A Study to Investigate Teachers' Practices Towards Creating an Inclusive

Classroom for Children with Special Education Needs in Mainstream Schools.

Marino Institute of Education

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Declaration

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Abstract

This study seeks to address how teachers are enhancing their practice in the Irish primary school classroom to better support children with SEN, in order to create an inclusive learning environment. The importance of Special Education Needs inclusion is well documented (Hodkinson, 2006). However, studies have not considered the impact teachers' initial and ongoing training have to classroom practice. This study addresses teacher training under initial teacher education and continuous professional development in relation to effective teaching and learning regarding children with Special Education Needs. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that are empowering teachers to be inclusive of all. Using qualitative methodology, this study examines teachers' approaches to facilitating Special Education Needs under current policies. A unique feature of this study is that it investigates teachers' attitudes towards the 'Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation'. No previous research has been conducted in this area, as it is a relatively recent development in Irish primary education. This study also explores the determinants of participants' teaching methodologies and the factors affecting their decisions. In common with research (Anthun, 1999; Travers 2006; Griffin & Shelvin, 2007), this study shows issues such as class size, classroom support, provision of resources and workload demand as impacting on pedagogical approaches.

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder

CPD: Continuous Professional Development

DES: Department of Education and Skills

EADSNE: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

EPSEN: Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

ERSI: The Economic and Social Research Institute

GAM: General Allocation Model

ICT: Information and communications technology

IEP: Individual Education Plan

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

MIE: Marino Institute of Education

NCSE: The National Council for Special Education

NEPS: National Educational Psychological Service

NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher

OT: Occupational therapist

PDSE: Postgraduate Diploma in Special Education

SEN: Special Education Need

SENO: Special Education Needs Organiser

SERC: Special Education Review Committee

SESS: Special Education Support Services

SET: Special Education Teacher

SLT: Speech and Language Therapist

SNA: Special Education Teacher

SP: School Placement

UK: United Kingdom

UN: United Nations

USA: United States of America

USB: Universal Serial Bus

Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter the author contextualises the research project within existing policy for Special Education Needs (SEN) in Irish primary schools. The value of this research to educational practice is explored, providing a rationale for the study, while also highlighting its relevance to the author. A brief overview of each chapter is provided.

Policy Context

Inclusion has received increased consideration in international and national policies in recent years. Greater emphasis has been placed on learning methods, with a renewed concentration on a 'need', rather than a 'label' (DES, 2017). The Warnock Report (DES, 1978), Special Education Review Committee (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 1993), The Education Act (Government of Ireland (GoI), 1998) and Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation (DES, 2017) have all had a significant impact on SEN in Ireland. It is clear therefore that the Irish primary school context has also undergone considerable restructuring in recent years. This research investigates how the recommendations and guidelines contained within these documents are being translated into practice, through teachers' pedagogy.

Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' practice towards creating an inclusive classroom for children with SEN. This research seeks to explore the factors that empower teachers to create learning environments that promote inclusivity. Numerous factors are noted throughout educational literature which impact teacher ability to be inclusive, as is explored further in Chapter 2. This

research identifies the primary issues inhibiting best practice regarding SEN and collaborative approaches in the primary school context.

Rationale

The provision of support for children with SEN is a topical issue since the introduction of the 'New Model' in Irish primary schools. There is a need for the success of such implementations to be exposed. There are many Irish studies written on inclusivity, which believe less attention has been given to the experiences of children with SEN as learners in mainstream classrooms (Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao, 2012). However, there appears to be a dearth of studies that have examined the extent that teachers have accessed additional training and how they have implemented such training practices within the classroom to provide a more inclusive learning environment for those with SEN. As a result, there is an apparent need for research in this area to be conducted, in order to ascertain how teachers are coping with this world of change.

This study is conducted due to personal interest in SEN, which stems from the author working in a severe/profound class. The personal learning of this experience was teachers' obligation to enable children that face physical and intellectual battles to flourish while in education. The skills children with SEN acquire during this time are not just to cope in school, but for life. If teachers are not enhancing their practice to facilitate some of the most vulnerable children in our education system, has our education system truly evolved? The knowledge acquired during the author's time working in SEN from teachers, clinicians, parents, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and children was absolutely fascinating. School placements (SP) also offered opportunity to observe and implement different pedagogy practice for those with SEN, which in turn further developed the author

awareness of the variety of approaches to SEN. This research aspires to gain a more in-depth understanding of how teachers are advancing their practices for SEN. This study also seeks to investigate what supports teachers are availing of to facilitate children with SEN in relation to teaching and learning in Irish primary schools.

It is hoped that this research advances the author's professional practice. The insights gained through this study heighten the author's awareness of common classroom factors, which hinder advancements in pedagogical practice and encourage the development of strategies to cope with such issues. Overall, it is hoped that this research guides future educational developments, highlighting aspects of policy and practice, which require change to facilitate pedagogical advancements for SEN.

Chapter Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth exploration of literature relevant to SEN in the primary school context. Policy developments, various forms of pedagogy and the implementation of such approaches by teachers are discussed. This chapter also examines various factors impacting teachers' ability to cater for SEN.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach utilised for this study. The use of a qualitative paradigm and interviews to collect data is presented. The coding procedure used to analyse the data is explained. Chapter 3 explores the measures taken by the author to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, while also accounting for all necessary ethical considerations.

The findings of the research are presented in Chapter 4. The data analysis process resulted in the identification of a number of key themes, discussed under the following headings: teacher training, evolution of policy, factors affecting SEN success in classrooms and pedagogical approaches towards SEN.

The concluding chapter presents conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study. A number of key suggestions for practice, policy and further research are discussed, with the aim of supporting teachers in enacting a more varied, active and supported pedagogical approach in the classroom for SEN. Limitations of the study are also included.

Conclusion

This chapter establishes the aims and objectives of the research within the educational context. Recent policy developments related to SEN are presented, demonstrating the relevance of this work. The author offered a rationale for the conduction of this study, in light of a dearth in educational literature surrounding the teachers' approaches to SEN. The literature pertinent to this research question is drawn on and discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, SEN is defined and the history of SEN in education is examined, while also looking at recent changes in policy. The road from segregation to inclusion, has been liberating for those with SEN, however this has increased the difficulties experienced by teachers in mainstream settings (Lindsay, Proulx, Thomson & Scott, 2013). The challenges encountered by teachers are identified in relation to SEN and international perspectives on inclusion are drawn on. Initial teacher education (ITE) is investigated through the lens of SEN facilitation, and methodologies to enhance practices for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and more experienced teachers are discussed. Factors that inhibit teachers from conducting best practice are also presented.

History of SEN in Education

In order to review the literature on SEN in education, the issue of segregation, which prevailed the Irish education system in the past, must be looked at. SEN is defined as a "restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition" (GoI, 2004, p.22). Children with SEN were excluded from mainstream schooling in Ireland and abroad. Ireland's system of education involved exclusion of schooling for pupils classified as 'handicapped', and these children were generally sent to special schools or institutions (Lodge & Lynch, 2004). The O'Donoghue case, 1993 highlighted how the Department of Health was fully responsible for the education of a child with severe/profound general learning disabilities, which resulted in the view that such education principally consisted of meeting their medical and care needs in Ireland (Banks, McCoy & Shevlin, 2013). The policy developments after this period profoundly

affected the recognition of SEN in society and the provision of resources in Ireland (Banks, McCoy & Shevlin, 2013).

Movement Towards Inclusion

In order to fully understand inclusion, one must look back to where the idea came from. It took many years for SEN to be seen as an educational difficulty and not as a 'medical' difficulty. Education was not seen to be for everyone. The word 'integration' was introduced before inclusion in the United States of America with the 'Education for All Handicapped Children Act' (USA, 1975). The United Kingdom (UK) began to follow suit with the 'Warnock Report' (DES, 1978). This act was extremely significant as it acknowledged that a child with SEN should be sent to a mainstream school instead of a special school, if they could be satisfactorily educated there. This act made schools responsible for putting a plan in place for students with SEN. Following this, the United Nations (UN, 1989) introduced 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child', which outlined that each child has an equal right to education. Following this, the rise of inclusive education came about which required children not to be only present in school but that they have all opportunities to participate in meaningful learning (Florian & Spatt, 2013). Therefore, it became a priority in schools not just to accommodate children with SEN in education with enrollment but also to fully include them in education.

