Education and Social Inclusion

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When we examine Social Inclusion particularly with regard to education there are many benefits for the use of Information Computer Technology (ICT) especially for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN). ICT give the opportunity to use a variety of assessment methods and instant feedback for learners which is not always possible when using traditional methods of assessment. In addition, feedback can be visual, auditory or textual to accommodate those with varying degrees of disability as well as saving time in the assessment process.

However, Inclusion is the process of accommodation where the onus of the school has to change, adapt curriculum methods and procedures to become more responsive to the requirements of SEN. Inclusion is expressed in terms, such as belonging, being wanted and unity, it is not a placement, it is a doctrine that says classrooms and communities are not complete unless all are welcome (Forest and O'Brien 1989).

Definitions of inclusion seem to vary widely. Mainstreaming and inclusion is involving learners with SEN in regular schools. It entails receiving all support services within the regular classroom (Marschark, Lang and Albertini, 2002; Marston, 1996; Powers; 1996, Stinson and Antia, 1999).

Most schools try to include all children with learning difficulties and have special inclusion units that are often used for those with SEN. It is argued (Huselid et al, 2005) that this allows special facilities and trained staff to be made available to children who require them. However, putting together groups who are thought to have similar needs can result in them being segregated from other learners of their age and this can not only lead to stigmatisation but also restrict access to important educational opportunities.

Integration is to establish a whole-school approach where all regardless of their, backgrounds, interests or disability has the right to have an education system which accepts ownership and diversity (Booth and Potts 1983; Weddell, 1995). The challenge is to create a system of equality and value. In the United Kingdom (UK) a number of schools are moving towards full inclusion and have introduced a task force of teachers, parents, children, counsellors, administrators and specialists to serve as a general advocacy group for integration. Education is to sustain an opportunity to learn, live and work with peers in natural, integrated educational and community settings (Sinclair, Vandercrook, Fleetham and Tetlie, 1988). As Stainback and Stainback (1985), Certo, York and Haring (1984), Madden and Slavin (1983) identify the key to success is to provide appropriate programs and educational prospect in integrated surroundings.

Researchers have found that students with learning difficulties perform worse academically in general education settings (Alter & Gottlieb, Kaufman et al., 1991). Many with learning difficulties experience social isolation in inclusive settings (Fraught, Balleweg, Crow, & Vanden Pol, Peterson 1982; Sale & Carey.1995). Other research has illustrated that although physical inclusion may occur, very little integration or social inclusion may actually result for children with learning disabilities (Dore, Dion. Brunet & Wagner, 2002).

Even in naturally inclusive settings, such as the mainstream school dining room researchers have found little interaction between children with learning difficulties and their peers (Hughes et al., 1999). Moreover, children with learning disabilities continue to experience social exclusion, isolation and discrimination (Williams 2006).

Educational opportunities should be a fundamental part of any individual's life, whether it is in relation to personal development or employment prospects (McIntosh and Whittaker 2000). So many children with learning difficulties face barriers in accessing the same standard of education as their peers who do not have a SEN (Mencap 2001).

There have been many methods and mechanisms adopted to try and put inclusion into practice (Cigman, 2007), one such initiative is the Link Scheme, this is a scheme whereby mainstream and special schools form a bond to try and share ideas, experience, knowledge and specialist skills. The benefit of this is to ease some of the pressure on mainstream schools and the learner involved by allowing them to share their education between two environments. The aim of this being to build up to a full time placement within mainstream education. It also allows teaching staff and support workers to learn more about the needs of the learner and will allow time to generate a strategy or plan that will enable a constructive delivery of sessions that are open to all learners in future. As Nind *et al*, (2003, p 60) acknowledge *'inclusive education needs to be part of a whole school equal opportunities policy'*.

Low achievers are often perceived as having emotional and behavioural attributes. A sense of failure and poor self-concept can lead to withdrawal from class interaction (Nind *et al*, 2003). Those with learning difficulties are often rejected by classroom peers; this can cause problems with social awareness and responsiveness (Gresham & McMillan, 1997, in Berk 2007). Steele (1992) argues that high failure and dropout rates amongst some students are related to negative feedback that many learners receive from teachers and support staff within the school environment. He further suggests that a lack of self-esteem can be a common cause of academic failure among students of socioeconomic backgrounds, but by offering quick positive feedback these strategies can be reversed (in Smith, 2000).

One of the philosophical premises of inclusion is the classroom teacher. Teacher's will assume the primary responsibility for educating of all children and will help adapt the curriculum and structure the classroom to promote social integration of all children (Jenkins, Jewel and Pious, 1990). Society has come a long way and opportunities for children with learning disabilities and having their right to social inclusion, has developed considerably and ICT can only enhance this. In recent years, there has been considerable debate about education services providing support for children with SEN in relation to keeping such children in mainstream schools. To exclude children described as having learning difficulties from mainstream local schools, colleges, and universities for whatever

reason is an injustice. Such injustice demands creatively to operate within the existing educational systems and to challenge regulations to understand 'special education'. The need of vision for the future of education is to look at issues of inclusion from a different standpoint and underline the inevitable struggle which will underpin the achievements of inclusive education in an inclusive society (Barton; Boys & Rix, 2003).

