

Barriers to inclusion: a case study of a pupil with severe learning difficulties in Ireland

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The aim of this study was to examine the inclusion of a pupil with a severe general learning difficulty in a four-teacher mainstream primary school, located in rural Ireland. The research employed a qualitative multiple operationism approach to data collection. Data were analysed qualitatively, and quantitative reporting and display procedures were also employed. This paper focuses on curricular and social access, the pupil's perception, peers' perception and the impact on peers. The study identified the existence of a number of dilemmas in seeking to secure successful inclusion. These included concerns over specialist teaching materials, mainstream teachers' perception of meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs as constituting an esoteric specialist domain, nondisabled pupils' lack of knowledge and understanding of learning disability, and the extent to which the pupil was included socially. Questions are raised about the model of support for inclusive education in Ireland.

Keywords: *Integration; Inclusion; Moderate learning disability; Severe learning difficulty*

International and European policies greatly affected Irish educational policy in the 1990s. In 1990, Ireland subscribed to a European Community (EC) declaration to pursue a policy of integration (EC Council of Ministers of Education, 1990). The Special Education Review Committee Report (SERC) further endorsed this integration policy (Ireland, 1993). The SERC report favoured as much integration as was appropriate and feasible, while accepting that there should be a continuum of placement provision matching a continuum of need. It outlined 12 different special education placement options. However, in relation to the inclusion of pupils with severe learning difficulties, it expressed a strongly worded preference for a particular model of integration. The arguments were based on the demography of Ireland, the number of small schools and the level of specialist teaching required to meet the needs of pupils with significant disabilities.

The demographic pattern in Ireland is reflected in the preponderance of smaller schools ranging from one teacher to four teachers and serving local identification, social and cultural functions (Convention Secretariat, 1994). In 1993/94, 41.2% of the primary student population were attending schools with staffs of one to seven teachers (Ireland, 1995). The SERC report outlined its thinking as follows:

The Review Committee is concerned at a trend, which has become more widespread in recent years whereby individual children with quite significant levels of disability and very special needs are being placed in ordinary classes. Placement in the local school in an ordinary class is often not the best available solution to the special problems posed by some children with disabilities. Attempting to provide for those needs in the ordinary classroom may be detrimental to the welfare of both the special pupil and of other pupils. Furthermore, where the pupil is the only pupil in a school, the amount of additional support-time, which can be allocated is frequently too little to make any significant impact on his/her learning. (p. 174)

Acknowledging that pupils with SEN require a high intensity of direct instruction, the SERC Report recommended that it was 'highly undesirable and inefficient to attempt to provide for the special educational needs of individual pupils with serious disabilities and learning difficulties in ordinary classes in individual schools scattered over a wide area' (Ireland, 1993, p. 59). Instead, it suggested that a network of designated ordinary schools should be developed with specialist facilities, staffing and support services. The Review Committee

envisioned that a full-time teacher would be provided to meet the needs of these pupils and that the pupils would have the facility of spending such time in the ordinary class as was deemed appropriate in individual circumstances.

Parents would be offered a choice between placement in a special school and placement in a designated ordinary school. The major weakness of the Resource teacher model for these pupils was identified as 'the proportion of a support teacher's time which could be allocated to such an individual pupil would be quite inadequate to meet her/his special learning needs, as compared with the provision which could be made in a special class or school' (Ireland, 1993, p. 178). It, again, stated that it 'strongly favours special schools or designated ordinary schools for pupils with significant disabilities and learning difficulties' (Ireland, 1993, p. 178). In referring specifically to pupils with a severe learning difficulty and to pupils with a specific learning disability the committee stated that it was:

strongly of the view that support services for the latter two categories of pupil would preferably be organised in designated central schools, so that they could spend a substantial part of each day in a class or group being taught by a specialist teacher. In addition, they would attend ordinary classes for such time as might be feasible and appropriate in each case. (p. 171)

Only in exceptional circumstances would such a pupil be placed in an ordinary class and be supported by a Resource teacher. Influenced by international trends, parents of pupils with Down syndrome began to approach their local primary schools, requesting enrolment for their children (Dunne, 1992). This constituted a rejection of the SERC Report's recommendation that designated schools be selected to provide a centralized service for pupils with SEN (Ireland, 1993).