International Perspectives on Inclusion

Although the movement for 'inclusive education' is part of a broad human rights agenda, many educators have serious reservations about supporting the widespread placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools as it brings about huge challenges (Florian, 2008). Inclusion is a difficult concept to achieve, as it compromises an ongoing process with no set endpoint or result. As Booth (1996,

p.89) states "I prefer to think of integration or inclusion in education as an unending set of processes, rather than a state". Bowman (1986), in a study of 14 nations, reported a wide scope in teacher opinions regarding integration of children with SEN into mainstream schooling. The study showed that teachers preferred certain types of SEN within their classroom environments. Over a quarter of the surveyed teachers felt that children with sensory impairments could be integrated into the classroom setting. Although less than 10 percent agreed that severe disability should be included in mainstream schooling. Bowman notes in her study that the views of teachers towards students with SEN were much more favorable in the countries which had law enforcing integration. Banks and McCoy (2011) reported that internationally, the number of children with SEN has increased dramatically in recent decades. However, no exact number of children with SEN in Ireland or across the globe is available, which is a major limitation of the provision of adequate supports.

Inclusion in the UK. England has made significant progress on the road from integration of students with SEN in mainstream settings, to full inclusion (Glazzard, 2014). This was brought about in 1978, when inadequate training of teachers was illuminated in the 'Warnock Report' (Hodkinson, 2006). This was a significant step in English education being inclusive of all. However, England has been subject to much criticism for not applying what they set out to do. According to Robertson and Messenger (2010), English teachers are failing to create inclusive environments, as the challenges inclusive education presents are too great.

Inclusion in Finland. Finland has often been credited as one of the most innovative education systems and has brought this pioneering philosophy to inclusion (Sahlber, 2007). Equity, participation and the welfare state are considered

the major attributes of the Nordic model of education (Antikainen, 2006). Although

Finland promotes inclusion of all in school, it was found that forty per cent of all

SEN pupils still study in special classes or special schools full time (Statistics

Finland, 2015). All Finish class teachers must obtain a master's degree, while this

not a requirement for Irish teachers (Kivirauma & Ruoho, 2007). However,

interestingly Finish teachers face difficulties in relation to insufficient teacher

training (Webster & Blatchford, 2014).

Change in Policy in Ireland

International trends influenced an era of change in Ireland. The SERC report

of 1993 impacted greatly on the way SEN was taught and included in Irish

mainstream schools. The SERC recommended "as much integration as is

appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary" (DES, 1993,

p.22). However, Avramids and Norwich (2002) view integration as being an

outdated term, they believe it is an assimilationist process. The students with SEN

are "present in the classroom but whether they assimilate is reliant on them" (p.131).

Inclusion embodies a whole range of assumptions about the purpose and meaning of

schools and has come to supersede 'integration' in the vocabulary of special and

mainstream educators (Kliewer, 1998). The SERC report was extremely important

in terms of SEN in Ireland, as it defined what SEN was and that 'integration' was

the step towards inclusion.

The Education Act. The Education Act was launched in 1998, which placed

emphasis on the Constitutional Rights of children with SEN. A more inclusive

approach was now a legal obligation and schools now had a responsibility to "ensure

that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other

SEN are identified and provided for" (GoI, 1998, p.13). Children with SEN now had

a legal voice and had to be catered for educationally. This was a more inclusive approach for the school community and in the classroom setting. This greatly impacted the school plan, admissions policy and the parental rights. In 1999 the 08/99 Circular took a major leap in providing resources, staff and hours for children with SEN in mainstream schools (DES, 1999). Then in 2000, the Equal Status Act (GoI, 2000), and later the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (GoI, 2004) prohibited the discrimination and promoted equality. It established a framework for the provision of students with SEN. In 2005, the Disability Act was introduced which stated that schools were obliged to alter physical aspects of the school to make them more accommodating for students with physical disabilities (GoI, 2005). Also in 2005, the Circular 02/05 introduced the General Allocation Model (GAM) (DES, 2005). This circular outlined how to organise resource teaching hours and resources within a school.

The 'New Model'. The "Circular to the Management Authorities of all Mainstream Primary Schools Special Education Teaching Allocation" was introduced in Ireland in 2017. The purpose of the 'New Model' is to revise the allocation process for Special Education Teachers (SET) to mainstream primary schools from the 2017/18 school year" (DES, 2017, p.1). The GAM, Additional Language Supports (ALS) and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Allocation Procedure, have been substituted by the 'New Model' (DES, 2017). The provision of the SET team is now one entity replacing what would have been the Resource and Learning Support Teacher. This aims to better support children with SEN, as the SET team is now one allocation rather than being a divided system. "The new allocation model will ensure that schools will have greater certainty as to the resources that will be available to them to provide additional teaching to support

the inclusion of pupils with SEN, on an ongoing basis" (DES, 2017, p.1). Schools now have the autonomy to deploy resources based on a need rather than a diagnosis. This is a significant development, advancing all children's with SEN in the Irish education system. National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS), the Inspectorate and Special Education Section provide training courses on the 'New Model' and audit schools to ensure the policy is being adhered to appropriately (DES, 2017).

The 'New Model' recommends in-class support as apposed to withdrawal (DES, 2017). It advocates the implementation of continuum of support plans if there is a concern about SEN, resulting in less emphasis and exclusion of the child with SEN. Ring and Travers (2005) argue that the child being withdrawn is missing out on opportunities and that it affects the school as a whole. "The emphasis on withdrawal reduces opportunities for a whole school approach, involving class teachers adopting inclusive practices as a matter of course" (p.54). The withdrawal system employed by the GAM had a knock on effect for the whole school, resulting in both the school and the child with SEN suffering (Shevlin, Winter & Flynn, 2013).

Education for Children with SEN Today in Ireland

Children with SEN have three options when deciding on the type of education they wish to receive in Ireland. These are: attending a mainstream class, attending a special class in a mainstream school or attending a special school (Irish Autism Action, 2010). Students in mainstream classes may have support through the allocation of SEN teaching hours or the provision of a SNA (Irish Autism Action, 2010). In terms of inclusion and integration, the EPSEN advises, "a child with SEN shall be educated in an inclusive environment" unless this interferes with "the best

interests of the child" or "the effective provision of education" for the child (DES, 2004, p.7). However, the 'Living in Ireland Survey' (ISSDA, 2001) shows that half of people with disability and chronic illness had no formal educational qualification whatsoever, compared with one-fifth of non-disabled adults.

NQTs' Training

Learning to become a teacher is a complex, multi-dimensional and subjective process of identity construction, an experience which can often be unsettling and conflictive (Hinchion, 2017). NQTs have gained classroom experience throughout their time in education, through SP. Dursun and Kuzu (2008, p.160) define SP as a "course through which teacher candidates have the opportunity to transform the theoretical knowledge they have gained during their four-year study period into practice". However Garner (1996) argues that teachers are apprehensive about their ability to teach pupils with SEN even on SP and have found their preparation for inclusive classrooms inadequate at best. Although, Little (1993) claims that universities aim to equip teacher candidates with enough knowledge to start teaching but not enough for the course of a career. Therefore, courses are available to teachers to enhance their professional practices when teaching children with SEN.

The NCSE provides online supports to schools and individual teachers. Schools can apply to the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) for teacher support, SNAs, special equipment, assistive technology and school transport (Stevens & O'Moore, 2009). In Ireland, teacher training has been redesigned with the inclusion of special education placements built into teacher training programmes. This allows teachers to gain first hand insight into the practices and structure needed for children with SEN to succeed in schooling (Akpınar & Aydın, 2007).

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Stenhouse (1981, p.104) argues "it is teachers who in the end will change the world of the school by understanding it". Snowling (2013) furthers this statement by claiming that through understanding the cause of a disorder, the development of an intervention will follow. In almost every country the concept of SEN is on the agenda (Ferguson 2008). The government is putting an emphasis on "raising the status of the teaching profession and increasing access to high-quality professional development" (DES, 2017a, p.8). Strong professional development and a set of respected professional qualifications are some of the "key tools by which teachers can navigate their own careers" (DES, 2017a, p.32).

