] 2016) collects data on the number of deaf/hearing impaired people using the terms 'deaf' and 'hearing impaired' regardless of their cultural stance on deafness and hearing loss. In this way the Census accounts for deafness only in terms of the medical model.

Introduction

This paper considers the voice of a small group of primary school children in a mainstream school in Dublin city around Irish Sign Language (ISL). ISL is the official language used by the Deaf community in Ireland. As with other communities, the Deaf community has a diversity of racial and ethnic cultures with a range of hearing levels from minor hearing loss to complete deafness

(Leigh et al., 2018). Being culturally Deaf in a Deaf community means that you are proud to be Deaf and want to interact with other Deaf people using their cultural language namely sign language (Leigh et al., 2018). Sign language has its own set of rules that make it unique to spoken languages. It is a language that is visually received and produced manually and employs the use of the signer's body to represent language (Leeson and Saeed 2020). Fingerspelling (using different handshapes to represent letters) is used in sign language to spell words from a spoken language which have no equivalence in sign language. It is often used to spell out places or names (Leeson and Saeed 2012). The structure of sign language also differs to the structures of a spoken language. Word order in signed languages is complex due to the multifaceted way in which signed languages are produced (Leeson and Saeed 2012). Sign language users express information on the body in the 'signing space' which involves using facial expressions and head movements (non-manual features); and the hands (manual features) (Leeson and Saeed 2012). The following example shows the difference in structure and word order between ISL and English. The 'n' symbolises the negation in the ISL sentence through the action of a headshake from side to side and a frown of the mouth;

_____n
ISL: 'GIRL COME SCHOOL'
English: 'The girl did not come to school'

It has been a common misconception that sign language is a universal language and that sign language is the same in every country (Baynton 2002). There are many different signed languages across the world comprising Australian Sign Language, German Sign Language, American Sign Language and British Sign Language. Signed languages are natural languages meaning they developed independently through culture and history. Whereas artificial languages such as signed English systems (e.g. Lámh), computer languages and Esperanto (a now obsolete language created in the 1900s intending to be a common inter-national second language) (Baynton 2002). International Sign Language began with a modern increase in international contacts and international organisations. In most situations it was used for very limited times and purposes, for example European meetings with signers observing other signers and then communicating on an ad hoc basis (Emmorey and Reilly 1995). Lucas (2001) describes sign language as a path to integration into the hearing community stating that if interpreters are provided, deaf people can access services and make their opinions heard within the majoritarian society. Moving towards more inclusive paradigms in 2003, International Sign Language was recognised as an official language (Moody 2008).

Literature Review

The Deaf Community in Ireland

Deaf communities are cultural-linguistic minorities who do not see themselves as disability groups (Padden 2000). The Deaf community in Ireland is a very

close-knit community with the largest Deaf community being located in Dublin where many Deaf events are organised (Matthews 1996). Someone who is part of the Deaf community in Ireland will generally have hearing loss from an early age, use ISL as their main form of communication and regularly attend social events with other Deaf people. They will also have a positive attitude towards sign language and are proud of their language (Matthews 1996). Deaf communities offer a sense of belonging often not found at home; there is no language barrier within the community (Lane 2005). Although most people are deaf or hard-of-hearing within a Deaf community, Napier (2002) discusses how hearing people can also be members. An example here is family interpreters of sign language and researchers who have become a part of the Deaf community through their involvement linguistically politically and/or socially.

Irish Sign Language

ISL was recognised as an official language in Ireland in December 2017 after 30 years of campaigning led by the Deaf community (Irish Deaf Society [IDS] 2019). The other official languages are; Irish, the first official language of the State; English, the language that is predominantly used in Ireland; and Cant, the language traditionally used by the Traveller community. In 2019 the Oireachtas was made accessible to the Deaf community through the provision of ISL interpreters (Oireachtas 2019).

The ISL Act contains eleven clauses that address the provision for ISL recognition, these comprise the use of ISL in legal proceedings, the provision of ISL interpretation by public organisations and the provision for related matters (Irish Sign Language [ISL] Act 2017). This was a positive step forward to embed ISL in Irish society.

Section 3.1 of the ISL Act describes the responsibility of the State to provide services for the right to use ISL as a native language:

> "The State recognises the right of Irish Sign Language users to use Irish Sign Language as their native language and the corresponding duty on all public bodies to provide Irish Sign Language users with free interpretation when availing of or seeking to access statutory entitlements and services." (ISL Act 2017).

Initially the Irish Deaf Society (IDS) campaigned for a clause that would recognise ISL as a language in its own right and the cultural aspects of the language to be recognised rather than just a provision for access to ISL interpreters (Conama 2019). However, as this clause was not accepted the IDS accepted the amended clause as another opportunity for recognition may not arise (Conama 2019). This recognition, although not complete, is significant for the Deaf community because it means the State will have to make more provisions for ISL and ISL users. ISL has experienced repression and misrepresentations in years gone by (Matthews 1996) and although there is now a more positive feeling towards ISL, it still faces barriers. Some research

identifies opposition from some public officials who see demands from ISL users as irrational, for example thinking that the provision of English text will suffice when video translation to ISL is desired (Conama 2019). The official status of ISL adds to more awareness about the language and the community it represents in Ireland.

Perceptions and attitudes towards languages

As part of a study by Feeney (2015) on the perceived status of the Irish Deaf community and ISL, Feeney compares her own research findings with that of similar research by Kyle and Allsop (1997) and Leeson and Sheikh (2008). Kyle and Allsop's (1997) study found that 50% of Irish participants perceived ISL to be lesser in status than all spoken languages. The data from the study by Leeson and Sheikh (2008) includes several countries with Ireland being among them. The findings have a similarly negative view towards ISL. The studies from Leeson and Sheikh (2008) also revealed that there was a more positive perception of signed languages in countries where sign language was recognised as an official language. Although the findings on the perception of ISL from 1997 and 2008 were for the most part negative, Feeney's findings from 2015 showed significant improvements regarding the awareness of ISL with most of the participants perceiving it as equal to all other spoken languages.

There have been no studies conducted on the attitudes of, or perceptions towards ISL since the ISL Act was passed in 2017 or since it was signed into commencement in 2020 (Irish Statute Book 2020). However, looking solely in terms of education there has been some progress made, for example Dublin City University now offers a primary teaching course for deaf students through ISL (Dublin City University 2019). At primary level a pilot sampler module has been launched where schools can choose to introduce a foreign language or ISL to students from 3rd to 6th class (Languages Connect 2021). The programme is based on the Modern Languages Curriculum that was written in 1999 but not enacted. The curriculum aims to develop competence in the target language to foster a positive attitude towards it and to create an awareness of the language linguistically and culturally (National Council for Curriculum and Planning 1999).

Baker (2011) states that cultural awareness is important when it comes to the teaching of a language as culture and language strongly influence each other. Baker (2011) also contends that it is important for second language learners to be aware of their own cultural communicative behaviours as well as that of other languages as this provides the information needed for the use and teaching of the language. This indicates that the attitudes towards sign languages and the perceptions of the language and Deaf culture are important when it comes to language policy and planning.

A study in 2018 by Lee and Pott addresses the importance of teaching language and culture together. The study involved a basic demographic survey and two

questionnaires to 98 university students (aged 18-33) attending a South-eastern American university (Lee and Pott 2018). The students in the current study were aged 8-12 years and attended a mainstream primary school in Ireland. The students in the study by Lee and Pott (2018) were taught by Deaf tutors in either an American Sign Language (ASL) or Deaf culture course. It must also be acknowledged here that, although the researcher teaching the children ISL in the current study was not Deaf, the children were introduced to Deaf culture as an introduction to their ISL lessons.

Society can impact on attitudes towards languages. Looking at language attitudes in terms of sociolinguistics can help in implementing language policies (Sihua 2015). In countries that have multiple languages, attitudes play an important role in determining the linguistic hierarchy, particularly in the area of education (Sihua 2015). In Ireland's linguistic hierarchy ISL is a minority language. Baker (1992) discusses how surveys of attitudes can be used as an indicator on the preferences, desires, thoughts and beliefs of a community. They also investigate the changes in the attitudes of the community which can lead to the chance of policy change. In relation to minority languages Baker (1992) compares attitude surveys to Censuses as they show a measurement of the status of the language. Language attitudes are important because they indicate the status value and importance the language has in a society. The information gathered from attitude surveys is important in attempting to democratically represent the views of the people (Baker 1992).

Academic studies often broaden the definition of language attitudes to include language users as they are the ones who are impacted by the attitudes towards their language (Baker 1992). Krausneker (2015) highlights the most common issues of the perceptions of signed languages which are, for example, people from the hearing community questioning whether sign language is a real language due to misunderstandings and misconceptions. For years sign language was not regarded as a 'real language'. However, the attitude towards signed languages has changed dramatically due to sign linguistics research and Deaf studies (Napier and Leeson 2016). The new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) recognises the need for awareness of languages and language users:

> "encouraging children to explore similarities and differences between languages and cultures can be of great benefit to the classroom language-learning environment by fostering a greater appreciation of languages. In the same way children who have special communication needs and use signs gestures or aids to communicate help raise awareness of how different methods of communication can contribute to the language-learning environment" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2019, p. 9).

Although it has come a long way in comparison to the status and policy implementation of Irish and English, ISL is far behind. In terms of the

outcomes for education since the ISL Act, more efforts could have been made to integrate the Deaf and hearing communities. For example the primary teaching course for deaf teachers will give them access to teach in deaf education settings only and not in mainstream schools. The studies on the perceptions and attitudes towards languages and language users, although some are dated, reveal that these can influence language policy and planning. With updated research there is potential for ISL to be further included in the national education curriculum. If there is an interest among schools partaking in Languages Connect to teach ISL, more research could be conducted to establish the perceptions and attitudes of primary level children and teachers towards ISL and the Deaf community.

Methodology

A mixed methods survey was undertaken for the research. A hardcopy questionnaire was distributed containing 5 purely quantitative questions, 2 purely qualitative questions, and 2 questions involving both a quantitative and qualitative component. Section one of the questionnaire comprised two personal questions to put participants at ease and give them a sense of autonomy (Cohen Manion and Morrison 2007). Section two focused on the perceptions of the participants towards ISL and the Deaf community. Section three focused on the participant's attitudes towards ISL and the Deaf community.

Closed-ended questions were used to gather quantitative data and open-ended questions to gather qualitative data (Cohen Manion and Morrison 2018). Nominal scales were used in the design of the closed-ended questions aimed at gathering quantitative data. Dichotomous questions (see Table 1) using Yes/No answer choice were used in questionnaire design (Cohen et al., 2018).

Table 1: Sample of Dichotomous Questions

Sample Dichotomous Questions
Do you like learning sign language? Yes No
Do you find it hard to learn? Yes No
Would you like to learn sign language in school all year? Yes No

For questions that required more complexity than Yes/No answers multiple choice questions (see Table 2) were used (Cohen et al., 2018).

Table 2: Multiple choice Sample Questions

Multiple choice Sample Questions
Do all deaf people use sign language? Yes No I don't know
Is sign language a real language? Yes No I don't know
Is sign language the same in every country? Yes No I don't know

The students were instructed to circle their answer. Questions that use a nominal scale measured only one item (Cohen et al., 2007).

Through the pilot the researcher ensured that the questions asked were fully aligned to the research question and aims and that they conformed to best practice according to published theories and knowledge on the topic (Denscombe 2014). This ensured that credible conclusions could be drawn from the research design (Sapsford and Jupp 1996). The questionnaire garnered many similar responses to the same questions so this emphasised the reliability and validity of the study (Denscombe 2014).

Sample

The sample group consisted of 32 hearing primary school pupils from 3rd-6th class (aged 8-12) in a mainstream English-speaking school in Dublin, Ireland. The children in the school had previously learned basic ISL and were briefly introduced to Deaf culture at the beginning of these lessons. The teacher discussed the Deaf community and explained that members of the Deaf community use sign language and do not refer to their deafness as a disability. The location and access to the primary school were convenient, as it was nearby and the researcher was on school placement there as part of the initial teacher education Postgraduate Masters of Education coursework. Cohen et al., (2018) note that access to a sample must be practical and permission to access the sample must also be granted. When accessing the sample group for this research a convenience sampling approach was used.

Data analysis

Quantitative data from hard copy questionnaires were manually entered into Excel Microsoft 2019 which was used to calculate the frequency of responses (e.g. 'Yes' 'No' 'I don't know' 'Sometimes') and present the data graphically using pie charts.

