REACH

JOURNAL OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN IRELAND

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- Critical Issues Affecting Special Needs Assistants in the Irish Education System
- Systematic Review on the Effectiveness of Using Children's Literature to Improve Peer Awareness of Additional Educational Needs in School-aged Children
- Moving Forward with Inclusion in Physical Education in Ireland
- Is the 'School Inclusion Model' a Pathway to Inclusion in Irish Schools?
- Call for Papers: Special Issue on "Deaf Education"

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Mathews, E. (2018) *Language, Power, Resistance: Mainstreaming of Deaf Education*. Washington DC: Gallaudet University Pres**s.**

Colum, M., & McIntyre, K. (2019) Exploring Social Inclusion as a Factor for the Academic Achievement of Students Presenting with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Schools: A Literature Review. *REACH: Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland*, *32*(1), 21–32. https://reachjournal.ie/index.php/reach/article/view/14/14

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Contents

REACH: Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland, Vol. 36.1 (2023), 2-3.

Editorial

The publication of *REACH: Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland 36.* 1 comes at a time of ongoing and indeed expanding review of national policy in relation to many aspects of inclusive education. At the time of writing in advance of the new school/academic year 2023/24, the Minister for Education announced first a public consultation process to inform the development of the new *Traveller and Roma Education Strategy* and a week later an OECD review of Ireland's *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools* (DEIS) resource allocation policy. At the same time, the report on the consultative process reviewing the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004) is still awaited.

Review of policy is of course to be welcomed and is hoped will lead to the kind of legislative and policy developments that over time ultimately followed the publication of the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) (Department of Education and Science,1993). Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that these concurrent multiple strands of review and consultation and the differing timelines will not lead to further fragmentation and ad hoc development of education policy. Figures recently released by the Department of Education (2023) reveal that by the end of the last (2022/ 23) school year over 15,500 Ukrainian pupils were attending Irish schools. Schools in Ireland are now more diverse than ever before and there is a pressing need to reflect on and evaluate how we understand and respond to the diversity and variability of *all* learners moving beyond a focus on placement to ensure meaningful inclusion for all regardless of setting.

The articles published in REACH volume 36.1 focus on key dimensions of inclusive education policy and practice. At a time of debate about the deployment of special needs assistants (SNA) in Irish schools the first article (Carolan) offers a very timely critical analysis of some key issues while considering and offering insights from experiences of how SNAs are uniquely recruited, deployed, and supported in one special school setting. The findings emerging from a systematic review of the effectiveness of the use of children's literature to improve peer awareness of additional needs (Drohan & Kelleher) will be of interest to many readers interested in fostering an inclusive school ethos. Drawing on Irish data from a large-scale European study of inclusion in physical education, Marron reports encouraging findings while highlighting the need for teachers to continue to reflect on and question practices such as the withdrawal of children from the PE lesson and instead consider how learning activities and the environment may be best adapted to support inclusion. Four years into the trialling of the School

Inclusion Model, Gardiner presents a very timely analysis of the development of the policy in moving towards full inclusion for all students in Irish schools. She argues that autonomy, access, accountability and the needs of all students must be considered and the voices of all stakeholders must be heard in an evaluation of the policy. Thanks to the stellar work of our Reviews Editor Mai Byrne, this issue of REACH also features reviews by Cregan of *Establishing Pathways to Inclusion: Investigating the Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Special Educational Need*s (Rose and Shevlin) and *Language, Power, and Resistance: Mainstreaming Deaf Education* (Mathews).

Following the successful move to online open access publication, I am delighted to announce a revamped look for the journal over the next year which we hope will also enhance accessibility for all our readers. Finally, the Editorial Board is pleased to announce a forthcoming special issue of REACH focusing on *Deaf Education: A 50-year Retrospective.* Details can be found in the Call for Papers bit.ly/3qyfYHT

ANNA LOGAN
Editor

Call for Papers

Forthcoming (2024) Special Issue of

REACH Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland

Deaf Education: A 50-year Retrospective

It is 50 years since the publication of the Department of Education's 1972 report *The Education of Children who are Handicapped by Impaired Hearing*. Much has changed in that time and to mark this milestone, the REACH Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland plans to publish a special issue focusing on deaf education. This follows previous successful special issues relating to learner voice and to student behaviour (20.1).

Submissions are invited from educators and other professionals interested in all aspects of deaf education across the education continuum nationally and internationally.

Contributions should be approximately 2,500-3000 words in length or 10/12 pages of type in double spacing on A4 paper. See https://reachjournal.ie for submission guidelines and template.

The Harvard style of referencing should be used. Submissions are now invited and should be submitted online at https://reachjournal.ie and emailed to Editorial Board member Elizabeth.mathews@dcu.ie

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REACH: Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland, Vol. 36.1 (2023), 5-18.

Critical Issues Affecting Special Needs Assistants in the Irish Education System

More than 18 000 special needs assistants (SNAs) are employed in Irish schools. According to the Department of Education (DE), their primary function is to support the care needs of students with additional needs, assist teachers, and ensure that students can access education. Recently, SNAs have been campaigning for greater recognition of their contribution to the Irish education system. This campaign has highlighted several critical issues that impact SNAs working in Ireland, including entry-level training and qualifications, ambiguity regarding their role and responsibilities and a need for access to ongoing professional development.

Recognising the genuine contribution of SNAs to the Irish education system and addressing some of the known inequities they experience is of particular interest to the author of this paper. The author works in a special education setting where forty-one SNAs comprise 80% of the staff. Hiring graduates for the role and investing heavily in their professional development has been transformative for this school. The contribution of SNAs in this setting is extensive and has enabled the school to thrive whilst serving a student population with highly complex learning and behavioural needs. This paper begins with a brief examination of the history and current interpretation of the SNA scheme. This is followed by a critical analysis of some of the key issues concerning the employment of SNAs and a consideration of how SNAs are uniquely recruited, deployed, and supported in the author's setting. It is argued that by addressing the critical issues impacting the current SNA scheme, we can advance the broader cause of inclusion in the Irish education system.

Keywords: *Special Needs Assistant (SNA), special school, qualifications, continuous professional development, supervision, collaboration*

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INTRODUCTION

Ainscow (2020) advises that a move towards inclusive education must be focused on increasing the capacities of all schools to support the participation and learning of an increasingly diverse range of students. He describes this movement as an 'inclusive turn' and cautions against interpreting inclusion as simply integrating vulnerable students into existing arrangements. The role of teaching assistants or TAs (TA is the term widely used in the literature concerning paraprofessionals working in education) in facilitating inclusive education has been widely endorsed and pursued, with many other countries engaging the services of paraprofessionals in their school systems (Logan, 2006; Rose and O'Neill, 2009; Keating and O'Connor, 2012). The role of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) was a central consideration of schools in Ireland as they reformed to deliver more inclusive learning environments (Zhao, Rose and Shevlin, 2021). The number of SNAs working in the Irish education system has grown from 8390 posts in 2006 (National Council for Special Education [NCSE], 2018) to 18 050 in 2022 (DE, 2023). While the number of SNAs employed in Irish schools has rapidly increased, their contribution is still relatively unexplored (Logan, 2006; Keating and O'Connor, 2012). This article begins with an examination of the history and current interpretation of the SNA scheme. This foregrounds a review of some of the critical issues concerning SNA deployment, including roles and responsibilities, qualifications, and professional learning and supervision, in tandem with consideration of how SNAs are uniquely recruited, deployed, and supported in the author's setting. Implications for policy and practice are identified, and it is argued that addressing the critical issues impacting the current SNA scheme can advance the broader cause of inclusion in the Irish education system.

HISTORY AND CURRENT INTERPRETATION OF THE SNA SCHEME

This first iteration of the SNA 'scheme' came into effect in 1979. It was initially introduced to support students who attended special schools and were considered to have exceptional difficulty and complex medical needs (DES, 2011). These employees were then known as child-care assistants, and their deployment was small in scale, numbering in the low hundreds. Following the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) report (DES, 1993), there was a move away from segregated educational provision and a greater focus on inclusive education. The development of this inclusive practice required additional staff to support students with additional educational needs (AEN) to attend mainstream schools. In 2002, to reflect the redefined objectives of the role, the title was changed from child-care

assistant to SNA (Morrissey, 2020). Two key DE circulars (07/2002; 30/2014) clearly state that the role of the SNA is to deliver personal care support to enable students with additional care needs to attend school (DES, 2002; 2014). A clear emphasis on school attendance evident in these circulars arguably promotes the situation Ainscow (2020) advises against, where the inclusion of students with AEN is defined by their physical placement in schools rather than their experience whilst there.

REVIEW OF THE SNA SCHEME

In 2018 the NCSE published the 'Comprehensive Review of the SNA Scheme'. This report is the most far-reaching analysis of the deployment of SNAs in Ireland to date (NCSE, 2018). One of the most apparent findings from the consultation process was that all education stakeholders highly valued the SNA role (Zhao, Rose and Shevlin, 2021). The overarching case made in the report is that access to an SNA is not sufficient to support the meaningful inclusion of all students with additional needs. Many other researchers in the area agree that TA support should not be viewed as a panacea when addressing the appropriate inclusion of students with additional needs (Webster, 2010; Butt and Lowe, 2012; Zhao, Rose and Shevlin, 2021). The authors of the NCSE report warned that the SNA scheme had developed into a "blunt instrument to deal with a wide variety of needs" (NCSE, 2018, p.21). One of their key recommendations to remedy this was making a broader range of support options available to schools, including developing ten regional multidisciplinary support teams. The report also identified and made recommendations to remedy some of the critical issues and inequities inherent in the current formulation of the SNA scheme. These matters will be discussed with reference to the broader literature within the following paragraphs.

CRITICAL ISSUES AFFECTING SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS

This section of the paper focuses on some of the critical issues that affect this cohort of school staff and discusses how these issues are addressed in the author's context. Some issues are unique to Ireland; others are recurrent in international research concerning school-based paraprofessionals.

Role and Responsibilities

The most prevalent finding emerging from the research concerning TAs is that the role is "plagued by confusion, ambiguity and lack of clarity" (Giangreco, Doyle

and Suter, 2014, p.695), a theme which is common across the literature (Logan, 2006; Butt and Lowe, 2012; Webster and De Boer, 2019). The SNA role has been repeatedly clarified across departmental circulars (DES, 2002; 2014), outlining the care duties inherent to the role and stipulating non-teaching responsibilities (Keating and O'Connor, 2012). Despite this, multiple researchers and the NCSE review found that many SNAs are engaged in tasks of a teaching nature (Logan, 2006; Rose and O'Neill, 2009; NCSE, 2018). It is not surprising, therefore, that research demonstrates that the ambiguity associated with the TA role may contribute to the misinterpretation of TAs' associated duties and the inappropriate assignment of responsibilities.

The research reported by Kerins and McDonagh (2015) reinforces the findings from Rose and O'Neill (2009) and Keating and O'Connor (2012), who observed that the interpretation of the role of the SNA was a matter of inconsistencies and that there are important questions to be asked about the professional boundaries between SNAs and teachers. This misinterpretation has seen many TAs performing tasks of a pedagogical nature, which are outside of their remit and may be beyond their professional qualifications (Webster et al., 2010; Butt and Lowe, 2012). While other SNAs have reported that their skill sets were under-utilised and that schools assigned them tasks such as cleaning, clearing lockers and making tea for teaching staff and school visitors (NCSE, 2018).

The NCSE (2018) recommended that SNAs be renamed 'Inclusion Support Assistants' to reflect that the role is primarily concerned with promoting independence and inclusion. However, five years on, the title has yet to be adopted in any official DE circular or documentation, and many schools have, in the interim period, adopted alternative titles, such as 'Additional Needs Assistant' (Educate Together, 2020). Stating SNA duties must be entirely non-teaching whilst indicating their function is to promote independence is arguably somewhat contradictory. SNAs, in the author's context, whilst providing care needs, are also tasked with supporting students to become as independent as possible around these needs. To achieve this, SNAs follow individualised task analyses, offering systematic prompts when necessary to encourage students towards independence and ultimately, where possible, fading themselves out of the situation. In this instance, SNAs are technically engaged in teaching practices. The promotion of greater independence patently requires those providing care to engage in the teaching of functional skills for daily living. Approaching the deployment of SNAs in this way is arguably a better use of resources and more in keeping with the central goals of inclusion (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [UNCRPD] (2006). While providing solely for the care needs of

students with AEN may facilitate their physical inclusion within a school, teaching students skills that promote their independence can remove barriers that exist in the first instance.

Qualifications

SNAs working in Ireland have mobilised via their union Fórsa, launching a media and lobbying campaign to gain recognition and respect for the role (Fórsa, 2022). Fórsa represents two-thirds of all SNAs employed in the state, and their campaign titled 'Respect for SNAs' is lobbying for new minimum qualifications to be introduced. The DE in circular 0051/2019 lists the minimum education requirements for employment as an SNA as a Level 3 qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or three grade Ds in the Junior Certificate (DE, 2019). This qualification requirement has remained unchanged since 1979 and is linked to the original childcare assistant scheme. Researchers discussing the qualifications required for the post of SNA point out that, as it stands, a person as young as 16 or 17 years of age, with no training in the field, could theoretically be supporting a student with AEN (Keating and O'Connor, 2012). The Level 3 qualification stipulation does not align with the international standards required for comparable roles (Kerins *et al.* 2018). For example, Finland has operated a one-year certificate programme for teaching assistants (TAs) since 1995. TAs in Malta must complete a state-organised, 140-hour course before being registered as 'Learning Support Assistants'. In Singapore, all 'allied educators' are trained in special education during a mandatory one-year diploma programme (Giangreco, Doyle and Suter, 2014).