Cosán is the national framework for teachers' learning, in the development of professional standards in Ireland (Teaching Council, 2018). It states that professional learning occurs at both a formal and an informal level. Teachers' feedback emphasised informal learning processes as being particularly valuable, and requested that the framework would recognise all forms of educationally enriched discussions as a form of CPD (Teaching Council, 2016). The policy provides the important definition for teachers' professional learning.

CPD refers to life-long teacher learning and comprises the full range of educational experiences designed to enrich teachers' professional knowledge, understanding and capabilities throughout their careers (Teaching Council, 2011). It emphasises teachers' beliefs, through highlighting the importance of formal and informal training required in the teaching profession.

Pedagogy. The teaching profession has undergone significant changes in order to meet the needs arising from today's social structures and technologies (Akpınar & Aydın, 2007). There are many different approaches teachers can take

towards meeting barriers and creating an inclusive classroom. Research shows that a multi-sensory approach to learning; involving visual, oral, auditory, tactile and kinesthetic learning styles are most effective in supporting children with SEN (Multi-Sensory Approaches to Teaching, n.d.). Information and communications technology (ICT) and Universal design for learning (UDL) are inclusive approaches that teachers avail of in Ireland and abroad to enhance learning of children with SEN (Sloan, Nelson & Sloan, 2007). UDL incorporates three key principles, multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression and multiple means of engagement (Rose et al., 2012). However, Bryant and Bryant (1998) argue that students with SEN strengths and limitations demand personalised intervention programmes to suit their requirements. What works for one child may not work for another. This is a challenge for teachers with more than one child with SEN in their class (Katz, 2015).

Teachers must be mindful of various 'triggers' for children with SEN, as transitioning in the school day is often a complex obstacle (Janus, Leffort, Cameron & Kopechanski, 2007). Although research has found that learning associated with movement can improve student engagement with SEN (Reilly, Buskist & Gross, 2012).

Professional conversations. Professional conversations are both formal and informal ways of developing teacher knowledge. Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002, p.7) state that "it is through shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do". In order to have an inclusive environment staff must share their ideas and methodologies. Collaboration allows staff as a whole to develop teaching, training and professional development. Ideas regarding how to aid students with SEN within

the classroom can be shared and experienced with other staff member. However, such methodologies can be very difficult to implement. Ainscow, (2007, p.5) states, "deeply held beliefs within schools might prevent the experimentation that is necessary in order to foster the development of more inclusive ways of working". Ainscow recognises that not all schools are as adaptable and open to new ideas as others. This is a similar difficulty that faces teachers when it comes to changing the in-class methodologies. Professional conversations aid teachers development of practices but also may inhibit change if teachers are unwilling to alter procedures.

Challenges Associated with SEN

Inclusive education is widely supported, although research shows that there are a number of challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive practice. Travers (2006) argues that "there are many barriers currently to in-class inclusive methodologies. These barriers include teacher attitudes towards inclusion, inherent system constraints in the education system, pedagogical issues and conceptualisation roles within the system" (p.299). These factors affect teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and furthermore act as barriers on a daily basis.

Class sizes. Large class size generates huge pressure on teachers and results in the inclusion of all, as almost impossible (Griffin & Shelvin, 2007). While observing and catering for all needs in a class is an obstacle for all teachers, it is certainly less obtainable when dealing with a large class size. Consequently inclusion is often neglected, as some needs dwarf others. Furthermore, too much pressure is placed on teachers to recognise issues within the classroom, when they do not possess the expertise or training, to identify a disorder. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have been advised by the EPSEN Act (DES, 2004). These are designed to assist with the child's education in establishing goals and specific educational

plans (Autism Spectrum Information Advice & Meeting Point, 2014). IEPs are taxing for many teachers, the practical usefulness is questionable as to whether they are able to follow instructional practices when dealing with large class sizes.

Provision of resources. As previously mentioned, the population of children with SEN is rising which directly influences the need for resources (Banks & McCoy, 2011). Pivik, McComas and Laflamme (2002) noted in their study that teachers are suffering from insufficient funding and personnel, which impacts on their ability to be inclusive. Teachers are expected to be engaging in CPD to develop professionally, although they face time and supply shortages in the workplace (Brunetti, 2006). Lydon and King (2009) noted CPD is only benefical if resources are readily available. Inadequate support from psychological and outside services for the provision of resources to children with SEN has been perceived internationally (Anthun, 1999). In regards to Ireland, Keating and O'Connor (2012) found in their study that SNAs are becoming increasingly involved in duties outside of their qualification, as resources are not being deployed where needed.

Teacher training. A major challenge that is faced by teachers is the inadequacy of CPD courses (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008). Travers et al. (2010) states that ITE does not prepare teachers to teach with inclusion of all. "The relationship between disability and educational attainment is a complex one" (Gannon & Nolan, 2005, p.24). In Ireland, law enforces those with SEN who are able to be included in mainstream schooling to attend. The EPSEN Act (GoI, 2004) aimed to guarantee the provision of suitable education for children with SEN. It states that integrated, inclusive education is to be the general approach. However, Magomedova & Damadaeva, (2015) argue that much of the success of inclusive education depends on the professional and psychological readiness of teachers.

Therefore, teachers who possess insufficient training are most likely unable to provide an inclusive classroom. Norrell (1997) argues that teachers must engage in ongoing training to be inclusive, however with CPD shortages, this is an impractical demand.

Pedagogy. While pedagogy is a substantial barrier to inclusive education, as teachers' perspectives vary and can be inconsistent with their philosophy towards inclusion. In order for a teacher's attitude to change they need to have a better understanding of the needs of the child with SEN in their class. Ainscow (2007, p.4) argues that by using evidence to study teaching, one can "can help foster the development of more inclusive thinking and practices". Teachers must reflect on their teaching in order for their attitudes towards inclusive education to develop and broaden. Ainscow (2007, p.4) also states "such approaches provide interruptions that help to make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action". Therefore, in order to progress, the teacher needs to draw attention to the unknown and question their teaching on how inclusive it really is. From this reflection, a teacher should take action and discover various possibilities to eliminate their possibly negative or ineffective attitudes towards inclusion within their teaching. Therefore, if teachers had more knowledge in the area of SEN, their confidence would increase and in turn their attitudes towards different methodologies for inclusive education would be enhanced.

Conclusion

Upon reviewing the literature concerning this area, it is apparent there is a gap as no studies have been completed on the 'New Model' for SEN in Ireland. Chapter 3 reviews the methodologies that are implemented in this study in order to provide findings on this topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Having critically reviewed the existing literature relating to the topic of inclusion of SEN in mainstream settings in Chapter 2, the methodology of this study is now presented. Methodology has been described as "defining how one will go about studying a phenomenon of interest, including methods of data gathering, forms of data analysis and ethical considerations" (Silverman, 2013, p.120).

Study design

The research being conducted is qualitative research. According to Cassell and Symon, (1994) this approach is usually thought of as the most flexible research design. Some say that qualitative and quantitative research differs greatly, and mixed method results cannot be compared for the purpose of cross checking (Hansen, 2006). The opinions of the participants may greatly vary, qualitative research allows for greater scope of understanding the views of those partaking. "Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis" (Bell, 1987, p.4). The instrument used is interviews that are recorded on a dictaphone and later transcribed. The author is interviewing eight teachers who have been teaching a range of years in Irish primary schools. A semi-structured approach to collecting data is implemented. The interviews allow the interviewee speak widely on the issues that arise. However, there is a structured list of questions asked. The methods and instruments are purposefully chosen to achieve the aims of the study. The main aim of this study is to explore the practices teachers are utilising in the classroom to support those with SEN.