The qualitative data was also entered into Excel. A thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke (2006) six key phases (familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report) was utilized to analyse the responses from open-ended questions. A coding framework was used to organise the text into categories involving common themes (Schreier 2012). The framework was devised after identifying re-occurring patterns in the text responses to open-ended questions. The codes used are presented above in Table 1. A frequency analysis of each theme could then be performed using Excel. Responses for these questions may contain information which spans multiple codes for this reason the response numbers presented may not add to the total number of respondents (i.e. Tables 3, 4 and 5).

Table 3: Codes used in content analysis of qualitative data.

Questions	Code	Sub-code
Q.3. Where have you seen sign language used?	Public spaces	Shops Restaurants Public Transport Unspecified
	Healthcare settings	Nursing home Hospital
	Relatives	
	Television/TV	
	School	
	Unspecified	
	Nowhere	
Q.4. What is sign language?	d/Deaf people	
	Talk	
	Communicate	
	Language	
	Hands/Fingers	
Q. 8. [If yes] why do you want to learn sign language?	Enjoyment	Fun Cool Interesting Good
	Communicate with d/Deaf people	
	To help d/Deaf people	
Q. 9. [If yes] what languages were they?	sign language	
	French	
	Spanish	
	Italian	
	Japanese	
	Polish	

Ethics

As this study was conducted with children under 18 years of age, parental consent was gathered. A letter of information and consent was given to the parents and the children, and these were read through with them. Both parties were aware that they would remain anonymous and were reminded of the right to withdraw at any time without any harm to themselves. The research was approved by the third level institution in which the study took place.

Findings

The main findings that emanated from the study are outlined below. For the purpose of this paper eight findings that examine both attitudes and perceptions are discussed. At the outset an overview of languages that are taught in the school is presented to highlight how ISL is considered a standalone language in this setting. In terms of perceptions around ISL the following are presented: children's perception of sign language, use of sign language, legitimacy of sign language and sign language as its own language. Attitudes towards sign language are outlined as follows: difficulty of sign language, attitudes towards sign language and learning sign language in schools.

Teaching of other languages in schools

The majority of respondents 67% (n=21) reported that they had learned languages other than English or Irish in school (Figure 1). The remaining 34% (n=11) said they had not learned any other language.

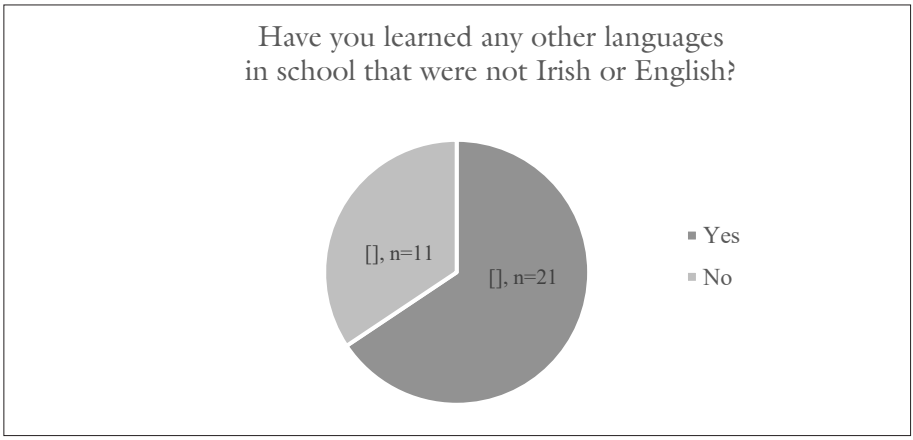


Figure 1: Children who learned languages other than English/Irish in school.

The 67% (n=21) of respondents who answered yes were then queried on what the other languages were. The results from this are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Languages (other than English/Irish) taught in school.

Reason	Number	Percentage
French	9	43%
ISL	8	38%
Spanish	5	24%
Japanese	2	10%
Italian	1	5%
Polish	1	5%

Perceptions of Sign Language:

1. Children's descriptions of sign language

Question five asked participants 'what is sign language?'. The various descriptions are thematically organized and presented in Table 5. The findings show that 67% (n=21) of respondents referred to sign language as a way for d/Deaf people to 'talk' or 'communicate'. It was specified by 6% (n=2) of respondents that sign language is not used by all d/Deaf people. It was referred to by 59% (n= 19) as a language. The words 'hands' or 'fingers' were used by 47% (n=15) of respondents when describing sign language.

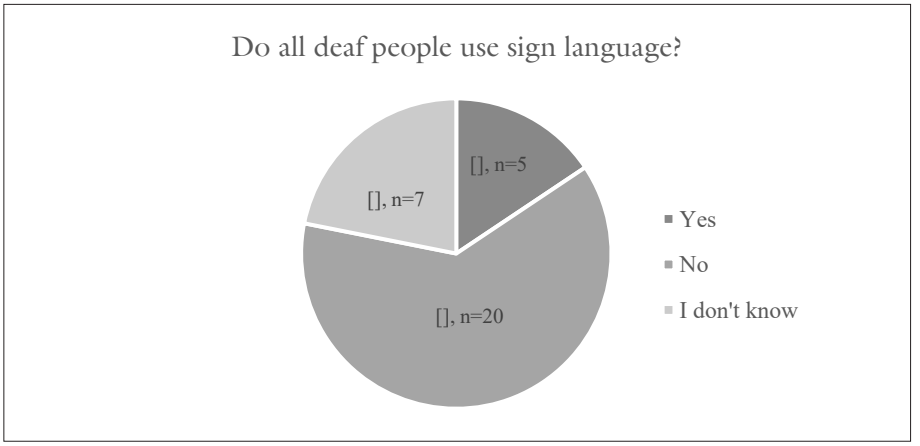
Table 5: Children's descriptions of sign language.

Description	Number	Percentage
How d/Deaf people talk/communicate	21	67%
Specified that sign language is a language	19	59%
Used the words 'hands' and/or 'fingers'	15	47%
Specified that it is not used by all d/Deaf people	2	6%

2. Children's perception of d/Deaf people's use of sign language

The first question asked participants if all d/Deaf people use sign language. The results in Figure 2 show that 63% (n=20) said that not all d/Deaf people use sign language. It also shows that 16% (n=5) thought that all d/Deaf people use sign language and that 22% (n=7) were not sure if they did or not.

Figure 2: Children's perception of d/Deaf people's use of sign language.

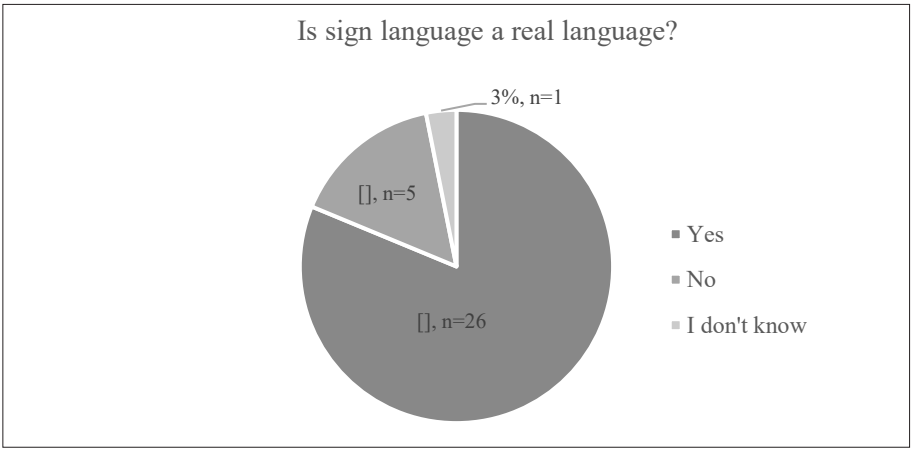


Perceptions: Legitimacy

3. *Children's perception of the legitimacy of sign language*

The second question asked participants if they classify sign language as a real language or not as a measure of perceived legitimacy. The responses are shown below in Figure 3. The results show that most of the children (81% n=26) said sign language is a real language. The remaining figures show that 16% (n=5) said sign language is not a real language and 3% (n=1) said they did not know.

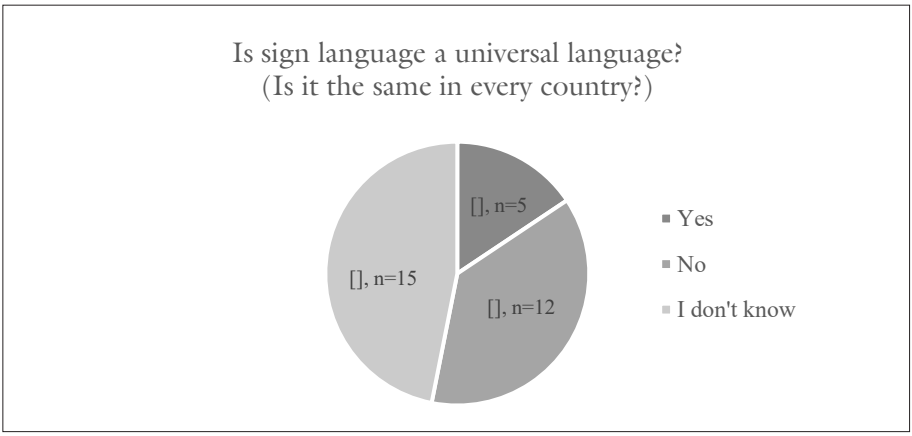
Figure 3: Children's perception of the legitimacy of sign language.



3. Children's perception of sign language as its own language

Participants were asked if sign language is a universal language (Figure 4). Almost half 47% (n=15) of respondents did not know if sign language was universal or not. The remaining results show that 16% (n=5) of respondents said sign language is a universal language and 38% (n=12) said sign language is not a universal language.

Figure 4: Children's perception of sign language as its own natural language.



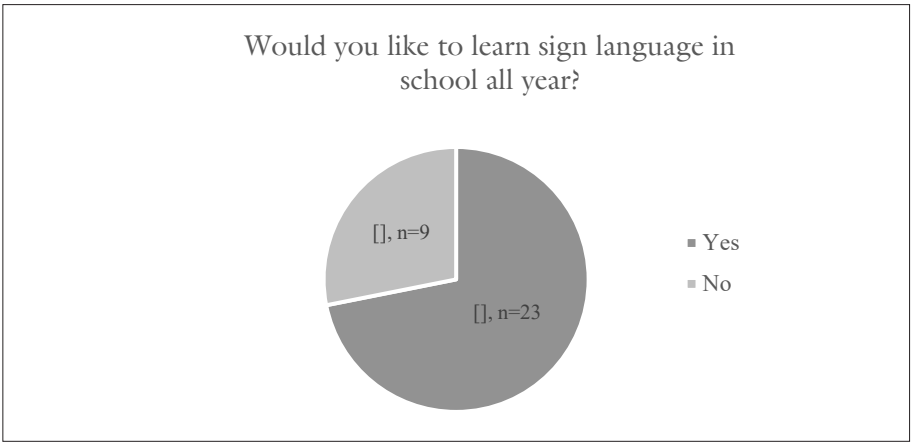
Attitudes towards Sign Language:

1. Children's attitudes towards learning ISL in school

Participants were asked if they would like to learn sign language in school all year. The findings are shown in Figure 5 below. The majority (72% n=23) of

respondents answered that they would like to learn sign language all year round. The remaining 28% (n=9) said they would not want to continue learning sign language.

Figure 5: Children's attitudes towards learning sign language in school.



The 72% (n=23) of respondents who said yes to wanting to learn sign language were then queried on what their reasons for wanting to learn sign language were. The thematic results from this question are shown below in Table 4. Over half (57% n=13) of these respondents said they wanted to learn sign language either to talk to d/Deaf people, to communicate with d/Deaf people, or to help them. The table shows that 30% (n=7) said they wanted to learn sign language either because they liked it or they though it was cool interesting fun or good to learn. The remaining 13% (n=3) said they would like to learn sign language "in case if any family or friends or people" ask them because their "grandmother is going deaf" and "it helps you learn".