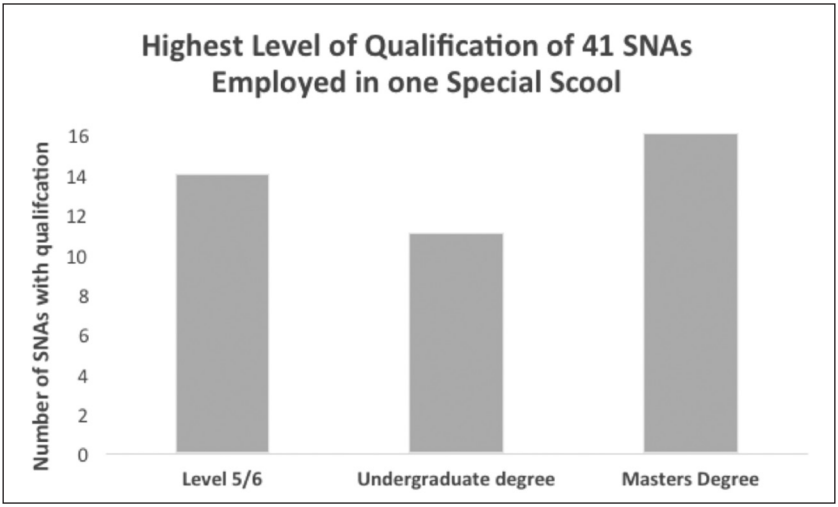
Fórsa, on behalf of its members, is seeking to have an appropriate NFQ Level 6 qualification be recognised as mandatory criteria for schools employing new SNAs (Fórsa, 2022). They maintain that the current educational requirements do not reflect the complexities of the role. SNA and Fórsa representative Linda O'Sullivan, speaking at an online seminar as part of the 'Respect for SNAs' campaign, stated, "The official belief that the current level of education is sufficient is insulting and misrepresents the educational standard of most SNAs across the country" (Ibid, 2022). The NCSE's review of the SNA scheme supports this assertion (NCSE, 2018). The report's authors found that many SNAs were highly qualified and "had undertaken further training and qualifications in their own time and at their own expense" (NCSE, 2018, p. 20). The NCSE review team recognised the need for improved entry criteria and recommended introducing a national training programme for SNAs (NCSE, 2018). The 'Certificate in Inclusive School Support' commenced in 2021 at University College Dublin (UCD, 2021). After initial delays and disagreements on how the course would be accredited, it was recently

designated at Level 6 on the NFQ (Fórsa, 2022). Despite this, the DE wrote to Fórsa stating that the current educational requirements do not need to be changed. They claimed that individual schools could dictate if further qualifications were required (Fórsa, 2022). The contradiction between funding a Level 6 course whilst stating a Level 3 qualification is sufficient may relate to concerns the DE has about pay claims that could arise from any professionalisation of the role.

SNAs working in the author's setting would not be equipped for the role with only a Level 3 qualification. SNAs in this school, under the leadership of the class teacher, are expected to follow guidelines set out in their student's learning and behaviour support plans and implement these recommendations throughout the day. The students attending this school have primary diagnoses of autism and co-occurring intellectual disabilities (ID) in the moderate to profound range and, in many cases, additional mental-health-related diagnoses. Most students join the school after first attending special autism classes within mainstream schools, but unfortunately, these placements have broken down. To effectively serve a student population presenting with multiple complex learning needs and often co-occurring behaviours of concern, the school has actively sought to recruit graduates for the role of SNA and deployed them in a way that utilises their skillsets and qualifications. Since 2010 the school has collaborated with a range of higher education institutions, creating opportunities for third-level students to avail of professionally supervised internships and work placements. Annually, the school hosts between twelve and fifteen students on long-term placements from six higher education institutions. These students are enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Psychology, Social Care, Applied Behaviour Analysis, Education Studies, and Early Childhood Education. Reaching out in this way enabled the school to attract highly motivated supernumerary volunteers. In addition, these arrangements have led to an academy whereby these individuals train in volunteer roles but later take up paid SNA contracts at the school. As a result of this recruitment approach, the school has attracted a highly qualified team of SNAs (see Figure 1).

The only additional human resources available in this school is their SNA staff; additional Special Education Teachers (SET) are not sanctioned in autism-specific special schools. With such highly qualified employees amongst the SNA staff, it has always made sense to engage them in *supporting* the education of students. The experience of this school is that SNAs, under the direction of the class teacher and with regular structured support and supervision from senior staff members, are capable and proficient at supporting individualised interventions as stipulated in their students' education plans. This experience would be in keeping with the

Figure 1: Highest qualification level of 41 SNAs employed in one Irish special school



findings of Farrell *et al.* (2010) and Haakma De Boer, Van Esch, Minnaert, and Van Der Putten (2021), who found that TAs can positively impact student attainment when explicitly trained and supervised to carry out targeted interventions grounded in evidence-based practices. A recent review of the research concerning the training of paraprofessionals also aligns with the experiences of this school. The authors stated that "the efficacy of paraprofessional support is only limited by the degree to which paraprofessionals have been trained to implement evidence-based practices" (Brock and Anderson, 2021, p.718). By enacting these arrangements, the school has certainly strayed from Circular 30/2014 description of the role of an SNA (DES, 2014). This departure from the circular guidelines has been made in plain sight and with the student's quality of life at the centre of the decision. Whilst the experiences of this school suggest that SNAs can positively impact the learning outcomes of the students they support, it is acknowledged that the school is an outlier, both in student profile and the educational attainment level of the SNAs employed.

Professional Learning and Supervision

Inadequate training and insufficient or non-existent supervision are fundamental issues affecting TAs in their roles (Webster *et al.,* 2010; Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero and French, 2011, Logan, O'Connor-Bones and Shannon, 2019). The literature

concerning the need for training paraprofessionals such as SNAs is unequivocal, insisting that these school staff require ongoing training and supervision to advance inclusion goals (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero and French, 2011). Rose and O'Neill (2009) investigated differences in the working conditions of TAs in the English system and SNAs working in Ireland. One area they examined was the training opportunities for each group; only 21% of SNA respondents agreed they were afforded good training opportunities compared to 74% of TAs. The researchers attributed the significant disparity in responses to English-based TAs increased pedagogical responsibilities (Ibid, 2009). Kerins *et al.* (2018) examined the continuous professional development (CPD) needs of SNAs working in Irish post-primary schools. The need for greater access to CPD was confirmed by both the SNA and principal respondents, with CPD related to behaviour support identified as a critical need. However, these highlighted CPD needs are at odds with the official position on the role of the SNA to provide solely for the care needs of students with AEN. This is yet another example of the contradiction between the stated requirements of schools concerning SNAs and the view of the DE regarding their function. Noting the disparity between the official position on the role of the SNA to provide solely for the care needs of students with AEN and calls by SNA and principal respondents, Kerins *et al.* (2018) highlight the need for a national policy on continuous professional development for SNAs.

The 2018 review of the SNA scheme made recommendations regarding ongoing training for SNAs advising that SNAs should be required to attend further training in line with the needs of students in their schools. The report does not specify whether this training should only apply to care needs. It recommends that school-specific training be provided to whole school teams, stating that "joint training opportunities will enhance the development of an inclusive school culture" (NCSE, 2018, p. 56). This would suggest that the report authors see a benefit in joint training for teachers and SNAs in topics unrelated to care needs. SNAs are currently not permitted to register for CPD available through the NCSE. There is no mechanism on the DE online claims system (OLCS) to excuse an SNA from work to attend training opportunities.

The issue of ongoing supervision is not addressed in the NCSE report. The report does mention that SNAs should work "under the direction of and in collaboration with teaching staff" (Ibid, 2018, p.92). However, no explanation exists for how this collaboration should be developed and nurtured. The research in this area supports formalised supervision and confirms that it positively influences TA performance (Giangreco, Doyle and Suter, 2014). This has been the experience in the author's context, where formalised supervision of SNAs is embedded into

the practices of the school. SNAs are supported by the school's behaviour analyst, teachers and other senior SNAs as part of the school's in-house staff training policy. SNAs receive instruction-based induction training and ongoing in-class observations with built-in modelling and feedback. They also attend monthly group supervision sessions, covering various topics related to their work. Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero and French (2011) found that positive collaborative working relationships contribute to more significant and meaningful inclusion. Despite the evidence that paraprofessionals are more successful in their work when supervision is embedded, research has shown that most teachers do not have assigned planning or feedback time with the support staff they work alongside in their classrooms (Blatchford *et al.*, 2009; Logan, O'Connor-Bones and Shannon, 2019).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE

A review of the literature concerning TAs indicates that additional classroom support is a critical factor in promoting inclusion (Rose and O'Neill, 2009). The literature also shows that the richness of that inclusion can be enhanced when TAs are considered partners and led by teachers committed to collaboration (Farrell and Ainscow, 2002; Logan, O'Connor-Bones and Shannon, 2019). It must be cautioned that expecting our teachers to nurture these collaborative relationships will require preparation in people management skills and supervision models (Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou and Bassett, 2010). Future research will need to determine what initial teacher education and ongoing professional learning teachers will require to prepare them for providing formalised supervision to SNAs. There are evident tensions between policy and practice concerning the role of the SNA in Irish schools. The NCSE report was explicit that their function is restricted to supporting only the care needs of students with AEN (NCSE, 2018). This decision was brought about by reviewing the practices in Irish schools and through a review of international research, indicating that students can be adversely affected when schools rely too heavily on TAs to support students with AEN (Giangreco, Doyle and Suter, 2014). The research is unanimous; for inclusion to be successful, every member of the staff must be responsible (Giangreco, 2021).

This literature review may be of interest to practitioners educating students with complex needs and for schools in which SNAs represent the majority of staff. When a large proportion of a student's support plan is focused on promoting functional communication and daily living skills, it is unsurprising that special schools rely on SNAs to reinforce students' learning goals. Whilst there is undoubtedly a need for further research in this area (Webster and De Boer, 2021), there is an argument

for re-evaluating the duties of SNAs supporting those with the most significant needs and perhaps expanding their role in specific contexts. Four new autism-specific special schools have been established in Ireland in the past two years, and others are being asked to expand (DE, 2022). Many students joining these schools will have multiple diagnoses, complex learning and behavioural needs, and may have previously attended special classes within mainstream schools. The special schools they enrol in must have something additional to offer these students. The author's experience of hiring graduates for the role of SNA and providing them with ongoing training and supervision leads them to believe that there is scope to develop the SNA scheme into something more ambitious and fruitful than what is currently in operation.

CONCLUSION

The grassroots union campaign 'Respect for SNAs' has highlighted that SNAs are calling for greater recognition of their contribution to the Irish schooling system. This call for respect could be achieved by policy changes that raise the minimum qualification level, provide greater access to ongoing professional learning and supervision, and issue clear guidelines to schools regarding constructive collaboration. Whilst a broader range of school supports promised by the NCSE may decrease schools' reliance on assistants in the future, SNAs or 'inclusion support assistants' are here to stay. Providing the employees who have the "least amount of power and agency in the education system" (Webster and De Boer, 2021, p. 296) with equitable access to training opportunities is an obvious way for the DE to model the kind of inclusive culture we are trying to foster in our schools. In addition, encouraging formalised collaborative practice between teaching and SNA staff may help facilitate the 'inclusive turn' promoted by Ainscow (2020) and further develop our education system's capacity to support an increasingly diverse population of students.

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Changing the Narrative: A Systematic Review on the Effectiveness of Using Children's Literature to Improve Peer Awareness of Additional Educational Needs in School-aged Children

Enduring barriers to meaningful inclusion and social exclusion experienced by students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) may be partially linked to lack of peer awareness and understanding of AEN. Research suggests that using children's literature including character portrayals of AEN may be an effective way of developing children's understanding and acceptance, resulting in increased inclusion in educational settings. The aim of this systematic review is to explore the effectiveness of using children's literature as an intervention to increase peer understanding of AEN in school-aged children. The current review carried out a systematic search to identify eligible articles using pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Selected studies were assessed for quality and findings were synthesised to draw conclusions that may inform future practice, policy and research. Evidence of increased peer awareness of AEN was observed in four of the five studies following the use of children's literature as an intervention. Increased peer awareness was reflected in increased positivity of peer attitudes and intended behaviours towards children with AEN. The review also highlights recommendations for using children's literature as an intervention to increase peer awareness of AEN.

Keywords: *Additional educational needs, inclusion, children's literature, special educational needs, educational intervention*

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education for Children with AEN

Children with Additional Educational Needs (AEN), widely referred to as Special Educational Needs, experience barriers to inclusion that impact meaningful participation in education (Subban et al., 2022; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Woodgate et al., 2020). Inclusive education involves removing physical and social barriers to provide all children with an education that meets their needs (Tiernan, 2021). In this review, AEN is an inclusive term to represent the broad range of support needs evident in Irish classrooms. In recent decades, there has been an international policy focus on increasing inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream schools (Merrigan & Senior, 2023). This has been linked to improved academic and social outcomes for students with additional needs, as well as either positive or neutral effects for their peers (Hehir et al., 2016). However, despite the perceived paradigm shift, students with additional educational needs continue to face obstacles to inclusion and endure social isolation in school. Herein, they experience more limited social interactions (Litvack, Ritchie & Shore, 2011; Louari, 2013), lower peer acceptance and fewer friendships than typically developing peers (Schwab, Lehofer, & Tanzer, 2021). Additionally, students with additional educational needs are more likely to be bullied than students without additional needs (Bates et al., 2015; Didaskalou, Andreou & Vlachou, 2009; Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2010) leading to significant impact on academic, social and emotional development (Kidger et al., 2012).

