

Developing inclusive practice in post-primary education



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Assignment Option 1 Inclusive Practice: 3000 words

In this essay I will discuss a number of important factors relating to inclusive practice in post-primary education. To do this, I will first give a brief introduction to inclusive education, individual education plans and differentiated teaching and the important roles each play in inclusive practice. Secondly, I will give a brief discussion of a student in my classroom as an example, discussing their strengths, needs and challenges. Thirdly, I will provide a discussion of the practical implications for this student in both their learning and social environment, making reference to current theory and literature. Having discussed all of this I will then identify key teaching and learning strategies that can be used to support the student. Finally, I will give a summary of my discussion with reference to best practice.

In order to discuss specific Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the classroom it is essential to first look at what is meant by inclusive education, individual lesson plans and differentiated learning. According to the NCSE (2011) inclusion is “ a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners. It involves removing barriers so that each learner will be enabled to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her schooling.” According to a publication by the INTO, inclusion is all about the presence of pupils from across the nine grounds in the school environment (gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community). There is a very strong emphasis on matching the diversity of the local population, both transient and permanent, in the pupil population of the school. (INTO, 2004).

Inclusivity means that every student is involved, including children with special educational needs. The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has a number of different support systems to help provide for the education of these children. These mechanisms differ from student to student depending on the child's disability. Section 2 of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 requires that children with special educational needs should be educated in an inclusive environment with children without these needs, unless it was not in the best interest of the child or if it were to effect the education of the other children in the environment.

Secondly, we must look at the purpose of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and what they consist of. The EPSEN Act 2004 stresses the importance of the development of education plans for students with SEN. The Act gives a complete breakdown of how IEPs should be prepared. These plans can be created by either the school (as set out in Section 3) or the NCSE (as set out in Section 8) for students who have special educational needs. The EPSEN Act requires the assessment to be completed in a strict time-frame. As soon as the student in question is confirmed to have a special educational need, the education plan drawn up as a result, must be prepared within one month of the results of the assessment.

There has been a strong emphasis on the importance of IEPs by a number of different organisations. One of the most important and clear descriptions given was in the NCSE report on the Implementation of the EPSEN Act (2006) where it was stated that the Individual Education Plan 'is the conduit for the

services and provisions needed for the child to be able to benefit from education’ (NCSE, 2006).

According to the EPSEN Act, IEPs should be individualised and child-centred, accessible, inclusive, holistic and collaborative (EPSEN Act, 2004). IEPs allow students with special educational needs to receive a good education.

Although they are not mandatory in Ireland, it is considered good practice for schools to complete IEPs. (Winters & O’Raw, 2010; Douglas et al, 2012).

According to Heacox, differentiation means changing the pace, level, or kind of instruction you provide in response to individual learners’ needs, styles or interests. (Heacox, 2002). Some educationalists have argued that differentiation should mean changing the level of the content provided in the curriculum to suit the different abilities of the students in the classroom.

Others found that it is more about providing alternative paths for success rather than changing the content, as in doing so may impact negatively in the long-term if content is over-simplified for those with learning difficulties.

In the same way, the more advanced students in the class may not learn as much as they should or could if they are simply being provided with extra tasks which involve the revision of their prior knowledge. As previously mentioned a classroom where differentiation is being used effectively will be very ‘ child centred’. According to Heacox this can often mean redefining your role as a teacher and acting as a facilitator.

I have a number of different classes in which there are students with special educational needs. These needs vary from class to class and require me to plan accordingly. In particular there is one student (student X) who requires

a lot of assistance and extra planning. This student has a series of diagnoses, however the main one is cerebral palsy. Cerebral Palsy is a term covering a number of disorders affecting muscles, movement and mobility. It occurs when the part of the brain controlling movement is either damaged in some way or has failed to develop properly. All of the above can lead to certain difficulties in learning, but there is no indication that those with Cerebral Palsy are any less intelligent than others. In extreme cases difficulties with communication can be an obstacle to learning. (Pritchard, 2008.)

As it is quite an extreme case, student X is wheelchair reliant and is also non-verbal. This student has a number of supports in place to help her deal with this condition. Firstly, she has an eye gaze which allows her to communicate quite freely with her peers and staff, although this has limitations and can be rather slow to respond at times. She is in the process of testing out new technology which is similar to the one she has at present which will be faster and make her daily interactions easier and faster. As well as being non-verbal, student X would consider English to be her second language. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage to her, especially in my classroom as her mother tongue is a similar language to French and therefore she can often see similarities, much like some of her peers.

