Inclusion for Special Education in Northern Ireland

Hamido A. Megahead[1]

[1]Education Authority, Belfast Region, Northern Ireland

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Abstract

In Northern Ireland, three decades ago, the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 has been declared the inclusion policy for special education. However, there has been needed much efforts to translate this policy into practice and substantiate such inclusion practice in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland definition of inclusion is offered. Northern Ireland inclusion policy and its current version of translated practice have been outlined. Seven pillars of inclusion practice have been described. Discussion of Northern Ireland inclusion policy has been explained. A number of inclusion practice programs have been suggested.

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Key Words : Special Education, Inclusion, Northern Ireland, Inclusion Policy, Inclusion Practice

The Northern Ireland Definition of Inclusion

The Northern Ireland definition of inclusion is that special educational needs pupils have enhanced and extended opportunities to be educated in a range of mainstream settings (Department of Education (NI), 2009; O' Connor, 2018). Inclusion is the educational process in which pupils with special learning and/or behavioural needs have been educated full time in the general education. Inclusion means that the pupil and student with special education needs are attending the general school program, enrolled in age appropriate classes 100% of the school day (Idol, 1997). The principles of inclusive education have focused on all special education pupils and not on some pupils. Inclusion on enabling the participation for all pupils has been emphasised (Messiou, 2017).

Northern Ireland Inclusion Policy and Practice

Inclusion for special Education in Northern Ireland (NI) is, according to some writers, underdeveloped. Gardiner (2017) viewed that, although the Northern Ireland Code of Practice encourages Education Authorities and Board Governors to place pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools, there is less prescription in this Code of Practice than that of the other three UK countries; England, Wales, Scotland. There is a lack of an agreed definition of special educational needs, and the interpretations of The Code across Northern Ireland have been varied (Lambe & Bones, 2008). As a result, special education pupils are not only placed in special education settings, but also their education arrangement have been located

outside mainstream classrooms and not linked into classroom practice. Further, it has been recognised that the Northern Ireland overall selective system have not easily facilitated the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs into mainstream schools (Lambe & Bones, 2008). Additionally, the roles and responsibilities of the classroom assistant to promote an inclusive learning environment have not yet clearly identified as the current roles and responsibilities of these classroom assistants have been only carrying out the child protection and safety rules and regulations (Moran & Abbott, 2002). According to statistics, the total number of special educational needs pupils in Northern Ireland was 3417(Dunlop & McClelland, 2017a, b, c). They have been educated in special education rather than mainstream settings. The age-range was from 3 to 18 years old.

Table (1) the Total Statistical Number of Belfast Special Education Pupils

No	School Name	The total N. pupils
1	Fleming Fulton	116
2	Glenveagh	200
3	Mitchell House	77
4	Oakwood	112
5	St.Gerards	268
	The total	792

In whole Northern Ireland, there are further 18 special education schools with total number of 2625 pupils described in table (2).

Table (2) the Total Statistical Number of Special Education Pupils in Northern Ireland except Belfast.

No	School Name	The total N pupils
1	Beechlawn, Hillsborogh	209
2	Ceara, Lurgan	152
3	Donard, Banbridge	86
4	Kilronan, Magherfelt	116
5	Knockevin Special School, Downpatrick	97
6	Longstone, Dundonald	197
7	Lisanally Special School, Armagh	100
8	Parkview, Lisburn	180
9	Roddensvale, Larne	125
10	Rossmar School, Limavady	124
11	Sperrinview, Dungannon	115
12	Arvalee School & Resource Centre, Omagh	140
13	Killard House School, Newtownards	200
14	Knockavoe School & Resource Centre, Strabane	120
15	Ardnashee School & College, Derry, Londonderry	265
16	Brookfield School, Moira	160
17	Rathore School, Newry	177
18	Riverside School, Antrim	62
	The Total	2625

In Northern Ireland, while there has been a declared and confirmed inclusion policy and legislation, the lacking of inclusion practice programs is apparent (Smith, 2014). The Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, the Education (NI) Order 1996 and 2003 legislation have been emphasised on the rights of children

with special education needs to be educated in mainstream environments with a view to increasing inclusion (Monteith, McLaughlin, Milner, & Hamilton, 2003). The Department of Education's 2009 consultation *Every School a Good School: the Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion* proposed extensive changes to provision for Special Education Needs, including introducing a new model based on Additional Educational Needs (Perry, 2015). The revised Code of Practice and new and amended regulations has aimed to support an inclusion framework for special education needs pupils. Also 2005 Order of Northern Ireland has contained a presumption in favour of inclusion. This Order enhanced the rights of children with Special Education Needs to attend mainstream schools (Perry, 2015).