Hampered social interactions experienced by children with additional educational needs may be partly attributed to lack of peer awareness and understanding of AEN, contributing to negative attitudes and avoidance (Bates et al., 2015; Litvack, Ritchie & Shore, 2011). In particular, there is a lack of peer awareness relating to 'hidden disabilities', including behavioural and learning difficulties (Van Mieghem et al., 2020). Research shows that negative attitudes towards AEN can form in children as young as four years old and emphasises the importance of fostering peer awareness of AEN from a young age (Bates et al., 2015). Notably, children respond to others' needs based on their understanding and thus to increase advocacy for children with additional educational needs, we must enhance their peers' understanding (Furuness et al., 2021). Evidence shows that knowledge of AEN and experiences of inclusive education positively impacts attitudes of typically developing peers (Van Mieghem et al., 2020). Despite this evidence, and the diversity of need in classrooms, AEN and disability are often not addressed by teaching methodologies and content (Adomat, 2014). As such, there is a need for AEN awareness programs and interventions to educate and nurture positive

attitudes in typically developing children towards peers with additional educational needs (Shamberger et al., 2014).

Children's Literature as an Intervention

Research suggests that using children's literature that includes character portrayals of disability to explore AEN may be a more effective way of developing understanding and acceptance than employing explicit teaching methods alone (Maich & Belcher 2012; Morrison & Rude 2002; Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006). Teachers can use children's literature as a stimulus for meaningful conversations regarding representation of AEN (Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006; Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). Additionally, children's literature is an accessible resource for all and can be used flexibly to cater for varying abilities, reading levels and contexts. Such exploration through a literary lens fosters empathy, encourages perspective-taking and allows children to connect ideas to lived experiences (Causarano, 2021; Furuness & Esteves, 2021). Engagement with literature that includes characters with additional educational needs affords children with opportunities to vicariously experience and learn about AEN in developmentally appropriate ways. One such intervention in Adomat (2014) describes whole-class read-aloud and independent reading sessions over a six month period in an elementary school with children from second to fifth grade. Twice per week, children listened to a story featuring a character with additional educational needs and were then encouraged to engage in open-ended discussion and reflection. Throughout the intervention, children's concept of disability evolved and they began to view AEN beyond categories and definitions, instead developing a nuanced understanding and acceptance of difference. In this way, readers receive opportunities to question deficit-based perspectives of disability (Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021), thus challenging attitudes and dissecting stereotypes (Adomat, 2014). As such, children's literature has immense power to communicate authentic representations of AEN (Rieger & McGrail, 2015) and 'provides a lens for reflection and action' (Artman-Meeker, Grant & Yang, 2016, p.158).

Rationale for the Current Review

As well as direct inclusionary benefits for students with additional educational needs, increasing peer awareness is significant from a policy standpoint. In the Irish context, following ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2018 (UNCRPD, 2006), a re-conceptualisation of inclusive education is emerging. Irish policymakers have reviewed a model of full inclusion implemented in New Brunswick, Canada, whereby all students, including those with additional educational needs, are educated in mainstream settings (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). This has prompted critique of current special

education provision. It appears that there is disparity between the model of inclusion stipulated in policy and the experience of children with additional educational needs in Irish schools (Merrigan & Senior, 2023; NCSE, 2015). To avoid tokenistic ideas of inclusion, an increase in peer awareness is warranted to facilitate meaningful inclusion of students with additional educational needs.

Aiming to address this need, this review explores ways to increase peer awareness of AEN using children's literature. At present, there is a gap in the research relating to the effectiveness of such an intervention (Causarano, 2021). Rather, much existing research investigates the nature of AEN portrayal in children's literature through content analysis (Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). A systematic review on the topic has not been previously conducted, and there is a paucity of literature overviewing this research area within an educational context. Thus, the review questions are as follows:

- 'What empirical research surrounds the effectiveness of using children's literature as an intervention to increase peer understanding of AEN in school-aged children?'
- 'How rigorous is the existing research in this area?'
- 'What are the considerations for implementing an intervention using children's literature to increase peer understanding of AEN?'

METHOD

Search Strategy

In November 2022, a literature search was conducted using PsychInfo, Education Source and ERIC databases. These were chosen due to their relevance in educational psychology. Search terms were formulated based on consideration of the research question (Boland, Cherry & Dickson, 2017) and information derived from a pilot search carried out by the research team. Based on findings from the pilot search, the following terms appeared to garner all relevant literature in the area. This included "children's literature" OR "children's books" OR "picture books" OR "children's picture books" AND "special educational needs" OR "special needs" OR disabilities. Included articles were limited to full-text, peer-reviewed papers, written in English and published between 2000-2022. The initial search yielded 60 articles, with 39 papers remaining once duplicates were removed. Titles and abstracts were screened to eliminate articles that did not align with inclusion and exclusion criteria (n = 24) (Table 1 in Appendix A).

Inclusion criteria pertained to empirical research articles, studies conducted with school-aged populations (i.e. children aged 5-18) and studies involving the use

of an intervention. Exclusion criteria related to systematic reviews or theoretical articles, research conducted with teacher populations, and studies evaluating children's literature without the use of children's books as an intervention. The research team independently reviewed and screened full-text versions of the remaining 15 articles and later met to review decision-making. This led to the removal of 12 articles which did not meet inclusion criteria. The remaining three papers were included in the review. An additional two papers were found through hand-searching bibliographies of included and excluded articles. A PRISMA Flowchart was used to provide an overview of the search strategy employed (Appendix B). The resulting five articles included in this review are listed in Table 2 (Appendix C).

Critical Appraisal

The Gough (2007) 'Weight of Evidence (WoE)' framework was used by the research team to appraise the quality of the five included articles (Appendix D). This framework involved evaluating the methodological quality of studies (WoE A), the relevance of methodology to the review question (WoE B) and the relevance of evidence to the review question (WoE C). Weightings derived from the WoE A, B and C were later combined to provide an overall score (WoE D) that established the extent to which each study provided evidence to address the review question. Evaluation of the methodological quality of included studies (WoE A) was conducted using criteria based on the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tool for qualitative and quantitative studies (CASP, 2018) and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool for mixed methods studies (Hong et al. 2018). Methodological relevance (WoE B) was evaluated using the Petticrew and Roberts (2003) typology of evidence. Finally, the relevance of evidence to the current review question (WoE C) was evaluated using a revised version of the PICO framework (Richardson et al., 1995). These quality appraisal tools and frameworks were chosen as they align with the scope of the review and were deemed reliable ways of assessing the quality of included literature (Hong et al. 2018; Long, French & Brooks, 2020). Furthermore, the use of multiple appraisal tools allowed the research teams to assess varying components of included articles and enhanced critical analysis and evidence synthesis (Gough, 2021).

Using the aforementioned tools and frameworks, WoE A, B and C scores were assigned for each study and averaged to provide an overall quality indicator (WoE D). The possible range of scores for WoE D were divided into triads of 'high', 'medium' or 'low' with scores between 0-0.9 considered low, 1.0 – 1.9 considered medium and 2.1 – 3.0 considered high. The included studies were rated according to these quality descriptors (Appendix D). The WoE ratings influence the extent

to which the papers were subsequently integrated and discussed. This ensures that the findings of the current review are informed mostly by higher quality papers.

Participants

A total of 253 participants were included in the reviewed literature. In line with inclusion criteria, all studies featured school-aged children ranging from five to 15 years. Two studies also garnered parent and teacher views (Adomat, 2014; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Some studies provided limited descriptions of participant demographics, alluding only to age and gender (Wilkins et al., 2016). In contrast, other studies provided a comprehensive overview of participant characteristics including socio-economic background, ethnicity and experience with AEN (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Participants in all studies attended mainstream schools and most studies outlined that participants had students with additional needs in their class. Moreover, some studies included participants with additional educational needs (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016). The studies were conducted in the United States (Adomat 2014; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016) and the United Kingdom (Butler, 2016; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Notably, no research was found within an Irish context.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used across all five studies. However, there was a dearth of detail regarding the sampling procedures used, with some studies providing no information on how they recruited participants (Adomat, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2016). Unstandardised recruitment processes were also observed, including differences recruiting participants with and without additional needs (Butler, 2016).

Study Design

All five studies described their research design, thus demonstrating good transparency. Three studies used qualitative design, including thematic analysis of coded audio and video-recordings of intervention sessions (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). One study utilised quantitative design involving a modified version of the Multi-response Racial Attitude measure (Aboud, Mendleson & Purdy, 2003) to compare pre- and post-intervention effects (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Smith D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010) employed a mixed-methods approach, including thematic analysis of interviews and use of the Adjective Checklist (Gough, 2000). Importantly, the findings of four studies relate directly to the review question. Conversely, the findings of Wilkins et al. (2016) focus on factors influencing peer attitudes of AEN rather than evaluating the effectiveness

of the intervention itself on increasing peer awareness, thus reducing its relevance to the research question.

Data Collection Measures

The studies included in this review demonstrated measures to increase rigour and transparency. This includes the running of a pilot study (Butler, 2016), triangulation of data sources (Adomat, 2014) and declaration of researcher bias (Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). All qualitative studies ensured that discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). None of the studies used social validity measures, which is a limitation given the propensity for the findings to bear social significance for children with additional needs, as well as for their families, teachers and peers.

Interventions

Studies varied in type and duration of intervention used, as well as the range of AEN explored. Interventions consisted of weekly sessions over four to 12 week periods and consisted of learning about AEN through explicit teaching and interactive literary discussion. Interventions in three studies consisted of guided reading, small group or read-aloud sessions using chosen texts, followed by structured post-reading discussions and reflections about characters with additional educational needs (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). One study adopted a similar approach combined with use of the Adjective Checklist (Gough, 2000) pre and post-intervention (Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Butler (2016) focused on motor impairments whereas other interventions included discussions about a range of AEN, including physical, cognitive and hidden disabilities (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016). For example, by reading stories that portrayed friendships between non-disabled and disabled children, Cameron and Rutland (2006), explored differences in peer attitudes when emphasis was placed on the character's identity versus their category of AEN. Moreover, criteria for selecting extracts from children's literature were outlined (Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Other studies ensured the use of high-quality literature by selecting award-winning books (Adomat, 2014; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Two sample excerpts from 'Sleepovers' by Jacqueline Wilson and 'Saffy's Angel' by Hilary McKay were provided as examples of inclusive literature in one study (Adomat, 2014).

Data Analysis

Four studies provided detailed descriptions of data analysis and measures thus enhancing transparency, rigour and replicability (Adomat 2014; Cameron &

Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016). Methods used included thematic analysis, open-coding and selective coding (Adomat, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2016). Some studies provided evidence of good reliability using Cronbach's alpha (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010) and counter-balancing materials (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). In addition, blind-rating of the coded transcripts by researchers who did not conduct the intervention increased reliability (Wilkins et al., 2016). Other methods to enhance reliability and validity included discussion of codes and themes to reach consensus (Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010) as well as comparison of codes with reflective notes to increase triangulation of data (Adomat, 2014). All qualitative studies included verbatim quotes from participants to substantiate findings, thus increasing reliability (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). Some studies obtained pre and post-intervention measures of students' attitudes towards AEN to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention (Cameron & Rutland, 2006).

Integrating the Findings

In the current review, children's literature inspired depth and quality of reflection about AEN. Evidence of increased peer awareness of AEN was observed in four out of five studies (Adomat, 2014, Butler, 2016, Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Wilkins et al., 2016). This was reflected in increased positivity of peer attitudes and intended behaviours towards children with additional needs, such as playing with peers with additional needs in school and interacting during extra-curricular activities (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Contrarily, one study found that despite positive trends in descriptive data and qualitative statements, there was no significant difference between students' perceptions of AEN pre and post intervention (Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010).

Social Constructivism

Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977) and Social Constructivism principles permeated the reviewed literature, as evidenced by children's shared understandings relating to AEN throughout included studies. Students influenced each other's understandings of AEN in a variety of ways. Adomat (2014) found that participants explored disability in a constructivist manner through the use of children's literature, as understandings were enriched through discussion including multiple perspectives and interpretations of the stories. Children had the propensity to influence one another's responses as participants imitated their peers' responses, particularly whereby responses were perceived as correct (Wilkins et al., 2016). The contagious nature of negative comments also emerged in the findings, as one prejudicial remark led to increased expression of stigmatising language and ideas

(Butler, 2016). Along with agreeing and sharing opinions, participants expressed diverse and constructive views of AEN, with differing perspectives promoting new understandings (Butler, 2016).

Conceptualisation of Disability

In the early stages of interventions, participants struggled to move beyond rigid definitions and categorisations of disability to form deeper understandings of difference (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Starkly, Smith-D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010) postulate that participants viewed AEN as a negative construct characterised by limitations and attribution of blame to the character with additional needs and their parents. The language and examples used tended to reflect a medical model focusing on deficits and definitions of disability as 'continuum of abilities within society' (Adomat, 2014, p.7). Similarly, participants illustrated views of AEN as something that needed to be ameliorated and posited that individuals need to compensate for their difficulties using other senses and capabilities (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Some studies found that when the books did not explicitly show how characters' behaviours related to their additional needs, students demonstrated reduced understanding and awareness (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Wilkins et al., 2016). Children showed greater interest and empathy when they understood characters' challenges (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Similarly, students' background knowledge of AEN facilitated a deeper understanding of difference (Wilkins et al., 2016). Students who had additional needs or had family members with additional needs provided greater insights and understandings than those who did not (Butler, 2016; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Notably, further discussions using children's literature as a stimulus led to participants forming deeper, more nuanced understandings of AEN in all studies. This included discussing typicality and critiquing labels, exclusionary practices and stigma, as well as developing stances towards advocacy (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016). Children also showed greater awareness of social isolation and challenges experienced by individuals with AEN (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006).

