Special and Inclusive Education
Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects

Edited by
Garry Hornby and James M. Kauffman

MDPI

Special and Inclusive Education: Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects

Special and Inclusive Education: Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects

Editors

Garry Hornby
James M. Kauffman

MDPI

Editors
Garry Hornby   James M. Kauffman
University of Plymouth   University of Virginia
UK   USA

This is a reprint of articles from the Special Issue published online in the open access journal *Education Sciences* (ISSN 2227-7102) (available at: https://www.mdpi.com/journal/education/special_issues/Special_Inclusive_Education).

For citation purposes, cite each article independently as indicated on the article page online and as indicated below:

LastName, A.A.; LastName, B.B.; LastName, C.C. Article Title. *Journal Name* **Year**, *Volume Number*, Page Range.

Contents

About the Editors

Garry Hornby was born in England and emigrated to Auckland, New Zealand in 1971. He worked as a mainstream and special class teacher for 7 years. He then trained and worked as an educational psychologist for the Ministry of Education for 7 years. He returned to England in 1986 and spent 14 years researching and lecturing at the Universities of Manchester and Hull, including two years working as a consultant on special needs education for the government of Barbados and lecturing at the University of the West Indies, in 1997 to 1999. He moved back to New Zealand to become Professor of Education at the University of Canterbury in 2002 where he worked for 12 years. In 2016 and 2017 he worked as Professor of Education and Director of Research at the University of Plymouth in the UK, becoming Emeritus Professor in 2018. His teaching and research has been in the areas of educational psychology, inclusive and special education, counselling, children's mental health, teacher education, and parental involvement in education. He has produced over 200 journal articles and book chapters, and 13 books in the field of education. His published books include: Mental Health Handbook for Schools; Counselling Pupils in Schools; Improving Parental Involvement; Meeting Special Needs in Mainstream Schools; Parental Involvement in Childhood Education; and, Inclusive Special Education.

James M. Kauffman is Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Virginia, where he joined the faculty in 1970. His Ed.D. is from the University of Kansas, and in 2011 he received the distinguished alumni award from the University of Kansas School of Education. He is a past president of the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and a former teacher of both general elementary students and special education for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. He is the author or co-author and editor or co-editor of more than 30 books, including the following since 2018: On educational inclusion: Meanings, history, issues and international perspectives (2020, edited); Exceptional learners: An introduction to special education (now in its 15th edition, 2023, co-authored with Daniel P. Hallahan & Paige C. Pullen); Characteristics of emotional and behavioral disorders of children and youth (now in its 11th edition, 2018, co-authored with Timothy J. Landrum); Special education: What it is and why we need it (2018, co-authored with Daniel P. Hallahan, Paige C. Pullen, and Jeanmarie Badar; The scandalous neglect of children's mental health: What schools can do (2018, co-authored with Jeanmarie Badar); Handbook of special education (2nd ed., 2017, co-edited with Daniel P. Hallahan and Paige C. Pullen). He is also editor of a forthcoming book, Revitalizing special education: Revolution, devolution, and evolution.

Editorial

Special and Inclusive Education: Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects

Garry Hornby [1],* and **James M. Kauffman [2],***

[1]   Institute of Education, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA, UK
[2]   Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA
*   Correspondence: garry.hornby@plymouth.ac.uk (G.H.); jmk9t@virginia.edu (J.M.K.)

For around 40 years, there has been intense debate about how to best educate learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) [1,2]. Competing paradigms of special education and inclusive education have been developed, disseminated, and discussed at length over the years. It is considered that discussions need to be focused on the effectiveness of these two competing approaches to educating learners with different types and severities of special educational needs and disabilities. Therefore, the aim of our special issue of *Education Sciences* was to focus on the latest issues, as well as current international practices and research relevant to special education and inclusive education. We sought new ideas and potential ways forward for special and general education practice, as well as possible future research directions, in order to enable the community of scholars, policy makers, and practitioners to consider the latest thinking on these topics.

The historical and contemporary context for this project is one of attacks on the very existence of special education that have culminated in the call for its elimination [3]. The confusions, myths, and distortions that have led to this state of affairs have been discussed in a recent chapter [4], and some of the key issues are highlighted in the Special Issue. The most fundamental issues are, first, the nature and degree of variability in the diversity we call disability compared to other diversities (e.g., gender, color, place of origin, religion, tribe, social and economic status) and, second, the nature of education and the special implications of disabilities for this.

Among ideas about special and general education is the notion that general education can be reformed or transformed into a social project that makes special education irrelevant or unnecessary. It is believed by some people that the success of this reformation or transformation will eliminate what we call special education. An alternative view is that special education needs improvement, as does general education, but that it will always be needed and, therefore, must be preserved if we are to have social justice in education, and effective education for children with SEND.

Kauffman and colleagues [2,4] point out that inclusive education gained momentum following the widespread implementation of neo-liberal economic and social policies by President Reagan in the USA in the 1980s. Those neo-liberal policies have continued to be influential in many countries for more than 40 years. They emphasise free-market economics that has translated into education policies that have led to cuts in programs for vulnerable children, including those with SEND. Some countries have implemented these cuts by using the theories underpinning inclusive education to promote education in mainstream schools, thereby justifying the closure of special schools and classes and/or reducing levels of support for children with SEND. Thus, it may well be that neo-liberal economic and social policies have dovetailed with the promotion of inclusive education to undermine special education, with the effect of diminishing special education provision, thereby also reducing the availability of effective education for young people with SEND.

Nevertheless, our view is that inclusion is an important focus and that inclusive education is appropriate for many children with disabilities—but not *all* of them [4]. This is

why we, through our Special Issue, argue for the continued implementation of both special and inclusive education or the development of inclusive special education [5]. We are of the opinion that it does not have to be one or the other for *all* students or *all* school children or *all* individuals with disabilities. In fact, in the case of students with SEND, having either *all* or *none* in general education classrooms precludes social justice in education. However, *all* is not problematic for other forms of diversity or for those with SEND in most places and activities other than education.

The 15 articles in the Special Issue present differing perspectives on the topic, examining ideas for implementing effective practice, developing new theoretical views or conducting useful research projects that are relevant to the education of young people with SEND in the education systems that exist in various countries around the world.

The first set of seven articles focus on a range of issues related to the education of learners with special educational needs and disabilities. The first article directly addresses theoretical differences between special education and inclusive education and provides an analysis of key issues contrasting the two paradigms. This is followed by an examination of the use of evidence-based practice and data-based decision-making in the education of learners with SEND. The third article focuses on strategies in the education of young people who present behavioral challenges. This is followed by one article examining the promises and limitations of the use of educational tiers for special and inclusive education and another considering the value of triennial evaluations in providing effective programs for learners with SEND. The sixth article reviews the implications for special education and the inclusion of educating twice-exceptional learners. The final article in this section considers whether inclusive education or special education programs are more likely to result in the inclusion of young people with SEND in their communities post-school.

The second set of eight articles focuses on the provision of special education and inclusive education in six countries in various parts of the world. Three are from Ireland, the others are from Portugal, Estonia, Germany, India, and Australia. The first article from Ireland presents an investigation of an integrated, school-wide, systematic approach to inclusive special education. The second one considers whether Ireland is at a crossroads with respect to its policy for inclusion and the dismantling of its extensive system of special classes. The third one examines whether Universal Design for Learning is gaining momentum in Irish education. The following article, from Portugal, examines teachers' professional development, working conditions, and instructional efficacy with regard to inclusive education. The fifth article evaluates the impact of an in-service training course for school teams on inclusive education in Estonia. The sixth article considers the barriers to inclusive schools that exist in Germany and explains why special education remains necessary there. The seventh article compares access to inclusive education for children with disabilities between metropolitan and rural areas in India. The final article presents a historical review of the development of inclusive education in Western Australia.

It is clear from the vibrant discussion of issues and ideas presented by the articles that there is a strong desire to build on the current practice of both special education and inclusive education. It appears that special education is alive and well, even within the context of calls for its abandonment [3], as well as there being an increasing focus on inclusive education. In terms of the further development of both special education and inclusive education, several articles emphasised the need for improved dissemination and greater implementation of evidence-based practices. Other articles focused on the importance of providing effective support and in-service education for teachers, as well as the usefulness of interventions, such as Universal Design for Learning. The value of regular assessments of children with SEND and tiered intervention systems was discussed, as well as the necessity for evaluations of long-term outcomes of either special education or inclusive education. The importance of recognising both the needs of twice-exceptional children and of implementing effective interventions for those with behavioral challenges was emphasised. The value of understanding the history and context of the development

of special education and inclusive education, identifying barriers to implementation, and of recognising rural/urban differences was also emphasised.

It is clear that special education still has much to offer in ensuring optimum outcomes for young people with SEND. However, the pressure to seriously consider the extreme option of full inclusion, resulting in the extinction of special education, is evident in one of the articles. This is despite the lack of evidence that full inclusion has been successfully implemented in any country, state, or province. In contrast, reality shows that continua of placement options are still the typical approach of education systems for meeting the needs of young people with SEND in most countries.

In conclusion, we want thinking, writing, and talking about educating students with SEND to be clearly included in what has been called the reality-based community [6]. Inclusion in that community does not come easily, and requires careful thought and the restraining of impulses to draw quick and intuitive decisions about what is possible. Moreover, we hope for the advancement of knowledge, understanding, and instructional skills necessary to implement effective inclusive and special education e.g., [7,8]. We want the aspirations of both special and inclusive education to be realized, not neutralized [8]. Neutralization could come in response to the demand of those who may have only good intentions but insist on promulgating the fantasy that general education can be so transformed that special education will become a relic of the past, no longer needed by anyone. This must not be allowed to happen as it would mean the loss of many decades of innovation and development of programs, strategies, and techniques for optimizing the education of learners with SEND. We consider that a much better way forward is to focus on continued development of the combination of and collaboration between special education and general education, to make it as inclusive as possible in the best sense of "inclusion" and "inclusive" by focusing on appropriate instruction for all. We want high-quality instruction, not placement, to be the primary concern of all educators, and we believe such instruction can happen often, but not always, in regular classrooms in neighborhood schools.

References

1.   Hornby, G. Integration of children with special educational needs: Is it time for a policy review? *Support Learn.* **1992**, *7*, 130–134. [CrossRef]
2.   Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P. What we want for children: A rejoinder to REI proponents. *J. Spec. Educ.* **1990**, *24*, 340–345. [CrossRef]
3.   Hyatt, C.; Hornby, G. Will UN Article 24 lead to the demise of special education or to its re-affirmation? *Support Learn.* **2017**, *32*, 288–304. [CrossRef]
4.   Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Felder, M.; Hornby, G.; Lopes, J. Recent debates in special and inclusive education. In *International Encyclopedia of Education*, 4th ed.; Tierney, R., Rizvi, F., Ercikan, K., Smith, G., Slee, R., Eds.; Elsevier: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2021; in press.
5.   Hornby, G. *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-Based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014.
6.   Rauch, J. *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defence of Truth*; Brookings Institution Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2021.
7.   Hallahan, D.P.; Kauffman, J.M.; Pullen, P.C. *Exceptional Learners: An Introduction to Special Education*, 14th ed; Pearson Education: London, UK, 2019.
8.   Silvestri, S.M.; Heward, W.L. The neutralization of special education, revisited. In *Controversial Therapies for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities*, 2nd ed.; Foxx, R.M., Mulick, J.A., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2016; pp. 136–153.

Inclusive Vision Versus Special Education Reality

James M. Kauffman [1,*] and Garry Hornby [2,*]

1 Department of Special Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA
2 Institute of Education, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth PL4 8AA, UK
* Correspondence: jmk9t@virginia.edu (J.M.K.); garry.hornby@plymouth.ac.uk (G.H.)

Abstract: The reasons are examined for the disparity between the inclusive vision espoused by Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the reality of the limited extent of inclusion in education systems worldwide. First, the leadership of key senior academics in the field of special education is considered to have been misguided in promoting a vision of full inclusion despite the lack of research evidence for the benefits of inclusive education over traditional special education provision. Second, attitudes toward and the treatment of people with disabilities have a long and complex history, and in this, many proponents of inclusion have been critical of 20th century special education. In particular, they claim that the sorting, labelling and categorizing required by special education have negative implications. Third, educators have been encouraged to imagine a system of education that is limitless, in the sense that *all* children with disabilities can be included in general education. This is because it is envisaged that general education classrooms will become so flexible that there will be no limits to the accommodation of students with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of their special educational needs. Fourth is the issue that deciding a student's placement for education requires a judgment call and that, since human judgment is fallible, errors of judgment will always be made. Fifth, commitments to inclusion require that educators consider the practical, reality-based implications, whereas this has not been the case for many supporters of full inclusion. In conclusion, inclusion in the sense of students being physically present in general education classrooms is not considered as important as inclusion in the reality of being engaged in a program of instruction that is meaningful and challenging. Therefore, we consider that, rather than becoming extinct, special education needs to continue to be developed, disseminated and rigorously implemented in schools. Key special education strategies and approaches must co-exist with those from inclusive education, in order to provide effective education for all young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Keywords: disability; special education; inclusion; inclusive education

1. Inclusive Vision versus Special Education Reality

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) Article 24, in General Comment Number Four [1], called for all countries to implement fully inclusive education systems as soon as possible. This was partly based on the controversial statement noted in General Comment Number Four that children with disabilities educated in segregated settings receive an education of inferior quality [1]. Given this unsubstantiated claim, important questions about the implications of moving to and operating single inclusive education systems, and also about the future of special education provision, need to be addressed [2]. This is because the policy directive of UNCRPD Article 24 foreshadows the extinction of special education as it exists today [3–5].

However, in contrast, the recently published Global Education Monitoring Report on Inclusive Education [6] presented international survey findings suggesting that predictions of the demise of special education may be premature. The report stated that "National policies emphasize segregation

in 5% of countries, partial segregation in 45%, integration in 12% and inclusion in 38%." Furthermore, the report also stated that "Worldwide, laws emphasize segregation in 25% of countries, partial segregation in 48%, integration in 10% and inclusion in 17%". Therefore, it is clear that, in reality, the global picture is one in which the vast majority of countries maintain partially segregated or fully segregated special education settings to provide for a large proportion of their children with special educational needs and disabilities. This is far from the UNCRPD vision of all countries moving to fully inclusive education systems [1]. It seems that, currently, only a minority of young people with special educational needs and disabilities are educated in fully inclusive schools, despite most countries having ratified UNCRPD Article 24.

So, how have we reached the situation where there is a substantial difference between the inclusive vision espoused by one agency of the United Nations and the actual reality of the extent of inclusion in education systems worldwide reported by another? We suggest in this article that there are a wide variety of reasons for this disparity, and these are explained below.

2. Misguided Leadership of Key Senior Academics in the Field of Special Education

During the past 40 years, some senior academics in key positions in the field of special education in the UK, USA, and Australasia appear to have been out of touch with the reality faced by many practitioners and parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities. They have also paid insufficient attention to developments in the field of special education that have occurred over this period and to the research evidence that has emerged on effective education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It has been suggested that "Good will toward special education has been undermined by years of unwarranted criticism from within our profession and from others, deliberate deconstruction, and proposals for reform that are unworkable" [7] (p. 70).

Some senior academics in key positions in the field of special education have promoted a vision of full inclusion, now often portrayed by the term, "All Means All", in which *all* children, with no exception, must be educated in mainstream school classrooms alongside their age peers. This policy advice has been promoted despite the widely reported concerns of teachers and parents, and the lack of research evidence for the advantages of inclusive education for some children over traditional special education provision and placements [2,8]. Why have these senior academic leaders continued to promote a vision of full inclusion and to ignore evidence of its inappropriateness? Several reasons are possible, and we discuss them in turn.

First, it has been easier, and therefore very appealing, to promote a clear and simple idea to explain the complex issue of how to provide optimum education for children with a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities. Full inclusion is a clear and simple policy, in which all children, with no exception, are educated in mainstream school classrooms alongside their age peers. So, this policy is easy to promote and disseminate. However, there is a major problem, as highlighted by the well-known aphorism attributed to H. L. Menken: "For every complex problem there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong."

The overly simplistic vision of full inclusion promoted by key senior academics in the field of special education was mainly based on a human rights justification, exposed as naïve and false after consideration of issues of human rights and moral rights [3,9]. Full inclusion has also been shown to be flawed and unrealistic when the elements of its theory, policy, research and practice are carefully examined, as outlined in an article that asks the question, "inclusion or delusion, can one size fit all?" [10]. These glaring flaws in the vision of full inclusion have been highlighted in the published literature for over 40 years now, but these same senior academics in key positions in the field of special education have consistently failed to engage with them, either in the academic literature or in open debate, preferring to continue to promote their simplistic vision of full inclusion.

Second, once full inclusion had been set up by senior academic leaders as the gold standard for the education of all children with special educational needs and disabilities, it became much easier for other scholars, researchers, and practitioners in the field to support it rather than to criticize it.

This was particularly the case because full inclusion was presented as being underpinned by the issue of human rights, so that criticizing the policy of full inclusion was seen as somehow suggesting that children with disabilities would be denied their human rights. Therefore, a situation developed as illustrated by the tale of the "emperor's new clothes", whereby people did not want to stand out by pointing out that the emperor was naked, so went along with the majority of people by pretending that the emperor's new clothes were wonderful [11]. In the same way, few special educators have been prepared to be critical of the policy of full inclusion, as it has been far easier to go along with this theory than to risk becoming a pariah by being skeptical of it. Hence, there has been a torrent of articles and books singing the praises of inclusive education, but only a limited literature that is skeptical or critical of it.

Third, the promotion of full inclusion by key senior academics has influenced the careers of less experienced academics in the field of special education. This is because of the policies of academic promotion committees, funding bodies and journal editors. It became clear that obtaining academic promotions favored those supporting inclusion or inclusive education. Of course, only anecdotal evidence is available to support this assertion. For example, one of the authors, as a young academic, after giving a keynote presentation in the north of England in the late 1980s that was critical of inclusion, was asked "Don't you want to get promoted?"

We observe also that research and development grant proposals related to the furtherance of inclusive education seem far more likely to obtain funding than do proposals to conduct research regarding special schools, classes, or education that is obviously different for students with special educational needs or disabilities from that offered to all other students.

It also became clear that journals in the field of special education favored publications reporting examples of inclusive education, and articles critiquing this or being critical of inclusion have been difficult to publish. Bias is apparent in the decisions of some journal editors regarding papers on topics related to special and inclusive education. Perhaps this is understandable, given differences of opinion regarding how facts are established, what constitutes reliable evidence, and the meaning and interpretation of data [12]. However, in what has been described as a "new normal" [13], some editors seem loathe to publish papers that do not tout the wisdom, logic, legal basis, or evidence for inclusion of all students with disabilities in general education. An indication of this is that the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* now has 14 issues per year in an attempt to accommodate the torrent of articles supporting inclusion, whereas most special education journals publish far fewer issues per year, and some have revised their titles to include the words "inclusion" or "inclusive" in attempts to attract more submissions.

Fourth, the policy of full inclusion espoused by senior academics has played into the hands of education authorities wanting to save money by closing special education schools and classes, to the detriment of educational outcomes for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. One example of this was the decision by a local education authority, driven by a policy of inclusion, to close a special school for young people with moderate learning difficulties in the north of England in the late 1980s, with the ex-students being transferred to mainstream schools. A follow-up study [14] found that ex-students who were transferred into special classes within mainstream schools, and their parents, were more satisfied with their placements than those who had been transferred into mainstream classrooms. A further follow-up study conducted a few years after the ex-students had left school [15] found that outcomes for those young people that had been transferred to mainstream schools, in either special classes or mainstream classrooms, was very poor, with the vast majority of young people without jobs and not living independently. A major reason for this was considered to be that these young people had missed out on the vocationally orientated curricula and work experience placements that they would have undertaken in the special school that had been closed. So it appears that the decision of the education authority to follow the policy of inclusion, and save money in closing the special school, had resulted in the young people involved being denied an education that would enable them to be included in their communities once they left school.

Another example was the closure of a residential special school for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in New Zealand. This school had operated effectively for many years and was considered by many people to provide a model program for the education of such children. However, following the policy of full inclusion, promoted by some senior New Zealand academics in the field of special education, the Ministry of Education adopted a policy of closing special schools and had already closed some which had been experiencing difficulties. Closure was more difficult to justify in this case, since the school had long operated effectively. So the Ministry commissioned a senior academic known to support full inclusion to do a review of the literature on provision for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties focusing on a wraparound approach as an alternative to special school placement. Despite senior colleagues warning this academic that the report would be used to justify closing the special school, the review was completed and subsequently the school was indeed closed.

Finally, another example is the determination by a full inclusion advocacy group to close a special school preferred by a student with disabilities and her mother. The girl was brought home from the special school and enrolled in a general education environment by her mother. But her inclusion failed to meet her needs and make her happy. As reported [16] (p. 16):

> Besides feeling lonely and out-of-it and being away from her friends, she wasn't learning much, if anything. So, she began begging her mom to go back to the special school out of state. There, she said, she had friends and could do lots of fun things, like be a cheerleader, ride horses, and learn to swim.

In conclusion, it is clear that views of senior academics in key positions in the field of special education have been influential in the recent history of policies and attitudes towards education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. In many ways, we seem not to have learned from our history [13,17,18].

3. History: Its Vicissitudes and Lessons

Attitudes toward and treatment of people with disabilities have a very long and complex history, and some people now find many of the attitudes and practices of the 20th century distasteful. For example, two proponents of inclusion who are critics of 20th century special education wrote:

> Special education plays a sorting role, both for those consigned to it and for those students who remain in general education. It limits expectations of the former, and gnarls the attitudes of the latter . . . Thus, the system of special education, and the attitudes towards disability that undergird it, have harmful consequences for both those labeled "disabled" and those not. [19] (pp. 767–768)

Some might observe that although sorting, labeling, and categorizing may be seen to have negative implications and can be done clumsily and inappropriately, they are practices that cannot be avoided without losing the ability to communicate clearly and effectively about disabilities. The real challenge is finding ways to sort, label, and categorize better, not to eliminate these essential tasks. They simply cannot be eliminated if disabilities are to be recognized and individuals with them are to receive special services. Even the field of Disability Studies must sort and label (and, therefore, categorize) or it cannot exist. That is, persons must be sorted (said to have or not to have disabilities) or the category of disabilities is meaningless and, therefore, cannot be studied. Without labels and categories, which imply sorting in some rational way, Disability Studies becomes the study of everyone, a hollow and unfocused study of homo sapiens. That is, if everyone has a disability, then there is no need to study the stigma that can accompany a disability, only the stigma that goes with being a human being [11].

However, given the fact that sorting, labeling, and categorizing are necessary for any kind of thinking about or analysis of phenomena, including those phenomena that go with being homo sapiens,

one might wonder about the attitudes towards disability that undergird special education and the consequences of being labeled as having a disability related to education. It is important to know what these attitudes are, how and to what extent they are harmful, and whether they can be avoided, if they are actually harmful, or the alternative benefits they may have. It is clear that histories of special education do not suggest that it is a malicious social project, or that the attitudes toward disability that undergird it are more harmful than helpful [20,21].

We now know that some people view special education and its ideas and ideals dating from 1975 as malicious [19,22], but we do not know what will be said half a century from now about Disability Studies in Education (DSE) of the early 21st century. DSE may, in retrospect, be seen as laudatory or horrific, insightful or naïve, or perhaps twisted into something grotesque. Commenting on attitudes toward the work of Nazi physician Josef Mengele, Gopnik [23] wrote:

> All ideas, and ideals, are capable of being twisted into their opposites. Religious doctrines preaching nonviolence and loving thy enemy quickly turn into a search for enemies not to love. The intention and its perversion are usually transparent. We even have a good word for this bad practice: hypocrisy. But scientific theories, which get their credibility from the ability to explain the action of a limited domain of objects, can explode into false models for unrelated subjects without conscious hypocrisy. The Darwinian idea of the struggle for existence, designed to explain the chiseling of birds' beaks, becomes in a generation the idea that poor people deserve to be poor. Einstein's ideas that the measurement of time is relative can warp into the idea that morality is also relative. The missteps can be hard to track. The perversion of a scientific practice takes a second; its rectification takes a semester.
>
> (pp. 77–78)

Guessing how various aspects of our generation's attitudes and opinions will be evaluated a century hence is therefore difficult [24]. Perhaps future generations will wonder how we could possibly make certain claims about disabilities and their meanings. They might wonder how we could confuse diversities and not see how disabilities are not like many other forms of diversity, such as color and sexual orientation, when it comes to teaching and learning. Or, perhaps, they will wonder how we could not see that all diversities are essentially the same when it comes to education. Perhaps they will wonder why we did not understand that the only limits of education were imagination and creativity. Or, perhaps, they will wonder why we did not see that education has its limits, that although it can do many things, it cannot do all things, that there are boundaries that constrain it, realities with which it must make peace or destroy itself. They may wonder why, given the necessity of identifying, labeling, and categorizing, people of our era did not see the importance of weighing disadvantages and advantages of doing so. Moreover, it is possible that special education will be destroyed or destroy itself, while inclusive general education will become the dominant approach, if not the only kind of public education left standing [17,18].

The kind of education that prevails will depend in part on what "sells"; that is, what captures the public imagination and wins the public trust or popularity contest that results in public policy. Special education does not sell well unless it has at least the patina of something that has been designed for everyone—that has limitless applications to students' education and, therefore, is best for all students.

4. On Limitlessness, Rejection of Current Wisdom, and Futures

Something "limitless" sells much better than anything "limited." Limitlessness is associated with strength, newness, flexibility, and desirability. It suggests a limitless future, one of excitement and as-yet-unimagined progress. Limitedness is associated with the old, outdated, weak, and clumsy. It suggests a future of no excitement, merely the same old thing. Many assume that the mind-boggling limits or seeming limitlessness of the natural sciences could be found in the social sciences as well. They call, for example, for transformational changes in education in which at least some supposed limits do not apply [25].

Important here is recognition of the fact that although rationality has limits, irrationality does not. Nonsense has no limits. Physicists have seen the humor of this fact and mocked the idea of limitlessness with statements like "Speed Limit: 186,000 miles per second. IT'S THE LAW!" Other scientists have noted how a patina of newness and limitlessness have seduced many to embrace nonsense as if it were not [26,27]. Limitless nonsense has also found its critics in philosophy [28–30] and literary criticism [31].

Educators, too—including special educators—have joined what might be called the "limitless craze," proposing ideas that at first seem attractive and somehow achievable [32]. With more thinking and evidence, however, these ideas are exposed as fraudulent or nonsensical [33–35]. Part of the problem is merely recognizing the differences between the limitless and the limited in both the natural world and human endeavors. Postmodernism, "alternative facts," religious beliefs, and human imagination have no known limits. Science and the known world of scientific fact do have limits, as does logic.

The universe may well be limitless, but the speed of light is not, nor are many other characteristics of the physical world. In the natural world, imagination that the speed of light, gravity, or evolution are merely artificial barriers does not make them cease to exist. The human imagination may well be limitless, but the social world of human beings is not. One problem of social structures is that although they may be extremely varied—and imagination of them is limitless—the actual social world is not limitless. True, some of the realities of the social world simply can be imagined not to exist, but their reality does not therefore go away.

In the matter of the inclusion of students with disabilities in education, educators are encouraged to imagine a system of education that is limitless, in the sense that *all* children with disabilities will be included in general education—that is, no more special schools, classes, or places for any children with disabilities, because regular or general education will become so flexible and differentiated that there will be no limits to its accommodation of and appropriateness for students with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of their special needs. Special education will become a thing of the past as general education becomes inclusive of all—"all means all," no exceptions [6,22,25].

Educators today are often encouraged to reimagine what schools can do, how they operate, and what they can accomplish. The assumption apparently is that if what is imagined is different from current practices, then it can and will be realized eventually. This is especially the case if what is promised is something unlimited (e.g., "all means all," typically used to mean that all students, no exceptions, can be taught together) and runs contrary to current beliefs, particularly the belief that some children are better taught a different curriculum and/or in a different place than most.

A common theme in many proposals to reform education is opposition to mainstream thinking, rejection of current assumptions, and push-back against ideas considered old, outdated, or captives of the status quo. Proponents of alternatives may believe that attacking existing structures or current practices is both urgent and rational. So, statements like the following are thought to apply to the matter of teaching *all* students the same ideas in the same place and at the same time:

> If we want to change the world [then] we need to be unrealistic, unreasonable, and impossible. Remember: those who called for the abolition of slavery, for suffrage for women, and for same-sex marriage were also once branded as lunatics. Until history proved them right. [36] (p. 264)

This statement may well apply to the notions mentioned—things obviously possible, though opposed by many (slavery, women's suffrage, same-sex marriage)—but the statement does not apply to the case of all students with disabilities because of the nature of the problem under consideration. The case of schooling and the objective of eliminating special education as a way of responding to educational differences reminds us of a Galileo trope [37] with quotations from Mario Livio, an astrophysicist who wrote a book about Galileo. It is almost comical irony that today's deniers try to assume the mantle of Galileo: people who disagree with the scientific consensus on things such as climate change sometimes cite Galileo as a rebel (like themselves) who is now seen as a hero.

> "It's really a logical fallacy," Livio said. "Oh, look, here was one who was going against the mainstream, and it turned out to be right: therefore, those few who speak against climate change are right. Galileo was right not because he was one against many—he was right because he was right." By this point, Livio was laughing: "It's not the case now every time that one speaks against the mainstream, he or she is right. Most of the time those people are wrong. In some rare cases, they are right. So to bring that as an argument is just ridiculous." Sadly, two arguments of very different weights can still convince a lot of people at the same rate. [37] (p. 70)

Our point here is that just because people are opposed to what they see as the evils of special education does not mean they are right. Even something like DSE and the full inclusion enthusiasm that seems to have captured attention across the world [4,22,25,38] could eventually be—and we think is very likely to be—found to be a will-o'-the-wisp; that is, an enticing but impossible goal.

Another reality that cannot be imagined out of existence is the variability of students. Variability is here to stay, so our imagination can only be applied to how to deal with it. But even that imagination has some limits imposed by the realities of social and physical limits. Disability is one of those human variations related to education, but it is one that is unlike any others in its implications for instruction. It may be imagined not to exist [39], but it will not therefore cease to exist. It is in some ways like variations in parentage, cultural heritage, language, size, age, and many other diversities, but it differs from other diversities in its implications for teaching. Some disabilities have few implications for education, requiring only minor and easily made adjustments for learning (e.g., mild learning disabilities or somewhat below average quickness to learn). However, some disabilities present problems that are very difficult to accommodate and require instruction vastly different from that which is effective with most other students (e.g., severe and multiple disabilities). Moreover, all educational disabilities are directly related to teaching and learning, to effectiveness of instruction, and to the quality of life following school years.

5. Fates of Alternative Views

We use the term special and inclusive education because we think that the education of students with disabilities should be inclusive in ways that maintain the appropriateness of education as the priority, and do not violate the principle of individualized decisions about education. Given these requirements, special education is an indispensable component of inclusive education. For many and perhaps most students with disabilities, appropriate and special instruction in general education is possible. For others, it is not. Deciding a student's placement for education requires a judgment call. Human judgment is fallible, so errors of judgment will always be >0. However, elimination of judgment, too, guarantees that errors will be >0. Our best strategy in the case of the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education seems to be using judgment but trying to keep errors as close as possible to zero [24].

Some observers of contemporary education see other reasons for the obvious enthusiasm for total or full inclusion, and we quote the statement of a friend who will remain anonymous:

> Over the years I developed a sense that there are people in the education community (in all areas, and at all levels) who are guided by nothing more than self-interest and dogma. I used to think they had an ideology, but it became clear to me that some elements within the inclusion 'movement' have neither the appetite for, interest in, nor capacity for constructive argument; they seek only to push their threadbare, evidence-lite drivel down everyone else's throats, and without a single thought for the young people's lives that are blighted by their poorly formulated ideas.

Special education is—both by American law (the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, dating from 1975) and traditional concern for the education and well-being of students with

disabilities—focused on the individual, not the general population of students. It is because educators must say of certain students with characteristics that are not shared by all, "This one, not that one."

Even when some plan for education that is seen as more inclusive of children with disabilities, such as the Response to Intervention (RTI), which involves judging students' responses to instruction or intervention, or the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), the educator must decide what to do with or for the *individual*, not a group. Variance among students in what they know and need to learn will not go away, and the question educators must consider is how best to respond to such variation. Trying to obscure differences among students, including those we call disabilities, will not make them irrelevant to teaching. However, alternative views of the ways disabilities are best addressed in schooling are relevant to instruction.

The proponents of plans in which all students with disabilities are taught along with their age peers without disabilities, as well as those who propose alternatives, eventually must specify various aspects of implementation of their ideas (i.e., how what they propose will work out in practice). For example, questions like the following must be addressed:

Will students be identified as needing something other than that provided for all students, and, if so, by whom and how?

Will students, if identified as needing something different from the typical, be taught by the same teacher and study the same curriculum as their age peers who have not been identified?

Will students identified as having special educational needs ever be taught by a specially trained teacher and, if so, as determined by whom and how?

Will any students identified as having special educational needs be taught in a place other than the general education classroom and, if so, how will that be determined?

How is disability the same as and different from other forms of difference or diversity for purposes of education, and how is education different from other life activities (i.e., how is access to education different from and the same as access to all other activities in which a person might engage)?

Everyday practices (the nitty-gritty of any philosophy that guides what people do) ultimately determine the fates of alternative views of disabilities. In education, talking and writing about philosophies ultimately must face the music of action—what we actually *do* with students. For example, how exactly will the needs of a student with profound and multiple learning difficulties, for whom independent living skills, including toileting and feeding, is of central importance, be met in the context of the general education curriculum, particularly at secondary school level?

Perhaps the coronavirus pandemic most starkly brought to light the differences between "alternative facts" and science, the difficulties in practice based on magical thinking or social construction of realities rather than empirical evidence. The politicization in the USA of such things as wearing face masks and other responses to COVID 19 contributed to many unnecessary infections and deaths. We support the idea that the politicization of educational inclusion is most unfortunate and inconsistent with meeting the individual educational needs of students with disabilities [38].

Unfortunately, political statements may call for full inclusion without defining it, ignore special education altogether, or fail to address the issue of quality and appropriate education for students with disabilities—for example, the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* [3,4]. Political statements may be consistent with DSE, but not with special and inclusive education. Eventually, philosophical commitments to inclusion require that educators consider their practical, reality-based implications.

6. Practical Considerations in Special and Inclusive Education

Some of the practical considerations in special and inclusive education are a consequence of trying to extend or apply unsuitable, inapplicable scientific principles or philosophies to educational problems. For example, some have tried to apply "the new physics," including the Heisenberg uncertainty principle and other principles or findings of the physics of subatomic particles, to social and educational problems—ideas, findings, and principles that have no implications whatsoever to

the macro-physical and social world in which we live and function [40]. Similar problems seem to accompany attempts to apply "postmodern" and DSE philosophies to education—no application to the everyday work of teachers, no practical applications to the nitty-gritty of instruction [33–35,41]. For example, DSE notions of social justice have been used to argue that special education has become the problem and that any supposed "problem" of disability in education is with the teacher and the structure of education or failure of educators to understand disabilities from the point of view of those who have them and/or failure to recognize the strengths that pupils with disabilities bring to schools [42]. Yet, in this, no other practical suggestions were offered for reforming education or teaching, merely complaining that special education is characterized by "traditional skill-based direct instruction" [42] (p. 424).

We wish special education did reliably, predictably, and consistently provide skill-based direct instruction, for that is precisely what scientific evidence consistently has shown is most effective in teaching students with disabilities [41,43–45]. In all cases of DSE-based statements regarding instruction and inclusion, we find a lack of attention to practical application with failure to provide nitty-gritty detail of how the philosophy will be applied and how the teachers will say or not say "Yes, this one, not that one" about individuals that are to receive particular supports. The upshot is that practical matters are avoided in favor of a general, hazy philosophy that suggests individualization while side-stepping it. For example, the following conclusion is typical:

> Because all students are different and all students have needs, learning supports must be embedded seamlessly into the general education classroom, not tacked on or subcontracted out. When supports are embedded and integrated into the general education classroom, they can be made available to support any or all students who need them, whenever they need them . . . . Of course, ideally our classroom structures and instructional practices would be universally designed to maximize the degree of fit between all students and the learning context—providing students with differentiated, meaningful, and challenging curriculum, along with high-access instruction, targeted support structures, and choice. [42] (p. 427)

In our judgment, those who propose the end of special education and the inclusion of all students in a common curriculum and site of education—that general education might be made appropriate for all learners—live in a fantasy world created by philosophical constructions and science fictions, that is inconsistent with real-world limitations. It is noted that full inclusion makes about as much sense as supposing that a single type of operator's license should allow all drivers to operate any non-airborne vehicle, that all pilots should be expected to be competent to fly all airplanes for all purposes, that all builders will be licensed to construct any building of any type, that all physicians will be able to perform all medical treatments, that all persons with a law degree should be able to handle all cases involving law, regardless of the nature of the case, and so on [46]. Specialization is understood by most people to be important in most lines of work. Of course, specialization can be taken to absurd, silly extremes, but it is recognized as important in most occupations and professions, and for good reason.

Why, we might ask, would anyone familiar with teaching and schools believe no specialization in training or practice is required to teach children with disabilities, simply because good teaching is good teaching? True, some of the same things are required in all cases; there are, indeed, core competencies required for the competent practice of teaching, regardless of the student. There are, also, core competencies required for driving, flying, building, practicing medicine, operating a hospital, serving in the armed forces, practicing law or dentistry, and many other endeavors. We realize that in each of these, the practitioner cannot be expected, should not be expected, is not by law or consensus expected to be competent in all areas of specialization. We need not belabor the points that specialization is important in every profession, that special training is critical for competent practice of that specialization, or that people get really good at doing something by applying their special training over and over as a specialist. That teaching special education is considered so nonspecialized that a single endorsement or certificate is sufficient is, in our opinion, laughably outrageous. Such a proposal

is not only unconscionable but reveals the devaluation of what special educators do and what students with disabilities deserve. The trope "*all* children are special" deserves another: 'some are more special than others' [46] (pp. 258–259).

The proposal to rid schools of special education is, in our opinion, a most curious outlier, a totally nonsensical and impractical notion that has no logical justification in the real world of education that involves human beings who are teachers and students. It has the potential to prevent many children with disabilities from getting an education best suited to their needs.

7. Concluding Comments

We believe that inclusion in the sense of students being physically present in general education classrooms, what has been called *habeas corpus* inclusion, is not as important as inclusion in the sense of being engaged in a program of instruction that is meaningful and challenging *for the individual*, what has been called *proprium instructio* [47]. Appropriate instruction is by far the most important task of education for *all* students, including those with disabilities. Making appropriate instruction a reality for all students requires special education, including teachers with special training, rather than a generic, "one size fits all" or all-purpose preparation.

The anti-mask movement in reaction to COVID-19 restrictions comes to mind as we contemplate attitudes toward special education. Anti-mask activists abandon scientific evidence of the effectiveness of masks in preventing the spread of the virus, saying they consider being forced to wear a mask contravenes their human rights to freedom of choice, even though this puts both themselves and others at risk. They value their personal freedom more than rational consideration of scientific evidence and being considerate to the safety and human rights of others. They therefore begin any logical discussion holding false premises about human rights. We see the same problems of muddled thinking and science denial in the DSE, special-education-as-*dis*service movement, and in the related assumption that special education is second-rate and demeaning.

One irony of the constructivist DSE version of education is that it spurns the very direct instruction methodology that is the most promising for all students, one that would make meaningful inclusion of more students with disabilities more successful. Unfortunately, many individuals' comments about their educational experiences are misleading when taken as indications of what is desirable or undesirable or for their benefit, particularly their long-term benefit. Certainly, individuals' preferences and comments about their personal experiences are important and should be considered. However, children and adolescents often express hostility toward necessary and beneficial discipline, control, direction, work, and education and choose patterns of behavior that are unacceptable and self-injurious in their ultimate consequences. Such consequences include eventualities that are not socially constructed but constraints of the natural world.

Perhaps the coronavirus has provided an apropos example of why scientific data and their logical interpretation are important and apply to special and inclusive education as well as to virology and human health. Most people can see the logical fallacy in the suggestion that cases of COVID-19 exist only because we test for it and that if we simply did not test so many people we would have a lower rate of infection. To us, that is no more laughable than the idea that if we did not test and then label so many students as having disabilities or special educational needs we would have fewer of them.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement of 2020 provides a cautionary example of what is at stake in labeling and categorizing. Of course, it is true at one level that all lives matter, but that truism is used by some as a distraction from BLM, a way of diminishing the necessary focus on *Black* lives. Naming the category or the individual does not guarantee that a particular issue will be addressed [48]. That is, it is not a *sufficient* condition for change, but it is a *necessary* condition—the change will not occur without it. We might note that the plight or needs of minorities, including those with disabilities as well as those of color, will be ignored if their category is not labelled—named. And names—labels—apply to individuals, not only to categories in their abstraction.

The truly horrifying thing to us is the lack of understanding of people who consider themselves advocates for students with disabilities regarding the fact that if people are not identified and given labels, they are likely to be ignored. In the real world, students judged to have no disabilities or deficits, will have no *special* programs, but will only have access to programs developed for all students. Remember, *all lives* matter, though true, removes the focus on *Black lives*. Likewise, the argument that *all students* are special, though true in some sense, removes the focus on *students with disabilities*. Only in a fantasy world is difference in ability so unimportant that no individual is considered typical, gifted, or to have a disability in any area of functioning, including school or education. Some imaginary worlds are dystopian, and one in which disability is thought to be universal, inconsequential, or even desirable when all social barriers are removed is, in our opinion, not only unrealistic but dystopian.

Our hope is to make the real world a better, more habilitative place for students with disabilities. In contrast to a focus on full inclusion that denies many children with disabilities an appropriate education, the application of evidence-based special education strategies will help to ensure that all young people with special educational needs and disabilities get an education that optimizes their educational outcomes and provides them with the greatest chance of being fully included in their communities after leaving school. A recent review of the literature on the effectiveness of educating children with disabilities has suggested that, in order to provide them with an equitable and excellent education, implementation of a synthesis of key components of special education and inclusive education is needed [49]. This review proposes that key special education strategies and approaches must co-exist with those from inclusive education in order to provide effective education for all young people with special educational needs and disabilities. One way to do this is within a model of inclusive special education which combines key elements of special education with those from inclusive education [44].

Therefore, it is considered that, rather than becoming extinct, special education needs to continue to be developed through ongoing development and evaluation of interventions, to be disseminated as widely as possible through the education and training of teachers and other professionals who work with young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and to be rigorously implemented and evaluated in schools at all levels of education systems.

References

1. UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). 2016. Available online: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html (accessed on 12 August 2020).
2. Cook, B.G.; Cook, L. An examination of highly cited research on inclusion. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 130–159.
3. Anastasiou, D.; Gregory, M.; Kauffman, J.M. Commentary on Article 24 of the CRPD: The right to education. In *Commentary on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*; Bantekas, I., Stein, M., Anastasiou, D., Eds.; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 656–704.
4. Anastasiou, D.; Felder, M.; Correia, L.; Shemanov, A.; Zweers, I.; Ahrbeck, B. The impact of Article 24 of the CRPD on special and inclusive education in Germany, Portugal, the Russian Federation, and Netherlands. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 236–245.
5. Hyatt, C.; Hornby, G. Will UN Article 24 lead to the demise of special education or to its re-affirmation? *Support Learn.* **2017**, *32*, 288–304. [CrossRef]

6.   UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Inclusion and Education: All Means All. Global Education Monitoring Report. 2020. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark: /48223/pf0000373718 (accessed on 12 August 2020).

7.   Kauffman, J.M. The special education story: Obituary, accident report, conversion experience, reincarnation, or none of the above? *Exceptionality* **2000**, *8*, 61–71. [CrossRef]

8.   Zigmond, N.P.; Kloo, A. General and special education are (and should be) different. In *Handbook of Special Education*, 2nd ed.; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Pullen, P.C., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 249–262.

9.   Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spéc. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]

10.   Hornby, G. Inclusion or Delusion: Can one size fit all? *Support Learn.* **1999**, *14*, 152–157. [CrossRef]

11.   Kauffman, J.M. Appearances, Stigma, and Prevention. *Remedial Spéc. Educ.* **2003**, *24*, 195–198. [CrossRef]

12.   Kauffman, J.M. Truths and their implications for special education policy and practice. *J. Disabil. Policy Stud.* **2020**. Manuscript submitted for publication.

13.   Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Pullen, P.C. Creeping normality: Special education's problem of a new normal. *J. Disabil. Policy Stud.* **2020**, in press.

14.   Kidd, R.; Hornby, G. Transfer from special to mainstream. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **1993**, *20*, 17–19. [CrossRef]

15.   Hornby, G.; Kidd, R. Transfer from special to mainstream—Ten years later. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2001**, *28*, 10–17. [CrossRef]

16.   Kauffman, J.M. Has Inclusion Gone Too Far? Reflections on change and progress. *Rethink. Behav.* **2019**, *2*, 11–16.

17.   Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Hallenbeck, B.A. Becoming your own worst enemy: Converging paths. In *Inclusive Education: Global Issues & Controversie*; Boyle, C., Mavropoulou, S., Anderson, J., Page, A., Eds.; Brill Sense: Boston, MA, USA, 2020; pp. 73–88.

18.   Kauffman, J.M.; Ahrbeck, B.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Felder, M.; Hallenbeck, B.A. Special Education Policy Prospects: Lessons from Social Policies Past. *Exceptionality* **2020**. [CrossRef]

19.   Lipsky, D.K.; Gartner, A. Inclusion, school restructuring, and the remaking of American society. *Harv. Educ. Rev.* **1996**, *66*, 762–796. [CrossRef]

20.   Gerber, M.M. A history of special education. In *Handbook of Special Education*, 2nd ed.; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Pullen, P.C., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 3–15.

21.   Kauffman, J.M. Attributions of malice to special education policy and practice. In *Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities Policy and Practice*; Scruggs, T.E., Mastropieri, M.A., Eds.; Emerald: Bingley, UK, 2009; Volume 22, pp. 33–66.

22.   Slee, R. Defining the Scope of Inclusive Education. Technical Report. Available online: https://www. researchgate.net/publication/330741940 (accessed on 18 May 2020).

23.   Gopnik, A. Measuring Man: Josef Mengele's malignant "science". *The New Yorker*, 22 June 2020; 77–81.

24.   Kristof, N. The mistakes that will haunt our legacy. *The New York Times*. Available online: https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/opinion/sunday/animal-rights-cruelty.html?action=click&module= Opinion&pgtype=Homepage (accessed on 11 July 2020).

25.   SWIFT Schools. Available online: https://swiftschools.org (accessed on 10 June 2020).

26.   Gross, P.R.; Levitt, N.; Lewis, M.W. *The Flight from Science and Reason*; Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD, USA, 1996.

27.   Sokal, A.; Bricmont, J. *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*; Picador: New York, NY, USA, 1998.

28.   Blackburn, S. *Truth: A Guide*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2005.

29.   Koertge, N. *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 1998.

30.   Neiman, S. *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-Up Idealists*; Harcourt: New York, NY, USA, 2008.

31.   Crews, F. *Postmodern Pooh*; North Point Press: New York, NY, USA, 2001.

32.   Gallagher, D.J. *Challenging Orthodoxy in Special Education: Dissenting Voices*; Love: Denver, CO, USA, 2004.

33.   Mostert, M.P.; Kavale, K.A.; Kauffman, J.M. *Challenging the Refusal of Reasoning in Special Education*; Love: Denver, CO, USA, 2008.

34. Sasso, G.M. The retreat from inquiry and knowledge in special education. *J. Spec. Educ.* **2001**, *34*, 178–193. [CrossRef]

35. Sasso, G.M. Science and reason in special education: The legacy of Derrida and Foucault. In *Achieving the Radical Reform of Special Education: Essays in Honor of James M. Kauffman*; Crockett, J.B., Gerber, M.M., Landrum, T.J., Eds.; Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, USA, 2007; pp. 143–167.

36. Bregman, R. *Utopia for Realists and How We Get There*; Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2017.

37. Mirsky, S. Denial du jour: Galileo's fights against science deniers have modern-day analogues. *Sci. Am.* **2020**, *323*, 70.

38. Ahrbeck, B.; Felder, M. The Politicization of Education: A Perspective from Germany. CIEO. Available online: https://www.cieo.org.uk/research/politicisation-of-education/ (accessed on 24 July 2020).

39. Baglieri, S.; Bejoian, L.M.; Broderick, A.A.; Connor, D.J.; Valle, J. [Re]claiming "inclusive education" toward cohesion in educational reform: Disability studies unravels the myth of the normal child. *Teach. Coll. Rec.* **2011**, *113*, 2122–2154.

40. Kauffman, J.M. *Education Deform: Bright People Sometimes Say Stupid Things about Education*; Rowman & Littlefield Education: New York, NY, USA, 2002.

41. Kauffman, J.M. *Toward a Science of Education: The Battle between Rogue and Real Science*; Attainment: Verona, WS, USA, 2011.

42. Ferri, B. Doing a (dis)service: Reimagining special education from a disability studies perspective. In *Handbook of Social Justice in Education*; Ayers, W., Quinn, T.M., Stovall, D., Eds.; Taylor & Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2008; pp. 417–430.

43. Bateman, B.D.; Lloyd, J.W.; Tankersley, M. *Enduring Issues in Special Education: Personal Perspectives*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2013.

44. Hornby, G. *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-Based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014.

45. Walker, H.M.; Gresham, F.M. *Handbook of Evidence-Based Practices for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Applications in Schools*; Guilford: New York, NY, USA, 2014.

46. Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Landrum, T.J.; Smith, C.R. Likely legacies of inclusion. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 249–265.

47. Kauffman, J.M.; Badar, J. Definitions and other issues. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 1–24.

48. Attiah, K. Black Lives Matter isn't complete without #SayHerName. *The Washington Post*, 21 July 2020, p. A25.

49. Hornby, G. The necessity for coexistence of equity and excellence in inclusive and special education. In *Encyclopedia of Inclusive and Special Education*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2020; in press.

Article

Using Evidence-Based Practice and Data-Based Decision Making in Inclusive Education

Gabrielle Wilcox *, Cristina Fernandez Conde and Amy Kowbel

School and Applied Child Psychology Program, Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4, Canada; cristina.fernandezco@ucalgary.ca (C.F.C.); amy.kowbel@ucalgary.ca (A.K.)
* Correspondence: gwilcox@ucalgary.ca

Abstract: There are longstanding calls for inclusive education for all regardless of student need or teacher capacity to meet those needs. Unfortunately, there are little empirical data to support full inclusion for all students and even less information on the role of data-based decision making in inclusive education specifically, even though there is extensive research on the effectiveness of data-based decision making. In this article, we reviewed what data-based decision making is and its role in education, the current state of evidence related to inclusive education, and how data-based decision making can be used to support decisions for students with reading disabilities and those with intellectual disabilities transitioning to adulthood. What is known about evidence-based practices in supporting reading and transition are reviewed in relationship to the realities of implementing these practices in inclusive education settings. Finally, implications for using data-based decisions in inclusive settings are discussed.

Keywords: inclusive education; data-based decision making; transition planning; reading disabilities; intellectual disabilities

1. Using Evidence-Based Practice and Data-Based Decision Making in Inclusive Education

Twenty-five years ago, Vaughn and Schumm [1] outlined the components of responsible inclusive education. These components included teacher choice and the development of their own philosophy of inclusion, adequate resources and professional development, a continuum of services rather than having only one option: full inclusion, school-based models rather than district- or state-mandated models, putting student needs first, ongoing evaluation of effectiveness, and curriculum and instructional practices that meet student needs. Making decisions that put students first ensures that students make progress academically and socially through ongoing progress monitoring. Decisions about placement and programming should be based on data related to student progress toward their goals rather than assuming that the same placement and programming will meet all students' needs. To understand some of the limitations in the use of data within the context of inclusive education, this article describes evidence-based practice and data-based decision making (DBDM) within the context of inclusive education, specifically in the areas of reading and transition to adulthood for students with intellectual disability (ID). In this article, we reviewed data-based decision making and how it is used to support educational outcomes, and the current state of evidence regarding the effectiveness of inclusive education. We then provided examples of how evidence-based practices related to DBDM can be used to make decisions in inclusive education that prioritizes meeting students' needs. We used two examples: reading difficulties and intellectual disability (ID) to provide examples with groups of students who have different needs.

2. Evidence-Based Practice and Data-Based Decision-Making

DBDM is a process of gathering data about how students are progressing toward specific goals in academic or behavioral performance. This includes identifying the current

and desired levels of performance, implementing an evidence-based intervention, regularly monitoring progress toward meeting that goal, and modifying the intervention as necessary [2]. This is an iterative process rather than a few steps to follow through once. DBDM is a process that can be implemented at all levels from entire districts to individual students. While staff at the school district and individual school levels should use data to inform their decisions about how they educate and support the academic and social-emotional development of their students, this article will focus on DBDM as it relates to individual students with exceptional needs.

While data are an important component of DBDM, decision makers must *interpret* the data to inform decisions about how to effectively support students. Data must be combined with pedagogical and content knowledge to translate it into a usable action plan, taking the context into consideration [3]. This reasoning process is not as straightforward as it appears, and decision makers need to attend to potential cognitive biases and misapplied heuristics that can interfere with their decision making, for example, confirmation bias [4,5]. While evidence suggests that DBDM can improve student outcomes [6], more work is needed to effectively translate this into widespread practice. Unfortunately, although teachers collect a great deal of data, they rarely use it explicitly in decision making for individual students' progress [7].

The outcomes of decisions and interventions implemented within the classroom depend on the validity of the inferences drawn from the data. Unfortunately, data literacy tends to be low among school personnel, contributing to this limited use of data in decision making [8,9]; however, supporting staff understanding of data can increase their data literacy [10]. Data literacy concerns the ability to analyse and interpret data so that it can be used to inform practice. Data only becomes usable information when the observer is able to understand it, which involves multiple steps. First, it is necessary to collect and organize data related to the goal and then transform the data into information. Then, educators need to be proficient in analyzing and summarizing, creating concise and targeted summaries of relevant information. Finally, by synthesizing the information into a unified and usable summary and prioritizing what has the most importance in working toward the intended goals, the information becomes useable knowledge. Teachers can use this knowledge to determine the effectiveness of an intervention, creating a feedback loop to the previous stages which informs changes needed to increase intervention effectiveness [3]. The complexity of this process may lead to false interpretations if the educator is not proficient in these skills.

Formal professional development in areas of data use can be difficult to access. Often, knowledgeable staff members train principals or other administrative staff, who then train teachers, relying on colleagues rather than development programs [9,11]. This training tends to be brief, without consistent levels of quality, and with a focus on using data systems rather than on data interpretation or how to connect the resulting information with strategies for instructional improvement [9]. Even within schools that promote and support the use of data, data are rarely used to improve teaching or adapt instruction to meet the needs of students [9,12]. Most often teachers respond by looking at the content of instruction, re-teaching or retesting the relevant information, or forming groups based on the identified needs of students rather than adjusting the delivery methods of their instruction [12]. To appropriately use the data collected in the classroom, teachers must be given the opportunity to improve their skills in data literacy. Means and colleagues [9] suggest that collaboration can be useful in this process, allowing teachers to learn from each other, clarify any problems, correct errors, and bring a broader range of interpretive skills to the task. Greater access to technological resources such as student information systems, instructional management systems, assessment systems, and diagnostic systems, can also help teachers meaningfully collect, analyse, and communicate data when the complexity becomes overwhelming [11]. Although DBDM is a process that can support effective teaching and positive student outcomes, teachers receive little to no training in this area and often have limited time to devote to data analysis and interpretation.

3. Evidence and Data in Inclusive Education

The rhetoric of inclusivity has made it unpopular to suggest that evidence of its effectiveness is necessary to support its implementation [13]. However, we argue with Reynolds and colleagues [14] (p. 307), that while "in God we trust. All others must have data." Ensuring that students receive effective instruction and support is of the utmost importance, and we cannot support a claim without evidence. While inclusive education is a popular idea, teachers generally do not use evidence-based curricula let alone evidence-based interventions for students with special education needs (SENs) [15]. Additionally, in inclusive settings, teachers report spending less time with students who have SENs [16], making it unlikely that they are effectively using student data to make decisions about instruction and intervention to ensure positive academic and social and emotional outcomes for students. Meta-analyses have found mixed results of the impact of inclusive education. They also noted limitations of studies examining inclusive education outcomes that included differing definitions of inclusion, amount of inclusion, varying levels of student needs included in the studies, and a lack of control groups [17,18]. Furthermore, a review evaluating the evidence supporting inclusive education indicates that there is no clear evidence regarding the positive effects of inclusion [19].

One challenge with some conceptions of inclusive education is with the idea that all students, no matter the level of need or level of education (from primary to high school) should be fully included in regular education classes in order to protect human rights [20,21]. However, both teacher training and the level of student need impact teacher readiness to provide education and whether or not teachers leave the field. In a study of teacher turnover, Gilmour and colleagues [22] found that regardless of their training, teachers who taught students with behavioral challenges left the field at higher rates. Teachers with special education degrees had lower turnover when working with students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, often in special education settings, while those with dual degrees had higher turnover when they had students with higher needs, and there was a higher rate of teacher turnover in regular education classes with higher numbers of students with SENs.

Relatedly, there is a belief that labelling is stigmatizing. While labelling can be used in a way that is stigmatizing [23], it can also be empowering, explaining difficulties so that students do not just feel "stupid." For example, one woman shared her story of being identified with a learning disability as an adult and how this helped to her get the interventions she needed to learn to read and have an explanation for her difficulties [24]. Furthermore, obtaining diagnostic clarity can be an advantage. The mother of a young boy with autism noted that confirming the diagnosis helped her understand her son's strengths and areas of need [25]. In addition, full inclusion for all does not take student or parent preferences into account, as found in one study in which parents whose children were in special education classrooms (92%) were more pleased with their children's placement than those who were placed into inclusive classrooms (47%). Moreover, more students were happy with their placement in a special education program (92%) than in mainstream classrooms (64%) in a small study in the UK [26].

While teachers regularly collect information on student progress, they are less likely to use that information to inform their teaching strategies or to inform programming decisions for students with SENs, despite the fact that students with severe disabilities perform better when teachers follow guidelines for DBDM. Teachers often note that they do not have the training necessary to interpret student data especially when there are multiple sources of data that add to the complexity of analysis [9,27]. Many teachers struggle to make sense of data representations, differences or trends, and creating relevant goals related to the data, which can lead to invalid inferences [9]. When data are complex, teachers can lose track of their initial goals or begin to rely on their own impressions and past experiences rather than the data [9]. Additionally, a qualitative study of primary school teachers in Belgium found that teachers reported using intuition rather than data to determine whether or

not to retain students [28] despite the strong evidence that retention does not improve long-term academic outcomes for students (see [29]).

Teachers should monitor the progress of students with SENs toward their educational goals through Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which are legal documents that are also tools for data-based decision making. A Turkish study examining the IEPs of students with SEN in inclusive settings found that only one third of the legal requirements were met on average in these IEPs [30]. For example, less than half included students' current level of performance and personal information, and when they included that information, it was vague. A majority of the IEPs did not contain information about special education services or related services. These are necessary components of DBDM, suggesting that there is not enough information in those IEPs to make data-based decisions about student progress. Unfortunately, research collecting data on inclusive education often focus on teacher and pre-service reflections rather than student outcomes [31,32]. Currently, there is limited research on the effectiveness of inclusive education, and the research that exists has significant limitations and has demonstrated mixed findings. There is also limited research on the use of DBDM in inclusive settings, but research on teaching practices [16], attrition [22], and use of IEPs [30], which document DBDM, suggest that it is not used effectively in inclusive education settings.

4. How Data Can Be Used to Inform Inclusive Education in Practice and Research?

This section highlights two common diagnoses of school-aged children with different aetiologies and different needs to demonstrate the role of DBDM for students with SEN. Reading difficulties are common. In the United States, just over a third meet proficiency [2]. IDs are less prevalent with 1–3% of the population having this diagnosis, and they tend to have more intensive needs related to functional academics and skills of daily living [33]. Consequently, these two groups of students provide a wide view of the types of services students require and how DBDM can be implemented in inclusive settings.

5. Data-Based Decision Making in Reading

Elementary school teachers should use evidence-based curriculum and curriculum-based measurement (CBM) to determine if students are gaining reading skills at an adequate rate because early intervention is critical for students' long-term outcomes. Students who do not gain reading skills early are less likely to ever catch up, especially if they do not receive remediation. They are also likely to experience multiple negative outcomes including less educational attainment, limiting their career choices; greater risk of drop out and interaction with the criminal justice system; and increased rates of mental health diagnoses [34–36]. Additionally, reading difficulties are quite common with 42% of Canadians not possessing the reading skills necessary to follow multi-step directions and 25% of third graders not reading independently [37,38]. They are costly, not only to the students who do not attain adequate reading skills but also to the global economy, costing over USD one trillion every year [39,40].

If inclusive education is considered to be a continuum where students spend as much time as possible in regular education classrooms as long as their needs can be met, then many students with reading challenges should be able to be included in regular education for most or all of the school day if DBDM is used to ensure that the reading interventions they are receiving are helping them to reach their reading goals. There is a strong foundation of research regarding best practices in reading instruction and intervention that could be used to support inclusive education for students with reading disabilities including how to collect and use data to make decisions about adequate progress [39]. Effective reading instruction depends on gathering and using reliable data to identify individual student needs and areas of strength [41]. Teachers then need to modify instruction or intervention strategies to improve reading outcomes if students are not making adequate progress to reach their reading goals [42]. Teachers need preservice and in-service training in delivering

evidence-based general curriculum as well as training in CBM in order to engage in the DBDM necessary to meet the needs of students with SEN.

Areas of need in reading are initially identified through universal screeners that evaluate overall school performance and determine which students need additional supports to successfully gain reading skills [43]. CBM is used to monitor growth in a specific skill to evaluate whether instruction is effective or not [44]. It is important to train teachers and staff who will be administering the measures to safeguard the fidelity and reliability of the data [44]. Similarly, it is crucial to monitor student motivation and to find a quiet distraction-free setting for test administration [44]. Research on the accuracy of decision making demonstrates the importance of gathering accurate data and to avoid making decisions solely based on judgment or intuition [45]. When decision making teams use multiple pieces of data (i.e., universal screening data, CBM, in-class assessments), they increase decision accuracy [45]. To use DBDM to support reading effectively, teachers need to collect and interpret the data and use it to inform instruction. However, even when teachers can read and interpret data and progress monitoring graphs, it is still difficult for them to link the data to instruction [46]. Linking data to instruction is more challenging than just reading data. Thus, specific training to link data to instruction is necessary for teachers to do so effectively [46]. There is a strong foundation of research on effective reading instruction, intervention, and CBM that could be used to support inclusive education practices for students with reading difficulties.

6. Realities of Delivering Inclusive Reading Education

While teachers who understand reading development and evidence-based reading instruction are better able to choose appropriate interventions for struggling students, teachers generally do not receive adequate training in this area, and experience does not improve their understanding of how to teach reading [47]. For example, in an international study of professionals in reading education, only 40% indicated that teacher training programs provide adequate training in reading instruction [48]. If teachers do not have the training to implement evidence-based reading instruction, which is a general education strategy, it is unlikely that they have the skills necessary to use data to determine specific skills to support struggling students and to select and implement more intensive interventions.

One study found that barriers to using CBM to support literacy skills included limited coaching support, not knowing how to translate assessment data into support for students, limited teacher knowledge, and reluctance to examine teaching practices as a result of student data [49]. Additionally, teachers do not receive adequate training in how to use data to make instructional decisions. For example, Wagner and colleagues [50] examined pre-service teachers' skill in reading and interpreting graphs of student CBM data related to their progress during a reading intervention. They found that pre-service teachers not only said less about what CBM graphs indicated than experts, they also provided descriptions that demonstrated weak understanding of the sequence of components of CBM. This is not surprising as teachers report receiving little if any training in CBM [51]. This is particularly concerning in an inclusive education setting where teachers are expected to meet the needs of students with a variety of challenges in academic skill acquisition in addition to other areas of need.

Reading disabilities are an area with significant research and clear guidelines on how to use data to make decisions and determine appropriate interventions. This research has demonstrated that an effective reading intervention requires intensive interventions that are delivered frequently, in small groups, over several months using explicit direct instruction with high levels of student engagement and practice [52]. These are skills that elementary teachers in inclusive settings need in order to support students with reading difficulties in gaining the reading skills necessary for academic success. Additionally, inclusive education teachers need to be skilled in collecting data on student progress towards their goals, in making decisions as to whether or not students are making adequate progress toward their goals, and how to modify the interventions when they are not. Unfortunately, students

with disabilities require more intensive instruction, and their low achievement can often be attributed to them not receiving instruction at the required intensity in regular education classrooms [53]. In order to demonstrate that inclusive education can meet the needs of the high incidence reading disabilities, teachers need to have knowledge of reading development and instruction as well as how to collect and interpret data on student progress so that they can use that data to make decisions about student progress and modify interventions as needed. Additionally, teachers need time and flexibility to deliver small group and one-on-one intensive interventions to students who are struggling while meeting the needs of other students in their class.

7. Data-Based Decision Making in Transition Planning Students with IDs

Best practices in transition planning for students with intellectual disabilities (IDs) need to be based upon DBDM. These include observable and measurable postsecondary goals that are monitored regularly to inform educational changes that need to be made to support reaching those goals [54]. Evidence-based practices to support transition to adulthood include instruction and support in job training, work study, life skills training, self-determination training, functional academics, parents involved in the transition planning process, social skills training related to workplace relationships, and community agency collaboration [55,56]. Other secondary school experiences related to better postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities generally include work experience, parental involvement, independent living skills, social skills, vocational education, work study, parent expectations, youth decision making, travel skills, and goal setting [57,58]. While a meta-analysis noted that students with disabilities performed better when involved in inclusive classrooms, few studies were included, and these had variable sample sizes, with small percentages of students with IDs (e.g., 12.38%) [57]. Consequently, broad studies of students with disabilities are not likely to adequately represent the experiences of students with ID.