In relation to the inclusion practice programs, the Code of Practice in Northern Ireland has come into operation and the position of a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) has appeared. The role and responsibilities of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator are to establish detailed inclusion practices. The role of the SENCO is defined and the criteria for inclusion on the SEN register have been determined. The special needs pupils have been recognised and their 'specialness' received an interest and attention. However, the method by which they received their 'special' support has created non-inclusion conditions as these special education pupils are often withdrawn for short periods each week. This withdrawal has caused them feeling excluded due to getting an individual attention.

Seven Pillars of Inclusion Practice

Hughes, Vaughn, & Schumm(1996) identified seven pillars of inclusion practice; namely special education pupil first, the need for teacher voting to participate in inclusive classrooms, the evaluation of inclusion model, developing and implementing school based level models, the development of school based philosophy of inclusion, concern with the maintenance of a continuum of services of special education pupils or students, consideration of curricula and instruction that meets the needs of all students or pupils. The first pillar deals with the ongoing assessment and monitoring of improved social and academic outcomes for a special education pupil. To achieve the improved social and academic outcomes for this target special education pupil or student, the perspective of this target special education pupil or student need to taken seriously. A research study found that special education students identified two major categories they wanted to see it in their inclusion schools; teacher characteristics included teacher's personality and general disposition and pedagogical practices involving the actions teachers take to ensure students are learning. Teacher characteristics are empathetic, accepting of differences, positive and supportive, dedicated in terms of time, receptive toward student feedback, and firm, fair and fun. Pedagogical practices are motivating, engaging, using multi-modalities, checking in via questioning, explaining clearly, personalising responses to struggling student or pupil (Connor & Cavendish, 2018).

The second pillar is the need for teacher voting to participate in inclusive classrooms. This reflects their positive beliefs and willing attitudes to work in inclusive classrooms. Northern Ireland research study revealed that teachers have a belief and attitude of not preferring to teach special education pupils and students (Purdy, 2009). Such teacher's belief and attitudes is unlikely supporting the inclusion. Another study revealed that Northern Ireland head teachers in the general education schools showed whole-hearted commitment to the philosophy and practice of inclusion, and could critically examine what they have achieved so far. However, they recognized persistent and varied constraints both within and beyond their schools. Head teachers in the special education school perceived their schools to have a multiple role in providing for pupils with the greatest need, reintegrating those on placement into their regular schools, and offering outreach support to mainstream colleagues (Abbott, 2006).

The third pillar is the evaluation of inclusion model. It describes how well each general education school is managing with inclusion in terms of time spent in general education and should include the teacher roles, the personnel attitudes toward inclusion, and the teacher skills. In other words, this evaluation includes a descriptions of how far along each general education school is with inclusion, the amount of time special education students spent in general education, the roles of the special education teachers, the rates of student referrals for special education consideration, the attitudes of all staff toward inclusion and toward collaboration, and the skills of the teachers related to the inclusion of special education students. It also

involves descriptions of the impact of inclusion on other students, the performance of all students, and the qualitative responses of educators toward inclusion (Idol, 2006). The evaluation of inclusion model is to differentiate between the special education students and pupils who are fully included and those who are half and part time attended special education programs for some time in terms of their outcomes of various curricular areas, in their levels of engagement in the activities of the school day, the type of activities in which they were engaged, and the degree to which they initiated and engaged in social interactions with peers and adults(Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994).