Fostering Relatability

In order to achieve this change in understanding, studies emphasised the importance of fostering connectedness between the children and the literary characters. This included encouraging children to identify commonalities between themselves and the characters (Adomat 2014, Butler, 2016, Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016). Cameron and Rutland (2006) found that emphasising individual characteristics while also increasing the salience of their additional educational needs was most effective, leading to the

greatest change in peer attitudes. However, de-categorizing the characters with additional needs and emphasising their individuality also significantly increased positive peer attitudes (Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Across the studies, children appeared to show interest in and develop empathy with the character before they could consider how additional needs impacted the characters' lives (Adomat, 2014, Butler, 2016; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). A sense of relatability allowed the children to form more nuanced views of AEN and recognise individuality, similarities and differences between themselves and disabled characters (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Conversely, an absence of connectedness and understanding appeared to impact children's ability to engage in critical discussions surrounding AEN representation in literature (Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Wilkins et al., 2016). Once participants could relate to characters, they began to focus on the social implications of their actions and treatment of individuals with additional needs (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006).

Following intervention, the children explored ways to counter-act stereotypes including use of inclusive practices and terminology within their own classroom. In this way, children's literature not only impacted attitudes towards AEN but also influenced behaviours (Adomat, 2014; Cameron & Rutland, 2006). Teachers and parents reported a change in how students interacted with children with additional needs, including increased understanding, compassion and patience, as well as higher-quality and more frequent interactions (Adomat, 2014). Children with AEN included in the studies also appreciated the representation of AEN within literature and increased awareness of their peers following intervention (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016).

Quality of Engagement

Some studies highlighted that the quality of children's engagement impacted the quality of their understanding of AEN. Factors impacting quality of engagement included lack of clarity surrounding intervention objectives, whereby some children focused on literary constructs such as the plot rather than developing understandings of AEN (Adomat, 2014). Moreover, Butler (2016) noted that children often used imaginative powers to speculate beyond evidence in texts and made assumptions and predictions about characters with additional needs. In addition, students' perception of disability was sometimes limited by lack of prior knowledge of AEN and misconceptions surrounding what an individual with additional needs can achieve. In Smith-D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010), one participant expressed the belief that a character with literacy difficulties was not capable of having a job. Similarly, Wilkins et al. (2016) propose that children's responses to the literature were influenced by external factors including

societal and teacher expectations. The children used common buzzwords and reiterated generic comments about AEN, inclusion and anti-bullying that they had previously learned rather than engaging in thoughtful discussion and critical thinking. Findings also suggest that children were holding back from voicing their own opinions and instead relied on patterns of responses which they felt would satisfy the researcher and their teacher (Wilkins et al., 2016). This highlights that children can be influenced by others' expectations, verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Wilkins et al., 2016), thus necessitating awareness of researcher bias and transference. Conversely, other studies reported that those implementing the intervention effectively facilitated discussions without imposing their own views once they had been given appropriate guidance (Butler, 2016; Cameron & Rutland, 2006).

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The current review provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of using children's literature to increase peer awareness of AEN. This is significant as it appears that enduring barriers to meaningful inclusion and social exclusion experienced by students with additional educational needs can be partially linked to lack of peer awareness and understanding of AEN (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016).

The review demonstrates the propensity of children's literature to promote understanding of AEN by drawing on children's contexts and experiences (Rosenbalt, 1994), as well as challenging and intentionally interrupting their beliefs (Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). The review reinforces the constructivist nature of children's learning about AEN, whereby they share views and co-construct ideas through democratic and insightful discussions. The use of children's literature as a stimulus encouraged critical conceptualisation of AEN and fostered more nuanced understandings. Discussions on complex topics ensued, including critique of categorisation and stigma, as well as consideration of exclusionary practices and challenges related to AEN. Along with increases in awareness and positive attitudes, the interventions also influenced children's behaviours surrounding advocacy and interactions with their peers with additional needs. For example, in Adomat (2014), some participants decided to volunteer at a therapeutic horse-riding centre in the community following the intervention in order to help their classmate with additional needs who attended. Similarly, parents reported that their children were more accepting of children with additional educational needs

in their class receiving additional support and allowances from teachers, having previously perceived this as unfair at times (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016).

Impact of the Findings

The review findings have significant implications for all children, as well as educators and policymakers striving towards increased inclusion. It can inform teaching about AEN within school contexts, including through the SPHE curriculum (Butler, 2016). This includes outlining considerations when designing interventions to increase peer understanding of AEN using children's literature. In particular, the effectiveness of the intervention appears to be related to the quality of books used and the nature of the intervention itself. For example, increased peer understanding of AEN was noted when the literature chosen included inclusive representations of AEN and when discussions fostered connectedness between the children and the literary characters (Adomat 2014, Butler, 2016, Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016). Herein, it is important to consider the portrayal of AEN in children's literature and the subsequent impact on children's attitudes and understanding (Roshini & Rajasekaran, 2022).This review emphasises the pertinence of fostering relatedness when teaching children about AEN. Authentic representations of AEN depict both strengths and weaknesses of multi-dimensional characters, celebrating individuality. Such representations portray the complexities of life with additional needs whilst having high expectations for the character and affording them with opportunities to make important contributions to the story (Artman-Meeker, Grant & Yang. 2016). In accurately portraying disability in fictional characters, it is important to promote empathy rather than pity and to avoid depicting characters as victims or outsiders (Blaska & Lynch, 1998). In addition, awareness of implicit messages of inability, naïve and patronising perceptions and othering language in children's literature is critical in framing characters with additional needs as 'one of us' as opposed to 'one of them' (Pennell, Wollak & Koppenhaver, 2018; Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021). Moreover, those implementing interventions should be aware of variables that impact children's engagement. This includes students' reading level and the text accessibility and quality, as well as environmental factors such as family values and experience of AEN (Causarano, 2021). Teacher and societal expectations also appear to influence the depth of students' engagement with the intervention.

Limitations and Future Research

As well as highlighting the effectiveness of children's literature as an intervention to increase peer awareness of AEN, the review identifies some limitations in the chosen studies. Notably, there was insufficient clarity regarding the sampling

procedures used in all studies (Adomat 2014, Butler, 2016, Cameron & Rutland, 2006; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010; Wilkins et al., 2016). In addition, a lack of methodological rigor and omission of details about participant demographics were observed in some studies (Butler, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2016). This may have impacted the generalisability, validity and reliability of the findings. Future research should enhance reliability and validity measures, particularly in relation to data analysis and fidelity of implementation.

On this note, there were a number of shortcomings in the interventions used, including insufficient duration, neglect in appropriately communicating the objective and focus of the intervention to the participants and use of children's literature which was not evidenced as high-quality or inclusive. The quality of the findings would be enhanced by employing checks to ensure interventions are of high quality and implemented with fidelity.

Moreover, in many studies it was difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention as measures of change in peer awareness were unstandardised or anecdotal in nature. Some studies did not track individual student changes or compare pre and post intervention attitudes (Adomat, 2014; Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas, 2010). Future research should focus on systematically measuring the effectiveness of using children's literature to increase peer awareness of AEN.

Finally, the voice of individuals with additional needs was only included in two of five studies (Adomat, 2014; Butler, 2016). These participants provided unique insights into the practicalities of daily life with additional needs, such as an understanding of the challenges characters faced when navigating wheelchair use (Butler, 2016). Notably, participants with additional needs appeared to be more willing to critique characters with additional needs whose actions or behaviour merited disapproval in the context of the story (Butler, 2016). Herein, participants with additional needs appeared to be more adept than other participants at separating the individual character from their additional needs. In addition, the views of participants with additional needs towards interventions enhanced the social validity of the research. In Adomat (2014), one autistic participant disclosed that he felt valued and represented having encountered an autistic character in one of the books. Similarly, participants with motor difficulties expressed enthusiasm towards others learning about AEN through literary interventions and felt this would increase other children's acceptance of AEN (Butler, 2016). Despite the value of including the voice of individuals with additional needs in this way, participants with additional needs may also risk biassing the data due to a unique and heightened awareness of AEN based on personal experiences. Future studies

should include the voice of children with additional needs without biasing the data. Butler (2016) suggested using children with additional needs' views to inform interventions through providing accounts of disability in the form of a video diary in conjunction with using children's literature. This would provide more dynamic, relatable insights into the experiences of individuals with additional needs and include their voice in the research without introducing confounding variables into the data.

As well as limitations within the included studies, there are some areas for improvement in the review itself. Firstly, although the search strategy employed was systematic, due to the scope of the review, a limited number of databases were consulted and literature within humanity journals were not considered. As a result, relevant papers relating to use of children's literature to increase peer awareness of AEN may have been unintentionally excluded. On a similar note, the term 'additional educational needs' is exceedingly broad. Although the researcher rationalised the use of this term to reduce categorisation and maximise inclusion on the basis that a wide range of AEN present in Irish classrooms, it is difficult to define and conceptualise such an expansive term. The lack of specificity may have impacted the effectiveness of interventions, as it may have been challenging to increase peer awareness of such a wide range of AEN in a short period. This may call for future studies to focus on teaching children about specific AEN to increase depth of understanding and awareness. In addition, there was little regard given to teacher and parent perceptions on the effectiveness of the interventions in this review. Future research may benefit from gaining these insights as well as the voice of the child.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that children's literature can be effective in increasing peer awareness of AEN in a developmentally appropriate way that is accessible within the classroom, regardless of context. Given the drive towards increasing inclusion in policy and practice within the Irish context, it is fundamental to dismantle the barriers that exist between students with additional needs and their peers by increasing awareness and understanding. Books can fulfil this purpose by acting as mirrors for self-reflection, windows to present a lens through which to view the world and doors to opportunities for attitudinal and behavioural change (Pennell et al., 2018). All of this is necessary if meaningful inclusion is to become a reality rather than an ideal.

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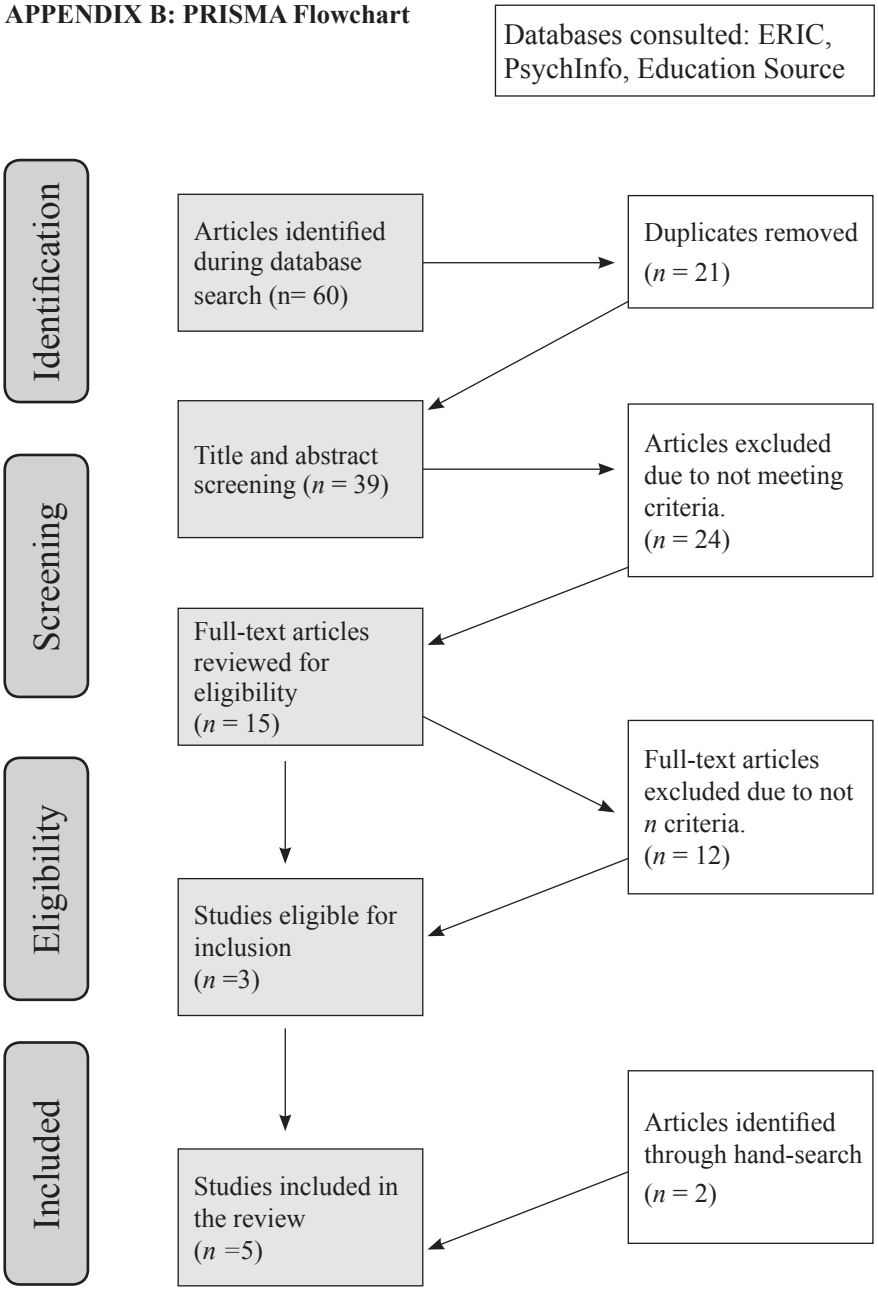
APPENDIX A: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Language	Papers written in English	Papers not written in English.	The researcher speaks English and translation services were not available.
Timeframe	Papers published between 2000-2022.	Papers published before 2000.	Relevant research on the topic exists within this timeframe.
Type of Publication	Peer reviewed articles. Journal articles.	Non-peer reviewed articles. Meta-analyses, systematic reviews, grey literature.	Peer reviewed papers have been independently assessed for quality. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses are outside the scope of the review.
Participants	Papers involving school-aged populations.	Papers based on teacher perceptions or adult populations.	The review is situated within research with school-aged children to focus on early intervention.
Intervention	Papers involving use of children's literature that includes character portrayals of AEN as an intervention.	Papers involving content analysis of AEN in children's literature. Papers that do not relate to children's literature and its use as an intervention.	The review approaches the topic through an educational psychology rather than a literary lens. It aims to evaluate the effectiveness of children's literature on peer awareness of AEN.