The concept of the designated school was further rejected by the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (Department of Equality and Law Reform, 1996). Prompted by mounting parental pressure and imminent litigation, the state responded in November 1998 with a government press release which pledged to provide resources to meet the educational needs of pupils integrated in ordinary schools (DES, 1998; Glendenning, 1999). These resources comprise the allocation of a resource teacher or a special needs assistant or both (DES, 1999a, b). The resource teacher may have a caseload of up to 11 pupils, depending on the nature of their special educational needs. In large schools this shift in policy did not make much of a difference as special class teachers were increasingly moving towards integrated provision in mainstream classes. This was supported by the inclusion of special class pupils on the main role of the school. Thus a resource teacher in such a school could work with a small group and have some flexibility in the amount of support time given to individual pupils.

However, in small rural schools the situation is a lot more complex. In Ireland half of all schools have four teachers or less and except for a small number of junior schools, this results in many multi-grade classes. Here the child is supported by a shared resource teacher who has to travel to various schools, resulting in the pupil with severe learning difficulty spending a very large portion of each day in a multigrade class with little additional support. The challenges for the class teacher in such a situation are enormous.

The integration of pupils with SEN in their local primary schools has escalated and accordingly forced the DES to respond with the provision of an automatic entitlement to resources to meet each individual pupil's assessed need. Since November 1998, the number of special needs assistants has increased from 299 to 5000 and the number of resource teacher

posts has increased from less than 300 to in excess of 2300 (DES, 2004). The focus of the Irish Education Act 1998 is to guarantee an appropriate education for all pupils in the school of their parents' choice subject to effective and efficient use of resources (Ireland, 1998). Therefore a qualified legal duty now exists to place pupils with SEN in the school of their parents' choice.

The literature identifies many factors leading to successful inclusion, for example, teachers' attitudes to inclusion, the role of parents, the impact of inclusion on peers, and pupil's perceptions of educational provision and curricular access. While the case study examined all of these factors, the present paper focuses on curricular and social access, the pupil's perception and the impact on peers. We were particularly anxious to include the pupils' perception as the lack of research into the direct experiences of people with learning disabilities has been criticized (Wade & Moore, 1993). Pupils with learning disabilities have relevant information that can assist in decision-making about needs and provision in integrated settings (Lewis, 1995; Norwich, 1997).

Methodology

James, the pupil whose inclusion was examined in this research, has been assessed as having a severe learning difficulty. According to the SERC Report, pupils with severe learning difficulty may have, *inter alia*, impaired development and learning ability in acquiring skills in language and communication, social and personal development, motor coordination, and basic literacy and numeracy (Ireland, 1993).

James was chosen specifically because of his need for an appropriate individualized educational programme and the inherent difficulties this may present for a class teacher in a multi-grade class of 30 pupils in a rural four-teacher mainstream school. James was also willing to participate in the research, and his mother, Kate, expressed an interest in contributing to and facilitating the study.

The research site was selected on the basis of potential theoretical interest and availability (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). The school was familiar with the concept of inclusion and there were three pupils with SEN attending the school. The teachers had a record of service ranging from 14 to more than 40 years. Collectively they had a considerable range of teaching experience, having taught the complete range of classes from infants to 6th class. Lucy had been a learning support teacher for six months, and Kim had taught in a special school for seven years. In addition to teaching James, all of the teachers had prior experience of having a pupil with special needs in their respective classes.

We were also interested in the perspectives of James' 30 non-disabled peers who had experience of James in their class for seven years. They were very cooperative and willingly participated in the study.

Methods of data collection

A multiple operationism approach was used for data collection, described by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966) as a collection of methods combined to avoid sharing the same deficiencies (see Table 1).

