University of Southampton

Doctoral Programme in Educational Psychology

Title: What should schools do to promote the successful inclusion

of pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties?

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Abstract

Inclusion policy and practice to date has been driven by the view that wherever possible, children with special educational needs (SEN) should have access to mainstream schooling and the opportunities it provides to participate in wider society (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). This is particularly pertinent for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) as they have been identified as being the most difficult to include within mainstream settings. Over the past forty years there has been a shift in the discourse surrounding inclusion, however the shift in terminology has not necessarily been reflected in changes in practice. Research into successful inclusion to date has been driven by attempts to change the ethos of schools, however practical strategies have been found wanting. There is an argument that rather than systemic changes, schools should be focussing on teacher level changes as they are the biggest source of influence on a child's outcomes (Reynolds, 2010). This essay explores research into teacher attitudes and beliefs, relationships with pupils and self-efficacy and the impact this can have on the outcomes of pupils with SEBD. It appears that Educational Psychologists (EPs) are ideally placed to support changes at this level through consultation, promoting pupil voice and training. While teachers have a huge impact on the inclusion of pupils with SEBD the research into parental or pupil attitudes is sadly lacking in this area.

What should schools do to promote the successful inclusion of pupils with social,

emotional and behavioural difficulties?

Inclusion policy and practice to date has been driven by the view that,

wherever possible, children with special educational needs (SEN) should have access

to mainstream schooling and the opportunities it provides to participate in wider

society (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). However, the government's pursuit of equity is

often jeopardised when policies for inclusion are superimposed onto policies of

competition and choice, which appear to reinforce inequality and social division

(Ainscow et al., 2007).

The inclusion agenda is particularly pertinent for those children identified as

having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), as they are often the

most challenging to include within the SEN spectrum (e.g. Burton, Bartlett, &

Anderson de Cuevas, 2009; The Audit Commission, 2002). The relevance is

magnified when we consider that alongside autism, SEBD has been one of the fastest

growing areas of SEN in recent years (House of Commons, 2006). Rather than being

included, children with SEBD are often forced to conform to the norms of the

mainstream school or are segregated within it (Dyson, 1997). In the current climate

of fear and accountability, schools are being discouraged from thinking radically and

addressing inclusion from the bottom-up (Bottery, 2007). Reynolds (2010) argues

that educational research should focus on education as 'experienced', not as

'intended' by policy, however it seems research into inclusion is being driven by

attempts at systemic change rather than addressing the issue at the level of the teacher

and individual pupil.

From schools' perspectives, the way policies relating to inclusion and SEBD

are translated into practice are often unsatisfactory (Goodman & Burton, 2010) and

training for staff to be able to meet the needs of pupils with SEN within their classroom is often lacking or insufficient (Hodkinson, 2009).

In light of these issues, this essay intends to explore inclusion from a perspective of how children with SEBD can be included into mainstream settings, what the evidence is for successful inclusion and what schools could do to overcome the barriers which are often encountered when attempts are made to enact Government driven inclusion policies.

For the purpose of clarity, references to SEN will encompass all categories of need within the following domains: physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional and multiple dimensions (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). SEBD will be defined as the, "abnormality of behaviour, emotions or relationships, sufficiently marked and prolonged to cause handicap in the individual pupil, and/or serious distress or disturbance in the family, the school or community" (Department of Education and Science, 1993, p. 132). While the acronym has changed many times over the past twenty years, this definition still encompasses how SEBD is perceived today.

It would not be possible to discuss inclusion without also referring to exclusion. For the purposes of this essay, references to exclusion will refer to the, "disciplinary exclusion where a pupil is officially removed from education on school premises permanently or for a fixed period of time" (Hatton, 2013, p. 155). It will not refer to internal exclusions, whereby the child is isolated from peers but remains within the school setting.

The definition of inclusion, has been debated over many years, and has been the entire focus of many papers (e.g. Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014), it therefore will need to be given more in-depth consideration, before continuing.

What is Inclusion?

Historically there has been no consensus among academics regarding the meaning or desirability of inclusion, despite the strong policy commitments from the government (Lloyd, Stead, & Kendrick, 2003). This is still true today even with an entire research field dedicated to the topic. Some of the definitional difficulties arise because of the different beliefs around what schools can and should accomplish (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014).