APPENDIX B: PRISMA Flowchart



APPENDIX C: DETAILS OF INCLUDED STUDIES

Table 2: References for studies included in the systematic review

1. Adomat, D. S. (2014). Exploring issues of disability in children's literature discussions. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, *34*(3).
2. Butler, R. R. (2016). Motor Impairment in Children's Literature: Asking the Children. *Children's Literature in Education*, *47*(3), 242-256.
3. Cameron, L., & Rutland, A. (2006). Extended contact through story reading in school: Reducing children's prejudice toward the disabled. *Journal of Social Issues*, *62*(3), 469-488.
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5. Wilkins, J., Howe, K., Seiloff, M., Rowan, S., & Lilly, E. (2016). Exploring elementary students' perceptions of disabilities using children's literature. *British Journal of Special Education*, *43*(3), 233-249.

Table 3: Overview of Included Studies

Study	Design	Participants	Data Collection	Findings
Adomat (2014)	Qualitative	*n* = 52	Interviews and Observation	Findings revealed a positive change in student understandings of disability and in their interactions with disabled peers.
Butler (2016)	Qualitative	*n* = 37	Focus Group	Findings showed children's awareness of the social isolation felt by disabled people. Participants with motor impairments demonstrated heightened awareness to the disabled characters challenges.
Cameron & Rutland (2006)	Mixed-Method	*n* = 67	Interviews and Questionnaires	Extended contact led to increased positivity towards disabled students.

Study	Design	Participants	Data Collection	Findings
Smith D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas (2010)	Mixed-Method	*n* = 14	Interviews, Observation and Questionnaires	There was no significant increase in positive attitudes towards peers with disabilities following intervention.
Wilkins et al. (2016)	Qualitative	*n* = 83	Observation	Themes emerged relating to the importance of societal messages, teacher influence and quality of portrayal of disability in influencing students' attitudes towards disability.

APPENDIX D: CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Table 4: Summary of WoE for each study

Study	WoE A	WoE B	WoE C	WoE D	Rating
Adomat (2014)	2.1	2	2.25	2.11	High
Butler (2016)	1.95	2	2.25	2.066	High
Cameron and Rutland (2006)	2.4	3	2.5	2.63	High
Smith-D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010)	1.5	2	2.0	1.83	Medium
Wilkins et al. (2016)	2.25	2	1.75	2.0	Medium

Table 5: CASP Tool – Qualitative (CASP, 2018)

Study	Clear statement of study aims.	Appropriate methodology	Research design addresses study aims	Recruitment strategy appropriate	Data collection addresses research question	Consideration of relationship between researcher and participants	Consideration of ethical issues	Rigourous data analysis	Clear statement of findings	Research valuable	**Total Score**
Adomat (2014)	2	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	2	2	14
Butler (2016)	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	0	1	1	13
Wilkins et al. (2016)	2	1	2	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	15

Table 6: CASP Tool – Quantitative (CASP, 2018)

Study	Clearly focused research question	Randomised assignment of participants	All participants accounted for at conclusion of study	Participants and assessors blind to intervention	Were groups similar	Were groups treated equally (fair test)	Were effects of intervention reported compre-hesnively	Do benefits of intervention outweigh harms and costs	Can results be applied to local population/ context	Would intervention provide greater value than existing interven-tions	**Total Score**
Cameron & Rutland (2006)	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	2	1	1	16

Table 7: Mixed Method Appraisal Tool (Hong et al., 2018)

Study	Adequate rationale for using mixed methods	Different components of study effectively integrated	Qualitative and quantitative results adequately interpreted	Divergences and inconsistencies between qualitative and quantitative results addressed	Different components adhere to quality criteria of each tradition	Total Score
Smith-D'Azerro & Moore-Thomas (2010)	0	1	2	0	2	5

Table 8: Calculation of WoE Scores

Study	WoE A Score
Wilkins et al. (2016)	15/20 = 0.75 x 3 = 2.25
Cameron & Rutland (2006)	16/20 = 0.8 x 3 = 2.4
Butler (2016)	13/20 = 0.65 x 3 = 1.95
Adomat (2014)	14/20 = 0.7 x 3 = 2.1

Table 9: WoE B Scoring Protocol (Petticrew & Roberts, 2003)

Study Design	WoE Rating	Rationale
Randomised Controlled Trials	3	RCTs are high quality research designs to measure the effectiveness of an intervention.
Qualitative Research, Cohort Studies, Mixed-Methods	2	Qualitative research and cohort studies can provide nuanced, rich insights into the impact of an intervention. However, measures are not as standardised as RCTs in evaluating the effectiveness.
Case Studies, Quasi-Experimental and Non-Experimental Designs	1	The samples in case-studies, quasi-experimental and non-experimental designs are too limited to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention.

Table 10: WoE B Scores

Study	WoE B Rating
Adomat (2014)	2
Butler (2016)	2
Cameron and Rutland (2006)	3
Smith-D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010)	2
Wilkins et al. (2016)	2

Table 11: WoE C Scoring Protocol

Criteria	Rating	Descriptor	Rationale
Population	3	School-aged children are directly involved in the study as participants. The voice of the child with AEN is also included.	The research question focuses on the impact of children's literature on peer attitudes of AEN. The researcher values including the voice of children with AEN in research about AEN.
	2	School-aged children are directly involved in the study as participants. The voice of the child with AEN is not included in the research.	
	1	School-aged children are not directly involved in the study as participants.	
Intervention	3	The intervention uses explicit teaching about AEN as well as children's literature including characters with AEN.	Interventions using both explicit methods and children's literature were found to be most effective (Maich & Belcher 2012; Morrison & Rude 2002; Prater, Dyches & Johnstun, 2006).
	2	The intervention uses children's literature involving characters with AEN without explicitly teaching about AEN.	
	1	Children's literature is used in an unstructured way, not as an intervention.	
Context	3	In schools in United Kingdom/Ireland	The research will be more generalisable to EP practice and schools within the Irish context if studies are based in countries that are similar to Ireland culturally and socially..
	2	In schools in OECD countries	
	1	In schools in non-OECD countries	
Outcome	3	Pre and post-intervention measures are compared to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention on peer attitudes of AEN.	The research will be highly relevant to the review question if it uses standardised measures to evaluate the effectiveness of using children's literature as an intervention to influence peer attitudes of AEN.
	2	The study considers the effectiveness the intervention on peer attitudes but does not include pre and post-intervention measures.	
	1	The study does not consider effectiveness of the intervention on peer attitudes.	

Table 12: WoE C Scores

Study	Population	Intervention	Context	Outcome
Adomat (2014)	2	3	2	2
Butler (2016)	3	2	2	2
Cameron and Rutland (2006)	2	2	3	3
Smith-D'Azerro and Moore-Thomas (2010)	2	2	2	2
Wilkins et al. (2016)	2	2	2	1

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Moving Forward with Inclusion in Physical Education in Ireland

This paper is based on the Irish data from a large-scale European study entitled 'Disentangling Inclusion in Primary Physical Education European Erasmus + project' (DIPPE). The quantitative study aimed to investigate teachers' practices on the inclusion of children with additional needs (AN) in primary physical education (PE) and identifying supports welcomed by teachers that could enhance their practices. The Irish data is based on the analysed results from 137 respondents (n=137) to an online questionnaire. The results showed some encouraging findings. However, it is crucial that teachers are aware of the importance of questioning their practices especially the withdrawal of children from the PE lesson and concentrate on how activities and the environment may be best adapted to include them further. The Irish results added to the European 'call' for specific supports that led to the development of an online website underpinned with the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) to further support teachers on inclusion in PE.

Keywords: *inclusion, UDL, additional needs, Physical Education, primary schools*

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INTRODUCTION

Physical Education and Inclusion

Physical literacy is defined as "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that enables a person to value and participate in physical activity throughout life" (Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland Consensus Statement, 2022, p.1). Each young person is on a unique physical literacy life-long journey. Planned, progressive, inclusive learning experiences have been highlighted as features of quality Physical Education (PE) contributing to the development of and interaction between the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional skills needed to lead a physically active life (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2015a). Motor skill development features as one key component of PE in the Irish Primary Physical Education

Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1999). Recent research from Ireland and beyond has reported concerns at children's motor skill development (Duncan, Foweather, Bardid, et al., 2022) which has implications for the PE lesson.

To assist each child's important physical literacy journey including their social, emotional, cognitive and motor development, in the school setting and in PE, each child should be valued and supported in an integrated school setting as individuals, with a commitment from teachers. Children should not alone be integrated into the school setting, the PE curriculum, the PE space and activities, but *feel* included (Haegele et al., 2021). The inclusive education agenda has been endorsed internationally (UNESCO, 1994) with legislation in place in all European countries designed to promote and advocate for inclusion (Winter and O'Raw, 2010). The International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport demonstrates the aspirations for inclusive PE (UNESCO, 2015b) and the fundamental right of the child to PE. Some schoolchildren with learning needs require support, which is additional to the provision that is generally provided to their peers to help them benefit from school education. The support may be cognitive, physical, sensory, communicative and/or behavioural. In this paper, these children are referred to as children with additional needs (AN). Inclusion is "understood as a sense of belonging, which includes feeling respected, valued for who you are, feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others" (UNESCO 2015a, p.8).

How is inclusion manifested by the teacher in the Physical Education lesson?
There is evidence indicating that teachers, despite trying to include all children in PE lessons, struggle (Fitzgerald, 2012; Haegele and Hodge, 2016; Haegele, Kirk, Steven, Holland and Zhu, 2021). Haegele (2019) strongly signals a misidentification of the terms 'inclusion' and 'integration' that can lead to negative experiences for children. The knowledge and the competence of the teacher is a critical factor in including children with AN in any successful PE programme no matter how positive teachers' attitudes are towards inclusive practice (Block and Obrusnikova, 2007; Crawford et al., 2012). Holland, Haegele, Zhu and Bobzien (2022) reported the opposing feelings of children with AN in the PE lesson in reaction to specific inclusive strategies by teachers.

Although the inclusion of children with AN in PE has been the focus of discussion internationally (Crawford, O' Reilly and Flanagan., 2012; Haegele and Sutherland, 2015) within the broader context of human rights discourse, systematic research evidence on the recent extent to which children with AN are included in PE lessons in primary schools in Ireland is scarce.

Aim of the study

Attempting to get a snapshot of what is taking place in PE lessons in Irish primary schools and teachers' needs, this study explores the practices of Irish primary teachers- the gatekeepers to children's feelings of inclusion- and identifies the further supports these teachers require. The paper focuses on the findings of a survey undertaken across European countries as part of an Erasmus+ project, 'Disentangling Inclusion in Primary Physical Education' (DIPPE). The paper's author and the seven project partners were teacher educators of PE at universities across Europe. The survey was undertaken during the initial stages of the Erasmus + project to (i) map the situation about including children in primary PE with a focus on children with AN, and (ii) identify the guidelines and resources that teachers of PE in primary schools would welcome to support them in including children with AN in their lessons.

Planning for inclusion must be seen as an evolving process, involving carefully reviewing the existing provision so that structures for successful inclusion and improvements to current practice can be made, supporting teachers and creating learning environments that respond to the needs of all learners (Winter and O'Raw, 2010). Activities in PE can be presented in different ways from no modifications, minor or major, separate activities, transitioning to all working together to parallel activities. This is known as the inclusion spectrum (Black and Williamson, 2011). Numerous strategies may be employed in PE lessons such as the application of an adaptation model or memory tool which outlines variables of a task for modification. Examples include the TREE model (Teaching Style; Rules; Equipment; Environment) (Australian Sports Commission Disability Education Program, n.d.) and the STEP model (Space, Time, Entity, and Process) (Black and Williamson, 2011). The inclusion spectrum and the aspects of the two memory tools provided the framework for the questionnaire design and development for this study. These strategies were promoted by the project partners in their work with student teachers. A subsequent narrative literature review (Gallagher, Clardy, O'Malley, Heck, Scheuer, 2021), as the second phase of the DIPPE project, evolved to the application of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to underpin the development of the DIPPE resource website, an outcome of the project to be discussed later in the paper.

The aim of this paper is to go beyond the results of the Irish data, to show how the results were acted upon to support teachers to be more competent and confident including children with AN in PE lessons and to assist them on their physical literacy journey helping to lead to lifelong physical activity. It summarises the development of the online website in response to teachers' needs to allow children

to move forward in inclusion in Physical Education. The paper highlights the availability of the new resource to disseminate to stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study employed data collected as part of the DIPPE Erasmus+ project. A questionnaire was designed and delivered online via Qualtrics xm. Primary teachers who teach PE in either mainstream or special primary schools in Ireland were invited to provide their responses to the questionnaire, which was piloted in February 2019 with 26 respondents (3 from each partner country). As a result of the pilot three sections to the questionnaire were added rather than two, some rating scales were adjusted as well as the order of questions. The insertion of a 'submit' button as a click function was included. The final questionnaire was administered in April 2019. The Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA), a voluntary organisation and an associate partner in the Erasmus+ project, emailed the questionnaire to their membership and promoted the survey on their social media platforms. Additionally, information about the project was posted on the IPPEA website. The IPPEA executive committee comprising generalist teachers and two university lecturers in PE were asked to circulate the questionnaire within their network of teachers. Those who received the questionnaire were asked, on the accompanying letter, to circulate the questionnaire with teachers in their schools and beyond. The letter described the purpose of the project and the questionnaire as well as the confidentiality, anonymity, and data storage protocols. It provided an operational definition of inclusion with an educational focus: inclusive education is a process of "addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners" (NCSE, 2011, p. 13). Ethics approval by the Research Ethics Committee of Dublin City University, where the author of this paper was affiliated, was granted for the secondary analysis of the DIPPE European study data. The questionnaire consisted primarily of 17 close-ended questions with an anticipated completion time of 15 minutes. It had three sections (i) professional experience, (ii) professional practice underpinned by questions related to the adaptation models TREE and STEP and (iii) the development of the online toolkit.

