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Education

Papers

A Special Edition of the Trinity Education Papers series, arising from a one-day conference in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin.

Series editors: Dr. Aidan Seery, Dr. Andrew Loxley, Prof. Michael Grenfell

Special Edition editors: Dr. Fiona Smyth & Dr. Michael Shevlin

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FOREWORD

This Special Edition of the Trinity Education Papers represents a selection of the research reported at a one-day conference in the School of Education in 2012, entitled Examining Theory & Practice in Inclusive Education. The keynote speaker on the day, Professor Mel Ainscow, has provided the first paper which introduces the edition and the contributions of School of Education staff, doctoral students, and their research colleagues inside and outside of TCD.

The one-day conference was a timely opportunity for participants to be updated on some of the latest Irish research in the area of inclusion, and to reflect on the challenges that face educators, particularly in a time of economic recession. The event was organised by the Inclusion in Education and Society research group and saw the launch of the new Psychology of Education research group. Strong interest in conference themes drew delegates from the fields of educational policy, practice and research.

Probing theory and practice, concepts around inclusion, and describing a range of investigations in to pressing issues in the field, the work-in-progress contributions of the School of Education staff and their colleagues from the Disability Service at TCD, the ESRI, and Stranmillis University College, make for diverse and compelling reading. The papers from our doctoral students showcase the important research questions and innovative research approaches they have tackled over the course of their studies, producing key insights as well as a range of practical tools for educational practitioners. Their study areas have ranged from early intervention to higher education and onwards to employment.

While this Special Edition is a one-off, similar single topic editions may occasionally arise in the Trinity Education Papers series.

Fiona Smyth and Michael Shevlin, September, 2013

MAKING SENSE OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Mel Ainscow

Centre for Equity in Education
University of Manchester

Introduction

The papers in this volume focus on what can be regarded as the major challenge facing education systems throughout the world, that of finding ways of reaching out to all children and young people. In economically poorer countries this is mainly about finding ways of including the estimated 70 million children who are not in school. Meanwhile, in wealthier countries many young people leave school with no worthwhile qualifications, others are placed in various forms of special provision away from mainstream educational experiences, and some simply choose to drop out since the lessons seem irrelevant to their lives. Faced with these challenges, recent years have seen an increased interest in the idea of inclusive education. However, the field remains confused as to what this means, and what it implies for policy and practice.

In this introductory paper I try to make sense of this complexity, drawing on international developments. In so doing, I hope to provide readers with an overall framework for reading the papers that follow, whilst also challenging them to think about their own perspectives.

Confusion in the field

The confusion that exists within the field internationally arises, in part at least, from the fact that the idea of inclusive education is defined in a variety of ways. It is not surprising, therefore, that progress remains disappointing in many countries. For example, a recent analysis of national education plans from the Asia region notes that the idea of inclusive education was not even mentioned. In fact, special schools and residential hostels were often put forward as a strategy for meeting the needs of a wide range of disadvantaged students, and non-formal education was seen as the response to many marginalised groups. This is a worrying trend, especially given the negative

effects of institutionalisation on vulnerable groups of children in under-resourced contexts (United Nations, 2005).

It is also important to note that, even in the developed world, not all educationalists have embraced the inclusive philosophy and some are resistant to the idea (Brantlinger, 1997). Indeed, some disability-focused groups still argue for separate, 'specialist' services. Most notably, many organisations of deaf people argue that separate eeducational provision is the only way of guaranteeing their right to education in the medium of sign language and their access to deaf culture (Freire & César, 2003). Meanwhile, the development of small specialist units located within the standard school environment is seen by some in the field as a way of providing specialist knowledge, equipment and support to particular groups of children whose needs are perceived to be difficult to accommodate in mainstream classrooms.

Consequently, as we consider the way forward, it is important to recognise that the field of inclusive education is riddled with uncertainties, disputes and contradictions. Yet throughout the world attempts are being made to provide more effective educational responses for all children, whatever their characteristics or circumstances, and the overall trend is towards making these responses within the context of general educational provision (see the special edition of the European Journal of Psychology of Education, December 2006 for accounts of international developments). As a c onsequence, this is leading to a reconsideration of the future roles and purposes of practitioners throughout the education system, including those who work in special education. And, of course, this has major implications for the direction of national policies and the development of practice in the field.

Defining inclusion
Experience had taught us that many different views of inclusion exist in the field and that there is no one perspective on inclusion within a single country or even within one school (Booth and Ainscow 1998). Consequently, within our research, my colleagues and I have felt it important to find out more

about how policy makers, administrators and teachers talk about inclusion. This led us to formulate the following typology of six ways of ways of thinking about inclusion:

1. Inclusion as a concern with disabled students and others categorised as 'having special educational needs'.
2. Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusion
3. Inclusion in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion
4. Inclusion as developing the school for all
5. Inclusion as 'Education for All'
6. Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society

(Ainscow, Booth & Dyson, 2006)

In what follows, I summarise these six approaches and offer a commentary on their possible implications.

Inclusion as concerned with disability and 'special educational needs'.
There is a common assumption that inclusion is primarily about educating disabled students, or those categorised as 'having special educational needs', in mainstream schools. The usefulness of such an approach has been questioned, however, since that in attempting to increase the participation of students it focuses on a 'disabled' or 'special needs' part of them, and ignores all the other ways in which participation for any student may be impeded or enhanced.

However, in rejecting a view of inclusion tied to special educational needs there is a danger that attention is deflected from the continued segregation of disabled students, or, indeed, students otherwise categorised as having special educational needs. Inclusion can be seen to involve the assertion of the rights of disabled young people to a local mainstream education, a view vociferously propounded by some disabled people. Where people see placement in special schools as a neutral response to 'need' they may argue that some children are best served in special settings. However, a rights perspective invalidates such arguments. Thus, compulsory segregation is seen to contribute to the oppression of disabled people, just as other practices

marginalise groups on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation.

At the same time, there is concern about the significant effect that categorisation of students has within education systems. In particular, the practice of segregation within special schools, involves a relatively small number of students (for example, approximately 1.3% in England), yet it exerts a disproportionate influence within education systems. It seems to perpetuate a view that some students 'need' to be segregated because of their deficiency or defect.

The special educational needs view of educational difficulty remains the dominant perspective in most countries (Mittler, 2000). It absorbs difficulties that arise in education for a wide variety of reasons within the frame of individual defect.

Inclusion as a response to disciplinary exclusions.
If inclusion is most commonly seen as associated with children categorised as 'having special educational needs', then in many countries its connection to 'bad behaviour' comes a close second. Thus, at the mention of the word 'inclusion', some within schools become fearful that it means that they are to be immediately asked to take on disproportionate numbers of behaviourally 'difficult' students.

It has been argued that disciplinary exclusion cannot be understood without being connected with the events and interactions that precede it, the nature of relationships, and the approaches to teaching and learning in a school (Booth, 1996). Even at the level of simple measurement, the figures for formal disciplinary exclusion mean little when separated from numbers for informal disciplinary exclusions, for example by sending children home for an afternoon, truancy rates and the categorisation of students as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. In this respect the informal exclusion of school-age girls who become pregnant, who may be discouraged from continuing at school, continues to distort perceptions of the gender composition in the official exclusion figures in some countries.

Inclusion as about all groups vulnerable to exclusion.
There is an increasing trend for exclusion in education to be viewed more broadly in terms of overcoming discrimination and disadvantage in relation to any groups vulnerable to exclusionary pressures (Mittler, 2000). In some countries this broader perspective is associated with the terms 'social inclusion' and 'social exclusion'. When used in an educational context, social inclusion tends to refer to issues for groups whose access to schools is under threat, such as girls who become pregnant or have babies while at school, looked-after children (i.e. those in the care of public authorities) and gypsy/travellers. Yet commonly, the language of social inclusion and exclusion comes to be used more narrowly to refer to children who are (or are in danger of being) excluded from schools and classrooms because of their 'behaviour'.

This broader use of the language of inclusion and exclusion is, therefore, somewhat fluid. It seems to hint that there may be some common processes which link the different forms of exclusion experienced by, say, children with disabilities, children who are excluded from their schools for disciplinary reasons, and people living in poor communities. There seems, therefore, to be an invitation to explore the nature of these processes and their origins in social structures.

Inclusion as the promotion of a school for all.
A rather different strand of thinking about inclusion relates it to the development of the common school for all, or comprehensive school, and the construction of approaches to teaching and learning within it. In the UK, for example, the term 'comprehensive school' is generally used in the context of secondary education and was established as a reaction to a system which allocated children to different types of school on the basis of their attainment at age 11, reinforcing existing social-class-based inequalities.

The comprehensive school movement in England, like the Folkeskole tradition in Denmark, the 'common school' tradition in the USA, and in Portugal with the unified compulsory education system, is premised on the desirability of creating a single type of 'school for all', serving a socially

diverse community. However, the emphasis on one school for all can be double edged. In Norway, for example, the idea of 'the school for all' was as much about creating an independent singular Norwegian identity as it was to do with the participation of people within diverse communities. So while, in Norway, the strong emphasis on education for local communities facilitated the disbanding of segregated special institutions, it was not followed by an equally strong movement to reform the common school to embrace and value difference. As in some other countries, there was an emphasis on assimilating those perceived to be different into a homogeneous normality, rather than transformation through diversity.

Inclusion as Education for All.
The issue of inclusion is increasingly evident within international debates. The 'Educational for All' (EFA) movement was created in the 1990s around a set of international policies, mainly co-ordinated by UNESCO, to do with increasing access to, and participation within education, across the world. It was given impetus by two major   international conferences held in Jomtien, 1990, and Dakar, 2000.

While many within this movement appear to identify education with schooling, thinking about education within some of the poorest regions of the world provides an opportunity to rethink schools as one amongst a number of means for developing education within communities. In response to the failure of many countries to meet the targets set a decade earlier, the organisers of the Dakar conference sought to emphasise particular areas where progress mightbe made, and focused attention, in particular, on the disproportionate numbers of girls around the world denied educational opportunities. Disabled people and their allies were very concerned about the way they appeared to be pushed down the priority order for participation in the Educational for All declaration (UNESCO, 2000). This was despite the apparent progress that had been made in drawing attention to the possibilities for an education system inclusive of all children, specifically including disabled children.

Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society.
In our own work we have defined inclusive education in a different way, one that emphasises the transformation of schools in response to learner diversity. This perspective is far more radical, not least in the way it challenges those within education systems to rethink the way they carry out their business.

Broadly stated, our approach to inclusion involves:
- A process of increasing the participation of students in, and reducing their exclusion from, the curricula, cultures and communities of local schools;
- Restructuring the cultures, policies and practices in schools so that they respond to the diversity of students in their locality
- The presence, participation and achievement of all students vulnerable to exclusionary pressures, not only those with impairments or those who are categorised as 'having special educational needs'.

Several features of this definition are significant for policy and practice. Specifically: inclusion is concerned with all children and young people in schools; it is focused on presence, participation and achievement; inclusion and exclusion are linked together, such that inclusion involves the active combating of exclusion; and inclusion is seen as a never-ending process. Thus an inclusive school is one that is on the move, rather than one that has reached a perfect state.

Among the drawbacks of such a view, is that it identifies education with schooling, whereas we view a school as only one of the sites of education within communities. In this sense, we see the role of schools as supporting the education of communities, not to monopolise it. We also emphasise the significance of the participation of staff, parents/carers and other community members. It seems to us that we will not get very far in supporting the participation and learning of all students if we reject their identities and family backgrounds, or if we choose not to encourage the participation of staff in schools in decisions about teaching and learning activities. We also seek to connect inclusion/exclusion in education, more broadly with

including and excluding pressures within society.

Moving policy and practice forward
The ideas that led us to see inclusive education as a principled approach to education arose from our research in many places, over many years (Ainscow, 2013). They led us to promote an approach to inclusive development that emphasises the importance of analyzing contexts. The aim is to understand why some children are missing out and to mobilise those involved in working together to address the difficulties these learners are facing (Ainscow et al, 2012).

This way of thinking has had a significant impact on international policy developments over the last twenty years or so, in part because of my nvolvement as a consultant to UNESCO. Specifically, it influenced the conceptualisation of the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). Arguably the most significant international document that has ever appeared in the special needs field, the Statement argues that regular schools with an inclusive orientation are 'the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all'. The approach also framed the UNESCO teacher education project, 'Special Needs in the Classroom', which led to developments in over 80 countries (Ainscow, 1999). And, more recently, it informed the conceptual framework for the 48th session of the UNESCO/International Bureau of Education International-al Conference, 'Inclusive education: the way of the future', held in 2008, and attended by Ministers of Education and officials from 153 countries (Ainscow & Miles, 2008).

Moving beyond policy statements, however, the practical implications of these proposals are, as I have suggested, deeply challenging to thinking and practice in both mainstream schools and special provision. The complex nature of these challenges is well illustrated in the 'Index for Inclu-sion' (Booth and Ainscow, 2012). Developed originally for use in England, the Index is a set of school review materials that has been refined as a result of over ten years of collaborative action research in many countries (see The

International Journal of Inclusive Education, volume 8 number 2, for articles about some of these developments). It enables schools to draw on the knowledge and views of staff, students, parents/carers, and community representatives about barriers to learning and participation that exist within their existing 'cultures, policies and practices' in order to identify priorities for change.

In connecting inclusion with the detail of policy and practice, the Index encourages those who use it to build up their own view of inclusion, related to their experience and values, as they work out what policies and practices they wish to promote or discourage. Such an approach is based upon the idea that inclusion is essentially about attempts to embody particular values in particular contexts. In other words, it is school improvement with attitude.

A final thought

The papers in this volume are focused mainly on the context of Ireland. In drawing on experiences from other parts of the world my hope is that readers will be challenged to read these papers with a more critical eye. In particular, I would hope that they will seek to analyse the ideas behind the ideas the authors present, looking specifically at their assumptions about what inclusive education means and what it implies for thinking and practice in the field. At the same time, I hope this will challenge readers to think about their own perspectives.

Note: My colleagues Tony Booth and Alan Dyson made significant contributions to the arguments presented in this paper.

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PSYCHOLOGY AND INCLUSION: Caught between Theory and Practice?

Michael Grenfell

School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

This article addresses issues of theory and practice. It locates itself within the context of the academic disciplines of inclusion and psychology. It argues that both areas raise issues of theory and practice, but the latter are often seen as antagonistic to each other: that there is a natural 'rightness' about issues with respect to inclusion which results in research into it often being under-theorised; similarly, and somewhat from a countervailing position, as psychology of education defines itself as one of the 'foundation' disciplines and bases itself on a developed canon of theoretical literature, the practical implications of research into its processes often gets overlooked.

The article proposes a model where practice is placed at the centre of concerns. Educational Theory, it is argued, originating in the Normative Sciences, provides Justifying Educational Principles of practice. However, it also argues that teachers, in the very practice of teaching, develop their own 'Tacit Knowledge', which also needs to be understood as inherently 'theoretical'. This is termed 'Pre-Theoretical Knowledge'. Articulations of such knowledge provide us with 'Fundamental Educational Theory' (FET), as a phenomenological realisation of the generating structures of practice. Finally, as rich as this FET is, it is necessary that appropriate connections with the aforementioned 'Justifying Educational Principles' and normative sciences be made, so that the relevancy of the latter can be tested against practice but, also, so that empirical practice can be constituted in the light of knowledge objectivity about education formed within its own critical community. The article amounts to a call for a more diversified view of theory and its location within identifiable structural relations to practice.

Introduction

This article considers issues of theory and practice in the light of such disciplinary areas as psychology and inclusion. Psychology, of course, has a

long history as a 'scientific' discipline; whilst inclusion is a contemporary domain, including concerns with such issues as equality and widening participation. The traditional claim to science that Psychology makes is predicated on the premise that it studies the workings of the human brain. Inclusion, alternatively, is often seen as being more preoccupied with questions of actual policy, equity and practice. My main argument is that both are saturated by issues of theory and practice, and thus need to be challenged in these terms in order to establish their status and usefulness within a modern field of educational research. I want to do this through an exploration of just what we mean by Theory and Practice, and the nature of their relationship.

Educational Theory and Practice

Of all the oppositions that artificially divide education, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between theory and practice. The very fact that this division constantly reappears in educational debates in virtually the same form would suffice to indicate that the forms of knowledge that it distinguishes are equally indispensable to an educational practice that cannot be reduced either to everyday common pedagogic sense or a science of teaching. It is an opposition, which continues to haunt education research and practice to this day. We might see the same dichotomy in the divide which marks psychology and inclusion. Unarguably, inclusion and widening participation are a good thing in practice; whilst psychology as an academic discipline strives to obtain scientific facts about learning and teaching and develop theory about them.

Without stereotyping the two camps, we might sum up the theoretical side as a search for the key to understanding learning and teaching through refined explanations of classroom processes; these often originate in the natural sciences – including sociology and philosophy as well as psychology. Whilst those on the 'practical side' often eschew any form of research or theory because it is perceived as undermining the reality of teacher experience and pupil learning. Thomas (2007) describes theory as a virus, apparently infecting everything that it comes across, a statement which somewhat reflects the populist view of teaching and learning that has become

fashionable in the UK as only being all about classroom practice - about which theory can have little to say . For many years, educational theory and educational practice kept their distance. Up to the 1960s, teaching was seen more as a vocation and a craft, where traditional values and common sense acted as the best guide for what went on in the classroom. When educational research did take place, the educational context was often incidental to the professional interests of the researchers involved, interests that often originated in the 'natural', or special sciences: for example, psychology. We might express the relationship as follows:

CONCRETE
PRACTICE

NORMATIVE
SCIENTIFIC
THEORY
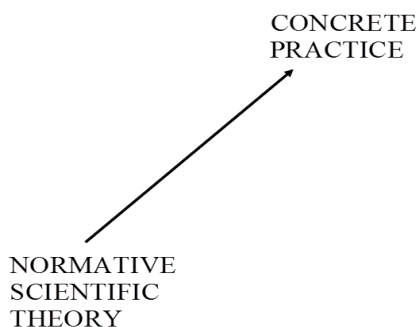
Figure 1: A Direct Relationship between Theory and Practice

Here, the relationship was direct, linear and one-way. Such psychological tests as IQ and cognitive style are good examples of this. The onus here was often on psychometric testing, statistics, and behavioural science. So, O'Connor's (1957) view of educational theory in the 1950s amounted to seeing theory in terms of the dominant normative scientific paradigm: thus as a way of forming, evaluating, and connecting hypotheses in order to explain particular educational phenomena. For O'Connor, 'educational theory' needed to be judged by the same standards as 'scientific theory'.

The leading exponent of 'scientific theory' has, of course, been the Austrian Karl Popper (see 1967), who argued that the strength and the descriptive power of any theoretical statement lay not in proving it 'correct' but by the

degree to which it could be 'falsified'; in other words, that it could generate statements that could be shown to be wrong. Everything else was supposition – worst myth. For Popper, knowledge advanced as hypotheses were falsified, leading to further refined hypotheses. Clearly, not many things in the classroom have a degree of certainty or uncertainty that would satisfy the Popperian criteria: what occurs there rarely has descriptive rigor against which underlying processes can be assessed; rarely is predictive with any degree of confidence.

The philosopher Paul Hirst (see 1966) noticed this in the mid-1960s and, with his subsequent arguments, laid the basis of what we now know as the 'foundation disciplines' (Sociology, History, Psychology and Philosophy).

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                    CONCRETE
                    PRACTICE
                       /
                      /
                   JUSTIFYING
                   EDUCATIONAL
                   PRINCIPLES
                     /
                    /
              NORMATIVE
              SCIENCES including
          Foundation Disciplines
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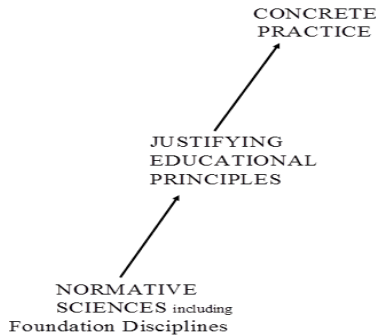
Figure 2: The Mediation of Justifying Educational Principles

For him, it was not so much that 'educational theory' could not match 'scientific theory' but that the latter misrepresented and undervalued the place of theory in education. For Hirst, educational theory could provide 'principles of practice' for education through a deeper grasp of the nature of learning, the values, which underpinned it, and the background context in which it took place. Just as physics and chemistry drew on mathematics to develop theoretical positions, so educational theory could draw on foundational disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, history and sociology to develop an appreciation of what to do in practice. It did this by providing principles, which could be justified according to the findings and rationale of

such disciplines. In other words theory's role was to tell practice what to do. Two important features emerge from this discussion: firstly, the contested nature of theory; secondly, the way it can operate in the field to determine actual educational practice. Nonetheless, this form of theoretical knowledge is not the only type of knowledge operating in classrooms and educational contexts. A more complex, if highly abstract view of theory, that of the German social philosopher Jurgen Habermas, shows that this view of knowledge is only partial. For Habermas, one form of knowledge was indeed 'normative,' what he termed 'nomothetical' (see Habermas 1987,1989). However, this type of knowledge was to be contrasted with other forms, such as the 'critical' and the 'hermeneutic' – the former revealed underlying socio -political processes, whilst the latter took account of 'subjective knowledge'. A key point for Habermas was that one form of knowledge was not necessarily better than another, but that each disclosed different so-called interests. So, whilst 'nomothetical' knowledge supported the formation of generalisable rules as its outcome, the 'critical' addressed the social and political potential of knowledge. Alternatively, the 'hermeneutic' under-pinned experiential and interpretative knowledge. Clearly, all of these can be applied in an educational context, where not all questions can or should be reduced to the instrumentality of teaching and learning from a technicist point of view. With this, it is no longer the case that theory simply 'tells practice what to do', but that 'practice' actively engages with theory from a critical perspective. Teachers do operate in classrooms according to principles which themselves are based on theoretical perspectives, as shown in the diagram 2. However, the process depicted in diagram 2 omits an important aspect of educational practice: teachers' own rationale for their classroom actions, which are most often generated from their own past (practical) experience. Much of this knowledge is fragmented, intuitive, affective, holistic and highly contextual. For this reason, it is termed 'tacit knowledge' (Polyani 1998, p. 58) - that practical 'horse-sense' that is the prerogative of the experienced practitioner.

It is worth pausing now to consider the nature of this 'tacit' knowledge from a theoretical perspective. Polyani writes that an "act of knowing exercises a personal judgement in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of

which (s)he is seeking to apprehend" (1998, p. 24-25). As stated, such tacit knowledge is essentially intuitive and subjective. As it emerges from practice, it is also contingent on a practical context to be re-activated at a particular point in time. In some respects, it is the very opposite to Popper's objective, or world 3, knowledge without a knowing subject, since it is, in fact, subjective, world 2, knowledge, with only a knowing subject. This type of knowledge could be seen as almost being 'pre-theoretical'. Such a statement implies a level of subjectivity that might seem unstable, hyper relative, and even arbitrary. This is not the case with tacit knowledge which is based on a practitioner's experience and therefore, has an internal coherence based on an individual's classroom practice, but articulated to varying degrees.

One way of elucidating this point is to return to the nature, or characteristics, of theory itself. Popper emphasises the predictive quality of theory, but that is not its only attribute. Theory must also be understood in terms of its other essential features. Theory is a reduction: it must express something complex in a simpler form. Theory is intended to be useful: neither a theory that expresses the obvious, nor one that is too obscure to be of much use in a practical context. Moreover, a theory must be expressible and readily articulated: it must not be just a hunch, because it must be communicated from one person to another. Finally, a theory must have some degree of coherence and regularity. In other words, it must pertain to more than a single event. Tacit knowledge, as I have described it, shares many of these characteristics; in that it is useful, generalisable, coherent and a reduction of complexity. In this respect, if tacit knowledge is not exactly 'theoretical' from a Popperian, scientific point of view, it does share many of the features of such theory. This type of theory, which reflects articulated tacit knowledge, will be referred to as 'Fundamental Educational Theory' (see Vandenberg, 1974), as shown in Diagram 3. It is 'fundamental' since it is still highly personal and contingent; 'educational' since it pertains to classroom practice; and 'theoretical' in that it shares the theoretical features outlined in the last paragraph. The next step in this investigation of educational knowledge is to consider these different types of theory in relationship to one another as a continuum in a single diagram.