Besides semi-structured interviews a vignette, a sociometric observation and unstructured and semi-structured observations were also employed. Vignettes offer young research participants opportunities to examine their perceptions and beliefs in a stimulating, non-threatening and reflexive manner (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). They allow research participants to depersonalize and thus deflect attention from the pupil whose experience is being examined (Lewis & Lindsay, 2000).

Table 1. Methods and duration of time spent collecting data

Data collection method	Research participant	Duration
Semi-structured interview	Joan, school principal and James' first teacher	35 minutes
Semi-structured interview	Kim, present class teacher	40 minutes
Semi-structured interview	Lucy, previous class teacher	38 minutes
Semi-structured interview	Susan, previous class teacher	26 minutes
Semi-structured interview	James, pupil with a severe general learning difficulty	51 minutes
Semi-structured interview	Kate, James' Mum	45 minutes
Vignette	James' class peers	45 minutes
Sociometric observation	James' class peers	10 minutes
Unstructured participant observation in the playground thrice weekly for five weeks plus a two week exploratory phase	James and his class peers	10 hours and 30 minutes
Semi-structured non-participant observation in the classroom for six Religion lessons twice weekly for three weeks including one pilot lesson	James and his class peers	2 hours and 45 minutes

A selected extract from Fanta Shyer (1978) was read and based on a 'draw and write' technique, the children were invited to respond to the extract on prepared worksheets (Pridmore & Bendelow, 1995). Fanta Shyer recounts the story of Gerri, a teenager with multiple disabilities, who is brought home from residential care to live with her parents and brother Neil. Neil has the role of narrator in the story.

Sociometric observational techniques record social behaviour by exploring group interactions (Kane & Lawler, 1978). Conscious that personal involvement might unintentionally confound the data as the children might include James in their responses to please the researcher, the class teacher was asked to collect the data. The children were asked to select and write the names of three classmates that they would choose to spend free time with (Antonak, 1988). Paper was supplied with a specific format for ease of administration and subsequent analysis.

While sociometric observation is a crude instrument which depends on children's volatile patterns of friendships, Thomas *et al.* (1998) suggest that it provides a reasonably accurate picture of social relationships within a stable group, such as a class year, and was therefore suited to the research purpose.

In order to assess peer interaction with James, unstructured participant observation was conducted in the school playground thrice weekly for five weeks. Each observation session lasted 30 minutes, involving time sampling at preset intervals of five minutes. The first author adopted a participant role as a teacher on yard-duty. She informed the children that she would be watching how they played and recording it on a dictaphone.

In order to assess the nature of the access James is afforded to the curriculum, we used semi-structured non-participant observation. An observation schedule was designed which combined interaction analysis and anthropological classroom research approaches (Hamilton & Delamont, 1974). The first author undertook observation in the classroom for six Religion lessons, which were each 20–30 minutes in duration. The first lesson constituted a pilot lesson.