There are many evidence-based interventions that target self-determination, which is important to support outcomes for students with ID. Self-determination concerns students' agency over their lives and education, making choices for themselves, and taking initiative in creating and attaining their goals [59]. Increasing self-determination can also improve decision making, goal setting, problem solving, self-monitoring and self-regulation [60]. Students with ID who scored higher in self-determination were more likely to live independently three years after high school, demonstrate greater financial independence, have positive employment outcomes, and have better community access [61,62]. A randomized placebo-controlled trial demonstrated that interventions improved self-determination in students with ID [63].

Data on students' current level of performance and their postsecondary goals are necessary to create measurable, observable transition goals in order to identify the transition planning for individual students' needs and to inform DBDM [64]. It is important to accurately communicate what will be expected of the student, the gap that currently exists, and what remediation and accommodations will be used to support students in reaching those goals, which will also be used to measure progress [64]. Though future-oriented goals are essential to the transition process, many teachers feel uncomfortable about helping students develop goals related to adulthood, which they cannot measure at the endpoint [65]. Because of this discomfort, teachers struggled to specify postsecondary goals and to develop clear and concise annual goals and how they would be measured [65]. Unfortunately, without clear and measurable annual goals, it is difficult to collect relevant data, monitor progress, or evaluate how to support the student, which leads to poor outcomes after they transition to adulthood [66]. Research on effective transition to adulthood for ID clearly outlines the experiences that increase their successful transition [54–58]. These areas are often difficult to provide in inclusive high school settings, however, because job training and independent living skills are typically not covered in preparing students for university.

8. Realities of Delivering Inclusive Education for Students with ID

When students graduate from high school, they are expected to be prepared for postsecondary training or to begin contributing to society through employment or volunteer experiences and to have meaningful community connections. To highlight the reality that full inclusion is not universally beneficial, we summarize the findings from Hornby and Kidd [26]. In the UK, some students with mild ID were transferred to full-time regular education classrooms as part of a policy to increase inclusive education. After they graduated, 71% of those who transferred to regular education were unemployed; 67% still lived with their parents; 46% indicated that they had no friends, 25% had only one friend. When they were asked about their most useful school experience, only 13% reported their time in regular education, while 46% reported that their time in special education was the most useful. Although this was a small study and the quality of instruction in the various settings was not accounted for, it suggests that inclusive education placement is not universally beneficial for students with ID.

Much of the research on inclusion for students with ID focuses on social benefits of being in an inclusive classroom, but it fails to take into account that the ideals of inclusivity are not always the reality, and some students with disabilities actually choose to socially interact with others who have similar needs and are more accepting of them [67]. Additionally, parents can have different inclusion goals for their children. In one small study, a mother wished for more inclusion, while the other wanted more special education to develop independent living skills. Neither student received the services their mothers thought they needed, contributing to challenges during the transition process [68]. These studies highlight the unique needs and goals of students that cannot all be met within the same setting and require a flexible continuum of services to provide students with the education they need to meet their postsecondary goals.

Research supporting inclusive education often only measures socialization [69], but long-term outcomes for students with ID are often predicated on educational experiences that support vocational and independent living skills. The areas of skill development that support effective transition to adulthood include training in independent living skills, self-determination, social skills and work experience [55–57]. There are, however, few if any high school teachers who can effectively teach the curriculum of their subject area and adequately support students with ID to gain these additional skills, especially in secondary education [70]. One qualitative study investigated parent and teacher perceptions of how the transition of students with ID is supported within an inclusive setting [71]. Most parents described their experience with inclusive education negatively, noting that their children's needs for instruction in basic skills necessary for academic success were largely ignored, resulting in a widening of the achievement gap between them and their peers [71]. Parents also reported that their children did not receive instruction in independent living, social, and travel skills within mainstream education. Consequently, parents needed to find these supports on their own. Though some teachers strive to learn more about evidence-based practices, there is a large gap between best practices and actual practice in transition planning [72]. In order to implement best practices in transition, teachers need to have knowledge and skill in delivering and measuring the effectiveness of interventions and the space in their curriculum to deliver them [72].

Though evidence suggests that transition goals related to independent living and vocational skills have a significant effect on improving the skills and outcomes of students with ID, they are rarely implemented in schools [61]. This could be a result of a lack of training in areas of evidence-based practices in transition. The majority of teachers and transition professionals report having little or no professional development or training in transition evidence-based practices, and even those who did receive some level of professional development reported that it did not prepare them to implement those practices [72,73]. In order to support students with ID as they transition into adulthood, it is important to provide them with training that will support them in gaining the independence needed to find success in adulthood.

9. Implications of the Lack of CBM and DBDM for Inclusive Education

Currently, teachers frequently report being unprepared to teach the wide range of student needs in inclusive settings, especially when students have behavioral challenges [74]. In order to meet the needs of students with SENs, teachers in inclusive settings need not only subject matter and pedagogical knowledge, they also need a wide range of instructional strategies and evidence-based interventions from which they can pull to meet their students' varying needs, because if students were able to be successful with general pedagogical knowledge, they would not need an IEP [22]. Relatedly, it is important to consider what is reasonable to expect from a teacher in how much they can reasonably differentiate instruction, especially considering the high rates of teacher burnout and turnover [70,75,76]. For example, it may be unreasonable to expect all teachers be skilled in supporting using picture exchange systems, toileting and feeding, and specific academic interventions in addition to classroom management, general instructional strategies, and their content [77].

Additionally, teachers need training in DBDM [10], including in collecting, interpreting, and using CBM and other progress monitoring tools to provide instruction [46]. Without preservice training or additional support, it is unlikely that DBDM will have a positive impact on instruction. Teachers need to be able to make decisions based on different sources of data as this relates to student progress toward their goals in order to prevent instructional decisions based solely on their judgement. As noted above, training is needed not only in data collection and interpretation, but it is also crucial for teachers to select and use appropriate progress monitoring tools. In addition to research on data-based decision making for students with disabilities broadly, we also need to increase a culture of using data to make decisions on instruction and placement for students with disabilities in order to engage in responsible inclusion and receive the type and intensity of instruction and feedback that they require to make progress toward their goals [53,70]. Without training in evidenced-based instructional practices, DBDM, and CBM, it will be challenging for teachers to know if students are making adequate progress or what additional supports or instructional modifications may be important to support students who are not making adequate progress.

Finally, inclusive education needs to prioritize student needs and use DBDM to ensure that students are receiving the interventions and supports necessary to reach these goals. For some students, this will mean full inclusion. Other students, however, will need access to services that are not available in inclusive settings whether that is a pull out program to provide an intensive reading intervention or a partial or full-time placement in a special education setting to provide instruction in independent living and vocational skills. As Zigmond and Kloo [78] noted, "general education is a place; special education is a service." (p. 161). In order to meet the needs of students with SENs, we need to ensure that they receive the services they need first, then consider where those services can be provided. These decisions are complex and require a full understanding of student and parent goals as well as the skill sets of teachers and supports available in schools. Vaughn's and Schumm's [1] call for responsible inclusion is still relevant, and those decisions require the use of DBDM to support *all* students in meeting their educational goals.

References

1. Vaughn, S.; Schumm, J.S. Responsible inclusion for students with learning disabilities. *J. Learn. Disabil.* **1995**, *28*, 264–270. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. National Assessment of Educational Progress. *The Nation's Report Card*; U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Educational Sciences, National Center for Educational Statistics: Washington, DC, USA, 2015.
3. Mandinach, E.B. A perfect time for data use: Using data-driven decision making to inform practice. *Educ. Psychol.* **2012**, *47*, 71–85. [CrossRef]
4. Kahneman, D.; Frederick, S. A model of heuristic judgement. In *Morrison Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning*; Holyoak, K.J., Morrison, R.G., Eds.; Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2005; Volume 137, pp. 267–293.
5. Wilcox, G.; Schroeder, M. What comes before report writing? Attending to clinical reasoning and thinking errors in school psychology. *J. Psychoeduc. Assess.* **2015**, *33*, 652–661. [CrossRef]
6. McNaughton, S.M.; Lai, S.; Hsaio, S. Testing the effectiveness of an intervention model based on data use: A replication series across clusters of schools. *Sch. Eff. Sch. Improv.* **2012**, *23*, 203–228. [CrossRef]
7. Schildkamp, K. Data-based decision-making for school improvement: Research insights and gaps. *Educ. Res.* **2019**, *61*, 257–272. [CrossRef]
8. Filderman, M.J.; Toste, J.R. Decisions, decisions, decisions: Using data to make instructional decisions for struggling readers. *Teach. Except. Child.* **2017**, *50*, 130–140. [CrossRef]
9. Means, B.; Padilla, C.; Gallagher, L. *Use of Education Data at the Local Level: From Accountability to Instructional Improvement*; U.S. Department of Education: Washington, DC, USA, 2010.
10. Pagan, S.; Magner, K.; Thibedeau, C. Supporting data-driven decision making in a Canadian school district. *Int. J. Digit. Soc.* **2019**, *10*, 1510–1515. [CrossRef]
11. Mandinach, E.E.; Honey, M.; Light, D.; Brunner, C. A conceptual framework for data-driven decision making. In *Data-Driven School Improvement: Linking Data and Learning*; Mandinach, E.B., Honey, M., Eds.; Teachers College Press: New York, NY, USA, 2008; pp. 13–31.
12. Farrell, C.C.; Marsh, J.A. Metrics matter: How properties and perceptions of data shape teachers' instructional responses. *Educ. Adm. Q.* **2016**, *52*, 423–462. [CrossRef]
13. Haug, P. Understanding inclusive education: Ideals and reality. *Scand. J. Disabil. Res.* **2017**, *19*, 206–217. [CrossRef]
14. Reynolds, C.R.; Gutkin, T.B.; Elliot, S.N.; Witt, J.C. *School Psychology: Essentials of Theory and Practice*; John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 1984.
15. Kretlow, A.G.; Helf, S.S. Teacher implementation of evidence-based practices in tier 1: A national survey. *Teach. Educ. Spec. Educ.* **2013**, *36*, 167–185. [CrossRef]
16. Cooc, N. Do teachers spend less time teaching in classrooms with students with special needs? Trends from international data. *Educ. Res.* **2019**, *48*, 273–286. [CrossRef]
17. Ruijs, N.M.; Peetsma, T.T.D. Effects of inclusion on students with and without special educational needs reviewed. *Educ. Res. Rev.* **2009**, *4*, 67–79. [CrossRef]
18. Szumski, G.; Smogorzewska, J.; Karwowski, M. Academic achievement of students with and without special education needs in inclusive classrooms. *Educ. Res. Rev.* **2017**, *21*, 33–54. [CrossRef]
19. Lindsay, G. Educational psychology and the effectiveness of inclusive education/mainstreaming. *Br. J. Educ. Psychol.* **2007**, *77*, 1–24. [CrossRef]
20. Kauffman, J.M.; Hornby, G. Inclusive vision versus special education reality. *Educ. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 258. [CrossRef]
21. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *Inclusion and Education: All Means All*; Global education monitoring report; Paris, France, 2020; Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00003737182020 (accessed on 15 January 2021).
22. Gilmour, A.F.; Fuchs, D.; Wehby, J.H. Are students with disabilities accessing the curriculum? A meta-analysis of the reading achievement gap between students with and without disabilities. *Except. Child.* **2019**, *85*, 329–346. [CrossRef]
23. Shifrer, D. Stigma of a label: Educational expectations for high school students labeled with learning disabilities. *J. Health Soc. Behav.* **2013**, *54*, 462–480. [CrossRef]
24. Storyhive. Searching for Words: A Woman's Fight to Learn. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOo1JQEZwU0 (accessed on 8 January 2021).
25. Barry, M.C. Boy from TMR chosen as National Ambassador for 2020 event Autism Speak Canada's Virtual Dog Walk on Sunday June 7. *La Poste Mont-Royal.* **2020**. Available online: https://www.autismspeaks.ca/siteAutismCaEN/assets/Image/Gallery/DogWalk/jmr_2020-04-29.pdf#page=5 (accessed on 10 January 2021).
26. Hornby, G.; Kidd, R. Transfer from special to mainstream—Ten years later. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2001**, *28*, 10–17. [CrossRef]
27. Datnow, A.; Hubbard, L. Teacher capacity for and beliefs about data-driven decision making: A literature review of international research. *J. Educ. Chang.* **2016**, *17*, 7–28. [CrossRef]
28. Vanlommel, K.; Van Gasse, R.; Vanhoof, J.; Van Petergem, P. Teachers' decision-making: Data-based or intuition driven? *Int. J. Educ. Res.* **2017**, *83*, 75–83. [CrossRef]
29. Jimerson, S.R. Meta-analysis of grade retention research: Implications for practice in the 21st century. *Sch. Psychol. Rev.* **2001**, *30*, 420–438. [CrossRef]

30. Rakap, S.; Yucesoy-Ozkian, S.; Kallan, S. How complete are individualized education programmes developed for students with disabilities served in inclusive classroom settings. *Eur. J. Sp. Educ. Needs* **2019**, *34*, 663–677. [CrossRef]
31. Azorín, C.; Ainscow, M. Guiding schools on their journey towards inclusion. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *24*, 58–76. [CrossRef]
32. Sánchez, P.A.; De Haro Rodríguez, R.; Martínez, R.M.M. Barriers to student learning and participation in an inclusive school as perceived by future education professionals. *J. New Appl. Educ. Res.* **2019**, *8*, 18–24. [CrossRef]
33. Hodapp, R.M.; Dykens, E.M. Mental retardation. In *Child Psychopathology*; Mash, R.J., Barkley, R.A., Eds.; Guilford Press: New York, NY, USA, 1996; pp. 362–389.
34. Daniel, S.S.; Walsh, A.K.; Golston, D.B. Suicidality, school dropout, and reading problems among adolescents. *J. Learn. Disabil.* **2006**, *39*, 507–514. [CrossRef]
35. Goldston, D.B.; Walsh, A.; Arnold, E.M.; Reboussin, B.; Daniel, S.S.; Erkanli, A.; Nutter, D.; Hickman, E.; Palmes, G.; Snider, E.; et al. Reading problems, psychiatric disorders, and functional impairment from mid-to late adolescence. *J. Am. Acad. Child. Adolesc. Psychiatry* **2007**, *46*, 25–32. [CrossRef]
36. Maughan, B.; Rowe, R.; Loeber, R.; Stouthamer-Loeber, M. Reading problems and depressed mood. *J. Abnorm. Child. Psychol.* **2003**, *31*, 219–229. [CrossRef]
37. Jamieson, D.G. Literacy in Canada. *Paediatr. Child. Health* **2006**, *11*, 573. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
38. Torgesen, J.K. *Catch Them before They Fall: Identification and Assessment to Prevent Reading Failure in Young Children (On-Line)*; National Institute of Child; Health and Human Development: Bethesda, MD, USA, 1998; pp. 1–15. Available online: Ldonline.org.ld_indepth/reading/torgesen_catchthem.html (accessed on 15 January 2021).
39. Castles, A.; Rastle, K.; Nation, K. Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. *Psychol. Sci. Public Interest* **2018**, *19*, 5–51. [CrossRef]
40. Cree, A.; Kay, A.; Steward, J. The economic and social cost of illiteracy: A snapshot of illiteracy in a global context. World Lit. Foundation: Melbourne, Austrailia. 2012. Available online: https://worldliteracyfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/TheEconomicSocialCostofIlliteracy-2.pdf (accessed on 4 February 2021).
41. Nel, C. A blueprint for data-based English reading literacy instructional decision-making. *S. Afr. J. Child. Educ.* **2018**, *8*, 1–9. [CrossRef]
42. Filderman, M.J.; Austin, C.R.; Toste, J.R. Data-based decision making for struggling readers in the secondary grades. *Interv. Sch. Clin.* **2019**, *55*, 3–12. [CrossRef]
43. Cummings, K.D.; Stoolmiller, M.L.; Baker, S.K.; Fien, H.; Kame'enui, E.J. Using school-level student achievement to engage in formative evaluation: Comparative school-level rates of oral reading fluency growth conditioned by initial skill for second grade students. *Read. Writ.* **2015**, *28*, 105–130. [CrossRef]
44. Bundock, K.; O'Keeffe, B.V.; Stokes, K.; Kladis, K. Strategies for minimizing variability in progress monitoring of oral reading Fluency. *Teach. Except. Child.* **2018**, *50*, 273–281. [CrossRef]
45. Shapiro, E.S.; Hilt-Panahon, A.; Gischlar, K.L.; Semeniak, K.; Leichman, E.; Bowles, S. An analysis of consistency between team decisions and reading assessment data within an RTI model. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* **2012**, *33*, 335–347. [CrossRef]
46. Van den Bosch, R.M.; Espin, C.A.; Chung, S.; Saab, N. Data-based decision-making: Teachers' comprehension of curriculum-based measurement progress-monitoring graphs. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2017**, *32*, 46–60. [CrossRef]
47. McMahan, K.M.; Oslund, E.; Odegard, T.N. Characterizing the knowledge of educators receiving training in systematic literacy instruction. *Ann. Dyslexia* **2019**, *68*, 21–33. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
48. International Literacy Association. *What's Hot in Literacy: 2020 Report*; International Literacy Association: Newark, DE, USA, 2020; Available online: https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/resource-documents/whatshotreport_2020_final.pdf (accessed on 16 November 2020).
49. Roehrig, A.D.; Duggar, S.W.; Moats, L.; Glover, M.; Mincey, B. When teachers work to use progress monitoring data to inform literacy instruction: Identifying potential supports and challenges. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* **2008**, *29*, 364–382. [CrossRef]
50. Wagner, D.L.; Hammerschmidt-Snidarich, S.M.; Espin, C.A.; Seifert, K.; McMaster, K.L. Pre-service teachers' interpretation of CBM progress monitoring data. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2017**, *32*, 22–31. [CrossRef]
51. Begeny, J.; Martens, B.K. Assessing pre-service teachers' training in empirically-validated behavioral instructional practices. *Sch. Psychol. Q.* **2006**, *21*, 262–285. [CrossRef]
52. Vaughn, S.; Denton, C.A.; Fletcher, J.M. Why intensive interventions are necessary for student with sever reading difficulties. *Psychol. Sch.* **2010**, *47*, 432–444. [CrossRef]
53. Fuchs, D.; Fuchs, L.S. Rethinking service delivery for students with significant learning problems: Developing and implementing intensive instruction. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *36*, 105–111. [CrossRef]
54. Prince, A.M.T.; Katsiyannis, A.; Farmer, J. Postsecondary transition under IDEA 2004: A legal update. *Interv. Sch. Clin.* **2013**, *48*, 286–293. [CrossRef]
55. Landmark, L.J.; Ju, S.; Zhang, D. Substantiated best practices in transition: Fifteen plus years later. *Career Dev. Except. Individ.* **2010**, *33*, 165–176. [CrossRef]
56. Test, D.W.; Mazzotti, V.; Mustian, A.L.; Fowler, C.H.; Kotering, L.; Kohler, P. Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Dev. Except. Individ.* **2009**, *32*, 160–181. [CrossRef]
57. Mazzotti, V.L.; Rowe, D.A.; Sinclair, J.; Poppen, M.; Woods, W.E.; Shearer, M.L. Predictors of post-school success: A systematic review of NLTS2 secondary analyses. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2016**, *39*, 196–215. [CrossRef]

58. Papay, C.K.; Bambara, L.M. Best practices in transition to adult life for youth with intellectual disability. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2014**, *37*, 136–148. [CrossRef]

59. Rowe, D.A.; Alverson, C.Y.; Unruh, D.K.; Fowler, C.H.; Kellems, R.; Test, D.W. A Delphi study to operationalize evidence-based predictors in secondary transition. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2015**, *38*, 113–126. [CrossRef]

60. Palmer, S.B.; Wehmeyer, M.L.; Shogren, K.A.; Williams-Diehm, K.L.; Soukup, J.H. An evaluation of the Beyond High School model on the self-determination of students with intellectual disability. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2012**, *35*, 76–84. [CrossRef]

61. Shogren, K.A.; Palmer, S.B.; Wehmeyer, M.L.; Rifenbark, G.G.; Little, T.D. Relationships between self-determination and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities. *J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *48*, 256–267. [CrossRef]

62. Wehmeyer, M.L.; Palmer, S.B. Adult outcomes for students with cognitive disabilities three-years after high school: The impact of self-determination. *Educ. Train. Dev. Disabil.* **2003**, *38*, 131–144.

63. Wehmeyer, M.L.; Palmer, S.B.; Shogren, K.; Williams-Diehm, K.; Soukup, J.H. Establishing a causal relationship between intervention to promote self-determination and enhanced student self-determination. *J. Spec. Educ.* **2013**, *46*, 195–210. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

64. Peterson, L.Y.; Burden, J.P.; Sedaghat, J.M.; Gothberg, J.E.; Kohler, P.D.; Coyle, J.L. Triangulated IEP transition goals: Developing relevant and genuine annual goals. *Teach. Except. Child.* **2013**, *45*, 46–57. [CrossRef]

65. Flannery, B.K.; Lombardi, A.; Kato, M.M. The impact of professional development on the quality of the transition components of IEPs. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2015**, *38*, 14–24. [CrossRef]

66. Huang, P.; Blum, N.J. Developmental and behavioral disorders: Grown-up–Intellectual disability. *J. Dev. Behav. Pediatrics* **2010**, *31*, 61–71. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

67. Butcher, S.; Wilton, R. Stuck in transition? Exploring the spaces of employment training for youth with intellectual disability. *Geoforum* **2008**, *39*, 1079–1092. [CrossRef]

68. Wilcox, G.; McQuay, J.; Jones, K. Transitioning to adulthood as a young person with an Intellectual Disability: Two case studies of mothers' perceptions. *Alta. J. Educ. Res.* **2019**, *65*, 1–21.

69. Salend, S. *Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Effective and Reflective Practices*; Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA, 2001.

70. Kauffman, J.M.; Badar, J. It's instruction over place—not the other way around! *Phi Delta Kappan* **2016**, *98*, 55–59. [CrossRef]

71. Cumming, T.M.; Strnadová, I.; Danker, J. Transitions of students with autism and intellectual disabilities in inclusive settings: The nexus between recommended and actual practice. *Australas. J. Spec. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *44*, 28–45. [CrossRef]

72. Plotner, A.J.; Mazzotti, V.L.; Rose, C.A.; Carlson-Britting, K.B. Factors associated with enhanced knowledge and use of secondary transition evidence-based practices. *Teach. Educ. Spec. Educ.* **2016**, *39*, 28–46. [CrossRef]

73. Mazzotti, V.L.; Plotner, A.J. Implementing secondary transition evidence-based practices: A multi-state survey of transition service providers. *Career Dev. Transit. Except. Individ.* **2016**, *39*, 12–22. [CrossRef]

74. Forlin, C.; Keen, M.; Barrett, E. The concerns of mainstream teachers: Coping with inclusivity in an Australian context. *Int. J. Disabil. Dev. Educ.* **2008**, *55*, 251–264. [CrossRef]

75. Gilmour, A.F.; Wehby, J.H. The association between teaching students with disabilities and teacher turnover. *J. Educ. Psychol.* **2020**, *112*, 1042–1060. [CrossRef]

76. Gray, C.; Wilcox, G.; Nordstokke, D. Teacher mental health, school climate, inclusive education and student learning: A review. *Can. Psychol.* **2017**, *58*, 203–210. [CrossRef]

77. Wilcox, G. Is full inclusion the answer for all? In *Inclusive Education—Unity in Diversity*; Głodkowska, J., Ed.; Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej: Warszawa, Poland, 2020; pp. 137–149. Available online: http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/239347 1/inclusive_education_internet.pdf (accessed on 15 January 2021).

78. Zigmond, A.P.; Kloo, A. General and special education are (and should be) different. In *Handbook of Special Education*; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Pullen, P.C., Eds.; Taylor & Francis Group: New York, NY, USA, 2011; pp. 160–172.

Article

Lessons from the Past and Challenges for the Future: Inclusive Education for Students with Unique Needs

William Evans [1,*], Robert A. Gable [2] and Amany Habib [1]

1   Department of Teacher Education and Educational Leadership, University of West Florida,
    Pensacola, FL 32514, USA; ahabib@uwf.edu
2   Department of Communication Disorders and Special Education, Old Dominion University,
    Norfolk, VA 23529, USA; rgable@odu.edu
*   Correspondence: wevans@uwf.edu

Abstract: The school-age population of students is becoming increasingly more culturally and linguistically diverse. There is mounting recognition that English Learners (EL) represent a unique group of students who have special educational and linguistic needs. This article considered the needs of learners with diverse special needs such as (a) learning and behavior challenges and (b) English Learners identified as students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). We highlighted some potential lessons to be learned from past-to-present efforts to serve students with behavior problems. Selected evidence-based practices were featured that are applicable to learners with special needs, thereby supporting the development of effective inclusive education, especially for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Keywords: at-risk; English Learners (ELs); inclusive education; refugees; SLIFE; special education

Most students benefit from an egalitarian philosophy whereby our system of public education has sought to do the "greatest good for the most students" [1], some students struggle to perform successfully within such a system and manifest learning and/or behavior problems that may be serious enough to impede their classroom performance and put them "at-risk" for failure. Some of these difficulties may be behavioral in nature and negatively affect their ability to interact appropriately with classmates or with adults [2]. Other issues relate to learning make it difficult for the student to profit from the general education program [3]. Still, other students grapple with cultural norms that are outside of their awareness. Not surprisingly, school personnel is finding it increasingly difficult to know how to best serve these students' diverse needs to alter an otherwise negative life trajectory [4].

Students who manifest learning and/or behavior problems often profit minimally from the established curriculum offered to all students. They do not receive the education they need to ameliorate their academic and/or behavioral deficits. Instead, they suffer through repeated suspensions and expulsions for the behavior that was problematic and reflective of their conditions. The consequence is an abbreviated or interrupted formal education, high drop-out rates, and academic achievement levels that undermine their ability to become productive citizens [5].

Over the years, education and treatment programs for students with challenging special needs suffered from a lack of understanding of the nature and needs of these students [6]. In some cases, academic and treatment programs consisted of curricula, instructional materials, and interventions that had little empirical support and consequently failed to sustain an adequate educational program [7]. Students often were moved through a curriculum without attaining any real academic competence. Too few teachers possessed the skills or were provided the technical support to be effective in delivering quality instructions [3]. Some students withdrew while others acted out to escape from the vagaries of inadequate instruction. In short, general education programs and, in some

31

cases, highly restrictive special education classrooms served as obstacles to academic achievement and social adjustment for students who exhibited serious learning and/or behavior problems [8].

1. One Size Does Not Fit All

There came to be a recognition that effective education should not be a "one size fits all" approach. Researchers such as Deno [9] noted the critical importance of diversity or array of services for students with special needs, and authors such as Lovitt [10] and Deschler, Shumaker, Lenz, and Ellis [11] argued that educational programs needed to adapt to the instructional needs of the student. Similarly, English Learners who have learning problems would benefit from educational programs that are responsive to their culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as services designed to support any other special learning needs [12].

That same literature underscored the critical role that achievement plays in student adjustment and success. Students who are successful receive good grades, teacher recognition, and peer acceptance. This recognition and academic success often is well received by students and helps to create an environment that the student finds gratifying. However, this success often is elusive for students who struggle with unmet instructional needs. In these cases, students often receive low grades, are the target of teacher admonitions regarding their unacceptable behavior, and are marginalized by their peers.

Along with an understanding of the role of student success and the importance of adapting instructions to facilitate that success came research on curriculum-based assessments, establishing of relevant instructional goals, and implementing of instructional plans and evidence-based interventions that serve as the foundation of effective instructional programming for all students, especially students with special needs [13]. Indeed, in the last several decades, we witnessed a tremendous increase in our knowledge of strategies that can be used to positively impact the performance of students who are academically at-risk or have challenging behavior. Research has systematically built a database upon which empirically-based strategies have been developed [2,7]. Some of that research revealed what was ineffective [1], but a great deal of research hinted at relationships that needed to be explored and built upon to develop educational programs that fostered student success [14]. What resulted was the development of a body of literature that distinguished promising practices from those that were either ineffective or inappropriate to deal with the needs of children and youth exhibiting academic deficits or challenging behavior [14]. Some researchers believe this literature has not been translated adequately into school-based practices [15]. However, an examination of current classrooms suggests that a growing body of empirical research has been adopted successfully into daily instruction [5].

Effective teachers now have a better understanding of the importance of the frequent administration and interpretation of curriculum-based assessments for students who experience academic problems. Furthermore, many teachers utilize instructional procedures such as precise praise, contingency management, errorless discrimination, and many other techniques that came from the literature in special education [5]. Schools have adopted school-wide non-punitive management programs that selectively apply a variety of educational options to students who are experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties. Additionally, there is a recognition that the curriculum and instructional procedures need to reflect the needs of students with diverse special needs [5]. This is illustrated by classroom practices, in which students have instructional materials that reflect learning needs, such as prompting student responses, presenting instructional material at an appropriate level of difficulty and interest, and a classroom management system designed to promote appropriate student behavior [16].

2. Challenges Confronting Educators Today

One of the major challenges confronting educators is the need to develop an array of programs that meet the unique needs of students while also allowing for the most inclusion

in general education settings possible. Over the years, there has been a movement toward the imposition of a standardized curriculum in public education. This often resulted in educational programs that lack options and a diversity of pathways to graduation. In some cases, school curricula have taken a singular, inclusive pathway approach that requires students to enroll in a specific series of classes, often only in a general education setting and consisting of college preparatory classes. Under these conditions, students with special needs struggle to master the curricula, find them unresponsive to their needs, and eventually abandon any attempt to cope with a hopelessly flawed system. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that teachers often do not have adequate pre-service preparation and/or in-service professional development regarding how to meet the needs of students at-risk or who evidence learning and/or behavior problems [16]. Add current budgetary constraints and a prevailing philosophy that schools need only inclusive classroom settings, a toxic educational environment exists that is extremely problematic for students who require a range of services to succeed; disaster is unavoidable [4].

There also are some ramifications to the widespread implementation of research-based practices in public schools. Foremost has been the proliferation of instructional techniques and educational and behavioral interventions that were thrust upon guileless teachers and school administrators [17,18]. These interventions promised new and novel approaches and easy, "quick fixes" without much teacher or student effort that would result in a dramatic and positive change in student performance—especially in inclusive classrooms. The promises were akin to those made to Pinocchio by the voice that encouraged him to go to Pleasure Island and forgo any productive activity that would have resulted in real gains.

The reality is that these patent medicine cures may be harmful to students by replacing empirically-based interventions that might be labor-intensive with interventions that do not work. Teachers and parents often realize, perhaps too late, that many of the interventions that were touted to be effective and easy to use did not have the promised effect, which leads them to become distrustful of engaging in these interventions. The result is that students most in need of interventions often do not receive effective empirically-based treatment. Unfortunately, many general, as well as special education teachers, remain highly skeptical about current classroom practices [18].

Another compelling issue is the recognition of the critical role of assessment. In too many cases, assessment has been viewed in a summative high-stakes manner that largely serves to determine which students will be successful and which will fail in a standardized, one-pathway curriculum. While this standardized approach may be helpful in some respects, the need exists for a more balanced approach to assessment and the use of more formative assessment techniques that can help teachers to identify student problems in a timely manner and can lead to the development of meaningful instructional interventions that will change the trajectory of student performance [19–22].

Clearly, there are challenges facing the education of students who are at-risk. Fortunately, the field of special education has grown and has contributed much to the effective teaching of students with diverse needs. Research related to effective educational practice has given educators new tools and instructional practices that can be of benefit to students who experience learning and/or behavior problems. Even so, we acknowledge that the challenges posed by some students are so severe that the general education classroom is not always the most appropriate treatment setting [3].

The interventions that follow are not meant to be exhaustive but may be some of the more relevant interventions to meet the needs of students with diverse academic and behavior problems. Moreover, these interventions point to promising practices that are the result of research over an extended period and the vital role played by empirical analysis of best classroom practices [22].

3. Classroom Practices of Proven Effectiveness

A growing number of evidence-based practices are applicable to a diverse population of children and youth. Many of these emergent practices are aligned with the needs of the

students who are at the forefront of our deliberations. Those students who have no voice, who have no support system—these are the students for whom the following strategies have been chosen. Appropriate practices include (a) precise praise, delivered contingently on student performance of desired behavior; (b) opportunities to respond, giving students frequent chances to actively participate in classroom instruction; (c) contingency contracts, written agreements regarding specific expectations and associated rewards; (d) pre-correction, the anticipation of likely "stumbling blocks" and addressing them with students before they occur; and, (e) choice-making, giving students fixed choices regarding the order in which they wish to complete assignments [7]. In what follows, we discuss three evidence-based practices that we believe have special value within the context of our current conversation. Each has sufficient flexibility to address the needs of students with diverse learning, behavior, and language needs.

4. Group-Oriented Contingency Management

Group-oriented contingency management is an effective intervention that can be implemented in various ways [23]. One approach takes the form of group-interdependent management, whereby the performance of a small group is judged on the overall averages of the children. For example, the performance of each student may be evaluated and then added to the scores of the other students. A preselected criterion is applied to judge the success of the group (e.g., an average of eight out of ten correct responses) as they work for a common reinforcer. Teachers should begin with a lower performance standard to ensure success and promote "student by-in"; however, it is important to increase expectations to ensure that students perform up to a mastery level [24]. A group-interdependent approach encourages a high degree of cooperation among students and can have an impact on not only classroom behavior but also promote a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging is especially important to students from diverse cultures. Furthermore, a group-interdependent approach decreases the probability that students will engage in bouts of antisocial behavior [24]. Even so, it is important to observe the group to ensure that one or more students do not attempt to complete tasks for students they perceive as less capable and more likely to have a negative impact on overall team performance. A group-interdependent contingency does require tasks and performance criteria that are attainable for all students. Last, it is useful to keep in mind that a group-interdependent arrangement may not be useful with students who do not value or seek peer approval or recognition [24].

A second option is a group-dependent contingency in which the performance of one or few students determines whether the group is judged to be successful and earns the reinforcer. There are various approaches that the teacher can take in its implementation. For example, during an activity, the students might be unaware of which classmate's performance would be selected. Once the task is completed and the student is identified (sometimes referred to as the "hero") [23,25], they usually receive an increased amount of prosocial attention from peers. The group-dependent arrangement tends to increase student verbal interactions and peer attention, which the teacher can capitalize on to increase the student's social integration. The student may be chosen at random, or the teacher might select purposely a student, with the goal being to increase that students' social status. A drawback of a group-dependent arrangement is that students should be performing on the same academic level, and it is "all-or-nothing". That is, everything hinges on the performance of a single student. It, therefore, is incumbent upon the teacher to have knowledge of every students' capabilities. Teachers must be aware of possible issues of cultural sensitivity that might affect the selection of the student as well.

The third approach is a group-independent contingency arrangement, during which the performance of each student stands alone; that is, their performance is judged apart from all other students [26]. This arrangement is analogous to student grades, meaning that one student's grade in math is not dependent upon how well (or how poorly) another student performed in the same subject area. Teachers often combine a group-independent

arrangement and a contingency contract to strengthen the potential impact of the contingency arrangement. While students often express a preference for a group-independent contingency, research and experience have shown that the other two options usually are more effective in changing pupil's behavior. Students from diverse backgrounds may prefer the anonymity associated with a group-independent arrangement, but again, the other options are preferable.

Overall, group contingencies work best when implemented in small groups or with "teams" of students (e.g., 4–5 students) [23]. Regardless of the contingency arrangement, it is important to define clearly how, what, and when the reinforcer is available, based on an accurate measure of each student's performance. Teachers might administer a fixed-choice reinforcement inventory survey to students, observe what high probability behavior students engage in during less structured periods of class time, or simply poll students regarding their choices of reinforcers (e.g., social, activity, tangible). The group contingencies afford teachers a range of options, require a minimum amount of instructional planning time, are relatively non-obtrusive, and easy to implement. They not only have been demonstrated to be effective in improving academic performance and classroom conduct, but they also can facilitate student social integration and promote a sense of solidarity not found with individual interventions. This may be especially significant with students who vary according to culture and/or language.

Group-contingency arrangements do have a few drawbacks, one of which is that one or more students might seek to sabotage the teacher's efforts to successfully manage group instructions. If that occurs, one option is to pull that student(s) from an existing team and create a "team-of-one". The student no longer participates in a team comprised of classmates. A teacher might position that student in close physical proximity to an existing team to observe when they are reinforced. This "conspicuous reinforcement" has been known to motivate some students to seek reinstatement back into a team. It also might be useful to develop a function-based intervention plan based on an analysis of the motivation behind the student's misbehavior associated with attempting to sabotage their teammates' efforts [26].

5. Errorless Learning

Based on experimental learning research, errorless learning is designed to minimize or eliminate the possibility of errors occurring. It contrasts with trial-and-error learning, in which the student attempts to complete a task and, if they are wrong, the assumption is that the student would learn from corrective feedback from the teacher [27]. That assumption is not always true; students with a history of learning and/or behavior problems may perceive teacher feedback as punitive and be less inclined to participate in subsequent instruction [16].

Errorless learning is an antecedent modeling strategy that can afford students a substantial number of opportunities to respond correctly and, in turn, receive positive teacher praise. With errorless learning, the teacher might introduce an instructional task and not only give the question but also the correct answer: "What is 2 plus 2? 2 plus 2 is 4." Given the question and the answer, the student is likely to give the correct answer: "2 plus 2 is 4" ("Good adding"). Within this instructional arrangement, student frustration is minimized, and it is likely that a sense of "positive behavioral momentum" emerges; initial student success would lead to a willingness to participate more actively in subsequent instructions [24]. In conducting errorless learning, a teacher identifies the task to be taught and the level of prompting that likely is required for the student to get it right, depending on the instructional skill being taught (e.g., verbal prompt, gestural prompt, physical prompt) [27]. Data are collected on pupil performance and the level of prompting provided the student; across time, higher-level prompts are gradually and systematically faded. Because students often experience success, they tend to engage in less challenging behavior. Learning by saying or doing a task correctly from the beginning avoids mistakes

and eliminates the possibility that the student would hold an incorrect response in their long-term memory [27].

6. Peers-Assisted Learning (PAL)

The Fuchs Research Group conducted 35 years of rigorous research on PAL programs and reported that it repeatedly produced positive academic and behavioral student outcomes [28,29]. PAL consists of a tutorial arrangement in which one student is the tutor, and the other student is the tutee; the students take turns in these two roles, alternating from one activity to the next. Parenthetically, the teacher always castes the more proficient student in the role of tutor first. The teacher instructs the students regarding preparation for instruction and how to organize the materials as well as emphasizes the importance of teamwork for achieving success in whatever subject matter area (e.g., arithmetic, spelling, reading).

In preparing the two students, the teacher models and "thinks aloud" for them, showing the expected behavior of both the tutor and tutee, and then asks the students to emulate the expected behavior and provides corrective feedback to shape their performance. The expectations must be taught directly and systematically, including how to give and receive feedback to each other during a tutoring session, along with praise for persistence in the face of a difficult task. The teacher also should model for the students' nonconstructive behavior (e.g., horseplay, off-task behavior) and constructive behavior (e.g., eyes on the partner, active listening). It is important to always end on constructive behavior, so that is what the students have as their memory of the teaching session [29].

Teachers often prepare contingency contracts, one for each student participating in the PAL tutorial program. The contract stipulates the behavioral expectations for serving in the PAL program and the reinforcers to be earned for satisfying those expectations, along with the criteria and timeline for doing so. As with most contracts, the initial agreement should impose modest expectations and within a brief period so that students experience success in achieving their goals. A condition of "positive behavioral momentum" is established so that the student envisions future success. Subsequent contracts will impose higher performance standards over a longer period. Even so, it is important for teachers to provide students with precise praise for their hard work and dedication and offer corrective instruction, as needed [26].

7. Selecting an Intervention

In choosing an intervention, teachers should pose the following questions: Has the intervention been reported in a peer-refereed journal? Has the intervention been replicated at least four times with the student population to which I wish to apply it? There is a risk associated with drawing conclusions about the effectiveness based on its impact on a different age group or category of students. Does the intervention fit the current program, and is it consistent with the skillset of those responsible for its implementation? To what extent must the instructional staff learn new skills to implement the intervention with high fidelity? Does the intervention fit within the current data collection system, or can reasonable adjustments be made to make it possible to assess routinely the effectiveness of the intervention [24,30]?

Regardless of the intervention, it is essential to consistently assess its impact on student behavior and be prepared to make timely modifications in the intervention. Data not only need to be collected on the effectiveness of the intervention but also on the fidelity of its implementation—the degree to which the intervention is implemented as it was originally planned. Absent these data, it is impossible to distinguish between a potentially sound intervention that is poorly implemented and one that is not properly aligned with the function of the problem behavior. The frequency with which these data are collected is dependent, at least in part, on the intensity and severity of the problem behavior. Ultimately, the likelihood of successful implementation and the sustainability of data-based and evidence-driven practices hinges on the existence of a "culture" that supports and reinforces their use [31].

8. The Increasing Diversity of School Populations and the Changing Demands of Students At-Risk—A New and Challenging Imperative

Increasingly, there is a population of children and youth from other cultures and linguistic backgrounds who share many of the same needs as students who manifest behavior and learning problems. There are differences in these at-risk populations regarding the origin and nature of their presenting problems, but they do share a common bond regarding individualization, focused classroom instruction, and specialized curricula. They additionally share the need for teachers with specialized training in how to meet the unique needs of EL students. Unfortunately, a largely "sink-or-swim" approach is a common practice applied to the education of students who speak a language other than English [32]. While some states require teacher training in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), others do not. Thus, states vary in their mandates for special certification and training of teachers of English Learners [33].

School populations reflect the increasing diversity, with growing numbers of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds [34,35]. These students are often referred to as English Learners (ELs) and enter schools with various levels of English proficiency and come from cultural backgrounds that may differ substantially from those found in most American schools. Likewise, the parents of these children may not be able, due to language and cultural differences, to fully participate in school functions where there is an English-only orientation and a school structure that differs greatly from that with which they are familiar. In such cases, students and parents alike find themselves mired in an organizational morass that they have difficulty understanding or navigating successfully [36].

As with special education, some school practices impede English Learners' performance, which underscores the need for educational alternatives and greater flexibility in constructing educational programs that effectively address their unique needs. The challenges facing these children may be behavioral or echo learning problems, but they also can be reflective of issues related to language, cultural differences, or trauma. In the case of children in English language development programs, they have specific cultural and linguistic needs that should be accounted for in the curriculum and in the services provided by school personnel [37].

The common unitary approach of a one-pathway curriculum of public education has been a challenge for special educators, and it also negatively impinges on students who are English Learners. The reality is that our society is growing in complexity, and this burgeoning diversity demands educational programs that address the unique needs of all learners. These needs can be based on demonstrable learning and/or behavior problems, cultural and/or language differences, or past failures in school. Students who are refugees or asylum seekers often come from disastrous circumstances in which their education has been interrupted. They also may have been subjected to or witnessed traumatic events and separated from their families for an extended period.

The most recent data indicated that 10 percent of the student population in the United States is classified as English Learners [38], with an estimated 12–20 percent of them being considered SLIFE or Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education [39]. These students bring some of their traumatic experiences into school settings and may manifest serious academic and behavioral problems in the classroom. The number of students who are SLIFE is growing annually and creates a situation in which there is a compelling need to develop educational programs that address their unique learning and behavioral issues. As the literature base for empirically-based interventions grows, so too does the awareness that culture and language are critical factors that frame school-based practices [40,41]. Effective educational practices must be understood in relation to the student's background as well as the cultural context of the setting in which students learn and teachers teach [36,42].

The needs of many EL students reflect some of the same issues that have long confronted the field of special education. EL students who also are SLIFE have distinctive needs and often face difficulty finding their way through an "alien culture" and coping

with a language in which they may not be proficient. Additionally, some EL students have significant emotional difficulties because of a disturbing background or suffer from interrupted schooling that necessitates additional treatment (e.g., mental health supports) as well as enhanced educational programs (e.g., intensive tutorial instruction) [43].

Students in programs for Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL) share much of the same history as students who are at-risk and students who exhibit challenging behavior or suffer from a history of school failure. Certainly, there are differences within these two populations, but they share similarities as well. Moreover, the development of the empirical base for special education may have some unique lessons that can be applied to the development of programs to meet the diverse needs of students in TESOL programs.

As more and more students from different cultures and who speak different languages enter schools in the United States, there is an increasing need for culturally sensitive educational intervention programs [40] as well as effective and intensive behavior management interventions [2,16]. Many of the students coming to the United States exhibit problems reflective of the trauma they have experienced elsewhere that can create barriers to student adaptation to a new educational environment. The growing number of students that fit this category highlights the urgent need for professional development for teachers and school administrators on how to deal effectively with students who have unique learning and/or behavioral issues. The need also exists for schools to adopt school-wide management programs that are inclusive and are specifically designed to keep students in school and engaged in a relevant curriculum. As teachers become more adept at using appropriate teaching strategies and interventions, many of these students can be taught in general education settings; however, this is not always appropriate. Separate, dedicated environments that provide specialized, intensive interventions still will be required to make the education of all students possible [3].

9. Conclusions

The accumulated research has contributed to the available practices with which to serve students, whether in general or special education. We also have a growing body of information related to effective delivery models and interventions for at-risk learners, whether they are native speakers of English or English Learners identified as SLIFE, and regardless of their educational placement. However, it is incumbent upon the research community to continue to develop culturally and linguistically-based teaching techniques that have strong empirical support. At the same time, both preservice teacher preparation institutions and in-service professional development programs must be more responsive to the rapid changes occurring in the school-age population throughout the United States. Perhaps there are lessons we can learn from past-to-present attempts to serve students with learning and/or behavior problems that can profit from that effort.

References

1. Rock, M.; Thead, B.; Gable, R.A.; Hardman, M.; VanAcker, R. In pursuit of excellence: Past as prologue to a brighter future in special education. *Focus Except. Child.* **2006**, *38*, 1–9.
2. Landrum, T.J.; Wiley, A.L.; Tankersley, M.; Kauffman, J.M. Is EBD "special," and is "special education" an appropriate response? In *The Sage Handbook of Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties*, 2nd ed.; Garner, P., Kauffman, J.M., Elliott, J.G., Eds.; Sage: London, UK, 2014; pp. 69–81.

3. Kauffman, J.M.; Landrum, T.J. *Characteristics of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders of Children and Youth*, 11th ed.; Pearson: New York, NY, USA, 2018.

4. Gilmour, A.F. Has inclusion gone too far? Weighing its effects on students with disabilities, their peers, and teachers. *Educ. Next* **2018**, *18*, 8–16.

5. Hardman, M.L.; Egan, M.W.; Drew, C.J. *Human Exceptionality: School, Community and Family*, 12th ed.; Cengage: Independence, KY, USA, 2017.

6. Gable, R.A.; Bullock, L.M.; Evans, W.H. Changing perspectives on alternative schooling for children and adolescents with challenging behavior. *Prev. Sch. Fail.* **2006**, *51*, 5–9. [CrossRef]

7. Simonsen, B.; Fairbanks, S.; Briesch, A.; Myers, D.; Sugai, G. Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research and practice. *Educ. Treat. Child.* **2006**, *31*, 351–380. [CrossRef]

8. Sullivan, A.L.; Sadeh, S. Does the empirical literature inform prevention of dropout among students with emotional disturbance? A systematic review and call to action. *Exceptionality* **2016**, *24*, 251–262. [CrossRef]

9. Deno, E. Special education as developmental capital. *Except. Child.* **1970**, *37*, 229–237. [CrossRef]

10. Lovitt, T.C. *Introduction to Learning Disabilities*; Allyn and Bacon: Boston, MA, USA, 1989.

11. Deschler, D.D.; Shumaker, J.B.; Lenz, B.K.; Ellis, E. Academic and cognitive adolescents: Part II. *Annu. Rev. Learn. Disabil.* **1984**, *2*, 67–76.

12. Klingner, J.K.; Boelé, A.; Linan-Thompson, S.; Rodriguez, D. Essential components of special education for English language learners with disabilities: Position statement of the division for learning disabilities of the council for exceptional children. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2014**, *29*, 93–96. [CrossRef]

13. Obiakor, F.; Harris, M.; Mutia, K.; Rotatori, A.; Algozzine, B. Making inclusion work in general education classroom. *Educ. Treat. Child.* **2012**, *35*, 477–490. [CrossRef]

14. Hornby, G.; Gable, B.; Evans, B. Implementing evidence-based practice in education: What international literature reviews tell us and what they don't. *Prev. Sch. Fail.* **2013**, *57*, 119–123. [CrossRef]

15. Scheeler, M.C.; Budin, S.; Markelz, A. The role of teacher preparation in promoting evidence-based practices in schools. *Learn. Disabil. A Contemp. J.* **2016**, *14*, 171–187.

16. Landrum, T.J.; Kauffman, J.M. Behavioral approaches to classroom management. In *Handbook of Classroom Management: Research, Practice, and Contemporary Issues*; Evertson, C.M., Weinstein, C.S., Eds.; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Malwah, NJ, USA, 2006; pp. 47–71.

17. Hornby, G.; Atkinson, M.; Howard, J. *Controversial Issues in Special Education*; David Fulton: London, UK, 1997.

18. Jacobson, J.W.; Foxx, R.M.; Mullick, J.A. (Eds.) *Controversial Therapies for Developmental Disabilities: Fad, Fashion, and Science in Professional Practice*; Lawrence Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, USA, 2005.

19. Brown, H.D.; Abeywickrama, P. *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices*, 3rd ed.; Pearson: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2019.

20. Farnsworth, T.L.; Malone, M.E. *Assessing English Learners in U.S. Schools*; TESOL Press: Alexandria, VA, USA, 2014.

21. Gottlieb, M. *Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges to Educational Equity—Connecting Academic Language Proficiency to Student Achievement*, 2nd ed.; Corwin: Thousand Oak, CA, USA, 2016.

22. Hattie, J. *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2009.

23. Litow, L.; Pumroy, D.K. A brief review of classroom group-oriented contingencies. *J. Appl. Behav. Anal.* **1975**, *8*, 341–347. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

24. Gable, R.A.; Hester, P.P. Early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder: Inclusive preschool programs. *J. Sci.* **2021**, in press.

25. Kauffman, J.M.; Pullen, P.L.; Mostert, M.P.; Trent, S.C. *Managing Classroom Behavior: A Reflective Case-Based Approach*, 5th ed.; Pearson: New York, NY, USA, 2011.

26. Scheunemann, B.; Hall, J. *Positive Behavioral Supports for the Classroom*, 3rd ed.; Pearson: New York, NY, USA, 2015.

27. Mueller, M.M.; Palkovic, C.M.; Maynard, C.S. Errorless learning: Review and practical applications for teaching children with pervasive developmental disorder. *Psychol. Sch.* **2007**, *44*, 691–700. [CrossRef]

28. Fuchs, D.; Fuchs, L.; Kazdan, S. Effect of peers-assisted learning strategies on high school students with serious reading problems. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* **1999**, *20*, 309–318. [CrossRef]

29. Fuchs, D.; Fuchs, L.; Burish, P. Peers-assisted learning strategies: An evidence-based practice to promote reading achievement. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2000**, *15*, 85–91. [CrossRef]

30. Strain, P.; Dunlap, G. *Recommended Practices: Being an Evidence-Based Practitioner*; Center for Evidence-Based Practices for Young Children with Challenging Behavior, N.D. Available online: https://www.challengingbehavior.org (accessed on 5 March 2021).

31. Cook, B.G.; Tankersley, M.; Cook, L.; Landrum, T. Evidence-based practices in special education: Some practical considerations. *Interv. Sch. Clin.* **2008**, *44*, 69–75. [CrossRef]

32. Ovando, C.J.; Combs, M.C. *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms: Teaching in Multicultural Contexts*, 5th ed.; McGraw Hill: New York, NY, USA, 2012.

33. Education Commission of the States. 50-State Comparison: English Learner Policies. May 2020. Available online: https://internal-search.ecs.org/comparisons/50-state-comparison-english-learner-policies-11 (accessed on 6 March 2021).

34. Custodio, B.; O'Loughlin, J.B. Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Understanding Who They Are. *Am. Educ.* **2020**. Available online: https://www.aft.org/ae/spring2020/custodio_oloughlin (accessed on 5 March 2021).

35. National Center for Education Statistics. The Condition of Education, USA. 2019. Available online: https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019144 (accessed on 5 March 2021).
36. DeCapua, A.; Marshall, H.W.; Tang, L.F. *Meeting the Needs of SLIFE: A Guide for Educators*, 2nd ed.; University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, MI, USA, 2020.
37. DeCapua, A.; Marshall, H.W. Reaching ELLs at risk: Instruction for students with limited or interrupted formal education. *Prev. Sch. Fail.* **2011**, *55*, 35–41. [CrossRef]
38. U.S. Government Accountability Office. Report to Congressional Committees: Challenges Providing Services to K-12 English Learners and Students with Disabilities during COVID-19. 2020. Available online: https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-21-43.pdf (accessed on 16 January 2021).
39. WIDA Consortium. WIDA Focus on SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education. 2015. Available online: https://wida.wisc.edu/resources/students-limited-or-interrupted-formal-education-slife (accessed on 16 January 2021).
40. DeCapua, A. Reaching students with limited and interrupted formal education through culturally responsive teaching. *Lang. Linguist. Compass* **2016**, *10*, 225–237. [CrossRef]
41. O'Loughlin, J.B. Students with Interrupted Formal Education. TESOL International Association—Refugee Concerns Newsletter. 2019. Available online: http://newsmanager.commpartners.com/tesolrcis/issues/2019-03-06/4.html (accessed on 5 March 2021).
42. Custodio, B.; O'Loughlin, J.B. *Students with Interrupted Formal Education: Bridging Where They Are and What They Need*; Corwin: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2017.
43. DeCapua, A.; Marshall, H.W. Reframing the conversation about students with limited or interrupted formal education: From achievement gap to cultural dissonance. *NASSP Bull.* **2015**, *99*, 356–370. [CrossRef]

Article

The Promises and Limitations of Educational Tiers for Special and Inclusive Education

James M. Kauffman

Department of Special Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904, USA; jmk9t@virginia.edu

Abstract: Making public school accommodating of all learners such that the need for special education is obviated, or at least reduced, has long been a desideratum of educators. Various strategies for making general public education more accommodating of students with disabilities have been tried. The most recent efforts to improve the general education of students with disabilities involve various models of tiered education. Educational tiers can be logical and advantageous in some ways, holding promise for improving general education, but they do not address the core problems of special education. Special education is still needed as part of inclusive education.

Keywords: tiers; levels; teaching disabilities

The idea that special education can and should become an educational invention of the past has current proponents, e.g., [1–4]. However, that idea is at least a half-century old. In 1970, special educator Evelyn Deno suggested that special education might be able to work itself out of business by teaching general educators to do special educators' jobs [5]. In later decades of the 20th century, others suggested merging special and general education or making general education so "supple" that it could serve all students and special education would no longer be needed [6–9]. Longing for an end to what special education is and what it does has a tortuous history [10–12].

With the concept of multiple tiers of support in general education, it appears some would argue that general education can "go it alone" or fully integrate the special into the general education so that a single, fully unified or integrated, inclusionary education system can be achieved, providing equity for all learners. For example, the SWIFT Schools eb site's home page [3] includes these statements: "We believe together we can transform education so that it benefits each and every student . . . " and "Leading the nation in equity-based Multi-tiered System of Support and inclusive education research and services."

As mentioned, the basic idea of merging special and general education is decades old, e.g., [6,13,14], but its current iteration is known as tiered education or multi (more than two) tiers, typically known as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). In some current plans for MTSS, e.g., [15], special education still exists, and lower tiers appear to be preliminary interventions that might prevent referral for special education. However, at least three things are not clear in all cases: (1) the tier that is designated as special education; (2) U.S. law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA) or other legal protections granted with each tier other than the one designated as special education; and (3) the qualifications other than a general education teaching license that are required to teach tiers other than the first.

1. Specialization in Education

Education is among the endeavors many consider so simple that specialization is not required in teaching basic skills [16]. Teaching such things as art, music, and physical education may be required at all levels of education, and specialization in teaching in particular curricular areas such as mathematics, science, history, etc., may be required at the secondary level. However, some seem to argue that no *special* education or separate

degree program is needed for teaching students with disabilities, only improved general education that includes some instruction in meeting the needs of *all* students [3,4].

In this respect, those who propose full inclusion—*only* inclusive education—must assume that teaching is much like ditch-digging. If you can dig a ditch, it matters little whether you are digging a trench for a sewer line or a water line. Ditch-digging requires no special training depending on what is to be put in the ditch. If you can dig a ditch for one thing, then you can dig a ditch for anything. Education stands very much alone as an endeavor (or profession) in which specialization for students with disabilities is thought to be—even argued to be—unneeded [1–4]. The assumption seems to be that if you can teach one child to do something, then you can teach any child to do it. A common disparagement of teaching any group is the comment that teaching is not rocket science. In fact, it is more complicated than rocket science. Additionally, it becomes more complicated with increases in the size and diversity in prior learning and cognitive ability of the group to be taught. One group of scholars wrote:

> Teachers who take their task seriously understand the ignorance of someone who asks, "Who knew teaching could be so complicated?" Experienced, competent teachers also understand how adding to the learning diversity of a group of students (not the group's racial, ethnic, gender, or other diversities that do not determine learning) adds to the difficulty of effective instruction. As with virtually any task, some will claim that whatever activity (teaching, building, playing a musical instrument or sport, etc.) is easy—or claim to have a simple solution to the challenge of its mastery. For more than 45 years, some special education leaders have supported the fiction that general educators should be able, at least with help from special educators at their elbows, to teach all children without exception, including those with disabilities . . . .

> In education, differentiation is often presented as an easy, or at least eminently doable, solution to teaching diverse groups. Inclusion of the most difficult students in general education is sometimes presented as something all teachers worth their salt can accomplish with a little extra effort, a little help, and/or reasonable determination. Aspersions are then cast on good general education teachers who say they cannot do it or cannot do it well. We hope that one legacy of the inclusion movement in education will be better understanding of the complexities and demandingness of teaching. [16] (pp. 261–262)

Most people readily recognize the absurdity of propositions such as the following: (a) *all* drivers will be licensed to drive *all* vehicles, with no special training or licensure to drive any trucks, buses, heavy equipment, or other vehicles not airborne; (b) *all* pilots will be expected to fly *all* airplanes for *all* purposes, regardless of number or type of engine(s), size, or purpose; (c) *all* builders will be licensed to construct all types of buildings; (d) *all* physicians will be licensed to perform all medical treatments, including examinations, prescriptions, surgeries, and other medical procedures; (e) *all* hospitals will be open to *all* patients, and *all* patients will be placed in general medical units regardless of medical condition or diagnosis; (f) *all* soldiers will be expected to operate *all* weapons of defense and be trained to accomplish *all* missions; (g) *all* lawyers will be expected to handle *all* cases involving law, regardless of the nature of the case; (h) *all* teachers will be prepared to teach *all* subjects at *all* levels; and (i) *all* dentists will provide *all* dental services and procedures, including extractions, orthodontia, and dental implants.

However, the insistence that appropriate education for *all* students can be achieved in general education—one system so "flexible" or "supple" that no special education is needed, that no student needs to be "singled out," "labeled," or "segregated" from general education is puzzling. Presumably, when "all" is used, and especially when the phrase "all means all" is invoked, the reference is to each and every individual, no exceptions. Perhaps, those using "all" and saying "all means all" do not really mean *all* in a *literal*

sense. However, it is incumbent upon them to say so and to describe the exceptions in some manner—to state the criteria or process for making exceptions.

Knowing that the number of exceptions needed to disprove the claim that "all means all" is precisely *one* and that certainly more than one living child will not be appropriately served by "inclusive" general education, some nevertheless double down on the claim e.g., [3,4]. Observations of inequities based on diversities other than disability (e.g., color, ancestry, gender) have been used to justify having only "inclusive" education, with special education tagged as "exclusionary," "segregated," and "othering" e.g., [4]. What is lost in the justifiable objections to inequities based on other forms of diversity is the nature of differences—the fact that disability is a different *kind* of diversity demanding a different response from educators concerned about equity.

2. Attempts to Make Education Appropriate for All

Many attempts have been made to find a method, structure, or ideology that makes the promise of appropriate education for all a reality without having special education, to make schools inclusive of all students without identifying or "separating out" any for education away from the general group.

Grades, levels, classes, and subjects (i.e., curriculum areas) are obviously ways of "separating out" students for particular instructional activities, but these are not usually considered "segregated" groupings, whereas any separate special education is called "segregated." Special education bears the brunt of condemnation for sorting, labeling, and segregating. However, all programmatic groupings in education require sorting, labeling, and segregating to meet their objectives. As with special education, they are dedicated to a particular activity and purpose for particular students. Special education, too, is better described as "dedicated" than "segregated" [17]. The moral taint of segregation is unnecessarily and unjustly attributed to special education.

Among the attempts to make general education more accommodating of students with disabilities is the idea of "pre-referral teams," groups of teachers (general and special, and perhaps school psychologists or counselors) who try to problem-solve the education of a particular student to preclude or prevent referral of that student for special education evaluation. The assumption of pre-referral is that the general education teacher has not tried techniques or strategies that would resolve the problem(s) that could lead to referral of a student about whom the teacher is concerned for the evaluation for special education.

Attempts to improve general education's responses to students with disabilities also included the regular education initiative of the 1980s (REI, peculiar to the United States) [14] and response to intervention or instruction of the 1990s (RTI; perhaps invented in the United States but not only applicable to teaching practices there) [18–22]. Although RTI has been suggested as a way of making full inclusion (i.e., placement of *all* students with disabilities in general education) possible, a more recent and internationally lauded idea about how this might be accomplished is the notion of tiers within general education. MTSS is usually focused on academic issues, and another tiered system called PBIS (positive behavioral interventions and supports) is usually focused on behavioral issues.

3. The Development of Tiered Models

The ideas leading to tiers have a history beginning in the late 20th century. In the early 21st century, many different models with a variety of acronyms have been developed [23]. The basic concerns leading to the invention of tiers include:

1. Many general education teachers do not use evidence-based instructional and behavior management practices, leading to unnecessary academic and behavioral problems;
2. Many students need help in improving their academic learning and emotional/social behavior but do not have actual disabilities;
3. Students' problems often become severe because intervention is delayed too long and opportunities for prevention are overlooked;

4. Students are often mistakenly identified as having disabilities because of these three previously stated concerns;
5. Too many students are served by special education simply because that is the only special service they can obtain in schools.

Consequently, Tier 1 consists of good evidence-based instructional and behavior management practices, a primary prevention strategy; Tier 2 is an attempt to catch problems early, using interventions known to be effective in secondary prevention so that students' problems do not become severe; and Tier 3 is intensive, individualized, targeted, interventions associated with tertiary prevention, managing problems so that they do not become overwhelming.

One thing not clear is precisely how the implementation of tiers is not a form of "tracking." In one sense, it appears to be a refined form of tracking, in that observed differences in students' learning and behavior are used to justify different designations and instruction. Perhaps it is more explicit, defensible, flexible, but relabeled tracking.

Many other issues involving tiers in the general case have been noted [22]. The most sophisticated tiered model to date combines academic, behavioral, and social concerns into a comprehensive, integrated, three-tiered model (Ci3T) [18]. In the Ci3T model, special education still exists but is independent of tiers. Specifically, students identified as having a disability are not necessarily assigned to Tier 3 but may be found in any tier, depending on their IEP (individual education program, required by U.S. law for all students receiving special education). Ci3T does have advantageous features, including improved general education and the possible inclusion of more students at all levels of general education [15]. Nevertheless, recognition of what any program of tiers greater than two (general/special) can and cannot do is important.

4. What More Than Two Tiers Can and Cannot Do

Although some may believe that tiers of general education can result in the inclusion of *all* students with disabilities in typical classrooms in neighborhood schools [3,4], it is important to note that not all proponents of tiers are advocates of full inclusion. However, some advocates of tiers argue that labeling and stigma can be avoided. They might even suggest that a child is not actually "in" a tier but receiving the supports offered in that tier. Nevertheless, someone must decide of students, "*This* one, not *that* one" will receive the programs or supports of a given tier, i.e., individuals must be chosen to receive the services of a given tier. Someone must decide which students will receive which services. Classification, sorting, labeling—actually doing something to address the diversity of responses to teaching—are things that cannot be avoided unless everyone is to receive the same thing. Furthermore, a student receiving the supports of Tier 1, for example, will inevitably be called a Tier 1 student. Moreover, any tier greater than the first will inevitably be stigmatizing, i.e., all tiers higher than Tier 1 will be stigmatizing, and higher tiers with higher numbers will carry more stigma than those with lower numbers.

Having more than two tiers (the traditional special/general education framework) so that there is a "sort of" or quasi-special education to address problems that are not considered actual disabilities may be a very good idea. In fact, tiers hold promise as a way of improving general education. However, it is also important to ask the following of any proposed model of tiers:

1. Precisely what qualifies a student to receive services or interventions associated with each tier?
2. What legal protections and regulations apply to each tier?
3. What preparation or qualifications are needed to implement the procedures of each tier?
4. How are tiers related to special education?

A given tier might or might not be designated as special education. Indeed, some have stated that no tier is exclusive to special education, and that special education identification

and IEPs are independent of tiers [15]. However, this suggests additional questions. For example:

1. Just how is a student identified initially for special education—by what measure of achievement or need?
2. Must a child first be found to need the most intensive, individualized interventions associated with the highest tier before being found eligible for special education?