Behavioural issues are something that goes hand in hand with many forms of SEN, where the child may have a lower social development than their peers or a disability that itself causes unpredictable behaviour (Riddall-Leech, 2003). *'There is no single solution to the problem of poor behaviour'* (ACE, 2005, p8), however to ensure that learners with a statement of SEN stand a better chance of success in mainstream education, Hanbury (2007) advocates the development of proactive strategies such as avoidance of conflict, using calming techniques and distractions. Also the lesson that is being taught should be within the learners' abilities and modifying teaching methods to suit different learning styles.

The process of assessing a child's educational needs should also include their behavioural needs too, which can be incorporated into their Individual Education Plan, so that if poor behaviour becomes an issue a programme of behaviour modification can be implemented (Riddall-Leech, 2003).

Furthermore, teaching staff should receive better training in all aspects of teaching including ICT to give them an understanding and abilities to cope with challenging behaviour. It is also often the case that a well trained teaching assistant can give one-to-one support, pre-empting and dealing with issues as they arise (Hanbury, 2007).

Education can bring positive experiences to those with or without a SEN and ICT is a tool that all children of varying abilities can use in their learning development. It can also be the beginning of forming valuable relationships outside of the family network. It is therefore necessary for teachers to have knowledge of a learner's educational ability if they are to gain an understanding of how best to help and achieve the learner to their full potential (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004).

Because those with SEN have different learning styles, teaching staff need to be aware of each individual's abilities, find a solution for effective teaching, and bring in tools such as ICT to enrich alternative learning Frederickson and Cline (2003). Large and diverse classes create there own problems with many learning difficulties to surmount, where perhaps smaller groups may work better, particularly for those needing emotional support, Johnson *et al* (1994).

Inclusive education has progressed immensely over the years and promoting the inclusion of children with SEN into mainstream was and still is the objective of the government in the United Kingdom's Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) 1997. Children with SEN and learning difficulties are entitled to and do receive education in main stream schools, but is this the best option? Many have social difficulties compared to their mainstream peers (Kaufmanet al. 1985; Taylor et al. 1987; Nabuzoka & Smith 1993). Cross and Walker-Knight (1997) say that inclusion is not to place children with disabilities into

classrooms, but that the classrooms must be re-structured to meet the needs of all individual children (Fredrickson & Cline, 2002 p92).

In the UK, legislation has been implemented to help target educational inclusion. Consequently, it has developed greatly throughout history and is still intensifying. This has involved eliminating prejudices and discrimination as well as guaranteeing admission into schools. Among the children involved are those with learning difficulties, the disabled, looked after children, ethnic minorities, those with challenging behaviour, hard to reach families and traveller's children. It endeavoured to transform the status of children, in particular their rights. However, Colley (2007) advises that social inclusion policies "*hit the target, but miss the point*".

The future of inclusion and educational needs provide much scope for optimism. There have been many key developments and significant changes. In the UK policies have been put into place and legislations have been updated which has had a vital impact. However, the consequences of some of these progressions are unfortunately dependant on the places in which people are living. One has to take into account that although inclusion and educational needs has improved over the years, a problem still exists with some outstanding concerns which requires scope for improvement.

Community Cohesion
Since 2007, schools throughout the UK have had a lawful obligation to endorse community cohesiveness as there has been an increase to both ethnic and cultural diversity. Previously, there was a definite divide in educational arrangements and very limited prospects. However, there has been a need for progression in schools where equal opportunities are available to everyone (Alcock *et al*, 2008).

Alcock *et al*, (2008) also argue that the focus on community cohesion would benefit those hard to reach families thus strengthen both educational and social inclusion. Colley (2007) identifies that in the Council of Europe, social inclusion is structured by an apprehension to encourage social cohesion. In 2000 the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) was developed and by 2004 had been revised and adapted by the Committee of Ministers and is periodically reviewed and updated. The CDCS has been a pioneer in defining social cohesion and developing tools in this field (e.g. Methodological Guide on the concerted development of social cohesion indicators). The current and future challenges are analysed by the CDCS and recommendations and guidelines are drawn up to assist member states in adjusting their social policies accordingly. The CDCS has developed and maintains a pan-European approach to co-operation in social matters, (https://wcd.coe.int).

Every Child Matters (2003) and The Children Act 2004 focused on inclusion; however it was later seen as making slow progress in terms of hard to reach children and families. However this has been further strengthened by schools introducing community cohesion. Although SEN and inclusion has progressed in terms of segregation as well as the emphasis on participation from children, there still lie difficulties between the use of the medical and social model in practice. However one of the major issues in relation to SEN and educational inclusion seems to point to the differences in the levels of need and support as well as the difference in resources being allocated between each local authority.

In conclusion the difficulties faced by all involved in Inclusive Education are clear for all to see and there are many challenges that lie ahead before the UK can be considered to have a good working model for inclusion. A massive part of the changes that need to be implemented involve the education and training of teachers and support staff. There is a very real need to educate them in working with and adapting to children with additional educational needs. One of the many problems is getting schools and teachers to think about what they do, the methods they use and the processes they follow to encourage learning rather than simply focussing on what they are called, yes they are a teacher by definition, but they need to realise that effective teaching is all about thinking of new ways of sharing or giving the information that they have to their pupils.