Over the past forty years, there has been a shift in the discourse, moving from 'integration' to 'inclusion'. The Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) referred to the 'locational', 'social' and 'functional' integration of learners with SEN, however there was never an expectation that all learners could or should be integrated into mainstream settings (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Thomas (2015) described the difference in the following terms: 'integration' is the commitment to educating children with SEN in mainstream, whereas 'inclusion' ensures the equality of learning for *all* pupils.

Göransson & Nilholm (2014) also recognise this difference and question whether the current definitions are challenging general education or whether they are simply new names for old practices. Their paper, exploring a wide range of research into inclusion, identified four hierarchical categories within which definitions could be placed: A) placement definition; B) specified individualised definition; C) general individualised definition; and D) community definition. Category A refers to the placement of pupils with SEN within mainstream classrooms; category B as meeting the social and academic needs of pupils with SEN; category C as meeting the social and academic needs of *all* pupils; and category D as a creation of a community.

While many of the government policies refer to category D definitions of inclusion, the criteria needed to be able to successfully research this interpretation are much more demanding and therefore there is little evidence to explain how schools go about creating such 'communities' (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). This definition of inclusion appears to be more of an ideology, rather than something that can be practicably achieved within the current educational climate. For this reason, and due to the limited research around a community-based definition, this essay will be using a category B definition of inclusion, which places the issue of inclusion within the SEN discourse (Mitchell, 2008). This definition enables this essay to explore the social effects of inclusion in addition to the academic aspects, which are particularly applicable for students with SEBD. Interestingly, this definition is synonymous with the previous notion of 'integration' and Thomas (2015) notes that despite the change in language, we still refer to children who have been excluded from mainstream provision as being 'reintegrated' rather than 're-included'. Perhaps therefore, a category B definition fits better with where education currently is rather than the ideology it is promoting.

Hodkinson (2010) describes a situation of inclusion, where policy development and philosophy have outpaced practice. As such there are bound to be barriers to the successful inclusion of pupils with SEBD within mainstream schools.

Barriers to Inclusion

Many studies have reported resistance within schools at attempts to make practices more inclusive and concern around the number of learners with SEBD within classrooms (e.g. Lindqvist, Nilholm, Almqvist, & Wetso, 2011; Pillay, Dunbar-Krige, & Mostert, 2013). Schools also have concerns around the sustainability of inclusion in terms of the cost, training, and changes to the

curriculum, which need to be made to accommodate pupils with SEBD within mainstream settings (Sindelar, Shearer, & Yendol-Hoppey, 2006). In addition, the continuous pressure for raised attainment within mainstream education can create tension and strained relationships between teachers and their pupils in particular when the behaviour of the pupil does not meet adult expectations and is disruptive to lessons (Pillay et al., 2013). Burton et al. (2009) found that these competing policy discourses led to a significant variation of experiences for included pupils with SEBD.

As previously stated, pupils with SEBD have not been as successfully included compared to other pupils with SEN (Thomas, 2015), mainly due to their challenging behaviour (Goodman & Burton, 2010). Thomas (2015) argues that the SEBD label carries negative connotations which can have a damaging effect on preconceptions and educational practices. Research has found that mainstream schools can be openly hostile to the inclusion of certain SEN groups and are particularly reluctant to take on pupils displaying challenging behaviour (McSherry, 2012).

Talmor, Reiter, and Feigin (2005) found that some teachers felt inclusion caused more disciplinary difficulties in class and an increased workload. Their study revealed that teacher attitudes to inclusion were significantly related to teacher burnout. However, it was the teachers with positive attitudes who were the most likely to experience burnout, perhaps because their high expectations around inclusion could not be realised in practice. The authors felt this was an indication of the gap between what was being demanded and how this was being provided for within classrooms.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2010) found that only one third of teachers were activity or regularly implementing resources to

support inclusive practices. This may be because inclusion is only one of several matters on the educational agenda (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014) and there are many conflicting messages being given to teachers around raising attainment as well as addressing diverse needs (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

Goodman and Burton (2010) felt that schools' reliance on learning support units (LSUs), which are separate behaviour provisions within mainstream schools, and the use of extra support staff to address the needs of pupils with SEBD, called in to question the extent to which these pupils were being truly included within mainstream settings. Clough, Garner, Pardeck, and Yuen (2003) felt that some educational establishments were simply not 'fit for purpose' to include all students because of their lack of knowledge, vision and resources.