The completion rate of the questionnaire and the total number of responses were used as the criteria for respondents' inclusion in the analysis. Only respondents with at least 80% completion rate were included in the analysis. The statistical analysis of data included descriptive statistics and a series of bivariate tests (Mann-Whitney U tests, Kruskal-Wallis tests, and Spearman correlations) to examine the relationships between teachers' background characteristics and the reported levels of engagement of children with AN in PE lessons and teacher competence

in including children with AN in PE lessons. SPSS 25 was used to perform the analysis. In Ireland, which constitutes the focus of this paper, there were 137 respondents in total (n=137).

RESULTS

The results will now be reported under three headings somewhat reflecting the main structure of the questionnaire (i) Teachers and their practices, (ii) Supports and Physical Education teaching strategies and (iii) Further supports required.

Teachers and their practices

Background information for teachers of the PE lesson in Ireland reported that there were 137 respondents in total (79% females, 1% preferred not to identify as either gender). Most respondents had up to 20 years of experience in either general or PE teaching. The extent of use of a Sport Coach/Dance teacher/Specialist Physical Education teacher in teaching PE was reported by 44% of respondents, with 4% reporting that PE lessons are taught exclusively by specialist PE teachers in their schools.

More than 80% of teachers in Ireland reported that they had up to five children with AN in their PE lessons. Table 1 shows the most frequently experienced AN in PE lessons, social (41.6%) and emotional (38%). Table 2 highlights that most teachers in Ireland (81.6%) reported that children with AN are either frequently (45.7%) or always (35.9%) included or engaged in their PE lessons.

Table 1: Type of identified AN experienced within the current class

	%
physical	32.8
motor	33.6
obesity	10.9
social	41.6
emotional	38.0
chronic disease (e.g. diabetes, asthma)	15.3
gender/mixed (boys and girls are taught together in PE lessons)	17.5
language	22.6
general learning	35.8
multiple	21.2
other	5.1

Table 2 reveals that 15.4% of children with AN are withdrawn from PE lessons to receive additional support in other subjects (e.g., mathematics). It also shows the percentage of teachers who indicated that specific support is provided to children with AN within the PE lessons in Ireland (20.7%). Of these children 55.4% receive additional PE lessons or motor skills lessons.

Table 2: Engagement levels of children with AN in PE lessons

	%
Never included and engaged	0.0
Rarely included and engaged	1.1
Sometimes included and engaged	17.4
Frequently included and engaged	45.7
Always included and engaged	35.9
Withdrawal of children with AN from PE lessons for additional support in other subjects (e.g., mathematics)	15.4
Additional PE /motor skills lessons for children with AN	55.4
Specific support in PE lessons for children with AN	20.7
Withdrawal of children with AN from PE lessons for specific support in PE	5.4

While there was a relatively high percentage of teachers in Ireland rating their competence to include children with AN in PE lessons as either good or very good (67.9%), a considerable proportion of teachers rated their competence as fair or poor. Additional analyses on the Irish data were conducted to investigate the extent to which teacher competence and their students' engagement levels were associated with individual and/or contextual factors (e.g., years of experience). None of the statistical tests that were conducted yielded statistically significant results ($p < .05$), indicating that teacher competence and their students' engagement levels were independent of individual and contextual factors.

Supports and Physical Education Teaching Strategies

The most popular type of support in PE reported among teachers in Ireland was the additional support provided by a special needs assistant (13.1%). While the majority (83.1%) were satisfied with this support, it is not clear if this involved withdrawing the child from whole class PE lessons. A particularly compelling finding was that 86.6% of teachers in Ireland ranked their satisfaction levels highly, with other teachers in the school. Additionally, teachers were satisfied with the support of their PE subject association (80.8%).

Table 3 shows that the two most popular teaching strategies to promote inclusion in PE lessons among teachers involved the modification of teaching styles (73.7 %) and the modification of the rules of the game or activity (68.6%). The use of the 'buddy system' strategy ranked third with 58.4% and modifications to equipment (51.1%) followed next.

Table 3: Teaching strategies to promote inclusion in PE lessons.

	%
Modifying teaching styles	73.7
Modifying the rules of the game/activity	68.6
Buddy system i.e., peer help for the child with AN	58.4
Modifications to equipment	51.1
Station teaching i.e., children rotate in groups from one activity to the next	51.1
Whole-class teaching	42.3
Modifications to space	33.6
Small groups of children working together according to ability (Parallel activity)	29.2
Task Cards e.g., images and task description, image only	29.2
Separate activities planned for an individual or group with AN (Separate activity)	11.7
Reverse integration where participants with and without AN participate in a disability activity/sport (Disability sport activity)	9.5
Zone areas exclusive to children with AN and their peer buddy	5.8
Other	4.4
Parental advocacy	2.2
None	0.7

Further Supports Required

The questionnaire allowed teachers to identify up to five aspects of AN that they would welcome guidance on as well as the supports respectfully, that might be beneficial for their planning for inclusion in PE lessons. Table 4 highlights the five most popular aspects of AN on which teachers would welcome guidance: Childrens' motor needs (67.2%) followed by physical needs (58.4%), adapting activities (48.9%) and social needs (48.9%). Table 5 indicates that the five most popular supports teachers considered beneficial for inclusion in their PE lessons:

video clips of children with AN working within PE classes (73%). Video practical case scenarios of teachers who are supporting children with AN to reach their PE goals describing their work accounted for 70.8% of respondents.

Table 4: Aspects of AN teachers would welcome guidance on as part of an online PE inclusive practice toolkit

	%
motor	67.2
physical	58.4
adapting activities	48.9
social	48.9
emotional	45.3

Only the five most popular aspects are presented in the table.

Table 5: Beneficial supports for planning for inclusion within PE lessons as part of an online PE inclusive practice toolkit.

	%
Video clips of children with AN working within PE classes	73.0
Video practical case scenarios of teachers who are supporting children with AN to reach their PE goals describing their work	70.8
Templates of visual resources e.g., visual cue cards related to activities in PE	62.8
Links to relevant organisations that offer online resources	49.6
Guidance on adapting activities	30.7

Only the five most popular aspects are presented in the table.

Discussion

The results depict a complex web of practices taking place in Irish primary school PE lessons that can impact the children's feelings of inclusion and their learning in PE. Some of the key results are discussed below to prompt reflection by teachers and other stakeholders.

Questioning Practices in the Physical Education Lesson

Despite the results of the number of children reported with AN in a PE lesson with the most frequently experienced AN being social and emotional challenges, the dominance of use of a Sport Coach/Dance teacher/Specialist Physical Education teacher in teaching PE in their programme by 44% of the respondents are timely

and insightful. This dilution of who is teaching PE is worrying given this study finding and of other recent Irish studies. Mangione, Parker and O'Sullivan (2021) reported a "well-established external provision network in the school… not supporting PE as intended by the Irish educational system" (pp.1). They reported that in some cases other than managerial issues, the school was handing over PE decisions such as teaching classes and activities to others rather than to the class teacher and the lack of linking to the PE programme learning outcomes. Ní Chróinín and O'Brien (2019) found that the content of the conversations about the learning needs and feelings of certain children in the class between the generalist classroom teachers and external providers were limited and maybe only at the start of a block of work. Randall (2022) has highlighted similar situations in England.

The use of external personnel in subjects such as music, drama and PE is recommended as a 'support' to the classroom teacher, who, it is intended, retains overall responsibility for teaching and learning (Government of Ireland, 1999). Ní Chróinín and O'Brien (2019) reported the current realities of the relationship with external personnel in PE which falls short of the notion of a partnership model, where learning benefits can accrue from collaboration between classroom teachers and external providers (Whipp, et al., 2011). The importance of the stability of relations that children with AN require in learning cannot be overlooked. The generalist classroom teacher is the gatekeeper (Ní Chróinín and O'Brien, 2019). Haegele et al., (2021) describes the power of the PE teacher granting or restricting access to the space itself, the activities of the space, and even potential modifications needed.

The results from this study showed that teachers welcomed the support of the additional support assistant although it is not clear if this involved withdrawing the child. Satisfaction levels with support from other teachers ranked very highly. Engagement with the PE subject association appears to be a rich source of information for teachers. These results highlight the support of other people and the IPPEA subject association in the teachers' work on inclusion in PE. It also poses challenges related to the external personnel provision. The level of collaboration between the class teacher, the external personnel, the additional support assistant and other teaching colleagues are key to ensure that *all* children have positive feelings in quality PE experiences.

Reconsideration of Inclusive Strategies

The results show that that some Irish primary teachers rely on the withdrawal strategies when teaching PE. This may cause concern in relation to best practice (Winter and O'Raw, 2010, Liebermann, Grenier, Brian and Arndt, 2021). The

motivation for this practice needs to be reviewed and support provided. Holland, Haegele, Zhu and Bobzien (2022) reported both the positive experiences of children in PE with an additional support assistant in class and the negative experience if a child is withdrawn and isolated even for PE. This practice should be reconsidered and certainly discussed with the child with AN.

Positive attitudes of teachers towards inclusive practice must be accompanied by teacher competence and knowledge (Block and Obrusnikova, 2007; Crawford et al., 2012). This study noted quite a high rate of competency self-reported by teachers to include children with AN in PE lessons. Building on the previous finding related to withdrawal, Haegele et al., (2021) reported that in fact some children may prefer withdrawal for PE if the teacher insufficiently accommodates their learning needs. The data showed that it is crucial that all who deliver PE lessons, are prompted to reflect on questioning some of their inclusive teaching strategies related to the withdrawal of children from the PE lesson. Holland, Haegele, Zhu and Bobzien (2022) and Haegele et al., (2021) recommended that the teacher should examine the unique needs of every child and talk to the child regularly and not just at the beginning of the school year to discuss their preferences to make them feel included. One teaching strategy may have a positive response on one child in one activity but a different response for another activity (Holland et al., 2022). Furthermore, Marron, Murphy and O' Keeffe (2013) recommended that student teachers should talk to the child with AN on-school placement observation days when preparing and planning their work for school placement and talk to them during the school placement itself to adjust plans and activities if required.

The Development of Supports

The results shed light on the specific supports that Irish primary teachers would welcome to include *all* children in the PE lesson (a) video clips of children with AN working in PE classes and (b) video-based supports including practical case scenarios of teachers describing their work in supporting children with AN. It could be argued that teachers need to see quality PE experiences for all children. In response to the study results, the website resource www.dippe.lu, Disentangling Inclusion in Primary Physical Education was developed and launched in 2021. The content of the website was informed by the expertise of the Erasmus + project partners and the narrative review of literature, an output of the DIPPE project. The website highlights practices, strategies, and resources (including those already available online videos) to further support teachers in the process of inclusion to include *all* children in primary PE lessons. The DIPPE website resource acknowledged the importance of talking to the learners, with ongoing listening opportunities afforded to them throughout the entire school year.

The suggested DIPPE website supports are framed in the spirit of UDL acknowledging the inclusion process linkage between the curriculum and pedagogy, the child, and the environment to help teachers, external providers and other stakeholders, in meeting the needs of each child to help the child towards joyful and meaningful inclusive PE learning experiences. The UDL framework can create a curricula and learning environments that are designed to achieve success for all learners with a diverse range of abilities (Winter and O'Raw, 2010; Lieberman, Grenier, Brian and Arndt, 2021). The teacher needs to be flexible to an ever-changing environment and responsive to the outcomes of the feelings from frequent conversations of children. van Munster, Lieberman and Grenier (2019) recommend differentiated instruction and UDL as significant resources to accommodate children with AN in PE. Brennan (2019), in an Irish educational context refers to differentiation through choice.

The UDL framework (Meyer, Rose and Gordon, 2014) has "become a popular mechanism to try to promote inclusion in classrooms" (Kennedy and Yun, 2019, p.31). This educational framework supported by Lieberman, Grenier, Brian and Arndt in PE (2021) underline the importance of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2018) as core principles in the practice of teachers. The three principles of UDL are: Multiple means of engagement, multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression. Multiple means of engagement are about offering options that engages and excites the children to keep their attention for example offering choice in a safe and enjoyable learning PE environment. Multiple means of representation relate to the presentation and instruction of PE content in a variety of ways for example using audio or visual information. Multiple means of action and expression relates to varying the ways in which children are encouraged to respond and show their learning of PE skills and knowledge, for example verbally, using demonstration or sketching images.

Limitations

Limitations of the study should be acknowledged and considered in the interpretation of the results. The questions were closed-ended. Information collected from the respondents was based on self-report and, thus, is prone to bias. The IPPEA circulated the study questionnaire to their members who were in turn asked to circulate it among their colleagues. Perhaps many of the study participants may have been members of the PE teachers' association who would have had a particular interest in the value of quality in PE lessons. Some voices of less committed teachers in PE may have been excluded. Caution is advised in interpreting the data as representative of all primary PE teachers in Ireland.

CONCLUSIONS

This quantitative study aimed to investigate primary teachers' practices related to inclusion of children with AN in primary PE in Ireland and identify supports that could enhance teachers' practices. The results showed some encouraging findings. Going forward, it is crucial that teachers are aware of the importance of questioning their inclusive teaching practices especially the withdrawal of children from the PE lesson and concentrate on how activities may be best adapted to include these children further.

