

Inclusive practice essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Complete a written assignment that will demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the legal requirements and policy relating to inclusion.

Critically analyse the issues surrounding Special Educational provision and disability in school.

During the ten years that I have worked in primary education inclusivity has played an increasingly important part when considering how the curriculum can be delivered and how a classroom can be managed to ensure that it is accessed by all children. Experience of working within a primary classroom has shown that the accommodation of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the delivery of inclusive lessons have had a vital part to play when determining classroom practice.

Historically however, an inclusive solution to supporting students with additional educational needs has not always been explicit in teaching pedagogy and an educational policy of segregation, then integration (rather than inclusion) was usual prior to the research and findings of Warnock in her report of 1978: Thus we are proposing a general framework of special education which is much wider than the present statutory concept, and within that, though an integral part of it; the means of safeguarding the interests of the minority of pupils whose needs cannot be met within the resources generally available in ordinary schools.

This framework is intended to establish once and for all the idea of special educational provision, wherever it is made, as additional or supplementary rather than, as in the past, separate or alternative provision. (Warnock, 1978, p. 49) The Warnock Report came at a time when the disability

movement had gathered considerable momentum. The civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s offered a platform from which the movement might take advantage.

The protestations of the movement gave rise to disability studies as a credible academic discipline and the parents of children with SEN became more vocal, challenging social policy and questioning the orthodoxy of professionally-led policies and practices which resulted in the segregation of their children through the use of alternative provision and specialist centres (Barnes, 2010). The movement saw the conception of a social model of inclusion that brought about an important shift in approaches toward disability.

Previous approaches and the medical model of disability had influenced thinking and had defined a social policy that was exclusive in its nature. The medical model of disability determining that disability is an attribute of impairment, physical or mental: Doctors are people who are trained to cure or alleviate such impairment and therefore disability becomes a medical problem. Disabled people are treated, changed and improved by doctors, specialists and therapists who plan and manage their health care... They (disabled) become defined by their medical condition - they are spastic or blind or deaf. (TDA, 2009, p.)

Unlike the previous approach to disability the social model breaks the causal link between impairment and disability, " Impairment only becomes disabling because of social structures and organizations" (Marks, 1999, p. 77). This philosophy contributed to the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act

(1995) which has now been repealed and replaced by the Equality Act (2010) and the creation of specific SEN legislation (2001). The 90s saw a clear emphasis being placed on inclusion with further guidance being provided through the Green Paper 'Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs' (DfEE, 1997).

In recent years however there has been a renewed surge to meet a broader range of learner needs, focusing on the external factors that might contribute to a child's underachievement such as, home life and the social emotional aspects of learning (SEAL); recognising that the curriculum content and scientific explanations of how students learn are not the sole determinant for educational achievement and that the classroom should play a fundamental part in contributing to the child's emotional well-being, reducing external barriers to their learning and supporting their family.

The premise of ensuring that the needs of the 'whole child' were met was further validated through the creation of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (2003). It had been regarded that inclusion was all too often seen as an issue about special educational needs (Briggs, 2004). It is important here to clearly distinguish between the terms of integration and inclusion as they are often interchanged (Thompson, 2002).

Ainscow (1995) suggests that integration is about making a limited number of additional arrangements for individual pupils with SEN in schools which themselves change little overall, reflecting Warnock's report. On the other hand, inclusion implies the introduction of a set of changes through which schools restructure themselves so as to be able to embrace all children.

Integration involves the school in a process of assimilation where the onus is on the assimilating individual (whether a pupil with SEN or a pupil with a different cultural and linguistic background) to make changes so that they can 'fit in'.

By contrast inclusion involves the school in a process of accommodation where the onus is on the school to change, adapting curricula, methods, materials and procedures so that it becomes more responsive. The creation of an inclusive school system certainly appears to harbour numerous challenges including: changing of staff attitudes; restructuring of the physical environment; rewriting and generation of curriculum resources and not least the training of staff to implement these 'wholesale' changes.

Given an inclusive philosophy however, it may also be suggested that ensuring the accommodation of those with SEN could be the stimulus to developing a much richer mainstream learning experience for all and where teachers develop a broader range of skills and resources. The SEN code of practice identifies four areas where a child is unique in terms of their learning: cognition and learning, communication and interaction, sensory and physical, and behavioural, emotional social difficulties. A student may have specific learning needs in each of the areas (DfES 2001).

To support these learning needs there has been an increased emphasis on providing an accessible learning environment rather than the child's difference or specific learning difficulty, " By inclusion we mean not only that pupils with SEN should where possible, receive their education in a mainstream but also they join in fully with their peers in the curriculum"

(DFEE, 1997, p. 44). One method of ensuring that a child's needs may be met and that the learning environment is accessible is through ensuring that all students are able to make progress, this might be achieved through the appropriate differentiation of lesson objectives.