Reason	Number	Percentage
To talk to/communicate with/help d/Deaf people	13	57%
Because they like it/ it is cool/interesting/fun/good	7	30%
Other	3	13%

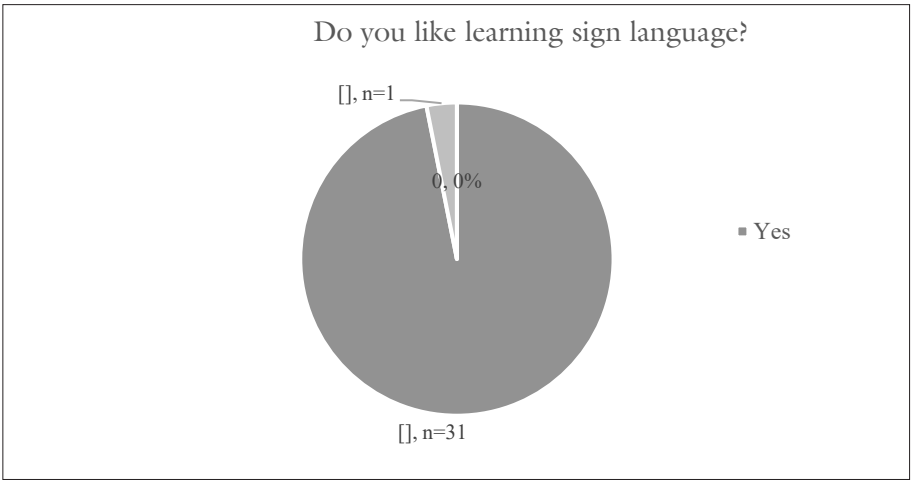
Table 6: Why the children want to learn sign language.

2. Children's attitudes towards enjoyment of learning ISL

The children were asked if they enjoyed learning sign language. The results in Figure 6 show a positive attitude towards sign language. Almost all respondents

97% (n=31) expressed that they liked learning sign language. Only 3% (n=1) said they did not enjoy learning the language.

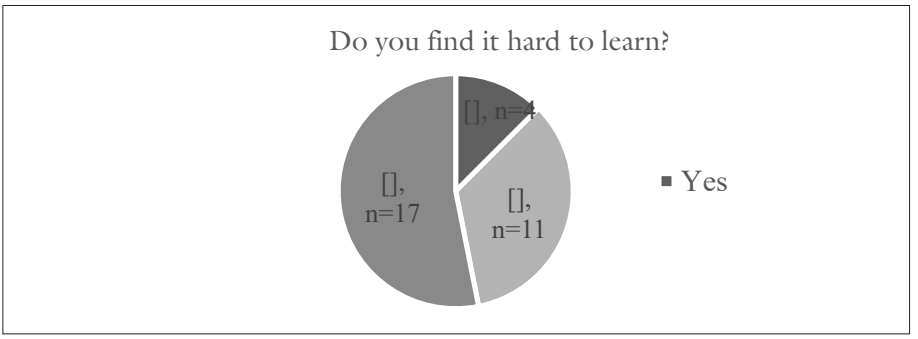
Figure 6: Children's response to the question 'Do you like learning sign language'.



3. Children's attitudes towards the difficulty of learning ISL

As shown in Figure 7 below 13% (n=4) of participants admitted to finding sign language difficult to learn. The remaining figures show that 34% (n=11) did not find it challenging and over half (53% n=17) of the respondents said sign language was sometimes hard to learn.

Figure 7: Children's attitudes towards the difficulty of learning sign language.



Discussion of Findings

Teaching languages in primary school

As part of a national consultation process in Ireland called 'Your Education System' a representative sample of (n=1511) people ages 15+ years completed a survey (Kellaghan, McGee, Millar and Perkins 2004). Their results showed that 57% (n=861) thought that 'too little emphasis' was being placed on teaching foreign languages in primary school and 78% (n=1179) considered teaching a continental language in primary school to be 'very important/important' (26 35). In the current study the languages mentioned were French, Spanish, Japanese, Italian and Polish. The findings from the current study demonstrate the value of teaching foreign languages which is reflective of the study by Kellaghan et al., (2004). Further research could indicate how many primary schools in Ireland have taught about ISL and Deaf culture in comparison/ along with teaching about foreign languages and cultures.

Perceptions of Sign Language

In the curent study the word 'language' was frequently used when describing sign language. Some literature on sign language and Deaf studies suggest that sign language is not used by all d/Deaf people (Leigh et al., 2018; Conama 2019; Leeson and Saeed 2012). Findings from the 2016 census in Ireland support this indicating that there are significantly more d/Deaf/hearing impaired people in Ireland than there are ISL users. The results from the 2016 census showed that 2.2% (n=10 3676) people identified as deaf or had a serious hearing impairment (CSO 2016). The number of ISL users is significantly lower with 0.09% (n=4228) of people (d/Deaf and hearing) saying they used ISL (CSO 2016). The perceptions in the current research reflects the literature and the latest Census figures. The majority of children (63% n=20) answered that not all d/Deaf people use sign language.

The current study mirrors literature around the perception of ISL as a 'legitimate' language. Studies by Kyle and Allsop (1997) and Leeson and Sheikh (2008) investigate the perception of sign language and are partially replicated in research by Feeney in 2015. Both studies have a somewhat negative response. The 2008 study looked at the perceived status of signed languages in five countries in the European Union; United Kingdom, Ireland, Czech Republic, Finland and Poland (Feeney 2015). Irish participants made up 8.6% (n=22) of the sample group, however a breakdown of the perceptions of Irish participants are not stratified. The majority of the overall 2008 study participants (69% n=138) perceived sign language as less than spoken languages/not recognised at all with only 6% (n=12) perceiving sign language as equal to other languages (Feeney 2015). Because sample sizes in all studies are low and not directly comparible to the current research this may imply that societal perception of the legitimacy of sign language has been improving. It must be noted that ISL was not recognised as an official language of the State for Kyle and Allsop's study in 1997 or Feeney's study in 2015. The negative perception of sign language shown in the former may be reflective of this and the apparent increase in

percieved legitimacy shown in the latter appears to mirror the growing awareness of ISL leading up to official State rcognition in 2017 (ISL Act 2017). Feeney's (2015) study used quantitative research methods (multiple choice questions) in an anonymous questionnaire to determine participants descriptions of the sign/word they use to refer to the communication of Deaf people. 'Signing' was selected by 24% (n=7) of participants ' sign language' was selected by 69% (n=20) and 'gesture language' was chosen by 3% (n=1) (Feeney 2015). This indicates that adults are familiar with general sign language terminology. The current study adds to this knowledge with the inclusion of children's perceptions of the language. The description 'gesture language' or similar was not used by participants in the current study which shows a positive perception of sign language as a legitimate language.

More than half of the participants in the current study (63% n=20) either thought that sign language was a universal language or did not know if it was or not. This lack of awareness reflects the skewed perceptions of sign language from the findings of Kyle and Allsop (1997) and Leeson and Sheikh (2008). Although most of the results from the current study reflect a positive perception of ISL this reveals a certain lack of awareness of sign language as its own language.

Attitudes towards Sign Language

Although research on the socio-linguistic perceptions of sign language is limited, some studies examine attitudes towards signed languages and Deaf people (Krausneker 2015). A UK study by O'Neill et al., (2005) involving undergraduate medical students aged 21-23 years completed a 72 hour course on British Sign Language (BSL) and Deaf awareness. Out of 52 students, 92% (n=48) said they enjoyed learning BSL. Despite differences (namely age sample size and location) the O'Neill et al., (2005) study and the current study have similar results with both sets of participants reporting that they enjoyed learning ISL. This is further reflected in literature that identifies an appreciation of learning sign language, in particular Key Word Signing (KWS) (For example Lámh) in school; 'It's more fun than doing like maths and all like Irish' (Bowles and Frizelle 2016, p. 288).

Attitudes towards difficulty of learning ISL is examined in the current study and this prompts reflection on teaching ISL in isolation or in tandem with Deaf culture. As noted in the literature review the study by Lee and Pott (2018) demonstrated that students in Deaf culture courses had more of a cultural perspective on ASL and Deaf people than the students in basic ASL courses which co-occurred with more positive attitudes. The study by Lee and Pott (2018) supports a previous study by Brightman (2013) indicating that taking an ASL class does not affect students' attitudes towards d/Deaf people. These findings suggest that there is an argument for the importance of teaching about Deaf culture when teaching sign language as this could influence students' attitudes towards d/Deaf people and the Deaf community. In the current study

it could be argued that some of the results on attitudes towards ISL and the Deaf community could stem from the teaching of Deaf culture along with ISL. Given the findings from these previous studies and the overwhelmingly positive results in the current study, it is reasonable to conclude that the concurrent teaching of both ISL and Deaf culture may result in more positive perceptions and attitudes towards ISL and the Deaf community.

Conclusion

Perceptions and attitudes towards ISL and the Deaf community are positively reported from this study. Most of the children believed sign language to be a legitimate language which suggests a perceived parity in status with spoken languages. This reflects the official recognition of ISL in Ireland. The majority of children were aware that not all d/Deaf people use sign language. Notwithstanding these positive perceptions of ISL and the Deaf community, there was a misconception among most of the participants that sign language is a universal language.

Most of the children found ISL difficult to learn but despite this all, bar one child, said they enjoyed learning ISL. This shows an overall positive attitude towards the learning of ISL. The children also demonstrated an understanding of the value of learning ISL. For example, one child wrote "I want to learn sign language because I want to communicate with deaf people". Although the majority of children said they would like to continue learning ISL in school, the study highlighted that foreign languages were taught in primary schools over other national languages, namely ISL and Cant. The study also highlighted from where the children's perceptions of, and attitudes towards ISL and the Deaf community stemmed. Over half of the participants had seen ISL used in public spaces and in school (ISL lessons). This shows how a school environment can influence children's perceptions and attitudes towards a language.

Recommendations

These findings indicate that concurrent teaching of Deaf culture and history alongside ISL instruction may have the potential to positively impact children's perceptions of ISL and the Deaf community. This study recommends further research to be conducted in primary and secondary level settings to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of schoolchildren in this area.

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Robust Vocabulary Instruction as an Inclusive Approach to Develop the Vocabulary Knowledge of Children at the Senior End of Primary School

Órla Ní Bhroin and Niamh Sloane

Abstract

In the Republic of Ireland, the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (Department of Education and Skills (DES) 2019) requires teachers to engage students in learning experiences that promote the development of an increasingly sophisticated understanding of vocabulary. Robust vocabulary instruction (Beck, McKeown and Kucan 2013) represents such an approach. This article presents findings from a small-scale mixed methods action research carried out over a 6-week period. The teacher-researcher planned, implemented, monitored and re-planned a programme based on the robust vocabulary instruction approach in a mixed-ability 6th class. The class included children receiving additional support for literacy difficulties. Pupils were assessed prior to and immediately after the intervention. Post-lesson observations and reflections were recorded daily. Weekly self-assessment rubrics and written exercises completed by pupils were also drawn upon for analysis. The robust vocabulary programme emerged as an inclusive approach to addressing the diverse learning needs in the class. Findings indicate that the programme resulted in improved word knowledge for all pupils and particularly for those who had lower pre-intervention test scores and those receiving additional support for literacy. Findings also revealed improved pupil ability in composing high-quality sentences for target words. Opportunities provided for rich discussion around target words and their meanings was a key feature of the programme in contributing to pupil learning. Teaching strategies incorporating explicit instruction, modelling, and guided practice with co-construction were also identified as contributing to pupil learning. Inclusion was secured through the use of collaborative learning experiences and varied means of representation. Additionally, for one pupil diagnosed with dyslexia, inclusion and participation in the vocabulary instruction lessons were enhanced by short sessions of preliminary and booster support. The study has implications for the practice of robust vocabulary instruction at the senior end of primary school.

Introduction

In the Republic of Ireland, the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (DES 2019) places particular focus on teaching vocabulary across three strands of oral language, reading and writing, with an outcome named Vocabulary common to

all three. For primary school senior classes, this learning outcome requires teachers to provide students with appropriately engaging learning experiences that will enable them to "acquire deep and broad vocabulary knowledge" (DES 2019, p. 26). In addition to expanding students' vocabulary knowledge, teachers are required to engage learners in activities that will develop their understanding of "word structure and word parts including prefixes, suffixes and root words" (DES 2019, p. 26). Support materials provided for teachers on implementing the PLC (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) 2019) encourage teachers to engage in explicit vocabulary instruction for which the robust vocabulary approach is identified.

Robust Vocabulary Instruction

Robust vocabulary instruction is an evidence-based approach to deepen pupils' understanding of six-ten words over a 5-day period (Beck, McKeown and Kucan 2013). Target words in the category of Tier Two Vocabulary are chosen for instruction from grade-level reading material (Beck et al., 2013). Tier two words are frequently encountered, high-utility words understood by mature language users (Sobolak 2011). Understanding of tier two words supports comprehension across contexts and subject areas (Ford-Connors and Paratore 2015). Words that fall into the wide-ranging tier two category are more characteristic of written text, therefore warranting instructional time as children are less likely to learn these words incidentally during oral interactions (Beck et al., 2013). Additionally, as tier two words are not always consistent with regular spelling patterns, pupils may need support when learning to read these words (Beck et al., 2013).