Important to recognize is what tiers can and cannot do. One thing they *can* do is add to teachers' options for levels or types of instruction and behavior management. In that respect, they hold considerable promise for improving general education. However, at least in the area of managing behavior, Tier 2 interventions seem to require individualization because no behavioral intervention works reliably with all students [24,25]. If, in fact, this is the case, and particularly if individualized attention or programs are found to be necessary for success with Tier 1, then the value of designating tiers might be questioned.

The things any model of tiers *cannot* do are:

1. Avoid labels;
2. Avoid "*This* one, not *that* one" decisions;
3. Avoid the stigma associated with all tiers greater than the lowest;
4. Avoid either labeling one tier as special education and granting all the legal regulations and protections associated with that tier—if those regulations and protections are to be maintained—or specifying just how students are to be identified as having a disability, if they are disabled;
5. Avoid the issue of legal regulations and protections that should accompany tiers greater than one but less than the highest.

Inclusion is an important aspect of education for students with disabilities, but so is having special education in environments other than general education [24,26]. In fact, insistence on the inclusion and elimination of special education might be predictably self-defeating [26–30]. Levels or tiers of education, regardless of the number of them or their comprehensiveness and integration, do not address the three core problems of special education—the two-tiered system of education (general/special). These three core problems are:

1. Drawing a line that separates special education from general education, one that is chosen from continuous distributions of academic performance and problematic behavior [31];
2. Deciding just where (or in what environment) a particular student should be taught, chosen from a continuum of alternative placements [32];
3. Prescribing precisely how and by whom particular students should be taught [33].

5. Concluding Remarks

Tiers are a good concept in many ways, and having more than two of them could allow more mainstreaming or inclusion of students in general education. Nevertheless, more tiers do not address, much less solve, the three core problems of special education noted in the preceding paragraph. The danger is not only that multiple tiers will prove to be another "latest thing" or "fad" of education [34], but that they will be used as an opportunity to dismantle special education, becoming a "new normal" [10], and will become a "size" that, presumably, fits all [26].

Attractive ideas can and have been used to mislead educators and the public into policies that are found to be unworkable [29,35]. To date, efforts to reform American public education in significant ways have failed. Tiers are an attractive idea, but so far little or no direct evidence of the use of tiers has demonstrated that tiers prevent problems or reduce the need for special education. This is not to say that no components of tiers that are practiced well have shown no promise in the prevention or reduction in problems or need for special education. Indeed, some have.

Teaching most students well is not easy. Teaching those with disabilities and doing it well is particularly challenging. Inclusive school environments have proven to be less successful than specialized instructions in separate settings for the most difficult to teach (i.e., lowest-performing) students [36]. Implementing the best models of tiered education with great fidelity is not easy, even in experimental situations, and bringing the implementation of them to scale such that they are practiced reliably in most schools would be a Herculean task, one probably quite unlikely to be accomplished. More likely is that many schools will claim to be implementing tiers but make that claim as a reason for eliminating special education or important parts of it (e.g., identifying disabilities that are not immediately obvious to almost all observers).

Some who have studied alternative numbers of tiers have found making Tier 1 work well to be very difficult. Some good advice from them: keep things as simple as possible, and note that teachers have limitations.

> By suggesting that some schools consider implementing a two-tier rather than three-tier framework, we are not saying that less complex frameworks are as effective as more complex ones. In principle, we would expect a three-tier approach to be more successful with more children. But in reality, many schools are *not* deciding between three and two tiers. They are struggling just to make Tier 1 work. . . . In considering a two-tier alternative, it is important to remember that the conventional three-tier approach, however logical and consistent with best practices, is without empirical validation. We do not say this dismissively or to be contentious or provocative. Rather, our point is simply that there is nothing sacrosanct about a three-tier framework. [37] (p. 266)

Of course, it is possible to argue for any number of tiers, including zero. The notion of having a carefully planned, individualized program of education for all students (essentially, having as many tiers as there are students) is, of course, risible. Some seem to argue for no tiers at all, simply doing away with the idea of having special education or, as it is known in some nations, SEN (special educational needs) [1–4,38]. The idea is that identifying disabilities or special educational needs is "othering" that justifies exclusion and segregation [4].

Education having no tiers at all, however, and denying the need of some students for *special* education, is at root denial not only of science generally and a science of education in particular, but also denial of the very humanity of students with disabilities and of teachers. It does recognize the fact that students with disabilities share many or most of the basic human needs of *all* students, but it also denies their human need for *education* which is not at all like the *educational* needs of most other students [39]. It denies the very human need and right of *all* students for *appropriate* education, plus the need of teachers for work they can do well. It makes education nothing different from any other civic activity, treating it as if being appropriately educated means merely being in a specified classroom.

The best number of tiers greater than zero is debatable, but having zero tiers is a profoundly regressive notion. It takes education back to the days before any *special* needs were recognized, and students with disabilities were expected to sink or swim like everyone else in the mainstream. It is a refusal to recognize the extraordinary in education for what it is.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) addresses the issue of education, although not including the quality or specialized nature of education for students with disabilities [39]. It addresses inclusion as a matter of a right to place only, and does not address the many practical issues of making sure such children receive appropriate education. It does not address the issue of tiers, apparently assuming that no tiers at all are necessary. Unfortunately, while addressing many important rights of persons with disabilities, it confuses " . . . the stone of 'being there' and the bread of learning critical skills . . . " [40] (p. xi). This is nothing short of a moral catastrophe.

References

1. Baglieri, S.; Bejoian, L.M.; Broderick, A.A.; Connor, D.J.; Valle, J. [Re]claiming "inclusive education" toward cohesion in educational reform: Disability studies unravels the myth of the normal child. *Teach. Coll. Rec.* **2011**, *113*, 2122–2154.
2. Connor, D.J. "I don't like to be told that I view a student with a deficit mindset": Why it Matters that Disability Studies in Education Continues to Grow. *Can. J. Disabil. Stud.* **2020**, *9*, 20–41. [CrossRef]
3. SWIFT Schools. Available online: https://swiftschools.org (accessed on 24 May 2021).
4. Slee, R. *Inclusive Education Isn't Dead, It Just Smells Funny*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2018.
5. Deno, E. Special Education as Developmental Capital. *Except. Child.* **1970**, *37*, 229–237. [CrossRef]
6. Goodlad, J.I.; Lovitt, T.C. (Eds.) *Integrating General and Special Education*; Merrill/Macmillan: New York, NY, USA, 1993.
7. Gartner, A.; Lipsky, D.K. Beyond Special Education: Toward a Quality System for All Students. *Harv. Educ. Rev.* **1987**, *57*, 367–396. [CrossRef]
8. Gartner, A.; Lipsky, D.K. *The Yoke of Special Education: How to Break It*; National Center on Education and the Economy: Rochester, NY, USA, 1989.
9. Lipsky, D.K.; Gartner, A. Inclusion, School Restructuring, and the Remaking of American Society. *Harv. Educ. Rev.* **1996**, *66*, 762–797. [CrossRef]
10. Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Pullen, P.C. Creeping normality: Special education's problem of a new normal. *J. Disabil. Policy Stud.* **2020**, in press.
11. Kauffman, J.M.; Ahrbeck, B.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Felder, M.; Hallenbeck, B.A. Special Education Policy Prospects: Lessons from Social Policies Past. *Exceptionality* **2021**, *29*, 16–28. [CrossRef]
12. Ahrbeck, B.; Badar, J.; Kauffman, J.; Felder, M.; Schneiders, K. Fachbeitrag: Full Inclusion? Totale Inklusion? Fakten und Überlegungen zur Situation in Deutschland und den USA. *Vierteljahresschr. Heilpädagogik Nachbargeb.* **2018**, *87*, 218–231. [CrossRef]
13. Stainback, W.; Stainback, S. A Rationale for the Merger of Special and Regular Education. *Except. Child.* **1984**, *51*, 102–111. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
14. Stainback, W.; Stainback, S. A rationale for integration and restructuring: A synopsis. In *The Regular Education Initiative: Alternative Perspectives on Concepts, Issues, and Models*; Lloyd, J.W., Singh, N.N., Repp, A.C., Eds.; Sycamore: Pierce Ave, NY, USA, 1991; pp. 226–239.
15. Lane, K.L.; Buckman, M.M.; Oakes, W.P.; Menzies, H. Tiered systems and inclusion: Potential benefits, clarifications, and considerations. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2020; pp. 85–106.
16. Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Landrum, T.J.; Smith, C.R. Likely legacies of inclusion. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2020; pp. 249–265.
17. Gliona, M.F.; Gonzales, A.K.; Jacobson, E.S. Suggested changes in thinking about instructional envi-ronments and in the language of special education. In *The Illusion of Full Inclusion: A Comprehensive Critique of a Current Special Education Bandwagon*, 2nd ed.; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Eds.; PRO-ED: Austin, TX, USA, 2005.
18. Lloyd, J.W.; Repp, A.C.; Singh, N.N. (Eds.) *The Regular Education Initiative: Alternative Perspectives on Concepts, Issues, and Methods*; Sycamore: Pierce Ave, NY, USA, 1993.
19. Johns, B.H.; Kauffman, J.M. Caution: Response to intervention (RtI). *Learn. Disabil. Multidiscip. J.* **2009**, *15*, 157–160.
20. Johns, B.H.; Kauffman, J.M.; Martin, E.W. The Concept of RTI: Billion-Dollar Boondoggle. Unpublished work. 2016.
21. Kauffman, J.M.; Bruce, A.; Lloyd, J.W. Response to intervention (RtI) and students with EBD. In *Advances in Special Education, Vol. 23—Behavioral Disorders: Current Perspectives and Issues*; Bakken, J.P., Obiakor, F.E., Rotatori, A., Eds.; Emerald: New Delhi, India, 2012; pp. 107–127.
22. Kauffman, J.M.; Badar, J.; Wiley, A.L. RtI: Controversies and solutions. In *Handbook of Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support*; Pullen, P.C., Kennedy, M.M., Eds.; Taylor & Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2019; pp. 11–25.
23. Pullen, P.C.; Kennedy, M.M. (Eds.) *Handbook of Response to Intervention and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support*; Taylor & Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2019.
24. Kauffman, J.M.; Travers, J.C.; Badar, J. Why Some Students with Severe Disabilities Are Not Placed in General Education. *Res. Pr. Pers. Sev. Disabil.* **2019**, *45*, 28–33. [CrossRef]
25. Kilgus, S.P.; Klingbeil, D.A. Adaptive Tier 2 behavioral intervention: What we know and what remains unseen. In *The Next Big Thing in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities (Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities)*; Cook, B.G., Tankersley, M., Landrum, T.J., Eds.; Emerald: New Delhi, India, 2021; Volume 31, pp. 111–123.
26. Hornby, G. Inclusion or Delusion: Can one size fit all? *Support Learn.* **1999**, *14*, 152–157. [CrossRef]

27. Hornby, G. *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-Based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*; Springer: Basel, Switzerland, 2014.

28. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]

29. Kauffman, J.M.; Badar, J. Definitions and other issues. In *On Educational Inclusion*; Routledge: London, UK, 2020; pp. 1–24.

30. Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Hallenbeck, B.A. Becoming your own worst enemy: Con-verging paths. In *Inclusive Education: Global Issues & Controversies (Studies in Inclusive Education)*; Boyle, C., Anderson, J., Page, A., Mavropoulou, S., Eds.; Brill Sense: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2020; Volume 45, pp. 73–88.

31. Kauffman, J.M.; Lloyd, J.W. Statistics, data, and special education decisions: Basic links to realities. In *Handbook of Special Education*, 2nd ed.; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Pullen, P.C., Eds.; Taylor & Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 29–39.

32. Rodriguez, J.A.; Murawski, W.W. (Eds.) *Special Education Law and Policy: From Foundation to Application*; Plural Publishing: San Diego, CA, USA, 2020.

33. Bateman, B.D. Who, how, and where: Special education's issues in perpetuity. *J. Spec. Educ.* **1994**, *27*, 509–520. [CrossRef]

34. Forbes, H.J.; Johnson, J.V.; Travers, J.C. Some concerns about the next big thing in special education: Persistency of fads. In *The Next Big Thing in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities (Advances in Learning and Behavioral Disabilities)*; Cook, B.G., Tankersley, M., Landrum, T.J., Eds.; Emerald: New Delhi, India, 2021; Volume 31, pp. 191–202.

35. Gillon, S.M. *That's Not What We Meant to Do: Reform and Its Unintended Consequences in Twentieth Century America*; W. W. Norton: New York, NY, USA, 2000.

36. Fuchs, L.S.; Fuchs, D.; Compton, D.L.; Wehby, J.; Schumacher, R.F.; Gersten, R.; Jordan, N.C. Inclusion versus specialized intervention for very-low-performing students: What does access mean in an era of academic challenge? *Except. Child.* **2015**, *81*, 134–157. [CrossRef]

37. Fuchs, D.; Fuchs, L.S. Critique of the National Evaluation of Response to Intervention: A case for sim-pler frameworks. *Except. Child.* **2017**, *83*, 255–268. [CrossRef]

38. Malaquias, C. Three Myths of Special Education—Thoughts for Parents: Starting with Julius Organisation. Available online: www.startingwithjulius.org.au/3-myths-of-special-education (accessed on 27 December 2017).

39. Anastasiou, D.; Gregory, M.; Kauffman, J.M. Commentary on Article 24 of the CRPD: The right to edu-cation. In *Commentary on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*; Bantekas, I., Stein, M., Anastasiou, D., Eds.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2018; pp. 656–704.

40. Kauffman, J.M. What we make of difference and the difference we make. In *Handbook of Psychosocial Characteristics of Exceptional Children*; Schwean, V.L., Saklofske, D.H., Eds.; Plenum: Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 1999; pp. ix–xiii.

Article

Triennial Evaluations: Divorcing the Means from the Ends

Frederick J. Brigham [1,*]**, Christopher M. Claude** [1] **and John William McKenna** [2]

[1] College of Education and Human Development, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030, USA; cclaude@masonlive.gmu.edu
[2] College of Education, University of Massachusetts Lowell, Lowell, MA 01854, USA; john_mckenna@uml.edu
[*] Correspondence: fbrigham@gmu.edu

Abstract: Confusion among stakeholders regarding some aspects of the special education process—chiefly the triennial reevaluation—leads to misapplication of rules across districts and states based on interpretations of informal lore-based reasoning. Local education agencies (LEA) can determine that no additional data are needed and advise parents to forego the evaluation. Too, often, families who fear losing special education services for their child will acquiesce and decline the evaluation. Although this may be appropriate for some students, for others it can be a highly questionable and counterproductive decision. We illustrated the ways that avoiding triennial evaluations could hamper the ability of the LEA to adequately foster the student's independence, monitor the student's disability condition, and set and reach the student's Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals. We argued that the major issue in decisions regarding triennial evaluations is centered on determining if a student is still eligible for special education services. This places too much attention on test-based eligibility and too little on educational needs, transition needs, and the instructional program. Triennial reevaluations should pivot from an "eligibility" focus to a "needs" focus, allowing schools and parents to gain a fresh understanding of the individual receiving the services. Failure to do so raises questions about the fidelity of assessment within the structure of special education service provision. Finally, we suggested that the motives underlying the practices for triennial evaluations illustrated here call the pragmatic acceptability of "full inclusion" into question.

Keywords: assessment; inclusion; students with disabilities; secondary education; triennial evaluations

1. Introduction

The twin pillars of special education in the United States are a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that is delivered in the least restrictive environment (LRE). We previously argued that FAPE should be the driving force in a rational education system [1,2]. With the Endrew F. decision, demonstration of "appropriate" progress is now required for all students with disabilities [3]. Demonstration of appropriate progress and delivery of FAPE require timely and accurate assessment data. Many proponents of inclusion of students with disabilities [4,5] suggest that general education settings are optimal environments for the education of all students with disabilities. However, a misguided interpretation of federal policy too often prevents the collection and utilization of potentially important assessment data for students with disabilities, that is, triennial evaluations, which are necessary to ensure a FAPE in either general or special education settings. Therefore, the practices associated with the implementation of this policy suggest that full inclusion is a questionable option in the minds of some people with disabilities, their parents/guardians, and school officials. We next turn to the requirements for triennial evaluations.

Students receiving special education services are required by law to "appropriately" benefit from them [6]. Thus, it is imperative that LEAs are capable of determining who is eligible for special education services so that they may receive the benefits to which they are entitled. However, these benefits come at a price. For example, according to the Overview

49

of Special Education in California [7], the state spends $17,000 more per pupil on students who receive special education services compared with students who do not. While the cost varies based on what the provided services are and where they are provided, stakeholders may consider the financial gravity accompanying special education services. Thus, there is a potential financial disincentive for schools to carry out triennial evaluations.

2. Eligibility

Eligibility for special education services is based upon a positive finding in each of the elements of a two-pronged test. In order to be determined eligible for special education services the individual must (a) have a disability and (b) require the provision of special education services to benefit from school due to the manner in which the disability adversely affects performance, and not some other problem such as lack of appropriate instruction in reading or math or having limited English proficiency [8]. The exclusion of performance problems not related to disability indicates that a number of influences can lead to characteristics that bear superficial resemblance to disabilities. Individuals with problems that are not the result of a disability are not eligible for special education services under IDEA. It is, therefore, reasonable to periodically reexamine individuals receiving services to screen out those false positive identifications (i.e., those who were mistakenly identified as eligible for services), as well as identify students who have a disability but no longer require special education services to make effective progress in school.

3. Independence

A clear purpose of special education is to provide instruction that encourages individuals with disabilities to become as independent and self-directed as possible [9]. Many students with disabilities are capable of continuing academic growth in general education settings after exiting special education services [10]. Providing unneeded services can prevent an individual from attaining independence because of the opportunity cost of engaging in the services as opposed to other activities. In addition, the expense of providing special education services is borne on top of the expenses of the regular per-pupil costs that the school incurs, so providing unnecessary services or services to those who are ineligible to receive them can drive up educational costs. When educational costs are unnecessarily inflated, the financial burden is spread across all of the programs in the school, reducing funds available for other purposes. Thus, decisions to determine a person to be eligible for special education services are weighty and not to be made impulsively or without deliberation and supportive data. The same can be said for the decision to continue or discontinue eligibility for special education services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [11] outlines the process for reevaluating students to determine their continued eligibility—both to empower the student towards independence and to consider the finances needed to enact services.

4. Monitoring Disability Condition

IDEA outlines 13 distinct disability designations. It is, therefore, reasonable that the reevaluation process may be more nuanced for some students than others. For example, individuals with more pervasive disabilities may be less likely because of their defining characteristics (e.g., IQ scores at or below a given level) to approximate grade level academic performance and/or perform adaptive behaviors consistent with age/grade norms over time than individuals with other, less-pervasive disabilities (e.g., some forms of specific learning disabilities). Additionally, individuals who are identified at early ages may have more unstable scores over time, at least until they are assessed when they are older. Most scores on a test-retest study with an interim period of approximately 2.84 years of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children—Fourth Edition remained stable within a few points. However, 25% of the individuals in this study had full-scale IQ scores that varied by ten or more points between measurements [12]. Therefore, it is unwise to assume that

all scores will remain stable over time, particularly when students are provided consistent access to research-based instruction and interventions.

We wish to note that we are neither stating nor implying that all individuals with learning disabilities or any other disability condition face fewer challenges than do individuals with other disabilities simply because of their condition. Challenges are based on the interaction of one's goals, personal characteristics, and the environment in which they are instructed. Thus, knowing the disability category in which one is eligible tells us only part of the story.

5. Meeting Educational Needs

Score-based eligibility determination is one part of the puzzle for re-evaluations. The other is determination of educational needs. Special educational needs are based upon the demands of the curriculum one faces and the nature of one's disability conditions. It is foolish to suspect that educational needs will remain constant in the face of changing demands of the curriculum. As students grow older, our expectations for their performance grow and the increased challenges can bring out different facets of the disability condition. Further, secondary and tertiary problems related to the disability can arise. Students may develop maladaptive behavior related to frustration or avoidance behaviors requiring different or additional interventions and instructional methods [13]. Therefore, it is unwise to assume that, once identified, an individual's needs will remain constant across the school year or their K-12 educational career.

6. Updating Educational Goals

An additional element that requires consideration in triennial evaluations, as well as evaluations that occur more frequently, is the actual progress an individual is making on the educational goals declared in the IEP. Given the requirement that students show more than de minimis progress relative to their IEP goals, it seems that having the same goal appear in several IEPs should be a cause for alarm [2]. One reason that goals may appear across IEPs is that they are written so broadly that it is difficult or impossible to detect meaningful progress. A triennial evaluation could set the stage for a refinement of the goal so that meaningful assessment data could be collected. Another reason that a goal may persist across multiple IEPs is that it is written in language that sounds impressive but is actually meaningless [14,15]. A triennial evaluation could serve as the setting event for honing and refining educational goals into more meaningful statements of what is intended for the student. Given that many special education teachers are underprepared for their roles—working on emergency licenses and teaching in demanding situations while they are being trained to do their jobs [16]—it makes sense to provide the support of a multi-disciplinary team working with fresh data in at least some cases.

7. Procedural Requirements

IDEA part B, subpart D, Section 300.305 outlines additional requirements for reevaluations. The first step is for the LEA to review existing data of the student, including test scores, observational data, and information provided by the family of the student. Importantly, the LEA can then decide that no additional data are needed to determine if the child is still eligible for special education services. In this instance, IDEA states:

1. If the IEP Team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, determine that no additional data are needed to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability, and to determine the child's educational needs, the public agency must notify the child's parents of—

    I. That determination and the reasons for the determination; and

    II. The right of the parents to request an assessment to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability, and to determine the child's educational needs.

2. The public agency is not required to conduct the assessment described in paragraph (d) (1) (ii) of this section unless requested to do so by the child's parents [17].

Some states mirror this language verbatim in their department of education's regulations for special education, but others do not. By and large, states paraphrase the wording in IDEA and use it as a baseline from which they can choose to add more regulations. See Table 1 for examples.

Table 1. Examples of State Triennial Evaluation Regulations.

State	Reevaluation Language
California	Requirements if additional data are not needed a. If the IEP Team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, determine that no additional data are needed to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs, the local educational agency shall notify the child's parents of— 1. That determination and the reasons for the determination; and 2. The right of such parents to request an assessment to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs; and b. Shall not be required to conduct such an assessment unless requested to by the child's parents. Sec. 1414. Evaluations, eligibility determinations, individualized education programs, and educational placements, section C paragraph 4 https://caser.specialedreference.com/, (accessed on 6 March 2021).
Virginia	Requirements if additional data are not needed: a. If the team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, determine that no additional data are needed to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs, the local educational agency shall provide the child's parent(s) with prior written notice, including information regarding: 1. The determination and the reasons for it; and 2. The right of the parent(s) to request an evaluation to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs. b. The local educational agency is not required to conduct the evaluation to gather additional information to determine whether the child continues to have a disability and to determine the child's educational needs, unless the child's parent(s) requests the evaluation for these specific purposes. c. The child's parent(s) has the right to resolve a dispute through mediation or due process as described in this chapter. d. This process shall be considered the evaluation if no additional data are needed. https://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/regulations/state/regs_speced_disability_va.pdf, (accessed on 6 March 2021).
Maryland	If after the review of existing data and information from the parents, the IEP team and parents agree no additional data or assessments are necessary to determine whether the student continues to be a student with a disability requiring the provision of special education and related services that date is the date of the reevaluation. Requirements if no additional data are needed to determine eligibility: IEP team must provide written notification to the parents of that determination and the reasons for the determination. This notification must also indicate that parents have the right to request MCPS to conduct assessment procedures to determine whether the son/daughter continues to be a student with a disability and to determine the student's educational needs https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/specialed/resources/handbook.pdf, (accessed on 6 March 2021).
Pennsylvania	When additional information is needed to complete a reevaluation, the school must receive your permission to perform the additional evaluation using the Permission to Reevaluate-Consent form. Also, if the school determines that no additional data is needed, they will notify you of this determination. You may agree in writing to your LEA's recommendation that the three-year reevaluation is not necessary. If the LEA proposes to not conduct the reevaluation, they will issue you an Agreement to Waive Reevaluation form. This is not an option if your child has an intellectual disability. https://www.pattan.net/assets/PaTTAN/2a/2a2a5b53-4694-41c8-aea6-0769490a89ed.pdf, (accessed on 6 March 2021).

Table 1. *Cont.*

State	Reevaluation Language
Nebraska	If the IEP team and other qualified professionals, as appropriate, determine that no additional data are needed to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs the school district or approved cooperative: Shall notify the child's parents of: ● That determination and the reasons for the determination; ● The right of the parents to request an assessment to determine whether the child continues to be a child with a disability and to determine the child's educational needs. 006.06D2 ● The school district or approved cooperative shall not be required to conduct such an assessment unless requested to by the child's parents. https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Rule51_2017.pdf, (accessed on 6 March 2021) page 31(title 92 chapter 51)

The utility of this written guidance is questionable. A recent study conducted by Gray and colleagues [18] suggested that the readability of IDEA is cause for concern. Specifically, according to the findings of the study, no procedural safeguard was written below an 11th grade level, and 74% of them were written at a graduate level. Thus, the readability of IDEA, or lack thereof, begets confusion, distrust, and many differing perceptions regarding the reevaluation process. Under such circumstances, advice from local schools or parent support groups can be highly influential.

The webpages of many parent advocacy groups discuss the dissonance between the available guidance and its practical utility. The reevaluation process, subsequent conflict resolution, and the provision of services are but a few of the areas on which advocacy groups disagree. Some advocacy groups encourage parents to review their child's evaluation more than once every three years to hold LEAs accountable to provide needed services [19,20], positing that LEAs may shrink from their responsibility regarding the reevaluation process to save time and money [21]. In fact, parents/guardians of students with disabilities have the right to call an IEP meeting at any time. Some parents prefer to waive the reevaluation process to ensure that their child keeps all of their services [22] while others prefer to avoid special education services entirely for fear of the associated stigmatization and label [10].

When there is disagreement between the family and the LEA, conflict resolution procedures may be necessary. Some groups objectively define the parent's rights to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at the school's expense [18]. However, other groups hold a more pessimistic perception of the conflict resolution process, maintaining that federal courts are more likely to side with the LEA than the family's IEE [23]. Some commentators and advocates have noted that schools tend to settle out of court and only choose to engage in legal actions when they are certain that they will win [24]. Thus, the preponderance of decisions favoring the schools in published legal disputes may reflect the approach that schools take toward disagreements with parents rather than a predisposition of courts and hearing officers to side with schools. Nevertheless, the willingness of school officials and parents to engage in potentially costly legal procedures is a factor in considering the adequacy of IDEA dispute procedures.

8. Exit Data

According to IDEA, the US Department of Education must collect data on students receiving special education services [25]. The department collects data on the number of students served in each setting as well as the number of students who exit special education services into general education. While interesting and potentially useful, these data are incomplete. Specifically, the *Exit* and *Child Count and Environment* data from the 2018–2019 school year from Wisconsin and Louisiana lacked data for students served in each setting and the number of students transferring out of special education services, respectively. Moreover, these data are not disaggregated by disability designation or demographic

information, rendering the picture painted by the data incomplete. However, using data for the remaining 48 states, Washington DC, and the Bureau of Indian Education, it is possible to begin to assess the ability of states to enable students to exit special education services.

Nationally, 3.5% of students in special education services in the secondary setting will transfer out of special education services into the general education setting. The range of such transfers is variable, with New Hampshire at 10.4% and Indiana at 0.8%. Given the purported similarity of curricula across states resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act [26] and the common Core Standards Initiative begun in 2009 [27], and the consistency of procedures carried out at least at the "floor level" required by IDEA, it seems likely that the variability is related to interpretation of the regulations rather than differences in the regulations across states.

9. Lore-Based Decision-Making

We contend that there is often a local lore that is employed to guide decisions in much of human endeavor and particularly in special education practice rather than reasoned policies. Such is the case in the area of interventions and volumes of rebuttals [28,29] that have been published. Similar problems of lore-based reasoning to the exclusion of clear contra-indicative evidence also exists in the realm of educational assessment [30]. Kurt Anderson produced a history of political and economic development in the late 20th century and early 21st century and concluded that among several destructive tenets held by many people in this time period are: (a) "establishment experts are wrong, science is suspect," and (b) "[we are] entitled to our own facts" [31] (p. 369). Given the ubiquity of such problems in other areas, it is difficult to imagine that such lore-driven advice is absent from the domain of triennial evaluations in special education.

We have described several of the purposes of triennial evaluations and now turn to problems that such lore-driven decisions create at the local level. There is very little empirical research on this topic in the literature. The references on this topic that we located [32,33] were not directly related to the arguments we developed herein. That could be because there are no problems in this realm. We doubt that. It could also be that, when issues arise and parents stand their ground to insist upon meaningful evaluations, schools back down and negotiate with the parents. That is possible. It could also be the case that parents do not know the intricacies of special education regulations [34] and, therefore, either take bad advice about securing triennial evaluations or do not know what their options may be. We believe that this is plausible.

10. Case Examples

We illustrated some of the problems with misapplication of triennial evaluation rules through a series of case examples. "Humans understand the world through narratives; however much we flatter ourselves about our individual rationality, a good story, no matter how analytically deficient, lingers in the mind, resonates emotionally, and persuades more than the most dispositive facts or data" [35] (p. 7). The cases that follow are real and, we think, illustrative of several problems that exist within current lore-based practices regarding triennial evaluations and, relatedly, the pragmatic attitudes they demonstrate towards inclusion. Our cases involved students in secondary settings because the cases that we collected at this level rendered the problems clear. We turn first to the story of Jesse.

10.1. Jesse

People who have characteristics similar to Jesse are very likely the reason that Congress amended the triennial evaluation requirement to allow extant data to suffice rather than to require duplicative administrations of tests when the scores are unlikely to change. Jesse was identified as eligible for early childhood special education services around the time she was 30 months old. She appeared unresponsive to most verbal stimuli and was not attaining her developmental milestones. Her family was worried that she might be deaf when they approached the local special education services unit for an evaluation.

Due to her young age, Jesse was declared eligible for special education services in the category of developmental delay. In essence, that means that there were a number of issues present, but it was too early to tell which ones were the major contributors to her performance and whether or not the measures that were used were stable and clear enough for a firm identification of the ongoing issues at her young age. She began receiving intensive services about the time of her third birthday.

By the time she turned seven, it was evident that Jesse had a substantial intellectual disability. Measures of intellectual ability indicated standard scores that consistently fell in the mid-to-high thirties. Language, communication, and adaptive behavior scores consistently rated her as far below age or grade level, as did measures of motor performance and coordination. Additionally, these measures were consistent with informal observations made by medical personnel and educators who worked with Jesse and her family. Scores on such measures from young children are often unstable and open to change. Additionally, scores as extreme as Jesse's are sometimes vulnerable to the effects of regression toward the mean. That is, scores this low are likely to be somewhat higher on repeated measure simply because extremely low scores are associated with "unlucky" error that may not be as prominent in the subsequent measure. Therefore, subsequent measures of the same elements may have yielded different results as she grew older. Such was not the case. Her scores remained in the same range for the rest of her schooling, and every three years a complete battery was administered.

Every three years, Jesse's parents received a formal report from school officials indicating that she still had an intellectual disability and that her language, motor, and academic abilities (i.e., reading, math, written language) were far below her grade level and that of her age-mates. Although her family was disappointed in this news, hoping that somehow her education could "cure" her disability, they were unsurprised. They were, however, alarmed that the reports simply repeated that she was far below the normative expectations for her age or grade mates. They would have been elated had Jesse's behavior indicated that she no longer needed special education services, and thought that the requirement to apply formal tests to corroborate the things that were evident in Jesse's interactions with others and performance of various developmental tasks was "just silly". They were correct in this judgment, and this is very likely the reason that complete triennial evaluations are no longer required when the team deems the extant data to be adequate. Even in this obvious case, there is a clear downside.

Jesse was included in her school's academic program for half of each day and participated in the school's community-based education program the other half of the day. The school maintained essentially the same goals for Jesse on every one of the 17 IEPs that guided her education from kindergarten to the year that she turned 21 and aged out of school services. As time wore on, some of the goals were altered to include the use of technology (e.g., she will read words presented on a computer screen rather than from printed media), and more attention to vocational settings (e.g., she will remain on task while carrying out [task] in the workplace rather than in the classroom). Nevertheless, the goals were the same; only the setting had changed. The pain that this caused the family was clear in the response from Jesse's mother to the question delivered in the IEP meeting just before Jesse aged out of school: "And, are there any special things that you would like to see in this, your daughter's last IEP?" Her mother replied, "Just pick one from the previous years and actually do it this time".

Analysis. Jesse's evaluation complied perfectly with the letter of the law and completely missed the purpose of the law. It is of no value to repeat that she was far below expectations on such normative measures and fail to discuss what she could do at the time of a given evaluation that she was unable to do during a previous evaluation. Normative measures are of great utility in the range of the mean plus and minus one, if not two standard deviations. But to say that Jesse was functioning far below the typical range is as useful as evaluating the competence of cellist Yo-Yo Ma by stating that he is way better than most players [36]. Good assessment of individuals in the extreme tails of the

distribution of any characteristic requires more attention to the actual performance of individually meaningful tasks than to comparative evaluation of normative tasks. Triennial evaluations, if they were focused upon performance rather than eligibility, could easily do this. Additionally, by having Jesse be present in general education settings for half of the day, the school was able to report her as a student with disabilities who received substantial amounts of instruction in general education. By reporting where she sat during the school day without concern for educational benefit and failing to respond to the clear lack of progress in her IEPs, Jesse's school made themselves look good but denied her both inclusion in a meaningful sense and a free appropriate education as required by federal special education mandates.

10.2. Lyle

Lyle was fourteen years old when his family relocated to a different state for work. He had been served in a dedicated setting for individuals with emotional and/or behavioral disorders for five years and was doing quite well in that setting. We prefer the term "dedicated" over pejorative terms such as segregated, or misleading terms such as self-contained; Lyle's special education services were provided in an environment that was dedicated toward the issues that he faced. He was making strong academic progress and was repairing the damage done to his achievement during the time before intervention when he was described as a school-refuser. He was due for his triennial evaluation at the beginning of the next school year.

Upon relocation, Lyle and his family decided that they no longer wished for him to receive special education services and removed the information about his educational evaluations and IEPs from the records that they delivered to his new school, telling the new school that he had been dismissed from special education services. They told the teachers at his former school that the new school district was much larger than the one he was leaving, so they did not trust the bureaucracy.

Lyle was enrolled in the ninth-grade general education program and did well for the first six or seven weeks. After the first month and a half, Lyle began to exhibit the school-refusal behaviors that had been the reason for his original placement. His grades fell from the mid-B range to the low C and D range, mostly due to failure to complete or submit assignments. Never an outgoing individual, Lyle withdrew from the few friendly contacts that he had established with his new peer group and avoided making new contacts with students at his school.

His parents clearly recalled that these were the kind of problems with which they and their son had been able to cope with through the services in his previous school system and decided that it was time to resume such supports in his new school. They contacted the local district for help. They were informed that Lyle would need to undergo a complete re-evaluation because he was dismissed from special education services and had been served adequately in a general education setting thus far in the school year. His parents questioned the adequacy of his services given his declining academic and social performance but agreed to the evaluation.

Upon completion of the evaluation, they were told that although Lyle clearly was experiencing increasing difficulty in his present setting, his problems were not so serious as to qualify for special education services. During a subsequent conversation with Lyle's former teachers, his father complained that it appeared that Lyle would need to revert to behaviors as serious as he had displayed in order to re-gain access to special education services.

Analysis. Lyle's family made the false conclusion that his performance without supports would equal or exceed his performance with supports. That is somewhat akin to concluding that because one's broken leg feels better with a cast, it will feel even better with the cast off. In some ways, it will, maybe, but the long-term healing of the limb may be impeded if not prevented by the premature removal of the support.

Lyle's family and his new school also made the false conclusion that special education was an all-or-nothing proposition. He was making remarkable progress with supports

from special education service providers, and he may well have been at a point where it was time to reduce his services. Rather than removing him "cold turkey" from a dedicated setting, it might have been more appropriate to reduce the amount of time that he spent in that setting and increase the amount of time he spent in other settings. Because he was removed from services, Lyle saw little hope for success in his new environment. It seems that the change of educational environment would have made more sense had it been done incrementally, but also had the option of returning to the dedicated setting remained viable for him. Even the most experienced and skilled sky divers regularly carry reserve parachutes [37].

A triennial evaluation could easily include considerations of the need for current levels of support. Also, we found no indication in the policy statements that once an individual with a disability exits special education services, regardless of the reason, they must exhibit problems as severe as those present at the initial evaluation to regain the services. Given what we know about the trajectories experienced by individuals with emotional and/or behavioral disorders, such a policy would make no sense. Indeed, it would be counter-productive and create a perverse incentive to avoid triennial evaluations lest the student be declared "ineligible for services". Additionally, a truly inclusive educational system would also be supportive of people exiting services when they are not needed and returning to them when they are once again needed. In addition to acknowledging individual differences, such a policy would clearly be supportive of individual risk-taking and independence. It also would acknowledge that disabilities tend to be life-long propositions that do not respond to a "fix-it" shop conception whereby a student, once again successful, will remain so.

10.3. Helen

Helen was a seventeen-year-old junior in high school when her parents were notified that it was time for her triennial evaluation. Her mother and father were very appreciative of the special education services that she was receiving as a student with learning disabilities and very proud of the high grades (A's and B's) that she had been earning in recent years with the support of her school's special educators. Helen's school employed the discrepancy model of eligibility for learning disabilities that required a large difference between her measured achievement and estimated ability levels. When she was re-evaluated, the discrepancy between her achievement and ability estimates narrowed and the school stated that she was no longer eligible for services.

As the school moved forward with plans to dismiss Helen from services, her family began to build the case that she was relying heavily upon her services and that ending them would seriously undermine her educational progress. The evidence that they amassed included statements from her special education teacher regarding the regularity and diligence of her efforts in accomplishing her tasks during school hours as well as corroboration of Helen's claim that she regularly was working on school assignments well past midnight for what appeared to be an average of four and a half to five hours of schoolwork every night. Helen's special education teacher noted that the language of Section 504 regarding eligibility based upon having a disability, being considered to have a disability, or having a history of a disability would make her eligible for a 504 plan that could require the same level of services [38]. When the family retained an attorney, who filed a request for a due process hearing, the school backed down. Helen retained her special education services and graduated from high school the next year.

Analysis. Helen's triennial evaluation focused almost exclusively, if not exclusively on her eligibility based upon the assumption that the characteristics present at her initial determination of eligibility needed to remain in order for her to have continued eligibility. Expression of this belief has a long history in special education practice and policy [38]. However, it appears to be a serious misunderstanding of the effect that special education services can have on a student. The suggestion that, in order to maintain special education services, one must continue to exhibit problems as severe as observed at initial

determination of eligibility is tantamount to declaring that if special education services work for one and one improves with them, they cannot have them anymore. However, if the services are not helpful and one makes little or no progress, one can have more of them. It is possible, and perhaps even probable, that individuals making little or no progress compared with their trajectory before identification and commencement of special education services would benefit from greater amounts and intensity of services. However, to remove services because they appear to be working is nonsensical.

The triennial evaluation could easily have examined the extent to which Helen was using the services provided and also consider the amount of effort that Helen was expending on her schoolwork in its decision. It is ironic that individuals who are resistant to our attempts at instruction are readily provided special education services but individuals who, like Helen, expend tremendous amounts of personal effort are less likely to receive services. Consideration of how a person uses their services could help to diminish this perverse incentive that seems to reward indolence and punish effort, at least, in some cases.

Helen was aware of her school's initiative to serve students with disabilities in general education settings. Many of the students that she knew in her school were considered to be included in that they were supported by co-teachers in their general education classes. She doubted that it would be sufficient support for the issues she faced in her studies. Her work habits demonstrated that she was far from indolent in her studies and was likely, therefore, to have good awareness of the kind of supports and intensity of supports that she needed. When offered the opportunity to return to general education, she balked, and her family sought legal advice to maintain her IEP services. A full inclusion model would, thus, appear to diminish her agency as an individual with a disability by forcing her into a model that was not of her choosing.

10.4. Dion

Dion was concluding her junior year in high school and was well on-track for graduation with the support of the school's special educators. She had good grades and was well into the process of applying for admission to colleges and universities. Well-liked by her peers and her teachers, she was a model student. The assistant principal for special education at her school contacted her family and suggested that even though she was due for a triennial evaluation, he recommended that she decline a formal evaluation lest she "test out of special education". After all, he said, she was doing fine and the data in the file had been fine for the two previous triennial evaluations.

Dion received very little dedicated specialized instruction from special education teachers or instructional assistants. Her IEP contained a list of fourteen accommodations that she claimed that she regularly employed, including extra time on everything (150%), small group testing, and a read-aloud accommodation that required staff read the tests to her. A review of the past IEPs indicated that she had been pursuing the same goals for four and a half years, since seventh grade. Those goals included: remaining on task during class, not talking during class, and improving reading comprehension. One of the teachers working with Dion noticed the similarity of goals over time and suggested to the parent that they might want to have some additional assessment work done, even if it was not completed at school.

Her family contacted a member of a local university's special education department who agreed to conduct an independent review. Much of what was previously known about her academic performance was re-confirmed. However, during the sessions the evaluator noticed that Dion almost always began working on her tasks before the instructions were completed. At the completion of the session, the evaluator reviewed the data and the qualitative results with Dion and her parents.

Her reading scores were in the middle of the typical range of performance for her age group. That made the read-aloud accommodation seem unnecessary. Dion admitted that she just let the teacher read away while she worked ahead on the test items. The individually administered assessments yielded no information that would be helpful

in considering the small-group accommodation. However, the habit that Dion had of beginning to work before the instructions were completed seemed to be damaging to her overall performance. Three subtests had to be repeated on a subsequent day because she began working before she understood the task. When asked about that behavior Dion stated, "Oh I need extra time, so I start as soon as I can. That way, I won't run out of time".

The evaluator suggested that this behavior might be the root of the perceived need for reading comprehension training in her IEP despite the adequacy of her test scores. By beginning too soon, she seemed to be making more errors than would be the case if she understood the task. In further consultation with the family, it was agreed that they would approach the school with the request that she be allowed to take her tests in a room by herself or with a school staff member as proctor so that she could read the instructions and test items out loud to herself. Her performance began to improve and, as she developed confidence in her own abilities, she became more relaxed about time limits on her work. Dion graduated from high school with the extended time accommodation and received it in college. At the end of her second year, she reported that she had kept the accommodation but had not needed to use it. She told the evaluator that after having it all the way through school, it was just too hard to walk away from it in college.

Analysis. Dion is a success story and might have enjoyed acceptable performance throughout her college education without the evaluation she received. If one only considers the scores, the evaluation may have seemed redundant to what was already known, but test results are sometimes more than just the numbers generated by a computer-based scoring program.

A norm-referenced measure presents the individual with a structured task that is presented and completed the same way by most other test-takers. The qualitative aspects of the responses in such a situation can be helpful to understanding the "how's and whys" of the individual's performance as opposed to simply determining the level of the individual's performance.

Dion probably needed a read-aloud accommodation at some point earlier in her academic career, but the results indicated that it was no longer necessary. She may have needed extended time earlier in her academic career, but, by now, she had become so convinced that she was a slow worker that she developed a set of maladaptive responses relative to this belief. By considering the "how's and whys" of performance, sensitive evaluators can gain insight into the continued need for existing accommodations and the developing need for other accommodations. A good evaluation is not just about the numbers but also about understanding the student. Having an evaluation that is different from the on-going classroom routine, at least triennially, seems a good way to make certain that our assumptions about a given individual are periodically put to the test and validated.

Dion was served in an inclusive setting in a high school located in a well-educated and wealthy community. The general education teachers, by school policy, taught "from bell to bell" (i.e., actively taught the entire class from the opening moment of the class period to the end of the class period) and were evaluated for doing so by the school administrators. The co-teachers in her classes rarely worked with individuals or small groups because that would remove them from instruction being provided by the general education teacher. Rather, her special education teachers sat in the back of the classroom, collecting behavioral data on their students and trying to document ways that the general education teacher delivered instruction to meet the IEP goals of the students with disabilities. Dion and her classmates with disabilities were considered to be served in an inclusive setting. However, her educational program was neither inclusive (her needs were not actually being met) nor individualized (she received very little individual attention directed toward her learning). As such, she was provided an education that was a perversion of the stated aims of both inclusion and special education.

11. Summary

We agree with the logic behind the decision to allow schools to forego additional assessment when current data is sufficient for providing educational services. Triennial evaluations that are conducted when test data are unlikely to change are wasteful. The option to forego this kind of assessment should remain. However, the focus of triennial evaluations in the language provided in the regulations is misleading and non-productive. As such, it neither serves the goals of high-quality special education services or the aims of inclusion.

The indication that the purpose of a triennial evaluation is to determine if the individual is still eligible for special education services leads, in some cases, to a seriously flawed outcome whereby individuals who are benefitting from these services will be dismissed because their scores are rising, whereas individuals who are showing no clear benefits according to the test data will be retained on the roles of eligible services. This is nonsensical, and ignores the evolving understanding that most of the disabilities that are the focus of special education are persistent problems that are not likely to vanish simply because their symptoms, low test scores, are ameliorated.

Triennial evaluations that focus on continued eligibility focus too much on the wrong thing, whether or not services can continue. As a result of this focus, many school officials advise parents to forego the evaluation. Parents, fearing loss of services, agree. The focus of triennial evaluations needs to be redirected from eligibility to a focus on need. To make this happen, Congress would be wise to adopt an element from Section 504 and state that having a history of a disability establishes continued eligibility but does not necessarily constitute a need.

The decision to carry out a triennial evaluation should include the IEP as a data source and not just the extant data in the files. Seeing the same goals on an IEP for several years should be a red flag that something is wrong. A good triennial evaluation can help detect these failures of the special education system and provide the impetus for the family and the school to amend the program so that it is more productive. It can also lead to increased scrutiny of the measures and data sources employed as well as the frequency of the data collection.

An additional but rarely considered advantage of a triennial evaluation is the evaluation of the individual by a professional who does not see the individual in the day-to-day routine of the classroom. Such a practice allows the individual to be seen with "fresh eyes" that may be free from prejudicial conditions, positive or negative, thereby providing a better understanding of the individual. The qualitative insights gleaned from a good evaluation can provide clues as to what is working and what is no longer functioning as it was intended. Considering the "how's and whys" of performance provides sensitive evaluators insight into the continued need for existing accommodations and the developing need for other accommodations, as well as the need for specially designed instruction that is the backbone of special education service provision. Having an evaluation that is different from the on-going classroom routine, at least triennially, seems a good way to make certain that our assumptions about a given individual are periodically put to the test and validated.

The efforts that school administrators exhibit to avoid having students complete triennial evaluations may be a demonstration of their skepticism that students with disabilities will be adequately supported in the general education settings in their schools. It is the case that educational leaders sometimes find themselves needing to choose between pursuing a policy of full inclusion or pursuing the best interest of the student [39]. Were the goals of full inclusion and the interests of the student clearly aligned, there would be no issue. Additionally, the efforts of parents and the individuals with disabilities themselves to maintain access to special education services demonstrates skepticism in the promise of full inclusion as a way of promoting their well-being in the educational system. After all, if parents were unwilling to have their children receive special education services, they could simply opt out. Given the high demand for special education teachers [16], it seems that

the consumers of special education services do not perceive the promise of full inclusion is anywhere near fruition. Otherwise, the demand for special education teachers would be much closer to the supply than it is currently.

With a small change, Congress could eliminate the perceived risk of a triennial evaluation that leads parents to avoid the procedures. An emphasis on identifying student strengths and interests that could potentially be leveraged during transition, skills and competencies for development, and response to a year of instruction and services could also be made. When assessing student response, IEP teams could consider and discuss the degree to which students with disabilities had access to instruction, interventions, and supports that have a research base of effectiveness. Assessment data could be used to frame discussions not just around school practice, but the need for additional resources and training to enact units of activity within the proposed IEP. Thus, the triennial evaluation could potentially serve as a reset for the provision of special education services and the conferral of FAPE. Parents need to be aware that they can request an evaluation if the school in unwilling to carry one out. Educators will benefit from more recent evaluation data and the consideration of the current educational program in the light of this data in many cases. These assessments are the means to the ends that we pursue. Current educational policy or educational lore too often divorces the means from the ends of providing high-quality and effective educational services to children and youths with disabilities.

References

1. Brigham, F.J.; Ahn, S.Y.; Stride, A.N.; Mckenna, J.W. *FAPE-Accompli: Misapplication of the Principles of Inclusion and Students with EBD*; Emerald Group Publishing Limited: Bingley, UK, 2016; pp. 31–47.
2. McKenna, J.W.; Brigham, F.J. More than de minimis: FAPE in the Post Endrew F. Era. *Behav. Modif.* **2021**, *45*. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
3. Couvillion, M.A.; Yell, M.L.; Katsiyannis, A. Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District (2017) and special education law: What teachers and administrators need to know. *Prev. Sch. Fail.* **2018**, *62*, 289–299. [CrossRef]
4. Kirby, M. Implicit assumptions in special education policy: Promoting full inclusion for students with learning disabilities. *Child Youth Care Forum* **2017**, *46*, 175–191. [CrossRef]
5. Mesibov, G.B.; Shea, V. Full inclusion and students with autism. *J. Autism Dev. Disord.* **1996**, *26*, 337–346. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
6. Endrew, F.V. Douglas County School District. 2017. Available online: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/16pdf/15-827_0 pm1.pdf (accessed on 6 March 2021).
7. Petek, G. Overview of Special Education in California. 2019. Available online: https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4110 (accessed on 6 March 2021).
8. US Department of Education. IDEA 34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.306. 2004. Available online: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/ regs/b/d/300.306/a/1 (accessed on 6 March 2021).
9. Brigham, F.J.; McKenna, J.W.; Brigham, M.M. Memories of the Warmth: Transition for students with emotional and behavioral disorders. In *Advances in Special Education: Special Education Transition Services for Students with Disabilities*; Bakken, J.P., Obiakor, F.E., Eds.; Emerald Publishing: Bingley, UK, 2020; pp. 35–52.
10. Huerta, M. Why Keep Your Child out of Special Education? Kars4Kids Parent. 2020. Available online: https://parenting.kars4 kids.org/when-to-keep-your-child-out-of-special-education/ (accessed on 6 March 2021).
11. US Department of Education. IDEA. 34 Code of Federal Regulations §300.7(C)(10). 2004. Available online: https://www.govinfo. gov/app/details/CFR-2002-title34-vol2/CFR-2002-title34-vol2-sec300-7 (accessed on 6 March 2021).
12. Watkins, M.W.; Smith, L.G. Long-term stability of the Wechsler intelligence scale for children—Fourth edition. *Psychol. Assess.* **2013**, *25*, 477–483. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

13. McKenna, J.W.; Flower, A.; Kyung Kim, M.; Ciullo, S.; Haring, C. A systematic review of function-based interventions for students with learning disabilities. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2015**, *30*, 15–28. [CrossRef]

14. Bateman, B.D. *From Gobbledygook to Clearly Written Annual IEP Goals*; Attainment Co. Inc.: Verona, WI, USA, 2007.

15. Bateman, B. Individual education programs for children with disabilities. In *Handbook of Special Education*, 2nd ed.; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Pullen, P.C., Eds.; Taylor and Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 87–104.

16. Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission. *K-12 Special Education in Virginia*; JLARC: Richmond, VA, USA, 2020. Available online: http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt545.pdf (accessed on 6 March 2021).

17. Gray, S.A.; Zraick, R.I.; Atcherson, S.R. Readability of individuals with disabilities education act part B procedural safeguards: An update. *Lang. Speech Hear. Serv. Sch.* **2019**, *50*, 373–384. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

18. Dorfman, M. What Happens When the School Terminates My Child's Special Education Services? Friendship Circle. 2015. Available online: https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2015/05/12/what-happens-when-the-school-terminates-my-childs-special-education-services/ (accessed on 6 March 2021).

19. Price, J. Seven Tips for Parents for the Beginning of the School Year. Disability Rights Ohio. 2018. Available online: https://www.disabilityrightsohio.org/blog/tips-for-parents-for-the-beginning-of-the-school-year (accessed on 6 March 2021).

20. Evaluations vs. IEP Meetings—A Very Important Distinction. School Kids Lawyer. 2018. Available online: http://schoolkidslawyer.com/2018/03/01/evaluations-vs-iep-meetings-a-very-important-distinction/ (accessed on 6 March 2021).

21. Morin, A. Reevaluations for Special Education: What You Need to Know. Understood. 2019. Available online: https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/evaluations/evaluation-basics/reevaluations-for-special-education (accessed on 6 March 2021).

22. Morgan, C.R. Parents Not Entitled to IEE at Public Expense due to Minor Flaws in Reevaluation. The NJ School Law Blog. 2018. Available online: https://njschoollawblog.com/parents-not-entitled-to-independent-evaluation-at-public-expense-due-to-minor-flaws-in-reevaluation/ (accessed on 6 March 2021).

23. Samuels, C.A. A Year Ago the Supreme Court Raised the Bar for Special Ed. What's Happened Since? Available online: https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/a-year-ago-the-supreme-court-raised-the-bar-for-special-ed-whats-happened-since/2018/04 (accessed on 15 March 2021).

24. US Department of Education. IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files: Washington. 2021. Available online: https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#be (accessed on 6 March 2021).

25. No Child Left behind 20 U.S.C. § 6319. C.F.R. 2001. Available online: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED556108.pdf (accessed on 6 March 2021).

26. About the Standards: Common Core State Standards Initiative. Available online: http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/ (accessed on 15 March 2021).

27. Foxx, R.M.; Mulick, J.A. *Controversial Therapies for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities: Fad, Fashion, and Science in Professional Practice*, 2nd ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2017.

28. Offit, P.A. *Autism's False Prophets: Bad Science, Risky Medicine, and the Search for a Cure*; Columbia University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2010.

29. Brigham, F.J.; Zurawski, L.; Brigham, M.M. Believable assessment fictions: The lure of the lore. In *Classrooms, Volume I: Assessment Practices for Teachers and Student Improvement Strategies*; Bakken, J.P., Ed.; NOVA Science Publishers: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 19–34.

30. Andersen, K. *Evil Geniuses the Unmaking of America: A Recent History*, 1st ed.; Random House: New York, NY, USA, 2020; p. 369.

31. Kanaya, T.; Ceci, S. The impact of the Flynn effect on LD diagnoses in special education. *J. Learn. Disabil.* **2010**, *45*, 319–326. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

32. Wilson, M.; Jakus, J.; Petersen, J. Adapted physical education: Does doctor know best? *JOPERD* **2014**, *85*, 44–46. [CrossRef]

33. Cooc, N.; Bui, O.T. Characteristics of parent center assistance from the federation for children with special needs. *J. Spec. Educ.* **2017**, *51*, 138–149. [CrossRef]

34. Bernstein, W.J. *The Delusions of Crowds: Why People Go Mad in Groups*; Atlantic Monthly Press: New York, NY, USA, 2021; p. 7.

35. Brigham, F.J.; Bakken, J.P. Assessment of individuals who are gifted and talented. In *Gifted Education: Current Perspectives and Issues, Advances in Special Education*; Bakken, J.P., Ed.; Emerald Publishing: New York, NY, USA, 2014; Volume 26, pp. 19–38.

36. Do Skydivers Have a Backup (Reserve) Parachute? Skydive California. 2021. Available online: https://skydivecalifornia.com/blog/do-skydivers-have-a-backup-reserve-parachute/ (accessed on 15 March 2021).

37. White, W.J.; Wigle, S.E. Patterns of discrepancy over time as revealed by a standard-score comparison formula. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **1986**, *2*, 14–20.

38. *Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights: Washington, DC, USA, 2010.

39. Oluwole, J.O. A principal's dilemma. *JCEL* **2009**, *12*, 12–25. [CrossRef]

Article

Twice-Exceptional Students: Review of Implications for Special and Inclusive Education

Marcin Gierczyk [1],* and Garry Hornby [2]

[1] Institute of Pedagogy, University of Silesia in Katowice, 40-007 Katowice, Poland
[2] Institute of Education, University of Plymouth, Plymouth PL4 8AA, UK; garry.hornby@plymouth.ac.uk
* Correspondence: marcin.gierczyk@us.edu.pl

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to review recent literature on twice-exceptional students and consider implications for their education in the context of the trend towards increased inclusive education for students with disabilities. The review focused on teachers' experiences and perceptions and the school experiences of twice-exceptional students. Fifteen articles were reviewed, published between 2000 and 2020, selected according to a systematic protocol from two widely used online databases. Findings indicated that the implications that need to be considered were the importance of teacher preparation, the need for a continuum of special education interventions, the need for collaboration with parents and specialists, and teachers needing to focus on developing strengths as much as remediating difficulties. It was concluded that twice-exceptional students can be taught effectively in inclusive education settings as long as they are able to access appropriate strategies and programs from the fields of special education and gifted education.

Keywords: gifted; twice-exceptional; special education; teachers; students

1. Introduction

The worldwide trend toward inclusive education has focused on students with a wide range of disabilities being educated in mainstream schools but has so far overlooked those who have various gifts or talents in addition to their disabilities. It is relatively easy to identify gifted and talented students whose ability is reflected in high performance in various measures of educational achievement or in a range of artistic or other types of creative activity. However, identification of a sub-set of this group, who also have various types of disabilities, is more difficult. These are students who are considered to have dual or multiple exceptionality, or are termed gifted learning disabled, or are referred to by the concept of twice-exceptional [1]. These students have been defined as follows:

Twice-exceptional learners are students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts, or other areas of human productivity and who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria [2].

Students are considered twice-exceptional when they are identified as gifted or talented in one or more areas while also having a learning, emotional, physical, sensory, or developmental disability [3,4]. This includes students with various cognitive disorders and learning difficulties, sensorimotor disorders, autism or Asperger's syndrome, ADHD, or social maladjustment [5].

A useful model for twice-exceptional children highlights the relationship between disability, socio-cultural environment, and abilities [6]. The features of this model highlight the developmental nature of giftedness, or potential for talent or achievement, rather than achievement being the focal point of giftedness. The model contributes to the understanding of twice-exceptionality by not defining giftedness as being only intellectually or academically based, but by incorporating multiple areas of giftedness [6].

In many cases, in twice-exceptional students, ability is partially or fully dominated by any disabilities, which contributes to the risk of marginalization, stereotypical treatment, and exclusion from groups of students considered gifted and talented. For those students identified as twice-exceptional, it has been suggested that their education should be carried out using programs designed for the gifted, with the simultaneous use of methods for working with children with learning difficulties or disorders [7]. Although not all twice-exceptional students exhibit lower levels of academic performance, it is likely that, compared to gifted children who do not have any difficulties, their abilities will be less obvious.

1.1. Gifted and Talented

Typically, gifted and talented education is not considered to fall within the realm of special education, but in order to examine education for twice-exceptional students, aspects of this need to be clarified. For many years, there have been ongoing debates about various issues such as who the gifted are and who the talented are, and how do we meet the needs of gifted and talented children? [8]. What makes giftedness? How do we develop it in young people? [9]. There is also a lack of agreement in defining the concepts of being gifted [10] and talented [11]. This may be due to the different contexts within which these concepts are explored, because giftedness may manifest in a variety of forms [12]. Morelock found that in the United States, such questions have developed into such a controversy that there are those who advocate totally doing away with the word "gifted," which they see as an elitist concept and, instead, talking about "talent development" for all children. Along this line of thought, one might conclude that whatever child performs above the average level of his or her age peers (no matter how poorly those age peers perform) in some area that is culturally valued (no matter what it is) is "gifted" [8] (p. 4).

Gagné [11,13] underscored the fact that the words "gifted" as well as "talented" are often interchangeable when used by experts, and suggested that giftedness is nothing more than the existing potential within a person, which can be turned into talent (advanced abilities or high achievements) according to the individual's environment. This view may be especially useful when considering the education of twice-exceptional students.

1.2. Aim

The aim of this article is to review recent literature on the education of twice-exceptional students. The following questions guided the review:

- What research methodologies were used in the studies?
- What are teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding the education of twice-exceptional students?
- What are the school experiences of twice-exceptional students?
- What are the implications for the education of twice-exceptional students?

2. Methods

2.1. Eligibility Criteria and Search

A systematic review of recent literature was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol [14]. Eligible studies were limited to scholarly, peer-reviewed articles published in English between 2000 and 2020. Publication types comprised empirical research published in scholarly academic journals. Data sources were two widely used electronic databases covering the areas of education, specifically ProQuest and SAGE Journals Online. In each database, an initial search was performed against article abstracts using the search term "Twice Exceptional" AND "Twice Exceptional Education" AND "Gifted Learning Disabled" AND "Dual or Multiple Exceptionality." The search was concluded in December 2020. The initial search results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Search Parameters and Initial Results.

Search Terms	Database	Research Limiters	Hits
"Twice-Exceptional" AND "Twice Exceptional education" AND "Gifted Learning Disabled" AND "Dual or Multiple Exceptionality"	ProQuest	Scholarly (peer reviewed) journals Published date: 2000–2020	192
	SAGE Journals Online	Journals: Journal for the Education of the Gifted; The Gifted Child Quarterly; Journal of Advanced Academics; Gifted Education International	321
	Total	Date range: 2000–2020	513

2.2. Selection

The selection process is presented in Figure 1. Screening criteria that guided the selection of articles from the initial list of studies for possible inclusion were:

1. Studies published in English between 2000 and 2020 were retained.
2. Studies published in scholarly journals were retained; those published in non-indexed or predatory journals, trade journals, or magazines were rejected.
3. Only studies in which the major focus was on the education of twice-exceptional children were retained.
4. Only articles that included empirical studies, either qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, were retained.
5. The quality of articles was judged on criteria that focused on clarity of purpose, participants, methods, results and conclusions, and significance within the field [15], and only studies of high quality were retained.

Figure 1. Article selection flow diagram.
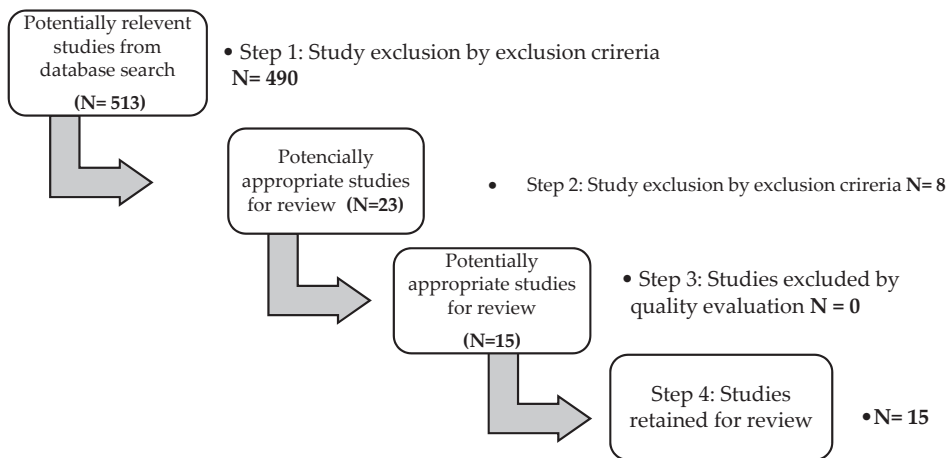
Step 2 yielded 23 articles (see Figure 1). These were read, and after assessing for eligibility, eight articles were eliminated because they did not address the research questions. Step 3 involved considering the remaining 15 articles, which were assessed using the quality criteria listed above. All 15 studies were considered of sufficient quality to include in the review.

2.3. Data Collection and Analyses

Data extracted included research purpose, participant characteristics, research design, and key findings. Extracted data were stored in a database indexed by article. In addition, complete Findings/Results, Discussion, and Conclusions sections of each article were extracted and stored in a database. These were then subjected to thematic analysis in accordance with the research questions. The analysis focused on the abstracts, research goals, research samples, results, conclusions, and recommendations. Findings were summarised and presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Teachers' experiences with twice-exceptional students.

Author/Date Reference	Country	Research Purpose	Methods	Participants	Findings
Bianco, Leech (2010) [16]	USA	Exploring differences among special education teachers, general education teachers, and gifted education teachers on their perceptions of students with disabilities and their willingness to refer them to a gifted and talented program.	Mixed methods	52 special education teachers, 195 general education teachers, 30 gifted education teachers	Referral recommendations for gifted services were influenced by teacher preparation. Research showed significant differences among teacher groups. When compared to teachers of gifted students and general education teachers, special education teachers were least likely to refer students with and without disabilities to a gifted program. The qualitative analysis of special education teachers' comments revealed their focus on students' weaknesses across conditions, even when referring the profiled student for gifted services. Special education teachers frequently wanted IQ data to help them determine whether the student was indeed gifted.
Rowan, Townend (2016) [17]	Australia	Teachers' evaluations of their preparedness to teach with regard to a range of areas directly tied to the education of gifted and twice-exceptional students.	Quantitative	971 early career teachers	Teachers felt inadequately prepared for teaching students with diverse abilities, supporting students with disability, and communicating sensitively with parents.
Wormald (2011) [18]	Australia	Investigating teachers' knowledge of gifted learning disabled students.	Mixed methods	Teachers and school counsellors	Schools were not able to identify gifted learning disabled students and were not meeting their specific educational needs. It was suggested that teachers exhibited inconsistent knowledge about these students and demonstrated a lack of understanding of how these students are affected by what the teachers do in the classroom.
Foley-Nicpon, et al. (2013) [19]	USA	Determining educational professionals' familiarity with gifted education, as well as knowledge and awareness about twice-exceptional students.	Quantitative	317 educators, psychologists familiar with gifted education	Results indicated that educators were more familiar with standards within their specific area of expertise (e.g., gifted or special education) and that fewer professionals were familiar with the use of Response to Intervention with twice-exceptional children. Gifted education professionals had significantly more knowledge and experience with twice-exceptionality than did professionals in other domains.