With the use of individualised objectives a student may take part in a lesson, contribute and make progress, regardless of their ability in relation to other students in the classroom; the curriculum being open to all. However, experience of working in PE classes has shown that this is an area of the curriculum that can be divisive. Having worked with a dyspraxic child as classroom support I have witnessed the child find team games extremely difficult. The nature of dyspraxia often results in the student experiencing weaker gross motor skills. In a game of football this could result in further issues for the student as bullying may result from their lack of contribution to the team. This may then lead to low self-esteem, an additional barrier to learning.

The DFEE statement clearly promotes the participation of students with SEN in curriculum activities however it does suggest that there are fundamental issues, such as the accessibility and appropriateness of the curriculum, " Difficulties in learning often arise from an unsuitable environment inappropriate groupings of pupils, inflexible teaching styles, or inaccessible curriculum materials - as much as from individual children's physical, sensory or cognitive impairments. (DfES, 2004, p. 31) The code of practice chapters the importance of working in partnership with parents, the value of which is reiterated in further DfES documents. " Parents and the home environment they create are the single most important factor in shaping

their children’s well-being, achievements and prospects” (DfES, 2007) The support of the family will offer the opportunity for teaching staff and other education professionals to draw upon the wealth of knowledge and experience that parents will undoubtedly have.

The communication with parents will equally allow for objective feedback about a child’s abilities, strengths and progress. One of the key principles of working with parents is for the teacher to adopt a positive attitude to parents which is not based upon stereotypes nor presumptions. This is particularly pertinent when dealing with parents of children that have ADHD as in these instances the popular perception is that the child is a product of poor parenting (Arcelus and Munden, 1999).

Though it is evident that positive parenting is beneficial in the schooling of students it is not always encountered. The ADHD child discussed later in the assignment was involved in no meetings which both parents and school staff. The parent rarely attended either PTC evenings or IEP reviews and there was a reluctance on her part to communicate with the school and share relevant information that may contribute to academic progress. “ The success of any policy of inclusive education depends on the quantity and quality of communication between the school and home. (Metcalfe and Metcalfe, 2001, p. 38). Within mainstream primary and secondary school environments the member of staff designated Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) is responsible for ensuring that the school’s SEN policy is adhered to and that provision is made to raise the achievement of students with SEN. The code of practice lists what the key responsibilities for a SENCO may be including:

ensuring the school communicates and liaises effectively both with parents, external agencies and other professional bodies.

In addition it is the SENCO's responsibility to ensure that curriculum managers and staff are provided with the necessary level of support to allow them to meet the learning needs of all students. The role of SENCO is seen as crucial to ensuring the needs of all students are met (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 2000). Expectations of mainstream teachers have risen. The development of an inclusive approach to teaching has given rise to a large number of challenges including recently the Rose Report's focus on pupils with dyslexia in 2009 (Richards, 2010).

Richards echoes the conclusions of a report completed by the DfES who infer that " Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has struggled to keep pace with these developments and equip all newly qualified teachers with the skills required to meet the needs of children with SEN (DfES, 2004: Introduction). The sentiment that teachers are poorly equipped to work with students with SEN is further highlighted through the experience of the student with ADHD. There may have been a failure of staff to recognise that there is an underlying biological cause.

In light of this it might be construed that a child is just a ' naughty boy' and recognised teaching strategies such as through the use of a more visual approach delivering lessons and ensuring the student is sat at the front of the room facing the teacher are not adopted. In a primary school that I worked at the only feature of controlling the behavior of a child with ADHD

was through ensuring that their medication was taken and that the poor behavior was something “ we have to put up with”.

Placing a student into a mainstream class environment and anticipating that the student will make progress is unsatisfactory, as a qualified teacher the core standards support the values that underpin government legislation and guidance. They succinctly highlight the teacher’s responsibility to support the diverse range of needs that a child may have creating an environment where barriers to learning are reduced. use an appropriate range of teaching strategies and resources, including e-learning, which meet learners’ needs and take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion. ” (TDA, 2007).

The Code of Practice provides guidance on the monitoring of student progress and acknowledges that through accurate assessment of the child’s abilities the teacher can provide ways in which the child can be accommodated to succeed. It is through the acknowledgement of the child’s strengths and weaknesses that lessons and resources can be differentiated.

The accurate assessment of a student is a useful method from which Individual Education Plans (IEPs) can be formed, these can be used to highlight the additional support that a student receives to enable them to participate and make progress. Udvari-Solner and Thousand (1995) described teachers’ attempts at differentiating the curriculum in an inclusive classroom as a decision making process that requires the asking of a number of questions relating to.