Instrumentation

The qualitative aspect of this study takes the form of interviews. The location for facilitation of the interviews is taken into account to yield optimal discussion. Each interview takes place in a classroom or office in a school, where the participants are not disturbed. The rooms are arranged so that participants can sit comfortably in front of a table. The table acts as a type of shield but also facilitates intimacy as participants can be allowed to lean in to share opinions (Silverman, 2006). The author is mindful to not express ones own opinion, but instead to remain open minded, listen carefully and observe interactions. The author must also keep the participants focused and bring them back to the main topic when needed (Johnson & Turner, 2003). At times however it may be necessary to adopt strategies to stimulate conversation such as offering alternative points of views. The participants are audio recorded, with each interview lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Participants

The method of sampling conducted in this study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves the enrolment of available participants that are easily accessible to the author (Depoy & Gitlin, 2011). The interviews were conducted in two schools located in urban settings in Ireland. The inclusion criteria for this study are teachers who are qualified over one year, up to teachers who qualified over 20 years. Teachers were excluded if they were NQTs as of this academic year as they do not have the experience needed to conduct an in-depth study of the practices being used in the classroom. A diversity of gender is important in this sample. Table 1 details the years of teaching experience the participants have in this research study.

Teachers	Under 5 years	Over 5 years	Over 10 years	Over 20 years
T1			✓	
T2				✓
T3			✓	
T4		✓		
T5				✓
T6		✓		
T7	✓			
T8	✓			

Table 1: Participates Profiles

Data Collection

Preliminary letters of consent were distributed to two schools. A mutually convenient time and place was organised to meet the teachers who agreed to partake in this study. They were informed prior to the interview of the length of time it would take. Once the information was gathered it was analysed, labeled and later broken down into codes. Eight interviews were conducted. This sample was geographically accessible and a manageable sample size for a novice author. Permission was granted in a mixed vertical school and a vertical girls' school to conduct interviews. A pilot interview was conducted. Ball (1993) states that a pilot interview is imperative to collecting background information and to adapting research questions that are suitable in an interview. An advantage of this form of research was "that the opinions and views expressed throughout the interview stem from one source: the interviewee. This makes it fairly straightforward for the author to locate specific ideas with specific people" (Denscombe, 2007, p.176).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is utilised for this qualitative study. TA identifies recurrent features/patterns across the data set (Hansen, 2006). This is achieved by focusing on what participants say and how they say it. There are a number of ways TA can be used. Specific to this study, TA was used inductively, with coding and analysis being a mixture of semantic and latent. Inductive means the analysis is driven by and reflective of the content of the data. Semantic coding is used by capturing meanings that were explicitly stated, by taking some words and phrases at face value. Latent coding involves a degree of inference, where assumptions or opinions, which are not explicitly stated, are captured (Braun, Clarke & Rance, 2015).

TA has six steps. The first and second steps in this analysis are familiarisation and coding respectively. The data transcripts from the interviews in this study were read and re-read, noting ideas, concepts and points of interest. A code was then applied to various pieces of data, providing a summary of points of interest in the data. Similar codes, which overlap, were merged together. The third and fourth steps involved searching for and reviewing themes. Codes were combined to create potential themes. The author then decided whether this potential theme will be: 1) relevant to answering the research question, 2) relevant across more than one/two of the transcripts and 3) has a clear core concept underpinning it. If the criteria was met, the theme was chosen as a candidate themes. Steps five and six involves naming themes and writing up the thematic analysis respectively. Analysing the clustered codes developed relevant names. An analysis of the themes was then completed discussing the point of interest and how the theme was relevant to answering the research question (Braun, Clarke & Rance, 2015).

Setting for Interviews

The context of a study is an important consideration, particularly in designs with qualitative aspects (Depoy & Gitlin, 2011). Interviews are conducted within school environment. This allows participants to discuss the topic of interest in their natural context. The mixed school in this study has five hundred and fifty students attending. Some students are receiving support from the SET team, SNAs and there is a Speech and Language class available in the school. The girls' school in this study has two hundred and sixty-five students enrolled. Students are receiving support from SET team and SNA support. It is important to note there are students with SEN attending both schools included in this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are associated with protecting research participants from any harm associated with their involvement in the research. For the purpose of this study ethical permission was sought and granted by the ethics committee at Marino Institute of Education (MIE). There are a number of ethical issues considered in this study. These include confidentiality, protection from harm and the consideration that the participants are a professional group. Confidentiality was adhered to in line with ethical guidelines. This was achieved by storing the data collected in a locked filing cabinet and on a password encrypted USB (Universal Serial Bus). Protection from harm was considered, by requesting the principals of the schools in this study to sign a letter of consent if the interviews were approved. In order to protect the participants, consent was sought from the participants themselves. Although they were required to provide names for the consent forms, their identity is anonymised during the transcription process.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity refers to the trustworthiness, accuracy and consistency of research findings (Kvale & Brinkman 2009). With the specific goals of this research in mind, Creswell's (2007) eight validation strategies were viewed as the most applicable to this study. Creswell recommended the application of at least 2 of these strategies, to ensure reliability and validity amongst research findings (Creswell, 2007). Two of Creswell's strategies, employed in this research are clarifying and documenting author bias and member checking.

Clarifying and documenting author bias. Due to the author's personal experience in SEN, it was necessary to record and clarify bias throughout the research process, through the use of a reflective journal. Any prior experiences, beliefs or preferences of the author were documented prior to commencing the study, while also recording any personal thoughts or interpretations, which emerged during the study. This allows the reader to understand and identify the author's position in relation to the topic of the study, as well as any existing biases or assumptions, which may be impacting upon the data interpretation process (Merriam, 1988).

Member checking. Member checking was conducted as part of the validation process, to ensure the information provided by participants is accurately portrayed by the author (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process involved sending data, analyses and interpretations back to the participants, allowing them to confirm or question the accuracy of the author's account (Creswell, 2007). All participants reported their satisfaction with the representation of their contributions in this study.

Rigour

In qualitative studies, rigour refers to the precision of a study in terms of planning, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Mays & Pope, 1995). The main strategy employed in this study to achieve rigour is transparency of methods.

Transparency. Transparency of methods is used to address rigour in this study. This is completed through thoroughly describing how the research is conducted, how and why participants are selected, what methods that are used, and how the analysis is conducted. Resulting in the reader being enabled to judge for oneself the suitability of the research design in addressing the research question (Hansen, 2006).

Conclusion

It is hoped that through in-depth discussion of the methodology in this chapter the research is clearly defined. The data gathered through this research methodology is presented and analysed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings, Analyse and Discussion

This chapter presents key findings on factors that empower teachers to create an inclusive learning environment for children with SEN. This study investigates their relevance to professional practice through the 'New Model' and children's learning. The findings of the qualitative methodologies described in Chapter 3 are analysed and discussed. The significance of the findings is considered, and related to educational literature, under the following headings: teacher training, evolution of policy, factors affecting SEN inclusion in classrooms and pedagogical approaches towards SEN. A number of conclusions are drawn after considering the findings as a whole.

Teacher Training

As referred to in Chapter 2, significant changes in terms of provision to schools have happened over the past two years in Ireland. The new approach to SEN with regards to the 'New Model' left schools feeling overwhelmed as no training was provided to the two schools in this study. Norrell (1997) suggested that an inclusive classroom requires prior and ongoing training for teachers. However, the majority of participants in this study reported that their ITE did not provide adequate preparation on how to create an inclusive classroom. One participant described her first working experience as having "*no knowledge of how to help children with SEN. In college, I had three lectures on SEN*" (T6). T2 agreed that training was not satisfactory, "*the undergrad programme was geared towards the lower ability and higher ability children, not children with SEN*". Garner (1996) agrees that teachers are apprehensive about their ability to teach pupils with SEN and have found their preparation for inclusive classrooms inadequate at best.

One finding worth noting is that the teachers who qualified over 10 years ago initially felt "in-limbo" as more diverse populations entered the schools each year (T2). "*In the last few years we are experiencing a huge variety in special needs, social background and children coming from war strike areas. I was not taught how to deal with that in college*" (T5). As ITE cannot always perceive changes in society, this left the graduates in a workplace that was not present when they were undergraduates.

Value of teaching experience. With regards to ongoing training, a number of participants shared similar views that *"most of the training is on-the-job learning"* (T1) and that *"the most you will learn is on the job"* (T4). The participants indicated that having many years of experience working as a teacher is an essential ingredient to effectively supporting children with SEN. T3 stated *"experience definitely helps, I feel more prepared than I was as a NQT, but I still wouldn't say I'm completely prepared".* This perception that one has to possess many years of experience in order to attain an inclusive classroom, highlights the need for improved prior and ongoing teacher training.

