

BOOK REVIEWS

Special and Inclusive Education: A Research Perspective

Edited by Thérèse Day and Joseph Travers

Reviewed by TONY CLINE, co-director of the CPD professional directorate in educational psychology at University College London and visiting professor in educational psychology at the University of Bedfordshire.

This book reports and celebrates empirical research undertaken by teachers who studied for masters and doctoral degrees at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. It has been published in connection with the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the Graduate Diploma in Special Education Needs programme in the college. Its scope reflects concern and curiosity that spans a broad spectrum of special and inclusive education. With twenty-seven empirical chapters the editors have been able to cast their net wide. The first section of the book covers responses to diversity and has a short series of chapters on issues relating to transition, teachers' attitudes and perceptions, meeting the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN) in Irish-medium schools (Gaelscoileanna) and listening to children's opinions. The second section covers access to the curriculum and has chapters on language and communication, reading, autistic spectrum disorders and the sense that teachers make of SEN policy and inclusive ideology in their day-to-day practice. The third section covers collaboration and has chapters on home-school cooperation, the development and use of individual education plans (IEPs) and collaboration between teachers.

Across this diverse subject range the book has two integrating motifs - the need to appreciate the complexity of inclusive education if its positive value is to be realised and the potential added contribution that can be made by practitioner research. These two themes interact in some of the most stimulating chapters which report studies that seem to have grown out of a teacher's thoughtful observations in practice and were transmuted into systematic investigations by the needs of a degree course and the stimulation of developing skills in research methodology. Many of the studies confirm in an Irish setting observations on

special education and inclusion that have been reported in other countries. The distinctive contributions - and there are several - come when there is a well-defined focus on a specific issue and an ambitious attempt to explore the topic in some depth. One example is a study of the transfer of pupils with mild general learning disabilities from mainstream to special schools. The cross-case analysis of individual interviews with adult stakeholders and small group interviews with pupils identified five key factors that influenced such transfers. Another example focused on developmental work on bilingual literacy assessment for young pupils in an Irish-Medium school. This demonstrated the added value that such assessments can offer in that setting. A study of two sixteen-year-old students with severe or profound general learning difficulties examined in detail the use of intensive interaction techniques to improve their communication behaviour. Time series video analysis, together with interviews with their parents and a range of school staff, confirmed improvement across a range of measures. These examples illustrate the broad scope of the book and the types of contribution that school-based action research can make in inclusive education.

In a well organised and well-presented volume with a thorough editorial introduction and a useful index there is one slightly surprising omission. With a large number of authors working in diverse settings I would have valued a list of contributors indicating the context in which they worked. It is possible to provide that information without naming schools and putting the confidentiality of research participants at risk.

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