Author/Date Reference	Country	Research Purpose	Methods	Participants	Findings
Šuligoj (2014) [20]	Slovenia	Examining teachers' perceptions about specific characteristics of twice-exceptional students.	Qualitative	3 teachers	Teachers were able to recognize mostly emotional and social characteristics of twice-exceptional students. Interviewed teachers thought it more important to eliminate defects, rather than develop talents but encouraged their students to develop their talents and allow them to demonstrate their knowledge in the classroom, as well as participate in school activities.
Schultz (20120 [21]	USA	Exploring the perceptions of parents, teachers, and guidance counsellors regarding the participation of twice-exceptional students in Advanced Placement and for college credit classes.	Qualitative	12 teachers 12 parents 6 guidance counsellors 6 college students	Teacher and guidance counsellor participants indicated that some twice-exceptional students were capable of attaining success in more challenging courses but lacked the confidence and support to take risks. Teachers and guidance counsellors reported that these students could not perceive their role beyond that of a special education student, primarily because feedback they received focused on their weaknesses.
Missett et al. (2016) [22]	USA	Understanding how teacher expectations about a gifted student with an emotional disability influenced his instructional choices.	Case study	1 teacher	Teacher instructional choices were directed almost exclusively toward features of student disability and remediation rather than toward evident strengths and their development.
Mann (2006) [23]	USA	Examining and understanding teaching strategies that are effective for students with spatial strengths and verbal weaknesses.	Mixed methods	5 Teachers	The structure of classroom activities and support system at a high school for students with learning differences promotes productivity and a sense of accomplishment in gifted students with spatial strengths and verbal weaknesses. Teachers emphasized understanding individual student strengths and developing awareness of their current levels of functioning. There was consensus among all participants that no one strategy was sufficient since wide range of student learning styles meant it was essential to teach to each student's area of strength.

Table 3. Twice exceptional students' experience of education.

Author and Date	Country	Research Purpose	Methods	Participants	Findings
Willard-Holt et al. (2013) [24]	Canada	Investigating the perspectives of twice-exceptional students on learning strategies that have been recommended for them in the literature.	Mixed methods	Students age from 10 to 23 years, twice-exceptional students	Findings indicated that participants perceived that their overall school experiences failed to assist them in learning to their potential, although they were able to use their strengths to circumvent their weaknesses. Teachers were considered to be essential in developing and implementing strategies to create and maintain favourable learning environments for twice-exceptional students.
VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) [25]	USA	Exploring the academic and affective profiles of gifted students who were classified under the five prototypes of: low-income White students, low-income African American students, low-income other minority students, high nonverbal and low verbal students, and twice-exceptional students.	Qualitative	Teacher, student, and parent.	The twice-exceptional students' vignettes and resulting themes reveal more negative factors at work than positive ones. Low motivation, hypersensitivity, lack of organization skills, negative behaviours, and lack of teacher accommodations for disabilities were the negative factors.
Wu et al. (2019) [26]	Canada	Exploring the learning experiences of highly able learners with ASD.	Case study	Two fifth-grade students	Supportive school context emerged as the core category that facilitated positive learning experiences among participants.
Wang (2015) [27]	China	Investigating academically achieving twice-exceptional students' perceptions of their academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy.	Qualitative	6 students age 13–15	Twice-exceptional students struggled with some subjects that required memorizing ability and reading skills, but they seemed to possess positive academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy that empowered their academic achievement.
Townend, Pendergast (2015) [28]	Australia	Measuring academic self-concept of twice-exceptional students, to explore their school experiences with teachers, and to explore the relationships between the two.	Mixed methods	Three twice-exceptional students	Students perceived teachers as highly important in their lives, and that interactions with teachers were essential for their sense of well-being and achievement at school. Participants also implied that feeling at an intellectual disadvantage led to their lack of participation in the classroom.
Ng et al. (2016) [29]	New Zealand	Understanding the transfer process from the participant's perspective.	Qualitative	Three twice-exceptional students	The way in which the twice-exceptional students experienced transfer influenced the development of their personal capabilities as learners in the education setting.
Mayes (2014) [30]	USA	Understanding of the perceptions and experiences of twice-exceptional African American students and their interactions with school counsellors.	Qualitative	8 twice-exceptional students	Findings revealed that students' special education status negatively impacted their relationship with peers, educators and school counselors.

3. Results

Six articles reported on qualitative studies, five on mixed methods studies, two on quantitative studies, and two on case studies. Eight of the 15 articles were found to focus mainly on teachers' experiences and seven focused mainly on students' experiences. Results are reported for each of the research question below.

3.1. Methodological Approaches Used

Most of the studies were conducted simultaneously with teachers and students. Six of the analysed studies were conducted using a qualitative approach, which made it possible to gain access to data on students and teachers experiences in the context of complex environmental, situational, and structural conditions.

Questionnaires and rating scales were used in both of the studies that used a quantitative research. Five of the studies used a combination of qualitative and quantitative procedures and two used case study methodology.

The size of the research samples ranged between 971 teachers in one quantitative study to just one teacher in one of the case studies. Most of the studies used purposive sampling, so samples may not have been representative. In some studies, the knowledge obtained concerns merely the analysed phenomenon in the specific context involved which may not be generalisable to wider populations [20,22,26,28]. Therefore, interpretation of the findings of the studies is limited to drawing tentative implications that will need to be investigated by further research [31–33].

3.2. Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of the Education of Twice Expectational Students

Of the eight reviewed articles that focused on teachers' experiences, four [16–19] focused on teachers' preparation and two on their relevant knowledge [18–20], with three concerned with their experiences in general [21–23]. The results are shown in Table 2.

The studies that were conducted among teachers found that, if they had undertaken appropriate courses, they were considered more likely to be successful in meeting the needs of gifted students [16,34]. It was reported that effective work with twice-exceptional students requires knowledge about their abilities, their diversity, and indicators that will guide teachers in the identification and use of appropriate teaching methods. Some analysed studies showed that teachers had only passing familiarity with, or were not aware of, twice-exceptionality [17,18]. It can be inferred that a misunderstanding of twice-exceptional students may result in a lack of appropriate identification of gifted individuals, and thus a reduction in the effectiveness of the teacher's work. It appears that teachers' competencies, positive attitudes, and appropriate preparation to work with gifted students are necessary but not sufficient to ensure their educational success, as much depends on the school environment and culture that they therefore need to take into account [20,23,26,29].

Two studies reported that teachers tend to focus more often on students' weaknesses than on their strengths [16,22], whereas another [23] reported that "teachers emphasize understanding individual student strengths and developing an awareness of their current level of functioning" [p. 117]. In most of the studies, it was apparent that there was less emphasis on developing students' strengths than addressing their weaknesses.

It was reported that experience, knowledge, style of working and understanding of twice-exceptionality largely depended on teachers' preparation [16–19]. In addition, collaboration between various school staff was considered essential [35], as mentioned by Foley-Nicpon et al. [19], who reported that teachers considered that twice-exceptional students need support from both gifted education and special education staff, but that gifted education professionals were considered to have a better understanding of twice-exceptionality in general.

3.3. Twice-Exceptional Students' Experiences of School

Findings from several studies (see Table 3 indicated that students considered that their school experiences had failed to help them reach their potential [24,25,27,30].

In some studies, students' statements suggested that their school environments were flawed. For example, Wu et al. [26] found that "Many twice-exceptional students have reported dissatisfaction in their overall school experiences as they often receive services focusing only on remedial intervention rather than on a more comprehensive program for fostering their strengths while supporting areas of challenge" (p. 235). This state of affairs may be the result of several factors. For example, teachers who were not exposed to courses and supervised practical experiences about the unique characteristics and needs of twice-exceptional students were more prone to bias and misconceptions concerning these students [36,37]. In fact, teachers were considered an essential key to creating and maintaining favourable learning environments for twice-exceptional students [24,28].

The importance of providing twice-exceptional students with adequate support and help with difficulties related to their disabilities is made clear in most of the studies. One study reported how twice-exceptional students experienced the transfer from elementary to high school influenced their personal capabilities as learners [29]. The complexity of twice-expectational students is illustrated by a quotation from one of the participants' statements in the study conducted by Reis et al. [38], "She often felt as if she were two different people in the same body: one who was competent and bright who was inside, and another who blocked the smart person inside from communicating" (p. 472).

3.4. Limitations

The limitations of the review must be considered when interpreting its findings. Only articles in English were included, and those within a specific time period of 20 years considered, which limited the number of studies that were reviewed. The 15 articles reviewed comprised mainly studies that were based on purposive sampling and qualitative methodology, suggesting that implications from their findings must be regarded as tentative until confirmed by further research.

Several specific gaps in the literature were identified. For example, "The literature reveals the gap in research associated with the unique aspects of academic self-concept of twice-exceptional students" [28] (p. 40). In addition, " . . . gifted students with emotional and behavioural disabilities have been overlooked in the twice-exceptional literature" [22] (p. 28). Additionally, " . . . research on twice-exceptionality and how school counsellors can support twice-exceptional students is limited" [30] (p. 133). Future research should address these gaps and include a wider range of teachers and parents of students with twice-exceptionality, as well as different types of school settings.

4. Discussion

This review synthesized findings from 15 articles that were published in English in peer-reviewed journals from 2000 to 2020 on students' and teacher's experiences concerning twice-exceptionality. Students' experiences in school were found to depend on many factors, including their type of disability. The review highlighted factors determining the effectiveness of education for twice-exceptional students, including the need for teachers to have a thorough understanding of the needs of such students, as well as knowledge of the skills, strategies, and programs from the fields of special education and gifted education that are most effective in facilitating their development [39–41].

It was reported that, in order to enable twice-exceptional students to make appropriate progress, the primary focus should be on developing their skills and using their strengths [5]. Therefore, teachers must improve their professional competences and be aware of the importance of the school culture and environment in which they operate. It is clear that the needs of twice-exceptional students are best supported when special educators, gifted education teachers, and parents collaborate effectively [42].

Overall findings of the review emphasise the importance of teacher preparation, the use of evidence-based strategies, the need for teachers to focus on developing strengths just as much as remediating difficulties, and the availability of a continuum of special education interventions. This is the approach suggested in a model that promotes com-

bination of best practice in both special and inclusive education [41,43]. A key aspect of this model is that children with disabilities are placed in the most appropriate settings, from mainstream classrooms through special classes to special schools, throughout their education. Therefore, consistent with this model, it is clear that twice-exceptional students can be taught effectively in various forms of inclusive education settings as long as they are able to access appropriate strategies and programs from gifted education [39,40] and special education [41–44].

This has implications for teacher preparation, the teaching strategies to be used, and the support organised by schools. First, programs of initial teacher education and in-service education must address the limited knowledge of twice-exceptional students that was reported in the studies. These programs need to extend their work on children with disabilities, gifts, and talents to include the education of twice-exceptional students. This should involve providing knowledge and skills for identifying twice-exceptional students, working with colleagues and other professionals to assess and plan programs for them, and on collaborating with parents to successfully implement these programs.

Second, teachers must learn to use a range of strategies, based on evidence-based practices from gifted education and special education, to cater for the range of different learning styles of twice-exceptional students. Teachers must focus on building students' confidence levels and developing their strengths, as well as remediating their weaknesses.

Third, schools need to provide organisational structures that support teachers in implementing strategies such as Universal Design for Learning, Individual Education Programs, curriculum differentiation, and various other accommodations for twice-exceptional students. Most importantly, schools need to focus on providing favourable learning environments and supportive school contexts in which positive attitudes towards inclusion embrace the celebration of diversity, so that twice-exceptional students feel supported and can achieve optimally at school.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.G.; writing—original draft preparation, M.G.; writing—review and editing, G.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

References

1. Coleman, M.R.; Harradine, C.; Williams King, E. Meeting the needs of students who are twice exception-al. *Teach. Except. Child.* **2005**, *38*, 5–6. [CrossRef]
2. Reis, S.M.; Baum, S.M.; Burke, E. An Operational Definition of Twice-Exceptional Learners. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2014**, *58*, 217–230. [CrossRef]
3. Assouline, S.G.; Foley Nicpon, M.; & Huber, D.H. The impact of vulnerabilities and strengths on the aca-demic experiences of twice-exceptional students: A message to school counselors. *Prof. Sch. Couns.* **2006**, *10*, 14–24. [CrossRef]
4. Yewchuk, C.; Lupart, J.L. Gifted handicapped: A desultory duality. In *International Handbook of Research and Development of Giftedness and Talent*; Heller, K., Mönks, F.J., Passow, A.H., Eds.; Pergamon: New York, NY, USA, 1993; pp. 709–725.
5. Rizza, M.G.; Morrison, W.F. Identifying twice exceptional children: A toolkit for success. *Teach. Except. Child. Plus* **2007**, *3*. Available online: http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol3/iss3/art3 (accessed on 20 December 2020).
6. Ronksley-Pavia, M. A Model of Twice-Exceptionality. *J. Educ. Gift.* **2015**, *38*, 318–340. [CrossRef]
7. Lee, K.M.; Olenchak, F.R. Individuals with a gifted/attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder diagnosis. *Gift. Educ. Int.* **2014**, *31*, 185–199. [CrossRef]
8. Morelock, M.J. On the nature of giftedness and talent:Imposing order on chaos. *Roeper Rev.* **1996**, *19*, 4–12. [CrossRef]
9. Renzulli, J.S. Reexamining the Role of Gifted Education and Talent Development for the 21st Century. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2012**, *56*, 150–159. [CrossRef]
10. Brady, M.; Koshy, V. Reflections on the implementation of the Gifted and Talented policy in England, 1999–2011. *Gift. Educ. Int.* **2013**, *30*, 254–262. [CrossRef]

11. Gagné, F. Academic talent development programs: A best practices model. *Asia Pac. Educ. Rev.* **2015**, *16*, 281–295. [CrossRef]
12. Konstantopoulos, S.; Modi, M.; Hedges, L.V. Who Are America's Gifted? *Am. J. Educ.* **2001**, *109*, 344–382. [CrossRef]
13. Gagné, F. Hidden Meanings of the "Talent Development" Concept. *Educ. Forum* **1995**, *59*, 350–362. [CrossRef]
14. Moher, D.; Liberati, A.; Tetzlaff, J.; Altman, D.G. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. *Ann. Intern. Med.* **2009**, *151*, 264–269. [CrossRef]
15. Mullet, D.R.; Rinn, A.N.; Kettler, T. Catalysts of Women's Talent Development in STEM: A Systematic Review. *J. Adv. Acad.* **2017**, *28*, 253–289. [CrossRef]
16. Bianco, M.; Leech, N.L. Twice-Exceptional Learners: Effects of Teacher Preparation and Disability Labels on Gifted Referrals. *Teach. Educ. Spéc. Educ. J. Teach. Educ. Div. Counc. Except. Child.* **2010**, *33*, 319–334. [CrossRef]
17. Rowan, L.; Townend, G. Early career teachers' beliefs about their preparedness to teach: Implications for the professional development of teachers working with gifted and twice-exceptional students. *Cogent Educ.* **2016**, *3*, 1242458. [CrossRef]
18. Wormald, C. What knowledge exists in NSW schools of students with learning difficulties who are also ac-ademically gifted? *Fac. Soc. Sci. Pap.* **2011**, *3530*. Available online: https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/3530 (accessed on 20 December 2020).
19. Foley-Nicpon, M.; Assouline, S.G.; Colangelo, N. Twice-Exceptional Learners. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2013**, *57*, 169–180. [CrossRef]
20. Šuligoj, A. O postrzeganiu przez nauczycieli cech wybitnych intelektualnie uczniów z niepełnosprawnością. *Analecta Crac.* **2015**, *46*, 255–277. [CrossRef]
21. Schultz, S.M. Twice-Exceptional Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Classes. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2012**, *56*, 119–133. [CrossRef]
22. Missett, T.C.; Azano, A.P.; Callahan, C.M.; Landrum, K. The Influence of Teacher Expectations about Twice-Exceptional Students on the Use of High Quality Gifted Curriculum: A Case Study Approach. *Exceptionality* **2016**, *24*, 18–31. [CrossRef]
23. Mann, R.L. Effective Teaching Strategies for Gifted/Learning-Disabled Students With Spatial Strengths. *J. Second. Gift. Educ.* **2006**, *17*, 112–121. [CrossRef]
24. Willard-Holt, C.; Weber, J.; Morrison, K.L.; Horgan, J. Twice-Exceptional Learners' Perspectives on Effective Learning Strategies. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2013**, *57*, 247–262. [CrossRef]
25. VanTassel-Baska, J.; Feng, A.X.; Swanson, J.D.; Quek, C.; Chandler, K. Academic and Affective Profiles of Low-Income, Minority, and Twice-Exceptional Gifted Learners: The Role of Gifted Program Membership in Enhancing Self. *J. Adv. Acad.* **2009**, *20*, 702–739. [CrossRef]
26. Wu, I.-C.; Lo, C.O.; Tsai, K.-F. Learning Experiences of Highly Able Learners With ASD: Using a Success Case Method. *J. Educ. Gift.* **2019**, *42*, 216–242. [CrossRef]
27. Wang, C.W.; Neihart, M. Academic Self-Concept and Academic Self-Efficacy: Self-Beliefs Enable Academic Achievement of Twice-Exceptional Students. *Roeper Rev.* **2015**, *37*, 63–73. [CrossRef]
28. Townend, G.; Prendergast, D. Student voice: What can we learn from twice-exceptional students about the teacher's role in enhancing or inhibiting academic selfconcept. *Australas. J. Gift. Educ.* **2015**, *24*, 37. [CrossRef]
29. Ng, S.J.; Hill, M.F.; Rawlinson, C. Hidden in Plain Sight. *Gift. Child. Q.* **2016**, *60*, 296–311. [CrossRef]
30. Mayes, R.D.; Hines, E.M.; Harris, P.C. Working with Twice-Exceptional African American Students: In-formation for School. *Counselors. Interdiscip. J. Teach. Learn.* **2014**, *4*, 125–139.
31. Vissak, T. Recommendation for using the case study method in international business research. *Qual. Rep.* **2010**, *15*, 370–388.
32. Shenton, A.K. Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Educ. Inf.* **2004**, *22*, 63–75. [CrossRef]
33. Tongco, M.D.C. Purposive Sampling as a Tool for Informant Selection. *Ethnobot. Res. Appl.* **2007**, *5*, 147–158. [CrossRef]
34. Blumen-Pardo, S. Effects of a Teacher Training Workshop on Creativity, Cognition, and School Achievement in Gifted and Non-gifted Second-grade Students in Lima, Peru. *High. Abil. Stud.* **2002**, *13*, 47–58. [CrossRef]
35. Assouline, S.G.; Foley Nicpon, M.; Colangelo, N.; O'Brien, M. *The Paradox of Giftedness and Autism: Packet of Information for Professionals (PIP)–Revised*; University of Iowa: Iowa City, IA, USA, 2008.
36. Plunkett, M.; Kronborg, L. Learning to Be a Teacher of the Gifted: The Importance of Examining Opinions and Challenging Misconceptions. *Gift. Talent. Int.* **2011**, *26*, 31–46. [CrossRef]
37. Baudson, T.G.; Preckel, F. Teachers' implicit personality theories about the gifted: An experimental approach. *Sch. Psychol. Q.* **2013**, *28*, 37–46. [CrossRef]
38. Reis, S.M.; Neu, T.W.; McGuire, J.M. Case Studies of High-Ability Students with Learning Disabilities Who Have Achieved. *Except. Child.* **1997**, *63*, 463–479. [CrossRef]
39. Amran, H.A.; Majid, R.A. Learning strategies for twice exceptional students. *Int. J. Spec. Educ.* **2019**, *33*, 954–976.
40. Reis, S.M.; McCoach, D.B. Underachievement in Gifted and Talented Students With Special Needs. *Exceptionality* **2002**, *10*, 113–125. [CrossRef]
41. Hornby, G. *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014.
42. Coleman, M.R.; Gallagher, S. Meeting the needs of students with 2E: It takes a team. *Gift. Child Today* **2015**, *38*, 252–254. [CrossRef]
43. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]
44. Kauffman, J.M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Pullen, P.C.; Badar, J. *Special Education: What It Is and Why We Need It*, 2nd ed.; Taylor & Francis: New York, NY, USA, 2018.

Article

Are Inclusive Education or Special Education Programs More Likely to Result in Inclusion Post-School?

Garry Hornby

Institute of Education, University of Plymouth, Plymouth PL4 8AA, UK; garry.hornby@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract: The main goal of both special education and inclusive education for young people with learning or behavioral difficulties is their maximum inclusion in the community as adults. The question of which of these two approaches is more likely to achieve this goal is addressed by considering the findings of three outcome studies of young people with moderate to severe levels of learning or behavioral difficulties who experienced either option, or some combination of the two. The overall findings indicate that students who left school from a special education setting had better outcomes than those who completed their education in mainstream schools. This is considered to be due to the vocational curriculum and work experience they gained in their final years of special education, which those in mainstream schools did not receive. This suggests that a policy of full inclusion, with the closure of special classes and special schools, will result in less inclusion in their communities post-school for young people with moderate to severe levels of learning or behavioral difficulties.

Keywords: learning difficulties; behavior difficulties; inclusive education; special education

1. Introduction

The main goal of both special education and inclusive education for young people with learning or behavioral difficulties is the same—their maximum inclusion in the community as adults. Therefore, the key question is, what research evidence is available or is needed to investigate which of these two approaches is more likely to achieve this goal. It is considered that there is a need to examine the findings of research on the effectiveness of a range of educational settings, especially those of outcome studies of students with learning or behavioral difficulties who have experienced either option, or some combination of the two, and those that include the perspectives of young people themselves and their parents.

2. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Inclusive and Special Education Programs

It is important to evaluate the effect of various inclusive and special education programs and settings on outcomes for children with learning or behavioral difficulties in order that a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of each of these can be provided. This involves examining outcomes for a range of educational options, such as those typically used in many countries [1,2]. A recent study of seven European countries [2] found that, although there was a trend toward increased inclusion of children with learning or behavioral difficulties in mainstream schools, most countries educate some children in four different types of settings, with a range of special education support. These are: (1) being educated in a mainstream classroom with support from a teacher's aide; (2) being educated in a mainstream classroom with an additional support teacher; (3) being educated in a special class within a mainstream school; (4) being educated in a segregated special school, including one attached to a mainstream school.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the education provided in each of these four types of settings requires evidence from all stakeholders involved: teachers, parents, and children with learning or behavioral difficulties themselves. Measurements need to focus

73

on parents' expectations of and satisfaction with children's education settings. They also must include teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and their views regarding the extent to which they can effectively provide for children with learning or behavioral difficulties in their classes. In addition, measurements may include the views and achievements of children with learning or behavioral difficulties, both in the short term and with regard to long-term outcomes, which, in the final analysis, are the most relevant to the overall education goal of inclusion in their communities post-school. A summary of the research on the three different types of stakeholder views are outlined below.

2.1. Research on Views of Parents

The findings of research on parents' views of special education and inclusive education programs suggest that they are neither overwhelmingly for nor against the practice of inclusion [3]. Parents sometimes prefer that their children with learning or behavioral difficulties are educated in separate special education settings, while, at other times, they prefer more inclusive placements. Thus, a policy of full inclusion that requires the uniform requirement of placing all children with learning or behavioral difficulties in mainstream classrooms is certain to override the preferences of some parents and deny them the right to choose what they consider to be the most appropriate educational setting for their children. This was the case with a mother of two autistic children who asked the author for advice when the state of Queensland in Australia, where they lived, was about to adopt a policy of full inclusion, closing special schools, meaning that the only option was to attend mainstream schools, which she considered would not work for her children. One option she was considering was to move to the state of Victoria, where the education policy is for both mainstream and special schools to be available and to collaborate with one another.

2.2. Research on the Views of Teachers

The findings from numerous reviewed studies indicate that many teachers have a critical view of inclusion, as envisioned under the *full inclusion* policy stated in Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) General Comment Number Four [3,4]. Empirical research with teachers highlights the necessity for special education expertise, in addition to general teacher training, in order to teach children with learning or behavioral difficulties in inclusive classrooms. Gilmour [5] states that general education teachers are typically inadequately prepared to meet the educational needs of many children with learning or behavioral difficulties. Of critical importance for teachers is the availability of support, most often teacher-aides, and appropriate resources in the classroom. Without a guaranteed support system, the attitudes of the majority of teachers toward inclusion tends to be cautious, if not negative.

2.3. Views of Young People with Learning or Behavioral Difficulties

The views of children with learning or behavioral difficulties should be taken into account when deciding on where they are best educated. Following placement, their views should be sought with regard to whether they are satisfied with the education they are receiving [6]. The views of young people after they leave school, looking back on their experiences, are rarely sought but are of great importance, as is illustrated by a study of young people who attended a residential special school for children with emotional or behavioral difficulties, which is discussed later [7,8]. Those young people were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at the residential special school but consistently negative about their experiences at the mainstream schools they attended following their time in the special school.

2.4. Short-Term Achievement of Children with Learning or Behavioral Difficulties

While at school, it is important to assess the development of academic skills, especially literacy and numeracy, social skills, such as relating to others, and daily living skills. Recent studies have shown that special education interventions can be effective in meeting the

needs of children with learning or behavioral difficulties in order to help them develop academic skills [9,10], whereas Wilcox [11] reports on several studies which found that students in inclusive classrooms made less academic progress than those who received specialized interventions. In another review, Gilmour [5] reported on a study which found that a special education intervention was more effective than inclusive education in improving the mathematics skills of children with learning difficulties. Cook and Cook [12] reviewed highly cited studies and reviews of research on the efficacy of inclusive education and concluded that claims that inclusion is typically more effective than special education interventions are not justified based on a rigorous evaluation of the research evidence.

2.5. Long-Term Outcomes for Children with Learning or Behavioral Difficulties

Long-term outcomes, examining the extent to which young people with learning or behavioral difficulties are included in their communities after leaving school, are by far the most important measures to be concerned with because they evaluate the extent to which the major goal of their education, inclusion in the community post-school, has been achieved. Three studies that the author has been involved with provide evidence about the outcomes of special education and inclusive education. Two of the studies involved young people with intellectual disabilities, referred to as having moderate learning difficulties (MLD), and one involved young people with emotional and behavioral difficulties (EBD). These are discussed below. The first is an anecdotal report of a case study of teenagers with MLD taught in a secondary school special class in New Zealand, who left school from the special class in the mid-1970s. The second is a follow-up study of young people with MLD in the North of England in the 1990s. In this study, participants were admitted to mainstream schools for the last few years of their schooling, after being in special schools for most of their school lives. The third is a follow-up study of graduates of a residential special school for children with EBD in New Zealand in the 1990s, who transferred back to mainstream schools after an average of 18 months at the special school.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed is a comparative analysis of the findings of three long-term follow-up studies of young people with special needs that the author was involved with over a period of 30 years. The purpose of this analysis is to be able to compare the outcomes of these examples of special education and inclusive education interventions in terms of the levels of inclusion achieved in their communities post-school for the young people involved.

4. Findings

4.1. Case Study of a Special Class in New Zealand

For three years, from 1974 to 1976, the author taught young people aged 14 to 16 years in a special class for young people with MLD within a mainstream secondary school in New Zealand. A social and vocational training curriculum was used, with those in the second year of the two-year program spending one day per week in 'work experience' jobs, organized and supervised by the class teacher. The focus of work in the classroom was on functional academics, daily living skills, social skills and vocational skills. They did not follow the academically focused New Zealand National Curriculum, but instead followed a curriculum designed to match their needs. Special class activities included: class discussions, problem solving and role play of challenging situations; functional reading, such as completing application forms and finding information from newspapers; using listening posts to learn the Road Code in order to obtain their driving licenses; work simulations using a production line; shopping for ingredients and cooking lunch in groups of three; playing table tennis in the classroom for social skill development; trips to the city to observe people at work, attend films and gain independence; work experience one day per week in the second year to develop vocational skills.

Outcomes of the Special Class Experience

Over the three years the author taught the special class, out of the 30 young people who left school, 28 acquired jobs in open employment and only two went to sheltered workshops. Many were employed in the jobs they worked at in their one day per week of work experience. The author was able to carry out some informal follow-up until around three years after those he taught had left the school and found that the special class graduates typically kept their jobs or acquired new ones. Few were unemployed and several had managed to purchase their own cars. These anecdotal findings supported the view that a vocational curriculum, including work experience, in the last years of school for young people with MLD, helped them gain employment and achieve a good quality of life. Similar findings have been reported in studies and reviews of research on this issue [13–15], confirming that vocational curricula and work experience are key factors in achieving positive outcomes for these young people.

4.2. Follow-Up Study of Young People with MLD in the UK

A study was conducted with an ex-principal of a special school, who had been employed to close a special school for children with moderate learning difficulties (MLD) in the North of England, by way of transferring all of the young people to mainstream schools [6,16]. Twenty-nine young people were transferred from a special school for young people with MLD to mainstream schools, with teacher-aide support organized by the principal. The first part of the study involved interviews conducted by the principal with the young people and their parents after their transfer to mainstream schools [6]. These were followed-up by more interviews several years later, once all the young people had finished school, and they were at an average age of 22 years [16]. Out of the 29 young people, 24 were located and interviewed [6]. They had spent an average of seven years at the special school and an average of three years in mainstream schools following this to complete their education. All of the young people had followed a mainly academic curriculum in their mainstream schools, although some were placed in a special class and some of these were able to participate in work experience. Eleven out of the 12 who were in a special class within a mainstream school saw their transfer positively, compared with only four out of the 12 who were transferred into mainstream classes, while eight saw it negatively. This difference was also found in their parents' views, with more parents of children transferred to the special class satisfied with this placement than those whose children had been placed in mainstream classrooms.

Outcomes at Average Age of 22 Years

In the second round of interviews, conducted when the young people had reached an average age of 22 years, 17 out of the 24 young people were unemployed, and only three were working full-time [16]. Eight out of the nine who had held jobs at some stage after leaving school had participated in work experience at secondary school, or at a Further Education College, compared with only four out of the 15 who had not had any work experience. Out of the 24 interviewed, 17 were living with their parents, while only four were living independently of their parents. Sixteen out of the 24 were on a severe disability allowance, which meant they were deemed unable to be employed. This shocked the ex-principal who had organized their transfer to mainstream schools, as he considered that most of them should have been able to find jobs given what he knew about them. Their outcomes were considered very poor and extremely alarming to the ex-principal.

4.3. Follow-Up of Young People at a Residential Special School for EBD in New Zealand

Twenty-nine out of the 51 young people (and/or their parents) who attended a residential special school for children with emotional or behavioral difficulties (EBD) in New Zealand between 1989 to 1992 were interviewed ten to 14 years after they left school [7,8]. Criteria for entry to the school included having at least an average IQ, along with a level of emotional or behavioral difficulties that could not be coped with in a

mainstream school. The length of time they attended the special school ranged from 10 to 30 months, with an average of 18 months. Government policy at that time was to have a maximum of 24 months at the school, and then be transferred to mainstream schools for the remainder of their schooling. When transferred back to mainstream schools, they had transition plans and visits from special school staff for the first year, but the reported feedback on this indicated that the implementation of this advice by schools was poor. When interviewed, they were aged between 21.7 and 27.5 years, with an average of 24 years.

Outcomes at an Average Age of 24 Years

The outcomes of the interviews conducted indicated that 27 out of the 29 participants left school with no qualifications whatsoever [7]. Of the 29, 17 left school before the legal age for leaving school, which, at that time, was 16 years of age. Nine of the 29 were working full-time, and six were working part-time at the time of interview. Four out of the 29 were in jail at the time of the interview and nineteen of the 29 reported that they had criminal records. Eleven of the 29 were in de facto marital relationships but none were married.

The participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences at the special school [8]. They commented on how they had been helped with their learning difficulties and enabled to achieve more academically and to manage their behavior better, whereas participants were consistently negative about their experiences at the mainstream schools they had attended after their time at the special school. They particularly noted the bullying they had experienced from other children and the labelling and lack of understanding they experienced from mainstream school teachers.

5. Conclusions

The positive outcomes of young people with MLD taught in a secondary school special class in New Zealand stand in contrast to the poor outcomes from the follow-up research conducted with young people with MLD in the UK who had attended a special school and then were transferred to mainstream schools for the final years of their schooling. The contrasting findings suggest that the young people who left school directly from the special class in the mainstream school were more successful when it came to being included in their communities post-school than those who had left school from the mainstream schools they had been transferred into for their last few years of schooling. It is inferred that this finding is related to the difference in curricula that these young people experienced during their final years of schooling. The New Zealand special class program had a vocational curriculum, including work experience, as outlined above, whereas, because of the transfer to mainstream schools, the UK sample followed a mainly academic curriculum with only a few of the students having had the opportunity to participate in work experience. The special school that these young people were transferred out of had had a mainly vocational curriculum, including work experience in the final two years, but because they were transferred to mainstream schools for the last few years of their schooling, the young people in this study were not able to benefit from this.

The poor educational attainments but positive views of most young people with EBD about their time at the residential special school in New Zealand contrasted sharply with the negative views of all of them about their time in mainstream schools. This suggests that the transfer back to mainstream schools to finish their schooling was counter-productive. Apparently, the gains they made during their time at the special school were not continued after they transferred back to mainstream schools to complete their education. This is evidenced by the high numbers of these young people who dropped out of their mainstream school as soon as they could. These findings are supported by international research reporting disappointing outcomes for children with learning or behavioral difficulties who had been in inclusive settings at the secondary school level [5,12,17,18].

It is realized that the three studies described in this article are small-scale studies conducted without the use of control or comparison groups, in changing contexts over many years, which, to some extent, rely on the interpretations of the author who was

involved with them. Therefore, the overall findings must be viewed tentatively and, furthermore, rigorously designed studies should be conducted before definitive conclusions can be drawn.

However, the tentative overall conclusion that could be considered from these three studies is that effective specialized instruction, vocational curricula and work experience, as part of a planned transition from school to post-school life, are of greater importance for optimizing outcomes for young people with moderate to severe levels of learning or behavioral difficulties than simply being included in mainstream secondary schools that are attempting to be as inclusive as possible. If this is indeed the case, then it is important to question the current international trend towards the closing down of special classes and schools in favour of including young people with moderate to severe levels of learning or behavioral difficulties in mainstream classrooms.

The Long-Term Negative Impact of Inclusion

Secondary school special classes like the one the author taught in during the 1970s have now been closed in line with the New Zealand Government policy of creating inclusive schools. Therefore, students with MLD now have no option but to attend mainstream schools, where, in most cases, they will not be receiving the vocational preparation and work experience that would help them find jobs and become as independent as possible when they leave school. The special school for young people with MLD in the North of England that was closed to facilitate the transfer of its pupils to mainstream schools subsequently re-opened as a school for young people with EBD, meaning that young people with MLD in that area of the country have continued to have no access to a special school. Additionally, despite the residential special school in New Zealand, whose graduates participated in the above study, continuing to receive positive evaluations of its effectiveness in helping children with EBD from education officials, it was closed a few years after the research was conducted in a government cost-cutting exercise, justified by the philosophy of inclusion.

Once these special classes and schools are closed down, instead of receiving the specialized education that they appear to benefit from, many young people with MLD and EBD have no alternative but to attend mainstream schools. This has come about mainly because of the ideology of inclusion, without any plans for evaluating the outcomes of this policy or of alternative options. Therefore, it seems that, despite the weight of evidence found in this review from the three studies, indicating that these types of special education programs were more effective in helping young people achieve inclusion in their communities post-school, they are no longer available and the only option for young people with moderate to severe learning or behavioral difficulties is now one of full inclusion, which the evidence suggests is the less effective option of the two.

Given the above findings, it is suggested that a more effective approach for optimizing post-school inclusion in their communities for young people with MLD and EBD than inclusion in mainstream classrooms is one of Inclusive Special Education [19,20]. This includes a range of program options rather than the only possibility being placement in mainstream classrooms. The theory of inclusive special education (ISE) is a combination of the philosophy, values and practices of inclusive education with the interventions, strategies and procedures of special education [19]. ISE provides a vision and guidelines for policies, procedures and teaching strategies that provide effective education for all children with learning or behavioral difficulties, whether they are in inclusive schools, special classes or special schools.

The key aspects of ISE are as follows: making available a continuum of placements, from mainstream classes to special schools; educating as many children with learning or behavioral difficulties as appropriate in mainstream schools; ensuring that education is provided in the most appropriate setting throughout children's entire school lives, with regular assessment data used to trigger transfers between different types of settings when required; collaborating and sharing expertise between mainstream and special classes

and schools; using evidence-based practices from both special education and inclusive education; and effective organization and use of resources within all schools to meet the needs of young people with learning or behavioral difficulties.

It is considered that evaluating the effectiveness of different types of education programs in achieving inclusion in the community post-school for young people with learning or behavioral difficulties is a necessity [17]. This needs to include the views of parents and teachers, as well as an assessment of young people's views and their short and long-term outcomes in various educational settings, such as mainstream classrooms, special classes or special schools [3]. This is considered to be the best way of evaluating the quality of the education that young people with learning or behavioral difficulties are receiving, and of gaining feedback in order to continuously improve outcomes, as well as evaluating the cost effectiveness of the various settings and programs used.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not Applicable as article is based on previously published studies and the author's recollections.

Data Availability Statement: Further details of the data reported in the three case studies can be obtained from the published articles on them cited in this article, or from the author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there are no conflict of interest.

References

1. Ianes, D.; Demo, H.; Dell'Anna, S. Inclusive education in Italy. *Prospects* **2020**, *49*, 249–263. [CrossRef]
2. Buchner, T.; Shevlin, M.; Donovan, M.; Gercke, M.; Goll, H.; Šiška, J.; Janyšková, K.; Smogorzewska, J.; Szumski, G.; Vlachou, A.; et al. Same Progress for All? Inclusive Education, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Students with Intellectual Disability in European Countries. *J. Policy Pr. Intellect. Disabil.* **2021**, *18*, 7–22. [CrossRef]
3. Kauffman, J.M.; Ahrbeck, B.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Crockett, J.B.; Felder, M.; Hallahan, D.P.; Hornby, G.; Lopes, J.; Pullen, P.C.; et al. Parents' and educators' perspectives on inclusion of students with disabilities. In *New Directions in Inclusive Education: Perspectives, Realities, and Research*; Boyle, C., Allen, K., Eds.; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2021.
4. Hyatt, C.; Hornby, G. Will UN Article 24 lead to the demise of special education or to its re-affirmation? *Support Learn.* **2017**, *32*, 288–304. [CrossRef]
5. Gilmour, A. Has inclusion gone too far? *Education Next.* 2018. Available online: https://www.educationnext.org/has-inclusion-gone-too-far-weighing-effects-students-with-disabilities-peers-teachers/ (accessed on 5 April 2021).
6. Hornby, G.; Kidd, R. Transfer from special to mainstream—Ten years later. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2001**, *28*, 10–17. [CrossRef]
7. Hornby, G.; Witte, C. Follow-up study of ex-students of a residential school for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties in New Zealand. *Emot. Behav. Diffic.* **2008**, *13*, 79–93. [CrossRef]
8. Hornby, G.; Witte, C. Looking back on school -views of their education of adult graduates of a residential special school for children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2008**, *35*, 102–107. [CrossRef]
9. Hurwitz, S.; Perry, B.; Cohen, E.D.; Skiba, R. Special Education and Individualized Academic Growth: A Longitudinal Assessment of Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. *Am. Educ. Res. J.* **2019**, *57*, 576–611. [CrossRef]
10. Schwartz, A.E.; Hopkins, B.G.; Stiefel, L. The Effects of Special Education on the Academic Performance of Students with Learning Disabilities. *J. Policy Anal. Manag.* **2021**, *40*, 480–520. [CrossRef]
11. Wilcox, G. Is full inclusion the answer for all? In *Inclusive Education–Unity in Diversity*; Głodkowska, J., Ed.; Wydawnictwo Akademii PedagogikiSpecjalnej: Warsaw, Poland, 2020; pp. 137–149. Available online: http://www.aps.edu.pl/media/2393471/inclusive_education_internet.pdf. (accessed on 20 February 2021).
12. Cook, B.G.; Cook, L. An examination of highly cited research on inclusion. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 130–159.
13. Blackorby, J.; Wagner, M. Longitudinal postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Except. Child.* **1996**, *62*, 399–414. [CrossRef]
14. Malkani, R. Investigating the opportunities provided for young adults with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) to prepare for adulthood in a city in England. *Support Learn.* **2021**, *36*, 238–257. [CrossRef]
15. Phelps, L.A.; Hanley-Maxwell, C.H. School to work transitions for youth with disabilities: A review of outcomes and practices. *Rev. Educ. Res.* **1997**, *67*, 197–226. [CrossRef]
16. Kidd, R.; Hornby, G. Transfer from Special to Mainstream. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2007**, *20*, 17–19. [CrossRef]
17. Hornby, G. The Necessity for Coexistence of Equity and Excellence in Inclusive and Special Education. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2020.
18. Kauffman, J.M.; Hornby, G. Inclusive Vision Versus Special Education Reality. *Educ. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 258. [CrossRef]

19. Hornby, G. *Inclusive Special Education: Evidence-Based Practices for Children with Special Needs and Disabilities*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2014.
20. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]

Article

Leading Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment in Post-Primary Schools in Ireland: Does Provision Mapping Support an Integrated, School-Wide and Systematic Approach to Inclusive Special Education?

Johanna Fitzgerald [1,*], Joe Lynch [2], Angela Martin [2] and Bernadette Cullen [3]

[1] Department of Educational Psychology, Inclusive and Special Education, Mary Immaculate College, V94 VN26 Limerick, Ireland
[2] Leading Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment Advisory Group, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board, V94 HAC4 Limerick, Ireland; joseph.lynch@lcetb.ie (J.L.); angela.martin@lcetb.ie (A.M.)
[3] Tipperary Education and Training Board, E45 XD59 Nenagh, Ireland; bcullen@tipperaryetb.ie
* Correspondence: johanna.fitzgerald@mic.ul.ie

Abstract: A parallel system of inclusive and special education persists in Ireland despite attempts to move towards integrated provision for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) along a flexible continuum of support. Even in mainstream schools, duality exists and discrete delivery of special education continues to create 'siloed' approaches to education for some students. This paper outlines a research and knowledge exchange initiative involving a higher education institution and a management body for post-primary schools in Ireland attempting to develop integrated, school-wide, systematic and collaborative approaches to inclusive and special education. Theoretically underpinned by Hornby's model of Inclusive Special Education (2015) and a conceptualisation of the SENCO role in the Irish context, a pilot process was implemented to support the development of an integrated response to a continuum of need. A year after initial implementation a review was undertaken. Focus group and individual interviews with SENCOs, Curriculum Leaders and Principals in six schools indicate that the initiative, while still in its infancy, raised awareness about inclusive special education amongst staff and provided data-informed approaches to education. The centrality of leadership in promoting school-wide approaches to inclusive special education also emerged. Finally, the importance of situated community of practice approaches to professional learning were identified as critical to leading change in schools.

Keywords: inclusive special education; school improvement; school self-evaluation; multi-tiered systems of support; Ireland; post-primary education

1. Introduction

For students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), inclusion in regular post-primary education in particular has been challenging, and is the focus of this paper. Recognising what is appropriate education for students with SEND is problematic [1]. The term inclusive education offers no universally agreed definition [2–4] and much of the debate seems preoccupied with placement as the constitution of inclusive education [5,6]. Furthermore, special education no longer seems fashionable [6,7] and has been described in the literature as incompatible with inclusive education [2,7]. This is partly arising from the 'All Means All' agenda [8] towards *full inclusion*, a concept described as 'ideological purity' by Norwich [9], legislated for and ratified by 177 countries under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [10]. The release of General Comment No. 4 by the UN provides greater clarity to the terms of the CRPD, and emphasises inclusion as a process requiring genuine systemic level reform and transformation

if all children are to receive equitable access to high quality education 'under the same roof' [11] (p. 36).

2. The Policy Reform Priorities for Inclusive and Special Education in Ireland

For the past three decades, socially responsive approaches to inclusive education have driven educational policy reform internationally. Rapid reform in Ireland, as in other jurisdictions, has resulted in increasing levels of diversity in regular education and arguably practice has some catching up to do vis à vis moves away from historical and deeply entrenched categorical approaches to funding and provision [12–15]. While recent changes to the post-primary curriculum in Ireland are enabling greater levels of inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities [16], systemic level barriers relating to how post-primary schools are structured and organised limit participation for some students [14,17]. Progress is often hindered by inflexible and discrete approaches to learning, teaching and assessment [12,18] and a lack of access to support [17]. Furthermore, performativity agendas and increasing demands for 'value-added' accountability within the teaching profession are time-consuming and harmful to the inclusive education agenda [19,20] and erode teachers' sense of autonomy and agency [20]. Moreover, the constant generation and monitoring of student data in a performativity driven agenda has been described by Pearson et al. [21] (p. 55) in their study investigating SENCOs' insights into the future direction of their role in a changing policy context, as 'more paperwork for less impact' and consumes inordinate amounts of time, perceived by SENCOs, as better spent working directly with students.

Efforts to respond to increased diversity in regular education have resulted in a variety of different and often segregated provisions for different kinds of students [14], and special class provision in particular for autistic students has experienced a proliferation. Is this a retrograde step or does it reflect a system of education which is needs led and adaptable? Limited research on the role of special classes and the assumption that students' needs will be better met through these classes has been challenged, with calls for more research into their efficacy [12,14,15]. Between 2011 and 2019 in Ireland [15] (p. 2):

- Overall student population in schools increased by 7.5 percent;
- Government expenditure on special education increased by 46 percent;
- Special education as a percentage of the total education budget increased by 12.7 percent;
- Additional teaching posts for special education increased by 46 percent;
- Provision of special classes increased by 196 percent;
- Number of students enrolled in special classes increased by 155 percent;
- Number of special schools has increased by 13 percent.

Ireland's current policy reform priorities are influenced by its recent ratification of the CRPD [22]. In 2019, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the independent statutory body responsible for allocation of additional resourcing to schools to support inclusion of children with SEND, published an interim progress report entitled An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society[15], following a request by the Minister for Education to advise on appropriate educational provision for students in special schools and classes, and to make recommendations which would lead to improved outcomes for students. The report, summarises the NCSE's progress to date in preparing its advice by setting out emerging findings from a preliminary analysis of information from the consultation and research strands of the review and the steps towards completing the policy advice for submission to the Minister. The progress report acknowledges fundamental tensions within the current system and presents conflicting stakeholder views on inclusive education and recognises:

'it is now timely to review whether special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex special educational needs or whether greater inclusion in mainstream classes offers a better way forward' [15] (p. 4)

Publication of the report has contributed to heated debate about the future of special education in Ireland. While some countries (Germany, United Kingdom, and USA) have refused to fully comply with UNCRPD, in other parts of the world it has now become policy (Italy, Portugal, New Zealand). If the full terms of the CRPD are adopted and legislated for Ireland, it will also see the abolition of special schools and classes, in favour of full inclusion, or at the very least, a dilution of special education in a system currently providing partial inclusive education (i.e., a dual system offering a continuum of provision) [23]. Building integrated and systematic approaches to education for all students across a flexible continuum, while recognising the distinct needs of some, and responding accordingly, is therefore necessary to maximise inclusive education. However, research illustrates the struggle schools continue to experience in attempts to implement, with efficacy, evidence-based practices which can meet needs across a continuum [24,25].

3. Inclusive Special Education: A Temperate Approach to Education for All

Positioning of inclusive and special educations in the literature as binary concepts is unhelpful [26–28]. Recent appeals for a more temperate approach to inclusive and special education, which considers the necessary co-existence of both [2,26,27] acknowledges the common, distinct and unique needs of students. Theoretically framed by Hornby's model of inclusive special education [29], we acknowledge both inclusive and special education as equally important components of an integrated education system and a recognition of a continuum of teacher expertise to meet common, distinct and unique needs of students [18]. Hornby spotlights the significance of high-quality teaching and learning in his model, and advocates for the use of established, evidenced-based interventions, informed by strengths-based individualised profiling of students. Furthermore, while the model recognises that most students should be educated in mainstream classrooms, it advocates the need for flexible movement across a continuum of provision for students with significant needs. The importance of developing effective organisational procedures and systems to optimise learning for all students, across an integrated continuum is essential, as is a close partnership between regular and special schools, with co-location being the ideal.

Formalised SEN provision in schools is promoted in the model which also recognises the importance of developing school-wide capacity to respond to diverse needs of all students. Emphasising the critical role of regular teachers to meet common needs of the majority of students in partnership with specialist teachers, tasked with meeting distinct and unique instructional needs of students with SEND, are important elements of the model and signal the need for integrated and collaborative approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the continuum.

4. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in the Irish Context: The Continuum of Support

A multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) is an evidence-based framework based on three tiers of support aimed at assisting at-risk students [30] and complements Hornby's model of inclusive special education in that it is intended to support implementation of a systematic and adaptive approach to meeting the needs of students with SEND. MTSS frameworks exist in many countries internationally, such as Finland, USA, Canada, England and Australia, and are mandated in some jurisdictions like Finland [17,24,31,32]. Interventions to support students can range from school-to community-based approaches to support common needs of students at tier one, to more distinct and unique needs at tiers two and three. The Continuum of Support (CoS) (Figure 1) [33,34] is an example of a MTSS for students with SEND, and more broadly for students at risk, and frames the response to intervention in Ireland [35]. The CoS provides a graduated solution-oriented framework of assessment, intervention and evaluation in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, with an emphasis on academic, social, emotional and behavioural supports. For schools to address the needs of all students three distinct school-based processes exist: school-wide and classroom support (support for all); school support (support for some); school support plus (support for few). Whole school and classroom support involve

processes of prevention, effective mainstream teaching and early identification. These systems are available to all students and in theory should effectively meet the needs of most. Considerable emphasis is placed on the provision of appropriate classroom-based preventative interventions and in-class support in preference to withdrawal methods of educational support [14,17,35,36].
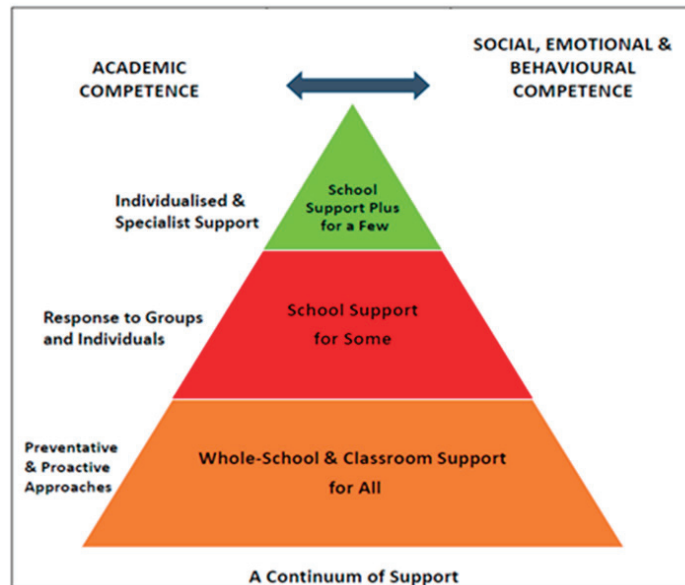
Figure 1. National Educational Psychological Service Continuum of Support. Adapted with permission from [33,34]. 2007 and 2010, National Educational Psychological Service [33,34].

While schools are attempting to provide a cohesive framework for data-driven, evidence-based interventions across the CoS, they are not always aligned and in practice, access to tier three therapeutic interventions is severely limited [17,36]. Implementation of MTSS frameworks such as the CoS is challenging and some have argued that it blurs the lines between regular and special education [37]. For instance, it is not clear if all tiers should address the distinct or individualised needs of some students [31]. Should regular classrooms be able to accommodate these individualised needs through tier one interventions? Can tier two and three interventions occur in the regular classroom or should students be removed for specialised intervention? Equally ambiguous is the allocation of additional resourcing to schools for special education. Can additional funding be used to support students at tier one of a MTSS approach to inclusive and special education [31]? Current service delivery models in Ireland and elsewhere, which, arguably are still embedded in deficit contructs of disability, apply categorical systems to allocation of resources, prioritising placement over student progress [24]. Furthermore, a graduated, data-informed response to a continuum of need requires evidence of the need for tier two and three interventions. How long should a student continue to fail before receiving access to additional support [17]? MTSS frameworks have also impacted on the role of special educators [37,38] now required to work in more collaborative ways with regular teachers in regular classrooms, and in Ireland, co-teaching models of provision are promoted by the DES Inspectorate, despite limited data on student achievement in co-taught classrooms [24]. Notwithstanding limitations of the MTSS approach to inclusive special education, it is the framework universally adopted in the Irish context and it underpins the approach to the initiative outlined in this paper.

5. Implementing a Strategic School-Wide Approach to Inclusive Special Education: Rationale for the Initiative

The initiative was initially motivated by research conducted by one of the authors which explored the role of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in the Irish post-primary context and was later developed in consultation with the Director of Schools and Education and Training Board (ETB) Team involved. The original study involved 27 SENCOs in an early phase of the research [39], followed by a more detailed study involving 6 SENCOs and their principals [18]. While small-scale, the research found that discrete approaches to the delivery of special education persisted and SENCOs were often tasked with responsibility for students identified with SEND, leading to greater levels of isolation and burgeoning workload. The research recommended the development of an integrated, systematic and school-wide approach to provision for students with SEND, seeking to reposition special education at the heart of learning, teaching and assessment and by default embed the work of SENCOs and SEN teams at the centre of school improvement. A conceptualisation of the SENCO role emerged from the research (Figure 2), integrating Hornby's model of inclusive special education and embedding processes of school self-evaluation across a continuum of support to enable data-led approaches to provision. The conceptual model illustrates the unique position the SENCO maintains and demonstrates how the SENCO role requires specific skills to support both specialist and universal approaches to inclusive special education [18] (p. 12). Some elements of the model are aspirational and require empirical validation. The model may also be too ambitious in its expectations of SENCOs' capacity to provide both universal (tier one) and specialist supports and interventions (tiers two and three). For instance, not all SENCOs have formalised leadership roles in schools [39] and implementation of school self-evaluation is not uniformly embedded in schools [40]. This initiative is an attempt to provide empirical validation and translate this model in schools to build SENCO leadership capacity and support data-led, systematic and collaborative approaches to school improvement across the CoS.
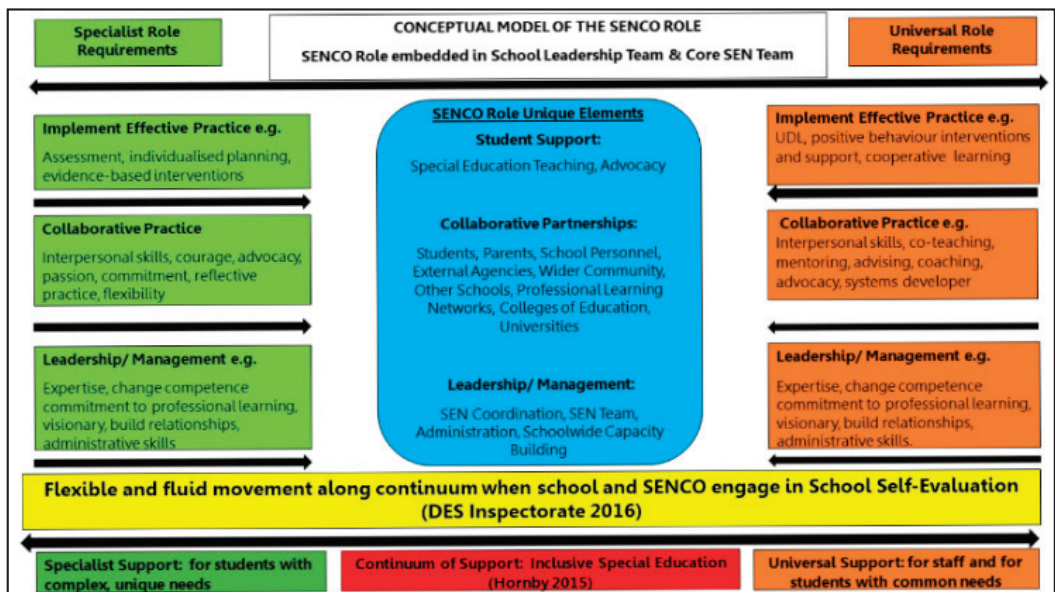

Figure 2. A conceptualisation of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator role within an inclusive special education framework. Adapted with permission from [18]. 2020 Fitzgerald and Radford.

The emphasis on research and knowledge exchange involved participants from pilot schools in co-constructing new practices in a shared collaborative space and derives from the perspective that policies are not simply implemented but are enacted through processes of interpretation and translation [40]. Knowledge exchange facilitates interpretation and translation of policy and enables 'a process whereby researchers and practitioners work alongside each other in partnership, sharing their respective knowledge, ideas, evidence and expertise in order to achieve real world impact' [41] (p. 180).

6. A Case Study: Implementing a School-Wide Approach to Inclusive Special Education in a Regional Education and Training Board (ETB)

The ETB involved in piloting this initiative, which was coordinated by the Director of Schools, established a Leading Inclusive Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LILTA) Team in 2016 tasked with guiding the eighteen post-primary schools in the region to support a broad response to students' needs that is both balanced and challenging, and where wellbeing is intrinsic to learning and the enabling of learning. In 2017 partnership between Mary Immaculate College and the LILTA Team was established and the initiative commenced in 2018 when all schools were invited to participate. Six schools volunteered.

6.1. School Self-Evaluation across the Continuum of Support: Provision Mapping as a Response

Developing collaborative approaches to school self-evaluation as it relates to inclusive special education will require a systematic approach involving, for example, dissemination systems; cascading and situated systems promoting professional learning and collegial sharing; and creation of specialist SEN teams, all of which collectively induce school-wide mediated change. Facilitating collaborative practice between colleagues is essential and preferential to individual teachers working in isolation [42,43]. Systematic approaches to school improvement require distributed models of leadership; high levels of staff and learner engagement; collaborative planning; a commitment to continual professional learning and reflective practice [44,45]. Arguably, achieving balance between collaborative practice and teachers' individuality can prove challenging [46] but strong leadership can promote equilibrium when teachers' and principals' perceptions of the school vision and culture are aligned [47].

This initiative integrates existing policy frameworks for school improvement to embed collaborative processes of school self-evaluation with the CoS through the *Looking At Our Schools Framework* [48] and *Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016–2020* [49] with a provision mapping processes [50]. At a policy level, lack of integration of these interdependent and inter-related frameworks encourages a discrete or 'siloed' approach to interpretation and translation in schools. In essence, provision mapping aims to support integration of approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the three tiers of the CoS through implementation of a three-step process [35] (Figure 3) whereby needs are identified, met and progress monitored and reviewed at school-wide level, classroom level and individual learner level. However, we recognise the complexity involved in implementation of any school-wide process, and we are:

'well advised to seek simplicity but, at the same time, distrust it (Bunge, 1962). Apparent simplicity can mask an underlying complexity that someone must acknowledge and understand to work successfully with or on a given matter' [6] (p. 79)
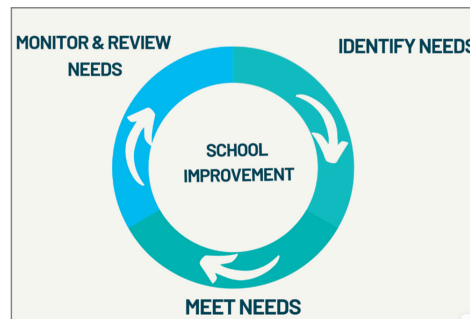
Figure 3. School self-evaluation process. Adapted with permission from [35]. 2017 Department of Education and Skills.

6.2. Provision Mapping

Provision mapping can be described as a self-evaluation and auditing process (Table 1 and Supplementary Materials Toolkit for Schools) which allows schools to identify how well provision for students with SEND matches need and recognise gaps in provision and areas of real strength. It allows schools to list the provisions and interventions available to students across the CoS, ranging from provisions for all students to specialist interventions for those with complex needs. In doing so, it provides a basis to strategically cost and plan provision, allocate resources and identify staff professional learning needs.

Table 1. Implementation of provision mapping process (adapted from Cheminais [50]).

Stages in the Process	Actions
Step 1	Capture current provision and identify resources allocated to provision.
Step 2	Audit projected need for the academic year.
Step 3	Compare projected need with current provision and identify any gaps.
Step 4	Consider evidence-based practices on what works best.
Step 5	Plan provision map for the next academic year.
Step 6	Involve parents, students with SEND, and all teachers in evaluating provision.
Step 7	Evaluate the impact of provision with evidence from wider student data.
Step 8	Engage in an annual strategic review of map to identify trends and patterns of need.

The process informs the school provision map (Supplementary Materials), which is a document that provides a summary of the different types of provisions and interventions currently available in schools to support the needs of ALL students across the CoS. According to Cheminais [50], the provision map can:

- Highlight repetitive or ineffective use of resources;
- Assess school effectiveness when linked with outcomes for students;
- Plan development to meet students' identified needs (including consideration of special class provision);
- Record changes in provision and transfer easily from year to year or school to school;
- Inform individualised education planning;
- Set annual success criteria for the SEND/Inclusion policy;
- Report annually on the success of the SEND/Inclusion policy;

- Demonstrate accountability;
- Inform parents, external agencies, NCSE and DES Inspectorate of how additional resources are being used to meet needs;
- Focus attention on school-wide issues of teaching and learning rather than on individual child issues.

In combination with SSE and CoS policy frameworks, provision mapping serves as the foundation and the scaffolding supporting the initiative outlined in this paper.

6.3. Aims of the Initiative

- Affirm and acknowledge existing good practice in relation to inclusive special education in schools.
- Support schools to develop school-wide systematic, collaborative and collective approaches to inclusive special education.
- Guide schools in their implementation of school self-evaluation to develop a school provision map, reflecting current provision for students with SEND across the CoS.
- Build systematic, collaborative and situated approaches to professional learning and capacity building.

6.4. Initiative Implementation

Between May 2018 and May 2019, we worked with Senior Leadership Teams, SENCOs and Curriculum Leaders (subject teachers involved in implementation of SSE) in six ETB schools. An initial overview of the initiative was presented to all 18 school principals and deputy principals in January 2018. Opt-in approaches to involvement in the initiative resulted in six schools volunteering (Table 2) and the process began in earnest in May 2018 when SENCOs from the six schools were invited to attend a clustered event to outline the initiative and provide opportunities for them to become involved in the design and development of processes and timelines for implementation of the initiative.

Table 2. Participating school profiles.

School Number	Enrolment	Gender	Catchment	* DEIS Status
School-1	<400	Mixed	Large town/rural	Yes
School-2	<900	Mixed	Urban/Small Town/Rural	Yes
School-3	<600	Mixed	Rural/Small Town	No
School-4	<500	Mixed	Rural/Small Town	Yes
School-5	<200	Mixed	Small Town/Rural	Yes
School-6	<600	Mixed	Small Town/Rural	Yes

* Delivering equality of opportunity in schools initiative (DEIS) (schools with disproportionality higher numbers of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds).

Following this meeting, resources including a provision map template, surveys for dissemination to parents, students and teachers, and CPD materials were over the summer months. At the beginning of the autumn term 2018, the LILTA team facilitated a full clustered day of CPD with the SENCOs and Curriculum Leaders from participating schools with an emphasis on the processes involved in systematic school self-evaluation across three tiers of the CoS.

Over the course of the academic year, a combination of school visits, clustered CPD events, online and telephone support and mentoring, and generation of resources assisted

schools to systematically gather and analyse data from staff, parents and students to develop a school provision map as outlined in Figure 4. This map would support a data-informed, strategic approach to school improvement across the CoS, support an audit of professional learning needs of staff and inform development in subsequent years. Principal engagement throughout the process was critical to support prioritisation of a collective and collaborative school-wide approach to meeting the needs of students with SEND [18] and will continue to play a central role in sustaining change based on trust and respect' [51].

Implementation of any school-wide intervention is linked to sustained support and professional development [52]. While professional learning is a highly individualised endeavour, models supporting transformation are those identified as collaborative, grounded [53] and adaptive [52]. Multi-modal approaches to initiative implementation in this study are illustrated in Figure 5. Approaches embraced situated, school-based learning involving school visits, training of trainers, coaching, mentoring and collaborative communities of practice [54] aimed at facilitating interpretation and customised translation of policy into practice [40].

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

MAY 2018
Cluster Meeting 1: SENCOs from 6 schools: Overview of Provision Mapping and SSE (2 hours).

MAY-AUG 2018
Develop Provision Map template

APRIL-MAY 2018
Develop resource pack and workshop materials for staff CPD to support school audit of current provision & staff CPD needs.

JUNE 2018
Briefing for Principals and Deputy Principals re. implementation of provision mapping (1 hour).

SEPT 2018
Cluster Meeting 2: Develop materials and resources with SENCOs & CLs to deliver whole staff CPD - training of trainers.

SEPT-OCT 2018
SENCOs & CLs to facilitate workshop with all teachers- subject department focus group evaluations (1.5 hours).
School Visit 1 with SENCO & CL (1 hour).

OCT-DEC 2018
Implementation of Provision Mapping process:
- disseminate surveys to parents & students.
- Collate and analyse all data.

JAN-MARCH 2019
School Visit 2: Meeting with SENCOs & CLs. Support for implementation of provision mapping and troubleshooting (1 hour).