In general, the school deals with inclusion in a positive way. There are a large number of students with special educational needs who are in mainstream school. As well as this, the school has a well-functioning AED unit which offers students the chance to take several mainstream classes should they wish. However, when it comes to the students, such as student <https://assignbuster.com/developing-inclusive-practice-in-post-primary-education/>

X, who have additional needs but are in mainstream school full-time, I have come across several issues.

Firstly, I find it difficult at times to plan ahead for a class where student X will be present as I have not received much guidance from the school with regards to her condition and how to plan for her. As it is a new school there are a number of documents and procedures which are still being implemented. Unfortunately, the IEP's have not yet been completed for such students and therefore I am unaware of all aspects related to student X's diagnoses. This means that I can not always plan effectively and rely on both trial and error and the guidance of the more experienced teachers around me. Yet still, many of these teachers are providing me with guidance based on their own experience and their personal trial and errors in order to help me plan for student X.

The Special Needs Assistants are always of great help when asking questions on how to best assist student X as they spend the most amount of time with her. They are often able to tell me what works best for her in certain scenarios, what she can cope well with and what might cause difficulties for her. Generally, I am encouraged to push her to the best of her abilities, yet it is hard to find what the limit to her abilities is as classroom interactions can take a long amount of time due to the slow technology she is working with.

There are a number of practical implications for student X in both her learning and social environment such as: need for scaffolding/ differentiated tasks, missing class time, difficulties with output and lack of social interaction with her peers.

To better understand the concept of scaffolding, we can look to the work of Vygotsky, which is the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is an idea from Vygotsky's work which has impacted on practice over the last 20 years or so as more importance has been given to the notion of differentiation in teaching. The ZPD is a theoretical space of understanding which is just above the level of understanding of a given individual. It is the area of understanding into which a learner will move next. This is where a learner is able to work effectively, but only with support. The zone is necessarily different for each individual child. Sewell (1990) explains it as ' a point at which a child has partly mastered a skill but can act more effectively with the assistance of a more skilled adult or peer'. This is very important to consider, especially in the case of a student such as student X who may need different tasks to complete or need extra support. Generally, student X will miss a large portion of class periods that fall just before break or lunch time as she requires extra time to be fed and use the bathroom (with assistance). This means that any homework I provide must be heavily scaffolded in order to fill the gaps of the information that student X missed out on in that particular class. As well as this I must ensure to upload the notes online or email these notes to this particular student to ensure she has all the tools she needs to learn the information I am working through with the class. This can cause stress and anxiety for student x as she feels like she is missing out on a lot of classwork. This means that as teachers we must take extra care and consideration when planning classes and ensuring that all students have the scaffolding they need in order to learn effectively.

For humans output refers to language – sounds, or to muscular activity – gestures, expressions, mark making (writing or drawing). Difficulties with language usually refer to spoken language and the inability to function effectively by means of the spoken word. Such difficulties with output can lead to a lower number of social interactions in the school environment as well as difficulties in the classroom. One of the main approaches to teaching that is greatly encouraged in modern teaching is working collaboratively, in pairs or small groups as it is an obvious socially constructive approach to learning. This can be especially effective in a language classroom where students are actively using and improving on their language skills. However, due to the fact that verbal skills are not something which student X can practice this can pose difficulties. Although the other students in the class are quite respectful and will allow student X the time to type out what she wishes to say, they can at times be impatient or forget to ask her questions as they know they only have a certain amount of time to complete each activity. Although this approach aims to get students working collaboratively, it can at times cause the opposite to happen and discourage students from talking when working in a group with student X who has to use a different form of output to the rest of the class.

Social constructivism gives a high priority to language in the process of intellectual development. Dialogue becomes the vehicle by which ideas are considered, shared and developed. The dialogue is often with a more knowledgeable other, but this need not always be the case. Dialogue with peers can be of equal value. Throughout the school day I have noticed that student X's social interactions can be quite limited. Her main point of contact

is often between herself, the SNA's and the teacher's whose classes she attends.