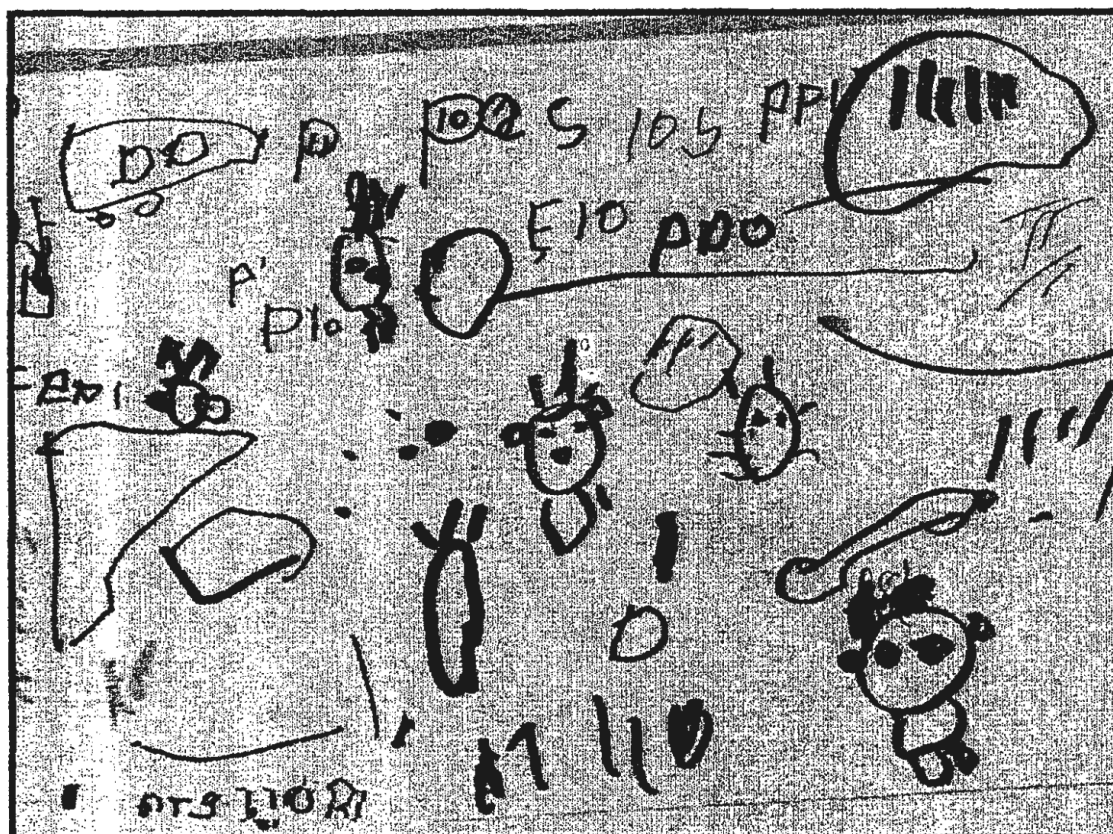
Findings and discussion

The findings were generated from a wide range of data sources, which were examined for considerable periods of time (see Table 1). The findings are presented conceptually by themes that were generated through comparative analysis of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These themes were identified inductively in accordance with their pertinence to the research focus and their conspicuousness in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Meeting individual needs through a common curriculum

In analysing the data, curriculum was conceived of in terms of aims, goals, content, contexts and pedagogy (Norwich, 1990). None of the teachers interviewed had difficulty in interpreting the aims of the revised Primary School Curriculum as being common to all pupils (Ireland/DES/NCCA, 1999). All of the teachers were concerned that James would live a full life as a child and realize his potential as a unique individual in the context of the mainstream setting. Joan reported that James had always been very happy in school. This is corroborated by James' Mum, who affirmed that he 'never had any problem going to school. He loved going to school really.' In the narrative phase of the interview with James, he spontaneously declared, 'I love school'. His drawing response, which he clearly explained, also conveyed his contentment and enjoyment of school (see Figure 1). In the figure, he described the top-left figure as himself kicking a ball, the central figure as his friend, Ben, and the bottom figure as the researcher on yard-duty. The centre circle, surrounded by spikes, he described as the sun. The drawing contrasts with drawing responses by Lewis (1995), where pupils with SEN depicted themselves as recipients of fighting and teasing in the playground.

Figure 1. James' drawing response



Goals

There was unanimous agreement that common curricular goals presented serious difficulty for James. The introduction to the revised Primary School Curriculum refers to curricular goals in terms of general objectives which include enabling the child to read fluently and with understanding, write fluently and legibly and acquire an appropriate standard of spelling, grammar and syntax (Ireland/DES/NCCA, 1999).

In Infants, Joan recalled that James was unable to do 'the little bits of work' that his classmates were doing. When James was in the 1st class, he was unable to sit still and concentrate or colour a picture.