APRIL 2019
Briefing for Principals & Deputy principals: Progress update. Presentation from team and one school case study (30 mins).

MAY-JUNE 2019
Provision Map submitted to Board of Management by Principals for ratification.

MAY 2019
Review of pilot phase. Focus groups & surveys with CLs & SENCOs. Plan next steps based on areas for development identified in Provision map.

Figure 4. Initiative implementation timeline.

Figure 5. Multi-modal approach to initiative implementation and professional learning.

7. Reviewing the Pilot Phase: Participants' Experiences One Year Later

In December 2018, it was agreed to undertake a review of the pilot and we developed a research plan as outlined in Figure 6, applied for and were subsequently granted ethical approval through Mary Immaculate Research Ethics Committee (MIREC Ref: A18-055/21 January 2019), and engaged in data collection. The following research questions guided focus group interviews with SENCOs (*n* = 7) and curriculum leaders (*n* = 3), and individual semi-structured interviews with principals (*n* = 5):

i.   What do you think were the benefits, if any, for the school as a result of participation in this project?
ii. What challenges did you experience as a result of participation in the project?
iii. How could the process be improved to support you and your school to implement school-wide systematic approaches to inclusive special education?
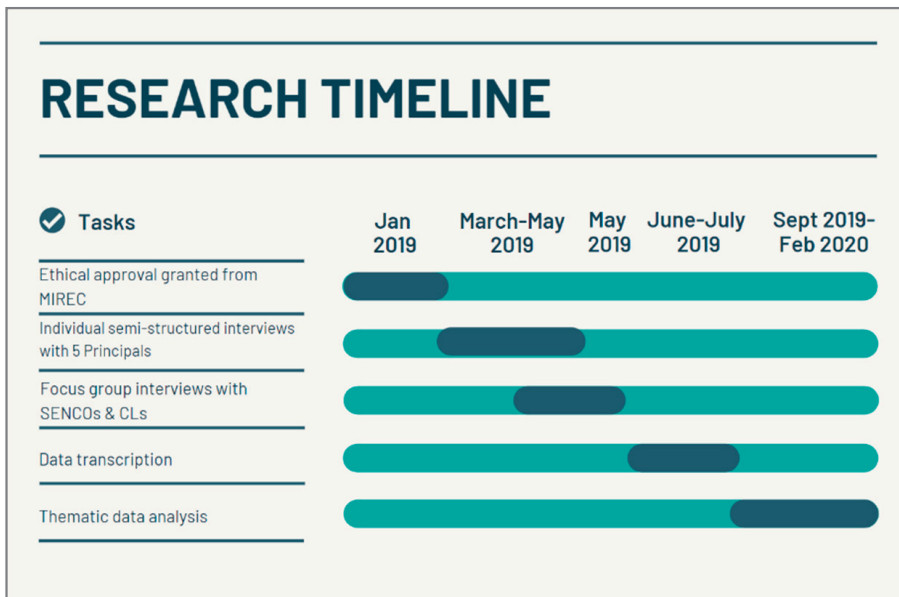

Figure 6. Research timeline.

7.1. Methods

A qualitative approach to the study was adopted, framed by interpretivism [55] to gain deep, rich insights into experiences of SENCOs, curriculum leaders and principals participating in the project. The qualitative approach provided 'an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a 'real life' context' [56] (p. 10). The lack of previous research on the topic warranted a qualitative approach. All six schools participating in the pilot project were invited to contribute to the research component, which was an optional element to the initiative. Fifteen participants provided informed consent to participate in the review. Curriculum leaders and SENCOs participated in separate off-site focus group interviews, lasting approximately 1 h each. Two researchers facilitated a focus group with the SENCOs, one led the questioning while the other took notes and summarised feedback at the end of the meeting to allow for clarification and member checking [57]. A third researcher conducted a focus group with the CLs. Individual, semi-structured interviews, of approximately one-hour duration, were conducted with principals in their schools. The principal in the sixth school was newly appointed and therefore was not involved in the project. Three of us were involved in interviews with principals. An interview schedule with guiding probes was devised to ensure consistency of approach between each interviewer [58].

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Three of us engaged in thematic analysis of data [59]. Systematic and rigorous analysis involved an iterative process comprising six phases [59]. This approach allowed theoretical freedom relating to the analysis, which was both data driven, and theory derived from the theoretical framework [59]. A process of initial familiarisation with data through transcribing of interviews to systematic open coding and generation of initial themes as they related to the three key interview questions, to the final refinement of themes facilitated close engagement with data. Three researchers engaged in independent coding and categorisation of data to enhance reliability of codes [60] and developed a codebook each, utilising a template which sought codes, categories and illustrative quotations from the transcripts [61] to support data reduction. All three codebooks were merged, codes were compared and 83 per cent consensus was achieved in relation to a total of 178 codes generated between all three researchers. This researcher-level triangulation adds credibility and trustworthiness to the findings [60] and enabled us to test our individual favoured lines of interpretation and potential bias [62]. Examples of codes included: lack of time; pace of change; duty of care to students with SEN; importance of a school-wide approach; accidental collaboration; community of practice. Refinement of codes resulted in 91 which were then categorised thematically into 16 categories such as: inclusion; the development of teacher practice; embedding change; collaborative practice; distributed leadership; school culture and ethos. Key themes subsequently emerged following lengthy discussion between the researchers and intensive reading of codebooks [63].

Debriefing occurred with all participants following data analysis, and a summary of review findings was disseminated to all 18 schools, including the ETB Director of Schools. These findings informed further development of the initiative the following year across the 18 schools.

7.2. Limitations

Notwithstanding efforts to maintain ethical, rigorous and transparent approaches to the implementation and research processes, we acknowledge the small-scale nature of the research, the early stage of implementation of an initiative that will take years to embed, and our dual roles as researchers and developers of the initiative. The potential for researcher bias is acknowledged and to counter the risk, a reflexive orientation was adopted throughout to examine our interpretive biases and reactions to data. Furthermore, efforts to look for alternative explanations or disconfirming evidence in the findings remained a priority throughout the analysis of data through negative case analysis [62]. Equally, social

desirability bias may have been a factor and impacted on the validity of data, particularly when we developed close coaching and mentoring relationships with participants [64]. Issues of reliability and validity were addressed through honesty, transparency, trustworthiness, authenticity, depth, scope, subjectivity, emotion and idiographic approaches to capturing individuals [65]. Finally, the compilation of an electronic database preserved and presented data in an accessible format that will provide a chain of evidence or audit trail from which other investigators can review evidence directly and determine for themselves if the findings are justified [66].

8. Findings

Synthesis and analysis of data as they relate to the research questions are presented thematically.

8.1. What Do You Think Were the Benefits, If Any, for the School as a Result of Participation in This Project?

Participants had more to say in response to this question than any other and two broad themes emerged from the data:

- Provision mapping, while at the early stages of development, started to support a more integrated, strategic, school-wide approach to inclusive special education.
- A multi-modal and customised approach to initiative implementation and professional learning maximised opportunities for sustained impact in schools and authentic collaboration towards a shared purpose.

8.1.1. Provision Mapping, While at the Early Stages of Development, Started to Support a More Integrated, Strategic, School-Wide Approach to Inclusive Special Education

Findings indicate that participants engaged with policy implementation in a more meaningful way through the process of SSE to creating a provision map. CLs, SENCOs and principals were presented with the opportunity to examine their entire current provision for the first time, when '*stop and think time is pretty precious in schools . . . .. it created that space to have conversations, it created a focus to have those discussions*' (Principal 1).

The provision map was a practical resource that provided an explicit and tangible tool to guide SSE as reported by principal 3 when she said '*it provided a framework to categorise . . . and it's a great tracking mechanism. It gives a structure to something that could be unmanageable*'. Data from all participants revealed that it affirmed existing good practice in schools while also identifying areas in need of development. It served as an indicator as to what values are being purported within their schools, while also offering the opportunity for '*professional and personal learning*' (SENCO 1). This visual representation of work achieved '*essentially on one sheet of paper*' (SENCO 2) is an evidence-based evaluation of a school's provision. Moreover, it is a strengths-based approach on which a school can build upon. It assisted with planning and provided supporting evidence as to what gaps may be in a school's provision. This ultimately provided a much-needed confidence builder among CLs, SENCOs and principals as it served as a clear acknowledgement of work done and gave SENCOs and CLs in particular more courage to assume greater leadership responsibility in school, as conveyed by SENCO 2 when she said '*I also think that having something like this kind of gives you a bit of courage*'. In conversation with all participants, it was clear that particular themes arose as a result of the provision map's introduction. Immediately it allowed them to identify most, if not all, of the good practice being carried out by teacher's school-wide. Data suggest that it allowed them to notice that the silo-mentality that can often be evident within post-primary schools may not have been so stark and with the introduction of the provision map these not-so-robust silos were beginning to weaken. Also, CLs indicated that they had evidence, for the first time, which highlighted that subject departments school-wide engaged with the idea of supporting students across the CoS rather seriously. In fact, the provision map could be said to have introduced the concept of a school-wide voice around supports for students with SEND.

Evidence also emerged that the provision map provided a framework to facilitate purposeful collaboration between CLs and SENCOs as articulated by SENCO 1 when she said '*I have noticed . . . how meaningful the actions are, do you notice as isolation reduces the meaningful aspect increases?*' In conversation with the CLs and principals it emerged that engaging with the provision map as a research tool began to highlight cross-curricular commonalities. SENCOs indicated that prior to engaging with the initiative, attempts to develop cross-curricular inclusive pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning were limited and often occurred discretely. Primarily the provision map allowed the CLs in particular to clearly see the changing role of the SENCO, as reported by CL3 when she said, '*the view of SEN has now changed; you're now a key member of the staff*'.

Both the CLs and SENCOs said the initiative allowed them to see one another as agents of change within their schools. They felt more competent at managing change as well as embedding changes school-wide over the course of the year at a pace that was appropriate to individual school contexts. They also felt more confident to engage with other teachers who found curricular change challenging. Managing and embedding change is challenging at the best of times for any individual or organisation. CLs felt that the provision map raised the whole 'time' issue for teachers, especially when it came to discussing areas around developing good practice and how to engage school-wide around the area of learning and teaching. Time for discussion can also bring time for teachers to reflect and share both challenges and good practice. Principals, the CLs felt, were more willing to support this concept when the principal witnessed the diligence of both CLs and SENCOs engaging with genuine curricular change, both at a classroom level and school-wide. In conversation with principals, a similar theme emerged, as conveyed by Principal 2 when he said,

> '*it has kind of shone a new light on SEN provision in the school and even the mapping made a big difference in relation to that whole concept of SEN. It isn't just three or four teachers, everybody is a SEN teacher*' (P2)

Vital to the support of all, some and few of the students within any school is the concept of curriculum planning. Curriculum planning involves classroom organisation, the content of the lesson, the style and pace of the lesson and the aims, objectives and outcomes planned by the teacher for particular lessons. CLs reported that the provision map focused attention on tier one interventions and informed the school's curriculum planning. It also had a possible impact on teacher practices, as well as identifying and possibly embedding good practice school-wide. Subsumed within the concept of teacher practice the provision map allowed teachers to identify evidence-based strategies and interventions that really work with all students in supporting them to access the curriculum, indicating further development of teacher skill competency and ultimately impacting on teacher agency.

8.1.2. A Multi-Modal and Customised Approach to Initiative Implementation and Professional Learning Maximised Opportunities for Sustained Impact in Schools and Authentic Collaboration towards A Shared Purpose

The flexible approach adopted, whereby schools were encouraged to customise the policies, resources, approaches and timescale to their individual school contexts was important and acknowledged that a 'one size fits all' approach would not have supported translation of the initiative into contexts of practice.

The sustained approach to professional learning provided opportunities for SENCOs, CLS and principals to grow their knowledge, skills and understanding of school-wide, systematic approaches to inclusive special education, and an understanding of processes involved in leading and embedding change. SENCOs and CLs valued the community of practice approach to professional learning as illustrated by SENCO 4 when she said,

> '*I think it's a great type of peer mentoring, that we learned from each other . . . .even if it is just giving feedback of what is going on in our school and realise we are not on our own and not in isolation. That the issues we have are affecting other schools as well. I*

just think that it is important for that type of collaboration and peer mentoring and that collegiality we developed in this group.' (SENCO 4)

The clustered meetings, as articulated by CLs and SENCOs, created space for them to engage with us in an iterative cycle of knowledge exchange and development of shared approaches to initiative implementation. School visits offered occasions for individualised coaching and mentoring which, according to SENCOs and CLs, cultivated their professional confidence and enhanced opportunities for them to lead implementation in their schools. For principals, the professional learning in relation to recent changes to SEND policy was immense, and for recently appointed principals, it affirmed and acknowledged their leadership for inclusive education across the school. Principal 2 felt valued when he was able to support staff in a purposeful way that *'does a lot for staff morale'* while principal 1 indicated that his engagement with the initiative *'as somebody sitting in the room rather than somebody sitting with it at the top of the room'*, facilitated deep learning for him alongside his staff.

Positive professional relationships between teachers and their benefits were recurring themes within the data. The provision map provided the evidence that to bring about a cohesive approach to inclusive special education, authentic collaboration was essential. It also emphasised the importance of building upon existing collaborative practices as indicated by principal 4 when he said, *'we did not realise we had to improve collaboration'*. The process engendered focused collaboration towards a shared purpose, sometimes for the first time in schools, as articulated by SENCO 1 when she said, *'suddenly it was the first-time teachers were involved in the whole process and they did engage with it, they really did and that surprised us if I am honest with you'*.

8.2. What Challenges Did You Experience as a Result of Participation in the Project?

Emergent themes in response to this question were:

- Finding time, taking time, eating time and giving back time.
- Developing integrated approaches to the work of CLs and SENCOs.
- Building school-wide systematic approaches to inclusive special education.

8.2.1. Finding Time, Taking Time, Eating Time and Giving Back Time

Time is perhaps the most finite of resources in schools and implementation of change is the thief of time. All participants spoke of the challenges in finding time to engage fully with the initiative. For principals, the challenges associated with finding release time for SENCOs and CLs attending clustered meetings, particularly when competing demands were placed upon them arising from multiple initiatives in development simultaneously. Both the CLs and the SENCOs talked about the challenges associated with finding time to meet with each other and other colleagues. Authentic collaboration requires time which isn't often resourced in schools. Of interest was the notion of 'taking time'. While principals, SENCOs and CLs had volunteered their participation in the project and had bought-in to it, as a school-wide initiative, it had implications for all teachers' classroom practice and curriculum planning. A comment from CL 1 is indicative of how CLs and SENCOs felt about working with colleagues, *'you're suddenly very conscious that they now see you as another eater of their time because you've given them an additional work'*.

Some principals had a more global point of view in relation to making time for this particular initiative and discussed how the use of Croke Park Agreement Hours (33 additional hours a year worked by teachers outside of the scheduled school day) engendered a very *'prescriptive'* (P2) approach to whole staff collaboration or professional learning, when competing priorities fought for space on staff meeting agendas.

8.2.2. Developing Integrated Approaches to the Work of CLs and SENCOs

While relationships between CLs and SENCOs deepened over the course of the year, lack of clarity about role expectations for CLs in particular caused confusion amongst both CLs and SENCOs. Further analysis of data points to discrete roles in school, with

SENCOs assuming responsibility for coordination of SEND provision and advisory support to colleagues. Asking CLs to work in partnership with SENCOs to develop evidence-based inclusive pedagogical classroom practice at tier one of the CoS was a new departure for some. SENCO 4 reported that she '*thought there was not enough connection, it was great that our CL presented at the staff meeting with me but that was kind of the extent of it*'. It is important to remember that the role of the CLs was far newer then the role of the SENCO but attention and support was given to an ETB-wide community of practice for a number of years before the introduction of the provision mapping initiative. It was interesting and evident that a number of CLs remarked how their role was becoming somewhat isolating, a fact they had not fully noticed until the arrival of the initiative with the SENCOs and the implementation of the provision map.

8.2.3. Building School-Wide Systematic Approaches to Inclusive Special Education

While all participants acknowledged that the provision mapping process was a positive force for change in their schools and will take some years to embed, for principals, it left them with more questions than answers in some cases. Fundamental aspects of their job such as appropriate staffing assignations and the effective deployment of staff was brought to the fore. Principals indicated that teachers working in specialist roles to support inclusion for students with SEND needed careful selection as individual skills, competencies and dispositions of teachers was a key factor in allocation of targeted resourcing. Principals also acknowledged that while distributed leadership is the ideal, it can be a challenge. It is dependent upon the experience and personal capacity of staff members and can lead to dispersed or disjointed decision-making in certain contexts.

Data from conversations with all participants spotlighted that '*SEN is all our business*' (P3), but developing and embedding systems supporting greater levels of integration across the CoS would take some time. For some teacher's provision for students with SEND continued to be considered the remit of the SEN team.

8.3. How Could the Process Be Improved to Support You and Your School to Implement School-Wide Systematic Approaches to Inclusive Special Education?

A synthesis of the data indicates that the following adjustments could support refinement of the process in schools and inform future implementation:

- Bringing CLs and SENCOs together from the very beginning of the initiative would enhance opportunities for both to clarify their respective roles from the outset.
- Ensuring that all schools have had explicit whole staff professional learning and support in relation to the school self-evaluation process is foundational to the initiative and will provide opportunities for staff to engage collaboratively with how the school interprets and translates SSE policy frameworks.
- While subject department focus groups provided excellent opportunities to reflect on classroom level pedagogy to support the needs of all, some and few students, the questionnaire which needed to be submitted was too lengthy, and some of the language was jargonistic and SEND specific. A simplified and shorter questionnaire would be more accessible.
- Involving senior leadership teams in the project was central to its continued implementation. Opportunities for SENCOs, CLs and principals to meet together more often in clustered groups are recommended to facilitate continuity and consistency of localised approaches.
- Increase the frequency of cluster meetings with SENCOs and CLs. The support provided is invaluable and opportunities to share ideas, resources, successes and challenges provided motivation and a sense of ownership.
- The process is ongoing and requires sustained support. Coaching, mentoring and advisory models of support adopted by the LILTA team affirmed and acknowledged CLs' and SENCOs' practice and enhanced their capacity to lead and embed change in schools. It also provided direction for principals. This sustained approach to building

capacity is paramount to further deepening and embedding of the initiative in schools over successive years.

- All participants asked that the LILTA Team continue to provide whole staff professional development in schools specifically targeted at gaps identified in the school provision map.

9. Discussion

The initiative outlined in this paper, combined with preliminary findings reported by some of the key participants involved, and our experiences and reflections of the process one year into implementation offer key direction for the initiative but also have wider implications for how schools may be supported to interpret and translate policy [40] for real-world impact and school improvement, with a particular emphasis on the CoS [41].

Leadership- principal leadership in particular- is critical to implementation of school-wide change processes [18,45,67]. Principal 'buy-in' to this initiative was essential from the outset to elevate the status attributed to the initiative, to direct resourcing as appropriate and to facilitate opportunities for collective and collaborative approaches to implementation of the change process across the school. CLs and SENCOs highlighted the important role of their principals in prioritising the initiative and its subsequent implementation in schools. Combined leadership from principals, CLs and SENCOs also engendered self-evaluation of school provision for all students in a more integrated way, and teachers were beginning to see connections between interventions and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment across the CoS [17,18]. Principal support for this initiative will be essential in further iterations, and 'opt-in' approaches to engagement will be recommended.

While many teachers know that they are working hard to support the learning of their students, they were not aware of the broad impact their teaching strategies had on the students that they work with across the CoS. CLs and SENCOs experienced the introduction of the provision map as the initial stage of integrating the CoS with processes of school-self-evaluation to generate opportunities for creative and shared planning and action towards a common goal [53] whilst allowing for a data-informed resource allocation by both subject teachers and subject departments [17,68]. For many CLs and SENCOs, it brought capacity building into their role, something they had not experienced so clearly prior to the introduction of the provision map and reinforced the importance of situated, customisable and collaborative approaches to school improvement and professional learning [40,52,54]. Creation of communities of practice within and between schools facilitated authentic collaboration and sustained support for real world impact and change [51–53]. SENCOs and CLs reported on the importance of this approach and recommended that opportunities for clustered support be increased in future iterations of the initiative.

Roles within any organisation can be experienced as places of isolation and places that may be constantly under threat, be that threat real or imaginary. The change process itself can be painful [69] and add to a sense of threat. Within post-primary schools, validity of individual teachers and schools is often driven by harmful performativity agendas [20]. Not only do negative drivers of educational change engender a culture of competition, compliance and fear amongst teachers [19], they marginalise the most vulnerable students in the system and by default, those tasked with coordinating their provision [29]. Furthermore, prioritisation of placement over progression within the CoS [24] perpetuates duality and isolated, discrete approaches to provision for students with SEND. For many involved in the initiative they had at last new partners, decreasing the 'silo' mentality by developing collaborative data-led approaches to school improvement and by valuing and affirming purposeful efforts towards inclusive special education. The provision map provided undisputed evidence that real collaborative change was taking place school-wide as it guided teacher reflection and evaluation of teaching. For SENCOs, the conceptual model informing the approach to this study [18] served as a heuristic to guide their practice to implement changes but additional empirical validation is necessary in order to understand how the role will evolve and adapt to sustain changes to school-wide practices over time.

System-level change requires significant resource investment, time, and personal and professional commitment from those involved [45,70]. Finding time to engage with the initiative was a recurrent theme in this study, as it is in much of the literature relevant to school improvement [44–46,70]. What is notable, is that all schools in the pilot indicated their wish to dedicate more time in successive years despite the investment and commitment required, when set against a backdrop of competing priorities. Why is this? Arguably, analysis points to the importance of the process we engaged with to support schools. Working together in a climate that fostered mutual protection, trust and cooperation was perhaps more effective and produced greater results than individuals working and/or learning in isolation [44].The multi-modal approach to implementation of the initiative and sustained support for professional learning through authentic knowledge exchange, collegial and collaborative sharing, combined with tangible and outputs, facilitated schools' investment in and sense of ownership of the initiative. Furthermore, while the provision mapping process required school-wide commitment, the provision map template provided tangible evidence of what schools were already doing and validated schools' efforts towards inclusive education. Starting from a position of strength, where good practice was affirmed, and a customised, collaborative and school-determined flexible pace of change guided implementation in schools, was perhaps motivational for all involved. The social and relational importance attributed to the process, and cultivated by the LILTA team carved out collaborative spaces for colleagues to meet, share, problem-solve and problem-pose towards a collective goal which, in time, will bring about change to inclusive cultures and practices, and alleviate the sense of isolation and burden of responsibility felt by SEN-COs [18]. In this way, perhaps the actions of individuals will be influenced, but moreover, the 'thinking that informs these actions' [44] (p. 403). Social and relational approaches to school improvement arguably promote the development of organisational structures that 'stimulate and support processes of interrogation and reflection' [44] (p. 405), and may facilitate repositioning of SENCOs to important system-level leaders of change [39]. Findings testify to the value all participants placed on their social and collaborative experiences, which requires commitment and additional time, but evidently this time was well spent.

In many ways, the process raised more questions and identified areas for development in learning, teaching and assessment to support students with SEND at classroom level, and by default has helped to introduce evidence-based inclusive pedagogical approaches which might be essential for some, but are beneficial for all [2]. These identified areas for development will continue to inform school improvement plans and staff professional learning needs, and guide future development of the initiative in schools. The quality of teaching is the most important in-school factor that affects learner engagement and achievement [70,71]. An emphasis on building teacher capacity to respond to diverse learner needs at tier one of the CoS is essential to promote a universal response to inclusive special education [18] and perhaps minimise the more specialised interventions necessary for some students at tiers two and three of the CoS. However, while the provision map provides some direction in terms of how a graduated response to a continuum of need can be organised in schools, ambiguity remains as to how to operationalise resources [17,31] and while schools are moving towards flexible approaches to need, more work is required to build adaptive and responsive systems which facilitate evidence-informed movement across the CoS [29]. Furthermore, as access to therapeutic interventions at tier three of the CoS is limited (or absent in many contexts) [36], it will be important to integrate the roles of external agencies working directly with schools (e.g., NEPS, the NCSE, Speech and Language Therapists) with the provision mapping process moving forward.

10. Conclusions

The first iteration of this initiative offers early evidence in support of provision mapping as a process enabling integrated approaches to provision for all students across the CoS in schools. The process helped to create opportunities for meaningful collaborations and actions in schools, which are still evolving. The provision map has promoted a new

way of looking at how the needs of students with SEND can be met at classroom level, while also illustrating the inter-relatedness and inter-dependency between classroom level practice supporting common needs and more individualised, specialist teaching to support distinct needs of students. This reframing will undoubtedly impact upon the role conceptualisations of teachers and those working as specialist teachers and SENCOs. Further examination of the efficacy, the robustness, the opportunities for further development and the limitations of the provision mapping process are necessary as its application continues in other schools.

References

1. Armstrong, A.; Armstrong, D.; Spandagou, I. *Inclusive Education: International Policy and Practice*; Sage: London, UK, 2010.
2. Florian, L. On the Necessary Co-Existence of Inclusive and Special Education. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 691–704. [CrossRef]
3. Salend, S. *Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Effective, Differentiated, and Reflective Practices*, 8th ed.; Pearson: Boston, MA, USA, 2015.
4. Shevlin, M.; Winter, E.; Flynn, P. Developing Inclusive Practice: Teacher perceptions of opportunities and constraints in the Republic of Ireland. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2013**, *17*, 1119–1133. [CrossRef]
5. Hyatt, C.; Hornby, G. Will UN Article 24 lead to the demise of special education or to its re-affirmation? *Support Learn.* **2017**, *32*, 288–304. [CrossRef]
6. Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J. Hallenbeck, B.A. Becoming your own worst enemy: Converging paths. In *Inclusive Education: Global Issues & Controversies*; Boyle, C., Mavropoulou, S., Anderson, J., Page, A., Eds.; Brill Sense: Boston, MA, USA, 2020; pp. 73–88.
7. Kauffman, J.; Hornby, G. Inclusive Vision Versus Special Education Reality. *Ed. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 1–13.
8. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Inclusion and Education: All Means All. *Global Education Monitoring Report.* 2020. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373718 (accessed on 3 February 2021).
9. Banks, J.; Norwich, B. When I Hear About Full Inclusion, I Think to Myself, and Are You Really Including Everybody? *Inclusion Dialogue Podcast Series.* 2021. Available online: https://audioboom.com/posts/7814450-when-i-hear-about-full-inclusion-i-think-to-myself-and-are-you-really-including-everybody (accessed on 5 March 2021).
10. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. *Article 24 Education*; UN General Assembly: New York NY, USA, 2006.
11. Warnock, M. *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*; Impact Series No. 11; Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain: London, UK, 2005.
12. Banks, J.; McCoy, S.; Frawley, D.; Kingston, G.; Shevlin, M.; Smyth, F. *Special Classes in Irish Schools—Phase 2: A Qualitative Study*; National Council for Special Education: Trim, Ireland, 2016.

13. Griffin, S.; Shevlin, M. *Responding to Special Educational Needs: An Irish Perspective*, 2nd ed.; Gill and MacMillan: Dublin, Ireland, 2011.
14. Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate. *Educational Provision for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Special Classes Attached to Mainstream Schools in Ireland*; Department of Education and Skills: Dublin, Ireland, 2020.
15. National Council for Special Education. *Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes: An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society?* National Council for Special Education: Trim, Ireland, 2019.
16. Flood, M. Exploring the Impact of a Collaborative Whole School Model of Continuous Professional Development on the Enactment of Level 2 Learning Programmes in a Mainstream Post Primary School. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland, 2019.
17. De Bruin, K. Effective Practices for Teaching All Learners in Secondary Classrooms. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*; Pergamon Press: Oxford, UK, 2021. [CrossRef]
18. Fitzgerald, J.; Radford, J. Leadership for Inclusive Special Education: A Qualitative Exploration of SENCOs' and Principals' Experiences in Secondary Schools in Ireland. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, 1–16. [CrossRef]
19. Fullan, M. *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole School Reform*; Seminar Series No. 204; Centre for Strategic Education: East Melbourne, Australia, 2011; Available online: www.michaelfullan.ca/media/13501655630.pdf (accessed on 21 February 2021).
20. O'Brien, T. Diagnosing a Crisis of Agency. *TES* **2018**, 20–23. Available online: https://www.tes.com/magazine/article/diagnosing-crisis-agency (accessed on 5 March 2021).
21. Pearson, S.; Mitchell, R.; Rapti, M. I will be "fighting" even more for pupils with SEN: SENCOs' role predications in the changing English policy context. *J. Res. Spec. Educ. Needs* **2015**, *15*, 48–56. [CrossRef]
22. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). 2016. Available online: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html (accessed on 3 February 2021).
23. Blanton, L.; Pugach, M.; Boveda, M. Interrogating the Intersections Between General and Special Education in the History of Teacher Education Reform. *J. Teach. Educ.* **2018**, *69*, 354–366. [CrossRef]
24. Lemons, C.J.; Vaughn, S.; Wexler, J.; Kearns, D.; Sinclair, A.C. Envisioning an Improved Continuum of Special Education Services for Students with Learning Disabilities: Considering Intervention Intensity. *Learn. Disabil. Res. Pract.* **2018**, *33*, 131–143. [CrossRef]
25. Sailor, W. Equity as a Basis for Inclusive Educational Systems Change. *Aust. J. Spec. Educ.* **2017**, *41*, 1–17. [CrossRef]
26. Hornby, G. The necessity for coexistence of equity and excellence in inclusive and special education. In *Encyclopedia of Inclusive and Special Education*; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2020. [CrossRef]
27. Kauffman, J.; Felder, M.; Ahrbeck, B.; Badar, J.; Schneiders, K. Inclusion of All Students in General Education? International Appeal for a More Temperate Approach to Inclusion. *J. Int. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2018**, *21*, 1–10. [CrossRef]
28. O'Connor, D. Who "Owns" Dis/ability? The Cultural Work of Critical Special Educators as Insider-Outsiders. *Theory Res. Soc. Educ.* **2013**, *41*, 494–513.
29. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]
30. Bohanon, H.; Gilman, C.; Amell, C.; Sortino, G. Using School Improvement and Implementation Science to Integrate Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in Secondary Schools. *Aust. J. Spec. Educ.* **2016**, *40*, 99–116. [CrossRef]
31. Kauffman, J.M.; Badar, J.; Wiley, A. RTI Controversies and Solutions. In *Handbook of Response to Intervention and Multitiered Systems of Support*; Pullen, P., Kennedy, M., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2019; pp. 11–25.
32. Ekstam, U.; Linnanmäki, K.; Pirjo, A. Educational Support for Low-Performing Students in Mathematics: The Three-Tier Support Model in Finnish Lower Secondary Schools. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2015**, *30*, 75–92. [CrossRef]
33. National Educational Psychological Service. *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support (Primary Guidelines for Teachers)*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2007.
34. National Educational Psychological Service. *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support (Post-Primary Guidelines for Teachers)*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2010.
35. Department of Education and Skills. *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*; Department of Education and Skills, The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2017.
36. National Council for Special Education. *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs: A Better and More Equitable Way*; National Council for Special Education: Trim, Ireland, 2014.
37. Fuchs, L.S.; Fuchs, D.; Compton, D.L. Rethinking Response to Intervention at Middle and High School. *Sch. Psych. Rev.* **2010**, *39*, 22–28. [CrossRef]
38. Brownell, M.T.; Sindelar, P.T.; Kiely, M.T.; Danielson, L.C. Special Education Teacher Quality and Preparation: Exposing Foundations, Constructing a New Model. *Except. Child.* **2010**, *76*, 357–377. [CrossRef]
39. Fitzgerald, J.; Radford, J. The SENCO role in post-primary schools in Ireland; Victims or agents of change? *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2017**, *32*, 452–466. [CrossRef]
40. Skerritt, C.; O'Hara, J.; Brown, M.; McNamara, G.; O'Brien, S. Enacting school self-evaluation: The policy actors in Irish schools. *Int. Stud. Sociol. Educ.* **2021**, *30*, 1–23. [CrossRef]
41. O'Brien, T.; Roberts, A. A domains-based approach to meeting social, emotional and mental health needs. *Support Learn.* **2019**, *34*, 179–192. [CrossRef]

42. Norwich, B. What implications do changing practices and concepts have for the role of SEN coordinator? In *Transforming the Role of the SENCO: Achieving the National Award of SEN Coordination*; Hallett, F., Hallett, G., Eds.; McGraw-Hill/Open University Press: Berkshire, UK, 2010; pp. 37–51.
43. Senge, P.M. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*; Century: London, UK, 1990.
44. Ainscow, M.; Sandill, A. Developing inclusive education systems: The role of organisational cultures and leadership. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2010**, *14*, 401–416. [CrossRef]
45. Hargreaves, A.; Halász, G.; Pont, B. *School Leadership for Systemic Improvement in Finland*; A Case Study Report for the OECD Activity Improving School Leadership; OECD: Paris, France, 2007, Available online: http://www.oecd.org/education/school/39 928629.pdf. (accessed on 24 March 2021).
46. Stoll, L.; Fink, D. *Changing Our Schools*; Open University Press: Buckingham, UK, 1996.
47. Sachs, J. Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes. *J. Educ. Policy* **2001**, *16*, 149–161. [CrossRef]
48. Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate. *Looking at Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*; Department of Education and Skills: Dublin, Ireland, 2016.
49. Department of Education and Skills. *Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016–2020*; Circular (0040/2016); Department of Education and Skills: Dublin, Ireland, 2016.
50. Cheminais, R. *Handbook for SENCOs*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2015.
51. Ní Bhroin, O.; King, F. Teacher education for inclusive education: A framework for developing collaboration for the inclusion of students with support plans. *Eur. J. Teacher Educ.* **2020**, *43*, 38–63. [CrossRef]
52. Davey, N.; Egan, M. Sustained CPD as an effective approach in the delivery of the incredible years teacher classroom management programme. *Ed. Psych. Pract.* **2021**, 1–18. [CrossRef]
53. Netolicky, D.M. Rethinking professional learning for teachers and school leaders. *J. Prof. Cap. Community* **2016**, *1*, 270–285. [CrossRef]
54. Lave, J.; Wenger, E. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1991.
55. Mertens, D. *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, 5th ed.; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2019.
56. Thomas, G. *How to do Your Case Study: A Guide for Students & Researchers*; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2010.
57. Oliver, P. *The Student's Guide to Research Ethics*; Open University Press: Maidenhead, UK, 2003.
58. Kvale, S.; Brinkmann, S. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Interviewing*; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2009.
59. Braun, V.; Clarke, V. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qual. Res. Psych.* **2006**, *3*, 77–101. [CrossRef]
60. Armstrong, D.; Gosling, A.; Weinman, J.; Marteau, T. The Place of Inter-Rater Reliability in Qualitative Research: An Empirical Study. *Sociology* **1997**, *31*, 597–606. [CrossRef]
61. Gibbs, G. Thematic Coding and Categorizing. In *Analyzing Qualitative Data*; Flick, U., Ed.; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2007; pp. 38–55.
62. Bryman, A. *Social Research Methods*, 3rd ed.; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2008.
63. Charmaz, K. *Constructing Grounded Theory A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2006.
64. Bergen, N.; Labonté, R. Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems: Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research. *Qual. Health Res.* **2020**, *30*, 783–792. [CrossRef]
65. Cresswell, J.W.; Miller, D.L. Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Pract.* **2000**, *39*, 124–130. [CrossRef]
66. Yin, R.K. *Case Study Research*, 5th ed.; Sage: London, UK, 2014.
67. Kirtman, L.; Fullan, M. *Leadership: Key Competencies for Whole-System Change*; Solution Tree: Bloomington, IN, USA, 2015.
68. Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate. *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines 2016–2020: Post-Primary*; Department of Education and Skills: Dublin, Ireland, 2016.
69. Hargreaves, A. Inclusive and exclusive educational change: Emotional responses of teachers and implications for leadership. *School Leadersh. Manag.* **2004**, *24*, 287–309. [CrossRef]
70. Fullan, M.; Hargreaves, A. *Call to Action: Bringing the Profession Back In*; Learning Forward: Oxford, UK, 2016, Available online: https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/16_BringingProfessionFullanHargreaves2016.pdf (accessed on 5 March 2021).
71. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. *Leading and Supporting Change in Schools*; Discussion Paper; National Council for Curriculum and Assessment: Dublin, Ireland, 2010, Available online: https://ncca.ie/media/1082/leading_and_supporting_change_in_schools_a_discussion_paper.pdf (accessed on 2 March 2021).

Article

Inclusion at a Crossroads: Dismantling Ireland's System of Special Education

Michael Shevlin [1,*] and Joanne Banks [2]

[1]   Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilties, Trinity College, the University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland
[2]   School of Education, Trinity College, the University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland; banksjo@tcd.ie
*   Correspondence: mshevlin@tcd.ie

Abstract: Ireland's system of special education has undergone unprecedented change over the last three decades. Following major policy developments in the mid-2000s which emphasised inclusive education, there have been changes to special education school personnel and funding structures which seek to include greater numbers of students with disabilities in mainstream education. There is one anomaly however: Ireland continues to operate a parallel system of special schools and classes with an emphasis on special class provision for students with disabilities. The aim of this paper is to examine the evolution of Ireland's special education policy over the past three decades and explore the extent to which it is compatible with its obligations under the United Nations Convention for People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and more recent discussions around moving to inclusive education. It uses a systematic investigation of policy and administrative data on special class growth over time to highlight anomalies between the policy narrative around inclusive education in Ireland and the continued use of segregated settings. The current system, therefore, suggests confused thinking at a policy level which has resulted in the implementation of special education grafted on to the general education system. Any move to an inclusive system therefore, in order to be successful, would require a root and branch overhaul of existing policies.

Keywords: inclusive education; segregation; special classes; education policy; Ireland

1. Introduction

The Republic of Ireland, in common with many European countries, developed a parallel system of special and general education over the 20th century. The earliest responses to the learning needs of children and young people who have disabilities and/or additional learning needs were confined to isolated initiatives developed by voluntary and religious organisations, with very limited input from the State. From the 1960s onwards, State involvement in educational provision for these young people increased with the funding of category specific special schools and special classes in regular schools. As a result, special educational provision existed on the periphery of the general education system, often with separate funding mechanisms, curricula, and assessment.

2. A Change in Policy Emphasis 1990s

From the 1990s onwards, there was a discernible shift in emphasis in government policy from a focus on educational provision for specific categories of disabled children towards a more inclusive approach to educating children with learning needs and/or disabilities within mainstream schools. This policy shift was influenced by a combination of international and national developments. Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) became a significant driver for policy change in educational provision for children with additional learning needs and/or disabilities. Parallel developments within the European Union increased the momentum to re-examine existing educational provision. There was strong evidence from Canada and the United States that

103

more inclusive approaches could be established and reinforced by legislative provision and significant investment in teacher education. In the Republic of Ireland, there were significant changes in special educational provision during the 1990s through a combination of government sponsored reviews of the existing provision and parental litigation that highlighted serious shortcomings within current educational provision for their children. The Special Education Review Committee (SERC) established by the Department of Education and Science in 1991 which reported in 1993 documented serious shortcomings in special educational provision [1]. Shortcomings included the lack of educational supports for individual children and their families; inadequate curricular provision; lack of therapeutic supports; limited specialist training for teachers. Not surprisingly, the Committee recommended that significant resourcing was required to address these shortcomings. The SERC Report marked a significant departure for the State in recognising its' responsibility for the education of children with learning needs and/or disabilities and a move away from a system that was overly dependent on charity and goodwill. Parental litigation was initiated against the State on behalf of children who had Autism and/or severe/profound intellectual disabilities. Specific cases such as O'Donoghue v. Minister for Health (1993) and Sinnott v. Minster for Education (2001) strongly argued that these children had been systematically ignored by the State and that current educational provision was seriously inadequate. As a result of this litigation the State was obliged to recognise that these children had the right to receive an appropriate education based primarily on their learning needs rather than their medical needs which had traditionally been the case.

3. Legislation in the Late 1990s and 2000s

From the 1990s the State has initiated policy developments that have resulted in enabling legislation, an emerging support infrastructure, and significantly increased funding. Parallel systems of special and mainstream education have often been underpinned by legislation reflecting the traditional emphasis on health dominated concerns when addressing the educational needs of children and young people who have disabilities and/or additional learning needs. The Education Act (1998) which provides the statutory basis for policy and practice relating to all educational provision marked a departure from this traditional approach within an Irish context [2]. There is an explicit recognition within the Act that children and young people with disabilities and/or additional learning needs should access educational provision on an equal basis to their non-disabled peers. For example, each reference to children and young people availing of educational provision is followed by the phrase 'including those who have a disability or who have other additional learning needs.' In common with many other jurisdictions, anti-discrimination legislation accelerated changes in policy and provision. The Equal Status Act (2000) prohibited discrimination on nine grounds, including disability. Schools are subject to the provisions of this Act and are required to provide appropriate accommodations to enable these children and young people to participate in school programmes [3].

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004) marked another significant milestone in establishing sustainable educational provision for this population [4]. Educational inclusion represents a core value in this Act and it is recognised that education for these children and young people should take place in an inclusive environment alongside their non-disabled peers. Exclusion from mainstream provision should be the exception rather than the norm in addressing the educational and social needs of this cohort. Unfortunately, critical aspects of this legislation, including mandatory individual education plans, remain to be implemented as the State refused to progress these provisions citing the economic recession. The definition of disability and/or Special Educational Needs (SEN) in the EPSEN Act (2004) marked a significant divergence from the traditionally deficit dominated definitions. The EPSEN definition encompassed a wide range of difficulties experienced by children and young people to include physical, sensory, mental health or learning disabilities or 'any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition'. The Act also established the

National Council for Special Education to take responsibility for special needs provision within schools and co-ordinating services throughout the country. It was anticipated that this more devolved structure involving locally based Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) would respond more effectively and flexibly to local needs throughout the country.

4. Funding and Resource Allocation

Providing adequate special needs provision was a major priority for the Department of Education and Science who introduced the General Allocation Model for primary schools in 2005. This resourcing model was intended to address the learning needs of students with high incidence additional learning needs including those who have milder levels of learning difficulties and would usually be eligible for learning support. Students deemed to have low incidence additional learning needs (complex and enduring needs) continued to be allocated resource hours based on a psychological assessment combined with a SENO evaluation. This attempt to lessen dependence on assessments to secure provision, while laudable, was only partially successful. Parents were often forced to pay for assessments to secure appropriate provision for their children and sometimes schools had the unenviable task of deciding which children would qualify for the state sponsored assessments [5]. Serious doubts about the reliability and validity of the SEN/disability categories were raised that undermined the existing resource allocation system [6]. SEN prevalence rates established by Author (2011), at 25 per cent, aligning with many international studies, challenged the adequacy of existing provision [7].

From 2011 to 2019 increased government expenditure for special needs provision was very evident, despite the impact of the economic recession. This additional funding was allocated to three key initiatives: (i) additional teaching posts (increased by 46%), (ii) Special Needs Assistants posts (increased by 51%), (iii) provision of special classes (increased by 196%) [8]. Despite these significant funding increases challenges persisted in achieving a more inclusive school system. Research studies highlighted serious problems in accessing timely assessments, the appropriateness of the existing linkage between assessment and provision, 'soft' barriers to enrolment of children with SEN in their local schools, inadequate therapeutic supports in mainstream schools, concerns about creating over dependency with individualised Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, transition difficulties and limited professional education opportunities for general education teachers [5,9–14].

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) and NCSE have made a concerted effort to address these difficulties in recent years, though, it is too soon to judge whether the Government sponsored initiatives will have the desired impact in creating an inclusive school system. Major initiatives include the establishment of the School Inclusion Model (SIM) and the introduction of a demonstration project involving specialised therapeutic support from speech and language and occupational therapists. Other changes include the introduction of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act, 2018 which sought to address 'soft' barriers to school enrolment and the introduction of learning programmes at levels 1 and 2 on the National Framework of Qualifications by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to provide appropriate certification for young people who have additional learning needs [15].

Despite many advances in support provision and the emergence of a national support infrastructure persistent difficulties remain. The rapid expansion of the special class model to facilitate provision for students with additional needs in mainstream schools is a case in point. To date, there has been very limited investigation of the efficacy of this model apart from Author et al. (2014) and Author et al. (2016) and little indication that concerns raised about this model in these studies have been addressed [9,12]. The special class model as it operates internationally and nationally is now examined and the implications for the continued expansion of this model within an Irish context discussed.

5. The Persistence of Special Classes Internationally

In light of the UNCRPD, special schools and classes have, perhaps, become the crux of the inclusion debate. Inclusive education research highlights the continued use, and expansion, of special classes and segregated settings more generally which is at odds with the prevailing policy narrative. This divide between inclusive education policy and practice on the ground is highlighted by Ebersold (2011) who argues that having an 'education for all' policy does not necessarily mean that all children are educated together in mainstream classes [16]. This research shows that 18 of the 23 countries in the study were operating some form of special class provision for students with additional needs. In one Austrian study [17] the authors describe how more than a third of all students who have been diagnosed with a disability are educated in segregated settings known as 'integration classes' [17] (p. 91). Similarly, in Finland, where special schools are in the decline, 23 per cent of students are in 'part-time special education' (1:1 or small groups) with another 7.3 per cent in 'special support' or special education classes in mainstream schools [18].

Despite the continued use of segregated settings, there is little evidence that students in these classes benefit from such placements. Research in this area is complex due to the level of variation that exists across different national contexts in the language and terminology used to describe resource rooms (Greece) or special units, integration classes (Australia), least restrictive environment (LRE) and functional grouping (United States), special education classrooms (Finland) and learning support units (England) [17–21]. In some countries, placement in special classes is full-time but temporary or used as an early intervention. Other countries have more permanent settings where children attend the class for just part of the school day. The language also varies around whether special classes are considered an inclusive practice in a school or whether they act as forms of segregation [22,23] or separation of children [21].

In addition to issues around language, research evaluating special classes has been impacted by methodological problems such as small sample sizes or, because from an ethical viewpoint, students placed in these classes are a difficult to access group. Measures of academic progress are also complicated by the extent to which countries vary in whether students in special classes are included in international standardised tests such as PISA or TIMMS. One exception however is a Norwegian study [23] which looked at the attainment of students in special classes but also asked whether special class placement was beneficial for them overall. The findings indicate little difference in the attainment of students in these classes compared to their peers in mainstream and stress the benefits of mainstream schools with additionally resourced provision over and above full-time placement in special classes.

One review of studies found that students with disabilities in mainstream classes are more likely to achieve better academic results and qualifications compared to those in special class settings and therefore impact on their chances of gaining access to employment or entering further or higher education when they leave school [16]. This review also notes the important social capital gained in mainstream classes for these students which facilitates access to employment and adult life more generally. It shows that young people with disabilities who are educated in mainstream classes gain important social skills useful in their professional and social life after school [16].

Other studies however argue that these specialised settings can offer unique advantages, including small class sizes, specially trained teachers, emphasis on functional skills and individualised instruction [24,25]. By removing these classes, some commentators believe they are removing the opportunity for these students to undertake more vocationally oriented curricula and work placements thus limiting their ability to gain employment and become members of their community when they leave school [25].

Special Classes in Ireland

Although special classes have been in existence in Ireland since the mid-1970s, it was not until the late 2000s that their numbers began to grow and their designation changed from settings primarily intended for students with Mild General Learning Difficulties

to classes for students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The NCSE and DES are primarily responsible for the provision and designation of special classes and describe their role as being 'part of a continuum of educational provision that enables students with more complex additional learning needs to be educated, in smaller class groups, within their local mainstream schools' [26]. A parallel system of provision has thus been created where special units or classes are attached to mainstream primary and secondary schools with many designated for students with Autism. Schools wishing to establish a special class have to have a minimum number of children seeking a class placement in the school in order to make an application. The NCSE also takes the level of special class provision in a local area into account. Students in special classes are supposed to have a diagnosis of a disability and a written professional recommendation for placement in this kind of setting. These settings have a reduced student-teacher ratio compared with the mainstream classes and are allocated SNAs depending on their designation. Special classes with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) designation have a student–teacher ratio of 6:1 with two SNAs per class whereas classes for students with Mild General Learning Disabilities (MGLD) have a ratio of 11:1 [9].

Special classes have now become an established feature of special education in Ireland due mainly to their increase in numbers over the last decade. Between 2001 and 2009 the number of special classes was in decline in Ireland, however since 2009–2010 they have increased with between 100 and 200 classes opening each year. By 2014 the numbers of these classes had reached the level of provision in 2000 of just under 1000 classes [27]. Figure 1 graphs the growth in this form of provision over time with just over 700 classes in operation in the academic year 2012–2013 compared to almost 1800 in the year 2019–2020 (Figure 1).
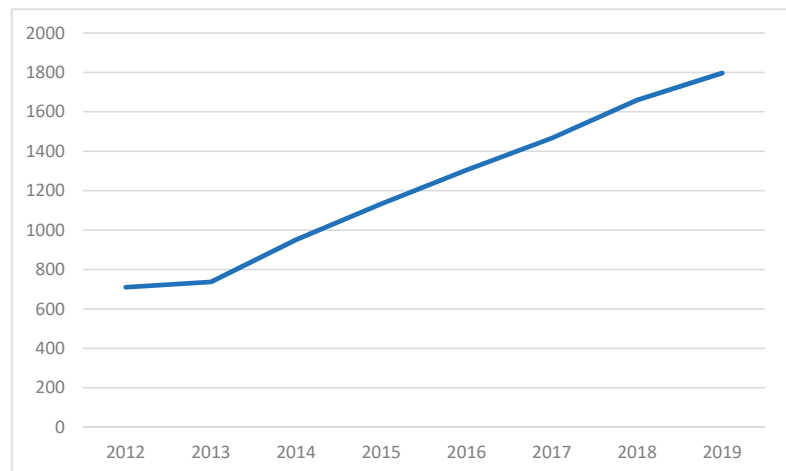
Figure 1. Growth of special classes 2012–2019 [27].

The increase in provision has drawn much attention across government with recent spending reviews [28,29] calling for cost control. These reviews note the special class cost per student increased by 11 per cent between 2012 and 2019 and given the 80 per cent increase in student numbers, this has led to overall increases of 145.5 per cent. Mirroring the increased student numbers, special class teacher numbers have also increased by 136.4 per cent during this period with much of the costs related to teacher pay [29] (p. 10).

Perhaps the most notable feature of Irish special classes over the last decade is their designation being primarily for students with Autism. Where special classes are sanctioned, the NCSE and the SENO are responsible for setting them up and assigning them a designation based on the level of demand [19]. Over 85 per cent of special classes in

Ireland are now designated for students with ASD with the second largest designation categories being classes for students with Specific Speech and Language Difficulties (SSLD) and classes for students with an MGLD diagnosis (Figure 2).
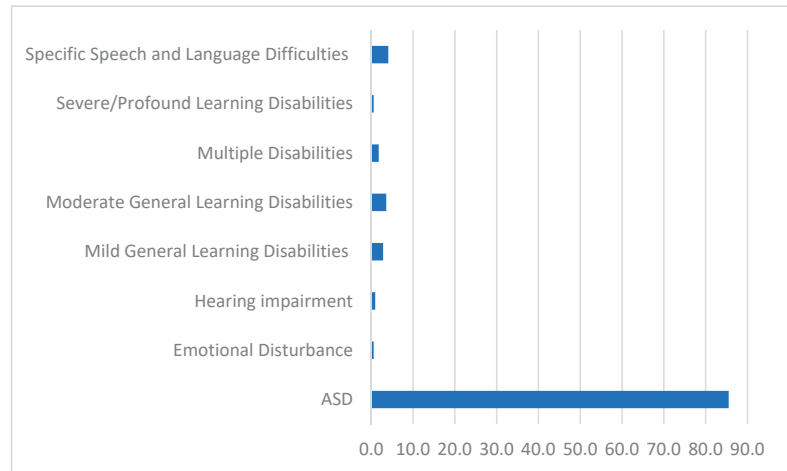
Figure 2. Designation of special classes in Ireland, 2020 [27].

The growth in the prevalence of students with Autism is the subject of much debate internationally [30–32]. In the Republic of Ireland, there is limited data available with the most recent prevalence estimate of school-aged children at 1.5 per cent [33] whereas in Northern Ireland this rate is higher at 4.2 per cent [34]. Despite the relatively low prevalence rates for students with Autism compared to other disabilities in the Republic, there is little discussion on why they are the primary focus of special education provision in Ireland at present. Parents and advocacy groups for students with Autism have gained much media attention in recent years in their attempts to get children places in special classes in their local schools, particularly where schools have been resistant [35,36]. While parents are simply demanding that their child's educational needs are met in their local school, a recent evaluation of ASD classes by the DES Inspectorate (2020) cautioned that the level of demand by Irish media and parental advocacy groups for the opening of new ASD classes brings with it 'a danger that segregated educational provision could expand unintentionally' [36].

Given the way in which special classes are established, their distribution across Ireland often depends on levels of demand. The NCSE publishes annual special class figures on its website by county, designation and education sector (early intervention, primary and secondary level). By analysing this data relative to the school age population by each county in Ireland it is possible to measure the distribution of special classes and explore whether these classes are meeting levels of 'need'. Figure 3 shows that there is large variability in how special classes are distributed with the ratio of student to special classes highest in county Dublin where there is the largest school aged population (special class to student ratio of 1:700). In contrast, county Offaly special class provision is relatively high with special class to student ratio of 1:187. These patterns suggest a lack of planning at government level about special class provision which accounts for population structures and the prevalence of disabilities/additional needs.

Although national figures are helpful in understanding special class provision, there is a clear need to understand the experiences of students in these classes, their access to the national curriculum, the structure of their school day and their progression and outcomes when they leave the special class setting. One national longitudinal study of special class provision [9,12] explored many of these aspects of special class provision and found much

variability in how special classes were operationalised in mainstream schools. Despite special classes being perceived as an intervention or temporary placement, it found that placement in special classes is often permanent with some students remaining in these settings for the entire day and throughout their school career. The report highlights the difficulties of this at the secondary level where many special classes are assigned one teacher to cover the full curriculum [12]. A more recent evaluation of special classes at primary and secondary level by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectorate found that some students placed in special class settings can remain there with little integration with mainstream classes. It highlights the need to take account of Ireland's obligations under the UNCRPD:

> *"if full inclusion or ultimate enrolment into mainstream classes is to be viewed as the index of success, the current system of special classes appears to be having limited success for many learners who enrol in a special class"* [37] (p. 7).

The report acknowledges that integration is taking place between some special and mainstream classes but stresses the need to 'extend this integration further towards full inclusion' [37].
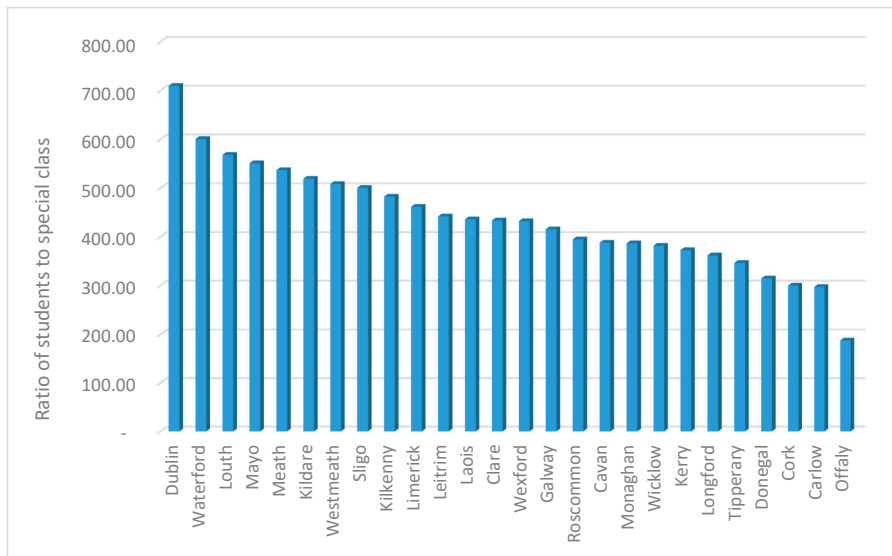
Figure 3. Special class to student ratio by county [27,38].

Placement in special classes can also be particularly problematic at secondary-level education where research shows students can experience stigma and lowered expectations by their teachers. Author et al. (2014) note that for students with more severe disabilities, these settings offered the opportunity to attend mainstream education instead of a special school, albeit in a separate setting [9]. The report highlights however that in some instances, students are being placed in special classes when there is no need for them to be there. They found that in some instances, secondary level students with mild needs and, in some cases, those with no diagnosis of disability, are placed in such classes. The DES Inspectorate evaluation (2020) also found that some students at the secondary level are being placed in special class settings where 'they are capable of greater integration with the mainstream classes' [37].

The research also highlights issues around teacher placement in special classes and the need for qualifications and experience in order to effectively teach in such settings. Author et al. (2016) found that teachers working in special classes were often younger,

newly recruited staff or those covering maternity leave periods and on temporary contracts [9]. The findings show that where teachers lacked specific qualifications in special education and/or support from their colleagues and school leaders there was a risk of teacher stress and in some cases burnout. The study also highlighted the role of effective inclusive school leadership in how teachers are placed in such settings and can access appropriate continuous professional development when requested. Similarly, the DES Inspectorate (2020) recommendations also stress the importance of school leadership in deciding which teachers are allocated to special classes and states that 'newly qualified or substitute teachers should not be deployed to the special class' [37] (p. 8).

Given increases in the numbers of special classes and, in particular, the number of special class teachers and SNAs required to staff this model of provision, there has been increased focus on the level of spending for special education in recent years [39–41]. Mirroring the increased prevalence of students with disabilities/additional learning needs in mainstream education, special education budgets have increased by over 52 per cent between 2011 and 2019 [29,41]. In an attempt to curb spending and introduce a more equitable system of resource allocation, the NCSE introduced a new funding model which signalled a departure from traditional funding models explicitly linking provision with individual student assessments towards a model based on the profiled need of each school. The NCSE policy advice (2014) clearly stated that: '... the current model for allocating the 10,000 additional learning support and resource teacher posts to schools was inequitable at best and potentially confirmed social advantage and reinforced social disadvantage' [42] (p. 3). Introduced in 2018, the new model comprises two key components: School educational profile based on (i) Students with complex needs, (ii) Percentages of students performing below a certain threshold on standardised test results, (iii) Social context of school which includes gender, primary school location and educational disadvantage; and a baseline allocation designed: '... to ensure that every school is an inclusive school and able to enrol and support students who may have additional needs' [42] (pp. 7–8). The move away from an assessment dominated mode of resource allocation has been facilitated by the development of the Continuum of Support model [43] that is designed to provide a tiered model of support both within and outside schools.

There has been no evaluation of this model to date but is considered to be a significant departure from the traditional linkage between resource allocation and professional assessments.

More recently however, debates around inclusive education have escalated in Ireland. The NCSE Progress report (2019) titled 'An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society?' poses fundamental questions regarding how Ireland can establish inclusive school environments [8]. This review of existing provision and future plans has been prompted by the Irish government's ratification of the UNCRPD in 2018 [44]. Article 24 (2) of the CRPD: 'obliges States, inter alia, to ensure that children can access an inclusive, quality and free education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live' [8] (p. 3). The UN Committee that monitors implementation of the Convention has already advised that having a separate special education system operating in parallel with a mainstream education system is not compatible with the provisions of the CRPD. In response to the State ratification of the CRPD and the significant changes in policy and provision over the past decade, the NCSE decided to review whether: 'special schools and classes should continue to be offered as part of the continuum of educational provision for students with more complex additional learning needs or whether greater inclusion in mainstream classes offers a better way forward' [8] (p. 4).

This progress report documents conflicting views among stakeholders regarding whether special schools and special classes should be retained. Proponents of special school/class provision argue that it is economically efficient and facilitates the delivery of specialist teaching and therapeutic inputs. Opponents of this model of provision point to what they consider to be serious shortcomings including: once placed in a special setting, there is little likelihood that the student will move from this setting for the whole of their

school careers; students often have to travel long distances to access the special school often losing the connection with their local community; many special school buildings are seriously deficient and ill-suited to educational and therapeutic supports; and high levels of challenging behaviour among students has been reported. Based on evidence gathered from research studies and extensive consultation with stakeholders the report authors conclude that significant progress has been made in establishing a more equitable resourcing system and that many mainstream schools have demonstrated a commitment to developing inclusive learning environments. Despite this progress there remain, as outlined above, significant difficulties with the current system of special education provision.

In the gathering of evidence for this progress report, NCSE personnel visited New Brunswick, Canada to assess their full inclusion model. This small province is internationally understood to have implemented an inclusive system of education through legislation and best practices [45]. In New Brunswick, the term 'inclusion' is used to refer to all students including socially disadvantaged, First Nation, newcomers, those with a disability or additional learning need and those with exceptional ability. Full inclusion is viewed 'as a fundamental human right principle underpinning the education system' [8] (p. 51). Overall, NCSE gave a very positive evaluation of the full inclusion model and observed that schools were very committed to the task of full inclusion as demonstrated by strong leadership, teacher confidence in including all students, parental support and a pro-active approach to addressing any issues that arise.

6. Discussion

Ireland appears to be at a crossroads in relation to facing the challenge of establishing inclusive school environments. The Irish government commitment to adhering to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities appears to have prompted a radical rethink by policymakers. Over the past two decades, Ireland has developed an extensive system of supports for students who have additional needs across mainstream and special settings. However, Ireland now faces the fundamental question about whether it wishes to reconfigure the supports and focus on how inclusive learning environments can be established as envisaged in the EPSEN Act (2004).

The 'New Brunswick' model of inclusion is being seriously considered by policymakers for the first time and this has prompted a review of existing provision and challenged the traditional mindset that promoted special schools and special settings within mainstream schools for students with additional needs. This paper argues that the retention of special schools and special settings is based on a number of assumptions that have rarely been challenged to produce compelling evidence to justify their existence. It is assumed that special schools and special settings are better resourced and capable of delivering better quality academic and social outcomes for their students. This perhaps helps to explain why the greater preponderance of students in special schools are of secondary-level school age and many have transferred into special schools having completed their primary school education. However, both internationally and nationally there is very little evidence that attendance at special schools produces greater academic and social outcomes for their students [46]. Parents and care givers are naturally reluctant to be seen to abandon special settings given their struggle to achieve appropriate educational provision for their children in the first place. This is understandable but sometimes based on a lack of information about the supports readily available to their children within mainstream settings.

Administrative convenience is another possible reason for the persistence of segregated settings as there is somewhere for children with additional needs to be placed and stave off the understandable anger and frustration of families faced with securing appropriate educational provision for their children. The current thinking appears to be to provide the physical space, a unit or special class within mainstream schools, a support teacher and special needs assistants and see what happens instead of providing funding or resources to schools, not only for student supports but for building teacher capacity which encourages inclusive practice. It can be argued that systems of segregation remain

in place due to a lethargic approach by the government to institute real reform and face the challenges of establishing mainstream pathways for every child. History and legacy remain the key influence on Ireland's current systems of teacher education, special education funding, pedagogical approaches and curriculum. Ireland has undergone a considerable transformation in a relatively short time regarding the establishment of legislative and administrative structures designed to support students with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Simultaneously, special schools have remained in existence and extensive special class provision has been established in mainstream schools. While we have limited evidence to support the effectiveness of these types of provision, it is very clear that these forms of provision retain considerable support among education stakeholders. While the 'New Brunswick' total inclusion model is being actively considered, it is unlikely that a major overhaul of current provision will take place in the immediate future despite the pressures exerted by signing up to the provisions of the UNCRPD.

References

1. Government of Ireland. *Special Education Review Committee (SERC)*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 1993.
2. Government of Ireland. *The Education Act*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 1998.
3. Government of Ireland. *The Equal Status Act*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2000.
4. Government of Ireland. *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2004.
5. Rose, R.; Shevlin, M.; Winter, E.; O'Raw, P. *Project IRIS–Inclusive Research in Irish Schools A Longitudinal Study of the Experiences of and Outcomes for Pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Irish Schools*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2015.
6. Desforges, M.; Lindsay, G. *Procedures Used to Diagnose a Disability and to Assess Special Educational Needs: An International Review*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2010.
7. Banks, J.; McCoy, S. *A Study on the Prevalence of Special Educational Needs*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2011.
8. National Council for Special Education. *Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes. An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society? Progress Report*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2019.
9. Banks, J.; McCoy, S.; Frawley, D.; Kingston, G.; Shevlin, M.; Smyth, F. *Special Classes in Irish Schools Phase 2: A Qualitative Study*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland; ESRI: Dublin, Ireland, 2016.
10. Keating, S.; O'Connor, U. The shifting role of the special needs assistant in Irish classrooms: A time for change? *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2012**, *27*, 533–544. [CrossRef]
11. Kerins, P.; Casserly, A.M.; Deacy, E.; Harvey, D.; McDonagh, D.; Tiernan, B. The professional development needs of special needs assistants in Irish post-primary schools. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2018**, *33*, 31–46. [CrossRef]
12. Banks, J.; McCoy, S.; Frawley, D.; Watson, D.; Shevlin, M.; Smyth, F. *Understanding Special Class Provision in Ireland*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland; ESRI: Dublin, Ireland, 2014.
13. Mc Guckin, C.; Shevlin, M.; Bell, S.; Devecchi, C. *Moving to Further and Higher Education: An Exploration of the Experiences of Students with Special Educational Needs. Research Report Number 14*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2013.
14. Scanlon, G.; Kamp, A.; Cochrane, A. Transition (s) to work: The experiences of people with disabilities in Ireland. *Disabil. Soc.* **2020**, *35*, 1556–1576. [CrossRef]
15. Government of Ireland. *The Education (Admission to Schools) Act*; The Stationery Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2018.
16. Ebersold, S. *Inclusive Education for Young Disabled People in Europe: Trends, Issues and Challenges, A synthesis of Evidence from ANED Country Reports and Additional Sources*; National Higher Institute for Training and Research on Special Needs Education, INSHEA: Suresnes, France, 2011.
17. Buchner, T.; Proyer, M.D. From special to inclusive education policies in Austria—Developments and implications for schools and teacher education. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2020**, *43*, 83–94. [CrossRef]
18. Saloviita, T. Attitudes of Teachers towards Inclusive Education in Finland. *Scand. J. Educ. Res.* **2020**, *64*, 270–282. [CrossRef]

19. Vlachou, V.; Didaskalou, E.; Argyrakouli, E. Preferences of students with general learning difficulties for different service delivery modes. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2006**, *21*, 201–216. [CrossRef]

20. Mitchell, D. *Education That Fits: Review of International Trends in the Education of Students with Special Educational Needs*; Ministry of Education: Christchurch, South Island, 2010.