The results of the study, the DIPPE narrative review of literature and the expertise of the project partners all shaped and informed the development of the DIPPE website to help teachers. In-service providers should be made aware of the website to promote it on their platforms. Reacting to the call for teachers for video support, and despite the cost implications and ethical considerations of recording children to produce video material which can be sensitive (challenges that were insurmountable by the DIPPE project), such demands should be listened to by Irish policy makers and stakeholders. This paper provides an opportunity to disseminate the research results of the Irish data from a large-scale study from the DIPPE Erasmus + project to draw attention of readers to a new website underpinned by UDL that can support teachers as they strive to make PE lessons more inclusive for children with AN.

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IS THE 'SCHOOL INCLUSION MODEL' A PATHWAY TO INCLUSION IN IRISH SCHOOLS?

In this article, there is an overview of the development of the policy of a new School Inclusion Model (SIM) recently piloted in an Irish context. The paper is essentially an analysis using the theoretical perspective of Bowe, Ball and Gold (2017) and the framework developed to support that perspective of the policy on moving towards full inclusion for all students in Irish schools. The analysis uses the Policy Cycle providing both national and international examinations of 'context of influence', 'context of production of text', 'context of practice' to examine the effects of the policy in the Irish context. The article addresses the core of the inclusion dilemma. The argument is made that all stakeholders voices need to be heard in an evaluation of the policy while the areas of autonomy, access, accountability and the needs of all students ought to be forefront in an assessment of the scheme.

Keywords: *Inclusion, School inclusion model (SIM), policy, New Brunswick*

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is on the development and implementation of the Social Inclusion Model (SIM) policy from inception to implementation. SIM is a project piloted in 2018/2019 by the National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE), which models one form of full inclusion for all students in Irish primary and secondary education. Since then, it has remained as a pilot which has not been reviewed, reported on or rolled out further to enhance inclusion (DES, 2020). In an Irish context, there is still a three-tier education system (Shevlin and Banks, 2021). Most students attend mainstream school (NCSE, 2022), while some attend special classes in a mainstream school or attend special schools. In Ireland, special schools

and special classrooms have been lauded as places where the needs of all SEN (Special Educational Needs) students are met (Travers et al., 2010). However, there is a body of evidence which argues that, once students are enrolled in the SEN classroom, they rarely make the transition back to mainstream education (Banks and McCoy, 2011). As a policy, SIM seems to attempt to address some of these concerns. This evaluation employs Bowe, Ball and Gold's (2017) theoretical perspective of policy cycle analysis, adopting the tools of 'context of influence,' 'context of text' and 'context of practice' to examine the effects of policy within the growing neoliberalism of educational policy in an Irish context. The goal is to understand the 2018/2019 SIM policy pilot by looking at a unique issue in special and inclusive education through three key policy lenses.

Launched in 2018, the SIM pilot policy features a number of elements. NCSE documents reveal that the main aim of the pilot was to assess whether personalised therapeutic provisions made available to students in school would be beneficial in promoting a system of full inclusion in an Irish context (NCSE, 2019). However, the SIM policy also included seven other key recommendations that may significantly impact inclusion in Irish schools. These key areas included the development of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), NCSE Regional Support teams with specialists in disciplines including Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Behavioural support, development of the National Training Programme for SNAs and specialist nursing service for learners who require that care. The pilot is based in the East of Ireland, specifically in South West Dublin, Kildare and West Wicklow, in seventy-five schools, including a representative sample of primary, post-primary and special schools involving a total of one hundred and fifty settings (National Council for Special Education, 2019).

In Ireland, the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) recognise the importance of education for all students. Recently, Irish policy has responded to the influence from Europe, citing both inclusion and equity for all as being at the heart of its focus (DES, 2019; 2019b). However, there is often a dichotomy between policy and practice (Shafik, 2021). SIM attempts to address the current three-tier education system (Shevlin and Banks, 2021). An inclusion policy would allow for SEN students to transition back to mainstream education (Banks and McCoy, 2011).

This article begins with an exploration of the many understandings of policy followed by an examination of the theoretical perspective used and why it is

appropriate to this context. Next, an outline of the Policy Cycle developed by Bowe, Ball and Gold (2017) for analysing policy from this theoretical perspective is provided followed by an analysis of the context of influence. The policy is explored through the context of influence and finally, conclusions will be drawn by looking at policy as practice.

THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The definition of policy used here is as a course of action adopted or proposed by an institution to change the way societal or institutional structures operate (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 2017). The theoretical perspective is the lens through which we examine policy (Howlett, Kekez and Poocharoen, 2017; Howell, Bradshaw and Langdon, 2020). The public nature of policy adds to its complexity, which can alter the theoretical perspective (Ball, 1993; Howlett, 2012; McConnell, 2016). This work examines the SIM pilot as proposed by the NCSE to potentially change the policy of inclusion in Irish schools. In this context, the roots of the proposed policy for inclusion seem to be in New Brunswick in Canada, but they have been shaped by the NCSE to adapt to an Irish context (National Council for Special Education, 2019).

THE POLICY CYCLE DEVELOPED BY BOWE, BALL AND GOLD

The triangulation of three key areas forms the bedrock of the theoretical framework which is used in this article (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 2017). These areas are context of influence, context of policy text production and context of practice as illustrated in Figure 1.

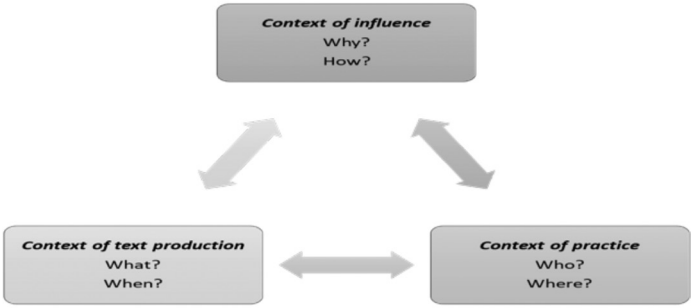

Figure 1: Policy Analysis Framework Examining the Key Focus in Each Category

To begin with, it is imperative to examine the context of influence. The focus will be on what caused this policy to become a reality. Secondly, an examination of policy text production will follow. Since there is no official Department of Education Curricular in this case, the examination of policy text will include a press release from the Department of Education (McHugh, 2019a, 2019b), Guidelines from the Department of Education on its implementation (Department of Education and Skills, 2019) and Policy Advice from NCSE to the Department of Education (National Council for Special Education, 2019). Finally, this review will examine the context of practice. There has been no official report to the Department of Education from NCSE about the SIM Model yet- due to delays occasioned by Covid-19 restrictions. In the absence of a review, in August 2020, Ministers Foley and Madigan extended the pilot to run for another year (NCSE, 2020). However, a critical analysis of what the context of practice may look like if the pilot is extended countrywide is included.

Context of Influence

This dimension of the policy analysis framework considers the key factors which shaped the origins of the policy. Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Person was influential in changing SEN Policy in countries (Szmukler, 2015, 2019). Article 42 established the importance of a fully inclusive system (Amanze and Nkhoma, eds., 2020; Black-Hawkins and Grinham-Smith, eds., 2022). The recommendation is that countries work to allow everyone in society equal access to the same educational opportunities, regardless of their special educational needs (UNCRPD, 2007, Article 24). Policy needs to work towards a culture of practice where the needs of all students are accommodated (Lindner and Schwab, 2020; Tiernan, 2021). General comment no 4 supports governments in working towards this ideal (Slee, 2018; Florian, 2019; Graham et al., 2020). The pressure to align Irish national policy and practice with international policy is evident (Murphy and Sugrue, 2021). However, there is still ambiguity at the level of policy documentation in an Irish context, including what inclusive provision is available, for whom and where (National Council for Special Education, 2019; Holland, 2021). This is the source of much current debate in Ireland (O'Brien, 2019; O'Kelly, 2022; Michael, 2022). The SIM pilot attempts in some way to address this gap within a wider framework of measures. However, the question remains- is SIM the best pathway to full inclusion in Irish schools?

Many European countries, including Portugal (Alves, 2020) and Italy (Nes, Demo and Ianes, 2018), have models of inclusion that may be influential in an Irish context (Banks et al., 2016). However, in the Irish context, there is a desire to find

the best fit in terms of inclusion (Young, McNamara and Coughlan, 2017). While some critics continue to feel that the idea of full inclusion is a fanciful allusion (Imray and Colley, 2017); others worry that, in Ireland, the practice of maintaining a three-tier system may allow some key actors to opt out of an inclusive vision (Shevlin and Banks, 2021).

On a macro level, one could argue there is a sense of 'policy borrowing' and influence when we examine the 'policy text' of the Irish SIM (National Council for Special Education, 2019) and compare it with New Brunswick's Policy 322 based on the idea of 'intentional' inclusive education as a 'human right' (Carr, 2019; AuCoin, Porter and Baker-Korotkov, 2020). New Brunswick is one of the ten provinces in Canada. The province has an education policy of full inclusion known as Policy 322. The support model used is similar to the Irish model of SIM. The concept of the neighbourhood school is the philosophical basis of the model which is seen in other jurisdictions—such as India and Italy—that have employed a full-inclusion model (Narayan, Pratapkumar and Reddy, 2017; Nes, Demo and Ianes, 2018; Ramberg and Watkins, 2020). The classroom becomes a microcosm of society where the goals of the policy are clear; that is, to eliminate obstacles for all students to learn within the same classroom by guaranteeing ease of access (Canadian Department of Education and Early Childhood, 2013). This model allows every student to remain in their base classroom in their local school. However, no system is flawless.

Having examined the origins of 'context of influence,' concerns remain about whether SIM is the best pathway to inclusion in Irish schools. By examining the context of 'policy text production,' which considers what is being proposed and for whom, we may come closer to understanding what is proposed.

Context of Policy Text Production

To begin to unpack the question of whether SIM is a good pathway to full inclusion in Irish schools, it is important to examine the proposal through the lens of text. While there is as yet no circular available from the DES on inclusion, the focus here is on available documentation, including press releases issued by the DES when the pilot was launched (McHugh, 2019a), policy advice available from the NCSE (National Council for Special Education, 2019), an annual report from NCSE (National Council for Special Education, 2020) and the publication of plans to review the scheme by the ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute, 2020). There is also a decision to continue the scheme but no other details available as to the rationale that led to that pronouncement (NCSE, 2020).

SIM is based on the premise of inclusion. However, the idea of inclusion has several meanings in society (Smith and Leonard, 2005; Travers et al., 2010; Banks and McCoy, 2011; Colum, 2020). As the SIM policy is the brainchild of the NCSE, their definition of inclusion adopted from the UNCRPD seems most appropriate:

> Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences (United Nations, 2008).

The suggestion is that inclusion implies a universal restructuring of education systems to allow every student to become an active participant within the classroom (McHugh, 2019a).

The policy of SIM emerged in response to the political desire to ratify the UNCRPD in 2018. The three-tiered education system was in breach of the convention. Ireland, lagging behind its European colleagues, moved to implement an inclusive system of education (Shevlin and Banks, 2021). The review of the provision for children with SEN attending special schools and classes (National Council for Special Education, 2019) resulted in policy advice from the NCSE, which suggested the move as the best practice.

The interplay between the 'context of text production' and 'context of practice' is interesting. One of the key philosophical arguments from the NCSE and DES for promoting the policy of SIM was to move from a culture of labelling students by their needs to a more inclusive model where students who need help are assisted (National Council for Special Education, 2019; Holland, 2021). This is in line with the international literature and practice on inclusion (Nes, Demo and Ianes, 2018). Given the vast amount of investment in the scheme, the SIM pilot allows stakeholders to examine how the needs of students are being met within this paradigm. In March 2019, the DES allocated €4.75 million to the SIM project (National Council for Special Education, 2019). However, one of the key criticisms of the SIM continues to be resourcing (Rose, 2021). The political actors continue to point out that the government has made SEN a key priority for funding (McHugh, 2019a, Merrion Street, 2022). Financial resources have increased in this area, while they have been cut in many other areas of education (McHugh, 2019b; Kenny, McCoy and Mihut, 2020). However, there remain concerns about the dichotomy between the aspirations of the NCSE policy advice and the political rhetoric that if the policy was to work appropriately, it needs appropriate financing (O'Brien, 2019; Mohan et al., 2020).

The SIM pilot was rolled out in schools in 2018/2019. However, due to the pandemic, the evaluation of its efficacy still has not taken place. In its annual report for the NCSE, SIM does get a brief mention in terms of the allocation of resources (National Council for Special Education, 2020). As there is more than one text, a study of those involved spanning across a wide range of actors and texts will be challenging. It will be interesting to evaluate whether stakeholders' voices are heard within the evaluation of the scheme, which will be conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ERSI) (ERSI, 2020). Having explored the origins of 'context of influence and context of text production,' an examination of the 'context of practice' would help to throw further light on the issue of whether SIM is the best pathway to inclusion in Irish schools.

Context of Practice

A policy has to become practice to be useful (Kerr and Dyson, 2017; Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016). It has to affect the ordinary lives of everyday people to be completely understood (Ball, 2017). Bourdieu's notion of 'field' is crucial to explore how educational policy texts 'circulate without their context' (Bourdieu 1999, 221) which Ball refers to as 'policy text' becoming 'policy discourse' and ultimately, 'policy effect'. Researchers accept that a policy is a method of discourse that involves philosophical shaping which Foucault calls 'subjectification' (Regmi, 2019). While examining the SIM pilot within the context of practice, it is worthwhile to consider how the policy will become embedded and the barriers to implementation. In terms of policy mobility, and in light of the SIM Model, there are five key areas of focus here: autonomy, implementation, access, impact and accountability.