Lucy recounted how she bought extra books for him in 1st class, which were at the Junior Infant level, she also brought in pre-school jigsaws and made up special little books for him. During classroom observation, the class teacher was always required to differentiate the lesson for James in order that he might access the Religion Curriculum, designed for 5th and 6th classes.

Content

All of the teachers interviewed encountered difficulties in providing James with a curriculum content identical to that of his non-disabled classmates. Lucy recalled that when James came into the 1st class,

... they had all kind of moved on and he had not yet moved on ... there was very little academic stuff he could do really at that time.

When asked of the possibility of James accessing the 3rd and 4th class curriculum content, Susan pointed out that 'there isn't an absolute hope that he'd go anywhere near it—he has to have his own special programme'. Kim pointed out that:

we're doing History now about Strongbow and the Normans and all that, that's totally irrelevant and I think it's a waste of time doing that with James.

Kim added that what the resource teacher had provided her with to develop James' basic literacy and numeracy skills was 'excellent if we could work on that I mean that's ideal, that's what I think is perfect'.

Interestingly, James demonstrated his ability to access the content of the Religion programme, at his own level during Religious Instruction. During one lesson, the teacher having read a harrowing letter written by a nun who had visited an orphanage in Romania, asked the class for suggestions to raise funds for the children in the orphanage. James suggested that pencils could be sold to raise money. During the previous week, pencils had been sold by another charity in the school.

This corroborates research by Ware and Peacey (1993), which illustrates that pupils with severe learning difficulties can follow programmes of study in History at the appropriate chronological age. Byers (1996) suggests that individual needs may be met through the content of the National Curriculum, provided such learning experiences occur in meaningful contexts.

Contexts

All of the teachers identified a dilemma in seeking to meet individual needs in the context of large pupil-teacher ratios and multi-grade classes, which characterized the mainstream classes in which James was integrated. Joan recalled the difficulty of giving 'him individual attention ... in a class of 30, of two infant classes and all the different ability ranges within your two infant classes'.

All of the mainstream teachers expressed satisfaction with the improved number of resource teacher hours but one outlined a different approach:

my ideal situation would be that they would be in the classroom depending on their handicap or needs or wants maybe one day, two days, three days and that there would always be, ideally in the school, a full-time teacher for him, but if not, with a group of schools that there would be an area that they would all come together ... some place for a day with a smaller pupil-teacher ratio to be educated.

This suggestion is reminiscent of the SERC Report's recommendation that designated schools be selected to provide a centralized service for pupils with severe learning difficulties in rural areas and reflects the difficulties inherent in providing sufficient resources and services to all schools (Ireland, 1993).

Pedagogy

The research yielded data that suggested that the mainstream teachers perceived that a specialist esoteric pedagogy was required to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. These findings are confirmed by research conducted by Shoetel *et al.* (1972) and Thomas *et al.* (1998). Joan described her perception of a special school:

I have an idea of special schools that their programmes are specifically geared towards the different abilities. I presume that a lot of these children ... fall into a certain ability range... and that everything is done at that level ... I'm sure the teachers there might have extra courses done.

Joan's perception is mirrored in data collected from Susan, Kim and Lucy. Shoetel *et al.* (1972) suggest that unanimity among teachers concerning the need for special methods may represent an obstacle to the integration of pupils with SEN if mainstream teachers believe they lack the expertise to teach these pupils. engaged through looking and listening, activity-based learning and with assistance for 93% of the duration of the lessons (see Figure 2). James sought to ensure he was at the correct page of the Religion book, through glancing at the book of the pupil sitting next to him or through actively seeking guidance from the pupils sitting behind him. As the lesson was read aloud by the teacher or pupils, James actively followed the text through finger pointing at the individual words. He took an active part in class discussions. On one occasion, a pupil recounted a newspaper report of a suicide and James asked, 'did he kill himself?'. James also willingly responded to questions posed by the teacher as is evident from his suggestion of selling pencils for the orphanage in Romania. James demonstrated his ability to seek clarification if he was unsure of what copy he needed or if he did not understand. The teacher was describing God's love and James asked, 'where is He, is He up there?', the teacher replied, 'yes, He is everywhere', and James retorted 'oh right' and continued following the text. James worked independently on written tasks that were modified by the class teacher. One of the lessons concerned the sowing of seeds and James unhesitatingly illustrated the seeds growing and copied the title of the lesson from the blackboard.