21. McLeskey, J.; Landers, E.; Williamson, P.; Hoppey, D. Are We Moving Toward Educating Students with Disabilities in Less Restrictive Settings? *J. Spec. Educ.* **2010**, *46*, 131–140. [CrossRef]

22. Markussen, E. Special education: Does it help? A study of special education in Norwegian upper secondary schools. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2004**, *19*, 33–48. [CrossRef]

23. Myklebust, J.O. Class placement and competence attainment among students with special educational needs. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2006**, *33*, 76–81. [CrossRef]

24. Kauffman, J.; Hallahan, D.P. *Toward a Comprehensive Delivery System*; Charles, E., Ed.; Merrill: Columbus, OH, USA, 1993.

25. Kauffman, J.; Hornby, G. Inclusive Vision versus Special Education Reality. *Educ. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 258. [CrossRef]

26. National Council for Special Education. *Guidelines for Setting Up and Organising Special Classes*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2016.

27. National Council for Special Education. Special Classes in Primary and Post Primary Schools Academic Year 20/21. Available online: https://ncse.ie/special-classes (accessed on 20 February 2021).

28. DPER. *Spending Review 2017 Special Educational Needs provision*; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform: Dublin, Ireland, 2017.

29. DPER. *Spending Review 2019 Monitoring Inputs, Outputs and Outcomes in Special Education Needs Provision*; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and Department of Education: Dublin, Ireland, 2019.

30. Fombonne, E. Editorial: The rising prevalence of autism. *J. Child Psychol. Psychiatry* **2018**, *59*, 717–720. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

31. Baio, J.; Wiggins, L.; Christensen, D.L.; Maenner, M.J.; Daniels, J.; Warren, Z.; Kurzius-Spencer, M.; Zahorodny, W.; Robinson Rosenberg, C.; White, T.; et al. Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder Among Children Aged 8 Years—Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, 11 Sites, United States, 2014, MMWR. *Surveill. Summ.* **2018**, *67*, 1–23. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

32. Campisi, L.; Imran, N.; Nazeer, A.; Skokauskas, N.; Waqar Azeem, M. Autism spectrum disorder. *Br. Med. Bull.* **2018**, *127*, 91–100. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

33. Boilson, A.M.; Staines, A.; Ramirez, A.; Posada, M.; Sweeney, M.R. Operationalisation of the European Protocol for Autism Prevalence (EPAP) for Autism Spectrum Disorder Prevalence Measurement in Ireland. *J. Autism Dev. Dis.* **2016**, *46*, 3054–3067. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

34. Rodgers, H.; McCluney, J. *Prevalence of Autism (including Asperger Syndrome) in School Age Children in Northern Ireland Annual Report*; Department of Health: Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2020.

35. Donnelly, K. Minister in Schools Stand-Off over Additional Special Classes. *Irish Independent*. 11 July 2019. Available online: https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/education/minister-in-schools-stand-off-over-additional-special-classes-38301862.html (accessed on 19 February 2021).

36. O'Brien, C. More South Dublin Primary Schools Agree to Open Classes for Special Needs Pupils. *Irish Times*. 3 December 2020. Available online: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/more-south-dublin-primary-schools-agree-to-open-classes-for-special-needs-pupils-1.4426972 (accessed on 19 February 2021).

37. DES Inspectorate. *Educational Provision for Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Special Classes Attached to Mainstream Schools in Ireland*; Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate: Dublin, Ireland, 2020.

38. Central Statistics Office. Department of Education, Education Statistics. Available online: https://www.cso.ie/en/databases/departmentofeducation/ (accessed on 20 February 2021).

39. Banks, J. A Winning Formula? Funding Inclusive Education in Ireland. In *Resourcing Inclusive Education (International Perspectives on Inclusive Education, Volume 15)*; Emerald Publishing Limited: Bingley, UK, 2021; pp. 7–19. [CrossRef]

40. Banks, J. Examining the Cost of Special Education. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*; Sharma, U., Ed.; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2020.

41. Banks, J.; Frawley, D.; McCoy, S. Achieving inclusion? Effective resourcing of students with special educational needs. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2015**, *19*, 926–943. [CrossRef]

42. National Council for Special Education. *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2014.

43. Department of Education and Skills. *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support*; DES: Dublin, Ireland, 2019.

44. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 24th ed.; UN General Assembly: New York, NY, USA, 2006.

45. AuCoin, A.; Porter, G.P.; Baker-Korotkov, K. New Brunswick's journey to inclusive education. *Prospects* **2020**, *49*, 313–328. [CrossRef]

46. Waddington, E.M.; Reed, P.; Baker-Korotkov, K. Comparison of the effects of mainstream and special school on National Curriculum outcomes in children with autism spectrum disorder: An archive-based analysis. *J. Res. Spec. Educ. Needs* **2016**, *17*, 132–142. [CrossRef]

Article

Universal Design for Learning: Is It Gaining Momentum in Irish Education?

Margaret Flood [1],* and Joanne Banks [2]

[1] National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Ireland, D02 KH36 Dublin, Ireland
[2] School of Education, Trinity College Dublin, D02 PN40 Dublin, Ireland; banksjo@tcd.ie
*   Correspondence: Margaret.flood@ncca.ie

Abstract: Responding to student diversity has become a key policy priority in education systems around the world. In addition to international and national institutional policies, major changes are underway in instructional practices and pedagogy in many national contexts. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) has become a key pedagogical approach used in education systems which seek to promote inclusive and equitable education in response to student diversity. Despite Ireland's policy commitment to inclusive education, UDL has been traditionally focused on the higher education sector with little discussion about the role UDL can play at primary and second-level education to achieve inclusion. Furthermore, there has been no research to date on the extent to which education policy reforms are introducing part, or all, of the aspects of the UDL framework. The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which UDL is gaining momentum in Irish primary and second-level education through an analysis of curriculum policy. This paper examines the development and evolution of UDL in Irish education policy over the past decade by exploring the use of UDL in national educational curriculum frameworks. The paper highlights how UDL is slowly and implicitly emerging in education policy at a national level but suggests further momentum could be gained from its inclusion in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and professional development programmes. By exploring the development of UDL within existing policy contexts, the paper argues for a more explicit commitment to UDL as part of ongoing curriculum reform at the primary level, the review of Senior Cycle, and Ireland's broader inclusive education agenda.

Keywords: universal design for learning; inclusive education; policy; primary education; second-level education; Ireland

1. Introduction

Internationally, and in Ireland, education systems are being challenged to respond to diverse student populations with a growing recognition that students may come from different socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and learning backgrounds, as well as students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students [1–3]. International policies such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities [3], United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child [4], and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals [2] stress the need for countries to provide inclusive and equitable education for everyone. Alongside the ratification of international conventions and introduction of national policies that promote inclusive education, focus has turned to whether instructional practices, or pedagogy, can increase access and engagement with the curriculum for every student [5–7].

Over the past two decades, the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework has become a key pedagogical framework which seeks to address the traditional 'one size fits all' curriculum that exists in many countries [8,9]. UDL assumes diversity in the student population and provides guidelines where they have flexibility and choices around how they learn and how they can share what they have learned [10] (p. 3). There is growing interest in UDL across education systems worldwide with increasing evidence around its effectiveness in creating more inclusive classrooms across education sectors [11–13].

115

Until recently, UDL in Ireland has been primarily reserved for higher education and is often associated with support services for students with disabilities. Despite this growing interest in UDL as a possible 'solution' to inequities in further and higher education sectors, there has been little research on the role that UDL could play at primary and second-level education in Ireland. Yet, there is a notable increase in online forums, workshops, and national and international lectures on the topic of UDL in recent years among educators. The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which UDL is gaining momentum in Irish primary and second-level education through an analysis of curriculum policy over time and across sectors.

2. What Is Universal Design for Learning

UDL is an approach to learning, teaching, and assessment design that is proactive in addressing the varied identities, competencies, learning strengths, and needs of every learner in our learning environment. Developed by CAST in the mid-1980s, studies highlight its potential to promote the engagement and independence of students as it ensures a variety of pathways through choice and flexibility [9]. These pathways provide for: understanding content; goals that are clear and specific to the expected outcome; and student assessment that is flexibly designed to enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and skills in a variety of ways [8]. At the core of UDL are three principles that educators are required to provide: multiple ways for students to engage in their learning (principle one: Engagement); multiple means of representation to provide students with equitable access to the learning content (principle two: Representation); and multiple ways for students to demonstrate and express their knowledge, understanding, and skills (principle three: Action and Expression). These principles are broken down into nine guidelines (three per principle) that provide suggestions to increase access to the learning goal, to build on students' learning and develop their knowledge, understanding, and skills, and to support students to internalise their learning and skills. Each guideline has corresponding checkpoints, thirty-one in total, that provide more detailed suggestions on how to provide multiple means within each principle.

3. Principles of Universal Design for Learning

The first principle underpinning UDL, providing multiple means of engagement, is the belief that learning contexts need to be designed in a flexible manner that enables every student to find their path into the learning experience, participate in a meaningful way, build their capacity, and stay motivated when faced with challenges [8]. This principle focuses on the teacher designing learning experiences that the students can connect with [14]. When students can bring their identity, prior knowledge, and experiences into the learning, and this is valued, the student will be more motivated to actively engage [10,15]. On the other hand, teachers are also designing to support students' cognitive load because if there is too much to focus on the learning environment students may not know what to pay attention to or where to direct their cognitive energy [16]. Thus, teachers need to ensure students can access the language, background, and skills to engage in the learning experience and ensure they are not embedding additional layers of skills or activities that may create a barrier to students' meaningful participation.

The second principle underpinning UDL, providing multiple means of representation, is the belief that for learning environments to support the variability of learners to access, engage, interpret, and understand learning content, teachers must present the information through a variety of media and methods [8]. By presenting information in multiple ways to students, teachers reduce barriers to accessing learning, therefore creating an inclusive learning experience for every student. Through creative design, teachers can facilitate different levels of prior knowledge, experience, skills, and capacity, and honour students' diverse backgrounds and identities [10,15].

The third principle underpinning UDL, providing multiple means of action and expression, is the belief that students' success should not be based solely on an inflexi-

ble summative assessment. Rather, it should be personalised (i.e., choice and flexibility) through continuous formative and summative assessment where the means of demonstrating and expressing students' knowledge, understanding, skills, and values is chosen by the learner in line with the goal or learning being assessed [8]. Thus, for a curriculum to be inclusive, it needs to incorporate a variety of options for students to demonstrate their learning and capacity as there is no one-size-fits-all method [12,15,17].

4. Research on the Effectiveness of Universal Design for Learning

Despite the wealth of literature on the neuroscientific origins of UDL [8,18] or the benefits of a UDL approach in achieving more inclusive education systems [10], there are increasing calls for evidence-based research to understand the 'soundness' of UDL [19,20]. Where empirical evidence on the effectiveness of UDL exists, there appears to be more emphasis on teacher change and practice than student outcomes. Indeed, Capp (2017) and Edyburn (2005) note that the principle of multiple means of engagement is the least discussed principle in the literature [12,17]. Student engagement is often a secondary outcome in studies focusing on the principles: multiple means of representation and multiple means of action and expression [12,17]. The lack of clear measurements to examine the impact of UDL on students' learning outcomes is a significant shortcoming [21] and there is a growing emphasis in research on how to measure UDL's impact on sustained engagement for every student rather than just a targeted audience [22].

5. Student Outcomes

Although empirical studies specifically focusing on the impact of UDL on student outcomes are limited, those available indicate UDL's potential to improve student outcomes. Increased student engagement, participation, and outcomes are noted across several large- and small-scale research studies. In one Canadian study findings show a positive impact of UDL on reducing student stress, improving confidence, and changing attitudes towards their learning [23]. In the USA, an evaluation of UDL projects in Montgomery County Public schools [24] found evidence of varying degrees of positive impacts of UDL practices on students' independence in learning and engagement depending on grade level, processes, and student subgroups. This reflects the findings of another study exploring UDL implementation in six local education agencies across five U.S. states [25]. This small-scale study reported that all educational professionals interviewed observed UDL benefits to students that included improved test scores, improved motivation, and interest in learning, and being excited about school and learning [25].

In one position paper focusing on student outcomes, Landin and Schirmer (2020) listed increased student engagement as a result of teachers respecting students' needs, allowing students to succeed on their own terms by offering them choices in how to demonstrate their understanding in ways that work best for them, improving peer collaboration and cultural inclusiveness through valuing students' unique interests, and enabling students to communicate through mediums that suit their learning profile through developing autonomy and culturally responsive learning [13]. Similarly, a content analysis of the thirty-one UDL checkpoints concluded that applying UDL principles, guidelines, and checkpoints would support students in building deeper knowledge about how they learn best, thus enabling them to build on their learning processes [26].

Other studies focus on the impact of UDL for specific subject areas or based on specific characteristics of students. In one study on emergent-literacy development, the findings suggest that UDL benefits every student regardless of ability or need because the content and learning is enhanced for every emerging-literacy learner through providing students with a variety of materials and learning formats [27]. When putting forward the case for UDL in physical education, Liebernman (2017) noted the reality that students do not want to be different or given special treatment [28]. Thus, if a teacher provides every student with the same options, then no one will stand out or feel marginalised. Additionally, it means that every student is engaged. This potential for engagement was also evidenced in a study

on UDL-designed learning environments for online literacy programmes for students with intellectual disabilities [29]. Findings from classroom observations and teacher and student interviews suggested clear advantages for students with intellectual disabilities as they were able to engage in the UDL environment that was designed to provide meaningful interactions between peers based on age-appropriate content by optimising student choice and autonomy and providing support and challenge [29].

6. Professional Learning and Practice

The position teachers take and how they approach teaching is a critical factor in successfully enacting any initiative to improve inclusive education. The quality and strength of learning, teaching and assessment, leadership, and curriculum in schools is dependent on the vision, commitment, and capacity of the teachers who bring the curriculum to life. Enacting UDL into practice requires a preparedness to change how we view diversity and difference and adapt our learning and teaching accordingly. Studies [11,12,27] on teachers' knowledge, confidence, and readiness to enact UDL revealed that not all mainstream teachers, at primary and second-level, had a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of UDL—an opinion shared by Edyburn (2010) who questioned how teachers could implement a construct that they could not define [30].

Other studies have examined the barriers to implementing UDL for teachers (It is acknowledged that the countries referenced here are at different stages in their inclusive education and UDL process and the data presented should be considered in this context.). Alquraini and Rao's (2020) survey of 131 Saudi Arabian teachers revealed that challenges and barriers to teacher readiness to enact UDL included lack of teachers' knowledge and belief in UDL [27]. Results revealed that 50 per cent of respondents did not know much about UDL, 61 per cent had no UDL training, and 75 per cent were not practicing UDL in their classrooms. Results also indicated a lack of teacher collaboration, particularly between mainstream and special education teachers [27]. This is in contrast to studies that reported experiences of collaboration for UDL planning and teaching [31,32]. For example, Smith et al. (2017) noted collaborative partnerships as an effective resource, particularly for using technology resources [32] while participants in Reynor's (2020) study reported speaking with the special education teacher before their placement and asking the class teacher more questions than in previous placements to gain a better awareness of student diversity, differences, and challenges [31]. Teacher confidence also appears to play an important role in UDL implementation. In Capp's (2020) survey of ninety-seven Australian primary and second-level teachers, he found that primary teachers were, in general, more confident than second-level teachers about implementing UDL [12]. Of note, is that both primary and second-level teachers were least confident engaging with principle one, providing multiple means of engagement, and with guidelines and checkpoints in the other two principles that related to engaging students. Conversely, they were most confident providing students with multiple means of representation [12]. This could be because this principle can be considered to be about teacher choice in how they present their lessons and content compared with principles one and three where student voice and agency come to the fore. These findings contrast somewhat with an Irish study of UDL in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) which showed that some of the twenty, fourth-year student teachers' participating were confused by the principle of multiple means of representation and found the UDL guidelines difficult to follow at times with too much information to process [31]. Both studies found that primary, second-level, and pre-service teachers showed varying levels of confidence in relation to the underpinning principles, guidelines, and checkpoints of UDL [12,31]. Furthermore, teachers in the studies continued to reference differentiation and it appears that there may have been confusion about their meanings, that they were using the terms inter-changeably, or that UDL was understood as a differentiation model.

7. Supporting Teachers' Learning for UDL

Moving away from thinking in terms of ability and disability and the traditional practice of retrospective differentiation to proactive planning for variability requires a change in teachers' mindsets about difference, diversity, equity, and inclusion. For this change to be successful and affect change in practice, teachers need to be supported through effective professional learning. Recent studies on professional learning have focused on professional learning to develop more inclusive classrooms. In Ireland, findings show that student teachers respond positively to using UDL lesson plan templates, for students that struggle with their work but also in creating an awareness of high achieving students where there may not be adequate levels of challenge [31]. For Greek student teachers, findings also show how exposure to UDL with a focus on representation led to the development of more inclusive lesson plans which improved the learning process for every student [33]. Similarly, an examination of an undergraduate teaching course with a focus on using UDL to develop inclusive lesson plans found improvements in the lesson planning process after the training [34]. Both studies established that the training improved the lesson planning process across all three UDL principles.

Regarding enactment and practice, studies show that professional learning directly impacts on UDL implementation in teacher practice. One study examining the outcomes of UDL and universal design for transition (UDT) training to fifty-two student and practicing teachers found that many of the participants embedded UDL and UDT into their lessons after the course [35]. This was because the participants could use them in activities for students in mainstream as well as students with special educational needs (SEN). Specifically, participants reported that UDL and UDT approaches provided them with the opportunity to include every student in their learning activities and that element of these approaches lent themselves to making learning meaningful and engaging for every student [35]. This reflects other findings on the impact of a weeklong UDL summer course on teacher practice [14]. A comparison of teachers who attended the course with teachers who did not, found that, overall, those who attended performed higher in UDL implementation than those who did not. This included improvements in planning, establishing goals, identifying, and removing barriers to learning, and providing enhanced comprehension opportunities to students through the UDL guidelines [14].

8. Challenges to Enacting UDL

The lack of evidence-based research into the effectiveness of UDL, particularly in relation to student outcomes, is perhaps the most significant challenge to promoting and therefore enacting UDL as an effective approach to inclusive education practices. Research by Edyburn (2005; 2020) has informed much of this debate in recent years as, although he asserts that UDL holds considerable promise, he argues that there are challenges to translating UDL theory into practice [17,30]. He believes that once educators understand what the principles are and look like, they are left to figure out how to apply UDL themselves [30]. Another, related, issue highlighted by Edyburn (2005; 2020) is the lack of evidence-based research validating UDL. He argues, "there is urgent and important work to do to capture the potential of UDL in meaningful applications to help all students access, engage and succeed in meeting grade-level expectations in a global society" [30] (p. 341). A final issue raised by Edyburn (2020) is the tendency to link the framework with special education some of which he cautions against given its applicability to every student instead of those perceived to need additional supports [30].

Other research on UDL lesson planning and practice also indicates several disadvantages and barriers associated with its approach [13,31,36], namely, a lack of resources, time, knowledge, support, and professional learning in UDL at ITE and practicing teacher stages [13,35]. These studies highlight how planning and facilitating inclusive learning experiences using UDL can be complicated [13,30] and negotiating the guidelines and finding ways to remove some of these barriers to learning can be difficult [31]. Despite these challenges, many of these studies conclude that with these supports, and despite the

initial time involved, the results of UDL outweigh the effort and that "without a doubt, UDL holds considerable promise" [30] (p. 40).

The literature to date has limitations due to a lack of evidence-based research, the small-scale approach many research papers have taken, and the contextual dimensions of each study, meaning their findings may not be generalizable [35,36]. However, context is a cornerstone of UDL and therefore its potential must be viewed through the lens of students' variability, the school climate, and the broader demographics of a school or institution. Furthermore, national contexts differ in their societal values, existing policies, and education systems more generally and this must also be considered when translating UDL from its origins in the United States.

9. Universal Design for Learning in the Irish Education Context

Universal Design for Learning is a relatively new concept in Ireland with the potential benefits of UDL beginning to appear in policy documents at both further and higher education levels [37]. This work has been supported by organisations (including the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and the further education and training authority (SOLAS)) who are seeking to respond to increasing diverse student populations through supporting educators in developing inclusive practices. However, as Quellett (2004) noted, significantly more needs to be done in these institutions to provide authentic access, participation, and engagement in high quality learning and teaching for every student [38]. Specifically, there is little evidence that UDL is part of programmes of ITE in Ireland where student teachers could gain an understanding of UDL as part of their preparation for learning and teaching in primary and second-level classrooms [31,37]. While an examination of Irish teacher support services suggests professional learning for UDL is slowly developing (UDL is either referenced or included in aspects of provision by organisations such as The Professional Development Service for Teachers, the National Council for Special Education, and Junior Cycle for Teachers), this is at an optional level. No baseline of teacher UDL practice in Ireland (with the exception of Devitt et al., 2021 [39]) has been established. However, there has been a notable increase in online forums, workshops, and national and international lectures on the topic of UDL in Ireland in the last three years. Many of these events are heavily attended by teachers, particularly at second-level, and representatives from teacher organisations that provide professional development.

10. The Irish Education System

The Irish education system is comprised of a mainstream primary and second-level education system and a parallel special school system. Compulsory education begins at age six, although the majority of students attend infant classes by the age of four and five. Additionally, the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE) provides two free years of preschool education for children prior to commencing primary education. At second-level, students normally take a nationally standardised examination at the end of lower secondary which is followed by an optional 'Transition Year', and a two-year upper secondary programme, at the end of which students take the nationally standardised Leaving Certificate examination.

Special education in Ireland is based on a model of a continuum of supports. While the policy is to ensure the maximum possible inclusion for children with SEN in mainstream settings, depending on the child's assessed level of need in education, children may attend special classes within mainstream schools and special schools. Though special schools provide primary and post-primary education until the age of eighteen, special schools fall under the remit of the primary sector. There are currently 134 special schools in Ireland with approximately 8407 students enrolled in 2020/2021 [6,40]. Special classes fall under the remit of the school they are in. In the school year 2020/2021, there were 1836 special classes across primary and post-primary schools in Ireland, and each class can have a maximum of 6 students enrolled [41].

11. UDL within the Special Education Sector

Until recently, differentiation has been the method of choice in Ireland for teachers wishing to include students with SEN. However, many argue, that the disability is within the curriculum in addition to the learning and teaching environment, not the student [8]. Thus, in recent years, education debates have begun to focus on moving towards more equitable systems of education and the use of innovative pedagogies such as UDL to enhance the school experiences of every student [6,41]. While there is a firm commitment to inclusive education at a policy level [5,42], in practice, the funding and provision of special education operates parallel to the mainstream education system [43,44]. This anomaly was further highlighted in the recent publication and open consultation by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) moving towards a more inclusive system of education [6]. Using inputs from delegates from New Brunswick, Canada, and Portugal who have moved towards models of greater or full inclusion that are informed by UDL, the consultations suggest that students with SEN could, and perhaps should, be educated with their peers in the mainstream. However, it noted that Irish schools, under the current structures, are not ready to successfully enact such a move. Principally, NCSE asserted the need for teachers to be competent in enacting inclusive practices such as UDL so that they have the capacity to teach in diverse classrooms with the full range of student variability.

As legislation developed around special and inclusive education, Ireland's National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) were tasked with acknowledging these changes and providing advice, guidelines, and directives to teachers on delivering supports to students with SEN. By reviewing these documents through the lens of UDL, some interesting patterns emerge. At the same time that CAST were beginning to articulate their concept of UDL, the NCCA published a seminal paper, *Special Educational Needs: Curriculum Issues* [45], outlining future curriculum developments in Ireland. Although not written from a UDL perspective, this paper is significant as it emphasised that the principles underlying education for students with SEN are the same principles that underpin education for every student. Furthermore, the terminology used in this NCCA paper sets the direction of inclusive language used in curriculum policy, with language such as 'pathways', 'individualised programmes', and 'whole-school approach' appearing throughout later NCCA and NCSE documents on special education [6,46,47]

12. UDL within Second-Level Education

12.1. Junior Cycle

UDL is, perhaps, most associated with the recent review of the lower secondary curriculum and introduction of the Framework for Junior Cycle in 2015 [7]. For the first time, there is explicit mention of UD in curriculum design in the Framework which was specifically designed with the intention of having one curriculum for every student. It aims to provide "meaningful and valuable learning opportunities for students from all cultural and social backgrounds and from a wide variety of individual circumstances" [7] (p. 26). This curriculum framework is based on eight principles, twenty-four statements of learning, and eight key skills. A unique aspect of the new framework is the choice of pathways students can take to achieve their Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA). This clearly aligns with the UDL inclusive mindset of multiple means of engagement and provides greater access to learning for every student. The framework has had a significant impact on meaningful engagement in learning for students with intellectual disabilities. This is provided through the options of Level 1 Learning Programmes (L1LPs) and Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) which exist as part of the overall Framework for Junior Cycle.

The landmark introduction of learning outcomes linked to student expectations is perhaps where UDL is most prevalent. The principles, statements, and skills are given expression through the learning outcomes [7] and these learning outcomes are flexibly designed to allow them to be contextualised and taught in various ways depending on the school and students. This approach gives teachers more autonomy to provide multiple

means of representation which were less possible with the prescriptive learning objectives of previous curriculum frameworks, further enhancing access and engagement for their students.

Another innovative component of the framework is the introduction of some assessment choices for students. Depending on pathway choices, students undertake a combination of formative assessments including Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) throughout the junior cycle, and summative state examinations, at the end. The nature of CBAs and other formative assessments embodies UDL's multiple means of action and expression as they allow teachers and students the autonomy to co-design the assessment brief and activity. In this way, students can engage with assessment through a medium that will best enable them to demonstrate and communicate their knowledge, understanding, skills, and values.

12.2. Senior Cycle

Senior cycle is currently under review in Ireland. Following extensive research and consultation, it is envisaged that NCCA will present its findings in an advisory report to the Minister for Education in 2021. The review findings indicate an appetite among students, parents, and teachers for greater flexibility in subject and programme choices and more learner-centred approaches in teaching, learning, and assessment at senior cycle [48]. The research highlights the extent to which stakeholders believe that the current senior cycle provision is too narrowly focused on students' academic ability. This means many students, including those with SEN and those who would benefit from vocational or apprenticeship options, are left without pathways. The most recent Senior Cycle Review report published [48] shows that there is a keen focus on flexible pathways and assessment in a future curriculum design.

13. UDL within Early Childhood and Primary Education

In recent years, there are some early indications of the introduction of UDL in the early childhood and primary education sector. In early childhood education, recent policy documents recognise the growing social, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity in Ireland in recent years and both the Aistear curriculum [49] and the Access and Inclusion Model [50] emphasise the need to be responsive to the changing groups of children each year and their abilities, preferences, and needs. At primary level, there are clear indicators of a UDL mindset emerging in curriculum documents. For example, it was explicitly stated that a new Primary Maths Curriculum (PMC) that promotes the principles of equity and access for children with a diverse range of abilities would be designed in line with the principles of UDL [51]. This specification is still in a development phase. In 2019, a new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) was developed and introduced to schools. Informed by research commissioned by NCCA that references UDL, the PLC incorporates a UDL approach and is the first part of the Irish primary curriculum to be redeveloped since 1999 [52]. Similar to the Framework for Junior Cycle, the PLC marks a significant move in primary education away from content objectives to a learning outcomes-based curriculum. Progression continua were also developed to support every student in progressing towards the intended learning.

Perhaps the clearest indication of a UDL approach thus far is evident in the recent publication of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, of which the PLC and PMC are part [53]. Similar to the Framework for Junior Cycle, the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework marks a significant move in primary education away from content objectives to a learning outcomes-based curriculum. Furthermore, it recognises teachers as 'curriculum makers' who use these broad learning outcomes within the wider framework of the curriculum vision, principles, and subjects to design a curriculum that is contextual and appropriate for the students in their learning community. Its statement that "in the context of a universally designed curriculum, inclusive education and diversity encourages a move away from thinking in terms of ability and disability to thinking about variability,

competency and opportunity" [53] (p. 20) indicates a commitment to supporting every student and sets the direction of curriculum experiences in a redeveloped primary school curriculum that will draw on the principles of UDL to provide every student with equity of access, engagement and challenge in their learning. The consultation for this Primary Framework is currently ongoing and it is expected to be a number of years before the redeveloped curriculum is introduced to schools.

14. Discussion

The exploration of recent curriculum developments in Ireland indicates a shift in mindset towards UDL as a framework for inclusive education in Irish schools. This paper finds that aspects of UDL are threaded across the curriculum principles that espouse engagement, participation and relevance, partnership, and choice and flexibility, from primary to senior cycle. The potential of UDL to increase student engagement is demonstrated in the most established of these, the junior cycle, where the three UDL principles are reflected in different aspects of the framework. However, this paper illustrates that UDL may be most evident in the new Primary Curriculum Framework. As the newest curriculum development, lessons from junior cycle reform have been learnt. Furthermore, the absence of a high stakes state examination at primary level may increase acceptance of UDL among practitioners.

In line with research internationally, this paper finds a lack of empirical research to support the potential of UDL in improving student outcomes which it argues will have implications for the translation of UDL curriculum initiatives into practice. Establishing an evidence base for UDL is imperative for policy change and development with a clear link required between the relevance and positive outcomes of UDL to inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment in Ireland. This reflects the research into teacher learning and practice which shows that when teachers have the opportunity to engage in professional learning for UDL and inclusion and experience the positive impact of UDL on their students, they are more likely to embed UDL into their practice [35].

Despite UDL gaining some momentum in Irish curriculum documents, professional learning opportunities for UDL remain limited at ITE and practicing teacher levels. A greater understanding of UDL at ITE is required to establish the effect of UDL on student teachers' knowledge, skills, and practice in the classroom. Furthermore, a systematic approach to UDL in the provision of all professional learning programmes could enhance teacher capacity in increasingly diverse school contexts. However, this paper argues that UDL enactment cannot be the sole responsibility of teachers. Without clear policy and messaging at a national level that supports effective professional learning for all teachers, there are concerns that UDL may become another 'educational fad' associated solely with special education, as noted by Edyburn (2020). Embedding UDL in ITE and professional learning programmes will ensure an awareness of the role of UDL amongst all educators. Perhaps what is required is a roadmap for systematic enactment of UDL as a pedagogical framework for every learner and teacher.

Education in Ireland is a critical stage in review and redevelopment across all sectors. Given ongoing discussions around moving to a 'full inclusion model' in Irish schools, this is perhaps an opportune time to proactively embed UDL as part of policy and curriculum design as well as part of learning and teaching design and practice.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. UNESCO. *Towards Inclusion in Education: Status, Trends and Challenges. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 Years on United Nations*; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: Paris, France, 2020.
2. United Nations. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020*; United Nations: Geneva, Switzerland, 2020.
3. UN General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Resolution/Adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106*; United Nations: Geneva, Switzerland, 2007.
4. United Nations. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*; UN General Assembly: New York, NY, USA, 1989.
5. Government of Ireland. *Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004*; Government of Ireland: Dublin, Ireland, 2004.
6. NCSE. *National Council for Special Education. Policy Advice on Special Schools and Classes. An Inclusive Education for an Inclusive Society? Progress Report*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2019.
7. DES. *Framework for Junior Cycle*; Department of Education and Skills: Dublin, Ireland, 2015.
8. Meyer, A.; Rose, D.H.; Gordon, D. *Universal Design for Learning: Theory and Practice*; CAST Professional Publishing: Boston, MA, USA, 2014.
9. CAST. *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines, Version 2.2 [Graphic Organiser]*; CAST: Wakefield, MA, USA, 2018.
10. Chardin, M.; Novak, K. *Equity by Design Delivering on the Power and Promise of UDL*; Corwin Press Inc.: London, UK, 2021.
11. Capp, M.Y. The effectiveness of universal design for learning: A meta-analysis of literature between 2013 and 2016. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2017**, *21*, 791–807. [CrossRef]
12. Capp, M.J. Teacher confidence to implement the principles, guidelines, and checkpoints of universal design for learning. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2018**, *24*, 706–720. [CrossRef]
13. Landin, J.; Schirmer, P. Teaching at-risk students using UDL: Cure or curse? *J. Higher Educ. Theory Pract.* **2020**, *20*, 24–29.
14. Craig, S.L.; Smith, S.J.; Frey, B. Professional development with Universal Design for Learning: Supporting teachers as learners to increase the implementation of UDL. *Prof. Dev. Educ.* **2019**, 1–16. [CrossRef]
15. Fritzgerald, A. *Antiracism and Universal Design for Learning: Building Expressways to Success*; CAST: Wakefield, MA, USA, 2021.
16. Posey, A.; Novak, K. *Unlearning: Changing Your Beliefs and Your Classroom With UDL*; CAST: Wakefield, MA, USA, 2020.
17. Edyburn, D.L. Universal Design for Learning. *Spec. Educ. Technol. Pract.* **2005**, *7*, 16–22.
18. Robinson, D.E.; Wizer, D.R. Universal Design for Learning and the Quality Matters Guidelines for the design and implementation of online learning event. *Int. J. Technol. Teach. Learn.* **2016**, *12*, 17–32.
19. Rao, K.; Ok, M.W.; Bryant, B.R. A Review of Research on Universal Design Educational Models. *Remedial Spec. Educ.* **2014**, *35*, 153–166. [CrossRef]
20. Mangiatordi, A.; Serenelli, F. Universal design for learning: A meta-analytic review of 80 abstracts from peer reviewed journals. *Res. Educ. Media* **2013**, *5*, 109–118.
21. Edyburn, D.L. Ten Years Later: Would You Recognize Universal Design for Learning If You Saw It? *Interv. Sch. Clin.* **2021**, *56*, 308–309. [CrossRef]
22. UDL-BOE Blended Learning in Schools: A Universal Design Approach. Available online: http://udl-boe.eu/project/ (accessed on 5 July 2021).
23. Katz, J.; Sokal, L. Universal Design for Learning as a bridge to inclusion: A qualitative report of student voices. *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2016**, *12*, 37–63.
24. Cooper-Martin, E.; Wolanin, N. *Evaluation of the Universal Design for Learning Projects*; Montgomery County Public Schools, Office of Accountability: Montgomery, AL, USA, 2014.
25. Sopko, K.M. Universal Design for Learning: Implementation in six local education agencies. *inForum* **2008**, 1–28.
26. García-Campos, M.-D.; Canabal, C.; Alba-Pastor, C. Executive functions in universal design for learning: Moving towards inclusive education. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2018**, *24*, 660–674. [CrossRef]
27. Alquraini, T.A.; Rao, S.M. Assessing teachers' knowledge, readiness, and needs to implement Universal Design for Learning in classrooms in Saudi Arabia. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *24*, 103–114. [CrossRef]
28. Lieberman, L.J. The need for Universal Design for Learning. *Recreation and Dance* **2017**, *88*, 5–7. [CrossRef]
29. Coyne, P.; Evans, M.; Karger, J. Use of a UDL literacy environment by middle school students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Intellect. Dev. Disability.* **2017**, *55*, 4–14. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
30. Edyburn, D.L. Would you recognise Universal Design for Learning if you saw it? Ten propositions for new directions for the second decade of UDL. *Learn. Disability. Q.* **2020**, *33*, 33–41. [CrossRef]
31. Reynor, E. Developing inclusive education in Ireland: The case for UDL in Initial Teacher Education. In *Universal Access through Inclusive Design: International Perspectives on UDL*; Gronseth, S.L., Dalton, E.M., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 258–267.
32. Smith, C.L.L.; King, L.H.; Williams, J.B.; Metcalf, D.; Rhys Myrick Potts, K. Evaluating pedagogy and practice of Universal Design for Learning in public schools. *Except. Educ. Int.* **2017**, *27*, 1–16.
33. Tzivinikou, S. Universal Design for Learning application in higher education: A Greek paradigm. *Probl. Educ. 21st Century* **2014**, *60*, 156–166.

34. Navarro, S.B.; Zeveras, P.; Gesa, R.F.; Sampson, D. Developing teachers' competencies for designing inclusive learning experiences. *Educ. Technol. Soc.* **2016**, *19*, 17–27.
35. Scott, L.; Bruno, L.; Gokita, T.; Thoma, C.A. Teacher candidates' abilities to develop universal design for learning and universal design for transition lesson plans. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, 1–15. [CrossRef]
36. Smith, S.J.; Rao, K.; Lowrey, K.A.; Gardner, J.E.; Moore, E.; Coy, K.; Marino, M.; Wojcik, B. Recommendations for a national research agenda in UDL: Outcomes from the UDL-IRN preconference on research. *J. Disability Stud.* **2019**, *30*, 174–185. [CrossRef]
37. Drudy, S.; Kinsella, W. Developing an inclusive system in a rapidly changing European society. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2009**, *13*, 647–663. [CrossRef]
38. Quellett, M. Faculty development and universal instructional design. *Equity Excell. Educ.* **2004**, *37*, 137–144.
39. Devitt, A.; Bray, A.; Banks, J.; Ní Chorcora, E. *Teaching and Learning During School Closures: Lessons Learned. Irish Second-Level Teacher Perspectives*; Trinity College Dublin: Dublin, Ireland, 2020.
40. Education, D. Key Statistics. Available online: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Data-on-Individual-Schools/primary/ (accessed on 5 July 2021).
41. Shevlin, M.; Banks, J. Inclusion at a crossroads: Dismantling Ireland's system of special education. *Educ. Sci.* **2021**, *11*, 161. [CrossRef]
42. NCSE. *Inclusive Education Framework A Guide for Schools on the Inclusion of Pupils with Special Educational Needs*; NCSE: Trim, Ireland, 2011.
43. Banks, J. A Winning Formula? Funding Inclusive Education in Ireland. In *Resourcing Inclusive Education (International Perspectives on Inclusive Education*; Goldan, J., Lambrecht, J., Loreman, T., Eds.; Emerald Publishing Limited: Bingley, UK, 2021; pp. 7–19.
44. Banks, J. Examining the Cost of Special Education. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*; Sharma, U., Ed.; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2020.
45. NCCA. *Special Educational Needs: Curriculum Issues: Discussion Paper*; NCCA: Dublin, Ireland, 1999.
46. NCCA (ND). Level 1 and Level 2 Programmes. Available online: https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/level-one-and-level-two-programmes/ (accessed on 5 July 2021).
47. NCSE. *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs A Better and More Equitable Way*; NCSE: Meath, Ireland, 2014.
48. NCCA. *Senior Cycle Review Draft Public Consultation Report*; NCCA: Dublin, Ireland, 2019.
49. NCCA. Early Childhood Aistear. Available online: https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/ (accessed on 5 July 2021).
50. DCYA. Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). Available online: https://aim.gov.ie/ (accessed on 5 July 2021).
51. NCCA. *Background Paper and Brief. for the Development of a New Primary Mathematics Curriculum*; NCCA: Dublin, Ireland, 2016.
52. Kennedy, E.; Dunphy, E.; Dwyer, B.; Hayes, G.; McPhillips, T.; Marsh, J.; O'Connor, M.; Shiel, G. *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–8 Years)*; NCCA: Dublin, Ireland, 2012.
53. NCCA. *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*; NCCA: Dublin, Ireland, 2020.

Article

Inclusive Education in Portugal: Teachers' Professional Development, Working Conditions, and Instructional Efficacy

João Lamego Lopes [1],* and Célia Regina Oliveira [2]

[1] School of Psychology, University of Minho, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal
[2] Hei-Lab: Digital Human-Environment Interaction Lab, Lusófona University of Porto, 4000-098 Porto, Portugal; celia.oliveira@ulp.pt
* Correspondence: joaols@psi.uminho.pt

Abstract: Inclusive education policies thin the boundaries of special and regular education as well as teachers' roles and competencies. The present study, using data from TALIS 2018, aims to find out whether Portuguese teachers working in classes directed entirely or mainly to special education needs students (SENS) differ from teachers working in classes with few or no SENS in the following areas: (a) professional development needs in special education; (b) perceived barriers to professional development; and (c) teaching and work features related to SENS. The results show small but significant differences between teachers working and teachers not working entirely or mainly with SENS in professional development needs, perceived opportunities for professional development, and stress involved in modifying SENS lessons. No other significant differences were found. Still, the results show that both groups of teachers perceive significant professional development needs and barriers to professional development but are optimistic about the quality of professional development, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy in instruction. However, teachers of both groups are pessimistic about professional collaboration, a key element of inclusive education. Overall, it seems that some critical elements of inclusive education are still to be implemented in Portuguese schools.

Keywords: inclusion; professional development; special education; SEN students; TALIS 20

1. Introduction

The field of special education faces significant challenges in the context of national and international educational reforms. Scholars, practitioners, administrators, and politicians have debated special education needs students' (SENS) priorities for many years. Nevertheless, there is no consensus about the best educational model(s) for SENS, and inclusion is still a controversial topic in education. It was stated in [1] that positions regarding inclusion could range from "unqualified enthusiasm for full inclusion" to "concerns about the responsibilities of general education teachers and the effects of inclusion on all students" (p. 264). A dominant perspective about inclusion (e.g., [2–5]) considers that the most critical issue is where SENS are educated. This perspective is the basis for the politics of full inclusion. Another perspective considers that instruction, not the place, is the priority for SENS [1,6–9]. Although the discussion has continued for decades, both sides' arguments are worthy of consideration.

1.1. Inclusive Education: Pros and Cons

An article published in "Educational Leadership" [4] thoroughly enunciated the main principles for the model of inclusion of SENS in regular classrooms: students are more alike than different; the development of effective educational practices for SENS will benefit all students because teachers and schools will be more prepared for any circumstances; the separation of students is costly, ineffective, and a violation of civil rights. Not least important, inclusion goes beyond integrating SENS into regular classrooms [4]. "It incorporates an end to labeling students" (p. 78). As [10] puts it, " . . . inclusive education is a franchise

127

of an education in and for democracy" (p. 910), in which "belonging" is a precondition of community and inclusion, and it is a powerful way to deal with social exclusion. Moreover, the promotion of inclusion "is a movement in a clear philosophical direction" [11] (p. 675–676), far more than a technical or organizational change. This movement involves not only classroom accommodations but also school and societal changes. The idea of educational inclusion has another necessary consequence: special education as a system distinct from general education becomes unnecessary and undesirable because it is at the margin of the normative system and reproduces educational and social exclusion [12]. Still, even proponents of inclusive education caution about the substitution of special education by inclusive education. For example, [13] asserts that many children with disabilities will not be able to participate in their environments without adequate support and resources. Simultaneously, [14] found that special education students placed in high inclusion settings get better reading and math results than special education students placed in low inclusion settings. Still, the authors assert that high expectations and limited resources create significant stress in educational contexts. This stress may be more evident for SENS. This tension is recognized by [15] when they assert that "the major obstacle to meaningful inclusion is a neoliberal educational system in which the meeting of academic performance targets and supply of demonstrations of progress have become overriding political priorities" (p. 448). That is, mandatory full inclusion faces demands for standard raising and teacher accountability.

With regard to the effectiveness of special education versus full inclusion, [16] found that special education services produce negative or statistically non-significant results on primary graders' math and reading achievement, and internalized and externalized problem behaviors. However, Ref [16,17] state that, over time, special education services may be positively, but weakly, affected by learning-related results. Moreover, the authors admit that the problem might not be special education services but an inadequate delivery of the services in many cases. Indeed, several observational studies [18–21] found significant problems in many education programs: specialized teacher shortages, variable teacher quality, limitations to individualized instruction, and scarce use of research-based practices.

Advocates of the need for a continuum of educational services, including special education, have long refuted the full inclusion proponents' arguments. For example, Ref [22] asserted that the most effective interventions for students with disabilities employ intensive, individualized instruction, combined with careful and systematic monitoring of students' progress, irrespective of the educational context. At the same time, Ref [22] contends that general education classrooms cannot provide this kind of instruction and that "Undifferentiated large-group instruction appears to be the norm in general education" (p. 81). Moreover, teachers are more likely to use easy adaptations for SENS that do not require preplanning. Still, Ref [22] indicates that in general classrooms, the average class size is larger, teacher training for SENS is limited, teachers work in a context of higher standards and expectations, and instruction is directed to average students. No less important is that "Teachers who have the greatest success at raising the academic achievement of the whole class may also have the least tolerance for students with impaired skills or with maladaptive behavior" (p. 82).

One of the main but often ignored criticisms of the full-inclusion model (FIM) is its implementation. For example, [1] have long stressed that educational models mandated at the district or government level may not get the school personnel's engagement. The authors state that inclusion is "irresponsible" when the location prevails over the academic and social progress; when teachers are mandated to participate in inclusive classrooms; when resources are not considered before the establishment of inclusive classrooms; when FIM is the only available model; when professional development is not part of the model; when a school philosophy of inclusion is not developed; and when curricula and instruction don't meet the needs of all students.

Overall, three criticisms of FIM seem particularly significant. One is the centrality (or the pre-eminence) of place over instruction. As [23] put it, "If we have learned anything

from the history of the treatment of disability, it is that place itself teaches nothing, is not a reliable predictor of instruction, and is no guarantee of instruction. 'Being there' and being exposed to instruction is not and never has been a reasonable measure of or a guarantee of instruction" (p. 31). One other criticism respects the dearth of regular teachers' preparation and professional development to deal with SENS and lack of resources [24,25]. The third main criticism has to do with the regular classroom's uniqueness as a context where SENS can be educated [26].

In several countries and communities, the practical problems of FIM paved the way for the movement of inclusive special education (ISE). As [6] states, "the focus of ISE is on effectively including as many children as possible in mainstream schools, along with the availability of a continuum of placement options from mainstream classes to special schools, and involving close collaboration between mainstream and special schools" (p. 247). According to [6], implementing effective practices from special and inclusive education, keeping a continuum of placement options, educating in the most appropriate setting, including as many children as possible in mainstream settings, and developing collaboration between mainstream and special classes or schools are the essential elements of ISE. These elements may well represent the best current compromise between the pre-eminence of "place" and the haste of "instruction."

1.2. Teachers' Professional Development and Other Needs for Working in Full-Inclusion Settings

Teachers are probably the most essential people in implementing current inclusion policies [27]. In countries that have embraced the idea of full inclusion, the dilution of special education in regular education have made every teacher responsible for SENS progress, indeed, for the progress of every student [28]. One difficulty with this model is that while the curriculum must be general for large groups of students, it must be specific and individualized for (at least some) SENS. It turns out that classroom teachers are usually trained to teach average students, not students with special needs. At a minimum, these teachers must know how to set individual goals, design instruction, and evaluate SENS. Not less important, they must also know how to do this while teaching the other students in the classroom. However, this does not seem to be done in most countries or schools [29].

For example, [30] studied the needs and perceptions of regular teachers regarding the inclusion of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) students in classrooms and its implications for the professional development of teachers. Teachers emphasized their difficulties in accommodating ASD in classrooms, encouraging the acceptance of children with ASD by peers, and collaborating with the staff. The authors stress that previous research (e.g., [31]) referred to the importance of teachers getting a basic knowledge about ASD and the definition of classroom teachers' role. "Without this basic knowledge general educators are often overwhelmed and frustrated with meeting the diverse learning needs of students in their classrooms" [31] (p. 53). Other studies found general educators lack the confidence to work with SENS because of limited qualifications and professional development (e.g., [32,33]).

Data from TALIS 2013 was used by [29] to study teachers' special education professional development needs. The study included 121,173 teachers from 38 countries. The results suggest that teachers working with SENS have lower qualifications than their colleagues, move schools more frequently, and have more professional needs. Few teachers report a positive impact of professional development on their teaching practices. The author concludes that many schools worldwide face a shortage of qualified teachers in special education and that professional development is needed in special education instructional strategies and on how to work with an increasing number of SENS in classrooms.

Another critical issue that deserves consideration in mandatory inclusive classrooms is teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. The results from the literature are not positive. For example, [27] reviewed 26 studies with primary teachers and found that most studies reported neutral or negative attitudes towards SENS inclusion in the classrooms. No study reported positive attitudes. The variables related to the attitudes were (lack

of) teacher training, type of disability (more rejection of behavioral than cognitive or hearing disorders), experience with inclusive education (more experience, less rejection), and class size (the smaller, the better). In a study with 1764 Finnish teachers, [34] found that classroom teachers hold negative attitudes and subject teachers hold very negative attitudes towards inclusion. In contrast, special education teachers hold positive attitudes. The author also found that 20% of the teachers were strong opponents of inclusion, and 8% were strong advocates. In Norway, [35] reported limited cooperation and coordination between general and special education teachers and problems with the standardization of achievement goals (unreachable by SENS) and large numbers of students in classrooms. The teachers also reported that quiet and withdrawn SENS tend to be left on their own. As [35] concludes, "The lack of cooperation and coordination between teachers contradicts the understanding that inclusion is the responsibility of all of the school's staff."

Studies conducted in the US, Greece, Thailand, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Trinidad, Hungary, Turkey, and France (e.g., [36–43]), found somewhat more favorable attitudes from teachers (still, special education teachers are always more favorable than general teachers). Still, almost always, participants refer to strong concerns about their preparation to deal with SENS and low confidence with their capacity to promote SENS education effectively. One interesting study conducted in Israel [44] reported that teachers consider that inclusion is implemented to a moderate degree in schools. However, while teachers seem to feel a "moral obligation" for inclusion, they also feel that they lack the knowledge to deal effectively with SENS.

1.3. Teacher Professional Development, Needs and Attitudes towards Inclusion: The Case of Portugal

The recent Inclusive Education Act [45], in Portugal, establishes as a priority "of the governmental action supporting/waging on an inclusive school where each and every one of the students, regardless of their personal and social situation, find answers that enable them to acquire a level of education and training which will enable them to be fully socially integrated" (p. 2918). In the context of this reform, every student must be educated in general classrooms. That is, special education is to be diluted in regular education. The model moves "away from the rationale that it is necessary to categorize to intervene." This model was found to be quite encouraging and seemingly accepted by stakeholders in terms of values by [46]. Still, [46] found an "inextricable challenge" originated by problems with the implementation of the model, perceived lack of resources, and the likelihood that "sharing scarce resources amongst a larger group of students might disadvantage those who are the most vulnerable (e.g., disabled students with complex needs)" (p. 282). This challenge might be unsolvable, but it is in no way a surprise. The literature we reviewed in the previous section shows that countries and schools worldwide face the same mismatch between will and circumstances.

There are not many quality studies about the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion in Portugal. Still, one study [47], published before Law 54/2018, found "an overall positive attitude of preschool teachers towards inclusion" (p. 8). Interestingly, more positive attitudes were found for teachers that personally knew someone with SENS. However, the attitudes were less positive when teachers had direct experience in classrooms with SENS. The authors provided no information about the motives of negative attitudes but suggested that they stem from negative classroom experiences.

Interestingly, the most important study to date about the application of law 54/2018 was conducted by a teachers' union [48], the National Federation of Education, not by university researchers. Six hundred and fifteen professionals participated in the survey (preschool to high school teachers, regular teachers, and special education teachers). Seventy-five percent of respondents referred to having difficulties or doubts about the implementation of the law. Sixty-one percent mentioned a lack of support from administration and training entities, and 60% asserted that the law is not functional but bureaucratic. Fifty-five percent were pessimistic about the law's scope, and 80% considered that the label "special education needs" from previous laws should be in place. More than half of

respondents did not understand the main concepts of the law. About 80% stressed that the text does not contemplate hours for collaborative work (this seems to be one of the most controversial law features). Ninety percent of respondents stated that the role of special education teachers is not clear in the text. Since the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) was discontinued, 77% of participants felt the need for a universal instrument to identity SENS. Almost 80% considered that partnerships to better identity/know SENS did not work.

Interviews with directors of groups of schools were also conducted by [48]. The main findings follow: seventy percent of schools do not have the human resources to implement the law; ninety percent of the schools claimed for human resources to implement the law, but they did not get any answer from the Ministry of Education or answers were not satisfactory; to effectively apply the law, schools need a specific professional training.

Taking the survey results into account, [48] suggests that the law explicitly mentions the category "special education needs" (as in previous laws), that teacher schedules include time allocated to collaborative work, that special education teachers' roles be clarified, and that the number of special education teachers must increase, not decrease.

Overall, the survey results suggest that participants do not support special education dilution in regular education or the end of categories of exceptional students. Like many international studies, the lack of human resources to implement inclusion is a primary concern for teachers and schools. Teachers' lack of qualifications to deal with SENS is another general complaint requiring further professional development. Using data from TALIS 2013, [29] found that Portugal was the country with the lowest participation of teachers in special needs professional development (17%). However, the teachers who participated refer to the high impact of professional development in their teaching practices.

Although the survey of [48] is not an academic study, it is the most important study about the implementation of law 54/2018 to date. Moreover, the results are not much different from what has been found in international studies. Like many other countries, Portugal steadily substituted special schools for SENS with mainstream and inclusion models. However, most teachers seem to agree with the latest models' principles but disagree with its implementation. This disagreement is a significant problem because educational reforms that cannot count on most teachers' accordance will hardly be successful.

2. The Present Study

The present study investigates educational inclusion in Portugal and its conditions, particularly teachers' professional development. Specifically, the study aims to know whether teachers working in classes directed entirely or mainly to SENS differ from teachers working in classes with few or no SENS in the following areas: (a) professional development needs in special education; (b) perceived barriers to professional development; and (c) teaching and work features related to SENS.

It must be noted that data from TALIS 2018 are prior to the publication of law 54/2018. However, most of the principles of the law were already underway several years ago.

3. Method

The present study used data from the teacher questionnaire of TALIS 2018 [49]. The schools for this study where participants were recruited are at the ISCED-2 level (International Standard Classification of Education). In Portugal, ISCED-2 corresponds to 7th-through 9th-grade classes.

3.1. Participants

As described in the TALIS 2018 Technical Report [50], Portuguese participants were recruited through a stratified two-stage probability sampling design. The target population was 2544 teachers from 200 schools (see Table 1). We must stress that TALIS does not inform whether participants are formal special education teachers (in terms of certification

or primary responsibility) but whether they teach in classes directed entirely or mainly to special needs students.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants.

	Teaching Class Directed Entirely or Mainly to Special Needs Students		
	Yes	No	Total
Female	86	1771	1857
Male	43	644	687
Total	129	2415	2544
Experience	22.82	22.73	

3.2. Variables and Measures

We extracted two types of variables from the TALIS 2018 database: single variables from responses to specific questions and latent continuous variables obtained from a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to a set of responses. In this last case, the latent variable is the combination of several observed variables. After computation, the factor scores were rescaled to a metric of convenience, with a standard deviation of 2.0, where the value of 10 corresponds to the mid-point of the scale in which the items were initially measured (i.e., 2.5 points). A result of 10 indicates average agreement with the items on the scale. A result above 10 indicates average agreement, and a result below 10 indicates average disagreement. The TALIS 2018 Technical Report [51] provides complete information about the scales' construction and the indices developed through CFA.

3.3. Single Measures

Teaching entirely or mainly to special needs students: this dichotomic variable is the predictor of the study's profile analysis specified in the results section.

Professional development needs: two items of this scale were used, "Approaches to individualized professional development needs learning" and "Teaching students with special needs." These items are measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "No need at present" to "High level of need."

Barriers to professional development: "There is a lack of employer support," "There is no relevant professional development offered," and "There are no incentives for participating in professional development." These variables are measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree."

Work stress accommodating students with special needs: this variable is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "Not at all" to "A lot." For this study, the variable was dichotomized as "yes/no."

Supporting students with special needs: this variable is measured on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "Of low importance" to "Of high importance" to the question "Thinking about education as a whole if the budget were to be increased by 5%, how would you rate the importance of the following spending priorities?"

3.4. Latent Continuous Variables

Effective professional development: this variable results from the combination of four indicators ("It built on my prior knowledge," "It adapted to my personal development needs," "It had a coherent structure," "It appropriately focused on content needed to teach my subjects") (Ω coefficient = 0.448).

Job satisfaction with the work environment: this variable results from the combination of four indicators ("I would like to change to another school if that were possible," "I enjoy working at this school," "I would recommend this school as a good place to work," "All in all, I am satisfied with my job") (Ω coefficient = 0.843).

Self-efficacy in instruction: this variable results from the combination of four indicators ("Craft good questions for students," "Use a variety of assessment strategies," "Provide an alternative explanation, for example, when students are confused," "Vary instructional strategies in my classroom") (Ω coefficient = 0.717).

Professional collaboration in lessons among teachers: this variable results from the combination of four indicators ("Teach jointly as a team in the same class," "Provide feedback to other teachers about their practice," "Engage in joint activities across different classes and age groups," "Engage in joint activities across different classes and age groups") (Ω coefficient = 0.587).

4. Results

Table 2 shows the results of teachers working and teachers not working mainly with SENS.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of teachers' answers in TALIS 2018.

	Type of Class							
Latent variables	**Entirely or Mainly SENS (N = 129)**				**Mainly Regular Students (N = 2415)**			
	Mean Rank	**Median**			**Mean Rank**	**Median**		
Professional development needs								
individualized learning	1521,57	3			1787.46	3		
teaching SENS	1583.67	3			1788.96	3		
Barriers professional development								
lack of employer support	1717.13	3			1774.31	3		
no relevant professional devel.	1905.42	3			1765.94	3		
no incentives for participating	1729.62	3			1777.27	3		
Work stress modifying lessons for SENS	2010.85	3			1764.31	3		
Financial support SENS	1837.79	3			1774.28	3		
	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD	Min	Max
Professional collaboration	9.47	1.80	6.61	14.83	9.10	1.70	6.61	15.90
Effective professional development	14.67	2.00	8.17	15.82	14.66	1.84	8.18	15.82
Job satisfaction (present work)	12.14	2.20	5.19	15.11	12.02	2.04	4.46	15.12
Self-efficacy in instruction	12.83	1.29	6.77	13.94	12.67	1.28	7.27	13.88

The medians of the answers (*mdn* = 3) show that both groups of teachers perceive significant professional development needs, barriers to professional development, and work stress modifying lessons for SENS, and agree with the increase in budget to finance SENS. Still, Wilcoxon rank-sum tests show that teachers working in classes mainly with regular students think they need (a) more training in individualized learning strategies (*mean rank* = 1787.46) than teachers working in classes entirely or mainly directed to SENS (*mean rank* = 1521.57), W_s = 313,442.50, z = −3.98, r = 0.07; and (b) more training teaching SENS (*mean rank* = 1788.96) than teachers working in classes entirely or mainly directed to SENS (*mean rank* = 1583.67), W_s = 327,820.50, z = −3.11, r = 0.05. Still, these teachers perceive (c) less relevant opportunities for professional development (*mean rank* = 1765.94) than teachers working in classes entirely or mainly directed to SENS (*mean rank* = 1905.42), W_s = 5,901,767.5, z = −2.05, r = 0.001; and (d) less stress modifying lessons for SENS (*mean rank* = 1764.31) than teachers working in classes entirely or mainly directed to SENS (*mean rank* = 2010.85), W_s = 5,901,602.50, z = −3.68, r = 0.06. No significant between-group differences were found for lack of employer support for professional development, incentives for participation in professional development, and importance of spending priorities supporting SENS.

Profile analysis was conducted to explore further whether there are differences between teachers working and teachers not working mainly with SENS in four latent variables of the TALIS survey: professional collaboration, effective professional development, job satisfaction with the work environment, and self-efficacy with instruction. Before present-

ing the profile analysis results, it must be noted that teachers from both groups are highly optimistic about effective professional development (a result above the mid-point 10 indicates a positive perspective about the content of the item, and a result below 10 indicates a negative perspective). This result suggests that although professional development offers are scarce, participants appreciate the opportunities. Teachers also seem satisfied with their work and confident about their teaching efficacy. Once again, these perceptions are surprising in the absence of relevant professional development. Most important, both groups of teachers are somewhat negative about professional collaboration, which is a crucial factor for the success of inclusion policies.

A repeated measure ANOVA, with one within-subject factor (i.e., response to four items) and one between-subjects factor (i.e., teach/not teach entirely or mainly NSE), was conducted to examine the responses on the four survey items. All items were rated on a 1 to 4 scale. The means and standard deviations across groups of teachers for the items are reported in Table 3.

The test of parallelism (see Figure 1) indicates that parallelism is tenable (Z (3, 7626) = 2.034, $p = 0.107$). The profiles can be considered coincident (i.e., the same) (Z (1, 2542) = 1.520, $p = 0.218$). This result suggests that differences in teachers' groups on the four items can be considered due to sampling error. The test of equal means across the four survey items indicates a difference between the means (Z (3, 7626) = 782.167, $p < 0.001$). Figure 1 graphs the results of the profile analysis.
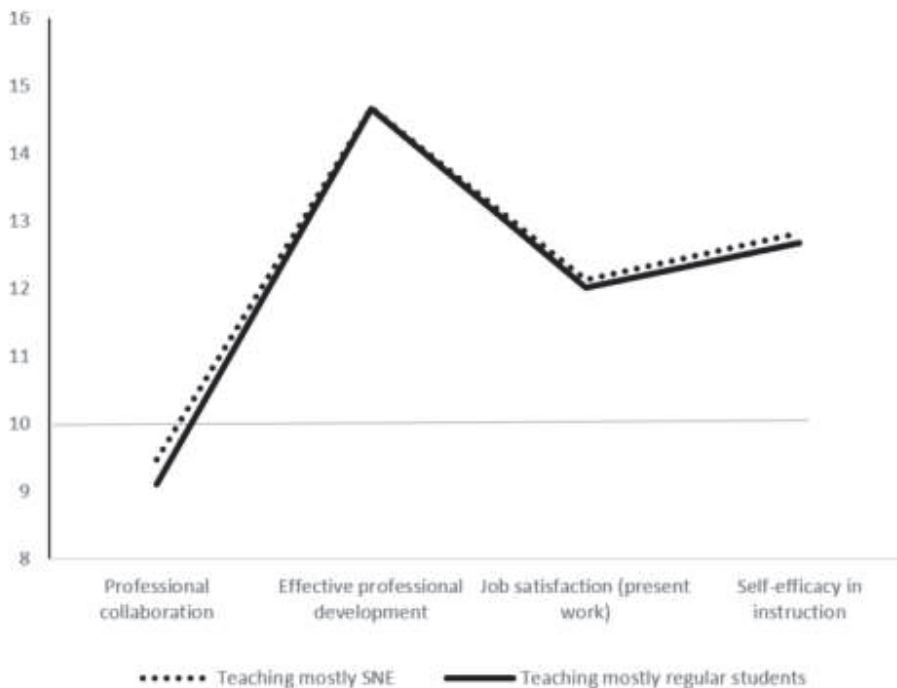

Figure 1. Profiles of teachers working primarily with SENS and teachers working mostly with regular students.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for profile analysis.

Latent variables	Teaching Entirely or Mainly to Special Needs Students	Mean	Std. Deviation
Professional	Yes	9.64	1.80
collaboration	No	9.31	1.69
Effective professional	Yes	14.47	2.18
development	No	14.66	1.85
Job satisfaction	Yes	12.20	2.19
	No	12.04	2.05
Self-efficacy in	Yes	12.82	1.30
instruction	No	12.68	1.28

5. Discussion

The main goal of our study was to know whether teachers working in classes directed entirely or mainly to SENS differ from teachers working in classes with few SENS in the following areas: (a) professional development needs in special education; (b) perceived barriers to professional development; and (c) teaching and work features related to SENS. It must be noted that classrooms entirely or mainly dedicated to SENS are to be discontinued in the context of law 54/2018. However, when data for TALIS 2018 were collected, some of those classrooms were still functioning, and some still are. In addition, in the context of law 54/2018, the frontier between special education teachers and regular teachers vanished. Every teacher is expected to work with exceptional students. Therefore, our study's data were collected when there were recognizable differences between special education and regular education teachers. A short time later, schools moved into a system where many teachers seemingly do not fully understand special education teachers' roles [48].

5.1. Teachers' Professional Development to Work with SENS

A critical feature of teaching is whether teachers receive adequate training. This feature becomes even more relevant in a full-inclusion system because most Portuguese teachers do not receive training to work with exceptional students while keeping the lesson's pace for the whole classroom. However, special educators can experience even more difficulties because while they might have adequate training to deal with SENS, they have less time working with crowded classes, where behavior management and curricular demands are challenging [51–53].

The Wilcoxon rank-sum tests show that teachers working mainly with SENS feel significantly less need to receive further training in individualized learning and teaching SENS, which is not surprising. However, both groups' median is 3, indicating that both groups feel only a "moderate level of need" [49]. This result contrasts, in some way, with studies that found, for instance, Portuguese teachers' high need for training in strategies to deal with classroom discipline [52]. Most likely, teachers feel that disruptive students are more threatening to the classroom lesson than SENS. Still, it is of concern that teachers do not feel much need for training in teaching SENS. Without further and specific teacher training, SENS might not receive adequate instruction.