While variations of robust vocabulary instruction have emerged, each weekly unit of vocabulary instruction begins with a teacher read-aloud of short story from which target words have been selected (Beck et al., 2013). Direct explanation of word meanings to students is central to the approach. On day one of each instructional cycle, teachers are encouraged to explain target words using student-friendly definitions that capture word meanings through language that is readily understood by pupils (Beck et al., 2013). Essential to the approach is "frequent and varied encounters with target words" (Beck et al., 2013, p. 83). Therefore, in the days following initial introduction of target words, students are engaged in activities that aim to deepen their understanding of selected vocabulary. While variations of these activities have been developed as part of studies investigating this teaching approach (Clarke, Hulme, Snowling and Truelove 2010; Moran 2016; Sobolak 2011), they are typically classified into five categories:

- Example/Non-Example
- Word Associations
- Word Relationships
- Generating Situations, Examples and Contexts
- Writing Exercises

Example/Non-Example activities require students to indicate whether situations presented are representative of a specific target word. Word Association activities focus on matching target words to statements presented. Word Relationship exercises focus on children's explanations of how target words are related to other words or scenarios. Activities relating to Generating Situations, Example and Contexts require students to generate examples and scenarios that convey the meaning of target words. Finally, writing exercises provide students with opportunity to incorporate target vocabulary in written contexts (Beck et al., 2013).

Models of vocabulary knowledge supporting robust vocabulary instruction

Conceptualisations of vocabulary knowledge capture the complexity of what it means to know a word with some models explaining that knowledge of a given word falls on a continuum while others explore the concept through the various components that constitute mastery of a word. Assuming a sequential and hierarchical process, the four-step continuum model (Dale 1965) places knowledge of a word on a four-step continuum ranging from "I have never seen the word before" to "I have pinned the word down" (p. 898). This model is reflected in recently developed measures of vocabulary knowledge, for example, the four-level scale ranging from "do not know the word" to "know it well, can explain it, use it" (Beck et al., 2013, p. 18) evident in the design of a student self-assessment tool proposed for classroom use. In the Irish context, curriculum support materials designed for teachers (NCCA 2019) propose a 5-level scale ranging from basic to advanced as a means of capturing pupils' understanding of given words. This scale spans from "no knowledge of the word, totally new" to "use it in multiple contexts orally and in written form" (NCCA 2019, p. 81). Arguably, adequacy of this particular scale is questionable as some tier two words used in writing are rarely used in casual conversation.

Contrastingly, the component model focuses on the elements that contribute to high-level understanding of a word (Richards 1976), proposing that this requires:

- knowledge of the semantic value of a word, the multiple meanings associated with a word, a word's basic form and derivations that can be made from it, and how to incorporate the word into a syntactically correct sentence;
- an awareness of a word's frequency in print or speech, the situations and functions that warrant use of a word, and the network of associations between the word and other words.

Developing on this, Vermeer emphasises the interconnectedness of words "on different dimensions" (2001, p. 218), explaining that an individual's understanding of a word is heightened by their familiarity with the thematic, phonological, morphological, conceptual and sociolinguistic networks associated with that word. Words categorised under a specific theme are thematically connected. Words sharing a common sound are phonologically

linked. Words that incorporate the same suffix or prefix are morphologically interlinked. Words associated with a common function are conceptually linked. Finally, words used in similar social contexts, for example, swear words commonly used in angry exchanges share a sociolinguistic connection (Vermeer 2001). A further development is the Lexical Quality Hypothesis (LQH) model (Perfetti 2007) which uses five-word features to distinguish high-quality representations from low-quality representations of a word in a person's lexicon; these features add orthography, meaning and constituent binding to phonology and grammar of previous models. Orthography relates to knowledge of a word being partially mediated by the extent to which an individual has internalized its spelling. Regarding explanation of word meaning, an individual who has little understanding of a word, will be highly reliant on context whereas a person with more in-depth knowledge of the word has a more generalised understanding of that word. Constituent binding is concerned with the degree to which the initial four word-features are bound in the individual's lexical representation of a word. Accordingly, when a word is fully understood by an individual, the orthographic, phonological and semantic components of that word are tightly bound (Perfetti 2007).

The continuum and component models of word knowledge are reflected in the five-day instructional sequence of robust vocabulary instruction previously outlined. Activities at the beginning of each cycle such as teacher read-aloud and example/non-example exercises to introduce and familiarise students with chosen target words and their meanings, reflect initial steps of the continuum models. Activities intended for the latter part of each instructional cycle such as the writing exercises, promote a more in-depth level of word knowledge mirroring that described at higher-ends of the continuum models (Beck et al., 2013, Dale 1965). The various elements that contribute to knowledge of a word as proposed by component models (Perfetti 2007, Richards 1976, Vermeer 2001, Zou 2017) are also targeted by discussion on word relationships, generation of situations, examples and contexts, and the writing activities proposed for later in the instructional cycle.

Evidence-base for robust vocabulary instruction

Four decades ago, an intervention was conducted to improve 27 fourth grade pupils' knowledge of 104 words over the course of 75 daily lessons (Beck et al., 1982). Words now classified as Tier Two were selected for instruction from grade-level material. Eight-ten words were taught to the pupils over a five-day instructional cycle, progressing from introduction to target words and definitions to completing sentence-stems containing target words, orally generating situations or contexts around target words, and matching target words to meanings. Significant gains were made by pupils on a researcher-designed, multiple-choice vocabulary measure from pre- to post-intervention, supporting the instructional approach. More recently, in response to vocabulary instruction being identified as an area of need, the Department of Education in Australia developed the Structured Tier Two Robust Instruction of Vocabulary

Experiences (STRIVE) programme, informed by the principles as outlined by Beck et al., (2013). Moran (2016) examined the implementation of the STRIVE programme in the whole-class setting involving a mixed-ability Year 4 class. As part of pre- and post-intervention testing, pupils were required to incorporate target vocabulary into sentences. With a total of 27 marks available, on average, pupils improved their scores on the pre-intervention sentence measure by 16.3 points, indicating that robust instruction promotes high-level word knowledge.

Focusing on 8/9 year-old children with literacy difficulties, a comparative study sought to examine the efficacy of three interventions designed to improve their reading comprehension (Clarke et al., 2010). One of the interventions, oral language training, was developed following the principles of robust vocabulary instruction. Findings revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean pre-intervention and post-intervention scores on vocabulary knowledge for pupils who had engaged in oral language training. Responding to documented differences in vocabulary levels of students from low socioeconomic households and their more affluent peers, research was conducted to determine the amount of robust vocabulary instruction necessary for pupils from low socioeconomic backgrounds to make sufficient vocabulary gains (Sobolak 2011). A class of 21 first-grade pupils in a school designated as economically disadvantaged was selected for study. Based on standardised test scores, all pupils were receiving literacy instruction in a lower level reading class. Robust vocabulary instruction on four 6-word sets of tier two vocabulary was provided for the pupils, following the instructional cycle as described, but with the addition of picture representations of target vocabulary to support teaching of target-word meanings. Pupils received a minimum of one week of instruction on each set of target words. Those who did not master target words, as indicated by performance on a researcher-designed measure of taught vocabulary at the end of one week's teaching, participated in second and third rounds of instruction as required. For these rounds, pupils were engaged in a condensed version of the first-round instructional cycle over three 15-minute sessions. Assessment analysis indicated that additional teaching resulted in increased levels of word mastery for these pupils. This evidence supports providing more of the same quality instruction when initial teaching "doesn't allow all students to reach mastery" (Sobolak 2011, p. 22). In response to educator concerns regarding the practicality of providing such levels of additional instruction, Sobolak concludes that short amounts of additional instruction (10-15 minutes) during allocated class literacy time are practical and feasible.

In summary, research evidence on robust vocabulary instruction reflects favourably in terms of promoting tier two vocabulary knowledge of children in middle primary grade levels, and of those with additional difficulties and with lower vocabulary levels. However, as this approach is recommended in curriculum documentation for older children (NCCA, 2019), a study exploring its implementation in a senior class in the Irish context is timely. Such a study has potential to add to current understanding, by shedding light on the

implications for practice of delivering on robust vocabulary instruction with senior primary pupils.

Research Design

The study aimed to improve the vocabulary knowledge of pupils and the inclusive vocabulary instruction practice of their teacher, using the robust vocabulary instruction approach. This aim was reflected in the questions guiding the study:

> Can robust vocabulary instruction be utilised as an inclusive approach to improve the vocabulary knowledge of sixth class pupils?
>
> What are the implications of robust vocabulary instruction for the teacher's practice?

The study took place in one classroom setting, with twenty-five sixth class pupils and their class teacher who was the researcher. Three pupils were receiving additional support for literacy (withdrawn from mainstream class and taught by

Phases of data collection	Data collection tools	Purpose
Pre-intervention	Quantitative: Teacher-designed assessment (Appendix A): 32 items consisting of 4 task-types:	To assess pupils' knowledge of target vocabulary as a baseline measure:
	true-false multiple choice cloze procedure written sentence generation	basic vocabulary knowledge in-depth vocabulary knowledge basic vocabulary knowledge in-depth vocabulary knowledge
During intervention	Qualitative: Reflective journal (Appendix B)	To systematically document post-lesson observations of teaching and pupil engagement and participation, and reflections
	Self-assessment rubrics	To gather information about pupils' perceptions of their own learning
	Writing exercises	To gather evidence of pupils' ability to incorporate target words into syntactically correct sentences
Post-intervention	Quantitative: Re-administration of teacher-designed assessment (as above)	To re-assess pupils' basic and in-depth knowledge of target vocabulary to determine change

Table 1: Data collection methods

a special education teacher (SET) for a daily 30-minute period). One of these pupils had a diagnosis of dyslexia. Previous standardised test scores indicated that vocabulary knowledge was an area requiring additional attention for the class generally. The study was designed using an action research model (McNiff 2010) which combined quantitative and qualitative data collection methods as described in Table 1.

The intervention

The intervention was informed by previous research on robust vocabulary instruction (Beck et al., 1982, 2013, Clarke et al., 2010, Moran 2016, Sobolak 2011). The planning phase started with selection of target vocabulary. Words meeting criteria of tier two vocabulary were chosen from six short pieces of sixth-class reading material for instruction (Appendix C). Eight-ten words were selected from each story. Next, basic pupil-friendly definitions were written for each target word (Appendix D). Then, activities based on Example/ Non-Example, Word Associations, Words Relationships, Generating Situations, Examples and Contexts and Writing Exercises were prepared as instructional options for the course of the intervention (Appendix E). Drawing on the five-day instructional cycle (Beck et al., 2013) and capturing the continuum from low-level to high-level word knowledge (Dale 1965), a schedule of work was designed as illustrated in Table 2.

Monday Pupils complete self-assessment rubrics of target words.	**Tuesday** Orally review target words	**Wednesday** iPad activity to review target words	**Thursday** Orally review target words	**Friday** Assessment exercise
Target words introduced to the class using short story.	Activity from Example/ Non-Example category	Activity from Generating situations and contexts category	Activity from the Writing category	Pupils write sentences containing target words.
Use of story context and student-friendly definitions to explain words. Pupils record word meanings in vocabulary notebooks.	Activity from the Word Associations category	Activity from the Word Relationships category		Pupils complete self-assessment rubric.
Target words displayed on designated notice board.				

Table 2: 6-week schedule of work

Note. Adapted from "Bringing words to life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction" (McKeown et al., 2013).

The intervention consisted of five-daily lessons, each of 25 minute-duration, taught over a six-week period, totalling 30 lessons. During intervention implementation, the researcher monitored lessons through use of a reflective journal. Additionally, self-assessment rubrics completed by pupils each week (Appendix F) and pupil performance on an end of week writing assessment were reviewed during the monitoring process to generate data that would inform future learning. The cycle of continued monitoring to inform development of subsequent plans was repeated for each of the following five weeks of instruction while modifications were made to an individual lesson based on issues that arose during the previous day's lesson.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative findings based on assessment results are presented, followed by thematic analysis of the qualitative findings drawn from the reflective journal, student self-assessment rubrics and written exercises.