These data suggest that mainstream teachers need to be re-affirmed regarding the effectiveness of their existing pedagogical skills in meeting the learning needs of pupils with SEN.

Figure 2. The nature of James' access to the curriculum during six Religion lessons

Engaged in activity based learning	15%
Engaged through looking and listening	61%
Engaged with assistance from a peer or class teacher	17%
Not engaged despite provision of opportunity for engagement	3%
Not engaged and no opportunity provided for engagement	1%
Fits in none of the above categories	3%

Specialist teaching materials

The teachers interviewed expressed concern regarding the lack of specialist teaching materials available to them. Joan, the principal, referred to the availability of equipment and

extra funding in special schools and recommended that: ‘the other teachers... would get more help with equipment, computers or anything that might be there that would keep these children occupied.’ Similar views were expressed by Kim, who had observed that there were huge benefits in having all the resources and all the expertise focused on the one class, concluding that: ‘special schools seem to have more money and more funding than mainstream schools.’

Lucy pointed out that, in mainstream schools, ‘you’re always conscious you have so much money in a school’. She suggested that:

every child with special needs might need different equipment ... there should be stuff made available before they enter the classroom. And not just throw the child in and hope the teacher will survive.

Interactions with non-disabled peers

Neither the classroom observation nor the playground observation yielded data which indicated evidence of overt discriminative behaviour directed at James. All of the teachers interviewed referred to the positive effect James’ integration has on his nondisabled peers. Lucy observed that:

the other pupils definitely have learned great patience, great tolerance and great understanding that will go with them for the rest of their life and I can’t see any of them writing articles in the paper about handicapped people afterwards, when they have experienced it.

This latter refers to an article that caused public outrage and was followed by the journalist responsible leaving the newspaper (Smithwick, 2000). The journalist suggested that the Paralympic games were part of a propaganda, which asserted the equality of all cultures, lives and philosophies (Synon, 2000). Susan reported that there had never been an incidence where they heard ‘a child saying anything disrespectful or wrong to one of the special children’. During playground observation, the ball went into a stream, separated from the football pitch by wire. A non-disabled peer placed his hand on James’ shoulder to prevent him from falling into the stream.

Data furnished evidence of James’ non-disabled peers’ lack of knowledge and understanding of learning disability. These findings endorse research, which reveals that it is unrealistic to suppose that knowledge and understanding of learning disability automatically accompany the placement of pupils with SEN in integrated settings (Bayliss, 1995; Thomas *et al.*, 1998).

Knowledge of learning disability

The data obtained from the vignette analysis indicated that James’ mainstream peers confused learning disability with mental health disability, which is consonant with research conducted by Kyle and Davies (1991). Cian referred to the residential special school that Gerri had attended as a ‘kind of a mental home’. Gerri was variously described as wild, weird, very strange and crazy.

A confused knowledge of learning disability was evident in the pupils’ perceptions of Gerri. Ciara expressed the view that Gerri was ‘a Down syndrome’ and Cian contended that Gerri was ‘a really bad Down syndrome’. Gerri was perceived as a tiny bit handicapped, very stupid, badly retarded, even disabled in some ways, fun and dumb. Such negative descriptions reflect a lack of knowledge of learning disability and can only be addressed by

reformulating and devising more appropriate definitions which provide an accurate representation of the reality experienced by people with learning disability in society (Oliver, 1993).

Understanding of learning disability

Data obtained from the vignette analysis revealed a lack of understanding by nondisabled pupils of the implications of learning disability for the person with a learning disability, his/her sibling and his/her parents.