The demands of inclusion are significant and add to the high demands of teachers' accountability for students' achievement [54–56]. These demands might generate high levels of stress and burnout and the inability to cope with classroom challenges [57–59]. About 70% of school directors interviewed in the study of [48] confirm that the schools do not have the human resources to implement the law 54/2018, and do not expect to receive them. The tension between curriculum fulfillment and inclusive education is highlighted by [46]: " . . . the imprecision regarding the processes of implementing inclusive education may in fact compromise educational success in some schools with lower commitment to the success of all pupils" (p. 284). Our study results suggest that teachers are not committed enough to professional development in teaching SEN, perhaps because they reason that the level of demands is too high and that choices must be made.

5.2. Barriers to Professional Development

Both teachers working and not working mainly with SENS agree that there are no relevant professional development opportunities. However, teachers that work mainly with regular students complain significantly more about the lack of opportunities. School directors interviewed in [48] also referred to a lack of opportunities for teachers' professional development in SENS. This finding is of significant concern because without adequate resources (including teachers' professional development), inclusion risks being a kind of placement with poor instruction.

It is asserted by [60] that inclusion demands can affect teachers' health and wellbeing. However, the authors are not optimistic about external resources, namely professional development being provided. According to [60], special education teachers and teachers with less exposure to inclusion-related activities assess their resources significantly more positively than general education teachers or teachers with more exposure to inclusion-related activities. Without adequate and readily available professional development, the perception of resources will hardly be positive. Most important, negative perceptions of resources are related to more negative attitudes towards inclusion [61–63].

The availability of professional development for teachers and the funding of inclusion policies have been debated, mainly in the recent years, when full inclusion policies were more clearly adopted. As stated by [64], "financing is now a vital component of inclusion, with research suggesting that if a country advocates inclusion, then legislation and especially financial regulations have to be adapted to this goal" (p. 926). This financing must include continuous professional development. Some (e.g., [65]) have estimated that special education is twice the cost of general education. According to [64], many countries have begun to re-examine their "funding formula" to accommodate the ever-changing landscape of needs in the area of SEN.

It is not clear how Portugal is dealing with this formula, but the [48] survey results suggest that the budget for professional development and other resources for inclusion to succeed are far from granted. Still, it must be noted that Portuguese participants in TALIS 2018 consider that the financial support to SENS should increase.

5.3. Teaching and Work Features Related to SENS

The results show no significant differences between teachers who work and teachers who do not work entirely or mainly with SENS in professional collaboration, effective professional development, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy in instruction. Still, it is interesting to stress that both teachers' groups are pretty optimistic about the professional development they receive. We may conclude that Portuguese teachers perceive moderate professional development needs and little supply of relevant specialized training, but they value the professional development training they have received. Interestingly, both groups of teachers seem confident in their ability to teach and are satisfied with their jobs. This finding is relevant because teaching self-efficacy and job satisfaction have been associated with better student outcomes [36,57,66–70].

One of our study's most relevant findings is that teachers from both groups perceive professional collaboration negatively. This finding is of much concern since professional collaboration is a crucial component of inclusion policies. For example, [71] stresses that, before 2018, special education teachers tended to work with small groups of students identified as SENS outside the classroom. "Conversely, the current expectation is for special education teachers to work as resources for the school, collaborating and supporting mainstream teachers in their role of responding to all students" (p. 869). In the same vein, documents from the Ministry of Education " . . . encourage schools and teachers to work collaboratively and in an interdisciplinary way, rethinking practices based on principles of curricular flexibility and school autonomy, to develop appropriate responses for all students".

The results from TALIS 2018 and the results from the [48] survey suggest that collaboration is not progressing in Portugal despite law 54/2018 determining that "The special

education teacher, within the scope of their specialty, supports, in a collaborative and co-responsibility way, the other teachers … " (p. 2922). A study conducted in Portugal [72] found that teachers perceive difficulties in collaborative work, and consider these difficulties to come more from organizational and structural features (e.g., time and work conditions) than from teachers' predisposition to work together. It was stated by [72] that the results support the contention that effective leadership "is central to enhance teacher motivation and job satisfaction and, therefore, authentic and productive collaborative work" (p. 103).

Literature about professional collaboration clearly states that collaboration between special education and regular teachers is vital to implementing inclusive education. However, the literature is also clear that this goal is far from being accomplished in many countries [73–78]. Additionally, [79] found that even Response to Intervention (RTI) models did not serve to improve cooperation between special and general education teachers until the referral stage. As the author put it, "Special education instructors did not have a formal space at the 'RTI table' prior to referral meetings, as evidenced by their absence from RTI PDs and intervention sessions. This meant that teachers missed multiple opportunities to expand their knowledge of both fields to refine their approaches to intervention and referral, despite teachers' desire to collaborate." (p. 16).

It was stressed by [25] that inclusion policies demand that regular teachers teach all students since they are taught in regular classrooms. Theoretically, this would imply the collaboration of regular and special educators. However, the authors state, this will only be possible if the number of special educators is somehow multiplied. Moreover, even with collaboration, regular teachers must assume most if not all responsibility for every student, which implies "general knowledge of great breadth" (p. 208), not specialization. As [25] claims, "Expecting competent regular education teachers to meet the needs of all students effectively is akin to expecting competent general practitioners to meet all the medical needs of their patients" (p. 208). Therefore, the authors raise serious doubts about the success of teachers' collaboration (at least in the current conditions) and the possibility of the regular teacher performing the dual role of special and general educator.

6. Limitations of the Study and Future Avenues

Our study had two main limitations. The first limitation is that TALIS 2018 does not entirely reflect the implementation of the full-inclusion model in Portuguese schools because the main survey data collection took place between March to May 2018, just before the publication of law 54/2018. It reflects most of the elements of that reform, however. The second limitation is that TALIS does not record whether participants are formal or regular special education teachers. It only provides information about who mainly works with SENS.

Future research should focus on the systematic collection of data about the implementation of the full inclusion model. There are almost no academic studies about critical issues such as the professional development of educators, teachers' and principals' perceptions about the feasibility of the model, or the availability of resources. With no such data, the full inclusion model will hardly be scrutinized or subject to changes and improvements.

7. Conclusions

Like other studies conducted in Portugal, the present study suggests that initial and in-service teacher training in SENS issues is scarce and not readily available. Perhaps the trend to dismiss special education limits and discourages the supply of specialized training. This trend is disturbing because in a full-inclusion model, much more, not less, specialized training is necessary. It is hardly conceivable that general teachers can effectively deal with the diversity of SENS when they perceive inadequate training and significant barriers to professional development.

The current blurring of roles between special education teachers and regular teachers is also a reason for concern. The statement that "every teacher is responsible for every child"

does not adequately fit the need for shared responsibility in most SENS cases. Portugal's most significant problems with the full-inclusion model seem to be, precisely, low levels of teacher collaboration and the blurring of responsibilities. TALIS results and other studies e.g., [48,70] show that Portuguese teachers claim for scheduled time to increase teamwork, but they exhibit difficulties in collaborating productively and sharing responsibilities even if time is available.

There are no obvious or straightforward solutions to the problems of special education in Portugal. Perhaps some or most of these problems are not workable in the framework of a full-inclusion model. Conceivably, inclusive special education would better deal with the challenges of including all exceptional students in regular classrooms. This model proposes a continuum of services for children and a more precise definition of special and regular educators' roles and functions, likely favoring teachers' shared responsibility for student outcomes.

Overall, it seems that some critical elements of inclusive education are to be implemented in Portuguese schools. These elements imply a massive increase in the budget for education (in Portugal and elsewhere) that does not seem within reach of most countries and educational systems. The problem is that without such an increase, the goal of placement might be accomplished, but instruction is at risk.

References

1. Vaughn, S.; Schumm, J.S. Responsible Inclusion for Students with Learning Disabilities. *J. Learn. Disabil.* **1995**, *28*, 264–270. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
2. Agran, M.; Jackson, L.; Kurth, J.A.; Ryndak, D.; Burnette, K.; Jameson, M.; Zagona, A.; Fitzpatrick, H.; Wehmeyer, M. Why Aren't Students with Severe Disabilities Being Placed in General Education Classrooms: Examining the Relations Among Classroom Placement, Learner Outcomes, and Other Factors. *Res. Pract. Pers. Sev. Disabil.* **2019**, *45*, 4–13. [CrossRef]
3. Kefallinou, A.; Symeonidou, S.; Meijer, C.J.W. Understanding the value of inclusive education and its implementation: A review of the literature. *Prospects* **2020**, *49*, 135–152. [CrossRef]
4. Lipsky, D.K.; Gartner, A. Taking inclusion into the future. *Educ Leadersh.* **1998**, *56*, 78–81.
5. Stainback, S.; Stainback, W.; East, K.; Sapon-Shevin, M. A Commentary on Inclusion and the Development of a Positive Self-Identity by People with Disabilities. *Except. Child.* **1994**, *60*, 486–490. [CrossRef]
6. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spéc. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]
7. Hyatt, C.; Hornby, G. Will UN Article 24 lead to the demise of special education or to its re-affirmation? *Support Learn.* **2017**, *32*, 288–304. [CrossRef]
8. Kauffman, J.M.; Ahrbeck, B.; Anastasiou, D.; Badar, J.; Felder, M.; Hallenbeck, B.A. Special Education Policy Prospects: Lessons from Social Policies Past. *Exceptionality* **2020**, 1–13. [CrossRef]
9. Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Kauffman, J. On Cultural Politics in Special Education: Is Much of It Justifiable? *J. Disabil. Policy Stud.* **2019**, *30*, 78–90. [CrossRef]
10. Slee, R. Belonging in an age of exclusion. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 909–922. [CrossRef]
11. Ainscow, M.; Slee, R.; Best, M. Editorial: The Salamanca Statement: 25 years on. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 671–676. [CrossRef]
12. Youdell, D. *Impossible Bodies, Impossible Selves: Exclusion and Student Subjectivities*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2006.
13. Florian, L. On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 691–704. [CrossRef]
14. Cole, S.M.; Murphy, H.R.; Frisby, M.B.; Grossi, T.A.; Bolte, H.R. The Relationship of Special Education Placement and Student Academic Outcomes. *J. Spéc. Educ.* **2021**, *54*, 217–227. [CrossRef]
15. Done, E.J.; Andrews, M.J. How inclusion became exclusion: Policy, teachers and inclusive education. *J. Educ. Policy* **2019**, *35*, 447–464. [CrossRef]

16. Morgan, P.L.; Frisco, M.L.; Farkas, G.; Hibel, J. A Propensity Score Matching Analysis of the Effects of Special Education Services. *J. Spéc. Educ.* **2010**, *43*, 236–254. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
17. Morgan, P.L.; Frisco, M.L.; Farkas, G.; Hibel, J. Republication of "A Propensity Score Matching Analysis of the Effects of Special Education Services". *J. Spéc. Educ.* **2017**, *50*, 197–214. [CrossRef]
18. Harry, B.; Klingner, J.K. *Why Are So Many Minority Students in Special Education? Understanding Race and Disability in Schools*; Teachers College Press: New York, NY, USA, 2006.
19. Lane, K.L.; Wehby, J.H.; Little, M.A.; Cooley, C. Students Educated in Self-Contained Classrooms and Self-Contained Schools: Part II—How Do They Progress over Time? *Behav. Disord.* **2005**, *30*, 363–374. [CrossRef]
20. Mason-Williams, L.; Bettini, E.; Peyton, D.; Harvey, A.; Rosenberg, M.; Sindelar, P.T. Rethinking Shortages in Special Education: Making Good on the Promise of an Equal Opportunity for Students with Disabilities. *Teach. Educ. Spéc. Educ.* **2020**, *43*, 45–62. [CrossRef]
21. Peyton, D.J.; Acosta, K.; Harvey, A.; Pua, D.J.; Sindelar, P.T.; Mason-Williams, L.; Dewey, J.; Fisher, T.L.; Crews, E. Special Education Teacher Shortage: Differences Between High and Low Shortage States. *Teach. Educ. Spéc. Educ.* **2021**, *44*, 5–23. [CrossRef]
22. Hocutt, A.M. Effectiveness of Special Education: Is Placement the Critical Factor? *Futur. Child.* **1996**, *6*, 77. [CrossRef]
23. Kauffman, J.M.; Travers, J.C.; Badar, J. Why Some Students with Severe Disabilities Are Not Placed in General Education. *Res. Pract. Pers. Sev. Disabil.* **2019**, *45*, 28–33. [CrossRef]
24. Alnasser, Y.A. The perspectives of Colorado general and special education teachers on the barriers to co-teaching in the inclusive elementary school classroom. *Education* **2020**, *3–13*, 1–14. [CrossRef]
25. Mock, D.R.; Kauffman, J.M. Preparing teachers for full inclusion: Is it possible? *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2002**, *37*, 202–215. [CrossRef]
26. Kauffman, J.M.; Landrum, T.J.; Mock, D.R.; Sayeski, B.; Sayesk, K.L. Diverse Knowledge and Skills Require a Diversity of Instructional Groups. *Remedial Spéc. Educ.* **2005**, *26*, 2–6. [CrossRef]
27. De Boer, A.; Pijl, S.J.; Minnaert, A. Regular primary schoolteachers' attitudes towards inclusive education: A review of the literature. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2011**, *15*, 331–353. [CrossRef]
28. Maag, J.W.; Kauffman, J.; Simpson, R.L. The Amalgamation of Special Education? On Practices and Policies that may Render it Unrecognizable. *Exceptionality* **2019**, *27*, 185–200. [CrossRef]
29. Cooc, N. Who Needs Special Education Professional Development? *OECD Educ. Work. Pap.* **2018**. [CrossRef]
30. Able, H.; Sreckovic, M.A.; Schultz, T.R.; Garwood, J.D.; Sherman, J. Views from the Trenches. *Teach. Educ. Spéc.* **2015**, *38*, 44–57. [CrossRef]
31. Allday, R.A.; Neilsen-Gatti, S.; Hudson, T.M. Preparation for Inclusion in Teacher Education Pre-Service Curricula. *Teach. Educ. Spéc.* **2013**, *36*, 298–311. [CrossRef]
32. McCray, E.D.; McHatton, P.A. Less afraid to have them in my classroom: Understanding pre-service general educators' perceptions about inclusion. *Teach. Educ. Q.* **2011**, *38*, 135–155.
33. Slowik, J.; Peskova, M.; Shatunova, O.V.; Bartus, E.V. The competences of young teachers in education of pupils with special educational needs. *Educ. Sci. J.* **2020**, *22*, 139–160. [CrossRef]
34. Saloviita, T. Attitudes of Teachers Towards Inclusive Education in Finland. *Scand. J. Educ. Res.* **2018**, *64*, 270–282. [CrossRef]
35. Nilsen, S. Inside but still on the outside? Teachers' experiences with the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in general education. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *24*, 980–996. [CrossRef]
36. Alnahdi, G. Are We Ready for Inclusion? Teachers' Perceived Self-Efficacy for Inclusive Education in Saudi Arabia. *Int. J. Disabil. Dev. Educ.* **2019**, *67*, 182–193. [CrossRef]
37. Biscevic, I.; Zecic, S.; Mujkanovic, E.; Mujkanovic, E.; Memisevic, H. Obstacles to Inclusion—Perceptions of Teachers from Bosnia And Herzegovina. *Spec. Ugdym.* **2017**, *36*, 49–76. [CrossRef]
38. Böddi, Z.; Serfozo, M.; Lassú, Z.F.; Kerekes, V. Integration-related experience and preparedness from the aspect of Hungarian preschool teacher candidates. *Int. J. Early Child. Spec. Educ.* **2019**, *11*, 80–89. [CrossRef]
39. Desombre, C.; Lamotte, M.; Jury, M. French teachers' general attitude toward inclusion: The indirect effect of teacher efficacy. *Educ. Psychol.* **2018**, *39*, 38–50. [CrossRef]
40. Gezer, M.S.; Aksoy, V. Perceptions of Turkish Preschool Teachers about Their Roles within the Context of Inclusive Education. *Int. J. Early Child. Spéc. Educ.* **2019**, *11*, 31–42. [CrossRef]
41. Klibthong, S.; Agbenyega, J.S. Assessing issues of inclusive education from the perspec-tives of Thai early childhood teachers. *Int. J. Early Child. Spec. Educ.* **2020**, 1–16. [CrossRef]
42. Parey, B. Understanding teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with disabilities in inclusive schools using mixed methods: The case of Trinidad. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2019**, *83*, 199–211. [CrossRef]
43. Yu, S.; Park, H. Early Childhood Preservice Teachers' Attitude Development Toward the Inclusion of Children with Disabilities. *Early Child. Educ. J.* **2020**, *48*, 497–506. [CrossRef]
44. Gavish, B. The Implementation of School Inclusion Practices for Students with Special Needs in Israel: Teachers' Perceptions. *Int. J. Disabil. Dev. Educ.* **2017**, *64*, 544–560. [CrossRef]
45. Ministério da Educação. *Decreto-Lei 54/2018*; Ministério da Educação: Lisboa, Portugal, 2018.
46. Alves, I.; Pinto, P.C.; Pinto, T.J. Developing inclusive education in Portugal: Evidence and challenges. *Prospects* **2020**, *49*, 281–296. [CrossRef]

47. Dias, P.C.; Cadime, I. Effects of personal and professional factors on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in preschool. *Eur. J. Spéc. Needs Educ.* **2015**, *31*, 111–123. [CrossRef]
48. FNE. *Consulta Nacional Educação Inclusiva 2019*; Federação Nacional da Educação: Porto, Portugal, 2019.
49. OECD. *Talis 2018 Results (Volume I)—Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*; OECD: Paris, France, 2019.
50. OECD. *TALIS 2018 Technical Report*; OECD: Paris, France, 2019.
51. Landrum, T.J.; Lingo, A.S.; Scott, T.M. Classroom misbehavior is predictable and preventable. *Phi Delta Kappan* **2011**, *93*, 30–34. [CrossRef]
52. Lopes, J.; Oliveira, C. Classroom discipline: Theory and practice. In *Classrooms: Academic Content and Behavior Strategy Instruction for Students with and without Disabilities*; Bakken, J.P., Ed.; Nova Science Publishers: Hauppauge, NY, USA, 2017; Volume 2, pp. 231–253.
53. Sun, R.C. Teachers' experiences of effective strategies for managing classroom misbehavior in Hong Kong. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2015**, *46*, 94–103. [CrossRef]
54. Lee, J.; Kang, C. A litmus test of school accountability policy effects in Korea: Cross-validating high-stakes test results for academic excellence and equity. *Asia Pac. J. Educ.* **2019**, *39*, 517–531. [CrossRef]
55. Paletta, A. How do school leaders respond to the growing intrusiveness of accountability policies? Evidence from Italy. *J. Educ. Adm. Hist.* **2019**, *51*, 381–401. [CrossRef]
56. Tolo, A.; Lillejord, S.; Petour, M.T.F.; Hopfenbeck, T.N. Intelligent accountability in schools: A study of how school leaders work with the implementation of assessment for learning. *J. Educ. Chang.* **2020**, *21*, 59–82. [CrossRef]
57. Robinson, O.P.; Bridges, S.A.; Rollins, L.H.; Schumacker, R.E. A study of the relation between special education burnout and job satisfaction. *J. Res. Spéc. Educ. Needs* **2019**, *19*, 295–303. [CrossRef]
58. Ryan, S.V.; von der Embse, N.P.; Pendergast, L.L.; Saeki, E.; Segool, N.; Schwing, S. Leaving the teaching profession: The role of teacher stress and educational accountability policies on turnover intent. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2017**, *66*, 1–11. [CrossRef]
59. Von Der Embse, N.P.; Schoemann, A.M.; Kilgus, S.P.; Wicoff, M.; Bowler, M. The influence of test-based accountability policies on teacher stress and instructional practices: A moderated mediation model. *Educ. Psychol.* **2016**, *37*, 312–331. [CrossRef]
60. Peperkorn, M.; Müller, K.; Mertz, K.; Paulus, P. Dealing with inclusion—Teachers' assessment of internal and external resources. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, 1–17. [CrossRef]
61. Avramidis, E.; Norwich, B. Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *Eur. J. Spéc. Needs Educ.* **2002**, *17*, 129–147. [CrossRef]
62. Goldan, J.; Schwab, S. Measuring students' and teachers' perceptions of resources in inclusive education—validation of a newly developed instrument. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2018**, *24*, 1–14. [CrossRef]
63. Paseka, A.; Schwab, S. Parents' attitudes towards inclusive education and their perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and resources. *Eur. J. Spéc. Needs Educ.* **2020**, *35*, 254–272. [CrossRef]
64. Banks, J.; Frawley, D.; McCoy, S. Achieving inclusion? Effective resourcing of students with special educational needs. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2015**, *19*, 1–18. [CrossRef]
65. Parrish, T.B.; Harr, J. Fiscal policy and funding for special education. In *Handbook of Special Education*; Kauffman, J.M., Hallahan, D.P., Eds.; Routledge: London, UK, 2011; pp. 363–377.
66. Anglim, J.; Prendeville, P.; Kinsella, W. The self-efficacy of primary teachers in supporting the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Educ. Psychol. Pract.* **2017**, *34*, 73–88. [CrossRef]
67. Emmers, E.; Baeyens, D.; Petry, K. Attitudes and self-efficacy of teachers towards inclusion in higher education. *Eur. J. Spéc. Needs Educ.* **2019**, *35*, 139–153. [CrossRef]
68. Gil-Flores, J. Características personales y de los centros educativos en la explicación de la satisfacción laboral del profesorado. *Rev. Psicodidáctica* **2017**, *22*, 16–22. [CrossRef]
69. Lopes, J.; Oliveira, C. Teacher and school determinants of teacher job satisfaction: A multilevel analysis. *Sch. Eff. Sch. Improv.* **2020**, *31*, 641–659. [CrossRef]
70. Stagg, S.D.; Eaton, E.; Sjoblom, A.M. Self-efficacy in undergraduate students with dyslexia: A mixed methods investigation. *Br. J. Spéc. Educ.* **2018**, *45*, 26–42. [CrossRef]
71. Alves, I. International inspiration and national aspirations: Inclusive education in Portugal. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 862–875. [CrossRef]
72. Forte, A.M.; Flores, M.A. Teacher collaboration and professional development in the workplace: A study of Portuguese teachers. *Eur. J. Teach. Educ.* **2013**, *37*, 91–105. [CrossRef]
73. Al-Natour, M.; Amr, M.; Al-Zboon, E.; Alkhamra, H. Examining collaboration and con-strains on collaboration between special and general education teachers in mainstream schools in Jordan. *Int. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *30*, 64–77.
74. Da Fonte, M.A.; Barton-Arwood, S.M. Collaboration of General and Special Education Teachers: Perspectives and Strategies. *Interv. Sch. Clin.* **2017**, *53*, 99–106. [CrossRef]
75. Keller, C.; Al-Hendawi, M.; Abuelhassan, H. Special Education Teacher Preparation in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries. *Teach. Educ. Spéc. Educ.* **2016**, *39*, 194–208. [CrossRef]
76. Khairuddin, K.F.; Dally, K.; Foggett, J. Collaboration Between General and Special Education Teachers in Malaysia. *J. Res. Spéc. Educ. Needs* **2016**, *16*, 909–913. [CrossRef]

77. Azmah, A.L.M.; Azlinda, W.M.W.; Azrani, A.M. Collaboration Among Teachers in Inclusive Special Education Program Classrooms. *Adv. Sci. Lett.* **2017**, *23*, 8316–8321. [CrossRef]
78. Pugach, M.C.; Blanton, L.P.; Boveda, M. Working together: Research on the preparation of general education and special education teachers for inclusion and collaboration. In *Handbook of Research on Special Education Teacher Preparation*; Taylor and Francis: Oxford, UK, 2014; pp. 143–160. [CrossRef]
79. Gomez-Najarro, J. An Empty Seat at the Table: Examining General and Special Education Teacher Collaboration in Response to Intervention. *Teach. Educ. Spéc. Educ.* **2019**, *43*, 109–126. [CrossRef]

Article

Designing and Implementing an In-Service Training Course for School Teams on Inclusive Education: Reflections from Participants

Tiina Kivirand [1,*], Äli Leijen [1], Liina Lepp [1] and Tiiu Tammemäe [2]

[1]   Institute of Education, University of Tartu, 50103 Tartu, Estonia; ali.leijen@ut.ee (Ä.L.); liina.lepp@ut.ee (L.L.)
[2]   School of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia; tiiumm@tlu.ee
[*]   Correspondence: tiina.kivirand@ut.ee

Abstract: Significant and effective implementation of inclusive education (IE) has been a major challenge in many countries during the last decades. Although teachers' knowledge and skills are considered a key factor for successful inclusive practice, the whole school staff commitment and contribution to implementing IE policies are equally important. Collaboration between different professionals such as teachers, school leaders, and support specialists is crucial. This study aimed to design and implement an in-service training course for school teams (teachers, support specialists, school leaders) on IE in the Estonian context and to explore how participants experienced learning as a team in this course. The results of this study showed that the main aspects of the in-service training for school teams valued by participants were: (1) All topics covered in a systematic and coherent way gave a good opportunity to focus on relevant issues, which should be considered in the schools' self-development activities in the field of IE; (2) practical approach to training structure helped to identify priority areas that need to be developed in particular schools; (3) learning from each other both within their own school team and across school teams contributed to finding the best solutions for meaningful implementation of IE. The implication of these findings is further discussed in the paper.

Keywords: inclusive education; in-service training; school teams; learning experience

1. Introduction

While the idea of inclusive education (IE) has been accepted in most countries, problems are still encountered with its meaningful implementation [1–3]. Although a number of guidelines have been developed for the implementation of IE at the international level [4–7], barriers to the implementation of IE have not been overcome in a diverse context. The academic and social inclusion of all learners is hampered by a number of factors, particularly the lack of common perceptions and vision of IE [8–10]. Additional barriers are related to attitudes towards teaching all children in an inclusive classroom, lack of IE policy at the school level, limited resources, insufficient professional development programs for staff, and limited engagement with key stakeholders [11,12].

Planning and enhancing teachers' pre-service and in-service education programs has become one of the key policy priorities working towards the vision of IE and providing high-quality education for all learners [13,14]. Reviews of international studies have shown that the majority of in-service teacher training courses have been of short-term duration and have focused on specific types of special educational needs (SEN) and differentiated teaching [15,16]. Simultaneously, a whole school approach to increase capacities within schools through school level self-improvement and learning activities that promote removing barriers in everyday inclusive practice has been considered equally important by several researchers [1,17,18]. Studies have also shown that teachers who are dissatisfied with the insufficiency of efforts to implement inclusive teaching in their schools often acknowledge

143

the inadequacy or total lack of collaborative teamwork at the school level [19,20]. More specifically, the development of teachers' agency related to the promotion of IE depends on cooperation at the school level [21]. Collaborative teamwork, in turn, contributes to the development of collective agency, which is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of IE at the school level [22].

Previous studies [23] have found that a whole school training approach is useful in eliminating the view that implementation of IE practices is the responsibility of only those teachers who have been trained for this. Instead, shared responsibility and collaboration among all staff members is important for successful inclusion. Several studies have highlighted that teachers, support specialists, and school leaders are the most important staff members to achieve the goals of IE [24–26]. The need for more collaborative teamwork and in-service training for school teams was also confirmed by a recent study conducted in Estonia [10], which forms the context of the current study.

Finally, McMaster [27] has recognized that successful and sustainable in-service professional development for promoting IE will only progress when all school staff and community stakeholders share the same vision and work collaboratively. Despite this recognition, there is little research on the effect of a long-term in-service training course on IE that targets diverse staff members at school. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to design and implement a long-term in-service training course for school teams (teachers, support specialists, school leaders) on IE and to explore how participants experienced learning in this course as a school team. More specifically, we were interested in what was valued in the training course and what suggestions were made by the participants for the development of the training course.

1.1. Whole School Approach to School Improvement

Schuelka and Engsig [3] have discussed that inclusive education is a complex multi-layered socio-cultural process within the educational system and propose analyzing and framing inclusion as a non-isolated subset of the educational system and not as one interdependent element of the whole educational system. Such an approach must be acknowledged, but the reconstruction of education systems is a long-term and complex process. Following the ecosystem model worked out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, which provides a holistic approach of the complex network at micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro levels, a large-scale change at the national, community, and also the school levels is required [17]. To promote inclusion and equity within education systems, Ainscow [1] has formulated a framework where the five factors of school development, inclusion and equity, community involvement, use of evidence, and administration are closely interrelated. He has pointed out that although external contextual factors influence the way schools organize their work, increasing the capacity of mainstream schools must be in focus. In the context of the current study, a whole school approach aims to raise quality and standards across the entire school. For this approach to be effective, schools need to identify and address the needs of the school community and engage in continuous cyclical processes for improvement.

Although school improvement has internationally been in focus for decades, there are still challenges. Hopkins et al. [28] have emphasized different factors of inclusive school development process. These include understanding the school's organizational culture, conducting research initiatives at the school level, building capacity for pupil learning at the local level, and emphasizing leadership. To make progress in these domains and create a better school through organizational learning, all stakeholders need to be involved, as shown by Thapa et al. [29]. Thus, it becomes clear that building human and social capacity requires collaboration within schools and between schools [30]. This is preceded by a common vision and a shared understanding of the meaning of IE [9,31]. Moreover, Mitchell [32] emphasizes that educators must recognize the vision and principles of IE at all levels, and this must be reflected in both legislation and policy at all levels of the education system. Kinsella [33] points out that special educational students' achievements depend

on the extent to which an inclusive culture is taken into account in the organizational development process.

Thus, to ensure the successful implementation of IE a need for school-based professional development programs have been highlighted by several researchers [12,18,26]. When planning these activities and redesigning school improvement strategies, it is important to take into account national and local policies [34]. In the following section, we will introduce the background of IE in Estonia and specify further the needs for developing long-term in-service course of IE.

1.2. Estonian Context

The principle of IE has been established at the legislative level in Estonia since 2010 [35]. According to the Estonian Information System of Education Statistics, the number of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools has increased since the Act came into force. However, with that the number of students enrolled in special classes in mainstream schools has also increased. A study conducted in Estonia showed that the meaning of IE is understood differently by teachers and leaders of educational institutions [36], and even among the specialists who train or advise teachers and schools [10]. In the present study, we follow the definition agreed between the member states of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, according to which "the ultimate vision for inclusive education systems is to ensure that all learners of any age are provided with meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities in their local community, alongside their friends and peers" [37] (p. 1). This has also been used as a founding principle for developing IE policy in Estonia. This means that the educational institution of the student's place of residence takes into account the student's academic and social abilities and needs and ensures the availability of the necessary support [38]. However, schools are often struggling with this.

As in many former Soviet and Eastern European countries (see, e.g., [39–41]), the expectation that support for students with SEN should be provided by special educators is still prevalent. Although the content of teachers' training has focused on how to differentiate teaching of SEN students in an inclusive classroom, less attention has paid to how to create a whole school IE policy with the aim to raise the achievements of all students and staff.

The Estonian education system leaves great autonomy to the local authorities and school leaders to organize compulsory education in their schools, including the provision of special needs education [42]. Studies conducted in Estonia have revealed that although many school leaders accept the philosophy of IE [43], not all of them have positive attitudes towards IE.

Analysis of in-service courses on IE in one of the major universities in Estonia providing teacher training showed that these courses have primarily focused on training teachers' special educational skills, and inclusive education has been considered only in the context of the state level legislative framework. There are a few in-service training courses for school leaders, and the topic of IE is also briefly addressed only at the legislative level. In addition, in-service training courses are not provided for school teams with different occupations, such as teachers, support specialists, and school leaders. It is also highlighted by Estonian experts, who train or advise schools on IE, that universities should develop long-term in-service courses and focus on topics like leadership, creating an inclusive learning environment, allocating necessary recourses, supporting teachers through collaborative school culture, and taking into account individual needs of schools with the aim to provide equal opportunities for all students to achieve their academic skills and social belongings [10]. These facts indicate the need to change the content and organizational form of training on IE in the Estonian context. Thereby attention had to primarily be paid to developing common understandings and values of IE.

Taking into account the complexity of an inclusive school improvement process and the need for enhancing teachers' and other school staff professionals' development through pre-service and in-service training curricula at the universities level in the Estonian context,

long-term in-service training for school teams seemed to be one possibility to enhance school-wide approaches to become more inclusive school communities. As teachers, support specialists, and school leaders play an important role in creating an inclusive learning environment for all students and should share a common vision about the school development process [26], an in-service training course on IE for school teams, which included professionals mentioned earlier, was developed by our research group. In the following section, we will describe the training course in more detail.

1.3. Description of the Training Course

The overall goal of designing the training course was to develop the school staff's attitudes, skills, and knowledge about the concept and meaning of IE and its effective implementation through inclusive school development strategies.

This course was developed in the context of a larger in-service teacher education program that aims to enhance IE. The whole training program included 60 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Teachers had to complete the entire program, support specialists had an opportunity to participate in the whole program or complete 29 ECTS (see Appendix A). One course of this long-term training program described, with the topics below in Figure 1 and named Inclusive Education with the volume 10 ECTS, was planned for school teams (teachers, support specialists, and school leaders). In this study, we focus on this particular course.

Figure 1. Main topics of the training course Inclusive Education (IE).

The training course topics were based on the ecosystem model worked out by the European Agency [17]. Key indicators from the meso-system like leadership, a continuum of support, collaboration, the professionalism of the staff, ethics for everybody, and family involvement, were combined with the exo-system around the school, i.e., community commitment working together with other professionals outside of schools. Finally, macro-system indicators like state legislation and policy, governance, and funding, monitoring, and quality assurance were taken into account. These topics were chosen based on the main needs for school teams revealed from previous studies in the Estonian context [10,36]. For instance, the need for clear school policy, allocation of resources, creating an inclusive school environment, the professionalism of whole school staff, and collaboration. International studies have also pointed out that professional development of teachers on IE should pay more attention to build on collegial interaction and collaboration between different

stakeholders [44,45]. The fact that teachers and support specialists participated in a longer training course for raising their capacities to work in the inclusive classroom was also considered. These courses covered topics such as learning and development, professional development, social-emotional learning, the inclusion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and action research (see Appendix A). All these topics were addressed in the context of IE.

As the course was planned, the relevance of topics and teaching methods for school teams with different professions at the school level (teachers, support specialists, and school leaders) was considered. To make the topics to be covered meaningful to participants, the principle of linking theory and practice was implemented by associating concepts from literature, national education policy, with peculiarities of the local community, and the school context. In addition, a co-creative approach in designing the training course was used. Vyas et al. [46] argue that the multi-disciplinary co-creation in the designing process where trained professionals and members from the community with whom the project is focused can lead to harmonious working, co-owned decisions, and the conceptual inner values into a practical research framework. Therefore, the content and volume of the training course were introduced to the participants before the training course. Participants' feedback was taken into account throughout the course. In addition, all school teams' members were given the opportunity to assess compliance with their expectations during group interviews conducted in the middle of the training course and at the end of the training course (see also Section 2.2. Collecting Data and Analysis).

Nine training sessions were conducted during November 2019 and January 2021. Each session consisted of 6–8 academic contact hours and after that schools' teams had to continue with certain topics in their schools. Training took place monthly or bi-monthly. During the summer holiday, there was a longer interval (4 months). This long training period allowed schools to plan development activities involving the entire school staff. In addition, Gibbs and Coffey [47] have found that training courses that have lasted for at least 18 months have the greatest impact on changes.

Three necessary dimensions to the development of inclusion within the school, like producing inclusive policies, creating inclusive cultures, and exploring inclusive practices, are described in the guidebook *Index for inclusion* [4]. Characteristics and requirements of inclusive schools are worked out by Kinsella [33], and guidance materials for raising achievements of all learners [17] were considered as foundations in the designing and conducting of the training course. Lectures and diverse group work activities were used as main methods. The latter included individual preparations as well. The balance between lecturing and group work was planned as 40 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

Regarding the learning outcomes, it was aimed that after completing the course, participants:

1. Understand the approach and application of IE;
2. can analyze the key components of IE and their combined effect;
3. know main models of collaborative networks and know his/her role in the implementation of inclusive practice;
4. are committed to professional development in the implementation of inclusive school culture and practice;
5. have readiness and know-how for designing an inclusive school.

More information about the training course is presented in Table 1.

The whole training process was developed so that school teams had to map their current situation and set up short-term and long-term development activities based on the addressed issue in a training session. It was meant that some of the improvement areas like school level policy documents, amendments to the school curricula, or some other activities were revised and implemented during the training course period. At the same time, long-term improvement areas were mapped and formulated in the final school improvement strategical document. To ensure that the participants work as a team in their

school, learning tasks were set up in all training sessions, which required the input of all parties in both group work and homework.

Table 1. Description of the training course.

Themes and Subthemes	Time for Contact Training and Group/Independent Activities	Homework: Practical Input to the School Development Process
Vision and school culture ● the definition and meaning of IE ● diversity and social justice ● inclusive school culture ● indicators of inclusive schools	Session 1 8 academic hours contact training 20 hours' independent or group activities	School's current background data and situation are mapped. Shared vision about the definition and meaning of IE and inclusive school culture is defined at the school level.
Legislative framework and school policy ● state policy for IE ● school policy for IE ● inclusive curricula and assessment ● structures for special educational needs (SEN) provision ● support system ● self-assessment	Session 2 and 3 16 academic hours contact training 40 hours' independent or group activities	Schools policy documents are analyzed and revised. Short-term and long-term goals are set based on the results of self-assessment.
Learning environment and resources ● physical environment, Universal Design (UD) ● personnel resources ● financial resources	Session 4 6 academic hours 20 hours' independent or group activities	The current situation of the learning environment and resources are mapped. Short-term and long-term development goals have been formulated.
The professionalism of staff ● roles of the school staff ● competencies and development of school staff ● leadership ● inclusive pedagogy ● evidence-based inclusive classroom strategies	Session 5 and 6 12 academic hours 40 hours' independent or group activities	The roles and duties of different school staff members are clarified and defined. Short-term and long-term training needs for raising staff competencies have been mapped.
Collaboration ● collaboration between school staff ● collaboration with parents ● collaboration with local authorities ● collaboration with external agencies ● students' voices	Session 7 6 academic hours 20 hours' independent or group activities	Improvement areas for collaboration within the school and with partners outside of schools have been mapped. A development plan for improving collaboration is composed.
Quality assurance ● state-level quality assurance ● school-level quality assurance indicators ● gathering quantitative and qualitative data ● schools' strategic development plan to ensure quality education for all learners	Session 8 6 academic hours 60 hours' independent or group activities	Quality assurance indicators are set at the school level. The school strategic development plan is finalized.
Concluding seminar for sharing composed school developmental plans and reflecting the whole training process	Session 9 6 academic hours contact training	Final outcome: Schools strategic developmental and operational plan for IE is composed.

The training was conducted by two trainers: A leading trainer from the University of Tartu and an assistant trainer from Tallinn University. The trainers ensured that all participants were actively involved in the learning activities and, if necessary, the school teams were advised individually during the training sessions. A reflection on the training process was carried out after each session. This gave a good opportunity to make flexible changes in the teaching methods or materials during the training course. Both trainers have experience with teachers' pre-service and in-service training on IE and are involved in a joint project between the two universities, which aims to develop and enhance the teaching quality of IE curriculum.

The Aim of the Study and Research Questions

As the main goal of the current study was to design and implement an in-service training course for school teams (teachers, support specialists, school leaders) on IE and to explore how participants experienced learning as a team in this course, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What was valued by the participants in the in-service training for the school teams on IE?
2. What suggestions were made by the participants for the further development of in-service training for school teams?

2. Methods

2.1. Sample

The qualitative study sample consisted of the team members of the 4 schools that participated in the training: From each school 4–6 teachers, a support specialist (special teacher or social pedagogue), and a school principal or a deputy principal. The choice of schools was based on all schools' wishes, and recommendations were given, in the case of 2 schools, by the local government running these schools. The interest of the local government was to raise the capacities of schools, which had the readiness to teach all students in their schools of residence. Background data from study participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Background information of participants.

	The Type of School	The Whole Number of Students in School	The Number of SEN Students in School	Team Members		
				Teachers	Support Specialists	School Leaders
School No 1 (X1)	Basic school	762	205	5 subject teachers who teach in grades 2 to 9	1 support specialist: Social pedagogue	1 deputy principal
School No 2 (X2)	Basic school	505	139	4 subject teachers who teach in grades 4 to 9	1 support specialist: Social pedagogue	1 deputy principal
School No 3 (X3)	Basic school	554	165	4 subject teachers who teach in grades 4 to 9	1 support specialist: Special educator	1 school principal
School No 4 (X4)	Basic school and upper secondary school as one institution	827	226	6 subject teachers who teach in grades 4 to 12	1 support specialist: Social pedagogue	1 school principal

Participation in the study was voluntary, but all participants agreed and gave written consent. Researchers guaranteed confidentiality.

2.2. Collecting Data and Analysis

Participants' feedback was collected twice during the training course. After the sixth session semi-structured school-based group interviews with all school teams were

conducted by both trainers using Zoom. Fontana and Frey [48] have pointed out that semi-structured interviews are the best way to understand other people. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison [49] have noted that group interviews can be effective in educational research because group members have worked together towards a common goal and thus enable them to support and complement each other. According to Arksey and Knight [50], interviewing several people at once results in more complete and reliable information because it is possible to identify relationships between group members—how participants support, influence, complement, agree, or disagree. The purpose of the interviews was to get feedback on the current content and organization of the training in order to make modifications if necessary. Before conducting the interviews, the interview plan was discussed among experienced researchers. The choice of interview questions focused on the research questions arising from the goal of the current study. To get answers to the first research question (What was valued by the participants in the in-service training for the school teams on IE?), participants were asked, for example: What are your opinions about the content and volume of the training? How do you evaluate participation in in-service training as a team? The main questions about the second research questions (What suggestions were made by the participants for the further development of in-service training for school teams?) were: What are your suggestions for making the content and volume of the training course more meaningful? What are your suggestions to increase the practical value of the training? In addition, the main questions of the interview were supplemented with follow up questions (e.g., can you give some examples?). Finally, the interviewees offered the opportunity to add more about the training course at their own request (question: What else do you want to say about the training course we did not talk about yet?). All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The duration of the interviews was between 1 h and 1 h and 10 min. During the interviews, it was observed that all team members expressed their opinions by answering the questions.

After the end of the course, data were collected in the final school-based semi-structured group interviews and individual written open-ended questionnaire to get the final feedback and recommendations to further develop the training course. An individual open-ended questionnaire, as an additional method, was chosen to complement group interviews and allow all participants to provide individually important information as well as additional information [51,52]. Through the final interviews and a questionnaire, we looked for answers to the questions: What is the final assessment of the training? What changes should definitely be introduced in future training? What was the value of participating in the training course as a team? The duration of the final interviews was between 1 h and 1 h and 30 min.

All data were analyzed by qualitative inductive content analysis using the qualitative data analysis web application QCAmap (qcamap.org). This method highlights important features, similar experiences and meanings, and describes differences [53]. Data from all data collections were analyzed by study questions. First, meaningful items related to the research questions were found and coded independently by the first and the fourth authors of the article. After the initial analysis, the researchers reviewed the labelled codes together and, if necessary, clarified the scope of the marking and the names of the codes. Units with similar codes formed subcategories, which in turn formed the main categories. For example, the codes "all topics were necessary", "the topic of external cooperative network was important", etc., formed a subcategory, necessity of topics. The codes "integrated approach to the topics", "multi-dimensional self-assessment tools", etc., formed a subcategory, comprehensive approach to the topics. The codes "optimal value", "reasonably distributed value", etc., formed a subcategory, volume of the training course. Finally, three subcategories formed the main category, content and volume of the training course.

All co-authors were involved in the final data analysis process to ensure the quality of the study. Both coding and categorization decisions were discussed with researchers until a consensus was reached.

3. Results

3.1. Issues Valued by the Participants in the In-Service Training for the School Teams

After analyzing the data, two main categories were set:

- Content and volume of the training course; and
- organization of the training course.

3.1.1. Content and Volume of the Training Course

In general, all the topics covered in the training course were considered important by the school teams and the comprehensive approach to the topics was highlighted.

Necessity of Topics

It was emphasized that covering the topics helped create an overall picture and a system for the aspects to be addressed in implementing IE at a school level. Feedback from participants revealed that while before the training it was felt that a lot had been done in the context of supporting all learners and implementing IE at the school level. However, the needs to further develop IE emerged in several instances after going through the different topics of improvement areas. For example, the school team was sure they had a well-developed support system at school, but bottlenecks were revealed during the training (like the clarity of the role of different stakeholders, taking into account students views to their study organization, etc.) and it was decided to improve their system. It was also discussed that many topics could seem familiar from theory (e.g., legislation, learning environment, and resources). Still, it became clear that not everything really works that way in school practice. It was mentioned that schools have not always correctly understood the meaning of statements of legislation, and thereby school policy directly applied from legislation did not work in their school practice.

Although it was first emphasized that all the topics covered in the training course were important, there were also examples of the importance of different topics. For example, it was highlighted that knowledge of the legislative framework provided an understanding of what school development activities, including policy documents, should be based on. As a result, special attention was paid to improving the support system and school curricula.

> Our curriculum is now coming in a whole new way, much more child-friendly and understandable. We have thought about this thanks to this training and we will start practicing from the new academic year (X2, deputy principal).

Feedback from participants showed that internal and external cooperation network was also a significant topic. The involvement of children and parents themselves to support the student's development was considered a priority, and it was emphasized that during the training, it was possible to think about it with team members and organize, for example, a child development interview guide which was understandable and useful for all parties.

The issue of assessing the quality of IE was also emphasized as an important topic of the training. It was pointed out that the planning of school development activities is a cyclical process. The development of internal evaluation criteria for ensuring quality education for all students in the context of a specific school was very important.

Comprehensive Approach to the Topics

Although the participating schools had expectations for various specific areas for development, the teams from all schools found it valuable that the integrated approach to the topics during the training helped create a comprehensive picture of the necessary development activities for the organization as a whole. Particular emphasis was placed to conduct the school self-assessment questionnaires (see Table 1, sessions 2 and 3) among the whole school staff. This self-assessment tool, worked out by the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, covers seven dimensions (pedagogy for all learners; support for learning; leadership roles and approaches; learner well-being and participation; curriculum development; partnership and collaborative working; support system for staff

and leaders) and was perceived by the course participants as a very valuable framework for raising school capacities in implementing IE [17]. The interview results showed that the results of this questionnaire were surprising for the members of the teams participating in the training and provided a lot of information that should be taken into account in further development activities. The head of one school said:

> What came out of it was thought-provoking. Get to know our team, our institution, in terms of how much we take this inclusive education into account, and what opportunities, resources, and areas for development are important (X4, principal).

The participants of the training course pointed out that the training provided input for the systematic development of an inclusive education policy within the school, taking into account the national legislative background and specific needs of schools, ensuring the well-being of students and the satisfaction of parents.

Volume

Regarding the volume of training, it was considered optimal and reasonably distributed among all topics. It was emphasized that the volume of contact training and independent study, including homework, was balanced. It was expressed that 10 ECTS in-service training for school teams focused on planning the development activities of an inclusive school was sufficient, if at the same time specific courses for support specialists and teachers are taking place.

3.1.2. Organizational Side of the Training

Feedback on the organizational side of the training revealed that involvement of different professions in the training course, participation with teams from other schools and with own schools, practical approach, and balance of teaching methods was valued.

Balanced and Various Teaching Methods

Regarding the teaching methods, it was pointed out that lecturing and more activating teaching methods were in balance. The theoretical part was considered necessary among all team members who participated in the training. It was pointed out that the participants were actively involved in the lectures, and this resulted in interesting discussions. It was emphasized that while discussing the theoretical framework (e.g., social justice, legislation, resources, the professionalism of staff, etc.) points of view that had not been intended before emerged, which in turn provided a good background for continuing various practical group work. It was emphasized that the set of group work tasks was well designed and provided input for further development activities at the school level.

> Such a very well-thought-out group work management and the setting of these questions or tasks were, in fact, very, very forward-looking for everyone. That it was, yes, super (X2, teacher).

Participants in the training were satisfied that different forms of group work were used: Working only with members of their school team, with participants from other schools, and also in groups formed according to job responsibilities. It was explained that this made it possible not only to analyze the problems of one's own school, but also to find out the experiences of other schools, which would help to improve the work of one's school.

> These four schools were a good group size. It adds a lot when other bystanders comment or see differently. Otherwise you're in your own bubble, it's still good to hear the experiences of other schools. Working with other schools is good and should be continued (X1, teacher).

Practical Approach

According to the participants, the activities carried out in the training courses made it possible to plan immediate and primary activities to implement IE at the school level in

the areas where development needs were identified. For example, it was pointed out that, during the training, the roles of different parties at the school level, the development of a common vision for the implementation of IE, and the organization of specific trainings for the entire school staff were immediately addressed. Team members from all schools appreciated that the activities that took place during the training days were aimed at completing independent homework. The opinion was expressed that independent work at home was extensive and time-consuming, but it was a pleasant and affordable activity because it was understood what and why it was done. They were satisfied that the impulse for their school's inclusive development activities came from the training session. At the same time, there was an immediate obligation to go deeper with the topic.

> Homework in the subject of inclusive education has been analytical and practical. They have been very, very useful to me in building this whole SEN system. Because, in fact, we analyze all this homework based on the situation of our school—what are the pros, what are the cons, how to move forward, they have really been very useful to me (X4, support specialist).

Participation with Own School Team

Participating in the training as a team was considered very important, and it was emphasized that there is no other way to develop inclusive school practice. Group work with their school team was valued precisely because of the practical impact. It was emphasized that there is often not enough time at school to listen to the thoughts of others, but the training valued listening to different opinions and thus finding the best possible solutions.

> I also like discussions, I also like discussions with other school groups, but discussions at my school are really very useful in the sense that we bring these issues to school and there we deal with them in-depth (X3, teacher).

As a value of participating in the training as a team, it was emphasized that it creates responsibility for the members of one's group, but also for the whole school staff. As the development of inclusive education is a complex and long-term process, it was recognized that supporting each other and maintaining motivation is important in taking the lead, and a long-term training course will help to achieve this.

Discussions and the development of common understandings between different professionals were considered useful for both the team and the school as a whole. It was also considered a value that all schools had representatives of different disciplines, which, in addition to the whole school development topic, made it possible to share internships and support each other on specific topics in the specialty. This experience was considered particularly important by teachers and support professionals. Teachers pointed out that their involvement in school-based inclusive development training is important and emphasized that existing training only for teachers as key players in implementing inclusive education does not provide a bigger picture and is often limited to individual classrooms and therefore has little impact on the school as a whole.

> It is as if teachers alone do not seem to have all this information. Additionally, that is what we needed the background information for (X4, teacher).

On the other hand, school leaders and support professionals emphasized that the value of the training was enhanced by the fact that a sufficient number of teachers from each school were involved.

Participation with Teams from Other Schools

The organization of the training in a way that involves teams from four different schools was also positively assessed. It was appreciated that while at the beginning each school had focused on its specific needs, which seemed to be a priority, the discussions also raised other issues that should be addressed in the context of school development and better solutions sought. It was pointed out that getting to know different approaches also allows you to analyze the situation of your school from a different perspective and

make changes in those areas that have so far seemed to work well. The interviewees emphasized that the exchange of experiences between different schools was very important for certain topics, like collaboration, structures for SEN provisions, and school policy on inclusive education. Interviewees got interesting ideas that could be tested and practiced in their own school. According to the participants, the involvement of the four schools in the training course was optimal; it allowed for mutual communication, sharing of practical experience, and the emergence of positive synergies. It was acknowledged that the existence of common problems in implementing inclusive education and the sharing of different practices provided support and encouraged to address even the most problematic issues and seek solutions.

> It was a very enriching experience! Each time again, there were so many fresh new ideas to see how they do and see how they have addressed and what the most important concerns for them are or values. I think it's just nice that if perhaps this training had been done in such a way that all the schools were separate, there would not have been this effect (X2, deputy principal).

At the same time, the participants were pleased that the participating schools respected each other's autonomy to deal with certain situations differently depending on the specifics of the school. The opinion was expressed that training based on only one school might not have been so effective.

3.2. Suggestions Made by the Participants for the Further Development of An Inservice Training Course for School Teams

The answers to the second question can also be divided into two categories:

- Content and volume of the training course; and
- organization of the training course.

3.2.1. Content and Volume of the Training Course

Although the discussion of the school's IE policy documents was considered to be a very positive and useful topic, at the end of the training course it was pointed out that in some cases it could have been even more thorough. This proposal was primarily related to the development of the school curriculum.

> We did a lot of work with the school curriculum, but it seemed that some parts still remained too general. It would be good to get expert opinions on how to make it more meaningful and concrete in the context of inclusive education (X4, support specialist).

One of the important concerns was the fact that in the upper school level (grades 7 to 9 in the Estonian context) problems often arise, which require different approaches. Therefore, this issue could have been addressed separately in the context of IE.

> At the younger grades we are able to make our support system work effectively, but at the third school level we would need resources and knowledge on how to improve cooperation between teachers and support professionals (X3, teacher).

The trainees considered the sharing of different experiences very important, and therefore it was pointed out that it would have been possible to get a more in-depth overview of the experiences of other countries, especially the Nordic countries where inclusive education have been implemented effectively for years.

> The experience of the Nordic countries has been cited as an example in Estonia. It would be interesting to know how the implementation of inclusive education actually works there (X4, principal).

With regard to addressing training issues, the need to further address the issue of the extracurricular network in supporting children with behavioral problems and their families was emphasized. Reference was made to various possibilities for cooperation with child

protection specialists. It was suggested that some training sessions could be organized with child protection experts designated as responsible in the participating schools.

> In this training, we talk about how collaboration should work, but in real life, child protection staff and the school team may not work towards a common goal. Aid is often scarce (X4, principal).

The participants emphasized that since the meaningful analysis of the topics covered in the training course was important and time-consuming, the development goals were set, but they would have needed more time to develop a specific strategic plan and quality assessment matrix.

> We have set targets, but at the same time we want to continue working with the assessment tools shared in certain training courses, and the strategic development plan still needs to be improved. We will continue to work on it (X2, support specialist).

It was expressed that cooperation between schools and trainees could continue after the training, as new challenges arise in IE in a rapidly changing world. Thus, according to participants' opinions there is a need to constantly engage in the self-development of an inclusive school, and outside counselling is very important.

3.2.2. Organizational Side of Training

The interviewees expressed the opinion that although during the training there was an opportunity to share experiences and thus learn from each other, it could also have been an opportunity to visit participating schools. This would have created an even broader picture of how one or another topic works in the practical life of the school.

> I really missed not having the opportunity to visit the schools with whom we shared our experiences during the training (X3, support specialist).

The wish to visit a special school was also mentioned in order to get acquainted with the system of how students with disabilities are supported in special schools and how to introduce changes in their school as well.

Although the training plan provided an opportunity to invite trainers to individual school counselling, only one school used it. Participants stated that they were overwhelmed by the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and therefore could not prioritize it. At the end of the training, the need for such activities was seen, and it was pointed out that this part of the training program could have been more mandatory.

> I really, really, immediately really like it when you come and look from the outside, because the look from the outside is a little different. You have built your system in your bubble there, we all do our work with passion and we like what we do and we are very happy with what we have achieved. But sometimes you get stuck in your business, and then when someone comes from outside and says a little bit about something, for example, you can go to another level and benefit from it (X4, support specialist).

It was also suggested that there could have been more mindset discussions and case study-based debates. It was also recommended to use the trainees themselves as trainers in such a way that different target groups who participated in the training go to other schools as a so-called job shadow. The team of one school was of the opinion that there could have been even more inconvenient activities that would have brought the participants out of the comfort zone. Although participants did not consider the organization of training through Zoom, due to the COVID-19 emergency being a significant obstacle, they expressed the view that the sharing of experiences, and the good synergies already created, would certainly have been even more effective if all the training courses could have taken place through contact learning.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to design and implement an in-service training course for school teams (teachers, support specialists, and school leaders) on IE and explore how participants experienced learning as a team in this course. The in-service training course (10 ECTS) for school teams (teachers, support specialists, and school leaders) was designed and implemented. Feedback from the training course was gathered through group interviews with all school teams and written open-ended questionnaire individually from each participant.

The results revealed that participants considered it very important that the training addressed in a complex and coherent way the most important topics (see Table 1) that affect the meaningful implementation of IE at the school level. To achieve the outputs of an inclusive school, which are related to the development of students, staff, and the whole organization, including school culture [33], it is necessary to approach all issues that affect these outputs cyclically and systematically. Thus, in order to support the self-development process of schools in the meaningful implementation of inclusive education through long-term in-service training, it is important to focus on all the key factors (i.e., vision and school culture; legislative framework and school policy; learning environment and resources; the professionalism of staff; collaboration; quality assurance) influencing changes in the organizational structure as a whole.

Although schools in the Estonian context have sufficient autonomy to manage the study process in their schools, the reviewing of schools' policy documents revealed that the organization of education for children with special needs had been copied too directly from the legislation, which on the one hand obliges all students to provide the necessary support systems in inclusive classrooms, and on the other hand leaves opportunities to have special classes for students with specific special needs [41]. Multiple reviews [54] also emphasize that practitioners at the school level often carry out statements of politicians and do not pay enough attention to the philosophical aspect of IE and all the other characteristics which should be taken into account when implementing and monitoring this within the school system. For example, the participants expressed that, before the training, they felt that the support system for children with special needs seemed to be well organized, and thus they could be recognized as inclusive schools. However, after covering the topics of the course revealed many bottlenecks, which are to be addressed. It was emphasized that the training provided a broader and more systematic view of inclusion, focusing not only on the availability of ability-based learning and support for students with SEN, but also on whole inclusive school development areas, taking into account the needs of all parties. Black-Hawkins and Florian [55] have also pointed out that in many cases, schools consider themselves inclusive, but in practice only focus on issues of how to support learners with SEN. Consequently, long-term in-service training, which covers a variety of topics related to the characteristics of an inclusive school, promotes a common and shared understanding of the concept and meaning of inclusive education.

Feedback from participants indicated that the training could have had even more mindset discussions, as developing common values is a complex process. Thus, more value-based debates on the equal rights of SEN children to education and social justice should be covered during the training. Even more, these discussions should be initiated at the level of schools, communities, and society as a whole. As the principles of IE often remain at the declarative level, they are not realized in real school life. In contrast, shared values and shared understandings of IE at all levels enable the analysis of schools´ inclusive practice more meaningfully, and to find solutions that support all learners as well as the whole school staff. Based on the experience of this training, it could be recommended to expand the school team with educational or social professionals from the local governments. Leadership training for school leaders, officials of local authorities, and schools' staff was piloted in Estonia some years ago, and participants reported good feedback, first and foremost, related to enhancing pupils' learning outcomes [56].

All teams participating in the training emphasized that the structure of the training, in which theory was linked to the practical experience of their school, mapping the real situa-

tion, and identifying areas for short-term and long-term development activities, provided good input for further self-development activities of the school as a whole. The participants acknowledged that schools often follow the inner feeling that they are doing the right things and the obstacles are not considered to be due to the school itself, but to factors from outside. It was appreciated that participants were guided during the training course on how to set priorities for development areas, how to involve the whole school staff, and how to assess the fulfilment of the set goals at the school level. The participants of the training course admitted that mapping a real situation of different topics and conducting question-naires among the whole school staff clearly showed that there are areas at the school level that need internal development. In summary, using different self-assessment tools during the training course enabled support for the development of evidence-informed practice, for identifying strengths, and areas needing to be improved, as well as for priorities to be set for strategic plans in the short or longer term at the school level.

Participation in the training as a team in one's school, representing different professions such as teachers, support specialists, and school leaders, was considered very important. Many studies have highlighted the importance of collaboration between teachers and support professionals to work in a heterogeneous classroom [19,20]. The role of the school leader in creating an inclusive school culture and practices and collaborative teamwork to achieve high-quality education for all students have also been seen as important [57,58]. Less evidence can be found of how, by learning together and at the same time sharing leadership between different professionals developing the activities of an inclusive school affects the whole school approach to self-improvement and well-being of all stakeholders. Participants expressed the opinion that during the training course they recognized the importance of working together and that could be the best way to start developing activities of an inclusive school. It was pointed out that during various discussions, it was possible to listen in depth to the opinions of various parties, about what are seen as the strengths and bottlenecks of the school, and to draw consensual conclusions on further areas for development. Findings of a study conducted by Ricci, Scheier-Dolberg, and Perkins [26] also indicate the need for common professional development to achieve the goals of inclusive schools because teachers, support specialists, and school leaders often focus on different aspects in the school development process. It was emphasized that participating in the training as a team creates motivation to contribute to the school development activities, but also obligations to the participants of one's team and the whole school staff. Although initial and in-service teacher training on IE is essential in teaching all students in an inclusive classroom, the results of this study showed the relevance of composing and conducting a long-term in-service training where school teams with different professionals can participate together. This means that the state and local governments should find ways and incentives to motivate schools to participate in such kind of courses.

The results of the study showed that participation in training with teams from other schools was also experienced positively. Although schools have their specific characteristics and approaches to improving the implementation of IE, cooperation between schools and sharing experiences had a major impact on finding the best solutions to problems. Ainscow, Muijs, and West [59] have found that there is a strong evidence that collaboration between schools can widen opportunities and help address vulnerable groups of learners.

It was emphasized that further training should pay even more attention to cooperation between schools, and school visits could be planned to gain even better practical experience. Training for teams from different schools also makes it possible to enhance further cooperation between schools and learn from each other in the context of the whole school's development activities and between different professions. Many researchers also have emphasized that cooperation between schools expands the opportunities for better implementation of inclusive education [1,18,59]. One of the main advantages of inclusive education is that differences enrich, and this also applies perfectly for providing in-service training courses on this topic.

After the training course, it was pointed out that visiting schools and providing individual feedback on their strengths and weaknesses by trainers could be planned on a mandatory basis. This would have helped to get even more comprehensive feedback from the point of view of the school system as a whole. The importance of collaboration between schools and trainers from universities has been emphasized by many researchers [19,60]. Therefore, individual schools' counselling during the training course is very important and should continue after the training course. This also provides a good opportunity for expanding the impact of the training course for the staff of whole school.

In conclusion, although the realization of the idea of IE depends to a large extent on the education system and national education policy of a particular country [34], significant changes can be achieved as a result of developing schools' internal resources to increase well-being and involvement of all stakeholders at the organizational level. Long-term in-service training for school teams, involving teachers, support professionals, and school leaders, provides a good starting position for this.

5. Limitations and Further Research

Although the study provides several important insights, we would also like to point out some limitations. Firstly, all the schools involved in the training were highly motivated and worked as a team. Therefore, we do not know how the training courses will be evaluated if there are negative power relations between the team members participating in the training. Secondly, due to the COVID-19 emergency, some sessions of the training were held via Zoom. In the beginning, it was unusual, but very soon, trainers and participants got used to it, and this gave an opportunity to experiment with different teaching methods.

Despite the limitations, this study has a practical value for in-service training and supporting schools' development activities in implementing inclusive education policy in similar contexts. Further research is needed to examine the longer-term impact of training activities on school-wide stakeholders (especially the well-being of students with SEN and also students without SEN) and explore the factors that support or hinder schools' development activities on inclusive education.
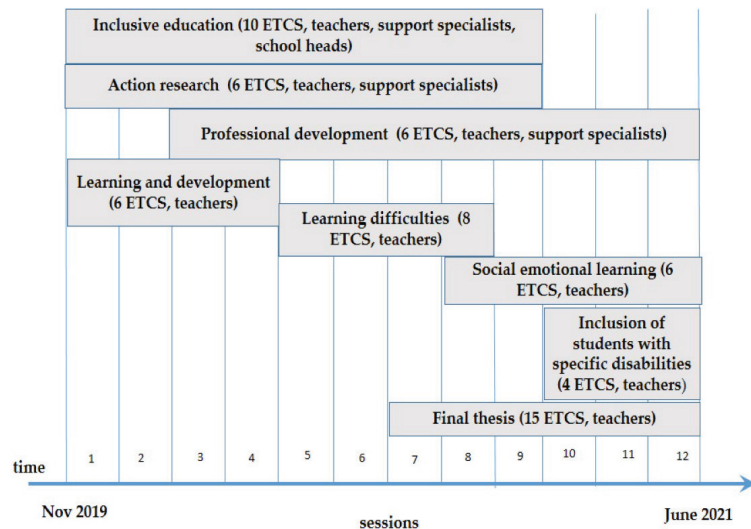
Appendix A

Figure A1. The whole training program.