CONCRETE
PRACTICES

PRACTITIONER'S
PRE-THEORETICAL
UNDERSTANDING

JUSTIFYING
EDUCATIONAL
PRINCIPLES

FUNDAMENTAL
EDUCATIONAL
THEORY

KNOWLEDGE FROM
THE NORMATIVE
SCIENCES

APPROPRIATE
PHILOSOPHICAL
RESOURCES
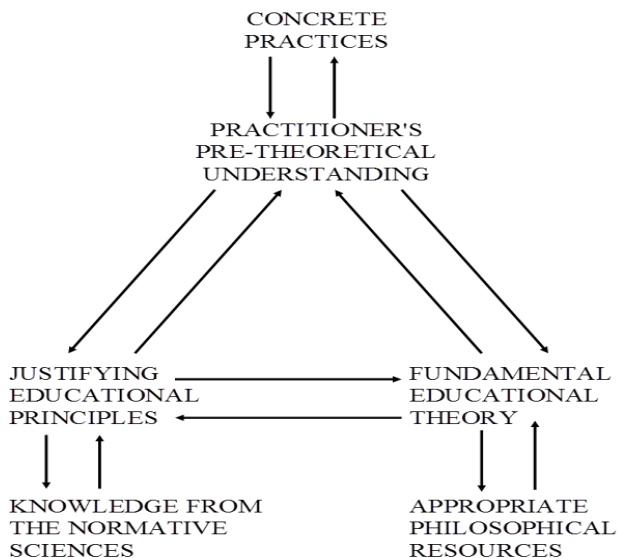
Figure 3: Relationships between Different Types of Knowledge (Based on Vandenberg 1974)

Each theoretical area in diagram 3 (figure 3: relationships between different types of knowledge) is distinct but inter-related. In other words, the different types of knowledge under discussion are represented in terms of their relational rather than their substantive nature. In this respect, they are dependent on time and place and on specific interactions. We might therefore conclude that the 'triangle' is a representation of the variety of relationships, which exist between theory and practice.

Psychology and Inclusion: From Practice to Theory and from Theory to Practice
As hinted at above, it often seems as if a discipline such as psychology suffers from too much theory and not enough: too much in the many fragmented approaches that borrow from its name (psycholinguistics, social psychology, psychoanalysis, etc.); not enough in taking account of the full scope of practice that might inform its investigations (including the social,

philosophical and historical).Vygotsky (1962, 1978) is one psychologist who attempted to integrate the intra-psychological with the inter-psychology, and probably has suffered over- exposure and misinterpretation because of it. To this extent, psychology is often trapped in the left hand side of the diagram above and keeps itself apart from other normative sciences. Here, a favoured research method is the questionnaire and it is seen as self-evidently enough to record the psychometric facts of psychological life. If we turn to inclusion, I would argue, again as suggested above, that it sometimes adopts a 'common sense approach', where it assumes that policies of inclusion and equity are necessarily a good thing and an end in itself. In its extreme forms, those involved with this sub-field get trapped at the top of the diagram. Not only is practice best, it is all there is, leaving areas of behaviour wholly under -theorised. Research conducted here can become a form of advocacy instead of building towards a body of evidence within a critical (scientific) research community.

We need a 'theory of practice' that links research to actual practice, which can form policies of practice, and which is congruent both with the research-er and the researched.

Here, both the researched - teachers and their pupils –and the researchers themselves are implicated in the research activity and in how its findings are constructed. In other words, it is necessary to see the triangle both in terms of the object of research and the practice of the researcher themselves. On the right hand side of the triangle, a form of knowledge is represented which is predicated on an explicit expression of knowledge formed in prac-tice - an articulation of tacit knowledge itself. The best way of describing and supporting such a process as theoretical is with recourse to philosophical resources based around phenomenology. Fundamental Educational Theory is therefore to be understood in terms of an imminent reflection on practice where, in Husserlian terms, the noema is expressed through an engagement with an individual noetic event. This is what tells us what we know intuitively about such an event at that point in time. In contrast, if we look at the left hand side of the triangle, educational theory, or principles of practice, provide a stable objectification of what we know about a particular research

object – for example inclusion, special needs, etc. As noted above, this knowledge itself is formed on the basis of the natural sciences, aspects of which are normative. It is 'theoretical' to the extent that it conforms to the type of characteristics outlined: generalisability, articulated, useful, simplified and predictable. This knowledge source informs and is informed by practice. However, it is formed at some theoretical distance from practice and takes little account of tacit knowledge.

Diagram 3 demonstrates the inter-relationships between three distinctive types of knowledge – tacit knowledge, fundamental educational theory and justified educational principles and shows the theoretical underpinnings for each as justification for regarding theory and practice in this particular way.

From a more ethnographic perspective, the sides of the triangle might be described as 'application' – left hand - and 'understanding' – right hand. (see also Gitlin, Siegel and Boru, 1989). As argued, the left and the right sides of the triangle respectively represent knowledge which mirrors both objective and subjective knowledge. They therefore conform to a type of structural understanding, as being both 'structured' and 'structuring'. Here, the ambition is towards a science that seeks to go beyond th e opposition of these two to a synthesis, so that a new form of praxeological understanding can be constructed out of research activity. In this way, the horizontal arrowed lines provide links at the bottom of the triangle - between left and right; objective and subjective; nomothetical and phenomenological. In other words, nomo-thetical knowledge - Justifying Educational Principles - must connect with Fundamental Educational Knowledge, and vice versa, all whilst both of these take account of practice as represented by Tacit Knowledge. The triangle is, therefore, to be seen as dynamic which expresses both discrete items within the theory-practice continuum, and their constantly changing inter-relationships.

In its abstract form, the triangle represented in diagram 3 awaits practical application to the real world. Indeed, we might see its application as the 'return of the repressed' to the construction of the object of our research; namely the actuality of agency and context – the people and the places. In

Bourdieusian terms, this would be articulated through the lens of habitus and field (see Grenfell, 2012). It is particularly important at the practice end of the triangle where practice occurs in a field context that is both structuring and structured. The most obvious examples of this are the material spaces of classrooms, their physicality and ideational structures, for example, the logic of practice enshrined in curricula and actualised in classroom pedagogy. A classroom is open to a full field analysis and at the same time, the agents involved – teachers and pupils – who come with their own backgrounds, attitudes and experiences can be studied in terms of constituents of habitus at play. What happens in the classroom for teaching and learning happens at the interface of this habitus and this field context. The triangle can therefore be actualised socio-genetically.

If we are exploring educational research, we need to do it both in terms of theory and practice, as represented in different sites of activity and in terms of the habitus-field interface being played out in those sites. For the top of the triangle, this may be actual classroom practice and teachers' and students' habitus. However, on the left side, activity is to be accounted for in terms of the structures of the academic field in question and the habitus of those involved in it – the researchers and academics.

Acknowledgement of this amounts to a reflexive stance, about which more in the next chapter. It is also possible to see the academic activity of research as the object researched, here at the top of the triangle – as a practice – and therefore as a source of both objective principles formed within the established field and Fundamental Theory as an expression of personal tacit knowledge with respect to the academic object under study. Both of these forms of theory will necessarily reflect the interests of the field itself, and any consequent biases. For Bourdieu, all this would be articulated through a field analysis which would, ipso facto, include detail of the way that individuals' habitus supports particular position taking and differing degrees of dominance within the particular social environment.

Conclusion
This article began with an expressed concern to rethink areas such as

nclusion and psychology in terms of theory and practice, and with the expressed charge that there was a danger in areas of research, which were under theorised or too narrowly empirical. One the one side, there is a tendency to take a 'common sensical view of what is right about the inclusive classroom; whilst on the other side, statistical and psychometric research which records incidence are seen as an end in themselves. The risk is that researchers go native in identifying their interests with those they research, and not relativise their work in social and historical terms. Here, advocacy replaces science, and researchers 'go native' in the field without sufficient theoretical tools to objectify the processes in which they are involved. Social narratives of equity and justice are just as dangerous as theoretical reifications if treated as simply necessarily good. Or, description is equated with explanation. The result of this approach to research is policy which is justified simply on humanistic terms.

What I have argued for in exploring theory and practice, and the relationship between the two, is an approach to research that is theoretically robust and rigorous, whilst being true to the authenticity of actual educational practice. At the end of the day, this discussion has highlighted, it is all a question of perspective; but not one that is uni-dimensional but is always relational in seeing one view with respect to another. Psychology can be 'socialised' and the social expressed in terms of its psychological constructivism. To work in this way is bound to develop better educational research; all the more better to inform educational policy.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RESEARCH: Evidence from Growing Up in Ireland

Joanne Banks*, Selina McCoy and Michael Shevlin
Economic and Social Research Institute and
School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

There is a new policy emphasis on inclusive education which means that more students with special educational needs (SEN) are being placed in mainstream education instead of special schools. Despite these changes little is known about the nature and characteristics of this group of children and there is little understanding of how they fare in mainstream schools. Using data available from the large scale and nationally representative Growing Up in Ireland study of nine year olds we can now provide much-needed insights into the experiences of children with SEN in mainstream primary schools. This paper provides an overview of recent research on children with SEN in mainstream schools. Findings show that 1 in 4 children in Irish primary schools have some form of SEN with strong gender differences and a clear social gradient in special needs prevalence. The research explores issues in the over-identification of SEN among some groups of students particularly boys from low-income families. In relation to the well-being and school engagement among children with SEN further analysis shows that 1 in 8 children with SEN 'never like school'. This suggests that children with SEN, and in particular those with learning difficulties, face barriers in engaging with school.

Introduction

The multi-dimensional, dynamic and contested nature of special educational needs (SEN) may make it inherently difficult to measure. Where this term is used its meaning varies not only by country and culture but also from person to person within the same family or social group (Leonardi et al. 2004) and over time (Powell, 2010). Variations in definition may lead to significant discrepancies within data with implications for both prevalence estimates and

related information about children. It is argued however that many countries simply lack any up-to-date, reliable quantitative data to inform planning and provision for children with SEN (Blackburn, 2010). Similarly in Ireland, there is a lack of consistency in the data collected on children with special educational needs with much variation in prevalence estimates between government departments and relevant organisations. Furthermore the nature of the data collected has meant that analysis of the characteristics or experiences of this group of children has been limited. This paper aims to contribute to this information gap by reporting on a number of studies stemming from analysis of a national, representative, cross-sectional survey, Growing Up in Ireland. This new data about over 8,578 nine-year-old children provides an opportunity to combine data from two sets of key informants (parents and teachers) to estimate the prevalence of SEN and disability in addition to exploring the characteristics of this group of children compared to their peers in mainstream educational settings. The findings provide valuable insights into the factors influencing SEN identification in primary schools and the ways in which students with a broad range of SEN and disability experience school.

Prevalence of SEN

It is no surprise that across European countries significant variations exist in the number of learners in compulsory education identified as having a SEN. These discrepancies can be seen in the data collected by international organisations which gather country-level information from either administrative systems designed for the purpose of allocating resources or other sources such as longitudinal or cohort surveys which provide data on those identified with SEN and disability but not necessarily receiving support (EADSNE, 2003). Caution is therefore needed in interpreting individual country prevalence estimates which range from 17.8% in Finland to 0.9% in Greece (Riddell et al., 2006; Eurydice in Meijer et al., 2003; EADSNE, 2003, p.9). Similar difficulties exist in Ireland, where international estimates for SEN prevalence gathered by organisations such as EADSNE are based on government administrative data which gathers information on the number of children with SEN in receipt of supports at school rather than the number with an identified SEN. The data are collected by the Department of

Education and Skills and the National Council for Special Education and forms the basis of funding, applications and grant payments. Other data sources include the Census of Population or National Disability Survey which gather information on the population with a disability. The National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD) and the National Physical and Sensory Database (NPSD) also supply important information on people with specific intellectual and physical/sensory disabilities who are assessed or need a disability service (O'Donovan, 2010). Across this selection of data sources prevalence estimate vary widely from 3.5% (National Disability Survey, 2008) to 17% (DES, 2009). Difficulties in comparing data on children with SEN have, in recent years, been further complicated by the introduction of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN, 2004). This Act introduced a broader definition of SEN than previous legislation and has had major implications for the numbers of children estimated to have SEN. Based on an interpretation of the EPSEN Act, the term SEN now includes a broad range of difficulties ranging from physical, sensory, mental health or learning disabilities or 'any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition' (EPSEN, 2004).

Issues in Identifying SEN

It is generally accepted that the identification of special educational needs is not a straightforward process and that there are tensions and complexities that must be recognised (Griffin and Shevlin, 2007). In addition to difficulties around the concept of SEN, further problems in data collection arise in relation to classification systems used by governments and agencies to collect data. A constitutive process of much educational, bureaucratic and political work, many researchers argue against the use of (often outdated) terminology and SEN categorical systems in both between and within countries analyses. Much of the concern relates to the impact of categories in shaping individual identities and impacting on educational and social experiences of the child. Such official categories as 'learning disabilities' often become labels that distinguish individuals (Powell, 2010). Florian, Hollenweger, Simeonsson, Weddell, Riddell, Terzi, and Holland (2006), for example, observe that children placed in the same disability category may

have very different learning needs, and that there is a risk that assigning a particular label or category to a child can lead to stereotypes and consequent lowered expectations for these children. Furthermore, it is argued that data collection classification systems inevitably shape the range of responses by research participants. The willingness of parents and teachers, for example, to identify children is often shaped by their own definition of SEN and disability generally and their perceptions of the difficulties of the child. Researchers and educators have also been concerned about the relationship between individual students' characteristics (such as socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity) and the prevalence of specific types of special educational needs among certain groups of socially marginalised children, for whom SEN identification may lead to further stigmatisation and isolation (Dyson and Kozleski, 2008; Network of Experts in Social Science Education and training (NESSE), 2012). Studies have highlighted how children from working class backgrounds or those living in areas of social deprivation are much more likely to be identified as having special educational needs (Keslair and McNally, 2009). These patterns become more apparent where studies have explored the types of SEN or disabilities which are over-represented. Normative difficulties such as hearing impairment and physical or motor impairment are only slightly more likely to be identified in areas of deprivation. However, non-normative difficulties, in particular social, emotional and behavioural difficulties are four times more likely to be identified in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived (see also De Valenzuela et al. 2006; Dyson and Gallannuagh, 2008). Furthermore, research also highlights the intersections between gender and particular types of difficulty, where boys outnumber girls in all types of difficulty but the discrepancy is most marked in the non-normative categories such as learning difficulty and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, where there are also strong associations with social deprivation (Riddell, 1996).

Other studies have gone further to understand patterns in SEN identification in schools by focussing on factors other than child characteristics such as the teacher or the school. This literature focuses more broadly on the education system and a possible underlying imperative to seek homogeneity in institutional life which necessitates delineating and differentiating those who differ

from the norm (Thomas and Loxley, 2001). The subjective nature of the SEN identification process particularly for non-normative SEN such as emotional and behavioural difficulties means that these students form part of the non-dominant culture and may be disproportionately more likely to be identified as being 'deviant' or having a SEN (Dyson and Gallannuagh, 2008). In attempting to understand this process, much of the research points to the complex interaction of student characteristics, teacher characteristics and the social composition of the school which results in higher SEN I identification for particular groups of students (Van der Veen, Smeets and Derriks, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to consider how teacher judgements of ability or acceptable student behaviour are most likely based on their referent group, which naturally consists of other students in the class (Hibel, Farkas and Morgan, 2010). In this way, the detection of SEN is likely to depend on what is considered normal and this will vary considerably between schools. Described as a frog-pond effect (Davis, 1966), this means that the same student appears worse when compared to higher than to lower performing schoolmates.

School Experiences of Children with SEN

Inclusive education policy emphasises reducing the number of students with SEN in special education settings and increasing the numbers attending mainstream schools. Obviously during this transition, the academic experiences and social interactions of this group of students are very different to what they used to be. Concerns have been raised however about the implications of inclusive education policies for the school engagement and successful learning of this group of children. In particular studies have focussed on the ways in which friendships are formed between students with SEN and their peers (Cambrian and Silvestre, 2003; Koster et al., 2010). The inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream environments has meant that they are frequently distinguished from their peers by both formal and informal processes involving identification and assessment which clearly differentiates them from their peers (Priestley, 2001). Some argue that through these systems and procedures there is a real risk that they will be viewed differently and negatively by their peers (Rose and Shevlin, 2010). As a result research shows that children with SEN have been found to be feeling

acutely aware of being treated differently by their peers and teachers (McArthur et al., 2007). Studies show that students with SEN often report problems in accessing the mainstream curriculum (Dyson 2008), are more likely than their peers to have negative teacher-student (Murray and Greenberg, 2001) and peer relations (Koster, 2007) and there is evidence that students with SEN fail to make sufficient progress in mainstream schools (Keslair and McNally, 2009). This research is particularly relevant where children are in receipt of supports.

Findings

Data on the prevalence of SEN and the characteristics and circumstances of children with SEN and disability in our schools is key to understanding the relationship between impairment and restrictive social conditions (Blackburn et al., 2010). Using the definition of SEN in the EPSEN Act, research based on Growing Up in Ireland data was for the first time able to estimate a true prevalence estimate using nationally representative data. The findings show an overall prevalence rate of 25 per cent, which is in line with recent studies internationally. In the Netherlands for example, Van der Veen et al. (2010) found a prevalence rate of 26 per cent with their research stemming from parent and teacher reports of SEN. Similarly in the UK, research from Croll and Moses (2003) concluded that teachers identified 26 per cent of children with SEN, while Hills et al. (2010) found 22 per cent of 16-year-olds has some form of SEN identified. The Growing Up in Ireland findings highlight the disparity between the prevalence estimate of 25 per cent and prevalence estimates from other national datasets. Interpretations appear to vary across agencies and organisations and seem to depend on the organisations' role in allocating resources (where there is often a narrow interpretation of SEN used) and research (where a more inclusive interpretation is adopted).

For the first time Growing Up in Ireland data allows us to explore issues of identification and group stereotyping in an Irish context. In particular we are able to examine the composition of the SEN group and whether SEN prevalence varies across different social groups or school contexts.

This new research shows that children from working class backgrounds are

far more likely to be identified with a SEN. Moreover, boys from disadvantaged backgrounds display particularly high levels of emotional/behavioural difficulties. These findings raise questions around the processes of SEN identification in Irish schools. In particular, whether being identified with a SEN is influenced by the social background characteristics of the child or the social mix of students in the school. In line with international research, our findings show that students with learning disabilities are less likely to be identified with this type of SEN in the most socio-economically disadvantaged schools - Urban band 1 DEIS schools. The findings also show the prevalence of SEN (of a non-normative type) such as emotional/behavioural difficulties (EBD) among nine-year-olds is somewhat higher among those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Moreover, children attending schools designated as socio-economically disadvantaged are significantly more likely than their peers to be identified as having EBD. These differences operate above and beyond the characteristics of children attending these schools and teachers teaching in these different settings. The under-identification of learning disabilities and over-identification of EBD in disadvantaged school contexts suggests a frog-pond effect is operating where only children with more severe learning needs are being identified as having a SEN.

As part of this research, we then examined whether EBD as identified by teachers, or within certain schools, is matched by the child's own performance on an internationally validated emotional and mental health self-concept measure. Our findings show that overall child-reported social emotional well-being is strongly related to teachers identifying children with an EBD. However, boys, children from economically inactive households, children from one-parent families and children attending disadvantaged schools are more likely to be identified with having an EBD, even after taking into account their social background characteristics and their scoring on an internationally recognised self-concept measure. These findings suggest that the identification of EBD based on teacher judgement is resulting in an over-representation of certain groups of children.

To address issues around school engagement and social experiences for children with SEN in an Irish context, our research took a holistic measurement of school experiences looking at both the academic and social aspects

of school. We examined a number of contexts in which children with SEN operate, including their family and their social characteristics, their attitudes to school and academic engagement and finally their peer/social relations at school. Findings show that school experiences and overall attitudes towards school vary among children with SEN (according to the type of SEN they have). Findings show that boys with SEN are more likely than girls to dislike school. Moreover, children with SEN from semi- and unskilled social class backgrounds are more than those from professional backgrounds to report never liking school. It is clear that children with SEN, particularly those identified with learning disabilities, face considerable barriers to fully engage in school life. For these students, their low levels of academic engagement and poor relations with their peers and teachers play a central role in their low levels of school engagement.

Summary

This research highlights the practical implications of placing children with SEN in mainstream schools. Our findings, which provide a new SEN prevalence estimate in Irish primary schools, highlight the need for discussion by policy makers and practitioners around the definition of SEN as per the EPSEN Act. The rate of 25 per cent brings Ireland more in line with prevalence estimates internationally and, at the same, time highlights the difficulties in using government administrative data sources in cross-national comparative statistics. From a policy perspective, the over-representation of boys, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and children attending disadvantaged schools among the SEN group highlights the need to review the ways in which children with SEN, and in particular children with EBD, are identified. The true value of Growing Up in Ireland data however is that it allows us to go beyond the scale and characteristics of children with SEN but also to examine the factors influencing SEN identification. In line with results internationally, findings suggest that the identification of EBD based on teacher judgement is resulting in an over-representation of certain groups of children. These patterns highlight the need to re-examine existing SEN classifications systems in deciding on provision for students and point to the use of other models of classification such as the bio-psycho-social model which are based on the interaction between

the   person and the environment in order to decide on appropriate provision. Lessons can also be learned from other national contexts where SEN classification systems have been harmonised across relevant government agencies or in some instances have been removed altogether and replaced with categories based on the type of support rather than need. The research also highlights how SEN identification is context specific in that the analysis has yielded evidence of a frog-pond effect in disadvantaged schools. The combination of the under-identification of learning difficulties and the over-identification of EBD may influence the type of teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools where teachers may opt for an environment of 'care' rather than an environment of 'challenge'. Moreover, it may be that the teachers in these contexts are more likely to identify EBD in response to greater disciplinary problems in these schools, difficulties which take precedence over the learning needs which students may have.

A natural progression from the findings about prevalence and identification is to ask how do students with SEN fare in mainstream settings? Taking a holistic perspective looking at both the academic and social aspects of student lives, this research shows that students with SEN like school less than their peers. Although this varied by SEN type, the analysis shows that boys and children from semi- and unskilled social class backgrounds are more likely to report never liking school. It seems that despite efforts to make the Irish primary school curriculum more inclusive, its academic orientation plays a central role in shaping how children with SEN view school. By simultaneously examining the role of academic and social relations in shaping the engagement of children with SEN, the analysis provides a unique opportunity to fundamentally assess the barriers to true inclusion for children with special needs.

*Corresponding author: Dr. Joanne Banks, ESRI joanne.banks@esri.ie

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TREATING IGNORANCE WITH IGNORANCE: A cross-border Irish study of student teachers' knowledge, experience, and confidence in dealing with disablist bullying.

Noel Purdy and Conor Mc Guckin
Stranmillis University College, Belfast and
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

This study explored the knowledge, experience, and confidence of student teachers from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in relation to disablist bullying. Adopting a mixed methodological approach of four focus groups (N = 18) and a pencil-and-paper questionnaire (N = 257), the study explored the students' knowledge, experience, and confidence in the discrete areas of special educational needs (SEN) and bully/victim problems, and then in relation to disablist bullying. Results highlight the high importance attributed to SEN and bully/victim problems, but also highlight the sporadic provision and low confidence in meeting the needs of children with SEN. None of the participants, in either jurisdiction, had received guidance in relation to disablist bullying as part of their Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Results highlight the need for practical, solution-focused, and evidence-based input at the level of ITE and Continuing Professional Development in both jurisdictions.

Introduction: Research Exploring Bully/victim Problems

Research exploring bully/victim problems has become an issue of immense and growing international concern in recent years. While reports of bullying are not a new phenomenon (e.g., Hughes 1857), we are at a stage whereby we have a substantive cross-national knowledge regarding the nature, incidence, correlates, and management of traditional 'face-to-face' (Mc Guckin, Cummins, & Lewis 2010a) bully/victim problems among school pupils (see Smith et al. 1999 for a review). We are also fortunate to have a robust knowledge base regarding successful intervention and prevention pro-grammes in the area (for scholarly reviews see Farrington & Ttofi 2009;

Smith, Pepler, & Rigby 2004). Relatively little attention is paid however to 'disablist' bullying – where those with a disability / Special Educational Need (SEN) are directly involved in bully/victim problems.