CPD

The findings revealed that the majority of teachers engaged in CPD courses, which they found to be beneficial towards classroom practice. However, some participants stated that more practical experiences would be more valuable than theoretical courses. T4 expressed that, "*my special education placement in a Speech and Language class was the most beneficial thing I did. I would love instead of the courses over the summer, to be able to volunteer in a special school".* Lydon and King (2009) agree that CPD based on practical and interactive teaching ideas, can have a long-term impact on those involved. The government claims they are

increasing access to high-quality professional development (DES, 2017a). However, T5 claims, that while Special Education Support Services (SESS) courses are provided, they usually take place *"during the day when no sub cover is given".* Although the government encourages CPD, one must question how committed they are if unwilling to grant substitute cover. Similarly, a lack of opportunity for CPD was outlined in a study by Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley (2008). It was found that insufficient CPD contributed to an inability to deliver quality education for children with SEN.

Another significant finding in this study is that participants who engaged in further education, such as a Masters degree, reported that they were more competent in their role as an inclusive educator. T2 explained, *"I would not be able to do the job adequately without the PDSE or be a confident teacher. I don't think anybody should be in SEN with a basic degree".* Similar views and experiences were expressed by T6, *"I did a postgraduate in SEN and then a masters, so I am prepared to teach children with SEN. Before doing that, I would have said no, I wouldn't have been at all able to help them".* Travers et al. (2010) agree that ITE does not prepare teachers to teach with inclusion of all. Evidently, receiving additional education is beneficial in supporting children with SEN. This poses the question of whether further third level education should be a necessity or if there is scope to revise and improve ITE programmes to better equip teachers to facilitate children with SEN.

Furthermore, there appears to be a variation between the CPD provided while completing the Dip compared to Droichead. T8 stated, *"As part of the Dip you had to 20 hours CPD, many of which involved SEN".* In comparison, T7 explained, *"When I was a NQT doing Droichead, I wasn't given any days to do a CPD*

course". Interestingly, in this case, the almost-expired Dip may have offered more opportunities for CPD.

Professional conversations. Teachers benefit from formal and informal learning processes through learning conversations (Teaching Council, 2016). This was also reflected in this study as all participants found *"staff members and colleagues' advice is valuable when dealing with SEN"* (T5). Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler (2002, p.7) stated: "It is through shared experiences that colleagues can help one another to articulate what they currently do and define what they might like to do". The 'New Model' suggests that professional conversations enhance the learning of children with SEN. It is required that the classroom teacher and SET work collaboratively to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of individual pupils (DES, 2017). T3 also stated the importance of this: *"Teachers need to work together to teach the children in front of them, rather than the curriculum set out by the NCCA, they must adapt"*.

Professional conservations are not strictly limited to colleagues' advice, as T1 claimed, *"I always ask students on teaching practice what colleges are recommending"*. Conversations serve as an accessible tool for all teachers, as a more knowledgeable other can share practical recommendations that are feasible for that given school. Peer support and coaching is a form of professional conversations that can take place. Gingiss (1993) revealed that peer coaching is more powerful in terms of transfer of training than all other training components. Therefore, if access to CPD courses is limited, professional conversations can provide an accessible means through which one can gain valuable learning.

Evolution of SEN Policy

Many changes have taken place in policy when it comes to SEN in Ireland. The SERC recommended more integration and as little of segregation that is possible (DES, 1993). T2 trusts that this is being achieved: "*There has been a shift in focus towards inclusivity and bringing those children with SEN into the community. Beforehand they were segregated. Yes, they were receiving an education but from a social and emotional point of view, they were segregated*" (T2).

The 'New Model'. All teachers agreed that the 'New Model' is much better and *"more flexible"* (T8) than the models in previous times such as the GAM. One teacher concurred with this statement:

> *The old model was quite restrictive; it didn't really suit a whole school approach to sharing out support hours. If a child had 5 hours, they had to get those hours each week. We had cases where a child was given 5 hours in 1ˢᵗ class and were still receiving those hours in 5ᵗʰ class, but didn't need them and they were of no benefit.* (T6)

Shevlin, Winter & Flynn (2013) concluded in their study that teachers working within the GAM conveyed clear concerns with their individual and school capacity to develop inclusive learning environments. The 'New Model' addresses those concerns and is welcomed; evidently as all participants commend the changes in policy and describe it as a *"great stepping-stone towards inclusivity"* (T4).

As previously mentioned, the 'New Model' provides a greater level of autonomy for schools in how to manage and deploy additional teaching support within their school, based on the individual learning needs of pupils, as opposed to being based primarily on a diagnosis of disability (DES, 2017). The majority of teachers found this to be true. *"We now have the autonomy to say we need in-class*

support or if a child needs to go out for help" (T5). T2 stated*, "Children now get support because of a need rather than a label".* Participants found they are better able to cater for children with SEN since the introduction of the model. Schools now deploy resources based on each pupil's individual learning needs (DES, 2017). There is *"no longer a need for a diagnosis to give extra help to a child"* (T3). T4 stated *"It's made a huge difference to teachers because we are teaching the children each day and we know what children need help".*

Participants agree that the 'New Model' is *"much more suited to a whole school approach"* (T5). Collaboration is now a priority in schools. Both class teachers and SET are more informed on the SEN population of the school and are *"singing off the same hymn sheet"* (T5). T2 stated that the 'New Model' has *"brought the mainstream teachers more into the picture, before that it was very much up to the Learning Support or Resource Teacher who had to look after children with SEN".* She went on to say *"Whereas now its classroom based, with teachers starting the support plans from the minute they notice children aren't meeting targets. There's more shared ownership in making sure children are progressing".* T6 shared the same opinion, *"there's more shared responsibility and children are less likely to fall through the cracks".* It is evident the changes in policy has been favorable by all teachers in this study and is benefiting those who need it the most, children with SEN, who do not have a diagnosis. As of now, no research has been completed on the effectiveness or teachers' perspective of this 'New Model.' Therefore it is not possible to compare the participants' perspectives on the 'New Model' to other Irish teachers perspectives.

New approaches to SEN in schools. The 'New Model' has restructured the support roles within schools and recommends more in-class support as opposed to

withdrawal of children. As a result better communication and collaboration is required of teachers. They are now working along side one another while aiming to allow those with SEN to be better able to access the curriculum. *"The learning support hours have been put altogether and can be shared out where they are needed"* (T6). A very significant change that has taken place is that *"the Learning Support and Resource Teachers are no longer two separate entities, they are now one, known as a SET or a SEN teacher"* (T2).

 This merge of support has:

> *Meant that the Resource Teacher isn't just taking children for resource at a time and the Learning Support Teacher isn't just taking children for English and Maths, they are now pooling the caseload together. So now both the teachers were supporting English and Maths.* (T6)

> The new approach recommends that in-class support is best practice as *"children learn best with their peers"* (T6). T1 claimed, *"there's much more of a push towards in-class support rather than withdrawal if it can be avoided. It's much more geared towards children learning together now".* The 'New Model' depends on the class teacher and SET to plan collaboratively through in-class support. Consequently the class teacher must complete a stage 1 continuum of support plan, if a child's learning is not satisfactory. This aims to support the SEN *"on the first level of support, at a classroom level"* (T2). However:

> *If it's a case that the targets are not being met, the SET team will intervene, they may help with target writing, they may come into the classroom or withdraw children. It may be that we need support from an outside agency, as the child may be on the top level of the continuum of support, we will apply for extra support such as SLT, educational psychologist or OT.* (T5)

Planning for SEN. Participants expressed positive views on the continuum of support plans, *"they are great, the targets are so specific"* (T1). Although the 'New Model' promotes in-class support, the majority of teachers were not availing of this and still using withdrawal. T4 stated, *"The SET teacher came in to support a child with ASD in September. However, withdrawal was what was needed for the child"*. T5 also stated withdrawal was being used in her classroom *"My student with ASD refuses to do his work in the classroom, but when he's with his SNA in different room, he can concentrate and will do his work"*. She also stated *"inclusion for the sake of inclusion is not worth it"*. Overall teachers' interpretations of the 'New Model' and accompanying approaches were affirmative and useful in the school context.