The fourth pillar is the development of a school-based philosophy of inclusion. This needs the promotion of dialogues regarding beliefs and attitudes of teachers and an acceptance of all special education and general education pupils. These dialogues are not only celebrating difference in dignified way, but also accepting all people are valued and treated with respect. In this philosophy of inclusion, teachers have an explicit value base providing a platform for inclusive practice. This philosophy of inclusion is evident in school documents such as the school prospectus. Teachers believe that exceptional students and pupils belong in the regular class and have confidence that they learn in that situation (Carrington & Elkins, 2002).

The fifth pillar is developing and implementing school-based models. The models of inclusion should be designed by the teachers and principals themselves so that they are not imposed on them by an outside authority. Four indicators need to be met so that developing and implementing inclusion models are coming from inside the school rather than outside ; 1-vision-based decision process used by teachers and administrators for educational inclusion; 2-consensus on a set of values included a belief that inclusive education meant that all members of the school and local community were connected and belonged, 3-an educational environment developed from a set of values including co-operative learning, educational activities that are fun and students contributing to the decision making process; 4-colloborative teaming for curriculum development and instruction, hiring, staff deployment, and student placement(Alessi,1991 cited at Hunt & Goetz, 1997).

The sixth pillar is the maintenance of a continuum of services for special educational needs pupils. When an inclusion model is developed, other educational services need to be maintained for special educational needs pupils who are unable to benefit and make use of inclusion models. This continuum of services has been categorised under the headings; the traditional medical model and inclusive model. These two ends of continuum define students and teacher responsibilities in different way. The language of the two ends of continuum creates different kinds of human relationships and teaching practice (Carrington & Elkins, 2002).

The seventh pillar is the consideration of how curricula and instruction meets the multi-level needs of all pupils. Changes in daily instructional approaches are likely to be required due to the variety of pupils' educational priorities. A single instructional model is not effective for all students and teaching environments. When there is a need to teach adverse group of students, the learners rather than the content are the focus of curricula and instruction (Carrington & Elkins, 2002).

Discussions

Inclusion for special Education in Northern Ireland (NI) is underdeveloped. The inclusion literature for special education in Northern Ireland is mostly policy documentation and material, while Inclusion practice programs is lacking (Smith, 2014; Monteith, McLaughlin, Milner, & Hamilton, 2003; Perry, 2015; O' Connor, 2018). The inclusive education policy cannot be disconnected from the broader educational policy context in Northern Ireland. The broader educational policy has been encouraging the non-inclusion in terms of Northern Ireland selective system when the children reached eleven years old. In Northern Ireland, once a child reached eleven years old, they are to sit the Transfer Test. Based on their score in this Transfer Test; they are admitted to a specific school. Also some writers claim that the practice of inclusion in Northern Ireland has presented challenges for mainstream schools in coping with increased numbers of children with Special education needs in terms of dealing with issues such as bullying and child protection (Lundy& Kilpatrick, 2006). However, the inclusion policy and the 2005 Order have introduced protections against special education needs discrimination to the mainstream education system. Discrimination is defined as the failure to make reasonable adjustments or providing less favourable treatment for a reason related to a child's

special education needs (Perry, 2015). Having an already accepted policy and legislation of inclusion, there is an urgent need to show people who are carrying out such accepted policy of inclusion how to translate it into detailed practical procedures and accomplish it. The above seven pillars of responsible inclusion have been identified and found interesting in terms of stimulating, initiating and lunching these detailed practical procedures and the inclusion practice programs for people working in Northern Ireland education settings. It is possible to be tried out and experimented in Northern Ireland special education settings and offering comments and feedback whether it can work out for them.