Hugh described Gerri as 'fat and annoying', and Fergal suggested that she was 'time-warped in a time machine from the stone age'. Aoife commented that Gerri 'did what she wanted to do, people never gave out to her'. Gerri was perceived as 'fun and dumb' by Ben. Frank concluded that she was 'very strange, very stupid, she was 14, she hadn't a clue how to do anything'. Conor suggested that Neil would be 'totally embarrassed and shamed', while Cian remarked that Neil would be 'embarrassed and annoyed with Gerri'. This theme permeated the vignette data, with 36% of the pupils commenting that Neil would be embarrassed by Gerri's behaviour. Gerri's parents were perceived as being happy about Gerri's homecoming by 68% of the pupils. However, 42% of these pupils qualified their remarks. Liam remarked that Gerri's parents were 'happy but scared', and Aoife suggested that they felt 'good about her coming home until she came'. An appreciation of the demands of caring for Gerri was demonstrated by some of the pupils. Mark observed that 'they might have to be prepared to get up at all hours of the night', and Cormac referred to caring for Gerri in terms of 'a big burden'. Fiona responded to the story empathically, concluding that it showed 'how difficult it is for a family with a child like Gerri'. The story was described as a very good story, a bit stupid, funny, a strange story and exciting. Cian concluded that it was 'hard to figure out what was wrong with Gerri'.

James' relations with non-disabled peers

Data obtained from sociometric observation and playground observation demonstrated James' significantly low sociometric status. James unhesitatingly nominated three of his classmates when completing the sociometric data collection sheet and nominated the same peers two months later when being interviewed. James was not nominated by any of his non-disabled peers. James made a significant number of both verbal and non-verbal initiations during playground observation which were unacknowledged by his mainstream peers (see Table 2).

Table 2. James' verbal and non-verbal initiations

Number of observations	Number of unacknowledged initiations	Number of acknowledged initiations	Total number of initiations recorded
1	4	2	6
2	4	1	5
3	3	1	4
4	3	1	4
5	5	1	6
6	4	1	5
7	4	0	4
8	2	1	3
9	5	1	6
10	2	1	3
11	4	1	5
12	4	2	6
13	3	1	4
14	3	0	3
15	2	0	2
16	2	1	3
17	4	0	4

Bayliss (1995) distinguishes between symmetrical relationships, which are characterized by equal participant rights and familiar interactions and asymmetrical relationships, characterized by didactic interactions, where one partner assumes a superior role. Austin (1962) suggests that underlying relationships are reflected in the way we use words. Interactions between James and his non-disabled peers, recorded during classroom observation and playground observation, were dominated by a didactic transactional structure and an absence of familiar, reciprocal interactions with non-disabled peers was evident.

A richer, more complex conversational pattern was evident in an observed exchange between James and a pupil with SEN. This pupil is not in James' class and therefore such exchanges are rare during lunchtime as school rules preclude different classes mixing with one another during recess periods. James had contact with both pupils with SEN attending the school during sessions with the resource teacher and while visiting the outreach centre. Both Joan and Susan referred to the special relationship that existed between the pupils with SEN in the school. James' Mum also reported that James 'often mentions his friends Teresa and Cathy'. This finding corroborates research by Buckley (2000), which found that reciprocity characterizes friendships fostered in special schools, whereas the range of friendships experienced by pupils with Down syndrome with mainstream peers is different in character.

Interactions with non-disabled peers were predominantly initiated by James. In class, James asked for assistance if he was unsure of what page was being read or what task was required. In the playground, James frequently signalled for the ball, using verbal and non-verbal gestures, but never made contact with it as a consequence of these requests. From directly questioning James, it became apparent that he did not know what team he was playing with during lunchtime football sessions. During the 17 sessions of playground observation, James

was observed making contact with the ball, fortuitously, on four occasions. On several occasions, James sought to engage in conversation with a non-disabled peer who either ignored the initiation or uttered a token response.