Factors Affecting SEN Inclusion in Classrooms

Inclusion presents many challenges; its fluid nature and constantly evolving definition are some of the difficulties that a mainstream teacher faces. *Once you think you are being inclusive, you are in fact not being inclusive. Inclusion is constantly changing. There's no definition on inclusion and that shows how broad it is* (T6). Booth (1996) trusts this to be true, as he states inclusion in education is an unending set of processes, rather than a state.

Class size. Class size is a prominent theme associated with challenges when attempting to adopt inclusivity. T5 stated:

> I am teaching 27 children and three of those have huge needs in the class. It's difficult to be mindful of the needs while I'm teaching 24 other students. I try to facilitate all their needs by changing different things within the room but still there's children in all class lessons who be won't be fully in engaged.

Participants' concerns are consistent with research results, which outline the impact of class size on teachers' readiness and confidence in implementing inclusive approaches, making it an almost impossible task (Griffin & Shevlin, 2007). Teachers reported the advantages of individualised in-class support, however, this is only feasible with a small class size or the support of a SNA. T4 offered further insight into the practicality of individualised approaches when teaching a large class: *"If you have 30 children in your class, and one needs to go for a walk and lift something heavy, there's no way that can be made inclusive"*. Bryant and Bryant (1998) argue that students with SEN demand personalised intervention programmes to suit their requirements. Some teachers expressed that UDL while great in theory, is of no benefit to a whole class in certain situations, as some children need to be individualised. Katz (2015) also found that teachers articulated several barriers to the implementation of UDL, which included large class size.

Lack of resources. Insufficient funding and personnel affects teachers' ability to be inclusive (Pivik, McComas & Laflamme, 2002). Participants agreed that there were inadequate resources available in their schools: *"There's a lack of teacher time, lack of staff and lack of infrastructure"* (T4). As previously mentioned, the population of children with SEN is rising. This directly influences the need for resources. T3 informed the author: *"many children need sensory breaks, we have been advised to do this but we simply do not have the space or rooms to carry this out"*. T4 also stated that *"You can be given all the advice needed but if you do not have the resources it's just not possible to carry out what is being advised"*. Research supports participant's concerns, suggesting that factors contributing to workload stress include time and supply shortages (Brunetti, 2006).

As previously referred to, CPD can be very informative, however a number of teachers explained that implementing approaches often depends on availability of resources. T5 explained *"I did an ICT CPD course for SEN which was very equipment focused so it was hard to implement it when you are lacking resources"*. While building knowledge and skills is paramount to best practice, the implementation of approaches proposed through CPD is only constructive if there are resources readily available (Lydon & King, 2009).

Support from outside agencies. Teachers noted the benefits of receiving support from outside agencies, such as NEPS, OT, SLT, however; these can be difficult services to obtain, as public waiting lists are very long. T8 stated, *"we need more support from outside agencies, it's very difficult to get them to come into schools"*. T4 made the point that *"in special schools there's usually an OT, SLT and Physiotherapist involved with the school. And although, there's a huge push to integrate children with SEN in mainstream, we do not have those facilities here"*. Although teachers are now able to allocate support hours where needed, accessing health professionals for those on the top level of the continuum of support appears to be extremely challenging for teachers. Research reflects low teacher satisfaction internationally with psychological and outside services (Anthun, 1999).

Interestingly, participants suggested more resources could be accessed if they had more power to make such demands. Teachers expressed that *"I feel that what a Psychologist, OT or even Physiotherapist say means more than a teacher's opinion, which is so frustrating"*. (T6). This view was shared by T3 who claimed, *"we are professionals, but our opinion doesn't have as much impact to access resources as an OT or Psychologist, even though we are with the children 5 days a week"*.

SNAs. Many teachers stated they were unsatisfied with the policy on SNA allocation. *"SNAs should not be for just care needs"* (T7). Most participants agreed that for SEN inclusion in mainstream settings to be successful, there must be more SNAs.

> *Lack of SNAs, is a massive problem. They are not given for academic reasons. You may have a child who can feed themselves and use the toilet, but simply cannot manage in a mainstream class without a SNA. I think the whole SNA policy is wrong.* (T4)

A change in policy was desired by most, *"the SNA policy has to be revisited"* (T3). T1 expressed that *"each year there's always the concern that SNA support might be withdrawn"*. Lack of SNAs impact those with SEN negatively, as teachers struggle to employ inclusivity, as the priority becomes basic classroom management. Keating and O'Connor (2012) found in their study that SNAs are becoming increasingly involved in duties outside their official remit. This further demonstrates the need for a change in policy regarding the role of a SNA. This would allow access to SNA support to be provided not solely based on care needs.

Challenging behaviour. Participants found challenging behaviour to be a difficulty when attempting to foster an inclusive classroom. Lindsay et al. (2013) concurs that teachers identified understanding and managing behaviour as a barrier to an inclusive environment. T1 stated, *"a child with social emotional difficulties is going to act out in-class. They are going to be potentially louder than the others, which will have a big impact on the class"*. T7 also found behaviour issues in a room to be challenging towards inclusive practice as well, *"if a child with SEN cannot manage and has a meltdown, the whole class suffers"*. Research proves that

noise levels that exceed are likely to compromise children's ability to engage in lessons (Dockrell & Shield, 2006).

Pedagogical Approaches Towards SEN

It is imperative that the author identifies the specific approaches being utilised in the classroom to foster inclusion. T3 stated *"I use ICT a lot to integrate children and ensure that they are adequately included in the classroom"*. Research has confirmed that ICT can greatly enhance the lives of those in society who traditionally face exclusion on the grounds of physical or mental capability (Sloan, Nelson & Sloan, 2007). Participants noted that teachers must be mindful *"of the needs of the child and work with those needs"* (T1). Furthermore a teacher must possess: *"an awareness of the child's needs, a full understanding of their diagnosis, strengths and weaknesses, so it can be worked with going forward"* (T2). Stenhouse (1981) furthers this statement by claiming, teachers will change the world of the school by understanding it.

Other approaches implemented by participants are multi-sensory strategies to learning, which research has shown to be most effective in supporting children with SEN (Multi-Sensory Approaches to Teaching, n.d.). T7 uses varied approaches for specific SEN: *"A child with ADHD, I would place away from distractions and in close proximity to me. A child with dyslexia, I would have a colour overlay on the board, so instead of looking at a white screen, they're looking at a pastel colour"*.

Movement breaks. Most participants incorporate movement breaks into their school day. They noticed numerous benefits for all children, not just those with SEN. Research has confirmed there are improved brain functioning as well as student behaviour, associated with movement breaks (Reilly, Buskist & Gross, 2012). T8 stated, *"I've really noticed the benefits of getting the children up out of*

their seats and involved in a whole class movement activity, such as dance or a game, between lessons". Another participant referred to a student with ASD and noted *"he needs these breaks to stay in the classroom".* Evidently, these whole-class movement breaks are particularly helpful in improving their regulation and ability to remain in the classroom, decreasing the need for withdrawal.

Visual timetables. Visual timetables were recommended by all participants as a means through which to allow all children to anticipate the coming day. Research has found that transitioning is often difficult for children with SEN (Janus et al., 2007). Visual timetables *"enable all children to transition from lesson to lesson with greater ease, particularly those with SEN"* (T7). This tool can be implemented in any given school as *"they're so easy to make and so effective"* (T3). It is evident from the findings of this study that numerous approaches are being utilised and adapted to meet the needs of all children, thus fostering an inclusive classroom. The participants see the success of these approaches. *"One of my students started in September with no English and now can hold a conversation. I have another child with SLT difficulties, so when you hear a specific sound being articulated. You're like yes, I did that!"* (T2)

Reflective practice. Overall teachers stated, *"reflecting and developing innovative, creative methods can lead to a more inclusive environment"* (T7). Ainscow (2007, p.4) furthers this statement; reflective approaches "help to make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action". Furthermore, granting teachers opportunity to develop a better understanding of SEN, consequently, enabling them to provide better access to more varied and holistic learning experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter presents the analysis of data from interviews conducted with 8 research participants. An overarching theme of an inability to be fully inclusive is revealed, despite all participants' advocating inclusive practice in the classroom. A number of recommendations as to how to achieve such developments are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Using a qualitative research approach, this study addresses teacher training, evolution of policy, factors affecting SEN success in classrooms and pedagogical approaches towards SEN. Based on the findings of this research, a number of recommendations for practice and policy is presented in this chapter. Opportunity for further research is suggested, while the limitations of this research project are established.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Participants' ITE is not perceived as a valuable foundation of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills. Another significant finding is that pedagogical training does not provide sufficient guidance for classroom practice on SEN. Some participants engaged in further education, which is necessary, in their opinions, to adequately support those with SEN. The author highlighted the possibility of there being a need to engage in further third level education, CPD or otherwise revising ITE programmes.