Assessment results

Minimum, maximum and average marks obtained by the class at pre- and post-intervention assessment illustrated in Table 3 indicate increases in pupils' levels of vocabulary knowledge from pre- to post-intervention.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Pre-intervention	25	4	27	15.96	15	5.496
Post-intervention	25	19	35	29.32	30	4.607

Table 3:
Descriptive pre- and post-intervention measures of vocabulary knowledge

With a total of 36 marks available, the lowest score recorded on the pre-intervention test of vocabulary knowledge was 4 and the highest, 27. The lowest score on the post-test was 19 and the highest was 35. Mean scores on the measure of vocabulary knowledge increased from pre-test (M = 15.96, SD = 5.496) to post-test (M = 29.32, SD = 4.607). A calculation of the median values for each data set indicated that the effect of outliers on mean scores was minimal, < .1. The difference of 13.36 between pre- and post-intervention mean scores was found to be statistically significant, witha t-test result (t=15.131, p < 0.001) strongly suggesting that the increase in mean scores could be attributed to pupils' participation in the instructional intervention.

The mean scores for each of the four tasks assessed on pre- and post-intervention tests were also calculated (Table 4).

	True or False		Multiple-choice		Cloze Procedure		Sentence Generation	
	Mean	Std. D.	Mean	Std. D.	Mean	Std. D.	Mean	Std. D.
Pre-intervention	4.68	1.030	3.08	1.115	3.36	1.934	4.84	3.880
Post-intervention	5.64	.700	4.76	1.508	5.80	.816	13.12	3.270

Table 4: Mean scores for each task on the pre- and post-intervention tests

Mean scores increased across all tasks following the instructional intervention. With a total of 6 marks available, scores on true/false increased by .96, multiple-choice by 1.68 and cloze procedure by 2.44. With a total of 18 marks available, post-intervention gains of 8.28 were evident on the sentence generation exercise. This finding suggests that the instructional intervention was a success in improving scores across all tasks whether designed to measure lower or higher levels of vocabulary knowledge.

Students who made the highest gains on the vocabualary measure from pre- to post-intervention were identified (Table 5).

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
KT	9	34	25
MDT	12	31	19
RM	14	33	19
MO	13	32	19

Table 5: Highest student gains

These students' pre-intervention scores were below the average pre-intervention test score, *(M* = 15.96, *SD* = 5.496). Notably, these same pupils achieved post-intervention scores that were above the class average for this test, (*M* = 29.32, *SD* = 4.607). When the performance of these pupils is explored on each task (Table 6), improvement across all sections of the vocabulary measure is evident.

	Pre-Intervention Test				**Post-Intervention Test**			
	True or False	Multiple-choice	Cloze Procedure	Sentence Generation	True or False	Multiple-choice	Cloze Procedure	Sentence Generation
KT	4	3	2	0	6	5	6	17
MDT	5	3	4	0	5	5	6	15
RM	4	3	1	6	6	5	6	16
MO	4	3	1	5	6	5	6	15

Table 6: Performance per task of students with highest gain

Notable is the increase to the post-intervention scores of these pupils on the sentence generation task (M = 13, SD = 3.559) with one pupil (KT) increasing from a pre-intervention score of 0 to 17. The other three pupils in this group achieved a post-intervention score on this task that was more than 50 percent higher than their score for pre-test.

The students with the lowest pre-intervention test results were identified and their scores were analysed further (Table 7). Three of these students (LJ, KMA and HA) receive additional support for literacy; LJ has a diagnosis of dyslexia.

	Pre-test	Post-test	Gain
LJ	4	19	15
KMA	11	24	13
HA	13	25	12
RG	10	19	9

Table 7:
Results of students identified as having the lowest pre-intervention scores

It is evident from the figures presented in Table 7 and the mean gain calculated (M = 12.25, SD = 2.500), that the results of these students improved significantly following their participation in the vocabulary programme. The vocabulary score of LJ was four times greater post-intervention than pre-intervention; KMA achieved a post-test score that was over double that achieved on the pre-test. These students' results were analysed across each section of the pre- and post-intervention tests (Table 8).

	Pre-Intervention Test				Post-Intervention Test			
	True or False	Multiple-choice	Cloze Procedure	Sentence Generation	True or False	Multiple-choice	Cloze Procedure	Sentence Generation
LJ	3	1	0	0	5	2	5	7
RG	4	5	1	0	3	5	2	9
KMA	4	3	0	4	6	1	6	11
HA	3	5	5	0	5	3	6	11

Table 8: Performance per task of students with lowest pre-intervention scores

Notably, two pupils (KMA and HA) decreased from pre-intervention to post-intervention on the multiple-choice task, as did RG on the true/false question. However, based on the figures in Table 8, in the main, these pupils made gains across all tasks. Notable gains were made by different pupils on different tasks; for example, both KMA and HA achieved full marks on cloze-procedure post-intervention, while LJ's score increased from 3 to 5 on the true/false task. However, when these pupils' results are viewed collectively, gains on the sentence generation task stand out with an average gain of 9.5 (M = 9.5, SD = 1.915).

Overall, assessment findings indicate that pupils' knowledge of target vocabulary improved as a result of their participation in the vocabulary programme. This is consistent with previous research highlighting gains made by students on bespoke measures of vocabulary knowledge following the implementation of programmes based on the principles of robust vocabulary instruction (Beck et al., 1982, Moran 2016, Sobolak 2011). Furthermore, assessment findings indicate that the instructional approach was particularly beneficial for certain groups of students: those identified as making the greatest gains who happened to have pre-intervention test scores that were lower than the mean score calculated for the first round of testing and those in receipt of additional support in literacy. Echoing findings from previous research (Clark et al., 2011; Sobolak, 2011), this study confirms that instructional cycles informed by the principles of the robust vocabulary can result in significant vocabulary gains for pupils identified as having reading difficulties.

Thematic analysis

The process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) applied to the qualitative data led to the emergence of three dominant themes which cumulatively and combined with the quantitative assessment findings answer the research questions this study sought to address. These themes are: robust vocabulary instruction and quality sentence generation, securing inclusion through robust vocabulary instruction and teaching strategies to support vocabulary growth.

Robust vocabulary instruction and quality sentence generation

Students' improvement from pre-intervention ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 3.880$) to post-intervention ($M = 13.12$, $SD = 3.270$) on sentence generation was mirrored in qualitative analysis of their written exercises. The following sentences, in which target words are underlined, provide insight into the general standard of work produced by students.

> WL: The vast ocean took my breath away.
>
> HL: The man's companion told him not to venture into enemy territory.
>
> DH: In an effort to dispel the rumour about the hospital he had to reach out to the press.
>
> FA: The captain looked westward and saw dark clouds, an indication that it was going to rain. (Observations_Journal).

In these sentences, pupils have incorporated taught vocabulary into grammatically correct structures that arguably demonstrate an in-depth understanding of taught target words contributing to quality sentence generation.

Sentences composed by students for whom literacy was an area of need similarly demonstrate in-depth understanding of the target vocabulary. The sentence,

"There was a pungent smell coming from the dilapidated house" (Observations_Journal) was written by a student (HA) for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Sentences composed by two of the students who required additional literacy support were observed as being of equally high-standard:

> KMA: There is a quaint little village near the river.
>
> KMA: There was a pungent smell in the classroom.
>
> KMA: There is a dilapidated shop beside the pitch (Observations_Journal).
>
> CT: The man did not take care of his building so it became dilapidated.
>
> CT: The carpenter modernised my room.
>
> CT: My friend used tactless comments that made me feel upset (Observations_Journal).

For LJ, with significant literacy needs relating to dyslexia, the following sentences are examples of this pupil's written work:

> LJ: On my street there is a quaint little house.
>
> LJ: The brave adventurer ventured up Mount Everest.
>
> LJ: At half time comments were exchanged (Observations_Journal).

The evidence of in-depth understanding of taught vocabulary conveyed in the sentences written by the pupils indicates that robust vocabulary instruction can enhance the quality of sentences generated by all participating students. While these findings are consistent with previous research (Clark et al., 2010, Sobolak, 2011), endorsing the emphasis on in-depth word knowledge captured by the models of vocabulary development (Beck et al., 2013, Dale 1965, Perfetti 2007), they further support the use of robust vocabulary instruction as an approach to developing the vocabulary knowledge and sentence generation of pupils at the senior end of primary school.

Securing inclusion through robust vocabulary instruction

Inclusion was secured through the use of collaborative learning experiences and varied means of representation. However, for the pupil diagnosed with dyslexia, inclusion in the vocabulary instruction lessons was enhanced by short sessions of preliminary and booster support.

The collaborative learning experiences to promote vocabulary knowledge incorporated in the programme and engaged in by the pupils are illustrated in the pupil exchanges recorded below:

> DMT: "We could say I was distressed by the damage."
>
> KT: "Or we could say I was distressed by all of the damage sustained."

> CR: "Or how about, I became distressed when I saw the damage sustained by the house during the storm" (Observations_ Journal).
>
> NG: "We could say I saw the glinting cameras in the sun."
>
> AF: "Maybe the cameras were glinting in the sun would be better" (Observations_ Journal).

In the conversations above, it is evident that pupils are working co-operatively to compose high-level sentences for target words. As the conversations progress, so does sentence quality. Evidently, pupils supporting and learning from one another was a benefit of the collaborative work incorporated in the vocabulary intervention. Moreover, the collaborative context in which pupil exchanges occurred was inclusive in affording all pupils the opportunity to contribute in interactions with one another. The Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (IPPA) framework, designed to "capture evidence of inclusive education in action" (Florian 2014, p. 286) suggests that such socio-constructivist learning opportunities are indicative of inclusive practice. According to the framework, collaborative work that provides "opportunities for children to co-construct knowledge" (Florian 2014, p. 290) is considered a way of supporting the inclusion of all learners. Additionally, as the collaborative exercises allowed for the equal participation of all learners, including children with additional learning needs, they were instrumental in promoting an inclusive learning environment with learning opportunities organised in such a way as to enable all learners "to participate in classroom-life" (Florian 2014, p. 290).

Initial plans were to use story contexts for introducing target words. However, when pictures were used to support one pupil's (LJ with dyslexia) understanding of target words, it was decided that such resources "could be incorporated into whole-class lessons" (Reflections_Journal). The following extract provides insight into the dialogue that occurred following the use of pictures to stimulate discussion of target vocabulary at whole-class level.

> I displayed all images that had been used to help introduce target vocabulary on the interactive whiteboard. I asked the pupils to call out the target word associated with each image. When I pointed to a picture of a cartoon character, LJ called out bumbling. He explained that the character "was a bumbling character who always made mistakes". When I pointed to a picture of a detective, GN called out "infiltrate" and explained that the detective was "probably planning to secretly enter a group to get some information" (Observations_Journal).

As the observation demonstrates, in addition to story contexts, carefully selected images (Appendix J) allowed for rich discussion of target-word meanings thus emphasising the benefit of varied means of representation in securing inclusion. This resonate with Sobolak's use of pictorial representations to enhance teaching of target-word meanings (2011). Furthermore, it echoes the principle

of multiple means of representation underpinning Universal Design for Learning, which promotes the provision of options for learners to access, build on and internalise what they are learning (Rose and Meyer 2002).

While collaborative activities enabled the learning of all pupils, observations documented in the journal highlighted that the students with literacy difficulties required varying amounts of support during lessons. For two of these pupils, this was one-to-one support from the teacher when they were engaging in independent work. The following extract conveys the level of support received by KMA and CT as they worked independently to compose sentences for taught target words:

> During this time, I also worked with KMA and CT. I provided these students with support as they wrote each sentence. For the most part these students were able to write sentences independently. They just seemed to require some reassurance from me that their sentences were correct (Observations_Journal).

However, LJ required more frequent and intensive levels of support. It was noted that it would be necessary "to spend some one-to-one time working with LJ on reading of target words" (Reflections_Journal). Thus, time was spent working with LJ each day on word recognition and meaning. In addition to listening to the pupil read aloud from flashcards of target words, the teacher supported LJ's word reading through analysis of individual words:

> We used a pen to mark off the different syllables in these three words. We discussed the sounds in each word. For example, we wrote the "aw" digraph under the "au" in taunting. (Observations_Journal).