Disablist Bullying Overview

One of the few available definitions of disablist bullying refers to it as "… hurtful, insulting or intimidating behaviour related to a perceived or actual disability" (Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum: NIABF, 2010). Possible manifestations of disablist bullying include: the regular use, consciously or unconsciously, of offensive and discriminatory language; verbal abuse and threats; public ridicule; jokes about disability; exclusion from social groups; refusal to cooperate with someone because of their impairment; or refusing to meet a disabled person's access needs (Bristol City Council, 2006, p. 18). While many studies have explored the nature, incidence, and correlates of disablist bullying – either in a general manner (e.g., Fernández, 2009) or related to specific categories of SEN / disability (e.g., Autistic Spectrum Disorders [ASD]: Humphrey & Symes, 2010a,b; Wainscot et al., 2008; Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD]: Unnever & Cornell, 2003; Learning Disabilities (LD) and co-morbid psychiatric problems; Baumeister, Storch, & Geffken, 2008; Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka & Smith 1993; Thompson, Whitney, & Smith 1994; chronic disease: Nordhagen et al., 2005; mental health: Kumpulainen, Räsänen, & Puura, 2001), like much research in the area of bully/victim problems, this has occurred on a sporadic and less than systematic manner (Mc Guckin, Lewis, & Cummins, 2010b). Despite this, a common finding is that there are higher incidence rates among children with SEN than among those without (e.g., U.S.: Carter & Spencer, 2006; The Netherlands: De Monchy, Pijl, & Zandberg, 2004; England: Norwich & Kelly, 2004). However, in attempting to understand the role of education in ameliorating the insidious effects of bully/victim problems involving children with SEN / disabilities, rather little attention has been focused on the role of the educator.

There are at least two reasons why children with SEN / disabilities may be at higher risk for involvement in such problems: they are less socially

competent (Whitney, Nabuzoka, & Smith, 1992) and tend to have fewer friendships – a significant buffer from being victimized (Martlew & Hodson, 1991). These are both areas where the influence of educators can have a positive effect. In her extensive review of the literature, Frederickson (2010) reported that some studies (such as Newberry & Parish, 1987) have shown that peer acceptance can be greater for more clearly apparent needs and disabilities (e.g., severe learning difficulties or hearing impairment) but not for less obvious specific learning difficulties (e.g., dyslexia) or low achieving pupils. As Frederickson (2010, p. 9) notes, "... in these cases there is nothing to signal to classmates that these pupils are deserving of special consideration". Frederickson (2010) cites Morton and Campbell (2008) who found that it was the class teacher who was the most persuasive source (rather than other professionals or parents) in presenting explanatory information to peers about a classmate with autism.

Guidance to teachers in dealing with disablist bullying remains relatively scarce. In the United Kingdom, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF: 2008) Safe to Learn materials include one publication which addresses Bullying Involving Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This comprehensive document considers legal duties for schools in relation to pupils with SEN; preventative strategies (e.g., school policy, listening to the voice of pupils with SEN, using the curriculum to tackle disablist bullying), and also response strategies (e.g., use of appropriate sanctions, peer mentoring). On a regional level, the guidance offered by Bristol City Council (2006) is also detailed and, in addition to the topics covered by DCSF (2008), also offers guidance on supporting victims and monitoring and recording incidents. In Ireland (North and South) there is no specific guidance offered to schools on disablist bullying, with the exception of the recently published (and very brief) pamphlet on the subject, by NIABF (2010).

Given the absence of any comparable studies to date, and the pivotal role that teachers play in combating such issues, this research study set out to investigate student teachers' experience and confidence in dealing with disablist bullying in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The

project also aimed to identify priorities for Initial Teacher Education in both jurisdictions in moving towards improving the preparation of teachers to address effectively the issue of disablist bullying in schools.

Methodology

Guided by the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (2004), ethical approval for the research was granted by the Ethics Committees of both participating institutions.

A mixed methodological approach was utilised. A staged process began with qualitative analysis of focus group discussions, followed by questionnaires providing a descriptive overview of experience and confidence, which served to supplement the qualitative data.

Two centres for Initial Teacher Education (ITE), one in each jurisdiction, were selected for recruitment of participants. In both cases, all final year teacher education students were invited to participate.

Following pilot studies in both locations, 18 student teachers participated in the focus groups (2 per centre). Eleven (61.11%) of the participants were studying to become primary school teachers (Northern Ireland [NI]: n = 6; Republic of Ireland [RoI]: n = 5), while the remaining 7 (38.9%) were studying to become post-primary teachers (NI: n = 4; RoI: n = 3).

Clusters of questions were developed regarding experience and confidence regarding, for example, policy, legislation, and official publications in each of the key areas of enquiry: (i) SEN, (ii) bully/victim problems, and (iii) disablist bullying. The semi-structured approach concluded with participants being asked to suggest alterations to current ITE provision.

A total of 257 questionnaires were completed and returned for analysis (NI: n = 65, 25.3%; RoI, n = 192, 74.7%). The overall response rate was 55.5% (463 distributed). The majority of respondents (90%; n = 233) were studying to become primary school teachers (80.7%, n = 188 of these were from the Republic of Ireland).

Questionnaire content was presented in a similar sequential style as with the focus groups (i.e., SEN, bully/victim problems, disablist-bullying). Response option formats included multiple choice, forced choice, and Likert scales.

Results

The results of the focus groups and questionnaires are presented together below for each of the three areas explored in the study.

Theme 1: Special Educational Needs (SEN)

The overwhelming majority of respondents to the questionnaire felt that it is important for student teachers to be trained to meet the needs of pupils with SEN (98.8%, n = 255: 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'). However, while 45.5% (n = 118) of respondents felt that their ITE course(s) had prepared them to meet the needs of children with SEN, over half reported a lack of confidence in their ability to teach students with SEN (55.3%, n = 142: 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', or 'Unsure'). This lack of confidence was also explored in the focus groups where a general feeling was expressed by many participants that the most successful approach to teaching about SEN was to have a balance between the theory (understanding the nature of a condition) and learning about the practice (classroom strategies).

This preference for practical expertise was reflected in the responses to the questions in both the questionnaire and in the focus groups regarding students' knowledge of relevant SEN legislation in the respective jurisdictions. In the questionnaire, only a third of respondents 'Agreed' (30.9%, n = 79) or 'Strongly Agreed' (3.9%, n = 10) that they knew the relevant legislation regarding SEN in schools. A further 38.3% (n = 98) reported that they were 'Unsure'. .

When asked to make recommendations for the improvement of the SEN section of their ITE courses, a large number of survey respondents suggested that the content could be enhanced by, for example, having 'more practical strategies for the classroom' (82.6%, n = 213), 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (76.0%, n = 196), and 'more guidance on completing Individual Education Plans for children with SEN' (72.5%, n = 187). Over half of the respondents suggested: 'more guidance about how to work effectively with SEN classroom assistants' (66.3%, n = 171), 'greater focus on working with children with SEN in mainstream school placements' (60.9%, n = 157), and 'longer placements in special schools' (53.1%, n = 137).   Less

than one-third of the respondents felt that it would be beneficial to have more input regarding 'relevant legislation' (32.2%, n = 83) or 'child protection issues in a special education setting' (27.1%, n = 70).

Theme 2: Bullying
Nearly all the respondents to the questionnaire (98%, n = 253) endorsed the view that the existence of bully/victim problems in schools is an important issue. Similarly, the majority of respondents agreed that dealing with such incidents is part of the responsibility of the classroom teacher (94.2%, n = 244). However, contradictory to the legislation in both jurisdictions, only 47.3% (n = 121) of respondents felt that it was a legal obligation to implement a school-wide anti-bullying programme, and only 65.2% (n = 167) felt that there was a requirement to be proactive in combating bully/victim problems within classes / schools. While 95.3% (n = 244) agreed that it was a legal obligation to have an anti-bullying policy, only 26.8% (n = 69) of respondents reported that they knew the relevant legislation regarding the management of bully/victim problems in schools (37.4%, n = 96 were 'Unsure').

As with the discussion of SEN, there was a feeling among many of the students interviewed that practical advice on preventing and dealing with bullying was what they most wanted to tackle the reality of the issue in schools. Nearly two-thirds of questionnaire respondents (64.8%, n = 167) reported that they felt confident in their ability to deal with bullying incidents, should they arise in school (27.5%, n = 71 were 'Unsure'). While 29.8% (n = 72) had not had to deal with any incidents of bullying in the course of their teaching placements to date, just over two-thirds (68.6%, n = 166) had to deal with between 1 and 7 incidents. Four respondents (1.6%) reported that they had dealt with between 8 and 12 incidents. This was also explored in the focus groups, where students reported a range of experiences of bullying on school placement, from little or no incidence (and the misuse of the term bullying by some primary pupils to refer to routine fall-outs) to more serious cases of sexual intimidation and cyber-bullying. Those students who had been taught about bully/victims problems were generally confident about how to respond to such behaviour.

However, for those students in Northern Ireland who had not chosen the Pastoral Care optional module of study, there was less certainty about how to respond. For instance, one such student noted that he had never touched on the causes or impact of bullying and admitted that his reaction to a bullying incident would be to deal with it purely instinctively:

> "You deal with it naturally. And that has the potential to
> be an ineffective reaction. I mean I don't know, or, I don't
> know why or what causes bullying; I don't know what the
> outcomes for people that are bullied are. I mean formally
> I've never, I've never even touched on it ..." (NI, primary)

Unanimously, all respondents 'Agreed' (22.8%, n = 59) or 'Strongly Agreed' (77.2%, n = 200) that it is important for teachers to be trained to deal with bully/victim problems. A large number of respondents suggested that provision for countering bully/victim problems in ITE programmes could be enhanced by, for example, having 'more practical strategies for responding to incidents of bullying' (81.7%, n = 210) and 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (70.4%, n = 181). While 52.9% (n = 136) felt that 'more information about school bullying-prevention strategies' would be useful, 44.7% (n = 115) felt that 'case studies to consider in College' could be useful. Less than one-third of respondents felt that 'greater focus on bullying during school placement' (29.2%, n = 75), 'more detail regarding the relevant legislation' (27.6%, n = 71), or 'more background information about different types of bullying' (26.1%, n = 67) would be useful additions to ITE.

Disablist Bullying

Although the majority of respondents to the questionnaire (87.7%, n = 214) reported that they had not had to deal with any incidents of disablist bullying during their teaching practice placements to date, 19 (7.8%) had dealt with 1 incident, 9 (3.7%) had dealt with 2 incidents, and 2 (0.8%) had dealt with 3 incidents.

In the focus groups, the students recounted that children with SEN were at

times deliberately excluded by their non-SEN peers. One student explained how a child with Down's Syndrome was frequently left out of activities and spent lunchtime walking around the playground with her Special Needs Assistant. Another male pupil with ADHD was not usually included in lunchtime games of football and when he was, "they wouldn't pass him the ball, because he seemed to, didn't know what to do when he got it". Another primary student reported that a child with autism was not chosen as a partner to pick wildflowers on an outing because her non-SEN peers felt that, due to her very poor coordination, she would not be able to pick as many wild flowers as the others. One student explained that the relationship was more complex: the peers were happy to provide practical help for the child with SEN (pack her bag, note down her homework) but they did not want to be friends on equal terms ("they didn't want her that kind of way").

When asked in the questionnaire about their confidence in dealing with an incident of disablist bullying, nearly one-third of all respondents (30.8%, n = 79) reported that they did not feel confident in dealing with an incident of disablist bullying, with a further 45.5% (n = 117) being 'Unsure'. When asked what would guide their response to such an incident, the majority (54.1%, n = 138) reported that they would revert to 'school policy', and 43.5% (n = 111) said that they would seek 'advice from a more experienced teacher(s)'. Interestingly, just over one-third (35.3%, n = 90) reported that they would rely on 'natural instinct'. Less than one-in-eight student teachers (12.2%, n = 31) reported that they would rely on 'knowledge gained from ITE'.

When asked in the questionnaire to name proactive strategies to prevent disablist bullying, students suggested an inclusive school ethos, awareness-raising among other children about the nature of SEN (including the use of puppets with younger children), peer-mentoring, and work with bystanders. In terms of reactive strategies (i.e., in response to an incident), examples of responses included dealing with incidents promptly and effectively, with appropriate sanctions to the pupil responsible and support for the victim. In the focus groups, participants told of how the attitude of the teacher had a significant positive impact on the inclusion of a child with SEN and thus on

the prevention of bullying. For example, in the case reported earlier of the young girl with autism left out by her peers as the class picked wild flowers, the student teacher began to ask the pupils to form groups of three rather than two, and regularly changed the groupings to encourage greater acceptance and less opportunity for bullying.

In some more complex cases, students reported that the perpetrator of the bullying in mainstream schools was, themselves, a child with SEN. In some cases, this bullying could be targeted towards other children with SEN, in other cases towards children without any SEN. The students found such cases particularly challenging to deal with, as one student teacher explained in relation to one eleven-year-old boy with spina bifida who was "very snide with people" and who "was able ... to really, really get at people". The same student confessed that he found this extremely difficult to deal with: "I would take the most classes for P.E. and [he] would play up you know if we were playing football ah [he] would just, ah, kick somebody's leg, just trip them because they were running past him and somebody would fall, ah, how do I, how do I deal with that? To the other ones I'd give them a wee fundamental movement skills exercise to do, can't give it to [him], he's physically disabled. I found it very, very difficult to find any way of sort of reprimanding him, so yes, by necessity the bullying was almost tolerated." (NI primary).

In terms of striving to develop student teachers' knowledge of disablist bullying, over three-quarters of questionnaire respondents (76.9%, n = 193) reported that ITE programmes should include 'more practical strategies for dealing with incidents of disablist bullying'. Nearly half felt that it would be useful to get 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (49.8%, n = 125), have 'more background information about disablist bullying' (45.4%, n = 114), have 'case studies to consider in College (39.0%, n = 98), or have 'a dedicated website on disablist bullying for students / teachers' (36.7%, n = 92). Fewer felt that it would be useful to have 'more detail regarding the relevant legislation' (27.1%, n = 68), 'CPD course next year' (24.3%, n = 61), 'greater focus on disablist bullying during school placement' (21.1%, n = 53), or 'links to external agencies' (18.7%, n = 47).

Discussion

The aims of the current research were to explore the experience and confidence of student teachers in relation to dealing with SEN, bully/victim problems, and disablist bullying, and to outline the subsequent priorities for the future development of ITE across the island of Ireland.

(i) The Experience and Confidence of Student Teachers in Relation to SEN

First, this study has highlighted that, despite the high importance attributed to SEN by almost all of the student teachers, only a minority felt confident in working with children with SEN in their classrooms. Given the rise in the number of children with SEN in mainstream schools following legislation in both jurisdictions (Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act [EPSEN]: Government of Ireland, 2004; Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 [SENDO]: Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 2005), it is clear that ITE has failed in its duty to prepare these student teachers adequately for the current realities of the classroom.

When asked to make recommendations for ITE courses, the respondents showed little interest in more legislation, 'theory', or the background to different SEN, and instead wanted practical advice and practical strategies, preferably from those with direct classroom experience. This again has implications for those who plan and deliver ITE courses in both jurisdictions.

(ii) The Experience and Confidence of Student Teachers in Relation to Bully/victim Problems.

Second, although it was heartening to learn that the majority of student teachers in this study accept the existence of bully/victim problems in schools and the important role that teachers play in countering such insidious behaviours and attitudes, there was no evidence of any detailed knowledge or understanding of either the legislation or the policy in this area (e.g., Department for Education and Science, 1993).

While over two-thirds of the respondents in the survey indicated that they

had to deal with bullying incidents while on teaching practice, this study revealed that course content was not consistent across the ITE institutions, with participants from Northern Ireland receiving tutelage in the area only if they selected an optional module (Pastoral Care) that explored bully/victim problems as part of its content.

It was noteworthy that all respondents to the survey felt that teachers should be trained to deal with such problems. Consistent with the results regarding SEN, participants voiced their opinion that ITE should contain more practical advice and practical strategies for countering bully/victim problems, preferably from those with direct classroom experience.

(iii) The Experience and Confidence of Student Teachers in Relation to Disablist Bullying.

Third, this study has shown that, while students did have the opportunity to gain some level of knowledge and understanding of SEN and / or bullying, none had received any input during their ITE regarding disablist bullying (i.e., the interaction of the two areas). Despite this, there were examples of how a positive school ethos, coupled with a successful approach to 'inclusion' by the classroom teacher (Morton & Campbell 2008), yielded positive interactions between pupils with SEN and their counterparts without SEN. However, several of the students were able to relate incidents of disablist bullying that they had experienced while on teaching practice. While it could be argued that some of these incidents may have occurred regardless of whether the child had a SEN or not, it is probable that the vast majority of incidents were enacted because of the SEN or were in some way related to the SEN (as in the case of a child with ASD who struggles with social interaction)Moreover it is clear from the students' accounts that in every case the presence of SEN made the situations more complex, sensitive, and difficult to deal with.

As with SEN and bully/victim problems more generally, the question arises here again as to the preparation (or not) of students for teaching practice and the 'non-teaching' related events that occur in classrooms and the wider school environs. While nearly one-third of respondents reported that they did

not feel confident in dealing with incidents of disablist bullying, just one in eight said that they would rely on what they had learnt in their ITE if confronted by disablist bullying. Worryingly, just over one-third reported that they would revert to 'natural instinct'.

Perhaps the most challenging example of disablist bullying that a teacher may have to counter is where the perpetrator, and possibly the victim too, has a SEN (De Monchy et al., 2004). Exemplified in the research was an example of a student with spina bifida who was viewed as being a bully, who relied upon their superior intellect, coupled with indirect bullying techniques (e.g., snide comments).

Yet again, in terms of planning for future ITE provision, the respondents asserted that ITE should contain more practical advice and practical strategies for countering disablist bullying, and again preferably from those with direct classroom experience.

Conclusion
This study set out to establish student teachers' knowledge, experience and confidence in dealing with SEN, bully/victim problems, and disablist bullying, and has discovered that while provision in the areas of SEN and bullying was variable and patchy, to date none of the student teachers in either jurisdiction has received any formal guidance in disablist bullying as part of their ITE courses. Hitherto, there has perhaps been an assumption that such bullying did not take place, that it was of little significance, or that student teachers would themselves be able to draw the connections between the areas of study of SEN and bullying in order to allow them to deal effectively with such incidents of disablist bullying.

However, this study has highlighted the falseness of any such assumptions of students' knowledge and confidence in relation to disablist bullying for two main reasons:

First, as indicated above, the level of knowledge and confidence of student teachers in the associated areas of SEN and bully/victim problems, even as

discrete domains, is variable at best, with provision sporadic across institutions and inconsistent, even between programmes in the same institution. This study has revealed poor knowledge of legislation relating to bully/victim problems or disability and an alarmingly low rate of confidence among students in dealing with children with SEN in their classrooms (less than half of participants felt confident). Second, this study has added further evidence to confirm the importance, but also the complexity, of the issues which are associated with disablist bullying. Through the interviews and questionnaires, participants spoke of their confusion in knowing how to respond to such incidents which may have involved the deliberate isolation or victimisation of a child with SEN, either by a child without a SEN or by another child with a SEN. The level of complexity associated with some of the cases recounted in this study further strengthens the argument for the topic of disablist bullying to be included as part of ITE and CPD courses in both jurisdictions, rather than leaving student teachers to make instinct-led, and potentially damaging, responses to often immensely challenging incidents.

In conclusion, it is imperative that Teacher Education in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland acts to address the serious issues raised in this study, taking into account the recommendations made by the participants in relation to SEN, bully/victim problems and their nexus in disablist bullying, and taking steps to offer practical, comprehensive advice informed by classroom practice coupled with appropriate placements and grounded in the latest research findings.

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SPACES, PLACES AND IDENTITIES: an Exploration of Early Intervention for Young children with Autism - Discussing the Theoretical Frame and Methodological Approach

Miriam Twomey
School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract
This research explores Early Intervention in a context of childhood with difference, with possibilities of identity and becoming. Central tenets are space and place; space and place are intrinsic to our being in the world. For the purposes of this research, 'space' was defined relationally and measured in terms of interpersonal relationships. This research also considered 'place' and explored the degree to which identity is transmitted through specialist and inclusive contexts, valuing contributions from young children with Autism and their peers. The experiences of young children with Autism in Early Intervention and school settings are explored in an effort to examine that space in relationships between self and other. Children's place and positioning have occupied ephemeral positions in the conception, design, and implementation of Early Intervention services. In an effort to address this inequity, this study elicited voices, and attempted to orchestrate these voices in an effort to construct a comprehensive view of Early Intervention for children with Autism in Ireland. Narratives of parents, children, teachers and professionals were explored. Valued contributions from young children with Autism and their peers were included, exploring children's lives and seeing them as children, in an attempt to understand the mechanisms supporting their inclusion.

Introduction
This article will explore existing literature in relation to Early Intervention experiences of young children with Autism. It will also explore specific methodologies to include children with Autism and give them a voice. It will describe how inclusive methods can enable research with 'all' children.

Rationale

Limited research has been carried out on Early Intervention in Ireland. To date there is little or no evidence of research on Autistic children's identities. Although research has paid attention to the cognitive and social competence of these children, little is known about how identity formation is mediated through special or inclusive educational contexts. While international research has examined the characteristics and dynamics of interactions between children with Autism in designated Early Intervention programmes, much less is known about the relationship between 'space'; that is, personal and interpersonal relationships and 'place'; the effects of the proximal environment or setting in which they take place. Furthermore, innovative responses have generally been associated with interventions that are decontextualised and fail to acknowledge the elements of identity that are associated with space and place. Notwithstanding the success of these nterventions and the current research emphasis on inclusion, extant research fails to capture the intricacies of everyday lives for the young child with Autism. It also fails to account for the unique and diverse complexities and characteristics of each child, family and school, and the bi-directional influences of an ecological systems perspective; incorporating biological processes and environmental events (Guralnick, 2011). The process of identity formation therefore may be linked to the development and acquisition of cognitive or social skills where current emphases lie. However the larger context representing reciprocal ecological systems has been neglected.

Significant links between cognitive and emotional development have been established. Optimal effects based on biological interdependence between the infant and caregiver remain undisputed. Development of essential intervention programmes is critical to the child's development. More recently the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2010) has informed us that epigenome studies consolidate factual evidence based on molecular proof supporting the effects of interactions on the young child.

The Council suggests that policy makers should use this knowledge to inform decisions about the allocation of interventions and resources that will

impact the life circumstances of young children. It has been established that effective interventions can alter children's genetic expression; encouraging long-lasting efm fects on mental well-being, physical health and behaviour (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).

Scaffolding interactions can significantly alter the child's survival and adaptation. These epigenetic effects are directly influenced by infant-caregiver interactions. In the absence of optimal interventions in the first five years of a child's life there is substantial risk of decline in intellectual development (Guralnick 1988; 1998). This is also a time when intensive interactions encourage the development of the social brain and where the emphasis is on the parent's potential to realise and enable this phenomenon. In effect parents can shape their children's brain. In the absence of these interventions young children's brains are more susceptible to developmental problems if their environment is impoverished (Zero to Three, 2013). Moreover, children with established developmental problems are 'doubly vulnerable' in the face of poverty or disadvantage (Guralnick, 1998). The need to support parents to facilitate their children, has been demonstrated by research revealing that young infants react consciously to adults' communicative intention during primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 2010). When threatened by risk or disadvantage, children with disabilities may fail to realise these optimal experiences. Innovative work in the fields of Education and the social sciences can bridge this gap and promote interventions to alter and improve children's lives.