On one occasion, James was concerned about the expiry date on his milk carton. He approached a non-disabled peer and held up the carton while he asked if the milk was alright. His peer ignored the request and continued playing football. James persisted until the pupil advised him that the milk was alright. During one wet lunchtime, the pupils were playing board-games, James asked them ‘what ye playing, lads?’ and no one answered him.

Bayliss (1995) suggests that integrational practice should be evaluated by examining the degree to which a joint culture exists in schools. A joint culture emerges through negotiation and sharing where interactions are familiar and relationships are symmetrical (Bruner, 1986). Fostering equal and complementary relations between pupils with general learning disabilities and their non-disabled peers is a complex task, which must be based on a knowledge and understanding of the implications of having a learning disability and the alternative possibilities for communication and participation that exist. The quality of interactions is central to the educational, social and emotional development of all pupils and is a priority in integrated settings (Hegarty *et al.*, 1981; Lewis, 1995).

Conclusion

This research was intended to examine whether useful data on inclusion could be selected from such a sample. Based on the data obtained during this research, it is apparent that a number of practical dilemmas emerge in securing the successful inclusion of a pupil with a severe general learning difficulty in a four-teacher mainstream primary school located in rural Ireland.

The data displayed a discrepancy between the practice observed in the RE lessons and the perception of the teachers that they were inadequate. Mainstream teachers’ perception of the existence of SEN-specific pedagogies presents a serious dilemma for integrational practice. From an extensive review of the literature, Lewis and Norwich (2000) conclude that there is a lack of evidence to support SEN-specific pedagogies. They suggest that a common and coherent framework of teaching skills, which acknowledge the existence of differences in degree, intensity and explicitness of teaching, should constitute a continuum of teaching approaches and inform pedagogical practices for pupils with SEN.

The uncoordinated dissemination of information that characterizes the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream primary schools emerges as a dilemma that needs to be addressed. The placement of a pupil with SEN requires structures that facilitate the supply of accurate and useful information to all personnel involved in meeting the intellectual, social and emotional needs of the pupil. The provision of a continuum of specialist support and advisory personnel to liaise with parents and school personnel would greatly enhance this process.

The knowledge and understanding of learning disability displayed by James’ nondisabled peers is ambiguous. Reducing marginalization constitutes a central aim of the integrational process (UNESCO, 1994; Bayliss, 1995). If inclusion is to lead to increased participation, choice and empowerment both in mainstream schools and in the community for pupils with

SEN, it is imperative that a greater sensitivity is fostered in mainstream pupils towards the difficulties and abilities of their peers with SEN (The Mental Health Foundation, 1996). Within the latter ideological framework the lack of knowledge of learning disability displayed by James' non-disabled peers, was identified as a salient dilemma emerging from the research.

While the SERC Report raises questions about the appropriateness of inclusion in a mainstream class for pupils with severe learning difficulties in meeting their learning needs, the data here suggest the difficulties were in the social side of the school and not the curriculum. It is clear from the data that James was not fully included socially, though he did not seem to notice. He was not fully participating with his peer group, although he was not teased or bullied. While interventions like buddy systems might be helpful, more fundamental questions are raised about how such a scenario can be prevented and if the support structures and model of inclusion in practice contribute to the problem.

These issues raise questions too about the model of resource teaching provision in Ireland, which operates predominately by withdrawing pupils on a one-to-one basis for additional support (IATSE, 2000). This model has serious limitations in terms of building inclusive schools that meet the needs of pupils with disabilities in an appropriate manner. The emphasis on withdrawal reduces the opportunities for a wholeschool approach, involving class teachers adopting inclusive practices as a matter of course. Telling class teachers that they have main responsibility for all pupils in their class and then operating a support system that militates against this is contradictory.

Appropriate models of in-class support could usefully be explored. Structures and systems to facilitate closer collaboration between class teachers and resource teachers in relation to joint planning and teaching could help demystify pedagogical issues, particularly for class teachers. Professional development opportunities need to recognize this and support a whole-school response to inclusion, with an emphasis on inclusive pedagogical practices.

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