The meanings of target words were given attention. It was noted that providing LJ with "oral prompts allowed pupil to recall word meanings with ease" (Reflections_Journal). For example, LJ's understanding of the target word 'masterfully' was elicited by teacher prompting: "If you do something masterfully you …." (Observations_Journal). While analysis identified that differentiated support helped to meet LJ's learning needs, the challenges of providing such levels of support came to the fore. From the outset, it was acknowledged that it was difficult "to work one-to-one with LJ during the allocated lesson time" (Reflections_Journal). Additionally, it was noted that LJ was missing out on group and collaborative activities and a decision was made to provide the support before or after lessons to enable LJ "to participate fully in other lesson activities" (Reflections_Journal). On one occasion when reflecting on a lesson in which LJ was noted as engaging particularly well, the researcher commented that perhaps this was a result of being allocated "the same amount of time as everybody else to work with partner" (Reflections_Journal). Providing preliminary and booster support to LJ outside of intervention lessons, for example as other pupils "worked independently on

a reading comprehension" (Observations_Journal), emerged as a way to meet LJ's needs while also allowing the pupil to participate fully in group and pair work. Regarding the practicality and feasibility of providing additional instruction during allocated class literacy time as advanced by Sobolak (2011), this study highlights the importance of sourcing that time outside of collaborative learning opportunities, for the purpose of securing inclusion.

Teaching strategies to support vocabulary growth

Analysis identified that the teaching strategies supporting robust vocabulary instruction were explicit instruction, modelling, guided practice with co-construction and discussion-based activities. While direct instruction and guided practice on target-word meanings featured in each of the instructional cycles implemented in previous research (Beck et al., 1982, Clarke et al., 2010, Moran 2016, Sobolak 2011), teacher modelling was not specifically mentioned in these studies.

At the outset, explicit instruction was used to teach target words and their meanings, as captured in the following extract:

> I then introduced "student-friendly definitions" of target vocabulary to the class using a PowerPoint. Each slide on the PowerPoint had a definition and example sentence containing the target word. As I introduced each new word to the class, I asked them to pronounce it. We spent time discussing the spelling patterns in each word and also the syllables. After I introduced each word and its meaning, we would refer back to the story context to further explore the word's meaning. I used a list of pre-prepared questions to stimulate discussion around the target words as they were presented in the story. (Observations_Journal).

Adding to previous research, teacher modelling was regularly used during the various written activities in this intervention as each week the teacher would model how to write meaningful sentences containing target words. At the beginning of the group writing lessons that occurred on the 4th day of each instructional cycle, the teacher spent time modelling a piece of writing for the class in response to a prompt and incorporated "as many target words as possible into the piece" (Observations_Journal).

Guided practice with co-construction was also utilised by the teacher to support pupils' written work. Post-lesson observations indicate that the teacher worked jointly with pupils to construct "sentences as a class" (Observations_Journal) before they would then work with peers or independently. In the following extract, the teacher elicits help from students to construct a sentence stem containing the target word "allies":

> I elicited help from the children. I asked why would "France and Spain need to become allies". MO responded "because another country could

> be working against them." I used this response to help complete the sentence on the board (Observations_Journal).

As the example illustrates, guided practice allowed teacher and pupils work together to co-construct the completed sentence.

Rich discussion is considered a hallmark of the robust vocabulary approach (Beck et al., 2013) and has proven to be effective in previous investigations of this teaching method (Clarke et al., 2010, Moran 2016, Sobolak, 2011). Rich discussion came to the fore as analysis of post-lesson observations suggested that carefully planned discussion-based activities supported vocabulary development. This is demonstrated in the following extract detailing student interactions in an Example/Non-example activity, a discussion-based exercise in which pupils are asked to decide whether or not situations described convey the meaning of chosen target words:

> CS explained to LJ why one of the scenarios, "After receiving permission from the prison warden the reporter was permitted to enter the jail and interview members of staff", was not an example of the target word "infiltrate". SKO and WL debated whether or not meeting someone once would make them an acquaintance. TK and RG decided that the following sentence, "I am not too sure, but I think the square root of 100 is 10," he mumbled, was not an example of the target word conviction (Observations_Journal).

Evidently, the carefully planned points of discussion presented to pupils provided them with an opportunity to further explore meanings of target words, thus deepening their understanding of these words. It is reflective of the socio-constructivist view that language learning is a social process influenced by both the cultural context and the interactions of the individual with more knowledgeable adults or peers (Vygotsky 1978).

Conclusion

As this was a small-scale study with a purposive sample limited to a single site and the teacher-designed measure of vocabulary knowledge was not a standardised assessment, findings cannot be generalised to other settings. Notwithstanding limitations, the study confirms that the programme improved participating pupils' knowledge of chosen target vocabulary and emerged as particularly beneficial for specific groups of students: those identified as having lower pre-intervention test scores and those receiving additional support in literacy. Additionally, the approach improved pupils' ability to compose high-level sentences containing target words. This augurs well for the policy recommendation (NCCA 2019) to use this approach for teaching tier two vocabulary to pupils in senior classes. Direct instruction, guided practice with co-construction and teacher modelling were identified as teaching strategies necessary to facilitate effective delivery of the vocabulary programme while

opportunities provided for rich discussion around target words were also highlighted as contributing to its success. While the guidelines for schools on the robust approach in curriculum support documents (NCCA 2019) are to be welcomed, findings of this study suggest that these guidelines could be developed further. In the descriptions of this approach being circulated to schools, the strategies employed in robust instruction, including teacher modelling, guided practice and socio-constructivist interactions should be highlighted. More attention could be paid to the assessment of pupils' knowledge of selected target words pre- and post-teaching.

Careful planning of whole-class discussions and discussion-based collaborative activities is essential if the desired rich discourse around target-word meanings is to be achieved. In their planning of such language experiences, teachers should consider the interests of pupils and prepare questions and pictures that will help to extend the discussions around target words. While the vocabulary programme implemented in this study emerged as an inclusive approach, the teacher's persistence and commitment to ensuring that the learning needs of all students were catered for was paramount. From an inclusion perspective, a willingness from teachers to provide varied representations of learning and to adapt and respond effectively to the needs of all their pupils will be essential to the successful implementation of similar vocabulary programmes in schools.

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ÓRLA NÍ BHROIN

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Appendix A
Teacher-designed Vocabulary Measure

Name:	
Date:	

TEACHER USE ONLY	
TASK	SCORE
Task 1	/8
Task 2	/8
Task 3	/8
Task 4	/24
TOTAL	/48

TASK 1: True or False Task
Please respond to these sentences with either true or false

EXAMPLE

Dogs often miaow.	False

People often cherish things that aren't important to them.	
It would be dangerous to swim in ferocious waves.	
People and animals can evolve.	
A house with lots of Christmas decorations could be described as being sparsely decorated.	
A bumbling policeman would likely need help to catch a criminal.	
Usually you wouldn't notice a pungent smell.	
A grating sound is unpleasant.	
People who put in a minimal effort often flourish.	

TASK 2: Multiple choice Task

Please underline the word closest in meaning to the word in bold

EXAMPLE

House	Car	Building	Garden	Attic

Regime	Leader	System	Ruler	Control
Glinted	Clean	Precious	Valuable	Sparkled
Indication	Sign	Suggestion	Notice	Poster
Circuit	Training	Loop	Round	Circular
Conviction	uncertainty	confidence	loud	doubt
Forlorn	Patient	joyful	gloomy	mean
Decree	Command	Certificate	Punishment	Idea
Dispel	build	Eliminate	Assemble	Change

TASK 3: Cloze Procedure Task

Place the correct words into the blanks

EXAMPLE

WORDS	red	hat	clouds

1. Ben noticed some _____ in the sky.
   Ben noticed some clouds in the sky.
2. Jen put her cosy ___ on.
   Jen put her cosy hat on.
3. Katie bought a ___ balloon.
   Katie bought a red balloon.

WORDS:	ingenious	intrusive	distress	quavered
	unconvincing	accusingly	merits	strenuous

1. The little boy was exhausted after the _____ activity.
2. The emergency services responded to the _____ call.
3. The man's voice _____ with rage.
4. The teacher glared _____ at the student.
5. Homework that is of high-standard _____ a reward.
6. The politician's speech was _____ .
7. The _____ neighbour peered over the garden wall.
8. The superhero was _____ enough to foil the villains plan.

TASK 4: Sentence Generation Task

On the lined paper that teacher has given to you please place the following words into sentences

EXAMPLE

Word = ball

Sentence = The boy had a wonderful afternoon kicking his ball about the park.

1. dismantle
2. tranquillity
3. internal
4. restore
5. inevitable
6. manner
7. tedious
8. manufacture

Appendix B

Sample from Reflective Journal: Week 2 Day 5

Post-Lesson Observations	**Reflections**
The class called out target words and I put them on the board. Children were eager to call out the words. I explained today's writing task to the class. The children were required to write a paragraph in response to the prompt "You go to the shopping centre and the lights go out". Children had to incorporate as much of the target vocabulary as possible into their work. As children worked independently on this exercise, I worked with LJ. Today he could read all of the target words from the flashcards. I asked the pupil if he would prefer to write target words into sentences instead of the paragraph. He opted to write sentences. In the time allocated the pupil successfully wrote 8 sentences. Target words were used correctly in each sentence. Example- "My intrusive brother was listening to my private conversation". Another pupil in the class, KMA, also opted to write sentences instead of a paragraph. Children did not get a chance to fill in their self-assessment rubrics due to time constraints (coaching). Observations of pupil's work Children used target vocabulary appropriately in their work. Many examples of sentences that demonstrate a high-level understanding of target words. MR- "The howling wind kept blowing strands of hair onto my face." GN- "They were just asking me intrusive personal questions." There were also examples of target word that had not been used correctly. MR- "The got etched between two rocks". TK- "The whole shop was intrusive to get to the door."	1-1 work with LJ worked well. I will continue this work with him. Perhaps I need to revise other target vocabulary from week 1 with him and even with the rest of the class. I was impressed with the sentences written by LJ. They demonstrated an understanding of target words. KMA would perhaps benefit from increased support during lessons. Reflecting on the mistakes made by children, I feel that I should have referred back to example sentences throughout the week. Although I gave the children example sentences this week, I didn't refer back to them much. I will do this next week. We could read through a list of example sentences each day at the beginning of lessons. Perhaps I should have asked the children to write some sentences in isolation before making the jump to writing an entire paragraph. Over the course of this week I have noticed that some pupils, (EMA, FA, GCO), seem to grasp the meanings of words rather easily. I feel that I need to further challenge these pupils. Next week, I will introduce two extra words to the class on Day 1. These words will be chosen from the weekly story. I will not focus on these words during the week. However, when children are working independently, I will encourage them to incorporate these words into their work if they wish.

Appendix C

Target Words

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Union	Grating	Reassure	Modernise	Quarrel	Inevitable
Allies	Transfixed	Sustain	Dilapidated	Tedious	Infiltrate
Regime	Cherish	Distress	Tactless	Cantankerous	Bumbling
Ingenious	Tranquil	Suspended	Strenuous	Decree	Acquaintance
Dismantle	Intrusive	Indication	Quaint	Disastrous	Mayhem
Territory	Gleaming	Overhead	Pungent	Whim	masterfully
Patrol	Glinted	Ferocious	Exchange	Summon	Flair
Reunited	Taunting	Companions	Dispel	Exotic	Conviction
	Etched	Internal	Manufacture	Merits	Insist
	Strands	Assess	Venture	Flourish	Unconvincing
		*administer	*flamboyant	*vast	wit
		* considerable	*breadth	* westward	*veteran
					*genre

* Target words introduced as "extra words" to extend students learning selected vocabulary with ease.