A point of difference in this research is that 'space' and 'place' are highly deterministic to the outcomes of these interventions. While existing Interventions are devoted to cognitive and social constructs in isolated or clinical settings, what needs to be developed is a developmentally and ecologically rich approach to investigating how, when and with whom these interventions take place for optimal effect. A child centred perspective should not be the main focus of these interventions; families, educators and practitioners should also be involved. Therefore the processes supporting identity formation need to be expanded to all settings, to include all participants in the child's life.

Services that are being developed fail to account for the transitional needs of children. New conceptualisations of early years education are market oriented and policy driven. Children with Autism occasionally attend their local preschool; where little is known about their difficulties. In the absence of this knowledge, they are identified by their difference. Collaboration between early year's educators and local health professionals invite assessment mechanisms into the child's life. The child becomes a child of the system (Goddard, Lehr and Lapadat, 2007); distanced from their community and where they are growing up. Policy frameworks assert the dominance of assessment and diagnostic processes, failing to account sufficiently in terms of time or resources for the child, family or models of education, within which these children are placed. Without adequate intervention or resources, failure to be included in the local school is commonplace. Early Years education settings and primary schools are faced with iterative cycles of failure; and inclusion that is a' not-yet-time' (Titchkosky, 2010).

Including children with Autism is generally conceptualised in terms of obstacles and challenges that are 'within-child' overlooking the socio-cultural and family orientation. Existing challenges include the failure to develop Early Intervention systems that render a seamless approach promoting inter-departmental (Health and Education) cooperation in the transition from health oriented Early Intervention services to primary schooling. Failing to evaluate the significance of relational processes and the proximal environment in the young child's life; the orientation is medicalised and detached. Appropriate policy frameworks need to counter this with a more equitable and rights-based systems that include the voice of the child and parents.

To further our understanding of identity formation and the mediating influences of space and place this research focused primarily on the role of relationships between children, Early Interventionists and teachers as well as the effects of the proximal environment. Gaps in the extant research were identified. Disabled children's own views and opinions have not previously been encouraged in Early Childhood Intervention Research. Parental and professional voices have witnessed overreliance as proxy. Pretis, Detraux,

Thirion, Giné, Balcells, Mas, Sohns, Hartung, Kraus De Camargo, Ališauskienė, Gutíez, Diken, Er-Sabuncuoğlu, Robertson & Messenger (2010) in a move to formalise Early Childhood Intervention in Europe have raised this issue and encourage participation of the disabled child and parent. While MacNaughton, Hughes and Smith (2007) alert us to the fact that children as young as two have a voice; more specifically, it has been noted that the voice of the child who does not use speech to communicate has not been heard (Kelly, 2005). To date, important aspects relating to encouraging and listening to the voice of these young children have remained unexplored.

As the research questions underpinning this research explored the mediating influences of space and place, a significant subtext began to emerge. The presence of children with Autism in educational settings challenged educators. Children's difficulties with intersubjectivity and classroom experiences prompted Hobson's (2007) theory. His question became pivotal; 'what happens if children with Autism are not moved by others'? Being moved in thought and feeling by others is one of the most significant aspects of human life and is critical to its encouragement. Hobson (2007) maintains that being moved by others is foundational for experiencing people as people, for   developing self-other awareness and for the construction of 'theory of mind' as a central feature to understanding the thoughts and feelings.
The remainder of this article will explore the relevant research on Early Intervention, Autism, the influences of relationships and the effects of the proximal environment. This will be followed by a description of the research methods and procedures used in the enquiry.

Identity

<div align="center">

And when she sang, the sea,
Whatever self it had, became the self
That was her song, for she was the maker. Then we
As we beheld her striding there alone,
Knew that there never was a world for her
Except the one she sang and, singing, made.-

</div>

(From The Idea of Order at Key West, by Wallace Stevens 1934)

Children with Autism are not typically described in terms of identity. In relation to Steven's poem, they are known by their song, and singing; not as singer. They are frequently described in tropes of isolation and withdrawal (Hacking, 1999; Solomon, 2010), estranged from this world, immersed in their own. In terms of research, we have tended to search where the light shines brightest (Loveland, 1993). The focus is child-centred; evaluating what children acquire in terms of skills; more specifically when they fail to do so.

This research explored the identity of children with Autism. Identity was viewed in terms of space and place. We have all come from some place. Where we grew up, in some part defines us. Place is defined as the proximal environment; the home, Early Intervention or school setting. In this place, we occupy space. We share physical and metaphorical space with others. We embody space. 'Space' as interpersonal or relational is described in this research as that space in relationships between self and other.

Ostensibly, the purpose of this research was to determine the state of current practice of Early Intervention for children with Autism in Ireland. Specifically, it sought to explore the influence of specialist and inclusive educational settings on the identity formation of young children with Autism. The research question was exploratory and sought to investigate if identity for young children with Autism could be enhanced in Early Intervention settings. The specific context for this analysis was Early Intervention Settings in Ireland, where children with Autism between the ages of C. 3 and 6 years attend Early Intervention or school programmes. The aim of this research was to identify how children's identity could be mediated by space and place. This aim was explored using the following objectives; 1) to consider concepts of Disability, Social Justice, Childhood theorising, Autism and Identity from a theoretical perspective, 2) to examine developments in the philosophy, policy and practice of Early Intervention, 3) to examine concepts of early socialisation and the role of parents and teachers Intervention programmes for children with Autism, and 4) to examine the concepts, practice and pedagogy of inclusion and Autism-specific pedagogy in a number of case studies.

Background

In Ireland, children with Autism have access to a system of supports. In some instances, this system includes Early Intervention Units attached to special and mainstream schools. Disparate Early Intervention services are delivered by many providers, 'making it difficult for parents to discern the wholeness' (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003).

The need for intensive Early Intervention for children with disabilities has been established in the literature (Soriano, 2005). Carpenter & Egerton, (2005) regard it as crucial. Champion (2005) emphasises the needs of vulnerable, infants and the neurological compromise they face. Research on Early intervention provides a compelling rationale for investing in the lives of young children with disabilities and investigating the effects of these interventions. Research has also established the need for optimal timing, intensity and specificity (Guralnick, 2005). Provision of Early Intervention encourages development but also avoids secondary disabling events (Guralnick, 2005). It reduces the need for later compensation requiring extensive intervention. Notably, sensitive periods within the early years have been identified where there are windows of opportunity for development to take place. Intervention establishes neuronal pathways on which subsequent development can be constructed.

Literature Review

Autism reaches in contradictory and unexpected ways to the very core of what it means to be human. (Solomon, 2010)

In a review of the literature, concepts relating to Autism were examined. Research on Autism has flourished in recent years. Subsequently, linear areas of specialism have become specific and isolated (Nadesan, 2005). Diverging from these approaches, this research explored the social construction of Autism and questioned if there are newer ways of 'seeing' Autism. During the last twenty years a complex understanding of Autism has emerged. Theorising on Autism has incorporated medical, psychological and neurobiological approaches. Initial observations account for Theory of Mind (Baron-Cohen, Leslie &Frith, 1985), Weak Central Coherence (Happé,

1996) and Executive Function (Hill, 2004). While they provide invaluable insight into Autism, more recent discoveries include neurobiological accounts relating to the role of the amygdala in the fear and anxiety associated with Autism (Amaral & Corbett 2003), the mirror neuron system dysfunction (Dapretto, Davies, Pfeifer, Scott, Sigman, Bookheimer & Iacobone, 2006) and early brain overgrowth as key factors in uncharacteristic neural connectivity (Courchesne, Karns, Davis, Ziccardi, Carper, Tigue, Chisum, Moses, Pierce, Lord, Lincoln, Pizzo, Schreibman, Haas, Akshoomoff, Courchesne, 2001; Courchesne, Mouton Calhoun Semendeferi, Ahrens -Barbeau, Hallet, Carter Barnes, Pierce, 2011). Research by Mottron and collegues (Mottron, Dawson, Souliers, Hubert & Burack, 2006) support the view that individuals with Autism demonstrate enhanced perceptual functioning. This perceptual advantage underlies superior performance in the detection of patterns, visual memory, perfect pitch, and musical talent.

We have benefitted greatly from theorising relating to the cognitive impairments associated with Autism, however, recent theorising on Autism has not typically searched for imaginative ways to understand Autism in the everyday lives of young children. One of the objectives of this research was to explore prevailing perceptions based on deficit 'within-child' factors. To interrogate these perceptions, this research incorporated recent theorising from diverse theoretical fields in an attempt to reconceptualise Autism, and 'see' it differently. This research was also mindful that Autism has been described in terms of limitless potential and neurodiversity of the human mind (Solomon, 2010).

Diverging from unitary perspectives and medicalised, homogenous theorising, a transdisciplinary theoretical framework supporting the Literature Review was conceptualised. This included concepts from the diverse fields of Disability Studies, newer theorising on childhood, social justice, and an anthropological/ethnographic perspective. While the juxtaposition of these dichotomous philosophies appeared incongruent, an ethnographical approach to otherness, to difference (Kasnitz & Shuttleworth, 2001), was the invisible thread that drew it together. Ethnographically informed enquiry focuses on the personal, familial and social experiences of Autism (Solomon, 2010). It

embraced the 'ordinariness', of quotidian experiences in the home, and school setting continuously seeking to refine its understanding. Elements of ethnography formed a natural discipline to engage with the lived reality of disability, in an attempt to move beyond rhetoric, validating the need for social justice and inclusion in the everyday lives of young disabled children with Autism. The search for identity therefore was preceded by a search for newer ways of 'seeing' and understanding Autism. It countered existing isolated professional/parent discourses; proposing that an 'emic' or insider view of disability, can inform us where and why the light shines differently. According to Grinker (2010) anthropologists are beginning to address the problem presented previously through narrow conceptualising of Autism, by rejecting what constitutes human social functioning, and by showing the complex ways in which Autistic children and adults participate in and contribute to their societies. These approaches draw attention away from Autism as a childhood disease and toward seeing Autism more generally as a human, social, and cultural phenomenon (Grinker, 2010).

Concepts relating to identity of children with Autism have rarely been explored with the exception of Bagatell, (2007) and Ochs and Bagatell (2010). This may be due in part to the paucity of their social world or the limitations with which they experience it. Alternative views of Autism ask if these children are experiencing a different way of being. Grinker asks if 'we are finally seeing and appreciating a kind of human difference that we once turned away from?' (2007, p. 5). Bagatell (2007) describes the inherent difficulties differentiating between self and other, authoring oneself, constructing a social world. While children with Autism challenge our perceptions of identity, due to their explicit difficulties engaging with the world, implications drawn from this research with inclusive groups of children and their peers in educational settings can be used to inform us about the experiences of young children with Autism in Early Intervention settings. Recent work in anthropology and linguistics has begun to critically investigate what Ochs and Solomon (2010) refer to as the notion of 'Autistic sociality'. Based on their decade-long linguistic anthropological research on Autism, they explore the implications for an anthropological understanding of Autistic sociality. Human sociality is defined as consisting of a range of

possibilities for social coordination with others, but it consolidates a view that emphasises the centrality of the dynamics of individuals and social groups (Ochs & Solomon, 2010).

Methods

To investigate the research question, aim and objectives, I developed qualitative in-depth case studies describing Callum, Jack, Adam, Charlie and Aaron's experiences. Case studies involved in-depth, longitudinal examination of instances and events and were considered a research strategy that investigated a phenomenon within the real-life contexts of these boys (Yin, 2002). The case study was an adaptable research method as Early Intervention in Ireland is not easily distinguishable, has loosely defined parameters, complex temporal qualities, and situates itself in a variety of contexts. Like Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2000) suggest, all research elements comprised a case study, sharing commonalities, but lacking homogeneity. Simons (2009) apportions importance to the subjective data; the analysis and interpretation of how people think, feel and act. She acknowledges the importance of Eisner's (1991) researcher as the main instrument in gathering and evaluating the data, however she warns that this may risk the transparency of the 'self' and thus needs monitoring its impact (2009). Case studies must reflect multiple perspectives of participants and stakeholders. To authenticate this, the case studies in this research were contextualised in naturally occurring circumstances in the home and school (Simons, 2009). Case studies explored how the participants construct their worlds; their understanding and interpreting of it, as well as the potential contribution to their self- knowledge.

In relation to the development of research tools, this research noted that the voice of the child with a disability and that of the parent have traditionally occupied ephemeral positions and according to Allan, (2008) those with the most direct experience of inclusion should be allowed to influence develop-ments in policy and practice. This study examined ways of listening to and consulting with children with ASD and their parents (Jones & Gillies, 2010; Kellet, 2005; Kelly, 2005 Lewis, 2002). It examined the chasm between discourses which construct individuals as objects and discourses that

encourage identity construction for children with Autism and their parents. Narratives of children and parents were foregrounded.

Over 80 interviews were conducted with a variety of representative stakeholders including parents, Early Interventionists, teachers, school principals, SNAs and allied health professionals over a period of 18 months in different geographical regions. Numerous classroom observations were carried out in schools and Early Intervention settings and children without the label of Autism were also invited to contribute to inclusive and creative research models.

Participants	5 Children 4 settings	7 Parents Parent Representative of parent Support Group	2 Early Intervention teachers 3 Mainstream 2 Resource teachers	3 Principals	HSE 0-5 Team and School Based Team Professionals in 4 HSE Regions
Research Tools	Direct Observation	Semi-structured Interviews	Semi-structured Interviews	Semi-structured Interviews	Semi-structured Interviews
Ethnographic flavour	Puppets Drama drawing Life story work	Field notes and reflective journal			
Mode	Video/Direct	Audio	Audio	Audio	Audio
Frequency	30 - 60 min sessions per school visit Increased number of classroom visits	4 Visits to school	4 Visits to school	4 Visits to school (additional where necessary)	4 Visits to school (additional where necessary)
Duration of Research Project	15 months				

Table 1

Methods included a portfolio of sensitive and creative approaches to eliciting parents and children's voices.

1. Observations and interactive methods took place in a sample of Early Intervention and mainstream school settings;
2. Focus group interviews were conducted with parents and children;
3. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, multi-disciplinary Health professionals, School principals and SNAs.

Additional sources in this project included autoethnographic field notes, observations, interviews and archival documents where available.

Creative Methods
While this research has taken the form of small-scale qualitative embedded case studies, involving interviews and focus groups with a number of participant groups including children with Autism, it has also yielded valuable information relating to of a range of creative, visual and augmentative methods which were designed to simultaneously engage children's I nterest and facilitate communication. Exploring children's visual and image based voice is not unrelated to approaches facilitating their communication. Effective approaches accommodate children's propensity to understand and represent their world visually. Having noted the particular difficulties disabled children experience in articulating voice (Lewis & Porter, 2007) this research observed recommendations made by Lewis, Newton & Vials (2008) and Long, McPhillips, Shevlin & Smith (2012) to use more creative methods. Recent innovative work by Jones & Gillies (2010) and Long, et al. (2012) was particularly relevant to this research in its approach to the encouragement of creative technologies to sensitively investigate the views and opinions of children in the context of inclusive groups of children. Similar to the authors this research sought to investigate notions of rights and their limitations (Kilkelly, Kilpatrick, Lundy, Moore & Scraton, 2005; Lundy, 2007). Inclusive group interviewing was introduced in an effort to empower children and was partially conducted by puppets. This method's effects ranged from avoidance of distractibility, memory limitations, and over attention to certain perceptual features of research methods (Lewis, 2002). Puppet role play initiated group talk and avoided the stiltedness of individual interviews where children's reticence may cause withdrawal from answering. Another positive feature of using puppets was the provision of thinking time,

while the more dominant participants were answering; children had freedom to formulate thinking and communicate differently.

Interviewing children took place on a number of occasions. The frequency with which children were actively involved prompted a higher degree of involvement. More frequent visits to schools had more successful outcomes in terms of familiarity with the researcher and responsiveness.

Original observational tools were observed as inadequate throughout the course of the research. As a method, observational assessments based on normative childhood development were inadequate. More creative methods involving puppetry and drama reaped fortuitous responses providing thought for future development.

Creative approaches have potential to be developed more broadly and show promise for eliciting large-scale surveys of disabled children's views through the use of ethnographies (Cocks, 2008) and potentially longitudinal work. These endeavours also need to be contextualised within research into children's lives which are pivotal to the development of policy, practice, family and societal priorities.

Conclusion
Efforts to see Autism differently were enhanced through the use of a transtheoretical conceptual framework. Impairment was seen in a different light. Identity was shaped through meaningful relationships and environmental processes, validating the influence of space and place in young children's lives. Efforts to see and hear about inclusion raised the possibility that it is through children's voices that we need to reframe policy, practice and research.

It also provoked thought about how children can guide our research design and methodologies. The choice of methods used was supported by philosophical assumptions supporting interpretivist and constructivist paradigms which in turn supported the conceptual framework for this methodology. In addition the research methods and design included

approaches, strategies, instruments, and data collection that were sensitive and creative in eliciting the voice of children who communicate differently. The evidence from this research also supports non-participation of the empirical researcher and the inclusion of children in the research design and methods. The use of puppets as co-researchers and intervention agents was critical. Their value was not just as a free play medium, but in interactive role play activities, and as instruction tools. The use of puppet role play assisted and supported social interaction. The puppets were successful in developing relational experiences and encouraging primary and secondary inter -subjectivity. The use of drama also assisted and supported children with Autism who have compromised narrative skills to develop these skills during role play. Most significantly drama and puppetry have implications in terms of pedagogy and further research.

Miriam Twomey has recently submitted her Doctoral thesis on Autism and Early Intervention. She is a specialist educator who has spent many years working with children and young people with disabilities and Special Educational Needs. Miriam lectures at the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin in these areas.

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL IN STUDENT VOICE RESEARCH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED WITH SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

Paula Flynn
School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

This paper discusses a research project conducted with the participation of thirty five young people who had been identified with internalising or externalising behaviours associated with the broad spectrum terminology of 'Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties' (SEBD) within four mainstream schools in Ireland. The discussion focuses on: 'student voice'; 'the transformative paradigm'; and the ethnographic approach taken to this study. The major themes which emerged from the data are identified as: 'the importance of being heard', 'perspectives of difference', 'relational care' and 'leadership'.

> 'Nowhere have rights to have a say in one's own affairs been won without serious struggle'
> (Qvortrup, 1997, p. 85)

Qvortrup's acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in the pursuit of having a voice is a significant theme within this student voice research (SVR) project and implicit in the objective to ascertain the transformative potential for students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) by means of the consultative and participative mechanisms integral to the study. However, what is also implied as an important goal of this research, is the determination to discover what may help overcome obstacles through 'struggle' and a commitment to the pursuit of 'transformative action'.

The primary research question which drove this research, sought to determine the impact on a sample group of participants with SEBD when their voices were listened to and they were encouraged to become active agents in transforming their educational experience through this engagement. Within the conceptual understanding of 'voice' for the purpose of this research, is the assumption that having a voice suggests having also a "legitimate perspective and opinion, being present and taking part, and/or having an active role in decisions about and implementation of educational policies and practice"(Holdsworth, 2000, p. 355). However, for groups who are not usually consulted or in some cases 'silenced', bell hooks maintains that "coming to voice is an act of resistance" (hooks, 1989, p. 12). Cook-Sather (2006) challenges that silence and questions the absence of student voices from discussions of educational policy. She suggests that their inclusion must have implications for the power to influence and make decisions about practices in schools as well as experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Student Voice

Robinson and Taylor (2007) point out that voice does not just encompass the 'words' spoken by students but also the myriad of ways students choose to express their feelings about any aspect of their lives. They describe 'voice' as "our representational signifier which, via the style, qualities and feelings conveyed by the speaker's words, gives insight into the metaphorical perspectives and worldviews that individual inhabits" (Robinson and Taylor, 2007, p. 6). Drawing on Habermas (1984), Robinson and Taylor point out the resemblance between 'student voice work' and 'communicative action' as "an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through the use of language orientated towards reaching an understanding" (Habermas, 1984, p. 44). They suggest that the "assumption of this theoretical framework is that student voice work enables, indeed empowers students to have the opportunity to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in school improvement work" (Robinson and Taylor, 2007, p. 10). Within the context of this study, the concepts of 'student voice' and 'empowerment' are similarly linked such that the pursuit of the former must enable an experience of the latter for the

purpose of change or 'transformative action', which in turn may have implications for policy, practice and power relations in schools.

Both nationally and internationally, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of children's rights especially influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC 1989) (Rudduck and McIntyre 2007; Shevlin and Rose 2008). The UNCRC challenged the treatment of children and sought to improve this by affirming their need for 'special consideration' enshrining a number of rights including: Articles **12, 13, 23 and 28**, whose inherent significance to this research is their emphasis on:

- *'voice'* through rights to express views and freedom of expression
- the implication for students with SEBD within a designation of *Special Educational Needs/Disability* and the associated difficulties for some children within this spectrum with challenging behaviour and ensuing *discipline difficulties*
- the right to *participate* in an education system which should help them determine and reach their *full potential*

Many of the countries which ratified this treaty have drafted or amended legislation to draw upon principles in relation to children in their respective states. Accordingly, Ireland ratified the treaty in September 1992, which subsequently led to the publication of a ten year National Children's Strategy (NCS); the creation of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children, the appointment of a Minister for Children and the Children's Referendum 2012. With these developments, Ireland made a clear commitment to the rights of children and demonstrated that commitment in the vision of the NCS, "An Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own" (NCS, 2000, p. 5).

Within educational research and reform, the issue of 'student voice' is not a new phenomenon. There was vigorous pursuit of student voice research (SVR) in the late 1960s and 70s "driven by the desire to build a fuller understanding of life in classrooms and schools" (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007, p. 3). However, although this research yielded evidence that student voice had

an important contribution to make, "there was no general expectation, as there is now, that the data would be fed back to teachers and pupils as a basis for informed action" (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007, p. 21). Since the 1990s there has been steadily increasing interest in the involvement and voice of young people in educational research from the United States; (Levin 1994; Weis and Fine 1993) to the United Kingdom; (Fielding and Bragg 2003; Flutter and Rudduck 2004) and Ireland; (ESRI 2007; Kenny et al. 2000; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Shevlin and Rose 2008; Flynn et al. 2012).

Despite the contention that with the engagement of student voice, comes the potential to improve teacher-pupil alliances and the quality of school life which may empower marginalized pupils (Tangen 2009), it is also evident that some groups of children and young people are seldom given a voice; specifically, children under the age of five; children with disabilities; and children from ethnic minorities (Clark et al. 2003). Although there have been many studies which focus on the perceptions of pupils in mainstream education, very few have focused on pupils with SEBD (Cefai and Cooper 2010; Davies, 2005). This is in spite of evidence which shows that the empowerment of students with SEBD can contribute to the resolution and prevention of some of the associated difficulties experienced by these students in school (Norwich and Kelly 2006; Cefai and Cooper 2010 ; Flynn et al. 2012). In much of the literature, children are acknowledged as having an expert role with respect to the knowledge and understanding of what it is like to be a student in a particular school, (e.g. Cooper, 1996; Rose and Shevlin 2010) and for that reason are the best sources of that information.

A significant question posed by Madeline Arnot (2001) which is particularly relevant when embarking on SVR with students with SEBD is, "In the acoustic of the school, whose voice gets listened to?" (In Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003, p. 278) The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) warned that '...appearing to listen to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change' (UNCRC 2005, p. 4). This directive challenges how and why we listen to children. It is essential that the act of listening to students who agree to participate in SVR should be 'purposeful' and 'significant'; in other

words, the experience needs to be 'authentic' rather than 'tokenistic' and should generate some experience of acknowledgement or change or transformative action as appropriate.

However, it is equally significant to address 'how what is said gets heard' and its dependence on "not only who says it but on style and language", (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007, p. 164). Robinson and Taylor claim that some schools listen only to the articulate and able students or "those who agree with what the school wants to hear" and argue that for SVR to be meaningful, "schools need to think carefully about who they listen to, how they listen to pupils and what they listen to pupils about" (Robinson and Taylor, 2007, p. 10).

This argument is particularly significant if we are convinced of the need for input from young people in order to determine the kind of education they think would facilitate their needs and well-being while at the same time include those students who are disaffected, disengaged and perhaps at risk of social exclusion. It is indeed paradoxical that "those pupils, who literally often speak or shout loudest in the classroom, are those whose voices are most seldom heard" (Tangen, 2009, p. 841).