Identification of key teaching and learning strategies to support the student, supported by evidence from relevant literature.

There are inherent problems in the current assessment of children's progress throughout their education, because measurement is primarily language based. Current guidelines for testing arrangements for children with SEN do not have formal provision for children who are perceived to be disadvantaged by language and communication impairments both in the classroom or through more formal examination arrangements, although many have informal arrangements in place.

The SEN Code of Practice identifies ' cognition and learning' as one of the four areas of need. This may apply not only to children who are seen to have general or specific learning difficulties, but also to children with physical and sensory impairments, and those on the autistic spectrum. It is also acknowledged that some children may have associated sensory, physical and behavioural difficulties which compound their needs (DfES, 2001).

In a review by Brahm Norwich it was found that there was a tilt away from SEN-specific teaching, which emerged in various ways and for the various forms of learning difficulties. They found relevant empirical evidence, which tended to support the unique differences position, as did more general position pieces and general studies of teaching effectiveness which were not based on empirical TEACHING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND

DIFFICULTIES 131 evidence. They recognized that the lack of evidence in <https://assignbuster.com/developing-inclusive-practice-in-post-primary-education/>

their review to support SEN-specific teaching might be surprising as there is a persistent sense that special education means special teaching to many teachers and researchers. This is illustrated in Peacey's (2005) comment concerning the conclusion of the UK school inspectorate that ' Many schools are still working with the " common sense" view that learners with SEN require something individualized or separate from normal provision' (p. 4). He adds wryly that ' Sometimes " experts on SEN" quite like this approach because it makes their knowledge special too'. (Peacey, 2005)

Strategies

There are a number of different strategies that can be used in order to support students with special educational needs.

A simple yet important strategy that would be important to help student x and allow her to have an enjoyable learning experience is to ensure that the classroom is laid out in such a way that it is easy for her to gain access to. although the classroom is quite small, the layout is essential in order for there to be space for student x to sit when she arrives to class in her wheelchair. Leading on from this, the seating plan is an important strategy that must be considered in order to ensure inclusion for all and ensure that other students in the class are also able to learn effectively without barriers. In creating this seating plan, the needs of all the students in the classroom would need to be assessed. Eg. If there are other students who need to sit up the front of the room.

One of the most obvious strategies that would be relevant to student x would be the use of technology in the classroom. Due to the fact that this student is

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so heavily reliant on technology in her daily life to get around and to communicate with people around her, it is logical to use her knowledge and appreciation for technology in a positive way in the classroom. By ensuring that all resources I make have an online version, it allows the information to be easily accessible to her. One strategy for inclusion would be to encourage all students to complete and submit their homework electronically. This is a simple strategy that may make the student in question feel a lot more at ease because everybody is doing the same thing.

The aim of this strategy is that ICT removes barriers in the classroom, specifically for student x who would otherwise not be able to communicate with her peers and the teacher. ICT in the classroom is supported by a wide-range of educationalists and theories. As the digital world has an increasing capability to enhance access, participation and benefit from education for students with GLD, and as the digital ecosystem offers unique advantages in terms of accessibility and new ways of interacting and learning, it is ever more important that those with greater literacy and communication needs should have structured learning opportunities to exploit these options. (Edyburn, 2013).

The NCCA's *Communication and Language Guidelines for Teachers of Students with Moderate General Learning Disabilities* (NCCA, 2009b), and the equivalent publication for Severe and Profound (NCCA, 2009c), can be drawn on in order to overview the relevance of literacy and digital literacy to this range of SEN condition. In relation to the 'reading' aspect of literacy, the *Guidelines* state that 'reading' for these students is far broader than the interpretation of <https://assignbuster.com/developing-inclusive-practice-in-post-primary-education/>

text and that some students may not learn to interpret text at all. The focus for these should be on enabling them to make sense of and derive pleasure from all types of visual and tactile representations (NCCA, 2009b and 2009c).

Other effective strategies that could be used are things like: use of visual aids, focusing on what students can do rather than what they cannot do, enable the student to experience success through identifying realistic learning objectives for each lesson, use active learning and collaboration with peers. Another strategy to support the use of ICT in the classroom would be to provide handouts/worksheets that minimise the amount of writing required. (Strategies for Learning and Teaching, Special Education Support Service, 2019).

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