Teachers clearly illustrated that it is the experiences encountered throughout their teaching career, in the form of experience, CPD and interactions with colleagues, which have developed their pedagogical practice. It is highlighted by the author that this need for many years of experience in order to support inclusivity, is a concern. Participants also reported an interest in receiving practical training, offering targeted guidance and strategies for the various SEN. Experiences of this kind could lead to more mixed pedagogical practice, raising teachers' awareness of various methods of achieving their learning and development objectives for their students with SEN.

The 'New Model' for SEN is blending in and enabling the SET team to support children through in-class support and withdrawal. Participants offer diverse perspectives on the benefits of the 'New Model.' This was associated with enhanced student engagement, a whole school approach and flexibility. It is clear that the value is being seen in the 'New Model' and teachers are starting to feel better able to cater for those with SEN, as there is more collaboration.

A number of various factors also emerged as challenging to inclusive practice in the classroom, primarily: class size, lack of resources and the method through which SNAs are allocated. The challenging behaviour attributed to a child with SEN may provide an explanation for the continued reliance on withdrawal in the classroom. It seems, however, that the factor underlying and exacerbating these issues is the lack of support available to teachers from outside agencies. This significant resource issue must be addressed in order to ensure the implementation of sufficient support for students and teachers.

This study reveals the various methods teachers adopt to ensure they are catering for those with SEN in the classroom, while simultaneously reflecting on the literature available regarding these approaches. These approaches include the use of ICT, strategic seating plans, movement breaks and visual timetables. The success of these strategies is acknowledged by all participants and indicates the many benefits of implementing such approaches in all schools.

Policy Recommendations

The participants' low satisfaction on SNA access for children who may not necessarily have 'care needs' but rely on that support to remain in a mainstream setting is a significant finding. Therefore, a recommendation in policy is to alter the job description of a SNA so that it encompasses academic responsibility of the child.

Another recommendation is to have health professionals, OTs, SLTs and physiotherapists affiliated with each mainstream school. This would grant children with SEN the same specialised support, as they would receive in a SEN school.

Research Recommendations

As the 'New Model' is relatively recent in Ireland, there is a dearth of literature surrounding it. A richer insight of the implementation of the model would be possible if further research was conducted on this topic.

Limitations

While it must be acknowledged that the small-scale nature of this study permits only a brief glimpse into teachers' pedagogical practice, the findings provide valuable insights into factors that are enabling inclusive practice and also preventing it from happening. These results heighten awareness of everyday issues in the classroom, which could lead to negligence towards children with SEN. The aforementioned findings must be considered in order to encourage and facilitate a more inclusive pedagogical approach by all teachers in the primary school context.

Qualitative studies allow the author to immerse themselves in the research setting, as well as the data collection process, interacting with participants in a direct manner, acting as the sole interpreter and mediator of the information collected (Merriman, 1998). This level of interaction and involvement, however, can operate as a constraint as well as a strength of the research design (Creswell, 2007). The presence of the author during data collection may restrict participant response (Anderson, 2010). The participant may attempt to offer what they perceive to be the 'right' answers to questions posed, in an attempt to please the author, rather than provide their honest, unaltered personal opinions (Crawford, 1997). Furthermore, interviews rely on participants' ability to accurately and honestly recall details about

their pedagogical practice. This however, may lead to inaccuracies in the details provided (Creswell, 2007).

The limited time period of this study is another constraint associated with this research. The primary data was collected over a six-month period, and the entire research study was completed over a nine-month period, from September 2018-May 2019. Perhaps a more in-depth understanding of participants' practices and preferences could have been gained through repeated interviews and observations, if time had allowed (Pole & Lampard, 2002).

Analysis and interpretation in qualitative research can also be quite time consuming (Anderson, 2010). Before formal data analysis, detailed transcriptions of each interview were conducted. Pole and Lampard commented on the demands of such a process; an hour-long interview takes approximately seven hours to transcribe (2002). The collected data in this study is comprised of 8 interviews, the duration of each between 15-30 minutes. Thus, the transcription process, followed by the data analysis procedure, made the overall preparation, and conduction of analysis a time consuming and taxing endeavour.

This study includes a relatively small sample. The results gained from this small study may not be generalisable to teacher practice across all primary schools (Price & Murnan, 2004). While each of these factors present certain limitations to the generalisability and reliability of the study, the findings, nevertheless, present insightful, relevant, and reliable data relating to inclusion of SEN, which can be used to achieve advancements in this area.

Conclusion

This chapter establishes the findings of this study, which have the potential to enact changes, not only in the practice of the author, but also in the classroom

practice of all teachers. Through the identification of factors operating to inhibit the

implementation of a varied teaching approach, measures can be taken to overcome

such barriers and facilitate advancements in pedagogical practice.

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Appendix A

List of Questions for Interviews

1. What was it like before the changes were in policy in relation to SEN were implemented?

2. What are the main changes in policy?

3. What has changed in practice in schools and classrooms?

4. What are the guidelines/policy for SEN in your school?

5. Describe the rational for the current policy on provision for children with SEN? Would you like to see changes in your school? Is it satisfactory from your perspective?

6. Are you yourself as a teacher adequately prepared to support children?

7. What factors helped you create an inclusive classroom?

8. Do you use in-class support?

9. What empowered you to create meaningful learning experiences for children with SEN?

10. Are there challenges associated with inclusive education in mainstream settings?

11. Are you satisfied that the children with additional learning needs in your classroom are being supported sufficiently? If so can you give an example?

12. Does the 'New Model' ensure that the needs of all children are being met mainstream schools?

13. Would the children with SEN children be supported and resourced for better in a SEN school? Can you give an example of a child if you think so?

14. As a NQT, did you feel that you were able to support children with SEN who had complex needs?

Appendix B

Letter of Consent to Principal/ Board of Management

Dear Principal/ Board of Management,

My name is Róisín Lawler, I am a 2nd year Professional Masters of Education student from Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. This year I am undertaking a research project, my research supervisor is Dympna Mulkerrin. This research is based on the question: How are teachers enhancing their practices to facilitate the learning of students with special educational needs?

I am writing to request permission to interview teachers in your school about this topic and use the school grounds as a site for interviews. If permission is granted, the teachers will sign a consent letter. A copy of the consent letter will be given to you for approval, prior to distribution.

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me by email on rlawlerpme17@momail.mie.ie or if you wish by phone on 0862364419.
Thank you for your time,

Kind regards,

Róisín Lawler

Appendix C

Letter of Consent to Teachers

Dear teachers,

My name is Róisín Lawler, I am a 2nd year Professional Masters of Education student from Marino Institute of Education. This year I am undertaking a research project, my research supervisor is Dympna Mulkerrin. My research is based on the question: How are teachers enhancing their practices to facilitate the learning of students with special educational needs? To be enabled to answer this question, I would love the opportunity to interview you about the kinds of practices that you are using within the classroom for children with special education needs. There is a lack of research in this area and by gaining your insights into the classroom environment; I will be enabled to complete a research project in this area. I am hoping that you might find some time to meet with me, of course participation is completely voluntary. If you would like to participant in this study please sign the slip below and leave it in the school office. I promise to not take too much of your time, interviews should take 15-30 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, which will be later destroyed. No names of participants will be mentioned in the research project. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me by email on rlawlerpme17@momail.mie.ie or if you wish by phone on 0862364419.