Social Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
Children with SEBD in Ireland are designated as having special educational needs as defined by the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, where they are assessed as in need of resource support under the classification of Emotional Disturbance (ED) or Severe Emotional Disturbance (SED):

> ...a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that difficulty (EPSEN, 2004, p. 6).

Under the allocation of additional teaching support for students with SEN, students with ED/SED are in receipt of three and a half to five hours of resource support per week (Government of Ireland 2005 Sp Ed 02/05). ED/SED is defined as follows:

> Such pupils are being treated by a psychiatrist or psychologist for such conditions as neurosis, childhood psychosis, hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and conduct disorders that are significantly impairing their socialisation and/or learning in school. (This category is not intended to include pupils whose conduct or behavioural difficulties can be dealt with in accordance with agreed procedures on discipline) (Bold and italics as per original publication, Government of Ireland 2005, p.19)

This definition clearly focuses on the categories of ED and SED from the perspective of a medical within-child deficit and also highlights these difficulties in terms of 'negative conduct and behaviour' with the inclusion of the caveat in bold and italics. However, the Irish National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) uses the broader spectrum terminology Social, Emotional and Behavioural, Difficulties in their guidelines to schools on supporting students within this classification (NEPS 2010). Their use of the terminology includes students classified as ED/SED who are in receipt of medical treatment but also more generally, to refer to:

> ...difficulties which a pupil or young person is experiencing which act as a barrier to their personal, social, cognitive and emotional development...Relationships with self, others and community may be affected and the difficulties may interfere with the pupil's own personal and educational development or that of others. The contexts within which difficulties occur must always be considered, and may include the classroom, school, family, community and cultural settings'' (NEPS 2010, p.4).

SEBD encompasses a broad spectrum of difficulties including: depression, eating disorders, neurosis, childhood psychosis, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder. "The scale of behaviours may present as internalising; shy, withdrawn and introverted through to externalising; hyperactive, disruptive and in some cases, aggressive" (Flynn et al. 2011, p. 62).

 Estimates of the prevalence of SEBD amongst children and adolescents in The United States, U.K. and Ireland range from 10 to 20%, (Cooper 2008; DES 2006; NCSE 2012; Zionts et al. 2002). The British Medical Association (2006) estimates that 20 per cent of young people experience a mental health problem at some point in their development, and 10 per cent experience these problems to a level that represents a "clinically recognisable mental health disorder" (Cooper 2008, p.14).

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) acknowledges the difficulty in accessing an accurate picture of the prevalence of SEBD amongst school age children in Ireland due to differences in classification. "There is a general consensus however, among researchers that up to one in five pupils may experience emotional and or behavioural difficulties at some stage during their school years" (NCSE 2012). NCSE data for August 2010, indicates that the number of pupils with emotional and behavioural   disturbance or severe emotional and behavioural disturbance in receipt of resource hours allocation was 6,900, "which equates to just over 20% of the population of pupils with special educational needs in receipt of additional teaching hours" (SESS 2011, p.4). However, students within this designation must be under medical supervision (Government of Ireland 2005) to fulfil the requirements for allocated resource support and as such, this number does not reflect students within the broader classification of SEBD (NEPS 2010 and SESS 2011).

Recent studies indicate the prevalence of children who are identified as having SEBD is disproportionately from lower income households, with the number of boys exceeding that of girls (Flynn et al. 2011 and 2012; McCoy and Banks 2012). Banks et al. (2012) draw on data from The Growing Up in

Ireland National Longitudinal Study of Children (Williams et al. 2009) which reveals that children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those attending schools designated as socio-economically disadvantaged "are significantly more likely than their peers to be identified as having a special educational need of a non-normative type such as emotional behavioural difficulty" (Banks et al. 2012, p.219). This highlights critical issues in relation to the pervasiveness of social class inequalities in education and the consequences for young people, particularly from socio-economically disadvantaged areas. On the one hand, there is an apparent 'over-identification' of some children, in particular; boys, children of single parent households and children from low-income households (Banks et al. 2012, p.230) revealing a level of inconsistency in terms of 'perspectives and perceptions' of 'normative behaviour'. However, there is also the unquestionable fact that the data reveals an over representation of SEBD in disadvantaged schools which is supported by children's self perceptions of their social emotional well-being by means of the Piers-Harris self concept scale: "Findings show that overall self-reported social emotional well-being bears a strong relationship to the probability of being identified with an EBD" (Banks et al. 2012, p.219).

Research has already criticised the prevalence of social class related inequalities as they pertain to education (Lodge and Lynch 2002; Smyth and McCoy 2009) and this recent study highlights the fact that a significant number of children in disadvantaged areas are more susceptible to SEBD. By implication, this suggests a higher prevalence of students in disadvantaged schools who may:

- be prone to negative self-concept or low self esteem (SESS 2011)
- experience barriers to learning (DCSF 2008)
- have problems working in groups or forming relationships (SESS 2011)
- present with aggressive behaviour or disaffection, potentially leading to criminality (Wearmouth 2004).

Wearmouth (2004) draws on the British White Paper, 'Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs', to illustrate the concerns

related to extreme examples of challenging behaviour, disaffection and failure as experienced by some students with SEBD:

> "The cost to society more widely of failure to tackle these problems is higher still, both in terms of reduced economic contribution in adult life and, for some, of criminal activity and prison" (Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), 1997, p.78).

She concludes that considering what can happen if we fail to address the potential 'problems' for disaffected students and their non-engagement with education, it is particularly important to determine the perspective of these students on themselves and their experience of the learning environment (Wearmouth, 2004, p. 7). Davies has similar concerns, pointing out that:

> Legislation alone will not achieve the goal of greater social or educational inclusion for disaffected or alienated pupils...research suggests that listening to what these pupils have to tell us holds the key to subsequent action to help combat social exclusion (Davies, 2005, p. 299).

Data from preliminary interviews with children, parents/guardians, and teachers in this research project clarified the contention that although there are multiple perspectives on the relationship between children with SEBD and their learning environment, the one thing that most people seemed to agree on was that for *some* children, the experience of mainstream school is very difficult and these difficulties can culminate in extreme examples of disengagement and/or social exclusion. For that reason, these perspectives contributed to framing the design as well as the theoretical framework and paradigm within which this study is located. Goffman's notion of frames and framing which "are the principles of organisation which govern social events and the actors' subjective involvement in them" (Goffman, 1974, p. 10), identify *how* we see the world and *influence* our participation and understanding of the world. It was integral to the objective of this study that both the process and the outcome of this research have the potential to make

a difference in terms of promoting *equitable* opportunities for children with specific special educational needs. Treating every child in mainstream education equally does not implicitly mean they are being treated with fairness. Providing for and meeting 'additional needs' requires understanding more than definitions and terminology that categorise specific special needs. Consequently the process of student voice research requires eliciting the voices of children and young people in order to learn from their perspectives and acting upon what we learn. The fact that the specific aim of this study was to make a difference, by promoting this process of empower-ment as a social justice requisite in conjunction with interrogating and challenging the concept of inclusion, firmly situated the research within a transformative paradigm. The purpose of this study was not just to describe the world in which the research took place, but to attempt to change it.

Transformative Paradigm
The transformative paradigm is referred to as 'critical theory et al.' by Guba and Lincoln (2005) and 'emancipatory' by Lather (1992). Grbich (2007) uses the term, 'critical emancipatory position' and lists the major characteristics of research in this tradition as; focus on questions of *identity*; clashes between those in *power* and those with limited power; and desirable outcome of *social transformation*. Mertens (2010) argues the necessity to replace the terminology relevant to this paradigm from 'emancipatory' to 'transformative' to "emphasize that the agency for change rests in the persons in the community working side by side with the researcher toward the goal of social transformation" (Mertens, 2010, p. 8). Researchers who position themselves within this paradigm believe that their research must contain an action agenda for reform "that may change the lives of the participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher's life" (Creswell, 2003, p. 9-10). Mertens points out that it is necessary to recognise, acknowledge and expose the frames that dominate our view of reality when we embark on research (Mertens, 2010, p.18). Acknowledging our philosophical viewpoints on the construction and inter-pretation of knowledge uncovers the "baggage" we possess and the biases we hold which are lenses that influence how we gather and interpret the data in our research.

The ontological assumption associated with the transformative paradigm holds that what we can know of what exists, or the reality that we accept as true, is socially constructed (Mertens 2010). However, this stance also recognises the impact and influence of power and privilege in determining the definition of what exists. Mertens (2010) argues that accepting differences in perceptions as equally legitimate ignores the damage perpetrated by factors that give privilege to one version of reality over another; 'such as the influence of social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and disability lenses in the construction of reality' (2010, p.32). This ontological position is evident and influential within this research which was cognisant of the systemic power that imposes a label to categorise the students who are targeted for this study. The approach was deliberately designed to prioritise the participants' perceptions and perspectives of what is real and what is significant from their unique, informed and expert position on their individual experiences. The transformative ontological stance acknowledges the consequences of marginalisation within power relations that stigmatise and/or render difference as invisible or deficient.

"The transformative paradigm's epistemological assumption centres on the meaning of knowledge as it is defined from a prism of cultural lenses and the power issues involved in the determination of what is considered legitimate knowledge" (Mertens 2010, p.32). Mertens explains that in order to achieve an understanding of what is valid knowledge within research, there needs to be a close collaboration between researcher and participants throughout the research process in which the relationship should be "interactive and empowering" (Mertens 2010). It was fundamental to this research to under-stand the relevant power relations and provide a practical description of the physical and environmental context of this study. However, the essential knowledge that informed the data was that which culminated as pertinent, 'real' and highlighted for analysis by the participants themselves.

Every stage of this process was designed to be flexible in order to facilitate opportunities for the participants to develop active agency both in their re-sponse to the experience of the process and in driving the stages of the data collection. Case studies and a summary of analyses were read and approved

by volunteers amongst the young participants and amendments were made if they believed an adult interpretation had influenced the thesis. Topics that were included for analysis and discussion which had emanated from my observations or feedback from key adults in the study were also presented to young representatives from the participant group and agreed upon before inclusion.

Ethnographic Approach to This Study

This study involved the participation of thirty five pupils identified with SEBD across four mainstream educational settings; two post-primary and two primary schools. An ethnographic approach, using a variety of research methods was chosen to collect data within this student voice project. Hammersley (2006) acknowledges the emergence of variations on ethnographic approaches such as 'critical and feminist ethnography' but believes that 'these orientations greatly increase the danger of systematic bias' because:

> ...the essence of ethnography is the tension between trying to understand people's perspectives from the inside while also viewing them and their behaviour more distantly....recent developments in ethnographic work seem to have lost that tension, and the dynamic it supplies' (Hammersley, 2006, p. 11).

However, Mertens argues that critical ethnography has the potential to interrogate dimensions of diversity related to those in power and those who suffer oppression within a theoretical framework that pursues social, educational and political issues by prioritising the voices of participants (Mertens 2010:232). Grbich (2007) clarifies the distinction between the roles of classical ethnographer and critical ethnographer by outlining the role of the former as, traditionally that of a "neutral" distant, reflective observer, dialoguing between the research process and product, meticulously documenting observational and visual images in order to identify, confirm and crosscheck an understanding of structures, linkages, behaviour patterns, beliefs and understanding of people within a culture or grouping. In contrast, she describes the role of the 'critical ethnographer' as a more 'active

analytical position' where terminology such as 'ideology', 'hegemony', 'alienation', 'domination', 'oppression', hierarchy', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' become important (Grbich 2007). Similarly, Bloome describes the role of the Critical Ethnographer as one who "brings to bear and foregrounds Critical Theories about the structuring of society and inequitable power relations" (Bloome, 2012, p. 19).

The decision to pursue an ethnographic approach within this research project was determined by the intention to spend as much time as possible in the participating schools with the students engaged in the research process in order to be a familiar figure in the schools and to generate and present a detailed and contextualised picture of the experience and expert voice of the participants. However, rather than assuming an 'entirely neutral stance' within the project, it was also the intention to have an interactive relationship with the participants such as to encourage activities for the purpose of promoting motivation, self esteem, empowerment and transformation and for that reason, the approach is more closely akin to that of 'critical ethnographer'. The advantage of the access facilitated within this role provided an opportunity to become familiar with the administration of the schools and the day to day life for the school community which provided an authentic context to engage with the participant students and monitor changes from multiple perspectives that occurred throughout the year as they were happening.

Preliminary interviews were carried out in the participating schools between December 2008 and May 2009; intensive data collection between September 2009 and December 2010 with follow up interviews and focus group meetings in 2011 and 2012. The intensive data collection involved a triangulation of research methods including; interviews, focus groups, observations, a   reflective journal and creative workshops (drama, sculpture, art, and music). The process involved consulting the participants on their experience and opinions relevant to supports and obstacles to their learning, engagement and positive behaviour in practice. Facilitating 'student voice', however, does not as a consequence and in isolation generate a sense of 'empowerment' on the part of participants. A significant element integral

to this process was the sustained approach and commitment to 'authentic listening' which could only be realised within acknowledgement and response to the views expressed and suggestions made by the students. A consequence of the involvement of relevant 'leaders' in the respective school communities, including school principals, special educational needs co-ordinators, school guidance counsellors and year heads or tutors in activities organised by the student participants as part of the project, led to discussions and negotiations around specific issues, such as: 'shared responsibility'; 'investment in resolution'; 'respect' and 'positive relationships'. Some of the emergent strategies trialled within the schools in response to these discussions included:

- A Positive Aims Diary designed by the pupils and entitled, My PAD, which incorporates contractual language on the part of the students in the 'voice' of the young people to their teachers; asking them 'to observe them' achieve their goals and 'notice' when they are successful.
- A mentoring programme between senior and junior students all of whom had been identified with SEBD
- Team building workshops with their respective class groups co-ordinated and organized by the participant students
- 'Chill Out' cards used when a student needed to calm down or felt very anxious
- Positive feedback meetings between students and teachers on a fortnightly/monthly basis where all parties report on what has worked well for them during that time

(Flynn et al. 2012, p. 256-7)

Themes and Findings

The four major themes which emerged as significant to the participants in this study were: 'the importance of being heard', 'perspectives of difference', 'relational care' and 'leadership'. The engagement with this student voice initiative was unique to every participant, and determined by each young person as they chose the pace at which they contributed and their individual levels of involvement and participation within the study. Having

the opportunity to be heard was highlighted was acknowledged as significant to all of the participants. However, for some of the young people who were 'silenced' on important issues in other parts of their lives, the experience of this 'voice' process had less impact. It proved difficult to convince a young person that their opinions matter and that their voice can make an important contribution to a study like this if there are contradictions in what is happening around them.

For many of the participants, the opportunity to talk and encountering an 'authentic response' influenced their levels of enthusiasm for and participation in the research process. As students realised that their contributions were met with genuine interest, correspondingly, there was a measured increase in levels of communication and participation. 'Authentic responses' to what students spoke about took many forms but very often it was simply remembering to follow up with questions or expressions of interest in whatever they had chosen to discuss in previous conversations, which was highlighted by some students as important to them.

Some of the most significant 'authentic responses' as relevant to this study were generated from asking the students to identify supports and obstacles to their enjoyment of and engagement in school. As a result of identifying important issues such as the quality of their relationships with teachers and their desire for respect, acknowledgment and to 'be cared for and about'; the focus of the research process was to encourage them to become 'active agents' in orchestrating changes to bring about an improvement in their experience of school.

The confirmation of the potential relationship between 'voice', 'empowerment' and 'transformation' was realised in the fact that most of the participants actively contributed to improving relationships with their teachers and peers, while promoting and participating in strategies and activities that impacted positively on their experience of school. Knowing that they were heard for some students was very powerful, as they had indicated at the beginning of the study that their opinions didn't matter or that nobody ever listened to them. It is significant that as they met a

response which assured them that their opinions *did* in fact matter, most of the students were empowered to actively engage in, suggest or design interventions that contributed to transforming 'the culture' of their school.

Perspectives of difference as revealed in the analysis of this research data submit evidence of links between attitudes of teachers and internalised perceptions of self on the part of the students. Marginalised groups expose the lenses of normality through which they are unconsciously subscribed as different, and reveal what is implicit to the hidden curriculum of the school. Although teachers and students may not intentionally reinforce negative perceptions of difference or reproduce notions of ability and disability, these are often unintended consequences of everyday practices associated with fulfilling the purposes of schools (Holt, 2004).

 'Care' emerged as one of the most important themes identified by the student participants across the data corpus. The language of caring prevails through the transcripts as students either accuse their teachers or the school of not caring about them, or praise and indicate appreciation for those people in their lives who do care about them. The significance of the theme was evident with respect to their relationships with teachers and the impact of those relations on their levels of confidence as well as their sense of comfort and well-being. Engagement in dialogue, in conjunction with experiencing praise, success and acknowledgement substantially improved relations between students and teachers.

The importance of 'attachment' and the need to feel like they 'belong' in school and amongst their peers also emerged within the theme of 'care' (Cooper 2008). Most of the participants enjoyed being part of the research group and the sense of identity and shared experience which this generated.

The impact of the students' active agency when they rose to the challenge of precipitating positive transformation to their school environment was realised throughout their school communities. Evidence of this is embodied in the teachers whose attitudes towards the students significantly became

more positive and the acknowledgement by key personnel of the participants' impact on teachers and the school. In one of the post primary schools, the principal, confirmed that the ethos and culture of the school had been changed to one that prioritised 'care' and 'listening'. She also pointed out that the most impressive outcome of the study 'was witnessing the leadership potential among pupils I had personally identified as exclusion risks' (Flynn 2013, unpublished thesis).

The theme of leadership is crucially linked to the other themes in this discussion and analysis. Taking the opportunity to promote a culture of 'listening' and 'caring' is not possible without the support and vision of the school leader and significant personnel. The school principal is also responsible for fostering and encouraging learning for all students, including students who present with different learning abilities and needs. This is essential to the encouragement of a positive response to 'difference' as well as recognising and encouraging all capabilities.

Within 'student voice work', it is important that students are not met with a 'tokenistic' response because an experience of 'authentic listening' has the potential to empower students to actively direct positive change in their school lives and to assume leadership roles in the process. However, a 'bottom up approach' such as this is redundant without an appropriate 'top down' response. This leadership relationship is multidirectional with the inherent possibility to promote relational care and, as a 'paradigm of leadership', is both empowering and reflective of itself. As a consequence of school leaders 'leading to encourage empowerment', the students become 'empowered to lead' generating a multidirectional model of empowerment, caring and leadership as a response to 'listening'. The paradigm is premised on encouraging students through an engagement with 'voice' to demonstrate their strengths and abilities and valuing them in the process. Respecting and acknowledging that students may know better 'how to help us help them', can promote a sense of 'ownership, responsibility and investment' in positive behaviour and learning as evident from this study.

Conclusion

Significantly, the students who participated in this study were identified as presenting with internalising and externalising behaviours that were impinging on their social and/or educational development. Some of the students had been identified as 'exclusion risks' by their school principals. Yet, students with labels that exemplify 'difficult difference' were responsible for positively affecting changes in attitudes towards them and presenting a model for the development of relationality in care and leadership. This evidence suggests that a 'student voice' approach to supporting young people is fundamental to the development of an inclusive learning environment for the benefit of all students. An education system which promotes inclusive principles should encourage a 'culture of listening'. Schools need to hear, not just the 'articulate' voice (Bourdieu et al., 1977; Robinson and Taylor 2007), or simply the voices of children with SEBD, but rather, the expert voice of every student in their own school in the pursuit of inclusive education.

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them.
Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness (hooks, 2003 p.xiv).

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SO HOW WAS IT FOR YOU? STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TRANSITIONING TO HIGHER EDUCATION:
a mixed methods study.

Alison Doyle*, Conor McGuckin, Michael Shevlin
School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract
This paper describes the methodological framework for a large scale longitudinal study examining the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning from 6th year of secondary school to higher education. The study combines inductive and deductive logics of enquiry using 1) college application and admissions data collated from one HEI, and 2) personal viewpoints collated via an online survey and discussion forum. This study was designed as a concurrent-transformative-triangulation-convergent Mixed Methodology with equal weighting and merged results delivered in two sequential phases. Research questions examine access to opportunities, and support and guidance through the transition process from the perspective of students, parents and practitioners within the education system, as stakeholders in the process. The strategic and structural elements of the research process are discussed with reference to the appropriateness of the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods of data collection.

Introduction
Rose & Shevlin (2010) make clear statements about the necessity to ensure that students are encouraged to voice their needs, intentions and aspirations for the future, and to support such engagement and participation. They draw attention to the need for developing tools that permit pupils to engage in self-evaluation as a means of moving towards achievable goals using a "systematic approach to investigating pupil responses" (2010, p. 131). The objective of the study is to identify issues related to transition of students with disabilities in order to inform future practices within senior cycle and

third level education. By identifying the main issues and examining the frequency of co-occurring experiences it may be determined whether such experiences are generalisable. The principal aims therefore are:

1. To document access to initiatives, advice, support and guidance using online surveys embedded within a dedicated 'transition' internet site.
2. To investigate personal perceptions of the impact of disability and to determine how these affect academic aspirations and achievement via an online discussion forum.
3. To re-examine transition experiences at the conclusion of the first year of undergraduate education, through a thematic analysis of in depth interviews.
4. To use an emancipatory methodology that permits students with a disability to voice their experiences of transition.

Methodology

Creswell & Plano Clark (2007) describe the Mixed Method (MM) approach as "a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as quantitative and qualitative methods" (2007, p. 5), based on a belief that combining both perspectives provides a clearer understanding of the research problem or question. Such a combination can be achieved in three ways: by merging, connecting or embedding both types of data. These combinations are used in many large scale studies (Luzzo, 1995; Richter, 1997; Thogersen-Ntoumani & Fox, 2005; Edmeades et al., 2010), and thus seemed the most suitable for this research project. A mixed method approach enhances the data by using qualitative methods as a tool for exploration, and quantitative methods as a tool for explanation.

Within this study quantitative data, whilst illustrating the scale and incidences of experiences and providing additional evidence to support theory, may not inform how experiences of disability within the transition process are internalised. Equally they may not lend weight to the argument that there are serious issues at an individual / institutional level. Qualitative methods consider the need for the insider viewpoint to lend depth and

gravity to the research, and to avoid situations where statistical data may be skewed or re-interpreted.

Research questions
In order to formulate research questions a hierarchy of concepts was constructed to assist with visualizing such questions:

Research area: Transition experiences of second level students with disabilities, their parents and other stakeholders

Research topic: Determinants / factors in successful transition to higher education

Research objectives: Investigation of the relationship between disability and successful transition

Research questions: What is the relationship between disability and access to / completion of successful transition

Specific questions:
- What is the relationship between specific disability and transition experiences?
- What is the relationship between school type and successful transition?
- What is the relationship between access to and quality of support and successful transition?
- What is the relationship between barriers / areas of concern and successful transition?
- How and to what extent do the above relationships inter-relate?
- What are the effects?

Research data: Quantitative data: survey items to measure variables for: specific disability, school type, current school year, access to and quality of support and guidance; student, parent and stakeholder viewpoints.

Qualitative data: Survey and discussion forum feedback describing experiences and concerns; in depth interviews

Research design

Creswell & Plano Clark (2009) argue that mixed methods permit multiple 'worldviews' and a greater freedom in the use of methodology and data. Investigating rare, hidden, elusive, marginalized, excluded and blurred populations, Rossi (2008) states that "without solid qualitative research it is not possible to define appropriate quantitative methodology" (2008, p. 3). Educational research is concerned with investigating the phenomena of educational experiences whether they are environmental, cognitive, behavioural, social or a mix or blending of these aspects. Within this field of enquiry lie paradigms that are used to identify specific areas for research. Brannen (2006) describes the importance of considering paradigms and philosophical assumptions, pragmatics and politics during the process of selecting an appropriate methodology, although "some of the advantages of mixed method research may not emerge until the end of the research process" (2006, p. 9).

The study was designed around the worldviews of pragmatism, advocacy and participation. The latter considers political issues such as marginalization and empowerment and seeks to address social injustices or inequities, and to investigate change by collaborating with individuals affected by such issues. Pragmatism considers the research question to be of primary importance rather than a particular method of investigation, and involves both inductive and deductive thinking: what data do I have, and what does it mean? A pragmatic worldview considers that whilst specific questions have been identified, they may need to be revised and adapted during the course of the research. For this research study an important consideration was that the methodology should be designed to facilitate the viewpoint of the research subjects.