The issue of lack of training, resources and practical support has been reiterated in several papers (e.g. Goodman & Burton, 2010; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). Atici (2007) called for greater attention to be paid to child psychology within initial teacher training to support teachers in understanding the needs underpinning pupils' behaviour. Research has shown that successful inclusion depends on teacher beliefs (Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008) and their ability to demonstrate a strong personal commitment towards inclusive practices (Grieve, 2009). As such, teacher attitudes and training may be an area where change can be affected at the individual level. This essay will now go onto explore research which has evidenced successful inclusive practices before examining teacher factors in more detail.

Successful Inclusion

Many studies which state they have evidenced successful inclusion cite the ethos of the school and a commitment from the majority of staff as fundamental

(Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cooper, Hart, Lavery, & McLaughlin, 2000). Munn, Lloyd, & Cullen (2000) explored the differences between high and low excluding schools in Scotland and identified four aspects of school ethos evident in schools which were more inclusive: 1) value was given to the personal and social development of pupils; 2) there was a flexible, differentiated, and informal curriculum; 3) they spent time involving parents; 4) they had flexible systems around exclusion and pastoral support available for staff.

Turner and Waterhouse (2003) also looked at two secondary schools' attempts to improve inclusive practices and decrease exclusions. They found that changing the ethos of the school away from one of punishment to one of diagnostic and supportive practice was the most influential in decreasing exclusions.

Despite, research stating the importance of ethos, much of this evidence has been taken from schools which are already identified as being inclusive and therefore gives us little insight in how inclusiveness actually occurs. Cole, Daniels, and Visser (2003) felt that changing the ethos and curriculum of schools was vital to increasing the likelihood of pupils with SEBD having their needs met, however were unable to identify a single approach which could be transplanted to all schools. Göransson and Nilholm (2014) also had difficulty finding methodologically sound studies in their meta-analysis of inclusion research, and hardly any reliable evidence regarding the factors which can make schools and classrooms more inclusive. They stated that this was in contrast to the abundance of advice that was being given to schools. Reynolds (2010) found that references to school-level actions within policy was much greater than references to classroom-level actions, despite the fact that organisational factors do not appear to be very powerful determinants of anything at all.

Some research has examined whole-school approaches to the inclusion of pupils with SEBD with apparent success. Many schools in the US have used a school-wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) approach to achieve socially important behaviour change (Sugai et al., 2000). This systems approach aims to enhance the capacity of schools to adopt and sustain effective practices for all through a variety of techniques such as: individual support plans; targeting interpersonal skills; positive reinforcement; and proactive, skill-building approaches (Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). It appears that this school-wide approach has been successful in the majority of schools at decreasing school-wide problems and creating a positive school climate (Cohen, Kincaid, & Childs, 2007).

Head, Kane, and Cogan (2003) examined the most effective uses of behaviour support funding within secondary schools in Scotland at reducing the exclusions of pupils with SEBD. They found the most effective strategy was co-operative teaching, where learning support teachers were able to facilitate a shift in the way in which SEN was conceptualised away from a within-pupil to a within-curriculum mind-set.

This research reiterates Reynolds' (2010) point that it is the teacher within the class that has the biggest influence over children not the school itself. In fact teacher and classroom effects of achievement outcomes have been found to be 4-5 times greater than school effects (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005). Therefore the remainder of this essay will focus on teachers and their influence on promoting the inclusion of pupils with SEBD.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs

It is likely that when a teacher perceives the difficulties surrounding a pupil with SEBD to be caused by within-child factors, they are less likely to take responsibility or facilitate change. Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill, and Handler

(1999) found that 46% of teachers ascribed challenging behaviour to within-child factors and 33% to home factors. They found that these attributions led to a sense of powerlessness and low willingness to intervene as they perceived the causation to be out of their control. Ryan (2009) found that teachers who embraced personal responsibility were more likely to adapt their classroom in attempts to become more inclusive.