Appendix D

Example of student-friendly definitions relating to week 3

Reassure	If you reassure someone you say or do things that make them stop worrying about something. *She reassured me that everything was going to be fine.*
Distressed	Describes feeling unhappy and stressed out with worry. *The man appeared distressed after hearing the bad news.*
Sustain	Describes when something, usually something unpleasant such as an injury or a loss, happens to you. *The aircraft sustained some damage during the battle.* *The man died as a result of injuries sustained during the crash.*
Suspended	Describes something that is hanging from a high place. *The chandelier was suspended on heavy chains from the ceiling.*
Indication	A sign, a clue or a suggestion. *His expensive jewellery and flashy clothes were an indication of his wealth.*
Overhead	Describes something that is above the level of your head. Can be used to describe something in the sky or in the space above someone's head. *Planes flew overhead.* *She noticed a gleaming chandelier overhead.*
Companions	Describes someone that is your friend or your partner in something *The old lady's dog had been her companion for many years.*
Internal	Used to describe something that is on the inside *I had an internal battle with myself over whether or not I should have the second slice of cake*
Assess	To carefully look and examine something or even a situation. Usually when you have finished examining you come to a decision. *The fireman had to assess the damage caused by the fire before entering the building.*
Ferocious	Used to describe something that is very intense or strong. *The competition between the students was very strong.*

Extra Words: Week 3

Administer	To give something to someone. Things that are administered include tests, exams, medicine, even justice! *The doctor administered the medicine to his patient*
Considerable	Describes something that is notably large in size or amount. *He had a considerable amount of money.*

Appendix E

Example of instructional menu of activities

Activity type	Explanation	Target word	Example
Example/Non-example	Children are presented with different situations and asked if it represents the target word. Children asked to explain their answer.	Intrusive	Each day your nosy neighbour looks over your garden wall to study the plants. Is this intrusive behaviour?
Word associations	Children are presented with statements and are required to match them to target words.	Cherished Gleaming Transfixed	I polished the vase for an hour. Granny keeps her necklace in a safe place. My brother stares at the television when Netflix is on.
Generating situations, contexts and examples	Children are presented with a question that requires them to suggest a situation with a specific context.	Patrol Union	Why would a teacher need to patrol the schoolyard? Why would two countries need to make a union? What would a dismantled car look like?
Word relationships	Children are presented with a continuum (line extreme) and children asked to plot statements along it. Children then explain their placements. A little trouble……..A lot of trouble	Cherished Taunting Grating Patrol	I broke my mother's cherished vase. I got caught taunting a boy in the yard. I used my fork to make a grating sound on the plate at dinner. I pulled a face at the security guard on patrol in the airport.
Writing	Give children a writing prompt and ask them to write a paragraph using a designated amount of target vocabulary.	Gleaming Cherished Transfixed Tranquillity	Breaking a precious item in your neighbour's house.
Word relationships	Children asked to explain how two target words are connected or activity can be more structured by phrasing questions around words.	Patrol Territory	An army might have to patrol the nation's territory. Do armies patrol territory?
Matching activity	Children use iPad apps such as Quizlet/ Kahoot to engage in matching a word to the correct definition.		

Appendix F

Sample self-assessment rubric

MONDAY

Word	I understand the word and could use it in my writing.	I understand the word	I recognise the word and have an idea what it means.	I recognise the word.	Don't Know it.
Reassure					
Distressed					
Sustain					
Suspended					
Indication					
Overhead					
Companions					
Internal					
Assess					
Ferocious					

FRIDAY

Word	I understand the word and could use it in my writing.	I understand the word	I recognise the word and have an idea what it means.	I recognise the word.	Don't Know it.
Reassure					
Distressed					
Sustain					
Suspended					
Indication					
Overhead					
Companions					
Internal					
Assess					
Ferocious					

Appendix G

Examples of Images Used to Support Teaching of Target Vocabulary

Cantankerous

Quarrel

Tedious

Summon

Flourish

Bumbling

Educational Research – concepts and terminology

Michele Dunleavy and Trevor O'Brien

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to offer a helpful guide to the terminology and concepts in relation to research in education. Whilst the main concepts and terminology will be described, the main focus will be on qualitative research within an educational, including special educational, context. There have been a number of changes within educational research over the past few decades; occurring mainly due to societal changes, for example, increased focus on inclusion, social justice, hearing the voice of the child, increased awareness of emotional and psychological well-being of participants, and the use of multi-method strategies to include children with special educational needs (SEN) as research participants. When the first-time researcher sets out on this journey, it might feel as if we are learning a new language – the language of research. One is expected to discuss their ontological and epistemological assumptions, theoretical framework, data collection methods, qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods and data analysis. It is hoped that this paper will demystify the terminology and provide some signposts to guide the first-time researcher through the process. We aim to help researchers navigate their way from the acorn stage (first seed of an idea for research) to a fully-grown oak tree (your submitted thesis). However, before starting to learn the language of research one must first ensure a common understanding of what is meant by research.

What is Research?

Fundamentally, research is about gathering data or information to answer a question or to prove or disprove a hypothesis or theory. As Mouly (1978) states, "research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data" (Mouly, 1978, cited in Cohen et. al., 2000 p. 45). Similarly, according to Boeije (2010 p. 1) research is "concerned with asking and answering relevant and researchable questions" and often aims to improve educational practice (Elliott, 2006).

Other writers, for example, Burns (1997), Mertens (2005) and Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) give similar definitions of research. So, we can conclude that research is a process of data collection, analysis, reporting and discussion of findings. But, how does one begin the research process? Perhaps, the best place is with the theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

Grant and Osanloo (2014, p. 13) argue that "without a theoretical framework, the structure and vision of the study is unclear" comparing it to trying to build a house without a blueprint or plan. Similarly, Eisenhart (1991, p. 205) defines a theoretical framework as "a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory". In other words, the theoretical framework is what guides our thinking with reference to what we have learned from previous studies and current societal norms and values. One must understand that research is always placed within the context of existing knowledge and research. Therefore, the first step on the research journey is a literature review. This provides an opportunity to examine what has been written on the topic and identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge. This will enable the researcher to support or defend the rationale for their own study and how it will contribute and add to what is already known. Put simply, this is what is meant by a theoretical framework – having a clear rationale. The researcher's theoretical framework will be influenced by the literature review and the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives. While this may be something that beginning researchers grapple with, it is argued that having a clear theoretical framework from the outset can make the research process more manageable and ultimately provide a higher quality piece of work. The next step in the process is to frame the researcher's paradigm.

Research paradigm

There are many claims in relation to how knowledge is generated through research and this can be referred to as the research paradigm. It is the lens through which the researcher views the world and thus the way knowledge is generated and shaped. In turn, this influences the way this knowledge is used, or not used, to guide policy and practice. It is inevitable that our beliefs and philosophical assumptions will influence our research design, but if we are aware of them we can use them to guide our research design. Our philosophical assumptions are influenced by societal norms and values and this is why our view of children, particularly children with SEN, within research has changed. However, the term philosophical assumptions or beliefs may be considered too ambiguous. To clarify, philosophical assumptions are deeply held beliefs that are shaped by a person's past and present environment and experiences. At the start of any research project, it is important to identify, name, and acknowledge our philosophical assumptions and beliefs, so that we are fully cognisant of what biases we, as researchers, may bring to the study. This is often referred to as researcher 'positionality' as the position of the researcher and how they view the world impacts each step of the process from the choosing of a research question right through to data analysis (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012). Simply put, a researcher's paradigm will influence whether qualitative or quantitative research is conducted and we will return to this at a later point.

Even if not explicitly acknowledged we all have beliefs, perspectives and philosophical assumptions that will influence the type of research we engage in

and how we design our research study. Our perception, for example, of inclusion will influence how we perceive children with SEN and therefore our paradigm. As Fargas-Malet et al., (2010, p. 175) writes, "Until relatively recently, research was fundamentally *on* children, rather than *with* children or *for* children" To use research parlance, the type of research we undertake and the reason we undertake it is influenced by our epistemological and ontological perspectives. Our epistemological assumptions will influence what we already know about the research topic; our ontological assumptions will influence what we think we can research. In other words, our epistemological and ontological perspectives will determine our research paradigm. As they are intertwined they will form a major part of the philosophical foundation of all research and work together to shape our research paradigm. Therefore, before we can examine paradigms we must understand epistemology and ontology.

Epistemology

Put simply epistemology is our understanding of what knowledge is, how we attain and impart this knowledge to others (Cohen et. al., 2007). Krauss (2005, p.758) describes epistemology as "the philosophy of knowledge or how we come to know". Likewise, Wahyuni (2012, p. 69) describes epistemology as a fundamental belief as to "what constitutes acceptable knowledge". In other words, it is the theory of how knowledge is generated, how it is collected and where this knowledge comes from. Therefore, it is important to establish one's epistemology at an early stage of the research as it will influence how data is collected, interpreted and presented to the world.

Krauss (2005, p. 759) suggests that epistemology poses the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the knower and what is known?
2. How do we know what we know?
3. What counts as knowledge?

These are important questions for the researcher to ask. In simple terms, is knowledge something which is fixed and observable or is knowledge created and subjectively viewed by different people? (Mertens, 2010). How these questions are answered will probably influence the type of research methods you choose. The generation of knowledge will vary depending on the philosophical position of the researcher. When you read the different paradigms, you will notice that each may have a different understanding of what constitutes reality within the world of research.

Ponterotto (2005, p. 126) defines epistemology as "the relationship between the "knower" (the research participant) and the "would-be knower" (the researcher). Many scientists may use quantitative data collection methods in the belief that knowledge can be captured or understood through statistical methods. However, many social scientists are interested in the subjective view of knowledge whereby, knowledge is captured or understood through the use of

qualitative data collection, thus, hearing the perspectives of the "knower". Nevertheless, these are not always mutually exclusive and many researchers use what is referred to as a mixed method approach, where the researcher will gather statistical data as well as participants', or the 'knowers', perspectives.

Some researchers, mainly from a positivist background (and we will discuss the positivist perspective later), will use quantitative data collection methods in the belief that there is only one reality. They believe that something is true or false. On the other hand, researchers from the social sciences, will use qualitative data collection methods, and believe in multiple realities. This, it can be argued, is particularly relevant for research within a special educational context as all children will have a different experience to relate. A simple example of this is where a question is asked such as "should a child with ASD be included in the mainstream class?" Quantitative data will seek a yes/no answer, or they may ask about the length of time spent in the mainstream class. Data will be presented numerically in the form of statistics. On the other hand, the qualitative data collector will gather information that will 'tell a story' usually about the experience of the child who is included in the mainstream class and this is presented in narrative form.

Ontology

Wahyuni (2012, p. 70) defines ontology as "the position on the nature of reality" and likewise, Ponterotto (2005, p. 130) defines ontology as concerning "the nature of reality and being" and further suggests that ontology poses the following questions:

1. What is the form and nature of reality?
2. What can be known about that reality?

It is important to acknowledge that a researcher's view of reality (whether fixed and observable or subjective and changing) will impact what they believe to be important and this begins with the choosing of a research question (Silverman, 2010). As educational research is often concerned with social issues in a social world, the view that multiple realities exist is a common assumption (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012). According to this view, reality is created in one's mind and is not something "out there" in the world (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011). In other words, reality is what we gain through capturing and interpreting people's experiences existing in our social world.

Types of Research Paradigms

Having given an overview of researcher paradigm (positionality) and associated epistemological and ontological stances, we will now turn our attention to the various types of research paradigms and discuss how these may impact the type of research we undertake. There are a number of paradigms within the sphere of research and it is easy for the first-time researcher to become confused. For

this reason, we will discuss the most popular research paradigms used within educational research; and the data collection methods preferred by each, incorporating those used to gain data from children, including children with SEN.

Interpretivists/Constructivist paradigm

Thomas (2003, p. 6) maintains that qualitative methods are usually supported by interpretivists/constructivist paradigm, because this paradigm "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing …". According to this view knowledge and reality are always socially constructed by people and are not objective and discoverable (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002). Interpretivist/constructivist researchers seek data collection methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between human beings and their environment and the part those people play in creating the social fabric of which they are a part. In other words, the researcher is seeking in-depth information on people's lived experiences. The researcher interprets what they are told and construct meaning to enhance understanding of individual's experiences and the multiple realities that exist. They prefer to view the world through what McQueen (2002, p. 17, cited in Thanh and Thanh, 2015, p. 26) refers to as a "series of individual eyes", in order to find out those individuals' realities.

The interpretive/constructivist paradigm is concerned with gaining rich data from delving into the stories of people and obtaining insights into their lived experiences. Additionally, those holding an Interpretivist/Constructivist paradigm believe that truth changes depending on the social context of the participants in a study (O'Donoghue, 2007). However, key criticism of this paradigm is its subjective nature. In other words, if knowledge and reality are socially constructed, are there any "facts" which are indisputable or "true"? (Hassan, 2016). However, this type of research has become more prevalent with changing societal attitudes towards children and their participation in research.

Positivists paradigm

Positivist researchers view the world through observable and measurable facts and the positivist paradigm, for this reason, often supports quantitative methods of data collection. As Mackenzie et. al. (2006, p. 3) write, positivism "is often referred to as a 'scientific method' or 'science research'. Positivists usually begin with a theory and set out to test this through observation and measurement and the use of statistical analysis. Likewise, Plack (2005, p. 226) states, positivists "strive to use valid and reliable methods to describe, predict, and control human behaviour" and also "believe reality exists independent of social context". The positivist approach uses experiments, quasi-experiments, tests and scales (Mackenzie et. al., 2006) to collect statistical data that can be analysed within a scientific and systematic framework; leaving no scope for ambiguity. Positivists within an educational setting very often provide an intervention, and using a quasi-experimental approach to gather data and analyse the results of the intervention. In other words, they are interested in cause and effect and apply

scientific enquiry and objective data analysis to increase the probability of replicating results. This concept of replicability or generalisability is fundamental to positivist research which often aims to generate theories from empirical data (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012).