The epistemology that emerged suggested the need for a concurrent-transformative-triangulation-convergent design, where qualitative and quantitative approaches are used simultaneously to "confirm, cross-validate,

or corroborate findings within a single study" (Creswell, 2003, p. 217). Data are then converged within either the analysis or discussion of findings, with the aim of providing a complementary inference, where these two different strands of investigation provide complementary conclusions or interpretations.

The transformative paradigm seeks to better understand the lived experiences of marginalized groups – such as disabled individuals – with the purpose of knowingly investigating and analysing social inequities and imbalance in order to address such issues by bringing about social action or change. It is important to stress that within the transformative paradigm there is no assumption of homogeneity - that all disabled people share the same characteristics - within the research sample, but that the research framework should take cognisance of within-group diversity in terms of degree of disability, functional limitations, lived day-to-day experiences, and access to supports. Indeed it is such a teasing out of different strands of   diversity which is the focus of this research study.

Tashakkeni & Teddlie (2003) use the term transformative-emancipatory, to describe an approach to researching individuals who experience oppression or discrimination, which is dependent upon building trust relationships with the researcher(s). Mertens (2003), states that such a perspective informs the work of researchers, by providing increased knowledge and understanding of "diversity within communities and implications for social justice and equity for diverse groups" (2003, p. 69).

Advantages and disadvantages of mixed methods designs
Where two different MM designs are combined in a research approach there is a tendency for one design to be considered the Primary (P) and the other to be secondary (s). In this study triangulation is considered to represent (P) and expansion represents (s). Greene et al., (1989) argue that whilst an expansion design "seeks to extend the breadth and range of enquiry by using different methods for different enquiry components" (1989, p. 259), such designs are often 'paramedic' in practice in that they tend to address failed or problematic scenarios. However they also argue that this approach is under-

explored and suggest that a more integrated methodological approach should be utilised. By adopting element of triangulation, complementarity and expansion into this study it can be considered as a multi-purpose design which serves to strengthen the methodological choices, means of analysis and findings.

Research environment

Internet sites and message board forums are examples of communities of practice and discourse communities, and can be considered as a 'third space' (Wilson, 2003). Third space theory (Bhabha, 1994) views these spaces as "discursive sites or conditions that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (1994, p. 37). The internet is an example of a third space that is neither home, school nor work, and thus is potentially emancipatory as individuals with disabilities are free to communicate without the constraints and boundaries of traditional communication models.

It is crucial to gain an understanding of how disabled individuals can engage in communities of practice to support their own learning. Equally important is observation of the ways in which the communicative freedom offered by virtual environments, facilitates a social construction in groups where normal contact is a pivotal difficulty. As more individuals join the message board and post communications, the space expands to become more than just a tool or resource. The website examined in this study operates as a community where members are able to construct a personal and social identity, without risk of rejection, thus providing new possibilities for positioning and identity.

Increased interest and adoption of virtual learning environments, particularly within higher education, might be expected to increase the participation of students from non-traditional groups. Woodford & Bradley (2004) support this argument stating that "being able to share experiences allowed for peer support in the form of emotional discharge. Thus the feeling of isolation was reduced even though they were unlikely to meet or recognise other contributors" (2004, p. 7).

Research method

Quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) data are collected simultane-
ously within the same time period, with both sets of data carrying equal
weight, and with results converged during the analysis and interpretation
stage. A visual diagram of the procedure was constructed by the researcher
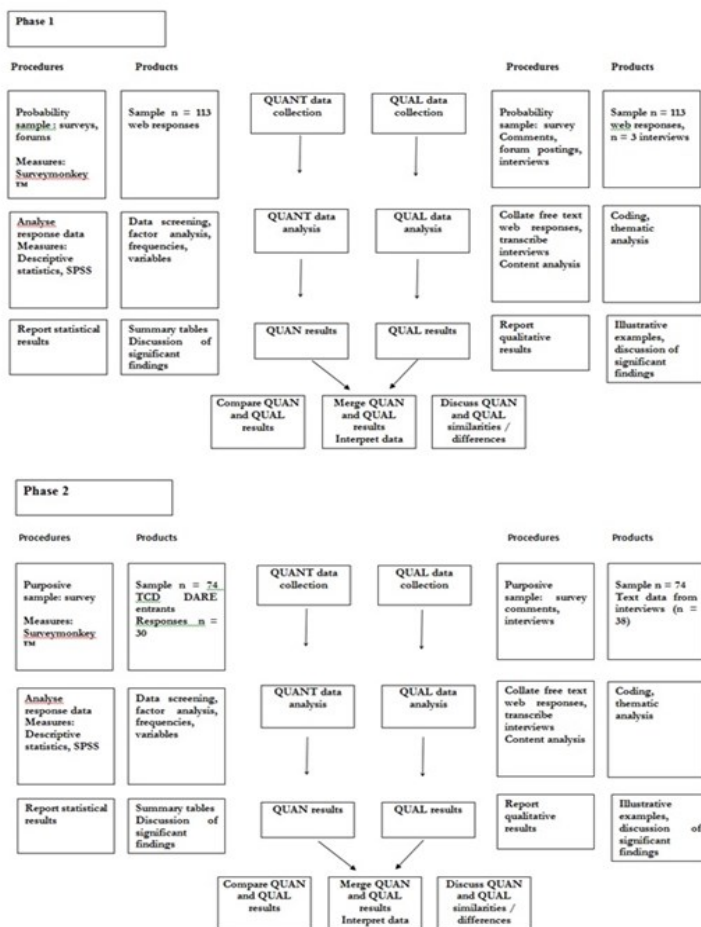to illustrate the research design which was delivered in two sequential phases
(Figure 1).

Figure 1. Visual diagram of procedures and products in Phase 1 and 2 of the mixed methods concurrent-
transformative-triangulation-convergent design

Figure 1

The rationale for a triangulated approach was that QUAN results would provide a general picture of the research problem, while content analysis of QUAL data would explain statistical data by exploring participants' views in more depth. The intent was to "validate or expand quantitative results with qualitative data" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 62).
No priority was given to either method of data collection or analysis and both were integrated into the research process from the beginning and were collated and analysed concurrently. The findings of both data sets were converged during the interpretation phase, and integrated into the discussion. Data was collected in two sequential phases: Phase 1 prior to college entry, Phase 2 after completion of the first year of college.

Web design
Phase 1 was delivered via a website specifically designed for this study as a community of practice 'Pathways to Trinity' www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity. Between April and December 2010 extensive research was conducted into websites that targeted disabled students transitioning from second to third level education, with the purpose of promoting, encouraging and facilitating such transitions. Specifically the search was confined to dedicated 'one stop' websites for secondary students as users, as opposed to sites that hosted information leaflets, listed useful links, or provided academic research and government resources. College or university specific web pages were not included and the search was limited to English language sites. The purpose of the web search was to identify best practice in terms of   accessibility, content, focus and design. Over a period of six months 36 sites were identified as meeting the research requirements as follows: USA (9), Canada (5), Australia (8), UK (8), NI (2), and the ROI (4). This examination of structure and content informed the final design of the research website.

A prototype transition website was constructed using drag and drop technology at http://pathways-to-trinity.weebly.com. This permitted construction of the web site architecture, writing of content and also acted as a repository for submissions by students and academic staff. Whilst the 'Pathways' website sits within the College domain, currently there is no

facility within the College design framework for blogs or web forums / discussion boards. For this reason the Weebly site was retained as the vehicle for online discussions. This is an open access forum and users are provided with clear pointers with regard to the purpose of the discussion board, anonymity and use of online forums.

Survey design

Both QUAN and QUAL data was collected using surveys embedded in the web site. Separate surveys were written for students, parents / carers and practitioners within the field of education. 'Practitioners' includes professional stakeholders in the educational process such as psychologists, teachers and policy makers. The purpose of each survey was firstly to measure the quantity and quality of information and assistance around the transition process for students with disabilities, and secondly to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to describe their experiences and / or provide opinions.

Adapting an existing survey is efficient in that it eliminates the need for lengthy design and construction. A number of other studies based around web delivery of specific user group e-tools were consulted with respect to the design and delivery of online surveys and use of forums, such as the LEO-NARDO CyberTraining Project (2010) and the Dyscovery Centre (Kirby, 2010). Questions from existing measures with high reliability / validity from similar studies such as AimHigher (Kinloch, 2006) and NCSE / Project IRIS (McGuckin et al., 2013) were adapted and merged with context questions specific to this study.

The surveys were delivered via a professional SurveyMonkey account which includes the facility to export and analyse numeric data to SPSS. The text analysis feature also permits open-ended responses to be qualitatively ana-lysed to determine insider viewpoints around the transition process, to pro-vide detail that will enhance numeric data, and to examine the importance of elements of the web design and content in terms of accessibility and relevance. Participants were also invited to take part in focus groups and / or

interviews. Surveys were piloted to determine ambiguity, clarity and length of completion and some questions were subsequently revised.

Research sample

Creswell & Plano Clark (2003, p. 212) discuss a range of sampling choices dependent upon MM type. Concurrent studies simultaneously use probability sampling (QUAN) - the probability of having a range of participants from a particular population, and purposive sampling (QUAL) - where the target population is refined due to size and time constraints. This method of sampling has been used successfully in a number of MM studies. Lasserre-Cortez (2006) used probability sampling for the QUAN phase of research (measuring difference in characteristics of teachers and schools) and purposive sampling for the QUAL phase (measuring the ways in which school climate affects teaching performance).

This approach was adopted as the most effective way of ensuring commonality in both sample populations in that one would be a sub-set of the other, and is well suited for investigation within an educational setting. The online surveys and discussion forum in Phase 1 assumed the probability of acquiring feedback from a range of disability types, school staff and practitioners within the field of education / special education. Interviews and focus groups in Phase 2 used a purposive sampling technique.

The target population for Phase 1 of the study was recruited from CAO applicants to Trinity College who had indicated a disability on the application form (n = 936). Email addresses for these applicants were sourced from the Admissions Office after close of applications on 1st February 2011. Stakeholder populations were recruited from disability and community groups (n = 63), national bodies such as the Department of Education and Skills, the National Disability Authority, the Special Education Support Service, and the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (n = 108), and secondary schools and colleges of further education (n = 185). Letters of introduction to the website were mailed to individual guidance counsellors across the country (n = 463). It was anticipated that a triangulation of perspectives from each of these

stakeholder groups would add gravitas to the findings. The website was formally launched on the 4th April 2011 and applicants / stakeholders were sent an email inviting them to access and use the website resources, and to participate in the stakeholder surveys.

Phase 2 of the research began in September 2011. In this phase the target population was identified as TCD entrants (n = 74) who accepted a place under the Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) scheme on reduced points entry, and who were approaching the conclusion of their first year in college.

QUAN Methods

Independent variables (IV) are identified as the relationship between disability type, school attended, current school year, quality and extent of support, identity of support providers and personal opinions of success / barriers in the transition process. The continuous dependent variable (DV) is identified as successful transition to higher education. Surveys were chosen as the QUAN method of data collection as they are "concerned with the relationship between variables" and not just the distribution or frequency of variables (Punch, 2003, p. 3). Elements that were considered when structuring the survey were the purpose, measurement, and methods of data collection and analysis.

Independent Variables (IV) and Dependent Variables (DV) were identified for each survey as a data set, in order to examine whether transition experiences can be extrapolated for factors that may contribute to the transition experience, such as disability type (DT). The number of IVs was based on the need to avoid overlap or duplication which may lead to incorrect conclusions about the DV. The purpose was to identify a connection between variables that would permit IVs to predict DV. The relationship between IV and DV within the three data sets is illustrated in Figure 2.

Data set 1: Student survey
Categorical
IV (conceptual definitions)
    1.   disability type (DT)
    2.   school type (ST)
    3.   quality of support (QS)
    4.   extent of support (ES)
    5.   identity of support provider (SP)
    6.   factors in successful transition (FS)
    7.   barriers to successful transition (BS)

IV (operational definitions)
    1.   disability categories (ADHD, AS etc)
    2.   fee paying, non-fee paying, DEIS
    3.   rating scales
    4.   rating scales
    5.   parent, friend, SENO, teacher etc
    6.   undefined open-ended response
    7.   undefined open-ended response

Continuous
DV
successful transition to HE

Data set 2: Parent / carer survey
Categorical
IV (conceptual definitions)

    1.   disability type (DT)
    2.   school type (ST)
    3.   quality of support (QS)
    4.   extent of support (ES)
    5.   identity of support provider (SP)
    6.   factors in successful transition (FS)
    7.   barriers to successful transition (BS)

IV (operational definitions)

    1.   disability categories (ADHD, AS etc)
    2.   fee paying, non-fee paying, DEIS
    3.   rating scales
    4.   rating scales
    5.   parent, friend, SENO, teacher etc
    6.   undefined open-ended response
    7.   undefined open-ended response

Continuous
DV
Successful transition to HE

Data set 3: Practitioners survey
Categorical
IV (conceptual definitions)

    1.   gender (G)
    2.   professional experience (PE)
    3.   qualification / expertise (QE)
    4.   disability type (DT)
    5.   quality of support (QS)
    6.   factors in successful transition (FS)
    7.   barriers to successful transition (BS)

IV (operational definitions)

    1.   male / female
    2.   years in education / special education
    3.   education, psychology, SEN etc
    4.   disability categories (ADHD, AS etc)
    5.   rating scales
    6.   undefined open-ended response
    7.   undefined open-ended response

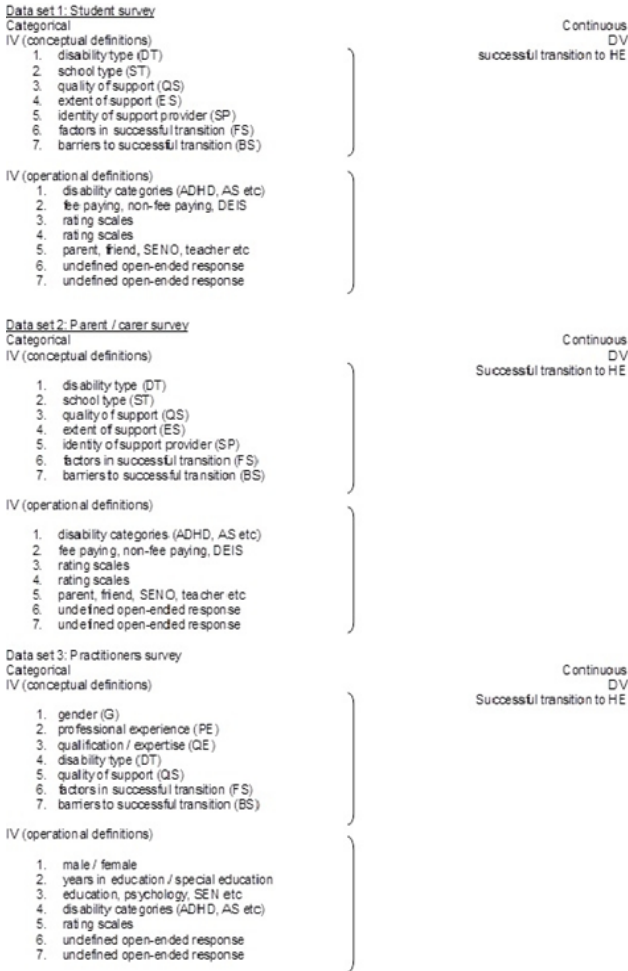Continuous
DV
Successful transition to HE

Figure 2. Relationship between IV and DV within the three data sets

Figure 2

According to Punch (2003, p. 35) completion rates in surveys are dependent upon length and construction of the survey, with shorter more succinct surveys more likely to have a higher response rate and thus more validity, as they reduce the possibility of confounding variables such as boredom / fatigue. Validity is concerned with how honest or conscientious the respondents were in providing their answers. Punch (2003, p. 42) suggests that a

response rate of 60% could be considered to provide validity. Accordingly, a maximum of 10 questions was applied.

Statistical data on web site traffic was collected through Google Analytics (GA) (Figure 3), which is an enterprise-class web analytics solution that provides added insight into the analysis of website traffic.
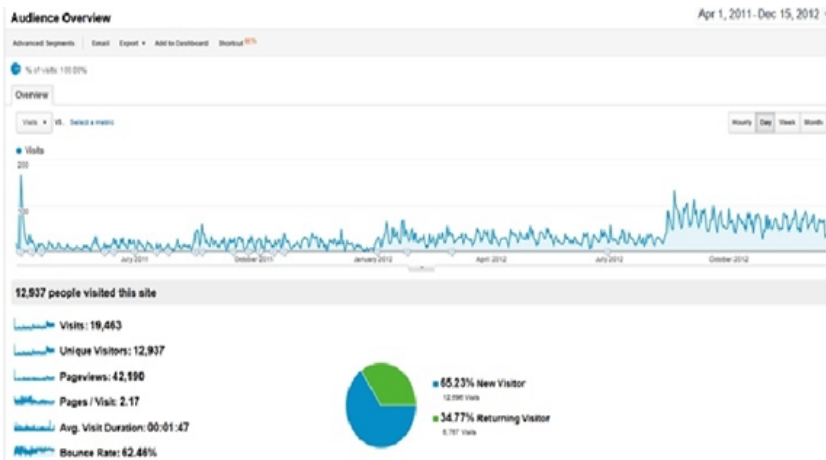

Figure 3

McGuckin & Crowley (2010) discuss the potential of GA as an effective resource for measuring the impact of academic research output and understanding the geo-demographics of users of specific web 2.0 content. The authors describe the advantages of this statistical analysis tool using as an example the EU-funded CyberTraining project. The findings of this study illustrate the promise of GA as an effective tool for measuring the impact of academic research and project output.

A short piece of html code was inserted into the header and footer of each page of both the 'Pathways' and 'discussion forum websites. Data includes number of visits, page views, time on site, referring sites, search engines and demographics by town / city, country and language. There is capacity to 'annotate' key dates and extract tailor made reports for specific date ranges,

for example the launch date of 4 April and distribution of letters to guidance counsellors on the 11th April.

QUAL methods

Open-ended survey questions allow feedback through a comments box. In addition the discussion board / forum space on the website has 5 sections: a general area for questions regarding applying to college, courses etc.; disability related discussions permitting members to share experiences, activities and advice which may be disability specific; disability service supports, in which members may post questions about college supports; transition from school to college, a section for contributing ideas about improving transition practices; and DARE queries specific to the DARE process.

In Phase 1 text from survey comments and forum contributions were analysed using the text analysis tool within Surveymonkey, and were also independently coded and thematically analyzed by the researcher. These categories were not selected on the basis of previous research findings, but were identified from the thematic analysis and the original research question.

In Phase 2 post-college entrants were invited to complete a transition survey and participate in semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. Interviews lasted approximately 15 – 20 minutes and included an opportunity for participants to describe / critique their use of the Pathways to Trinity website. Such a free-response method was also used by Luzzo (1995) and is a good opening activity ensuring that participants feel that viewpoints are valid and valued. Participants were asked to describe their experiences of transition from three perspectives: disability, 'internal' support (parental / school input), and 'external' support (colleges, press, media, events etc). The purpose of this line of questioning was to provide data that could be analysed to determine differences in experiences and perceived barriers within the transition process. The results of the interviews were coded into distinct categories, which were not selected on the basis of previous research findings, but were identified from thematic analysis and consideration of the original research question.

Ethical considerations

- Guidelines provided by the Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin (Whyte, 2003), stipulate the following principles for consideration during the research process:

- Having a commitment to children's well-being (Beneficence);

- Having a commitment to doing no harm (Non-Maleficence);

- Having a commitment to children's rights including the right of individuals to take responsibility for him or herself (Autonomy);

- Being child-centred in its approach to research, listening to children, treating them in a fair and just manner (Fidelity).

Whilst participants in this study were aged over 16 years the above principles were considered as being reflective of good practice. In addition it is advisable for researchers to familiarize themselves with the different ethical guidelines relevant to vulnerable groups produced by different organizations. Thus the Code of Ethics provided by the Psychological Society of Ireland, the British Psychological Society and the British Educational Research Association were also consulted.

An explanation of the purpose of the study is provided in the first two pages of the internet survey, together with consent to participation and ethical guidelines. This is based on best practice for similar internet studies (Kirby, 2010). A letter of introduction and code of ethics are provided on the home page of both the 'Pathways' website and the discussion forum, and thus were available for consultation at all times. Participants were assured that data collection and storage complies with The Data Protection Act, 1998, which requires that data should be stored securely, and that computerized data should be password-protected, printed documents should be kept in secured storage, and all data should be anonymized by replacing names with ID numbers or codes (Data Protection Commission Ireland, 2010). Contributors to the discussion forum and blog were reminded that postings were submitted in the public domain; they were advised not to identify themselves or others through user names or content of submissions.

Role of the researcher

This study was founded on valuing the voice of stakeholders and engaging them in the research process. Barnes (2003) states that research should be rooted within an environment and cultural setting which highlights disabling consequences, should have a meaningful practical outcome and should refer directly to the interests and needs of those being researched; the researcher believes that this study meets these criteria. Important principles that need to be considered are the researcher's own awareness of privilege in having access to and the trust of parents, students, teachers and representatives from community groups, not to push for information or participation, to accept refusal, to give value to their time, to ensure confidentiality and security of information, not to breach the trust barrier, to listen and not to re-interpret what is said.

The researcher's involvement with data collection within both phases of this study differs between the quantitative and qualitative processes. In the former the researcher collects data using standardized survey procedures, with data analysis performed using commercial statistical analysis tools. The qualitative process requires the researcher to assume a more participatory role as the researcher is a Disability Officer and provides advice and assistance to stakeholders wishing to engage with the supplementary admissions route into college. This includes engaging with students, parents, school staff, and national experts face to face and remotely. During the data collection procedure, particularly with regard to in depth interviews, the researcher may develop closer and more supportive relationships with some participants, particularly with those who are tracked across the first year of college. All of the above indicates the potential - to some extent - for a subjective interpretation of the data and arguably a potential for bias. However the inclusion of a triangulation of research methods addresses such issues.

Summary

This paper has presented the methodological framework for a large scale longitudinal study, examining the experiences of students with disabilities transitioning from 6th year of secondary school, to Higher Education. Phase 1 of

the study is concerned with gathering quantitative and qualitative data from students with disabilities, their parents or carers, and educational practitioners, prior to, or during the process of transition. This was achieved via a dedicated transition website, a research environment specifically designed for this study, and which was based on the principle of third place communities of practice. Phase 2 of the study collates quantitative and qualitative data from students with disabilities who are nearing completion of the first year of HE. The study was launched in April 2011, and it is anticipated that preliminary results will be available in December 2013.

Corresponding author: Alison Doyle, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. E-mail: doylea6@tcd.ie

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THE DISABLED STUDENT JOURNEY: a new transition model is emerging

Alison Doyle, Declan Reilly, Declan Treanor
Disability Service
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

Society, and the education system in particular, tends to view disabled people as homogenous members of specific disability groups. By contrast, using an ecological framework to research the impact of environmental systems for each student facilitates a wider exploration of factors that may affect the educational progression of each student. It also allows disability services to move away from what has historically been a 'reactive' model of service delivery, to a proactive approach that takes many factors and circumstances into account. This paper presents the framework and structure for an emerging model of disability service support - The Student Journey – which is designed to enable students to become independent, self-aware and self-determined. Strategies are delivered across three phases related to the journey through Further or Higher Education: Phase 1 - pre-entry, admission and the first year experience, Phase 2 - building and maintaining a college career, and Phase 3 - progressing through College to employment. The first year of activities, projects and outcomes associated with each phase of the Student Journey, are reviewed and discussed.

Introduction

The Disability Service (DS) in Trinity College Dublin has implemented an Outreach, Transition, Retention and Progression Plan 2011 – 2014 (Disability Service, 2011) which aims to develop clear and effective support systems, at all stages of the student Higher Education (HE) journey, from pre-entry to employment. It is an example of evidence-based practice, using on-going data collection and evaluation, to improve the student journey. This strategy is delivered in three phases:

Phase 1:   Pre-entry, admission and the first year experience.