Thank you for your time,

Kind regards,

Róisín Lawler

Appendix D

Consent Form for Participants

I _____ agree to participate in this research project, which

aims to study 'how are teachers enhancing their practices to facilitate the learning of

students with special educational needs.'

- I am aware of my part in this research.

- I understand that interviews will be recorded, transcribed and afterwards

   destroyed.

- I understand that the research is confidential.

- I understand participation is voluntary and I reserve the right to withdraw at

   any stage.

Print name_____

Sign name _____

Date   _____

Appendix E

Application for Ethical Approval of Research Proposals

Title of Research: How are teachers enhancing their practices to facilitate the learning of

students with special educational needs?

Research Reference Number: N/A

Researcher's Name: Róisín Lawler

Email Address: rlawlerpme17@momail.mie.ie

Category of Proposer: Student

Student Number: 17342929

Course of Study: PME

Please indicate the level of approval required: Level 1

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1. **Please give a structured abstract of the proposed research, including the methods you intend to use**

The method of research the researcher will be conducting is qualitative research. This form of research according to Cassell and Symon (1994) is usually thought of as the approach that is the most flexible research design to be found. The instrument that will be used will be interviews, which will be recorded on a dictaphone and later transcribed. The researcher hopes to interview eight teachers who have been teaching a range of years in Irish primary schools. The researcher will take a semi-structured approach to collecting data. The interviews will allow the interviewee speak widely on the issues that arise. However, the researcher will have a structured list of questions to be answered. A pilot interview will

be conducted and alterations to the questions may take place afterwards. Ball (1993) states that a pilot interview is imperative to collecting background information and to adapting research questions that are suitable in an interview. An advantage of this form of research "is that the opinions and views expressed throughout the interview stem from one source: the interviewee. This makes it fairly straightforward for the researcher to locate specific ideas with specific people" (Denscombe, 2007, p. 176).

The researcher will distribute preliminary letters of consent to two schools. A mutually convenient time and place will be organised by the researcher to meet the teachers who agree to partake in this study. They will be informed prior to this of the length of time the interview will take. Interviews will recordeed on a dictaphone, and later transcribed. Once the information is gathered it will be

2. Please answer the following questions in relation to your proposed research. Questions (b), (c) or (d) will require detailed explanations if answered 'yes' and will be referred for additional scrutiny by the MERC. Answering 'Yes' to (e) will require a separate application to the relevant HSE REC.	Please tick	
	Yes	**No**
a. Does the research involve work with children (under-18) or vulnerable adults? If 'Yes', has appropriate Garda clearance (or equivalent) been obtained (include details)?		✓
Please provide the date of issue on the Certificate of Garda Vetting.		
b. Could any aspect of the research give rise to any form of harm to participants, including the researcher(s)?		✓
c. Could any aspect of the research produce information that could lead to criminal prosecution of the participants or others?		✓
d. Is deception of the participants planned in any aspect of the research? If yes, provide details.		✓
e. Does any aspect of the research involve patients (or their relatives or carers) or other users of health and social care services, the premises or facilities of such services, access to personal records or the participation of health or social care staff?		✓

---

3. (a) Who are the proposed participants, e.g. teachers; students?

The proposed participants are teachers.

(b) What is your relationship with them?

The researcher will be undertaking a ten-week advanced school placement; this is where the participants will be gathered. The researcher will also distribute letters of consent to a school where a past school placement was completed.

---

4. (a) How will you recruit participants?

The researcher will also distribute letters of consent to a school where a past school placement was completed. The researcher will distribute preliminary letters of consent to the two schools. It will outline that participation is completely voluntary. The partipants who agree to partake will sign a preliminary letter of consent.

(b) Please detail any ethical aspects that must be considered, including the proposed use of any incentives.

Confidentiality is an important concern when undertaking interviews. Names will not be used when data is recorded. Permission from the interviewee will be sought to record the interview. The researcher does not intend to use incentives.

5. (a) What is the location(s) at which the data collection will be undertaken?

A mutually convenient time and place will be organised by the researcher to meet the teachers who agree to partake in this study.

(b) Describe any circumstances that might give rise to security concerns for participants or researchers?

All data including the dictaphone will be stored in a secure location. Transcriptions will be written, analysed and deleted from a password incrypted laptop.

(c) Describe any conflicts of interest where data might be critical of working practices, people etc. or disclosure of illegal activities?

Teachers will be asked to disclose classroom practices, which they use with children with SEN. This may be critical of working practices. The reseacher intends to be sensitive and non-judgemental of all information disclosed. However, participants will be informed prior to interview that if any illegal practices are being carried out, the researcher has an obligation to inform the appropriate authorites eg. TUSLA.

6. Please indicate how informed consent of all participants will be gained. For participants under the age of 18, indicate how the informed consent of both the participant and the participant's parent/guardian will be gained. (Draft consent forms MUST be attached – see question 8 for guidance.)

Participates will be qualified teachers. The researcher will distribute preliminary letters of consent to two schools. It will outline that participation is completely voluntary. The partipants who agree to partake will sign a letter of consent. They will be informed prior to the interview of the length of time it will take. Once the information is gathered it will be analysed and labeled. The data will be sorted through common themes after transcription. It will then be inserted into grids so that the researcher can fully analyse the information and be enabled to code it.

7. (a) Please indicate how the participants' rights to privacy (inc. confidentiality and anonymity) and the privacy of their data will be protected. Highlight potential limitations of confidentiality in the ethics form and information sheets for participants (e.g. for small samples or insider research and how this will be addressed).

The participants' names and school they work in will not be mentioned in the final dissertation work. A limitation of this qualitative research is that only a small sample group will partake, as this form of research is very time consuming. A challenge that will be faced, is gathering eight teachers who are prepared to contribute to this study through recorded interviews. The researcher will overcome this difficulty by extending my research to interviewing Special Needs Assistants (SNA's). Another difficulty that may arise from conducting interviews is having technical difficulties from using the Dictaphone this will be dealt with a second Dictaphone will be brought to all interviews.

(b) Please also indicate how the data will be stored (and ultimately destroyed as appropriate).

Data collected will be stored in locked filing cabinet and on a password encrypted USB (Universal Serial Bus). Although participants are required to provide names for consent forms, their identity is anonymised during the transcription process. The data will be deleted and destroyed in 6 months after the submission of the research.

8. Please complete the checklist below to confirm you have considered all ethical aspects of consent. **(Note that the consent forms that must accompany this application; any omission or inadequacy in detail will result in a request for amendments).**	
I have attached (an) appropriate consent form(s) which include the freedom to withdraw at any stage without having to offer a reason.	✓
Each consent form has full contact details of the researcher to enable prospective participants to make follow-up inquiries	✓
Each consent form has full details, in plain non-technical language, of the purpose of the research and the proposed role of the person being invited to participate	✓
Each consent form has full details of the purposes to which the data (in all their forms: text, oral, video, imagery etc) will be put, including for research dissemination purposes	✓
Each consent form explains how the privacy of the participants and their data will be protected, including the storage and ultimate destruction of the data as appropriate	✓
Each consent form gives assurances that the data collection (questionnaires, interviews, tests etc) will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner, and that the participant has the right to cease participation at any time and without the need to provide a reason	✓
Please include here any other comments you wish to make about the consent form(s)	✓

Has your proposal been submitted to any other Research Ethics Committee? No

Declaration by All Proposers:

I have read and understood Marino Institute of Education's policy on ethics in educational research: and the Trinity College Dublin Good Research Practice Policies:

I declare that the details above reflect accurately my research proposal and I undertake to seek updated approval if substantive changes are proposed after this submission. I have consulted an authoritative set of educational research guidelines.

**Signed:	Date**

(Students Only) My proposals are based on consultation with my supervisor(s).

**Signed:	Date**

Supervisor's Signature: (**Student Proposal Only**, first supervisor only if there are two)

**Signed:	Date**

In instances where supervisors feel that their specialised expertise may be important information for the MERC to take into account (e.g.in relation in researching highly sensitive areas such as trauma/abuse), please submit an additional page with any relevant information.

Final Approval Signed-Off by Research Ethics Committee

Signed: Date