Principals

Policy depends on leadership to make it work on the ground in schools (AuCoin, Porter and Baker-Korotkov, 2020). In terms of the context of practice, there are struggles on the leadership level (Frizzell, 2022). There seems to be some fear that the implementation of the SIM policy leads to less autonomy in schools (Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2019). Some critics argue that those in management positions should be given the opportunity to examine a menu of policies available to their schools and choose those which align with the needs of their school (Sugrue, 2009) and that lack of a "top-down prescription" affords schools more effective interventions (Tracey et al., 2014). Leaders with a burning desire for inclusion may choose SIM for their schools, but not all leaders may have that aspiration, leading commentators such as Kenny et al., (2020) to call for ongoing evaluation of reforms such as the Special Education Teacher Allocation Model

(DES, 2017) and the SIM.' Equally, the lack of a unified curricular from the DES as a blueprint for schools might prove problematic.

There may continue to be concerns that the implementation of the SIM pilot will lead to a loss of autonomy amongst leadership in schools. In Ireland, at present, principals get no extra allowance for managing their SNA staff (Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2019). There appears to be no appetite on the part of the government to increase funding to support Principals for their extra work in this area (McHugh, 2019a, 2019b; NCSE, 2020). Interestingly, after examining the frontloading of the SIM scheme, 88.4% of principals agreed that they have less SET time than they would have had in the older allocation model (Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2019). Although the Irish government suggested that the new model would ensure extra teaching support to ensure inclusion, almost all schools have lost time for supporting children with additional needs (National Principals' Forum, 2019). The question of who implements, oversees and leads the policy is key. Financial remuneration may make this extra work more palatable. It is crucial to clarify roles and responsibilities to make the alliance effective (Rhodes, 1996).

Teachers

Equally, SIM cannot work without buy-in from teachers. In New Brunswick, Policy 322 works due to the long-term commitment by teachers to engage with all learners in their classroom (Korostov, 2019; Fraser, 2017). This is replicated in other countries where full inclusion has been successful, such as Finland, Italy and India (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Riddell, 2003; Florian and Rouse, 2009; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011; Nes, Demo and Ianes, 2018).

The ratio of teacher to student in New Brunswick is 12:1 (Carr, 2022). Teaching staff are also supported by behaviour mentors and school intervention mentors. In addition, specialist teachers take primary school students for specialist subjects freeing classroom teachers up for professional learning time during the day (Frizzell, 2022). As the workload continues to increase for teachers (Pijl, 2010), this model demands that Irish teachers engage not only with SNAs in their classrooms but also with other professionals. Additional professional time during the teaching day may make the idea of inclusion more appealing for teachers in an Irish context. Teachers working within the SIM pilot liaising with other professionals can ensure that the student gets the support that they need—in school—and they are not absent from class for long periods (Irish Primary Principals' Network, 2019). In my own experience, in rural Ireland, students may be absent for a full day in order to attend an appointment with a specialist. If there are several appointments, rates

of absenteeism can be alarming and counterproductive. SIM seems to address some of the issues teachers worry about, however, one wonders if they will have the appetite for the extra work required on top of huge existing workloads without being accommodated in some way for the extra toil.

Parents

SIM does in some way address the needs of those parents of SEN children who may have three to four appointments for services each week. As a parent/professional with a child who had intense levels of intervention, I struggled while trying to balance working full-time with the four or five additional appointments—SLT, OT, physiotherapy and play therapy—each week which put serious pressure on the family resources. It is possible that the SIM model addresses some of the stress faced by parents. However, there is an ongoing argument in New Brunswick that some students need much more on-site, intensive therapy than is being allocated under the model (Fraser, 2017, 2020). The idea of an integration service model, which is used in New Brunswick, may also be very welcome in an Irish context (Frizzell, 2022). The idea is simple- every child has one file containing all their specialist reports and professional input from those supporting them each school year. The file moves with the student so that the next teacher and school can pick up without the parent having to fill the teacher and staff in on the students' story so far. Parents give one time consent which allows everyone to support the student. This reduces the administration burden that is felt so keenly in an Irish context. However, in an Irish context, there are likely to be data protection regulation concerns in this regard.

CONCLUSION

Using Bowe, Ball and Gold's (2017) theoretical perspective, this work examined the pilot SIM within an Irish context. While the pilot has merit as explored here, the pathway to full inclusion in Irish schools is by no means straightforward. There are likely to be ongoing concerns from all stakeholders. Expansion in the rollout of the SIM model is likely be widely welcomed if accompanied with appropriate funding, guidance and professional development. However, whether that is likely to happen given this period of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) is very uncertain. Challenges remain (Brown, 2021; Smith, 2021) even in a context such as New Brunswick where there is a policy of full inclusion. In the absence of further development and review of SIM, it seems as if we are still in a state of flux. We are no closer to knowing whether the system will be rolled out countrywide or remain a well-intended pilot in the east of the country.

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Establishing Pathways to Inclusion: Investigating the Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Special Educational Needs

Edited by Richard Rose and Michael Shevlin

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At a moment when the implementation of a, by now, widely accepted global education policy of inclusion, and underpinned by a 'common quest to establish more inclusive environments', this book presents an important insight into the delivery of inclusive education in the context of the Irish education system.

The catalyst for this publication is Project IRIS (Inclusive Research in Irish Schools, 2015) commissioned by the National Council for Special Education. Unique in Europe as the largest longitudinal study of provision for students with special educational needs, these findings allied with findings from international literature on the subject, enabled the authors to consider the reality of inclusive education in Ireland from a wide range of perspectives at both primary and post-primary levels.

The book is clearly laid out in three sections, focussing first on establishing the context for inclusive education, followed by presenting stakeholders' viewpoints, and concluding with important learnings in relation to effective inclusive practice. As such, the authors indicate that their intention is to consider 'policy, practice, experiences and outcomes'.

Despite the relative paucity of recent references, many of the well-rehearsed, thorny issues affecting successful implementation of inclusive policy highlighted in this book, continue to persist. These are, for example, resourcing issues which inevitably leave a gap between policy and practice and influence the fact that many of the recommendations of the EPSEN Act remain to be implemented; parent frustration with continuing issues around access to assessment; teacher efficacy in terms of knowledge, confidence, and use of effective pedagogical strategies;

student issues in terms of isolation and dependence; and the stubborn resistance to change of the undercurrent of a deficit perspective.

Throughout the book we hear the authentic voice of stakeholders – students, parents, and professionals, heralding the importance of collaboration in the delivery of an effective inclusive education system. The wide base of evidence from which the book draws, uncovers and forefronts the key elements of *collaboration* and the development of *positive relationships* as cornerstones in the successful implementation of effective inclusion. The need to establish positive and reciprocal relationships is highlighted and reinforced repeatedly throughout this book. These relationships include, for example, *internal relationships* such as respectful classroom relationships, both among the students in the classroom and between the teacher and the students; school relationships among the professionals and paraprofessionals in the school and between school leadership and school personnel, represented as 'transformative' when quality relationships with school personnel are fostered. Crucially, the significant importance of positive *external relationships* between the teachers and other professionals, and between school personnel and parents are also highlighted. Relationships of a more abstract nature such as the important relationship between happiness and successful learning outcomes for students, and the 'bi-directional' relationship between academic and social outcomes for students gain particular traction in this book.

Ongoing tensions in effective implementation of inclusive education such as inadequate levels of connectedness between professionals from the Health sector and the Education sector, and the broadly positive views expressed by parents and students contrasted with the often expressed sense of inadequacy voiced by teachers are clearly articulated. Drawing attention to challenges surrounding the effective use of differentiation as a pedagogical strategy spotlights the recognition that the academic development of students may at times be relegated due to an over-emphasis on their social development.

This book is at once academic and yet easily accessible to a wide audience, derives from a broad base of evidence, and has a clear and compelling writing style. It will serve as a solid baseline introduction for those interested in pursuing research in the field of implementing effective inclusive education, along with those tasked with its delivery and those centrally involved as users in the system.

ESTABLISHING PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION: INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS edited by Ricard Rose and Michael Shevlin is published by Routledge, 2021 and costs STG£29.59

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Language, Power, and Resistance Mainstreaming Deaf Education

By Elizabeth S. Mathews

Reviewed by FRANCES MCDONNELL, a retired Teacher of the Deaf, who worked in St Mary's School for the Deaf, with the adult Deaf population, and more recently in the Visiting Teacher Service. She has an MA in Social Justice (Equality Studies).

In her book *Language, Power, and Resistance Mainstreaming Deaf Education* Elizabeth Mathews takes the ideological position that mainstreaming deaf education represents the farthest reach of a regulatory 'medical model' of response to deafness, and a consequently oralist linguistic bias in education. This she contrasts with a 'social model' according to which being deaf is regarded not as a disability, but as a cultural identity, signified primarily by the use of sign language. According to her argument, the social model relies on the existence of 'congregated communities' e.g. as in special schools, the medical model being more associated with 'dispersed communities' i.e. deaf and hard of hearing children attending mainstream schools.

A significant proportion of the book is dedicated to explaining the medical model, its origins in theories of power, and its predominance in contemporary services, which introduction will be especially useful to students who are new to the field. Less attention is focussed on the social model, however, and the fact that the models are respectively conflated with speech and oral language versus sign language usage reduces these complex concepts and their applications to a 'social model good' / 'medical model bad' simplification which is problematic both practically and theoretically.

While the preference of a minority demographic to be identified as culturally 'Deaf' is acknowledged, the simplified medical / social narrative neglects the fact that a majority of deaf people are culturally of the hearing world, oral language users for whom hearing loss is indeed a deficit. This includes a majority of the deaf and hard of hearing children who attend mainstream schools, as referenced in the book's title. A counterposing of 'speech' v 'sign', as presented in the book, risks an underestimation of the challenge faced by many such children in learning a language, either oral or manual, and the simple fact that whether they are speaking

or signing, for successful participation in the education system, children ultimately require proficiency in the language of the curriculum i.e. in most cases in the Irish context, English.

That the persistent use of sign language in the 'congregated communities' of special residential oralist schools represented an act of resistance by deaf pupils is well illustrated. However, the seriously oppressive and punitive regimes within which such survival was negotiated, at what social and emotional cost to those deaf children and their families, is understated, as is the fact that parental resistance to the incarceration of children in segregated institutions was a significant factor in the impetus towards mainstreaming in the later part of the twentieth century. Nor can it be assumed, under present arrangements, that children attending special schools for the deaf in Ireland will have a significant linguistic or curricular advantage, considering the shortage of suitably qualified specialist teachers of the deaf and of trained teachers who are proficient in sign language. As for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) children attending mainstream schools, the dedicated service provided to them by the Department of Education, The Visiting Teacher (VT) Service (under the management of the National Council for Special Education since 2017) now suffers a similar shortage of qualified Teachers of the Deaf. That this was not the case at the time of writing raises serious questions as to why a book purporting as this one does to 'unpack the experience of mainstreaming' would not include the voice of this 'significant cohort', and why such selected references and third-party quotations as are included would be so prejudicially unfavourable to VTs.

The book can be commended for a thorough accounting of the labyrinthine history of deaf education, apart from a puzzling omission of reference to the establishment of the Centre for Deaf Studies at Trinity College in the 1980s which surely signified an empowering advance for the Irish Deaf Community at the time and continues to offer graduate and post graduate courses in Deaf Studies, ISL Interpreter Training and ISL Teacher Training. In the historical context, the establishment, operation, and role of the National Council for Special Education might also have borne scrutiny, especially in the light of the author's claim that '...mainstreaming, instead of deinstitutionalising DHH students, is merely reinstitutionalizing them...into a spatially dispersed "institution" of local schools.'

Since the publication of the book in 2017, The Irish Sign Language Act 2017 was signed into law in December 2020. The act recognises ISL as a native language of the State and provides for the right to use, develop, and preserve it. It places a duty on public bodies to provide free interpretation and provides for specific obligations,

including in educational provision. In relation to professional advocacy for supports for deaf and hearing-impaired children in the mainstream, the legislation has predictably eased the burden of persuasion concerning deaf children who require ISL support. Ironically, by reinforcing the exclusive identification of deafness with signing, it seems it may inadvertently serve to invalidate the equal need for support of oral deaf children.

Not surprisingly, Ms Mathews reports shared concern among the Deaf community, parents of DHH children, and service providers regarding the current deaf education system. She concludes that DHH children move through a system driven by 'institutional ideologies and a medical model of deafness...presumably coping, but perhaps never quite reaching the potential they so deserve'. Whether under an ideological 'social model' the system might magically suddenly succeed where it currently fails is doubtful, however, not least because, as Ms Mathews acknowledges, the potential of the system to deliver rests on the very practical issue of appropriate resources. Chief among those resources, I suggest, would have to be an available pool of qualified teachers of the deaf (be they oral or signing or both) and a policy commitment to engaging only those so qualified in teaching positions in Deaf Education Services, whether mainstream or segregated. To this end it would be in the interest of all concerned to accelerate the plan, referred to by Ms Mathews, to re-establish a programme for the training and qualification of teachers of the deaf here in Ireland.

The strong and unapologetic ideological position adopted in Language, Power, and Resistance Mainstreaming Deaf Education is challenging, and leaves itself open to challenge in response. For this very reason it also has the potential to reignite a lost tradition of robust debate in the arena of Deaf Education, the revival of which would be very refreshing.

With a bit of luck, it might even springboard some measure of intercultural collaboration across the ideological divide. Here's hoping.

LANGUAGE, POWER, AND RESISTANCE MAINSTREAMING DEAF EDUCATION by Elizabeth S. Mathews is published in paperback by Gallaudet University Press, 2018 and costs $35.00

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