The following additional considerations may also be required: cultural awareness, emotional requirements and IEP targets. Jacques and Hyland (2003) do suggest that there are a number of implications and considerations that require thought when differentiating. They suggest that differentiating lessons through the possible use of ability groupings or different activity outcomes you may label a child a failure and impact upon their self-esteem.

With such a weighty number of considerations to be made for each student with SEN a class with a number of such students will require considerable thought and time, time being a commodity that a number of teachers that I have spoken to have little of. One teacher commenting that they simply don't have the necessary time to spend on differentiating and planning all their lessons to the necessary level of detail for their classes to receive anything better than satisfactory lessons.

Certainly the notion of inclusion is one which is supported by most teachers (Thomas, Walker and Webb, 2002) but the necessary time commitment and training implications appears to threaten the ability of teachers to deliver the inclusive ideal; a concern shared by Corbett (2001) who argues that teaching staff may not be kept sufficiently up to date or provided with adequate practice, training and support to provide what is necessary for all students to be included.

From the example highlighted it becomes apparent that the role of the SENCO is absolutely crucial in determining the success that a school has when supporting children with special educational needs. A school's needs

will invariably differ and whereas one school may frequently encounter children with dyslexia, dyspraxia, physical impairment and other special educational needs with well-trained staff that are experienced in delivering to students with a range of abilities through resourced schemes of work (SOW), there will be schools who are less likely to encounter such difference and feel ill-equipped to support such children.

It is in these instances where a SENCOs role becomes all the more apparent in ensuring that the school's SEN policy is applied and that staff training requirements are met. This importance is supported through the code of practice that recognises that there is a significant time commitment required by the SENCO, others noting that the SENCOs role should reflect a very limited timetable. The code of practice emphasises the need for all agencies that are engaged with a student with SEN to work in partnership, stressing that this is a critical success factor.

Metcalfe and Metcalfe (2001) suggest that the range of support can come from a variety of areas, these include: social services, health, education, family and community. The SENCO could be the pivotal communication point through which the agencies communicate. Due to the complexity of the needs of some students there may be a large number of people in the welfare of one student. Having such a number of individuals involved with one child may however detract from the child's inclusion.

Ouvry and Lacy (1998) suggest that it is extremely difficult for a team of greater than eight to work effectively as the intensity of communication and sharing of information is difficult to maintain. It appears evident that

inclusion in the classroom has led to greater thought on how to deliver a lesson that is creative, accessible and enjoyable; ensuring that all students achieve in the classroom regardless of differences. From personal school experience I rarely remember a lesson that didn't follow a 'chalk and talk' format or that veered away from a text book, working individually to a prescribed diet of content led question and answers.

The content led nature of the current curriculum is still however considered a key barrier to inclusion. There would seem to be a danger that the National Curriculum, which at its best gives all children access to a broad and balanced curriculum is in some cases, having the opposite effect in that 'broad and balanced' is determined in relation to the ordinary child and may be inappropriate and restrictive to the extra-ordinary child. (Fletcher-Campbell, 1994 cited in Thomas, Walker and Webb, 2002, p. 44) The range of outcomes of the NC was designed to provide a standard scale for measuring pupils' performance from the age of 5 to 14. The nature of this assessment framework was such that most pupils were expected to reach level 2 at Key Stage 1, level 4 at Key Stage 2 and level 5 or 6 at Key Stage 3. The use of this continuum creates the notion of expected rates or levels of progress from one key stage to the next.

This may be considered as conflicting with the Government's inclusion and disability agenda, as the manner in which the Government identifies the successful, high achieving educational establishments, is through inspection systems and league tables. The impact of which has created a market economy where schools compete with one another on the basis of test

results in order to ensure that they receive children who are not encumbered with challenging circumstances and learning needs.

At present, league tables act as an incentive to schools to enhance their reputation by changing their admissions policies to favour applications from more intelligent children. They encourage schools to exclude poorly performing pupils. " (Dunford, 2002). The philosophy of inclusion certainly appears to have been embraced by many of the professionals that write in the area of education and teaching pedagogy however, it seems a less attractive proposition to parents who continue to determine the effectiveness of a school through its ability to manage their children to high test results.

When discussing inclusivity Fulcher (1993) comments that it is a moral and ethical concern and as such it is one that cannot be measured through performance data. A new Conservative government could now also impact on the progress made in the last two decades. The government's austerity measures already appear to be reducing services. Accountants may now be determining the provision received by students with SEN regardless of the wants of professionals, parents and the individual.