Therefore, one can suggest that positivists seek statistical data to test theories within a social context. The positivist researcher expects the theory to be proved or disproved regardless of the social context; believing that 'truth' remains static or fixed regardless of the changing social context. As Plack (2005, p. 227) states, "positivists attempt to apply mathematical principles to philosophical thoughts". As Cohen et. al. 2000, p. 8) state, positivism "implies a particular stance concerning the social scientist as an observer of social reality". The rigidity of positivist research is sometimes criticised by interpretivist/constructivist researchers as nuances are often missed (O'Donoghue, 2007). It can be argued that this is especially true in research involving children with SEN where experiences can be considered more relevant than statistical data.

Postpositivist paradigm

Plack (2005, p. 227) suggests that post positivists have "attempted to soften" the approach taken by positivists and, hence, maintain that there are "philosophical distinctions" between positivists and postpositivist paradigms. Creswell (2003, p. 7) concurs that post positivism challenges the "traditional notion of the absolute truth of knowledge" that appears to be the principal tenet of positivism. According to Mertens (2005), this replaced positivism after and differs from positivism in that there can be multiple 'truths' depending on social context. As with positivism, post positivism seeks a scientific method of data collection and objective analysis and therefore favours a quantitative data collection approach. As Creswell (2005, p. 7) states, a researcher using a postpositivist paradigm will have an interest in "developing numerical measures of observations and studying the behaviour of individuals" but also acknowledge that our claims of knowledge cannot be conclusive when measuring the behaviours of humans. Post positivism may be seen as a challenge to positivism, adopting "a pluralist view of multiple, co-existing realities rather than a single reality" (Cohen, Manion et al., 2011, p. 27).

Pragmatic paradigm

Researchers working within a pragmatic paradigm see a problem, try to understand the problem and seek a solution to it. As the problem becomes the focus of the research, the pragmatic researcher will use any approach necessary to find a solution. Therefore, the research question will most likely determine the research approach. They will probably use, what is termed, a mixed methods approach to data collection, drawing equally from qualitative and quantitative data.

Creswell (2003, p. 11) suggests that many researchers adopting a pragmatic stance are more interested in "knowledge claims that arise out of actions,

situations and consequences". They want to gain a greater understanding of the problem and then find a solution using any data methods available in order to find that solution. They also believe that there is more than one reality and want to investigate what works at any one point in time but concede this may change over time. Fundamental to pragmatism is the contention that a question needs to be answered and this may require more than one research method (Arthur, Waring et al., 2012).

Therefore, the pragmatist begins with the research question and asks what research framework can I use to answer this question? Unlike other paradigms that polarise the objective and subjective reality they believe that they can both work together. The pragmatist believes that qualitative and quantitative can work alongside one another to give a better understanding of social reality (Wahyuni, 2012).

In other words, a researcher seeking to answer a complex question that does not neatly lend itself to the use of qualitative or quantitative data collection can be described as having a pragmatic paradigm. This allows the researcher more flexibility with their choice of data collection methods. As Creswell (2003, p. 12) states, "for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism open the door to multiple methods, different world views, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection, and analysis in the mixed methods study".

Research Methods

This part of the research design is concerned with the type of data collection approaches; i.e. qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods approach. As qualitative research is the most commonly used method within educational research the focus here will be on qualitative methods with reference to gaining data within the context of SEN. We will discuss also how qualitative data may be analysed.

Qualitative data

Qualitative research is described by Polkinghorne (2005, p. 137) as "an umbrella term" and by Flick et. al. (2004, p. 5) as a "generic term" for a variety of research approaches that uses narrative to present the research findings. Researchers using qualitative data collection methods are seeking to build a narrative or story to help understand a phenomenon or situation. For this reason, the researcher will undertake research in what Creswell (2003, p. 181) refers to as, "the natural setting". This means that it usually takes place in the participants' work- place; in the case of educational research it often takes place in schools or colleges. Traditionally, data was collected by observations, interviews, examination of documents. However, as Creswell (2003, p. 181) states, there are a variety of new ways of collecting qualitative data, for example, "sounds, emails, scrap books, and now we can conduct online interviews and observations using Zoom, MS Teams and other online platforms". Furthermore, Bogdan et. al. (1992, p. 5) suggests, qualitative data can,

> take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. The data include interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, videotapes, personal documents, memos, and other official records.

From this we can conclude that there is an array of data collection methods within a qualitative approach. This should include methods of gathering data from children with SEN to ensure their voice is evident within the findings. Additionally, there are a number of other strategies linked to the collection of qualitative data, such as ethnographies, grounded theory, case studies, phenomenological and narrative research. These will be discussed here.

Ethnographies

Cohen et. al. (2000, p. 24) describes ethnography as being "concerned with the world of everyday life". For this reason, an ethnographic researcher will immerse themselves in a culture or society in order to study life within that natural setting. The researcher seeks to gain an understanding of how a group live their lives in order to make sense of their existence (Robson, 2002). Data is gathered mainly through observation of daily life in context (Creswell, 2003) and in order to do this Robson (2002, p. 187) suggests that "the researcher is *fully immersed* in the day-to-day lives of the people being studied".

Grounded theory

Robson (2002, p. 90) suggests that "the central aim is to generate theory from data collected during the study". This means that when information is collected in relation to a group or phenomenon then, through analysis, new theories are developed. These new theories are based on the views of participants in the study. Using grounded theory involves collecting data at different stages and comparing data from each stage (Creswell, 2003). Data can be collected using interviews with open-ended questions, observations, focus groups and the study of artefacts and documents (Robson, 2002).

Case Studies

Creswell (2003, p. 15) describes a case study as an investigation whereby the "researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals". Data is collected, over a period of time, using various data collection methods, including interview, observation or document analysis. The focus is on gathering in-depth data from individuals in relation to local situations. The analysis will capture the complexity of behaviour within the organisations or 'case' (Cohen et. al. 2000). Researchers can use a single case study or multiple case study model. There is no one prescribed method of qualitative data analysis for 'case studies'. Robson (2002, p. 473) suggests that the main objective is to "gain an understanding of whatever constitutes the case".

Phenomenological

An important aspect of a phenomenological approach within qualitative data collection is the impact of the researcher's background on the research process. We all approach research in a different way depending on the awareness we have of our own biases, preconceptions and perspectives and how they will influence our research design. Robson (2002, p. 172) cites Ahern (1999) to suggest that a phenomenological approach is, "the ability to put aside personal feelings and preconceptions is more a function of how reflexive one is rather than how objective one is because it is not possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware". As Creswell (2003) explains, the researcher must 'bracket' his or her own life experiences and become fully immersed in the life of the participants before truly understanding the life experiences of the participant. Rahman (2016, p. 104)) cites Wilson, 2004 and Tuohy et. al., 2013) to suggest that a phenomenological approach "attempts to uncover, interpret and understand the participants'' experience. In other words, when taking a phenomenological approach, the researcher must first become aware of, and acknowledge their own preconceptions and biases. Only when they immerse themselves in the lives of the participant can they understand how these preconceptions and biases influence their interpretations of their observations.

Narrative

In narrative research the investigator listens to the life story of an individual or individuals and then organises the story into a chronological account of the participants' life (Creswell, 2003). Here the life experiences of the researcher may impact on how the participant's life story is told, because the story, as told, will intertwine the perspectives of both the teller and the researcher. Therefore, the final iteration of the story will be a collaborative creation of the participants' (story tellers) perspective and the lens through which the researcher views the story.

Methods and special educational needs

In the past number of years there has been increased interest in gaining the perspective of children, including children with SEN. This change of direction within research has been influenced by a rights approach and an evolving social justice approach to meeting the needs of children with SEN. There have been a number of legislative documents such as the Disability Act (2005), Equal Status Act (2000 & 2015) in Ireland and internationally the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989). This has increased awareness among researchers of the need to find methods to assist the involvement of children as equal participants and facilitate the recording of their opinions.

Interviews are the most common data collection method within qualitative research. As the traditional structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews may not be the most effective method to use with children, a number of more 'child friendly' interview methods have been developed. Researchers

have recognised that children with SEN are not a homogenous group and therefore a number of different methods have been developed. Examples of these are Photography (see, Latz, 2017, Harper, 2002); drawings, (see, Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Veale, 2005, Goodall, 2020); Diamond ranking (see, Clark, 2012, Goodall, 2020) and Visual supports (see, Harrington et al., 2013).

Data analysis

When data has been collected the next step is analysis. The way this is done will mainly depend on what type of data has been collected i.e. quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. Data analysis is the process of systematically examining and evaluating data and looking for trends, and themes depending on the type of data collected, i.e. qualitative (usually narrative) or quantitative (usually statistical) data. Data analysis is perhaps the most important component of the research process. Weak analysis produces inaccurate results that not only hamper the authenticity of the research, but also make the findings unusable. It's imperative to choose your data analysis methods carefully to ensure that your findings are insightful and actionable.

Qualitative data analysis methods

It is at this point that a researcher may become over-whelmed by the process of converting raw data into data that can be presented. There are a number of ways qualitative data can be analysed such as inductive, deductive, thematic analysis and these will be discussed here.

Creswell (2003, p. 182) states that "qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive". This means that the researcher interprets the data collected. For example, the researcher will interpret data within the context of the research; with reference to the overall research question, embedded questions, and literature review.

Inductive Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 10-11) suggests that there are three general tasks during qualitative data analysis. These are data reduction, data display and verification. Creswell (2003) breaks these down further into what he describes as six generic steps to qualitative data analysis; these are:

1. organise and prepare data such as transcribing interviews;
2. seek an overall sense of the data, through reading;
3. begin coding through chunking information into categories;
4. description of data by generating themes or categories;
5. representation of themes, sub-themes and their description, usually through narrative text;
6. interpretation, what does the data tell us?

Inductive analysis allows new theories to emerge organically, as the answers to participants' questions are analysed. In other words, new theories are constructed and developed from insights and perceptions of the participants in the study. For this reason, it must be remembered that multiple meanings can be derived from the text depending on the epistemological beliefs of the analyst (Thomas, 2006), therefore multiple 'realities' may emerge.

Deductive Analysis

Deductive Analysis is mostly associated with quantitative data analysis. However, when used in qualitative data analysis, it is used to test a theory, usually emerging from the literature review. The researcher then frames the data collected to prove or disprove their theory. As with inductive analysis multiple meanings can be derived from the data depending on the philosophical lens through which the researcher views the phenomenon or situation under investigation.

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is not recognised as an analytical method but nevertheless, it is one that traverses all methods of qualitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) state "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data". Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) identifies six phases of thematic analysis:

1. Becoming familiar with the data, transcribing, reading and re-reading and making notes;
2. Generating initial codes, highlighting interesting features and collating them systematically across the data;
3. Search for themes, collecting data relevant to each theme;
4. Reviewing themes, do they fit with the initial codes and themes created;
5. Defining and naming themes, identifying the "essence" of what each theme is about;
6. Produce the report, in other words begin writing your analysis.

In other words, the data has to be collected, organised, themes found and coded, find the essence of each theme and begin to write the report. In addition to identifying the 'story' from each theme, it is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall 'story'. This means the 'story' being told by the data, in relation to the research question or questions, to ensure there is not too much overlap between themes. The data analysis used when analysing data from photography, drawings, diamond ranking and other more 'child friendly' data collection has been described by the authors referenced earlier.

Conclusion

The authors have presented a guide to the concepts and terminology in relation to research within an educational context. Firstly, we defined the term research to ensure a shared understanding, then went on to explain the various steps along the research journey. Research, we concluded is the gathering of data or information in order to answer a question or prove or disprove a hypothesis. We discussed the initial step of completing a literature review, to help ascertain what has previously been written on the researcher's chosen topic; in other words, articulate our theoretical framework. The discussion on the research paradigm included a discussion on epistemology and ontology and how these philosophical assumptions or beliefs influence the researcher's paradigm or positionality. This led on to a discussion on types of research paradigms and data collection methods used within educational research, including data collection methods commonly used with children. Finally, we discussed the various qualitative data analysis methods. It is hoped that this paper has demystified some of the concepts and terminology associated with research undertaken within educational settings and provided signposts for undertaking research within a SEN context.

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