Visser (2000) states that within schools who are committed to inclusion, teachers have a clearer definition and understanding of what SEBD means and flexible and skilled responses to their needs. It appears that for successful inclusion to take place teachers require the knowledge, understanding and skills in order to be able to work with a diversity of pupils (Hodkinson, 2009),

A number of studies have attempted to categorise teacher beliefs towards inclusion. Grieve (2009) identified three categories of teachers, when she explored attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with SEBD: those who were willing to implement inclusion; those who felt inclusion was detrimental to other children within the class; and those who felt children with SEBD required a higher level of support outside of a mainstream setting.

Significant differences have been found between teachers with positive and negative attitudes towards inclusion (Monsen, Ewing, & Kwoka, 2014; Monsen & Frederickson, 2004). Monsen et al. (2014) divided participants into those with high, medium or low attitudes towards inclusion and found those with high attitude scores reported greater levels of satisfaction and less friction than teachers with low attitude scores, which is contrary to the findings of Talmor et al. (2005) previously mentioned.

Monsen et al. (2014) also found significant differences relating to age, where teachers with high attitude scores were significantly younger (M = 35.85 years)

compared to those with low attitude scores (M = 45.50 years). A similar finding was identified by Forlin et al. (2008), who found that concerns around inclusion increased with age and experience.

Scanlon, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, and Stewart (submitted, cited in Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013) suggested there may be a difference between teachers' explicit and implicit beliefs. They found that teachers showed strong implicit negativity towards the stimulus 'EBD pupil' despite positive explicit attitudes. Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) also found that teachers had more favourable implicit views towards SEBD pupils than trainees.

Researchers have proposed that our professional experiences enhance our implicit attitudes towards certain populations (Coogan, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, 2008 cited in Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013), which can mediate favourably or unfavourably towards our feelings, thoughts and actions (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). This may help to explain the apparent contrary findings of these studies. Perhaps younger teachers and trainees have higher explicit beliefs towards inclusion, but their lack of experience is contributing to their negative implicit beliefs. It seems likely that the more experiences teachers have at successfully supporting and managing pupils with SEBD the more positive their implicit attitudes towards this population will become. However, in order to experience success, teachers first need to be able to establish successful relationships with these pupils.

Student-teacher relationships

How teachers interact with students with SEN has a huge impact on their development (Poulou, 2005) and having a caring and skilled member of staff in place, who a pupil trusts and listens to is crucial to supporting that pupil effectively (Thomas, 2015).

Establishing a respectful relationship between a teacher and a pupil with SEBD is invaluable, however this requires a teacher to be willing to connect with a pupil on a personal level (Goodman & Burton, 2010). Goodman and Burton (2010) found that when teachers took the time to find out about their students, their relationship improved. Supportive teacher-student relationships have also been linked to a decrease in aggression (Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003) and an increase in student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement (Martin & Dowson, 2009).

Pillay et al. (2013) promoted a 'bioecological resilience' approach towards supporting pupils with SEBD to become more resilient, through ensuring more promotive experiences (ones which support the individual to cope amid adversity). They found that when relationships between pupils and staff were promotive, they had a stabilising effect and contributed to the pupil's sense of safety, attachment and emotional wellbeing.

On the other hand, strained relationships between teachers and learners are often punctuated by a lack of flexibility and have been shown to be the most significant antecedent leading to poor-to-fit behaviour of pupils with SEBD (Pillay et al., 2013). Teachers often perceive interactions with pupils with SEBD as tense and aversive (Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008) and therefore interventions which support teachers' ability to perceive pupils with SEBD in a different light, may enhance their ability to build effective relationships with these young people. Success or failure at establishing relationships with the pupils in their classrooms will greatly impact on teachers' self-efficacy, which will be explored next.

Teachers' self-efficacy

When challenging behaviour occurs and teachers are not trained to deal with it, low self-efficacy is unavoidable (Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013). Conversely, teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to be open to ideas and experiment with new methods (Stein & Wang, 1988). Therefore, it seems appropriate that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy are more likely to respond positively to attempts by schools to become more inclusive. Although positive beliefs on its own can also be a risk factor to damaging self-efficacy in particular when these beliefs are not able to be realised in practice (Talmor et al., 2005).