Phase 2:   Building and maintaining a college career.

Phase 3:   Progressing through College to employment.

Each phase of the student journey is aligned to the strategic objectives of Trinity College Dublin (Trinity College Dublin, 2009) and to national targets for students with disabilities set by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland (HEA, 2008), and activities are linked to recommendations from the OECD (2011) report on students with disabilities in HE.

Theoretical framework for service strategy
Engaging students across their journey into, through and from HE, requires an individualised approach. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework (1989) argues that the development of the individual is impacted by the systems within which that individual functions (Figure 1).

Macrosystem: attitudes and ideologies of the culture in which the individual exists, for example, equal rights and lifelong learning.

Exosystem: institutions and contexts which may impact directly or indirectly on the microsystem, for example, support systems, social welfare, educational policies.

Mesosystem: links / interactions between different agencies or 'actors' within the microsystem, for example, home-school relationships.

Microsystem: immediate social context, for example, family, school, peers, church, play group, local area, family health service.

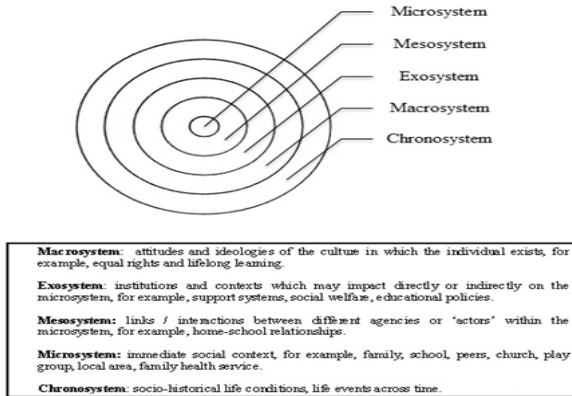Chronosystem: socio-historical life conditions, life events across time.

Figure 2: Interpretation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of child development (1989)

Figure 1

Interaction between each of these systems will have varying degrees of impact, at different times in the student journey. This framework assists with identifying promoters and barriers within each of the environmental systems, which may affect the educational progression of each student. It also allows disability services to move away from what has historically been a 'reactive' model of service delivery, to a proactive approach which takes many factors

and circumstances into account. Including evidence-based research in service delivery also addresses issues that arise as a function of the current economic climate, including the financial resourcing of disability services.

Model of practice for supporting students

Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby, & Letts (1996) propose a Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model (Figure 2) which describes the dynamic nature of occupational performance, and examines the complexity and interaction of factors related to tasks or outcomes to be achieved by an individual as:

1.   Person: is deemed to be a unique being who assumes a variety of ever changing and concurrent roles, which vary across time and context in the meaning and importance attributed to them.

2.   Environment: is viewed as the context in which behaviour takes place and provides cues to individuals as to what is expected and what they are to do. Elements in the environment can be viewed as supports or barriers. Environment includes social, intuitional or organisational, physical contexts and cultural contexts.

3.   Occupation: encapsulates all the tasks and activities that individuals and want to do on a day to day basis, such as self-care activities, leisure and work / productivity.
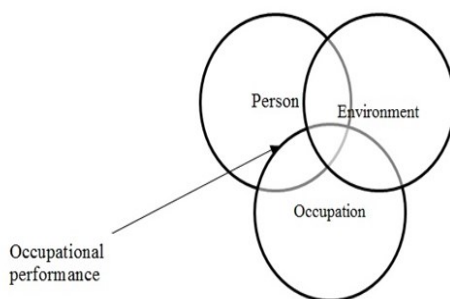
(Stewart et al. 2003)

Figure 2. PEO model.
Source: Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby & Letts, 1991, p. 18

Figure 2

Thus the process of transition from school to post-secondary education, and progression through the student journey, can be supported using a PEO model. This approach facilitates the acquisition of skills such as self-awareness, self-determination and self-advocacy, which are transferable across the entire student journey.

This paper describes each of the three phases of the student journey and the work that DS has undertaken to facilitate the student journey, using a PEO model. Phase 1 examines pre-entry activities and the First Year Experience, and discusses strategies that provide transparency around college application and supports, and that encourage the development of skills required in third level, in a way that enhances the first year experience of disabled students. Phase 2 focuses on transition through HE, and examines the outcome measures and risk factors that can be used to monitor the effectiveness of supports for students with disabilities, as they progress through college. Finally, Phase 3 presents a model that allows disabled students and graduates, employers and HEIs to be confident in the employment of independent, self-aware graduates with disabilities.

Phase 1 - Pre-entry activities and the First Year Experience
Objectives for Phase 1 of the student journey are to i) increase the number of students with sensory, physical and multiple disabilities in HE as stated in the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008 – 2013, ii) engage students, parents and practitioners in pre-and-post entry activities in preparation for the transition to HE, and iii) identify factors that function as either promoters or barriers for students with disabilities applying to HE. Phase 1 is delivered via the Pathways to Trinity web strategy, the Pathways Outreach Project, and the Pathways Transition Tool. This model is included in the Compendium of Effective Practice (HEA, 2012), a publication which presents a wide range of strategies and initiatives focused on improving the student experience.

Pathways to Trinity Website www.tcd.ie/pathways-to-trinity
Students and their transition partners require access to relevant information in an accessible format presented in an uncomplicated, jargon free context. Felsinger and Byford (2010) identify pre-entry activities as a reasonable

adjustment for students with disabilities and argue that 'students can have a smoother transition to higher education, subsequently influencing their retention and progression' (2010, p. 22). This study also recommended that strategic actions for HEIs should include public dissemination of information on reasonable accommodations, entitlements and supports.

The Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB) Public Information project (2011) surveyed second level students (n = 266) and Career Guidance Counsellors (n = 264) throughout Ireland, to ascertain what types of information should be available on university and other websites, in a format that is clear and accessible. Students indicated a need for information on course content and entry routes, clearer and simpler use of language, explanation of higher education jargon or key words, and provision of a site specific search engine. Guidance Counsellors indicated a need for course specific information, a glossary of key terms, realistic accounts of programmes, entry routes, and student supports. The IUQB recommended inclusion of feedback on the experiences of students in college with regard to specific courses and campus life.

The Pathways to Trinity website is a dedicated transition site for second mlevel students, parents, professionals, and other stakeholders that assists with transition planning. The purpose of the site is to collate and disseminate information identified in the IUQB study, as being critical to transition success. The website hosts longitudinal surveys for completion by students, parents and practitioners, which provides quantitative and qualitative data on the transition experience, with the purpose of informing future practices within senior cycle and HE.

Analysis of visitors since launch of the website in April 2011 is facilitated by embedding Google Analytics in each of the web pages, an enterprise class analytic tool. Such data (April 2012) indicates encouraging trends: 7,868 visitors have accessed the website of which 5,134 are unique visitors; 62.13% of these were new visits and 37.87% returning visitors, from 94 countries. Pages have been viewed 19, 992 times, the most popular content by ranking is study skills, college application, DARE, course choice, and college

supports. It is anticipated that these trends will increase significantly as Pathways becomes embedded as a resource at second level.

Pathways Outreach Project

This pilot programme seeks to engage students with disabilities during Leaving Certificate year by providing college-based workshops which explore topics such as assistive technology, academic skills, planning a college career, and the college application process. Parents and practitioners are encouraged to engage in workshops which provide advice on the college application process, supporting students through state examinations, managing student stress and setting up a study environment. Sessions are designed and delivered by DS staff and Occupational Therapists, together with sessional input from current students with disabilities in the university. All participants in the workshop are introduced to the Pathways Transition Tool.

The first cycle of workshops took place between October 2011 and April 2012 with 11 students and 13 parents in attendance; the second cycle ran between September 2012 and January 2013, with 17 students and 4 parents in attendance. Quantitative and qualitative data for both cycles was gathered from a survey, examining parent and Data from the first cycle was used to re-evaluate / adjust programme format and content, for the following cycle. Parents expressed improved confidence and engagement by students with the transition process, and whilst students were satisfied with the content of the workshops, logistics such as travel time, venue and breaks, caused some difficulties. No feedback was received from any of the practitioners from either cycle of the workshops.

Pathways Transition Tool

Students with disabilities should be assisted with planning and recording the steps in the transition process, adapting their goals and needs as they progress through their school career, and reviewing such goals collaboratively with a transition 'partner', be that a parent, teacher, Guidance Counsellor or other practitioner. The Pathways Transition Tool is a web-based assessment and planning resource structured into five modules:

Preparing Myself for the Future, Independent Living, Academic Skills, College Application and Course Choices, and Identifying and Using Reasonable Accommodations. The Transition Tool is currently available as separate Word documents, and an online version is in development.

Phase 2 - Principles for transition through higher education

Objectives for Phase 2 of the student journey are identified as i) identify transferable skills across the college experience which will promote and encourage independence, self-determination and self-advocacy, ii) ensure support systems are fit for purpose by conducting evidence-based research to determine needs and supports, and to monitor performance and delivery of those supports, and iii) identify factors that function as either promoters or barriers to student retention.

The focus of the second phase of the student journey is on building and maintaining a College career. This means continuing to provide reasonable accommodations (AHEAD, 2008; NAIRTL, 2008; Trinity College Dublin Disability Service, 2010) that are appropriate to the student, their disability type and their course requirements. In addition, DS seeks to create a balance in the provision of support, the facilitation of independence and the retention and progression of students through College until graduation. Striking a balance between 'providing support' and 'encouraging independence' need not be a conflict of interests if the supports offered adjust to the student's needs as they proceed through College.

Retention of students in TCD

Retention and progression are recognised as important outcome measures of HE internationally (Tinto, 1993; Yorke, 1999; HESA, 2011; Seidman, 2012). In the academic year 2010/11 a total of 530 undergraduate students withdrew from courses in TCD. While 260 (49%) were 1st year students, 117 (45%) were repeating 1st year. However, the number of repeating 1st years who withdraw can accumulate over 3 to 4 years. For example, within the 2006/07 cohort (Table 1), the combined total of repeating 1st years who withdrew over 3 subsequent years (n = 131), actually outnumbered the total of 1st years who withdrew as first time 1st years (n = 125).

Year	JF	SF	JS	SS	Total
2006/07	125	0	0	0	125
2007/08	93	40	0	0	133
2008/09	31	39	11	0	81
2009/10	7	21	9	1	38
Total	256	100	20	1	377
%	67.9%	26.5%	5.30%	0.3%	100%

Table 1: TCD Senior Lecturer's Report 2010/11

(Table H2 – 2006/07 cohort Standing and Year of Withdrawal)

Students with disabilities in TCD

The Pathways to Education report (UCC, 2010), tracked the progress of students with disabilities within nine HEIs in 2005, finding that students with disabilities who leave HE are - similar to their non-disabled peers - most likely to leave in their first year. However, they also found that students with disabilities, compared to their non-disabled peers, are more likely to graduate and to take longer to do so. The retention rate for disabled students in TCD was 93% for the 2005/06 intake (Pathways to Education, 2010), in contrast to the retention rate of the general undergraduate student population in TCD, which was 82.2% (TCD Senior Lecturer's Report, 2010). *

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Caution needs to be exercised when comparing the retention rates of disabled and non-disabled students. A skewed comparison is easy to emerge if the total number of students registered with the Disability Service in any one year is used as a basis. This is because a substantial number of 3rd year and 4th year students (who have typically much higher rates of completion than 1st or 2nd years) tend to register with the Disability Service for the first time later in the academic year. A fairer comparison is to count only those students who disclosed at entry (as in the Pathways to Education report 2010) and follow them as a cohort against their peers.

Disability	Current DS (820) (A)	WD DS (193) (B)	Grads DS (744) (C)	WD Risk (B/A)	% WD of B + C
Mental Health	131 (15%)	66 (34%)	94 (12%)	2.26	41%
Deaf/HOH	40 (5%)	18 (9.3%)	35 (7%)	1.86	34%
ASD	31 (4%)	8 (4%)	16 (2%)	1	33%
SPLD	327 (38%)	64 (32%)	404 (54%)	0.84	14%
SOI	117 (13%)	18 (9.3%)	99 (13%)	0.71	15%
Physical	71 (8%)	11 (5.5%)	57 (7%)	0.68	16%
DCD	41 (5%)	4 (2%)	0	0.4	N/A
ADHD	41 (5%)	4 (2%)	16 (2%)	0.4	20%
Blind/VI	21 (2%)	1 (0.5%)	23 (3%)	0.25	4%

Table 2: TCD withdrawal (WD) rates 2007 to 2011 Disability Service Statistics

Persistence and disability type

DS statistics (Table 2) indicate that students with mental health difficulties or who are Deaf or hard of hearing, have shown much higher rates of withdrawal compared to students with other disabilities. Students with Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental co-ordination disorder (DCD) or who are blind or visually impaired, are least likely to withdraw.

Home origin

International students with disabilities make up 9.5% of the student in the service compared to 21.5% of the general student population in TCD. Students with disabilities from the US have withdrawn from courses in TCD at a much higher rate than students with disabilities from the UK (Table 3).

DS Int.	All DS Int. 186	DS Int. Current 83	DS Int. WD 13	DS Int. Grad 90
UK	96 (5%)	47 (5.4%)	2 (1%)	47 (6%)
US	32 (2%)	12 (1.4%)	5 (2.5%)	15 (2%)

Table 3: Withdrawal rates by country 2007 to 2011 Disability Service Statistics

Progression rates

Students with disabilities progress at a slower rate than their non-disabled peers, compared to the TCD average for progression which is 91% (Appendix D Senior Lecturer's Report 2010/11). Of 80 students with a disability in their final year in 2011/12, just 44 (55%) had progressed each year since their 1st year.

Grade comparison

Students with disabilities in TCD are less likely to achieve a 1st or 2.1 exam result and more likely to achieve a 2.2 or pass (Table 4) compared to their peers.

Final Grade	1st	2.1	2.2	Pass/3
TCD%	15	53	22	10
DS%	14	40	30	17

Table 4: TCD Disability Service Statistics 2010/11

There are two possible reasons for this: supports are more sought after by students at risk of failing, and the facility to repeat on medical grounds or go 'off books' is more likely to be taken up by students with disabilities. The vast majority of students with disabilities make the transition into and through HE successfully. However, a minority struggle and withdraw at some point after registration. The outcome measures indicate that students registered with DS have a higher rate of retention and course completion, than their peers. Among disability cohorts, students with a mental health difficulty have the highest risk of withdrawing. Students with disabilities are more likely to withdraw after attempting to repeat 1st year, as opposed to withdrawing

during their first attempt at 1st year. They are more likely, as a group, to take longer to complete their degree, and are more likely to attain grades of 1st class or 2.1, in proportionately lower numbers than their peers.

This overview of the areas where DS is establishing an evidence base for students in TCD, is just a beginning. As 50% of students register with DS post-entry, thus far insufficient data has been available to differentiate entry route, beyond a basic level, as a variable in comparison to the other measures discussed here. Further data are also required in order to make meaningful comparisons with the general student population, in areas such as prior educational attainment, home origin and socio-economic status.

Phase 3 - Transition to employment: a new model is emerging
Objectives for Phase 3 of the student journey are identified as i) investigate the experiences of disabled students transitioning into employment, ii) evaluate the transition to employment tool within a university to employment setting, iii) critique issues around the employment of disabled graduates, and iv) determine national policy issues that promote employment opportunities for disabled students.

As a result of national and HE strategies, the number of disabled students participating in third level education has grown significantly. The last decade has seen student numbers rise from 450 in 2000, to over 6,000 in 2010, and TCD has the highest numbers of disabled students in third level education (AHEAD, 2009; 2010). Consequently, the number of disabled graduates entering the labour market is at unprecedented levels, although there are few studies relating to their status within the Irish labour market, and there is no national data identified from the HEA First Destination Survey (HEA, 2010) that provides an indication of the employment levels of disabled graduates. Disabled students are graduating successfully with their peers, albeit with some discrepancies between grades. Further research is required to ascertain the reasons for the marked differences in achievement identified in the previous section of this paper. Historically, 'reactive' strategies adopted by DS did not focus on the transitional nature of the student, but primarily worked on retention and adding retro-fit supports to ensure that students

stayed within the system. Inclusive design and future destinations of disabled students were not part of the agenda.

In 2010 DS participated in an OECD study 'Pathways for Disabled Students to Tertiary education and Employment'. The resulting report (OECD, 2011) provides new knowledge and insight into effective policies and practice to support people with disabilities, as they move from school into post-secondary education or employment. This document, together with changes in the economic climate, prompted the development of the Student Journey, resulting in a clear strategy for assisting disabled students and graduates to determine their needs in the employment arena.

Data sources
The lack of information on the graduate status of disabled students is a significant issue for HEIs. The HEA distributes a survey to graduates known as the First Destination Survey, and which informs the First Destination Report (FDR). This annual report examines the employment, further study, and training patterns of graduates on the 30th of April each year. However, no data are available specific to non-traditional student groups, including students with disabilities. Some HEIs have attempted to gather such data, typically by including an additional question in the survey. University College Cork (UCC) provide the Careers Service with a list of ID numbers for final year students registered with a disability, and relevant data are extracted from the FDR. From 2012, UCC will use a tagging system on student records to extract those students with disabilities who responded to the FDR survey. Expected changes to FDR in 2013 – 2014 include survey questions examining the destination of disabled graduates.

The Careers Advisory Service (2010) conducted a survey of the first destinations of TCD graduates holding diplomas, primary degrees and postgraduate qualifications (n = 2,938), with a response rate of 59%. Of these, 85 students (2.9%) were identified as having been registered with DS while at TCD, 29% did not respond to the survey, 39% were in employment, 25% were in further study, 2% were not available for work, and 5% were seeking employment. Generally, students registered with DS were more

likely to transition into employment than the general graduate population (55% DS, 42% GGP), and less likely to go into further study (35% DS, 49% GGP). There is a slight difference in unemployment rate, with 7% DS seeking employment against 5% GGP. Of those who had been registered with DS and went on to further study, at least 81% stayed in Ireland (2 students did not state where they were studying), compared to 78% of GGP remaining in Ireland.

Implications for further research

This document has discussed a single graduate cohort and data from successive years is necessary before emerging patterns can be confidently identified. However, the fact that disabled students were more likely to choose employment over further study, mirrors findings from UCC (2005) and UL (2005). Further investigation is required as to why this might be the case. Research conducted in Phase 2 indicates that students with disabilities can face greater challenges while pursuing their primary degree, and can take longer to progress through their undergraduate career. It may be that the time and energy necessary to meet these additional challenges leads to burn out, leaving graduates unlikely to pursue another demanding course. An analysis of the motivations for disabled graduate choices is worthwhile. The TCD Career Service (2011) noted that graduates with a higher degree had a higher starting salary in 2010 (43% of level 9/10 graduates earned €33,000 or more against 34% of level 8 graduates). This raises the possibility that if disabled graduates are less likely to pursue higher degrees, they face lower earning potential in the longer term. A deeper analysis of possible challenges facing disabled TCD graduates is essential.

Leonardo Project - Univers'Emploi

In 2010, TCD joined the EU Leonardo project 'Univers'Emploi' led by the INS HEA Institute (France) and partnered with the University of Aarhus (Denmark), the University of Rome "Foro Italico" (Italy) and UCC. This is an innovative employment transfer project that builds on the employment strategy developed by the University of Aarhus (Denmark), known as the 'Aarhus Model'. The aim of this project is for each partner country to

create a tool to assist universities to embed employment elements into the needs assessment process. To achieve these goals, this project will compare the Aarhus model with the practices of other partner countries, and thus build a scalable and transferable methodology linked to national contexts. The pilot study is based on a sample of 20 students per country, and mobilizes actors in the university, the world of business and, where necessary, the sector of vocational rehabilitation. A website was developed to disseminate information and to report on outcomes of each stage of the project http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/Phase3/Leonardo.php and a guide for all stakeholders (student, university and employers/mentors) was produced, to ensure all were aware of responsibilities in participating in this project.

Recruitment
Selection criteria was agreed by each participating country, and graduates with physical, sensory, significant illness (SOI), mental health difficulties and Asperger's Syndrome (AS) were identified as having significant difficulties in preparing and gaining employment. A survey of students entering their final year of study in TCD and UCC was conducted to determine the level of interest in participating in this project, and issues and concerns about the transition to employment. High-level results include 48% (n = 44) of those surveyed in TCD were interested in full-time employment and participation in the pilot, compared with 82% (n = 28) of a smaller sample in UCC. Disclosure of disability was the most significant issue for respondents in both universities (55% TCD, 46% UCC). Lack of disability awareness in the workplace (43% TCD, 20% UCC), and negotiating reasonable accommodations (27% TCD, 20% UCC) were the next most important issues. TCD and UCC opted not to set a participant limit, and the final number of participants was 26 (TCD n = 15, UCC n = 11).

Student Demographics
Of the 26 students participating in the project, 14 were male (TCD n = 6, UCC n = 8) and 12 female (TCD n = 9, UCC n = 3), with an even representation across disability categories (Table 5). The majority of students pursued Arts degrees (TCD n = 9, UCC n = 10), followed by Engineering and Sciences (TCD n = 4, UCC n = 0), Health Sciences (TCD n = 2, UCC n = 1).

With respect to award level, 19 students received a level 8 undergraduate degree (TCD n = 13, UCC n = 6), and 9 students received a level 9 postgraduate qualification (TCD n = 2, UCC n = 5).

	TCD	UCC
Aspergers' Syndrome	3	0
Blind / Vision Impaired	1	3
Dyspraxia	1	0
Physical Disability	3	3
Significant Ongoing	2	0
Deaf / Hard of Hearing	2	1
Mental Health	3	4
Total	15	11

Table 5: student participants by disability category

Employment transition process

The main activities of the project were of three types: i) activities involving students, including training and information events, one-to-one guidance, and online activities; ii) activities targeting employers, both HEIs focused on establishing and developing links with existing organisations that work with students and graduates with disabilities, such as GetAhead and Employability; and iii) activities involving other relevant HEI services. A student-centered approach was taken from the outset, with the student setting the direction for employment guidance. For some students this meant identifying a mentor, for others it meant accessing guidance on disclosure and supports within the workplace. As all students were at a different point in their transition, they had diverse needs and a one-size fits all approach was unfeasible.

Activities involving the student

Students were invited to attend an introductory meeting to explain the purpose of the pilot and their responsibilities in participating in the project, as communicated in the project guide http://www.tcd.ie/disability/projects/Phase3/student.php. A report of this

meeting was sent to all students, outlining next steps to be taken in the employment process. This action plan approach allowed the student to work on tasks such as dealing with disclosure, attending the Careers Service for specific supports, for example engaging in a mock interview, CV preparation or exploring employment options. Follow-up meetings were arranged with all students together with referral to mentors, with an average of three meetings per student. The main issues identified by students for discussion were i) disclosure of disability, ii) negotiation of reasonable accommodations, iii) interviewing skills, iv) balancing transition planning with academic responsibilities, v) job hunting resources, vi) self-advocacy skills (for example, approaching potential employers), and vii)postgraduate applications and managing disability in the workplace. Students in both universities were invited to avail of a number of specialist supports and disability focused career events, such as 'Bridging the Future', and an Employment Preparation Day, both organized in association with WAM/AHEAD.

Activities with employers
Unlike the other European partners in this project, a decision was taken to focus on employer engagement via the student. Where students expressed an interest in a specific area or employer, research was conducted with the student to determine issues they might need to address, and whether the employer was known to be a strong equality employer. Research involved reviewing website information and contacting the Careers Service. In addition, contacts were made with Employability, an agency set up to assist disabled people in the employment journey, in Dublin and Cork. Strong links were developed, with the universities making a group of disabled students available to this agency. WAM and AHEAD also proved an effective support service for students, as they offer advice and support along with internships.

With the development of the student journey approach and synergies with other stakeholders internally and externally, a re-focus of resources has allowed mainstream services such as Careers and specialist supports such as Unlink, to integrate employment transitioning issues into the student journey, from earlier in the progression stage. This allows specialists to work

with students as they progress, improving their confidence, and making their CVs more employment-focused. The Leonardo Project has encouraged TCD to develop a model of transition to employment that previously did not exist for disabled students in college. An evaluation of the project in each of the participating countries and institutions will allow for the embedding of such a transition tool.