I have applied these seven pillars of responsible inclusion on Northern Ireland special education; I reviewed the research literature on inclusion practice programs in Northern Ireland and found small research body (Abbott, 2006; Lambe & Bones, 2006a, b; Lambe, 2007; Lambe & Bones, 2007; Lambe & Bones, 2008; Moran & Abbott, 2002). These seven pieces of research studies have been only examined two pillars out of the above seven pillars. These two pillars were the need for teacher voting to participate in inclusive classrooms in terms of their attitudes and beliefs towards the inclusions and the development of a school-based philosophy of inclusion. There has been no indication to the other seven pillars. A study revealed while there was evidence of support for the philosophy of inclusion, many young teachers still show a strong attachment to, and belief in, traditional selective system as a preferred education model(Lambe & Bones, 2006a). Another study found that many student teachers believe that lack of appropriate preparation, concerns about class size, resources, managing other adults and coping with increasing numbers of pupils with diverse special educational needs are the key issues need to be dealt with (Lambe & Bones, 2006b). In addressing some of these issues, study found that the effect of a successful teaching practice in the non-selective sector had the most positive influence on the teacher general attitudes towards inclusion (Lambe, 2007).

Inclusion for special education in Northern Ireland needs urgent attention and interest from both education researchers and practitioners to examine and research the other five pillars so that inclusion policy and legislation can be carried out in Northern Ireland education context. Researchers have been well considered that the potential of this inclusion policy and legislation leads to successful inclusion practices on the ground. They have concentrated on these above five pillars of the inclusion practices. They have focused on the issue of teacher education for inclusion and development projects in relation to successfully engage teachers with inclusion practice programs (Smith, Florian, Rouse, & Anderson, 2014). Moreover, a research study revealed that teachers held positive attitudes toward inclusion. However, their perceived competence dropped significantly according to the severity of children's needs as identified by the UK 'Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000). For these teachers, teacher education for inclusion and these development projects are essential.

Conclusions

Based on the above descriptions of the inclusion for special education in Northern Ireland, it is concluded that Inclusion practice programs are only the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO). Additional inclusion practice programs are badly needed to overcome the withdrawal and non- inclusion condition of SENCO and to fully implement the declared and confirmed inclusion policy and legislation on the ground. First of these inclusion practice programs is to capitalize the classroom assistant. The classroom assistants will be more willing to play a significant role in developing such inclusive practices. For example in the general education schools, classroom assistants are assisting with the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties in regular classrooms. In the special education schools, classroom assistants are required to have the knowledge and skills both to cope with children and young people who have a broad range of intellectual, physical and emotional difficulties, and to promote inclusion and participation beyond the school environment (Moran & Abbott, 2002). The preparation of classroom assistants' education offers the knowledge and skills of inclusion (O'Connor, Hansson, & Keating, 2012).

Second of these inclusion practice programs is to prepare inclusive' teachers and this inclusion preparation blends across the fabric of the teacher-training curriculum (Slee, 2001). Inclusion teachers needs not only to have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach in inclusive classrooms, but also to make best use of what they already know when pupils experience difficulty(Florian & Linklater, 2010). Effective teaching skills are

required from the teachers who are working with all pupils with and without special education needs. Effective teaching skills includes high levels of pupil engagement based on good classroom and time management skills; the ability to scaffold learning that is adapted to pupils' current levels of understanding; cognitively engaging pupils in higher-order thinking; and encouraging and supporting success. Overall effective teaching depends on the beliefs of teachers about special education, and about their roles and responsibilities in working with pupils with special education needs. Teachers who believe pupils with special education needs are their responsibility tends to be more effective overall with all of their students regardless of special needs and non-special needs. Teachers' beliefs about special education and about their responsibilities for their students with special educational needs is part of a broader set of attitudes and beliefs about the special education needs and about the nature of knowledge, knowing and how learning proceeds; that is, epistemological beliefs. Therefore, teacher training and development of these effective teaching skills need to be offered so as to implement the effective inclusion (Jordan, Schwartz & McGhie-Richmond, 2009).

Third of these inclusion practice programs is to help special education pupils to effectively acquire the social skills, because the children's pro-social behaviour is a critical indicator indecision-making toward inclusion. This critical indicator is more important for decision-making regarding inclusion than IQ and academic achievement (Gresham, 1983). There has been much empirical evidence to signify the importance of social skills including pro-social behaviour over the academic achievement in terms of facilitating the inclusion of special education pupils into mainstream schools (DiPerna, Volpe, & Elliott, 2002; Weissberg, Goren, Domitrovich, & Dusenbury, 2012).

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