Scanlon and Barnes-Holmes (2013) attempted to address these issues by combining two psychological interventions in order to increase teacher attitudes towards inclusion of pupils of SEBD and counteract feelings of inadequacy. The study compared the implicit and explicit attitudes of teacher trainees (N = 20) and teachers (N = 25) in Ireland after a behavioural intervention (BI) and a stress management intervention (SMI).

They found that the BI was successful at increasing both groups' self-efficacy, readiness to make changes, and positive attitudes towards inclusion. However, the SMI had a much greater impact on the implicit positivity of current teachers towards SEBD pupils. Conversely the SMI had little effect on the implicit attitudes of the trainees. This finding suggests that schools need to be aware of the impact age and experience can have on teacher attitudes and that different interventions might be more or less successful depending on the stage of teachers' careers.

This study, is hopefully the start of research which explores interventions around promoting inclusion at the classroom level rather than whole school level. Göransson and Nilholm (2014), call for more, "methodologically sound evidence for

how schools and teachers can proceed in order to achieve greater inclusion" (p. 267), and it appears that research that focuses on practical changes which can be proven to impact on teacher attitudes, relationships with pupils and self-efficacy can go a long way to facilitate change at an individual level for pupils with SEBD within mainstream schools.

Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

This essay raises a number of implications for EPs around the inclusion of pupils with SEBD and the support they might offer to schools. Systemic issues around ethos, which appear crucial to establishing a climate of inclusion (e.g. Cooper et al., 2000), are difficult to change, however EPs are ideally situated to support change at the teacher level.

A greater understanding of SEBD, appears to be a very simple way of changing perspectives (e.g. Visser, 2000). This may be through explicit behaviour training (e.g. Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013) or through consultation and solution-focussed brief therapy (Rhodes, 1993), whereby a change away from a within-child mind-set could be facilitated, thus empowering those working with the child so they are more likely to enact change. As well as this, EPs may also need to support schools' and teachers' understanding of what they perceive inclusion to be and what is achievable within their own setting, so that expectations and actual experiences do not become incompatible.

In addition, EPs are well placed to support student-teacher relationships by providing teachers with insight and understanding into a pupils' behaviour and promoting pupil voice. Encouragement of teachers to take the time to find out about their pupils and get to know their interests, would be one way to begin to build this relationship. Pillay et al. (2013) advocate a resilience-based approach, in particular to

support pupils being reintegrated back into mainstream schools, which facilitates the promotive emotional experiences of the learner and the development of relationships with teachers, peers and parents.

Finally, EPs may be able to support teacher self-efficacy through providing them with skills and support in managing pupils with SEBD and challenging behaviour, but also with managing their own stresses, anxieties and feelings which occur alongside. Teachers' self-perceptions of competence are influenced by levels of resources (Butler & Shevlin, 2001) but also successful experiences. EPs can support teachers to identify times when they have been successful and collaborate with them to generate strategies which can be used with individual pupils within the classroom.

Conclusion

This essay aimed to explore ways in which schools could promote inclusion for pupils with SEBD and identified a number of barriers to be overcome. Some of these relate to broader government funding and policy issues, which schools have little or no control over, however others, such as negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion or low self-efficacy can be addressed and can have a huge impact on the experiences of pupils with SEBD within our schools.

It appears that while ethos is promoted as essential for successful inclusion, the research around how to achieve this is lacking. However, research has shown that it is possible to shift the mind-sets of staff away from within-child beliefs through collaborative teaching and increasing their understanding of what SEBD means. It is also possible to promote positive relationships through encouraging teachers to get to know more about their most challenging students. Successful relationships and experiences of working with these children are likely to lead to more positive implicit

attitudes, greater self-efficacy and an increased willingness to include these students within the classroom.

      While this essay has focussed mainly on teacher attitudes, it is acknowledged that this is by no means the only way to address inclusion. Little attention has been paid to the attitudes of parents or the students themselves, within this essay but also within the wider research. Perhaps in the future the inclusion agenda should be driven less by government policies and more by the individual pupils who we are trying to include.

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