Conclusion

In general, the measures mentioned in Phase 1, 2 and 3 provide evidence that supports have a positive impact. TCD has the highest number of students with disabilities of any HEI in Ireland (AHEAD, 2011) and these students are more likely to graduate compared to their non-disabled peers (Pathways to Education, 2010). However, with the use of detailed empirical data, it is possible to identify gaps and deficits among the outcomes, that otherwise may be regarded as insignificant or acceptable. The value of such outcome measures are that they identify risk factors for student success, and provide an evidence base on which to initiate and trial further service development.

In Phase 1 there is a need to focus on promoting the use of the transition tool, working with schools and individuals who have identified TCD as a destination of choice. In Phase 2 identifying retention risk factors is essential in determining how to effectively support students with the greatest needs, and ensure that suitable resources follow this cohort throughout their college career. Phase 3 should focus on embedding employment indicators in the needs assessment process. Disclosure and information on how to communicate disability-related needs and rights-related issues with confidence, is an essential part in developing the self-determined, self-aware, self-advocating disabled student/graduate.

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USING A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO EXPLORE THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

John Kubiak

School of Education
Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

This paper outlines the justification and use of phenomenography as a research approach in the exploration of intellectually disabled students' experiences of learning while undertaking the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) at Trinity College. The historical background and techniques of phenomenography are examined, and the choice of this approach is justified. The study's findings are presented in the form of four categories that describes students' learning: 1) the cognitive stages of learning; 2) self-regulation of learning; 3) learning as collective meaning making, and 4) learning as environment. An 'outcome space' shaped from these categories forms an inclusive, hierarchical unity which describes CCL students' experiences of learning. The findings of this study are of value because they highlight the importance of the educator in shaping an environment that is a 'safe space' for learning to unfold.

Introduction

The context of the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL)
This article focuses on intellectually disabled students' experiences of learning while attending tertiary education. These students attend a two year programme called the Certificate in Contemporary Living (CCL) in the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) at Trinity College Dublin (O'Brien, O'Keeffe, Healey, Kubiak, Lally and Hughes, 2009). The course aims to develop learning and social networks for its students, and offers opportunities for career development through work experience placements (O'Brien, O'Keeffe, Kenny, Fitzgerald, & Curtis 2008). In addition to their certificate studies, CCL students also audit undergraduate courses of their

choice (Kubiak & Espiner, 2009; O'Connor, Kubiak, Espiner & O'Brien, 2012).

Ireland is not unique in offering tertiary educational opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities; indeed post-secondary educational opportunities exist in many countries. For example, Hart, Grigal and Weir (2010b, para. 2) identified 149 programs across 37 US states that enrol students with intellectual disabilities. The University of Alberta, Canada (University of Alberta, 2006; Uditsky, Frank, Hart, & Jeffreys, 1987) has been offering the On-Campus Program since 1987. In South Australia, Flinders University (Flinders University, 2011) have been running the "Up the Hill" Project for over 10 years, and Deakin University briefly hosted (1999-2003) a Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy program operated by Gawith Villa Inc (now Inclusion Melbourne) in Victoria (Quinn, Laghi, Bisenieks, & O'Connor, 1999).

Although some of these programmes have been in existence for a number of years, there is however, little research done on how these groups of students experience their learning while they are in college. Consequently, this author argues that college educators working with people with intellectual disabilities do not possess adequate knowledge of how this group of adult students experience learning. For this reason, this area deserves to be minutely examined.

Justifying the use of phenomenographic approach
For the purpose of examining the learning experiences of CCL students, this study used a phenomenographic research approach (Martin & Booth, 1997). Although being relatively new, phenomenography has gained a positive reputation in the last 25 years particularly in Sweden (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, 1993; Marton & Tsui, 2004; Ǻkerlind, 2005) its country of origin, as well as in China, (Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse, 1996), Africa (Cliff, 1998), Finland (Tynjälä, 1997) and the United Kingdom (Vermunt and van Rijswijk, 1988).

Writing in 1995, Marton defined phenomenography as "an attempt to capture critical differences in how we experience the world and how we learn to experience the world… with a focus on *variation*" (p. 176, emphasis this author). Phenomenography therefore focuses on variation and experience. Later in their writing Marton and Booth (1997) added the context of learning and education. Phenomenography was therefore seen as "a specialisation that is particularly aimed at questions of relevance to learning and understanding in an educational setting" (Marton and Booth, 1997, p. 111).

Definitions such as these have informed and justified the use of phenomenography as a research approach for this study. More importantly it has enabled CCL students to articulate their collective experiences of learning so that they can become better at understanding learning from their own perspective.

Techniques within phenomenography

Although Marton (1994) allows for a variety of techniques for data gathering, he expresses a preference for the one-to-one interview because his primary concern was individual experiences. Transcripts from the interviews are typically transcribed verbatim and become the focus of the analysis. The set of categories or meanings that result from the analysis are not determined in advance; rather they 'emerge' from the data in relationship with the researcher.

For Åkerlind (2005b, p. 232), the outcomes of phenomenography are the "categories of description" and the "outcome space". Categories of description are described by Marton and Booth (1997, p. 126) as "a series of increasingly complex subsets of the totality of the diverse ways of experiencing various phenomena". The categorisation should include as few categories as it is feasible and reasonable to capture the critical variation in the data. However, the ultimate aim of phenomenographic analysis is to constitute a logical inclusive structure relating to the different meanings of the phenomenon (Åkerlind, 2005). This structure is a different way of experiencing a phenomenon and represents a structured set called the "outcome space" (p. 323) defined by Åkerlind (2005b, p. 322) as a way of looking a collective

human experience of phenomena holistically; the structure of the outcome space consists of "the relationships (between the categories of description)… in terms of providing an elucidation of relations between different ways of experiencing the one phenomenon".

The ultimate aim of this phenomenographic analysis is to constitute an outcome space that represents the core aspects of the collective ways of experiencing learning among CCL students in the NIID. With reference to Järvinen and Järvinen (2000), the outcome space of this study is an inclusive, hierarchical outcome space in which the categories further up the hierarchy include the previous or lower ones.

Before the categories of description and the outcome space of this project are presented, a review of learning from the perspective of phenomenography is now offered in order to create a context for this study's findings.

Learning from the perspective of phenomenography
A phenomenographic perspective on learning is a perspective presented by Marton and Booth (1997), Säljö (1979a, 1979b), Bowden and Marton (2004) and Marton, Runesson & Tsui, (2004). The origins of this tradition is found in empirical studies of learning carried out in the Department of Education at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden in the 1970s. Säljö focused on the experience of the learner, and described people's conceptions of learning (Säljö 1979a, 1979b) by interviewing 90 individuals between the ages of 15 and 73 years.

An initial analysis suggested that for many respondents learning was taken for granted and was tantamount to little more than rote memorisation. For others however, learning had become "thematised", in other words, "something which can be explicitly talked about and discussed and can be the object of conscious planning and analysis" (Säljö, 1979a, p.446).

On the basis of a more thorough analysis of the respondents' replies to the specific question: "What do you actually mean by learning?", Säljö's (1979b) study showed that students come to learning situations with very

different preconceived views of what is meant by 'learning'. Five qualitatively different and hierarchically related conceptions of learning were identified by Säljö; learning was conceived as:

1. Increasing one's knowledge
2. Memorising
3. Acquisition of facts, procedures etc. which can be retained and /or utilised in practice.

In the remaining two conceptions, the reproductive nature of learning was replaced by conceptions in which the emphasis was on learning as a constructive activity: learning was seen as the:

4. Abstraction of meaning, and
5. An interpretative process aimed at the understanding of reality (Säljö, 1979).

Säljö's categorisation of students' conceptions of learning showed similarities with Perry's (1970) work who investigated students' intellectual development during the course of tertiary study at Harvard and Rathcliffe Colleges in the USA. As Säljö's (1979) study built on Perry's (1970) work, later studies on learning by Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty (1993) built on Säljö's (1979) and described the same five conceptions of learning as Säljö.

However, in addition, Marton, Dall'Alba, & Beaty, (1993) identified a sixth conception of learning: learning as "a personal change". This conception of learning was found only during the later years of study and only in students who had previously displayed Säljö's fifth conception of learning. It appears to reflect the kind of personal commitment that was implicated in the later stages of Perry's (1970) model of intellectual development.

The Säljö framework, as modified by Marton et al. (1993), is summarisied in Table 1.

Learning as increasing one's knowledge
Learning as memorising and reproducing
Learning as applying
Learning as understanding
Learning as seeing something in a different way
Learning as changing as a person

Table 1. Conceptions of learning (Marton et al., 1993; Säljö, 1979)

These six sections can be divided into two groups: quantitative and qualitative conceptions (Boulton-Lewis, Marton, Lewis, & Wilss, 2000). The first three conception are all essentially reproductive, and reflect a lower-level, quantitative view of learning (Boulton–Lewis 1994). The latter three conceptions reflect a higher-level, qualitative view of learning as an active process of seeking meaning, leading to some kind of transformation in one's view of things, or bringing about a more fundamental change: in other words changing as a person (Marton et al., 1993).

Several subsequent studies in which 'changing as a person' (Marton et al., 1993) has also been identified are Pratt (1992), Wakins and Regmi (1992) and Dahin and Regmi (1997). More recently an additional conception of learning has been added: 'learning as collective meaning-making' (Paakkari, Tynjälä, and Kannas, 2011).

These and other authors (such as Jackson, 2009 and Rauhala, 1981) who used the phenomenographic approach in investigating perceptions of learning, put their findings down to the increased use of constructivist and socio-constructivist theories in education; conceptions of learning as "merely increasing one's knowledge may have largely been abandoned, and correspondingly the idea of learning as social meaning-making has become more general" (Paakkari et al., 2011, p. 711).

It is significant to note however that researchers in countries outside Europe have found somewhat different results. For example, in Nepalese students, Watkins and Regmi (1992) found that a conception of learning as 'changing as a person' had been induced by local cultural and religious traditions and this did not represent the most sophisticated development level. In China, Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse (1996) interviewed teacher educators and found that most distinguished between mechanical memorisation and memorisation with understanding.

Some regarded memorisation with understanding as a way of retaining what had already been understood, while others regarded memorisation with understanding a way of attaining a deeper understanding. Marton et al. (1996) concluded that the conceptions of learning that he identified in the West were not adequate to describe learning in Chinese culture.

In Finland, another study carries out by Tynjälä (1997) identified seven conceptions and found that these did not have a clear hierarchy. In South Africa research on conceptions carried out by Cliff (1998) found that conceptions of learning did appear to fit the categories described in the European research, however, some students expressed the notion of learning as a moral obligation to God, an authority figure or a community.

Research carried out with students of the Open University (Vermunt and van Rijswijk, 1988) found the five conceptions of learning described by Säljö (1979). However, a more detailed analysis by Vermunt (1996) of this research resulted in four rather different conceptions of learning. These are:

1. Co-operating with fellow students and being stimulated by teachers;
2. Absorbing knowledge in order to pass examinations;
3. Constructing knowledge and taking responsibility for one's own learning; and
4. Acquiring knowledge in order to apply it in practical situations.

To summarise, research in mainstream higher education has produced descriptive categories of conceptions of learning that initially seem universal

and hierarchically organised. However, other research has produced different accounts with some questioning whether their categories amounted to developmental hierarchies. There are clear messages from the above studies that learning varies across different cultures and systems of higher education. Consequently, a comparison of the learning experiences of CCL students with the above mentioned studies is addressed later in this paper.

The study
One of the main objectives of this study was to gain knowledge and understanding of CCL students' experiences of learning while attending Trinity College. For that reason the research addressed the following question: What kinds of variation exist in students' ways of experiencing learning while attending the CCL programme at the NIID?

18 individuals participated in this study, all of whom were students on the CCL course. This selection was in keeping with Moustakas (1994) who stated that when selecting research participants for a phenomenographic research study, an essential criterion for choosing participants is that these individuals have experienced the phenomenon that the researcher is interested in and, that these individuals are willing to participate in the research and are keen to explore the phenomenon in question.

Taking this recommendation into account, this author adopted a purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) which involved aiming for maximum diversity in the characteristics considered most important to the research questions. To ensure maximum variation, sampling was obtained from the CCL students within the selected context of the CCL programme, the author purposefully picked "a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest" as well as picking "all cases that meet some criterion" (Patton, 2002, p.243).

As the objective of this research was an nterest in variation in CCL students' experiences of their learning, the sample was selected with the purpose of highlighting such variation.

Regarding the correct number of participants for a phenomenographic research project, Sandberg's (1994) view is that it should be sufficient to yield adequately rich descriptions of the varying experiences. A total of 35 CCL students attended a presentation on the study. Out of this group 15 CCL students declined to take part in the research. This resulted in 20 students willing to participate, who signed the consent form and undertook the research comprehension quiz, the purpose of which was to ensure that these students understood the nature of what they were signing up for. As two students failed (with support from staff) to answer the quiz correctly, they were deemed to be unsure or unaware of what they were signing up for.

Consequently, this resulted in 18 CCL students participating in the study, eight females and ten males, all of whom had been attending the CCL programme for over one year. For ethical reasons, there are no names offered of participants in connection with the quotes presented in the findings below. Participants are referenced in the following manner: P1 (Participant 1), P2 – P18.

I used a visual reference (a drawing undertaken by the interviewee) as a catalyst for initiating and encouraging a conversation on the research topic. A flexible semi-structured interview followed where no written notes were made during this process. Before the conversation became centred onto the topic of learning however, some chat took place between interviewer and interviewee to create a relaxed and calming atmosphere.

Because of this a more conversational style of interview was advanced which encouraged participants to talk more freely about their experiences of learning. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes in each case, and were recorded. The data were then transcribed from the tapes and responses coded.

In this study the whole transcript was used to form categories, and "bracketing" (Åkerlind, Bowden and Green, 2005, p. 98) was adhered to as much as possible, whereby "neither categories of description nor structural relationships (were) anticipated in advance of the data" (p.98). My choice

was not to focus on structure too early in the analysis in order to avoid imposing his own ideas (Ashworth and Lucas, 2000).

Categories were constructed from the pool of data (as opposed to being fitted into categories) and, as they were constructed by this author, it is inevitable that the process is therefore open to "researcher bias" (Walsh, 2000, p. 29).

To minimise this bias, and in an effort to be as objective as possible, every attempt was made by me to use the evidence from the data to form the categories of description. According to Walsh (2000) "the categories don't exist independently of the person who's doing the analysis" (p. 22); any analysis is therefore dependent on the researcher's background, knowledge and ideas.

A second-order perspective (Prosser, 2000) was maintained throughout the interviews – the emphasis was on attempting to see the phenomenon through the students' eyes. However, this is not straightforward (Prosser, 2000) with some claiming that it is impossible to set aside one's preconceptions in order to remain unbiased (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). It is recognised that I had my own thoughts on the phenomenon, and it was imperative that a conscious decision was made to focus on eliciting CCL students' experiences of their learning without bringing in to the process the author's own perceptions.

Findings of the research

CCL students' experiences of learning are now presented. These are grouped into four categories which are:

1. The cognitive stages of Learning
2. Self-regulation of learning
3. Learning as collective meaning making
4. The supportive environment and learning.

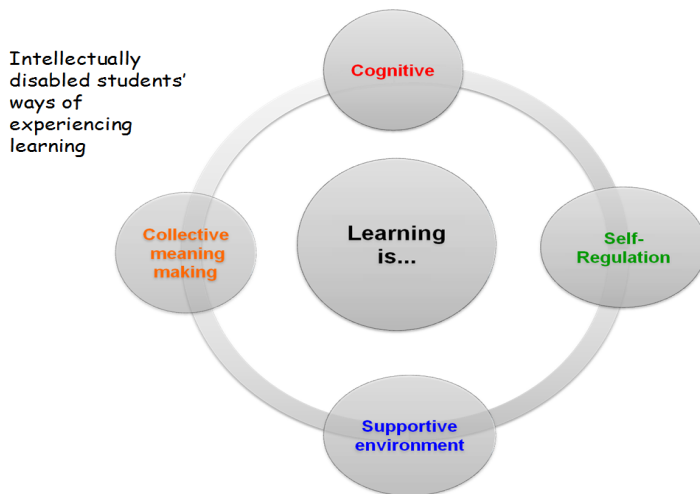These categories are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 The four categories of description of CCL students' learning

The outcome space

As discussed above the analysis of the data resulted in four categories of description. Phenomenography involves the identification of logical relationships between the categories of description to form an *outcome space* (Marton and Booth, 1997). Whilst a hierarchically structured outcome space is not a phenomenographic essential (Green, 2005), it is a recognised part of the phenomenographic method (Marton and Booth, 1997), the rationale being to show structure in the variation, key aspects and variation between the categories (Prosser, Martin, Trigwell, Ramsden and Lueckenhausen, 2005).

The outcome space forms an inclusive, hierarchical unity in which the categories further up the hierarchy subsume those preceding them (Åkerlind, 2005a; Järvinen & Järvinen, 2000). In structuring this outcome space "bracketing" (Åkerlind Bowden and Green, 2005, p. 98) was adhered to by this author as much as possible. This outcome space presented here provides an empirically based description of learning as experienced by CCL students. This collective level description represents variation in experiences across the participants of the research (e.g. Marton, Watkins & Tang, 1997). Whilst phenomenography does not seek to generalise, it is expected however, that

the "range of meanings within the sample will be representative of the range of meanings within the population" (Åkerlind, 2005a 2005b, p. 104).

Figure 2 presents the outcome space of CCL students' ways of experiences of learning.
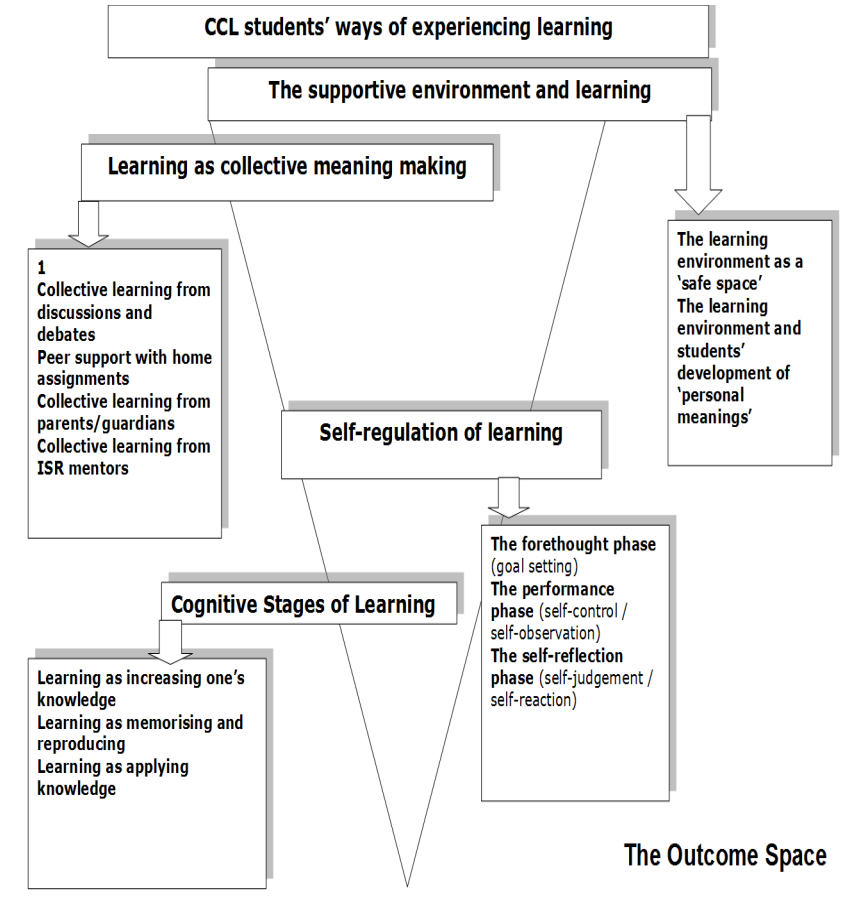

Figure 2 The outcome space for CCL students' ways of experiencing learning

Figure 2 draws attention to the importance of the category entitled "The Supportive Environment and Learning" which highlights the benefits of learning environments that create an atmosphere or a climate that is "safe, supportive, and that offer(s) helpful relationships" (Dart et al, 2000, p. 269). Such

environments are seen by Paakkari et al (2011) as spaces created by the tutor that support conditions for the development of students' own views, i.e. "personal meanings" (p. 709) that can influence both individual students as well as their peers. As this learner said:

> Students are just like friends and they are there to support me
> and I'd do the same for them... I picked it up the first day
> when we agreed on the group culture with the tutor. Plus...
> it's important to know that you're able to ask people ques-
> tions without getting grief…we are a strong group and we're
> able to share things… and get feedback from the tutor on
> how we can cope with college. (P16)

Conclusion

One of the purposes of this paper is to justify and explain the use of phenomenography as a research approach to create new knowledge and understandings of intellectually disabled students' learning at university. From a theoretical viewpoint, the most important results of this phenomenography are the findings of CCL students' qualitatively varying ways of experiencing their learning. As is customary in phenomenography, these findings are presented as a holistic set of varying degrees of categories of description in an outcome space (Figure 2). The research shows that CCL students' qualitative ways of experiencing learning varied from relatively undemanding - a collection of isolated knowledge fragments, to more sophisticated – the vital skills and awareness the educator needs to shape an environment that is a 'safe space' for learning to unfold.

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Notes on Contributors

Mel Ainscow is Professor of Education and co-director of the Centre for Equity in Education. He is also Adjunct Professor at Queensland University of Technology. Between 2007 and 2011 he was the Government's Chief Adviser for the Greater Manchester Challenge, a 50 million pound initiative to improve educational outcomes for all young people in the region. Correspondence: Mel Ainscow, Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom. Email: Mel.Ainscow@manchester.ac.uk.

Joanne Banks works in research on special educational needs at the Economic and Social Research Institute. She is particularly interested in disproportionality in special education and teacher expectations for students with special needs. She has recently published A Study on the Prevalence of Special Educational Needs which examines issues around special needs identification in Irish schools and the ways in which resources are assigned to children with special needs.

Alison Doyle is a Disability Officer in Trinity College Dublin and is responsible for the Trinity supplementary admissions procedure for student with disabilities.

Paula Flynn is a lecturer in the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin. Her research interests include: 'learner voice'; 'diversity and difference'; 'critical ethnography'; and 'the relationship between behaviour, learning and leadership for young people in schools'. She is principal investigator on a national 'learner voice' research study, which is a collaborative initiative between the Inclusion in Education and Society (IES) Research Group and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) due to commence data collection in September 2013.

Michael Grenfell is 1905 Chair of Education at Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland. He is also a former Professor of Education at

the University of Southampton, UK. His doctoral thesis was on the philosophy of teacher education.

John Kubiak completed his D.Ed. in the School of Education (2008-12) under the supervision of Dr Michael Shevlin. Since 2006 John has been Teaching and Learning Officer at the National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College Dublin. John is also involved with Project IES (Inclusion in Education and Society) with the School of Education.

Selina McCoy is joint Education Programme Co-ordinator at the Economic and Social Research Institute. She has published extensively on educational issues, with much of this research focusing on inequality in educational access and outcomes. Among a range of projects, she is currently leading the Leaving School in Ireland study, examining how school leavers are faring in the current climate.

Conor Mc Guckin is a Chartered (British Psychological Society: CPsychol) and Registered (Psychological Society of Ireland: Reg. Psychol., Ps.S.I.) Psychologist, and is a Chartered Scientist (CSci) with The Science Council. Conor is the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin.

Noel Purdy is Head of Education Studies (including Special Educational Needs) and Programme Chair for the Primary B.Ed. at Stranmillis University College, Belfast. He is a member of the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum and is Vice President of the NI branch of the National Association for Special Educational Needs.

Declan Reilly joined the Disability Service in TCD in 2005. He has particular responsibility for phase 2 of the student journey; building and maintaining a College career, Declan is completing Ph. D research exploring if supports for students with disabilities remove barriers and impact on their experience of College.