References

1. Ainscow, M. Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *NordSTEP* **2020**, *6*, 7–16. [CrossRef]
2. Monico, P.; Mensah, A.; Grünke, M.; Garcia, T.; Fernandez, E.; Rodriguez, C. Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *24*, 527–543. [CrossRef]
3. Schuelka, M.; Engsig, T. On the question of educational purpose: complex educational systems analysis for inclusion. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**. [CrossRef]
4. Booth, T.; Ainscow, M. *Index for INCLUSION: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools*; Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education: Bristol, UK, 2002. Available online: https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/Index%20English.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).
5. UNESCO. Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All. 2005. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140224 (accessed on 1 March 2021).
6. UNESCO. Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education. 2009. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000177849 (accessed on 1 March 2021).
7. UNESCO. Inclusive Education. 2017. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254 (accessed on 1 March 2021).
8. Cigman, R. A Question of Universality: Inclusive Education and the Principle of Respect. *Philos. Educ.* **2007**, *41*, 775–793. [CrossRef]
9. Haug, P. Understanding inclusive education: ideals and reality. *Scand. J. Disabil. Res.* **2017**, *19*, 206–217. [CrossRef]
10. Kivirand, T.; Leijen, Ä.; Lepp, L.; Malva, L. Kaasava hariduse tähendus ja tõhusa rakendamise tegurid Eesti kontekstis: õpetajaid koolitavate või nõustavate spetsialistide vaade. *Est. J. Ed.* **2020**, *8*, 48–71. [CrossRef]
11. Schuelka, M. Implementing inclusive education. *Knowl. Evid. Learn. Environ.* **2018**. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6eb77340f0b647b214c599/374_Implementing_Inclusive_Education.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).
12. Sharma, U.; Armstrong, A.; Merumeru, L.; Simi, J.; Yared, H. Addressing barriers to implementing inclusive education in the Pacific. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2018**. [CrossRef]
13. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Empowering Teachers to Promote Inclusive Education. Literature review*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2015. Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Empowering%20Teachers%20to%20Promote%20Inclusive%20Education.%20Literature%20Review.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).
14. OECD. TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals. *Oecd Publ.* 2020. Available online: https://www.oecd.org/publications/talis-2018-results-volume-ii-19cf08df-en.htm (accessed on 1 March 2021).
15. Florian, L. On the necessary co-existence of special and inclusive education. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *27*, 691–704. [CrossRef]

16. Kurniawati, F.; DeBoer, A.; Minnaert, A.; Mangunson, F. Characteristics of primary teacher training programmes on inclusion: a literature focus. *Educ. Res.* **2014**, *56*, 310–326. [CrossRef]

17. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Raising the Achievement of All Learners: A Resource to Support Self-Review*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2017. Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/raising_achievement_self-review.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

18. Hadfield, M.; Ainscow, M. Inside a self-improving school system: Collaboration, competition and transition. *J. Educ. Chang.* **2018**, *19*. Available online: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10833-018-9330-7 (accessed on 1 March 2021). [CrossRef]

19. Juma, S.; Lehtomaki, E.; Naukkarinen, A. Developing inclusive pre-service and in-service teacher education: Insights from Zanzibar primary school teachers. *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2017**, *13*, 67–87. Available online: http://www.wholeschooling.net/Journal_of_Whole_Schooling/articles/13-3%20Juma%20Lehtom%C3%A4ki%20&%20Naukkarinen%202017.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

20. Lawrence-Brown, D.; Muschaweck, K. Getting Started with Collaborative Team-work for Inclusion. *J. Cathol. Educ.* **2004**, *8*, 146–161. Available online: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1006516.pdf (accessed on 1 March). [CrossRef]

21. Miller, L.; Wilt, C.; Allcock, H.; Kurth, J.; Morningstar, M.; Ruppar, A. Teacher agency for inclusive education: an international scoping review. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**. [CrossRef]

22. Lyons, W.; Thompson, S.; Timmons, V. We are inclusive. We are a team. Let's just do it': commitment, collective efficacy, and agency in four inclusive schools. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2016**, *20*, 889–907. [CrossRef]

23. Loreman, T. Seven pillars of support for inclusive education: Moving from "Why?" to "How?". *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2007**, *3*, 22–38. Available online: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ847475.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

24. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Changing Role of Specialist Provision in Supporting Inclusive Education. Mapping Specialist Provision Approaches in European Countries*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2019. Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/CROSP_Synthesis_Report.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

25. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Inclusive School Leadership. Exploring Policies Across Europe*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2019; Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/sisl_synthesis_report.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

26. Ricci, L.; Scheier-Dolberg, S.; Perkins, B. Transforming triads for inclusion: understanding frames of reference of special educators, general educators, and administrators engaging in collaboration for inclusion of all learners. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**. [CrossRef]

27. Mc Master, C. Building inclusion from the ground up: A review of whole school reculturing programmes for sustaining inclusive change. *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2013**, *9*, 1–24. Available online: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1016788.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

28. Hopkins, D.; Stringfield, S.; Harris, A.; Stoll, L.; Mackay, T. School and system improvement: A narrative state-of-the art review. *Sch. Eff. Sch. Improv.* **2014**, *25*, 257–281. [CrossRef]

29. Thapa, A.; Cohen, J.; Guffey, S.; Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. A Review of School Climate Research. *Rev. Educ. Res.* **2013**, *83*, 357–385. [CrossRef]

30. Ainscow, M. Diversity and Equity: A Global Education Challenge. *N. Z. J. Ed. Stud.* **2016**, *51*, 143–155. [CrossRef]

31. Ainscow, M. Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools. *Electron. J. Res. Educ. Psychol.* **2005**. Available online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228935522_Understanding_the_development_of_inclusive_education_system (accessed on 1 March 2021).

32. Mitchell, D. Inclusive education is a multifaceted concept. *Ceps J.* **2015**, *5*, 9–30. Available online: https://www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2015/10611/pdf/cepsj_2015_1_Mitchell_Inclusive_Education.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

33. Kinsella, W. Organising inclusive schools. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2020**, *24*, 1340–1356. [CrossRef]

34. Haug, P. It is impossible to avoid policy comment on Mel Ainscow: promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *NordSTEP* **2020**, *6*, 17–20. [CrossRef]

35. Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act. 2010. Available online: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/530102013042/consolide (accessed on 1 March 2021).

36. Haidkind, P.; Oras, K. Kaasava hariduse mõiste ning õpetaja ees seisvad ülesanded lasteaedades ja esimeses kooliastmes. *Est. J. Educ.* **2016**, *4*, 60–88. [CrossRef]

37. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Agency Position on Inclusive Education Systems*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2017. Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/PositionPaper-EN.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

38. Ministry of Education and Reseach. Hariduslike Erivajadustega Õpilaste Toetamine: Õppekorraldus ja Tugiteenused. Available online: https://www.hm.ee/et/haridulike-erivajadusega-opilaste-toetamine (accessed on 1 March 2021). (In Estonian).

39. Abery, B.; Ticha, R.; Kincade, L. Moving Toward an Inclusive Education System: Lessons from the U.S. and Their Potential Application in the Czech Republic and Other Central and Eastern European Countries. *Soc. Educ.* **2017**, *5*, 48–62. [CrossRef]

40. Florian, L.; Becirevic, M. Challenges for teachers' professional learning for inclusive education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. *Prospects* **2011**, *41*, 371–384. [CrossRef]

41. Stepaniuk, I. Inclusive education in Eastern European countries: A current state and future directions. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 328–352. [CrossRef]

42. Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act. 2019. Available online: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/501022018002/consolide (accessed on 1 March 2021).

43. Rais, M.L.; Sõmer, M. Haridusliku erivajadusega õpilaste kaasava hariduskorralduse ja sellega seotud meetmete tõhusus. Temaatiline raport: kaasamise tähenduslikkus. *Eest. Raken. Keskus Cent.* **2016**. Available online: https://centar.ee/uus/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Teemaraport-Tahenduslikkus-final.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021). (In Estonian).

44. Mangope, P.; Mukhopadhyay, S. Preparing Teachers for Inclusive Education in Botswana: The Role of Professional Development. *Int J Spec Educ* **2015**, *18*, 60–72. [CrossRef]

45. Forlin, C.; Sin, K.-F. In-Service Teacher Training for Inclusion. *Oxf. Res. Encycl. Educ.* **2017**. [CrossRef]

46. Vyas, P.; Young, R.; Spencer, N.; Sice, P. Can Awareness-Based Practices Benefit Co-Creation for Social Innovation? ServDes Conference at Lancaster University. 2014. Available online: http://www.servdes.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Vyas-P-Young-R-Spencer-N-Sice-P.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

47. Gibbs, G.; Coffey, M. The impact of training of university teachers on their teaching skills, their approach to teaching and the approach to learning of their students. *Act. Learn. High. Educ.* **2004**, *5*, 87–100. [CrossRef]

48. Fontana, A.; Frey, J.H. *The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement*, 3rd ed.; Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S., Eds.; Sage: London, UK, 2005.

49. Cohen, L.; Manion, L.; Morrison, K. *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2007.

50. Arksey, H.; Knight, P. *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, 6th ed.; Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., Eds.; Sage: London, UK, 1999.

51. Bryman, A. *Social Research Methods*, 5th ed.; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2016.

52. Mason, J. *Qualitative Researching*, 2nd ed.; Sage Publications: London, UK, 2002.

53. Creswell, J. *Collecting Qualitative Data in Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 4th ed.; Pearson: Boston, MA, USA, 2012.

54. Goransson, K.; Nilholm, C. Conceptual diversities and empirical shortcomings—A critical analysis of research on inclusive education. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2014**, *29*, 265–280. [CrossRef]

55. Black-Hawkins, K.; Florian, L. Classroom Teachers' Craft Knowledge of their Inclusive Practice. *Teach. Teaching.* **2012**, *18*, 567–584. [CrossRef]

56. European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. *Key Actions for Raising Achievement: Guidance for Teachers and Leaders*; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education: Odense, Denmark, 2018. Available online: https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/Key%20Actions%20for%20Raising%20Achievement.pdf (accessed on 1 March 2021).

57. Ainscow, M.; Sandill, A. Developing inclusive education systems: The role of organisational cultures and leadership. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2010**, *14*, 401–416. [CrossRef]

58. Carter, S.; Abawi, L. Leadership, Inclusion, and Quality Education for All. *Australas. J. Spec. Educ.* **2018**, 1–29. [CrossRef]

59. Ainscow, M.; Muijs, D.; West, M. Collaboration as a strategy for improving schools in challenging circumstances. *Natl. Coll. Sch. Leadersh.* **2006**. [CrossRef]

60. Robinson, D. Effective inclusive teacher education for special educational needs and disabilities: Some more thoughts on the way forward. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2017**, *61*, 164–178. [CrossRef]

Analysis of Barriers to Inclusive Schools in Germany: Why Special Education Is Necessary and Not Evil

Bernd Ahrbeck [1],* and Marion Felder [2]

[1] Psychoanalytic Paedagogy, International Psychoanalytic University Berlin, 10555 Berlin, Germany
[2] Department of Social Sciences, Koblenz University of Applied Sciences, 56075 Koblenz, Germany; felder@hs-koblenz.de
* Correspondence: bernd.ahrbeck@ipu-berlin.de

Abstract: Over the past decade, ever since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UN-CRPD) in Germany, a morally charged debate has taken place about inclusive and special education. Special schools are under considerable attack and even special education is deemed responsible for the difficulties in implementing full inclusion in schools. The gravest accusation is that special education and special schools are even today a close connection to the Nazi era between 1933 and 1945, when children with disabilities were sterilized and murdered. Special education is seen as a symbol and guarantor of separation and exclusion and therefore incompatible with the idea of inclusion. This article will outline and analyze this claim and present other more compelling reasons why full inclusion has been difficult to implement in Germany. Following the analysis, we will describe a possible way forward for inclusion and special education.

1. Introduction

Inclusive education—meaning here the education of students with and without special needs in the same classroom—has been a controversial topic in special education in Germany and elsewhere for the past decades [1]. In 2019, 10 years after the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities [2] (CRPD) in Germany, advocates of inclusion criticized the slow progression of implementing fully inclusive schools in Germany. The monitoring body of the implementation of the CRPD in Germany, the Deutsche Institut für Menschenrechte (German Institute for Human Rights) (DIM), claims that inclusion is not working because Germany continues to operate a system that includes special education schools. The DIM advocates for the closure of all special schools because maintaining a dual system is too costly and thus undermines inclusion [3]. Recent data revealed that 550,000 students with special education needs (SEN) are educated in the German education system. Of these, 42% are educated in general education schools and 58% in special schools. From 2008 to 2018, the number of special needs students educated in general schools doubled [4] and the number of special schools decreased. In 2005 there were 3468 special schools, whereas there were 2865 special schools in 2017 [5]. However, since 2007 the percentage of students in special schools in relation to the total number of school-aged students has not changed and is at 4.2% [6]. This is because over the years more and more children have been declared as requiring special support. The increased inclusion figures are related to this increase. There is much to be said for the fact that the more severely impaired are accommodated in special schools and the less severely impaired in inclusive schools. However, the monitoring body (DIM) considers the 4.2% of students in special schools as evidence that not much has changed in the past 10 years in Germany in terms of fulfilling Article 24 of the CRPD. Very closely related to the argument that the continuous existence of special education schools is the reason for failure to comply with the CRPD is the argument that special education in itself is a barrier to achieving

inclusion for children and youth with special needs. One line of thought to support this latter claim is based upon the accusation that German special education is still, to this day, entrenched in ideas developed during the Nazi era in Germany [7].

In this article, we examine the claim that special education with its history, particularly the time between 1933–1945, is a significant reason for problems in educating children with and without special needs in the same classroom in Germany. We then present other possible reasons for Germany's supposed and continued failure to educate all children with special needs in general education classrooms. Finally, we describe a way forward to achieve quality education for children with special needs in the most inclusive settings.

2. Methods

The method to examine the above themes is a literature review. The focus of analysis is based primarily on written works by Dagmar Hänsel, a German historian of special education and professor emeritus of education at the University of Würzburg, Germany. Significant sources and statements by researchers and scientists in the area of special education, particularly as they refer to Hänsel and the debate surrounding her theses, were also explored.

All sources were originally written in German. Through the translation program dippl.com with subsequent English-language editing by native speakers working in the tertiary sector of special education, the authors hope to make the arguments and the language used accessible to the research community involved in inclusion and special education. The text contains perhaps more direct citations than usual, however, the language used is important, as it reveals the conflict and the dramatic nature of the arguments surrounding the discussion in the field of special education in Germany today.

3. Hänsel's Theses about Special Education during the Nazi Era

In 2014, Dagmar Hänsel published a highly acclaimed book about special education training during National Socialism in Germany [8]. Hänsel claimed that Germany's special education community falsified its history to this day. The matter became a political issue when the Conference of Education Ministers (KMK) was informed of this at the beginning of 2015 and was called upon "to ensure the necessary historical and political reappraisal" [9] (p. 1). This initiative was based on the conviction that special education was not in a position to come to terms with its role under National Socialism. Or, to put it more sharply: without a powerful intervention from outside, without external pressure, this reappraisal would simply be impossible [10].

Following the accusations, the German Association for Special Education (VDS) set up a "Taskforce on Special Education under National Socialism" at the next federal congress in Weimar (2016) and gave Hänsel the opportunity to present her thoughts and findings. The situation was heated immediately before the conference by an article on special education and National Socialism published in the "Tageszeitung" (TAZ): "Disabled Enlightenment", subtitled: "Children from poor families have to go to special schools particularly often: Is this because the school form is a Nazi legacy?" [11]. Dagmar Hänsel is quoted in detail in the article as saying that "special education - especially education for the learning disabled - has been fundamentally developed in the post-war period on the back of its Nazi victims" [11] (p. 26). A more serious accusation can hardly be made. Schumann [12] also claims that even today there is no serious willingness to deal with the past in the special education community. Leading representatives of the association, according to the tenor of the TAZ article, put all their energy into opposing clarification. In the special education science sector, according to the accusation, Hänsel's works were deliberately ignored and attempts were made to silence other critical voices. In Hänsel's words: "this is not critical reappraisal, this is falsification of history" [11] (p. 27).

The German Association for Special Education (VDS) came under additional pressure as a result. At the congress it sought a clarifying discussion, ultimately from a defensive position. The question was whether academic and institutionalized special needs education has faced up to its history and dealt with it within the framework of what is possible, or whether overpowering defensive movements

dominated and defensive processes took place which are no longer justifiable. Hänsel's accusation of a lack of coming to terms with the past was accompanied by massive attacks on contemporary special education. First and foremost, she referred to (school) inclusion as a highly topical educational policy issue to which far-reaching historical links are being established. Hänsel is by far not alone in her assessment. Her deliberations also have special weight since Theresia Degener, Chairperson of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, also supports this view: "education is one of the most important human rights of our time, and that there is only a right to inclusive education, but not a right to apartheid in education, has been known at least since the UN Disability Rights Convention" [13] (p. 7). Brigitte Schumann, a former member of the German parliament, who often comments on education policy, agreed with these statements, and she uses Hänsel's works as a central reference point. German education policy maintains "one of the world's most segregating segregation systems bordering on apartheid" [12] (preface). In Degener's view the "main responsible actors" of the discriminated development are "especially the KMK" and the "Professional Association of Special Needs Educators" [13] (p. 8). The view that the existence of special schools is comparable to an apartheid system is shared by other influential protagonists as well [14–16]. Hans Wocken, a German special education professor and researcher spoke of the "Social Darwinian harshness of a divided school system" [17] (p. 47). He did not use the term apartheid but places the system in an inhumane context as well [10].

The main accusation by Hänsel and others is that the German Special Education Association is occupied by an unresolved past and is not only mistaken in numerous questions of detail, but even today it defends an overall concept which has proven to be historically outdated and ethically untenable. Its genuine self-image is misguided, the special education theory is questionable, and the practice is just as questionable as the adherence to special schools and the special education influence on inclusive schooling [12,18]. For Hänsel [19] (book cover), it is clear that the German special education system is "deeply marked" by the experience of the crimes of the Nazi era. In other words, it is about more than the historical events that have become known, it is not just about a stage which, even if its significance is fully recognized, stands next to later ones. "Deeply marked" refers to something very lasting, to the fact that everything else is influenced, if not determined, with great power.

Hänsel's massive criticism is not just aimed at special education settings but at special education itself. Her conclusions leave no doubt about this:

"The Nazi era is [...] seen as a gain for the special school teachers" [19] (p. 10). This gain also applies to the training of special education teachers. During the Nazi era, important foundations were laid for the establishment of special education teacher training, even if it was not yet enforceable at the time. Hänsel criticizes the development of independent special education training at the university level, which she argues led to a separation from general education—all on the back of what was developed in special education during the Nazi era [8]. She claims, that this seamless progression of special needs education, the development of its curricula and structures from 1933–1945 to the post war era had considerable consequences: special needs education has been able to consolidate itself further, and its educational and social weight has increased more and more. She states that this influence is currently becoming particularly clear: in times of inclusion, special needs education is striving to further expand its influence. It now wants to implement its problematic contents in the courses of study for general teachers. This is also seen as a historical continuity: "whereas before the Nazi era the reason given was to open up general teachers to special education in special schools, and under National Socialism the importance of special education for the racial recovery of the German people was also emphasized. Today the inclusion of disabled people is cited as a reason for abandoning special education, meaning their special educational support only in general schools" [8] (p. 264). Consequently, there should not be any special education teacher training anymore.

4. Critical Evaluation of Hänsel's Research

From a historical perspective, Hänsel describes a fact that is now undisputed. In the years between 1933 and 1945, the school for learning impaired was modernized and strengthened as an independent school form. The school type has been severely damaged by its implications in "racial hygiene" and euthanasia, and the special needs teachers involved in this process are heavily to blame. Hänsel explains the relevant facts in detail and analyzes which circumstances led to this. There is no dissent about this terrible event in recent special education history. It is also conceded and acknowledged that the generation directly involved in these events successfully tried to deny them for a long time after the war (in detail: [20–25]). Ellger-Rüttgardt [21] (p. 87) complained that those who worked in special education after the war "generally felt neither inclination nor need to critically question their own role in the past". There are, however, different views on the medium- and long-term consequences of the events at that time, and on the direct or indirect conclusions that can be drawn. It is true that after the war, there were indeed attempts to create an excessive distance from one's own history with the aim of avoiding a confrontation with the past. A "good" special education should be saved: with its commitment to people with disabilities, the will to support them, and the desire to improve their living situation, by identifying with a group of people for whom no one else was committed, and by holding on to an institution that was considered irreplaceable. The price for maintaining the illusion of an exclusively beneficial special education was a considerable degree of denial of reality. For this reason, it was also possible to pretend that a new beginning had become possible after 1945, leaving the past behind (largely) without consequences. The circumstances are nevertheless actually more complicated than they are presented [10,26]. A special education approach to evaluating the past has indeed taken place, starting with the second special education generation after the war [22,23,27–30]. There can therefore no longer be any talk of a split into "good" and "bad" special education, and certainly not of a split that continues to this day [20,21].

The fact that "special school teacher training was also based on race hygiene" [8] (p. 260) was particularly serious at a time when eugenic ideas were widespread and met with great acceptance, even in other European countries [31]. Thus, in the early 1930s, teaching staff at special schools were also caught up in the "eugenics movement"—like many other Germans [21] (p. 62). A willingness to resist was therefore hardly to be expected, at least not on a broad scale.

Nevertheless, no misunderstanding should arise. For all the exaggeration and short-sightedness that characterize Hänsel's conclusions, it should not be overlooked that her work is meritorious in several respects. That is beyond doubt. New sources have opened up, previously unknown facts have been brought to light, connections have been made that were previously unknown. In this respect the author deserves recognition [10]. However, it is surprising to see the intensity of the arguments, and the strength and the relentlessness of the accusations against special education which are to be found in all the writings. Hänsel unwaveringly maintains that the Nazi era was beneficial for special school teachers [19] (book title), and that special education carries its legacy deep within itself and continues to benefit considerably from the National Socialist era. Special education history is characterized by "repression", "silence" and "falsification" [32] (p. 7). Special education stubbornly and intransigently keeps "a myth alive" [18] (p. 55), and out of pure self-interest it draws on "mythic tales" [8] (p. 10).

This massive criticism is difficult to understand today, after an intense struggle in special needs education, after long professional debates. In earlier times, this attitude would have been more understandable and appropriate, as reflections on coming to terms with the past. For many representatives of the first post-war generation, those who had worked during the Nazi era tried to evade historical responsibility. There is sufficient evidence for this, that is undisputed [10]. At that time, there was no will to enlighten, as Berner [33] and Ellger-Rüttgardt [23] state, and documents were kept secret or only made accessible in a limited way, as happened to Biesold [34], who wanted to gain insight into the history of deaf education [28]. Further examples could be added. However, these times are perceptibly long gone for everyone [10].

Today's special education has changed. There can be no doubt about that, too. In a large number of publications, a critical look was taken at one's own guild, in great clarity and with clear words. "The monstrosity of Nazi disability policy remains to this day a thorn and a wound in the collective memory" [23] (p. 15). In another place: "it must be emphasized again and again that the Nazi era did not represent a complete break with established special (curative) education traditions, but could build on existing ideological currents and willing individuals" [23] (p. 65). Should these statements be a tactical maneuver, an attempt to cover up again? That is hardly something that can be taken seriously. It cannot be deduced from the numerous writings of Ellger-Rüttgardt, an important scholar and researcher in special education, nor from those of many other prominent researchers, historians, and others in special education [10].

Special education has dealt intensively with its past. Topics were the extent of coercion and repression against special education, special education's identification with central goals of National Socialism, personal and institutional entanglements, the inner ambivalences of parts of the special education teaching staff, them being torn between willingness to harm and protective partisanship for the pupils as well as their resistance to the Nazi state. Furthermore, there was the evaluation of continuities and breaks in the work of associations, the importance of professionalization efforts, and preparatory work for teacher training in the years before 1945 [20,21,23,28,35–38].

In the overall picture, there are many consistent results in historical research of special education at that time, but also many results that are incompatible with Hänsel's research results, and that in some cases fundamentally contradict them. Hänsel also contradicts herself in some of her works [26]. The research situation is, with many gaps still existing, differentiated, tense, and contradictory. It cannot be pressed under the yoke of a simple equation. This should be taken note of and accepted, as can be expected from scientific discourse [10].

The immense distrust of special education continues with Hänsel and others who support her findings partially or more broadly or who come to similar insights on their own part. Hänsel uses a mode of expulsion: Evil is identified as not belonging to itself and is projectively shifted to an outside world that is completely alien to one's own. This is intended to preserve the good and save one's own innocence [10].

An entire profession is still accused of not being interested in historical clarification. Obviously, it does not matter that in the meantime the pedagogical responsibility has passed on to several generations with very different characteristics in a country that has undergone fundamental changes. Nevertheless, it is claimed that there can be no special education self-reflection. Without external intervention it is lost, helpless, and incapable of dealing with the past, unanimously, without cutbacks, without differentiation. The compass knows only two extremes: good or bad.

Hänsel's works are a disturbing example of how coping with the past can fail. The unyielding accusations and unwavering attacks create rifts that even with the best will in the world would be difficult to overcome. Divisions are created between the good and the bad, the enlightened and the unenlightened, the progressive and the regressive. They are opposed to a fruitful dialogue. This is a repetition of something that may have been inevitable after 1968 due to the circumstances of the time, particularly the reckoning with the Nazi regime, but which is no longer up-to-date today [10].

5. Special Education as a Barrier to Inclusion

From the historical accounts it has become clear how hostile, to put it almost cautiously, Hänsel is to special education. Her views are reflected in the work of Hinz [39], Schumann [40], and Ferri [41], among others, who also fear that special education is increasingly penetrating the inclusive field and causing damage there. They back up their claims with the increase in special education identification. In Germany, special education identification increased from 6.0% in 2009 to 7.4% in 2018. This increase is viewed as evidence of an encroachment on general education. However, on average, this puts Germany in the middle range of special education provision in Europe (for the school year 2015/16) [42].

This very critical view of special education is not the position of outsiders. The pressure that is now being exerted on special education in the United States of America is also quite considerable. Some prominent authors therefore speak of a threat to the existence of special needs education [43]. In a highly complex field, the "agitation of special needs educators" [38] (p. 74) is hard to explain, especially since a similar development is taking place in countries with very different school systems and educational histories [38].

It is more likely that the concrete local difficulties in the implementation of inclusive education are similar in many countries [44–46]. Educational tasks have generally become more varied and more difficult. This increases the risk that individual children will not be reached through education. This fear is repeatedly expressed by teachers and parents in the case of inclusive schooling [47–49]. In this respect, the need for special educational support, which certain children require, is also increasing. As a result, particular attention is being paid to the child as a person, his or her learning and developmental situation at school, and his or her integration outside of school. Special educational diagnostics thus also react to conditions in the social field; they are not purely individual-related and deficit-oriented [50].

The skepticism Hänsel harbors towards special education, however, goes even further. Doubts are cast on whether special education is even capable of making a substantial contribution to the promotion of the group of people entrusted to it. What was previously regarded as reliable knowledge, corresponding to accumulated experience and empirical findings, is now suddenly put up for discussion. Once again, it will no longer be about facts that can be disputed in detail, but about subjective convictions of special education, which can be arbitrary, about nothing other than beliefs. Accordingly, Hänsel [18] (p. 63) states: "the belief of special needs education that special needs teachers are specialists and superior to general teachers in the promotion of these children lacks any foundation and cannot be empirically proven". Hänsel claims that special needs teachers are not in a position to make any substantial contribution to the promotion of children beyond general education, that they have nothing valuable to pass on to children with disabilities. Surprisingly, the empirical findings she mentions are referred to with great determination. This is remarkable, inasmuch as there is an abundance of research results that prove exactly the opposite of what Hänsel puts forward. Overview presentations on the beneficial effects of special education interventions can be found in Ahrbeck [51], Felder and Schneiders [46], Ellinger and Stein [52], Stein and Müller [53], and Lelgemann, Singer, and Walter-Klose [54]. They document what special education helps children achieve, even if methodological problems arise in individual studies and there is a need for more empirical research in some disciplines. More recently, there has been an effort in this research to focus more on evidence-based research criteria [55–57].

Special needs education interventions are not only described as ineffective and useless by critics, but also as extremely harmful. The special nature of children's experiences through special education is apparently responsible for this attitude: "a child who has been classified as 'learning disabled' is excluded from certain careers and educational pathways, even if he or she receives special educational support in general school, or access to these careers is made more difficult. In this respect, special needs education has immense consequences for children's chances of learning and education" [18] (p. 61). In other words, special needs education is a handicap in all cases, whether in special or inclusive settings. Even if the disadvantages of special schools no longer apply, they retain a considerable residual destructive potential which has an immediate effect on practice and the future of children. Any support by special education is seen as damaging.

This also calls into question the advantages that inclusive schooling can offer to children with learning difficulties. It seems that as long as special education is present, the benefits of inclusive education such as shared social experiences, a feeling of belonging and acceptance by others and the opportunity to benefit from the higher average level of achievement are not even possible. The latter two aspects in particular can be major benefits of inclusive schooling, which open up far-reaching perspectives for children in post-school life. In Hänsel's opinion, all this is threatened by the provision

of special education. It is unclear how this damaging process actually happens. The inconsistencies in Hänsel's arguments begin with the criticism of classification as learning impaired, language impaired, or in need of emotional and social support. In many German states however, this is no longer done in relation to the individual child; instead, the subsidies are allocated independently of the individual by means of a systemic allocation of resources. One explicit aim here is to avoid those labels which were associated with the old status diagnosis. Now, it is only a matter of informal attributions, which in one form or another are unavoidable if a child needs to receive special support. Thus, a central criterion of the desire for inclusion is fulfilled: professionals from general and special needs education turn their attention to the children, without categorizing them.

Yet Hänsel claims "the central tenet of special education, on which the German special education system is based, is that children who cannot be accommodated by the general school system are disabled and require special educational support. This belief, in which the special school tradition is reflected, continues to apply without interruption in the context of inclusion" [18] (p. 61). Hänsel is correct in that the general school system does not succeed in adequately supporting all children but these children are by no means only those for whom a special educational need is possible or identified. One of the main problems of German schools is that a considerable proportion of pupils in the 7th grade have elementary problems in reading, writing, and arithmetic. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Study 2015, the proportion of those who have a particularly low level of mathematical competence (competence level I or below) is 17 percent, in the natural sciences it is also 17 percent, and in reading competence 16 percent [58] (p. 28, p. 45, p. 53). In contrast, the number of those classified as requiring special educational support is much lower. Special conditions must therefore already exist for a need of support to be identified. At the same time, Hänsel makes it sound as if there is an automatic, undifferentiated attribution of disability that is arbitrary. She uses a concept of disability which is borrowed from radical constructivism and questions whether disability exists at all outside of subjective constructions. In this sense, Feuser [59] already claimed years ago that "mentally disabled people do not exist". If disability is now only understood as a social construction that no longer has any fixed points of anchorage, the term remains vague. The door is wide open to any kind of disability with far-reaching consequences: "ultimately, it can only be determined in a circular way who is disabled and who needs auxiliary school or another school, and ultimately every child can be considered disabled by the 'usual' educational institutions or in need of special educational assistance" [32] (p. 319). "Every child" can be considered disabled—that is quite a remarkable statement. It completely underestimates and belittles the seriousness of the impact of some disabilities on learning and on quality of life in general. Hänsel fears that the special educational influence will expand if all children attend school together: "more special needs teachers, like the expansion of the special education support places, produce more disabled people, and the German special school tradition lives on unbroken in the context of inclusion as well" [18] (p. 64). Here, too, the choice of language is interesting: rising disability rates are being generated by special education, it is the responsibility of special education alone. That is what makes this very critical view of special education so dangerous, especially in times of inclusion. Hänsel can be sure of the support of others—such as governments worldwide who struggle economically and/or want to cut costs in educating children with disabilities. In her view, it is the general education teachers who should be solely responsible for the education of pupils with special needs. Funding should reflect this as well [8] (p. 62).

6. Inclusion and Special Education

Special education in inclusion now encompasses a wide range of activities with many professional collaborations. The individual support of a child is now only one area of activity among others. Special educational attention and support is regarded as a disruptive factor by Hänsel and others, possibly because specific support measures are generally underestimated. In schools it takes a long time, sometimes now to a frightening extent, before special educational attention is paid to children due to

fear of stigmatization. Children may have significant problems, but they are not recognized as such, making prevention impossible. Even without special needs education, their problems will continue to exist. From the point of view of radical constructivism, however, this may be difficult to understand. Empirically, it has to be asked whether children would develop better without the "disturbing" special educational care and would follow higher educational paths. As has already been explained, there is virtually no evidence for this, apart from a few exceptional cases. For pupils with learning disabilities, great hopes rest on inclusive schooling, because the basic assumption shared by Hänsel is that "the vast majority of them are prevented from obtaining a school leaving certificate in the socially impoverished learning milieu of special schools" [12] (p. 22). The subsequent question, which can only be answered empirically, is therefore what and how inclusive schooling contributes to the performance development of children with learning disabilities. A whole series of studies has indeed shown that inclusive schooling for this group of students can offer advantages over special institutions, especially due to a higher level of stimulation and higher performance requirements [60–62]. However, this is not the case consistently, and many questions remain unanswered [46]. Realistically however, it cannot be expected that all children with learning disabilities will be able to achieve the average level of performance in a general classroom. Their unfavorable starting position does not remain without consequences for further development, their performance is comparatively weaker [48,63–65]. Children may still need specialized instruction outside of the general education classroom to reach curriculum milestones. Even in inclusion, not all children can attain a high school diploma. Educational barriers cannot be removed at will. Special education is really not to blame for this. The possibilities of inclusion should be assessed soberly, and excessive expectations should be abandoned. The school is well advised to focus on what it is really capable of achieving [66,67].

7. Problems in Implementing Inclusion

Given the very negative or, better, destructive view of special education it is no surprise to the authors that inclusive education in Germany is difficult to achieve. In the opinion of the authors, inclusive education is unthinkable without a robust special education. Unfortunately, the very negative view of special education does not seem to be exclusive to Germany but also permeates the UN-CRPD, which does not mention the term "special education" once [68]. Of course, Theresia Degener, who was instrumental in drafting the CRPD, is a jurist and professor in Germany and as we described above, she has a very negative view of special education.

In the following paragraph we will highlight two aspects that contribute to difficulties in the implementation of inclusive schools. These issues are the most salient in our opinion.

7.1. CRPD

The CRPD undoubtedly increased the numbers of children who were educated in general education classrooms. However, the wording of the CRPD, particularly Art. 24 is vague and is open for interpretation. Necessary processes to achieve its goal of high-level education in the general education system are not specified. In Germany, this resulted in increasingly teaching children with special needs in the general education classroom without providing adequate supports [69]. In Germany's case it may have been better to establish a national system based on IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act) in the United States [70] than on the CRPD. IDEA offers predictability, transparency, accountability, and due process, and it was instrumental in placing a majority of children with special needs in the general education system in the United States, albeit with securing adequate support services for children. The individual child and the parents have enforceable rights, and there are timelines and deadlines. None of this can be said for Art. 24 of the CRPD, which is now the guideline for inclusion in many countries of this world. As Anastasiou et al. point out, a focus on "acceptance" and "anti-discrimination" and an open door policy to allow students with special needs into schools is meaningless if not supported by robust inclusion practices, anchored by special education and other support systems to reach social justice and educational excellence [71].

7.2. Systemic Allocation of Resources

The idea that school "systems" should receive funds and distribute them to their liking is highly problematic when it comes to children with disabilities. This is often, however, proposed by advocates for full inclusion [17]. Part of such system thinking is that allocation of resources to individuals stigmatizes them and thus the number of special education teachers should be based on the numbers of special needs students in a school or grade and not on the needs of particular students. The KMK views this practice as problematic because in the absence of diagnostics, there may be a very unclear picture of how many children actually have special needs [6]. Students with special needs have diverse needs, and one student alone may require the sole attention of a teacher allocated to 10 other students. On the other hand, there are cases where students with disabilities in a given school have relatively few special educational needs, yet they also receive a fixed amount of special education coverage. A system like that can be fundamentally unjust. In our opinion it is incompatible with the individual centered approach of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health [72]. Identification of and asset allocation to an individual student does not mean harming or stigmatizing the student if it is done in a professional and reflective manner. Teachers can do much to foster inclusive learning environments even with resources designated specifically to individuals.

In Germany, the resources necessary to provide meaningful education in the general education setting are not comparable to services the children used to receive in special schools. They are often much lower [69,71]. Systemic allocation of resources also always introduces the danger of misusing them, particularly in general education schools that struggle with a multitude of different interests. Who can truly guarantee that needs of children with disabilities are considered in complex systems such as large public schools if funds are not allocated specifically to them but to all children?

Hänsel and others also want more general education teachers, not special education teachers, for inclusion to be successful. It is difficult to conceive how general education teachers in Germany can teach all children with disabilities effectively when they often do not achieve this goal even with children without disabilities, as we pointed out above. Even in the United States, where inclusion has been developed for more than 40 years, the reality is that general education teachers are often still taught during their training to teach the "middle of the road" children, not the child with special needs [73]. We doubt that this is very different in German teacher training. In addition, due to an increase in birth rates, retirement of teachers, and immigration to Germany, there is currently a significant shortage of general education teachers in Germany, particularly in the elementary school sector [74]. It thus seems incredibly unrealistic to think that there will be more general education teachers available for inclusive education in the foreseeable future. Reality and wishful thinking collide here. However, even with improved training and more general education teachers it may frankly be a too high an expectation for all teachers to be capable of educating the most difficult-to-teach students.

Irrespective of equipment and resources available, it is clear that children with unfavorable school forecasts have a statistical average difficulty in catching up with the general trend. They often remain in the lower performance range. Moreover, a "better" pedagogy does not lead to the same outcome in academic performance. On the contrary, if every child is taught optimally, the range of achievements is more diversified. The differences become greater and greater [10]. "The assumption of homogeneity is inevitably destroyed by successful pedagogy" [75] (Tenorth quoted, p. 122).

8. A Way Forward

Anastasiou, Sideridis, and Keller [76] found in their extensive study that special education coverage actually leads to higher reading ability in children (as evidenced by PISA studies). To claim that special education is inherently evil denies significant empirical evidence such as this. In our opinion, Germany needs more, not fewer, special education services in the general education system in a variety of roles and settings so that inclusion can be successful for more students. In Germany, special education teachers are highly trained professionals. A Master's degree is a prerequisite for teaching students with special needs. The university education is followed by a 1–2 year long intensely

supervised apprenticeship in a school. Such intensive training is also evidence that children and youth with disabilities and their education are highly valued by society. Teachers have a range of responsibilities and intervene at different levels in special and inclusive schools. There is no doubt that teacher training and service delivery could be improved—in special and in inclusive settings. The acclaimed Finnish model of special education is often cited as an example to follow. It is based on broad special education support and coverage for all children and differentiations are provided when necessary, such as special instruction and special settings [77].

Hornby [78] proposes a system of "inclusive special education", which builds upon elements of the Finnish model of special education delivery. It can be seen as a new theory which combines inclusive and special education. In the theory of inclusive special education, each child with special needs should receive the most appropriate intervention in the best possible setting "with the aim of achieving the highest possible level of inclusion in the community post-school" [78] (p. 247). Fostering acceptance and diversity is part of inclusive special education but so is evidence-based instruction and strategies such as response to intervention (RTI), positive behavioral intervention and supports (PBIS), universal design for learning (UDL), state-of-the-art assessment strategies, and other tested methods. Many but not all children will be able to be educated in general education classroom with such strategies in place. Thus, a continuum model of placement which includes options, such as general classes, special classes, special schools, and residential and hospital settings, must still be in place and is part of the inclusive special education theory [78] (p. 248).

9. Concluding Comments

Inclusion will fail if a totalitarian approach such as "full inclusion" or "all means all" is taken and special education is eliminated. It seems, though, that, at least in Germany's case, both of these approaches are supported by prominent researchers, advocates, people with disabilities themselves, and politicians without sufficient empirical evidence. By omitting the term "special education" from the CRPD and by trying to link special education today to the Nazi era, calls not just for the abolition of special schools but also for dismantling special education have found their culmination and justification. In this article, we attempted to show that special education today is not as evil as it is portrayed by some. A solid and continuous line between special education in Nazi Germany and Germany today is highly questionable and debatable. In the not-so-distant past, the only schooling option available for all children was the public, general education classroom. This often meant exclusion from education for children with disabilities who were deemed too difficult to teach by general education teachers. We are not convinced that this history could not repeat itself in the absence of special education and special, dedicated settings for some children.

References

1. Kauffman, J.M. *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020.
2. UN. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Available online: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html (accessed on 19 October 2020).
3. Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte (DIM). Pressemitteilung. Menschenrechtsinstitut fordert "Pakt für inklusive Bildung" (Human Rights Institute demands "Pact for inclusive education"). 26 March 2019. Available online: https://bildungsklick.de/bildung-und-gesellschaft/detail/menschenrechtsinstitut-fordert-pakt-fuer-inklusive-bildung (accessed on 19 October 2020).

4. Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung. Bildung in Deutschland 2020. Available online: https://www.bildungsbericht.de/de (accessed on 10 October 2020).

5. Statista. Anzahl der Förderschulen in Deutschland von 206 bis 2019 (Number of Special Needs Schools in Germany from 2006 to 2019). Available online: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/235854/umfrage/foerderschulen-in-deutschland/ (accessed on 19 October 2020).

6. KMK. *Sonderpädagogische Förderung in Schulen 2007 bis 2016 (Special Needs Education in Germany 2007–2016)*; Kultusminister Konferenz: Berlin, Germany, 2018; Dokumentation 214.

7. Hänsel, D. Sonderpädagogik im Nationalsozialismus—Verschwiegene Zusammenhänge. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2017**, *68*, 39–60. Available online: https://www.pedocs.de/frontdoor.php?source_opus=17242&la=en (accessed on 19 October 2020).

8. Hänsel, D. *Sonderschullehrerausbildung im Nationalsozialismus*; Klinkhardt: Bad Heilbrunn, Germany, 2014. Available online: https://www.pedocs.de/frontdoor.php?source_opus=17242&la=en (accessed on 19 October 2020).

9. Schumann, B. An der Wahrheit Interessiert? Available online: https://bildungsklick.de/hochschule-und-forschung/meldung/an-wahrheit-interessiert/ (accessed on 19 October 2020).

10. Ahrbeck, B. *Was Erziehung Heute Leisten Kann*; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, Germany, 2020.

11. Maihofer, G. Behinderte Aufklärung. *TAZ*, 17 April 2016, pp. 25–27.

12. Schumann, B. *Streitschrift Inklusion. Was Sonderpädagogik und Bildungspolitik Verschweigen*; Debus Pädagogik: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2018.

13. Degener, T. Vorwort. In *Streitschrift Inklusion. Was Sonderpädagogik und Bildungspolitik Verschweigen*; Schumann, B., Ed.; Debus Pädagogik: Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 2018; pp. 7–8.

14. Von Bullion, C. Apartheid im Schulsystem muss beendet werden. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 7 September 2017. Available online: https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/bildung-apartheid-im-schulsystem-muss-beendet-werden-1.3657775 (accessed on 19 October 2020).

15. Arnade, S. Ende der "Apartheid"? *Erzieh. Wiss. Z. Bild. GEW* **2015**, *67*, 2.

16. Merz-Atalik, K.; Katzenbach, D.; Ahrbeck, B. Kontroverse Perspektiven zur Theoriebildung schulischer Inklusion zwischen Kerstin Merz-Atalik, Dieter Katzenbach und Bernd Ahrbeck. In *Kontroverse Inklusion. Ansprüche, Umsetzungen und Widersprüche in der Schulpädagogik*; Müller, K., Gingelmaier, S., Eds.; Beltz: Weinheim, Germany, 2018; pp. 127–140.

17. Wocken, H. *Das Haus der Inklusiven Schule. Baustellen—Baupläne—Bausteine*; Feldhaus: Hamburg, Germany, 2012.

18. Hänsel, D. Die Sonderpädagogik hält einen Mythos am Leben. In *Wie Inklusion in der Schule Gelingen Kann und Warum Manche Versuche Scheitern*; Irle, K., Ed.; Beltz: Weinheim, Germany, 2015; pp. 55–65.

19. Hänsel, D. *Die NS-Zeit als Gewinn für Hilfsschullehrer*; Klinkhardt: Bad Heilbrunn, Germany, 2006.

20. Bleidick, U. Der Verband und die Bildungspolitik 1948 bis 1998. In *Erfolg, Niedergang, Neuanfang. 100 Jahre Verband Deutscher Sonderschulen*; Möckel, A., Ed.; Reinhardt: München, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 1998; pp. 96–163.

21. Ellger-Rüttgardt, S. Der Verband der Hilfsschulen Deutschlands auf dem Weg von der Weimarer Republik ins ‚Dritte Reich‘. In *Erfolg, Niedergang, Neuanfang. 100 Jahre Verband Deutscher Sonderschulen*; Möckel, A., Ed.; Reinhardt: München, Germany; Basel, Switzerland, 1998; pp. 50–95.

22. Ellger-Rüttgardt, S. Die Last der Geschichte. Der Hilfsschulverband im Widerstreit von Fachvertretung und Standespolitik. In *Entwicklungen, Standorte, Perspektiven, Proceedings of the Sonderpädagogischer Kongress 1998*; Schmetz, D., Wachtel, P., Eds.; Verband deutscher Sonderschulen: Würzburg, Germany, 1999; pp. 27–34.

23. Ellger-Rüttgardt, S. Sonderpädagogen im Dritten Reich zwischen Überzeugung, Anpassung und Opposition. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2017**, *68*, 61–69.

24. Möckel, A. Behinderte Kinder im Nationalsozialismus. Lehrer für das Verhältnis von Pädagogik und Sonderpädagogik. In *Du Bist Nichts, Dein Volk Ist Alles*; Berg, C., Ellger-Rüttgardt, S., Eds.; Deutscher Studienverlag: Weinheim, Germany, 1991; pp. 74–87.

25. Heimlich, U. Bayerische Sonderpädagogik in der Nazi-Zeit, dargestellt am Beispiel des Münchener Hilfsschullehrers Erwin Lesch. *Sonderpädagogik Bayern* **2013**, *56*, 37–42.

26. Eberle, G. Einige Anmerkungen zur Geschichte des Verbands Sonderpädagogik. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2020**, *71*, 544–557.

27. Möckel, A. Erfolg, Niedergang, Neuanfang. In *100 Jahre Verband Deutscher Sonderschulen*; Möckel, A., Ed.; Reinhardt: München, Germany, 1998.

28. Brodehl, F.A. *Widerstand, Anpassung, Pflichterfüllung? Zur Konfrontation der Taubstummenpädagogik mit dem Gesetz zur Verhütung Erbkranken Nachwuchses vom 14. Juli 1933*; Verlag Dr. Kovač: Hamburg, Germany, 2014.

29. Brodehl, F.A. Zwischen Widerstand und Anpassung—Die Rolle der Sonderpädagogik bei der Durchführung des Gesetzes zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2017**, *68*, 7–28.

30. Ellger-Rüttgardt, S. *Geschichte der Sonderpädagogik*; Reinhardt: München, Germany, 2008.

31. Kuhlmann, A. *Politik des Lebens. Politik des Sterbens*; Fest: Berlin, Germany, 2000.

32. Hänsel, D. *Karl Tornow als Wegbereiter der Sonderpädagogischen Profession. Die Grundlegung des Bestehenden in der NS-Zeit*; Klinkhardt: Bad Heilbrunn, Germany, 2008.

33. Berner, H. Sonderpädagogische Geschichtsschreibung nach 1945—Verdrängen, verschweigen, verfälschen. In *Aussondern—Sterilisieren—Liquidieren: Die Verfolgung Behinderter im Nationalsozialismus*; Rudnick, M., Ed.; Marhold: Berlin, Germany, 1990; pp. 1998–2013.

34. Biesold, H. *Klagende Hände: Betroffenheit und Spätfolgen in Bezug auf das Gesetz zur Verhütung Erbkranken Nachwuchses, Dargestellt am Beispiel der „Taub-Stummen"*; Jarick: Solms-Oberbiel, Germany, 1988.

35. Möckel, A. *Geschichte der Besonderen Grund-und Hauptschule*; Winter: Heidelberg, Germany, 2001.

36. Möckel, A. *Geschichte der Heilpädagogik oder Macht und Ohnmacht der Erziehung*; Klett-Cotta: Stuttgart, Germany, 2007.

37. Möckel, A. Die Gleichschaltung des Verbands der Hilfsschulen Deutschlands 1933 und der Verrat an den behinderten Kindern und an der Heilpädagogik in der NS-Zeit. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2017**, *68*, 29–38.

38. Hillenbrand, C. Lehrerbildung für Sonderpädagogik: Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten in historischer Perspektive. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2017**, *68*, 71–85.

39. Hinz, A. Inklusion—Von der Unkenntnis zur Unerkenntlichkeit!?—Kritische Anmerkungen zu einem Jahrzehnt Diskurs über Schulische Inklusion in Deutschland. *Z. Inkl. Online Net* **2013**, *8*, 1–17. Available online: https://www.inklusion-online.net/index.php/inklusion-online/article/view/26 (accessed on 26 October 2020).

40. Schumann, B. Inklusive Bildung braucht inklusive Diagnostik. *Bildungsklick*, 10 July 2013. Available online: http://bildungsklick.de/a/88459/inklusive-bildung-braucht-inklusive-diagnostik/ (accessed on 26 October 2020).

41. Ferri, B.A. Undermining inclusion? A critical reading of response to intervention (RTI). *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2012**, *16*, 863–880. [CrossRef]

42. Aktion Mensch. Inklusionsquoten in Deutschland. Available online: https://www.aktion-mensch.de/inklusion/bildung/hintergrund/zahlen-daten-und-fakten/inklusionsquoten.html (accessed on 26 October 2020).

43. Kauffman, J.M.; Anastasiou, D.; Maag, J.W. Special education at the crossroad: An identity crisis and the need for a scientific reconstruction. *Exceptionality* **2017**, *25*, 139–155. [CrossRef]

44. Ahrbeck, B.; Badar, J.; Felder, M.; Kauffman, J.; Schneiders, K. Full Inclusion? Totale Inklusion? Fakten und Überlegungen zur Situation in Deutschland und den USA. *Vierteljahresschr. Heilpädagogik Nachbargeb.* **2018**, *87*, 218–231. [CrossRef]

45. Anastasiou, D.; Kauffman, J.M.; Di Nuovo, S. Inclusive education in Italy. Description and reflections on full inclusion. *Eur. J. Spec. Needs Educ.* **2015**, *30*, 429–443. [CrossRef]

46. Felder, M.; Schneiders, K. *Inklusion kontrovers: Herausforderungen für die Soziale Arbeit*; Wochenschau-Verlag: Schwalbach am Taunus, Germany, 2016.

47. Ahrbeck, B.; Fickler-Stang, U.; Friedrich, S.; Weiland, K. *Befragung der Elternvertreterinnen und Elternvertreter zur Umsetzung der Inklusion in Nord-Rhein-Westfalen. Forschungsbericht. Eine Studie im Auftrag der FDP-Fraktion im Land Nordrhein-Westfalen*; Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Berlin, Germany, 2015. Available online: https://docplayer.org/27555602-Forschungsbericht-befragung-der-elternvertreterinnen-und-elternvertreter-zur-umsetzung-der-inklusion-in-nordrhein-westfalen.html (accessed on 26 October 2020).

48. Ahrbeck, B.; Fickler-Stang, U.; Lehmann, R.; Weiland, K. *Anfangserfahrungen mit der Entwicklung der Inklusiven Schule in Berlin—Eine Exploratorische Studie im Rahmen von Schulversuchen (AiBe)*; Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie: Berlin, Germany; Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Berlin, Germany, 2019; in press.

49. Forsa Politik-und Sozialforschung GmbH. *Inklusion an Schulen aus Sicht der Lehrerinnen und Lehrer—Meinungen, Einstellungen und Erfahrungen. Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Lehrerbefragung im Auftrag des Verbandes Bildung und Erziehung (VBE)*; Forsa Politik-und Sozialforschung GmbH: Berlin, Germany, 2015. Available online: http://www.vbe-bw.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Inklusion-Ergebnisse-BW.pdf (accessed on 26 October 2020).

50. Asmussen, S. Sonderpädagogische Diagnostik—Eine Bestandaufnahme. *Pädagogische Impulse* **2012**, *45*, 21–25.

51. Ahrbeck, B. *Der Umgang mit Behinderung: Besonderheit und Vielfalt, Gleichheit und Differenz*; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, Germany, 2017.

52. Ellinger, S.; Stein, R. Effekte inklusiver Beschulung: Forschungsstand im Förderschwerpunkt emotionale und soziale Entwicklung. *Empir. Sonderpädagogik* **2012**, *22*, 85–109.

53. Stein, R.; Müller, T. *Inklusion im Förderschwerpunkt Emotionale und Soziale Entwicklung*; Stein, R., Müller, T., Eds.; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, Germany, 2015.

54. Lelgemann, R.; Singer, P.; Walter-Klose, C. *Inklusion im Förderschwerpunkt Körperliche und Motorische Entwicklung*; Lelgemann, R., Singer, P., Walter-Klose, C., Eds.; Kohlhammer: Stuttgart, Germany, 2015.

55. Hillenbrand, C. Evidenzbasierung sonderpädagogischer Praxis: Widerspruch oder Gelingensbedingung. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2015**, *66*, 312–324.

56. Hennemann, T.; Hillenbrand, C.; Franke, S.; Hens, S.; Grosche, M.; Pütz, K. Kinder unter erhöhten emotional-sozialen und kognitiven Risiken als Herausforderung für die Inklusion. Evaluation einer selektiven Präventionsmaßnahme in der schulischen Eingangsstufe. *Empir. Sonderpädagogik* **2012**, *4*, 129–146.

57. Voß, S.; Marten, K.; Diehl, K.; Mahlau, K.; Sikora, S.; Blumenthal, Y.; Hartke, B. Evaluationsergebnisse des Projekts „Rügener Inklusionsmodell (RIM)—Präventive und Integrative Schule auf Rügen (PISaR)" nach vier Schuljahren zum Messzeitpunkt Juli 2014. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2016**, *67*, 133–149.

58. Reiss, K.; Sälzer, C.; Schiepe-Tiska, A.; Klieme, E.; Köller, O. *PISA 2015. Eine Studie zwischen Kontinuität und Innovation*; Zentrum für internationale Bildungsvergleichsstudien: Berlin, Germany, 2016. Available online: http://www.ipn.uni-kiel.de/de/das-ipn/veranstaltungen/01_Reiss.pdf (accessed on 26 October 2020).

59. Feuser, G. Geistigbehinderte gibt es nicht. *Geist. Behind.* **1996**, *35*, 18–25.

60. Kemper, T.; Goldan, J. Schulerfolg von Schülerinnen und Schülern mit sonderpädagogischem Förderbedarf. *Z. Heilpädagogik* **2018**, *69*, 361–372.

61. Werning, R. Stichwort: Schulische Inklusion. *Z. Erzieh.* **2014**, *17*, 601–623. [CrossRef]

62. Stanat, P.; Schipolowski, S.T.; Rjoski, C.; Weirich, S.; Haag, N. *IQB Bildungstrend 2016. Kompetenzen in den Fächern Deutsch und Mathematik am Ende der 4. Jahrgangsstufe im Zweiten Ländervergleich*; Stanat, P., Schipolowski, S.T., Rjoski, C., Weirich, S., Haag, N., Eds.; Waxmann: Münster, Germany, 2017.

63. Hinz, A.; Katzenbach, D.; Rauer, W.; Schuck, K.D.; Wocken, H.; Wudtke, H. *Die Integrative Grundschule im Sozialen Brennpunkt. Ergebnisse eines Hamburger Schulversuchs*; Hamburger Buchwerkstatt: Hamburg, Germany, 1998.

64. McLeskey, J.; Waldron, N.L. Full Inclusion Programs for Elementary Students with Learning Disabilities: Can They Meet Student Needs in an Era of High Stakes Accountability? In Proceedings of the Council for Exceptional children Convention, National Harbor, MD, USA, 26 April 2011. Available online: https://education.ufl.edu/disability-policy-practice/files/2012/05/McLeskey-Waldron-2011-Full-Inclusion-LD-1.pdf (accessed on 26 October 2020).

65. Bosse, S.; Dumont, H.; Friedrich, K.; Gronostaj, A.; Henke, T.; Koch, H.; Kretschmann, J.; Krückels, C.; Jaeuthe, J.; Jäntsch, C.; et al. Inklusives Lernen und Lehren im Land Brandenburg. Abschlussbericht zur Begleitforschung des Pilotprojekts "Inklusive Grundschule". Available online: https://www.inklusion-brandenburg.de/fileadmin/daten/inklusion_im_land_brandenburg/pilotprojekt_inklusive_grundschule/wissenschaftliche__begleitung/Abschlussbericht_PING.pdf (accessed on 26 October 2020).

66. Kaube, J. Soziologiekolumne. Bildung, Schule. *Merkur* **2011**, *65*, 1054–1058.

67. Ditton, H. Wie viel Ungleichheit durch Bildung verträgt eine Demokratie? *Z. Pädagogik* **2010**, *56*, 53–68.

68. Anastasiou, D.; Gregory, M.; Kauffman, J.M. Commentary on Article 24 of the CRPD: The right to education. In *Commentary on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*; Bantekas, I., Anastasiou, D., Stein, M., Eds.; Oxford University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 656–704.

69. Lang, H.-G. Die Inklusionspraxis im Sauerland ist ein einziges Trauerspiel. *Lehr. Sch. Heute* **2017**, *9*, 258–263.

70. Kauffman, J.M.; Wiley, A.L.; Travers, J.C.; Badar, J.; Anastasiou, D. Endrew and FAPE: Concepts and implications for all students with disabilities. *Behav. Modif.* **2020**, *45*, 177–198. Available online: https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30832492/ (accessed on 26 October 2020). [CrossRef] [PubMed]

71. Anastasiou, D.; Felder, M.; Correia, L.; Shemanov, A.; Zweers, I.; Ahrbeck, B. The impact of Article 24 of the CRPD on special and inclusive education in Germany, Portugal, the Russian Federation, and Netherlands. In *On Educational Inclusion: Meanings, History, Issues and International Perspectives*; Kauffman, J.M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 236–245.

72. World Health Organization. International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Available online: https://www.who.int/classifications/icf/en/ (accessed on 1 November 2020).

73. Mader, J. How Teacher Training Hinders Special-Needs Students. The Atlantic. Available online: https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/03/how-teacher-training-hinders-special-needs-students/518286/ (accessed on 26 October 2020).

74. Klemm, K.; Zorn, D. Steigende Schülerzahlen im Primarbereich: Lehrkräftemangel Deutlich Stärker als von der KMK Erwartet. Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019. Available online: https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/steigende-schuelerzahlen-im-primarbereich-lehrkraeftemangel-deutlich-staerker-als-von-der-kmk-erwartet/ (accessed on 3 November 2020).

75. Fleischhauer, J. *Unter Linken*; Rowohlt: Reinbek, Germany, 2010.

76. Anastasiou, D.; Sideridis, G.D.; Keller, C.E. The Relationships of Socioeconomic Factors and Special Education with Reading Outcomes across PISA Countries. Exceptionality. Available online: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09362835.2018.1531759?journalCode=hexc20 (accessed on 26 October 2020).

77. Anastasiou, D.; Keller, C. Special education in Finland. A system beyond the uniformity of a globalized ideal. *Educ. Sci.* **2010**, 155–167. Available online: https://www.academia.edu/6547675/SPECIAL_EDUCATION_IN_FINLAND_A_SYSTEM_BEYOND_THE_UNIFORMITY_OF_A_GLOBALIZED_IDEAL (accessed on 19 October 2020).

78. Hornby, G. Inclusive special education: Development of a new theory for the education of children with special educational needs and disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]

Article

A Comparison of Provision and Access to Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in a Metropolitan City and a Rural District in Telangana State, India

Richard Rose [1,*], Jayanthi Narayan [1], Shankar Matam [2] and Prathima Reddy Sambram [2]

[1] University of Northampton, Northampton NN1 5PH, UK; narayan.jayanthi@gmail.com
[2] Sahara Health and Development Society, Hyderabad, Telangana 500001, India; drshankar4214@gmail.com (S.M.); prathima.sambram@gmail.com (P.R.S.)
[*] Correspondence: Richard.Rose@northampton.ac.uk

Abstract: In response to international agreements, recent Indian legislation has raised expectations that all children, regardless of need or ability, should gain access to formal education that is inclusive and addresses their social and learning needs. Initiatives designed to support the implementation of this legislation have been undertaken in several parts of India. Reports related to such initiatives have largely focused upon developments in large urban connotations, with studies in rural areas being less in evidence. This paper reports a small-scale study conducted in Telangana a state in the south-central part of India. Through the application of semi-structured interviews data were obtained to enable a comparison to be made of the experiences of two purposive samples of families of children with disabilities and special educational needs, and the professionals who support them. The first sample was located in Hyderabad, a large metropolitan city, the capital of Telangana State. The second was situated in villages in Sangareddy, a single rural district of the same state. Interviews were conducted either in English or in Telugu, the state language with all interviews transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. The findings, which will be used to support further development in the area, reveal a willingness on the part of professionals to support the education and social welfare needs of children with special educational needs and their families and an awareness of current national legislation aimed at achieving this objective. A disparity exists between the availability of professional support services available to families and children, with those living in the rural district experiencing greater difficulty in accessing appropriate support than their counterparts in the metropolitan city. The lack of opportunities for training and professional development is perceived to be a major obstacle to the progress of inclusive education as required by national legislation in both locations. Recommendations are made for further research that is closely allied to changes in practice, for the development of professional development of teachers and other professionals, and for the development of centralised provision in rural areas to address the needs of families.

Keywords: inclusive education; education in India; educational equity; disability; special educational needs

1. Introduction: The Purpose of the Study

India, in common with other Asian countries has made significant advances in securing access to education for all children [1,2]. The implementation of significant legislation [3,4] has led to an increase in the interrogation of those conditions, that can either enhance or inhibit progress towards including those learners who have been previously denied educational opportunities [5,6]. These actions have in some instances provided potential pathways for further development towards the provision of a more equitable education system [7,8]. However, some observers of developments in this area have expressed concerns that the concept of inclusive education and the practicalities of its application has

177

been subjected to a limited interpretation in India, a country that is diverse in terms of its culture, languages, socio-economic situations and geography [9–11].

Singal [12] suggests that there has been a focus upon the provision of resources, aids and assistive devices deemed necessary to provide access to learning for children with special educational needs. This she believes has led to an assumption that disability as an exclusionary factor is inherent in the child and may thereby limit the important considerations around changing systems and pedagogical approaches. It has been suggested by other researchers [13,14] that the concept of inclusive education in India has been inadequately defined in legislation. It is apparent that some children who have previously been denied access to formal education have been enrolled either in special or mainstream schools and that the numbers of children out of school has increased. However, these authors contend that simply enrolling a child in school is not a guarantee that they will succeed in learning, or that teachers are adequately prepared to teach them.

Special schools, many of which are privately funded or managed by non-governmental organisations, continue to play an important role in the education system in India. Narayan [15] reports that for many parents, the opportunity to send their child to a special school, where they believe that they will receive support from specialist therapists and trained teachers, is seen as beneficial. However, she suggests that the quality of teaching in some such schools is inadequate to fully address the learning needs of all children, particularly where such special provision is located in rural communities.

In the past twenty years, the growth of the Indian economy has led to major developments in the country's metropolitan cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bangalore [16,17]. With this growth has come new employment opportunities and an increase in demand for labour, leading to major patterns of migration from rural to urban communities [18,19]. Investment in city economies has been an important growth factor and has supported many developments in the infrastructure, transport systems and commercial opportunities within these areas [20]. Concerns have been raised in relation to two specific areas that may have arisen from this rapid period of expansion. The first of these suggests that with increased migration of workers from rural areas into the cities there has been an increase in the developments of pockets of poverty and deprivation [21]. These have often occurred around migrant populations who lack proficiency in English or the local language of the city, and who strive to maintain families either in poor city accommodation or those left behind in their rural communities [20–22]. The second concern has focused upon the impact of internal migration upon rural communities in India that have been denuded in respect of a workforce, and the suggestion that they have not benefited greatly from the socio-economic developments that are so apparent in the metropolitan cities [23].

The apparent disparities between urban and rural areas in both incidence of disability and access to services for families who have a child with disability, has been identified as an area of concern and one in need of further investigation [24,25]. The importance of increasing empirical study in this area and gaining greater understanding of the needs of families who have a child with a disability in rural Indian communities is apparent. With this need in mind, the small-scale investigation reported in this paper was conducted within the state of Telangana with the intention of gathering data to inform understanding and to assist in planning further actions to provide necessary professional support.

The research conducted for the study reported here, aimed to obtain insights into the current situation in two distinct districts of Telangana with the express purpose of assisting the further development of service provision and delivery to families of children with special educational needs and disabilities. In particular the study aimed to gain an understanding of gaps in current provision as identified by both service users and providers. It is anticipated that the data obtained will be used to assist both policy makers and practitioners to consider changes to the services on offer.

Two specific research questions provided the focus for the investigation, these being:

1. What are the support systems available to families who have a child with disability in the metropolitan city of Hyderabad?

2.   Do such families have similar/equal support in rural Sangareddy?

2. The Indian National Context

India is a country with significant socio-cultural, economic, religious, geographic and linguistic diversity making it a challenge to plan innovative development programmes nationally. The principle of "Education for all" [26] (UNESCO 2015) has been accepted by the Government of India and a range of policies, legislation and interventions have been implemented since independence [27]. When the Constitution of India was framed in the year 1950 [28], free compulsory education up to the age of 14 years was envisaged under the administration of state policies (Article.45).

Education became a fundamental right of every child in 2009 with the enactment of the Right to Education Act, (RTE) [3]. "Education for all", the flagship programme of the Government of India was initiated to realise the goal of establishing a right to education for all children. Initially implemented at primary level (ages 6–12 years), currently the programme takes into account all age groups from preschool to grade 12 (age 16) under the programme named Samagra Siksha [29]. The scheme, centrally sponsored and implemented by the state governments, aims to provide quality education to enhance the learning outcomes of all students; bridge social and gender gaps in school education; ensure equity and inclusion at all levels of school education; ensure minimum standards in schooling provision; promote vocationalisation of education and support states in implementation of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The implementation of this legislation has been instrumental in the reduction of the number of Out of School Children (OOSC) aged 6 to 14 years, from 13.46 million in 2006 to 6 million in 2014 [30]. The UNICEF report further adds that out of the six million children that are still out of school, a majority are from marginalised communities including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and religious minority groups.

The Rights of persons with disabilities Act (RPwD) [31] which replaced an earlier Act of 1995 [32] so as to align with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) [33], endorses the right of all children with disabilities to receive an appropriate education. The act supports the concept of inclusive education and the action plans of the education sector have prioritised educational access to children with special education needs by making compulsory the necessary arrangements. This includes the creation of a barrier free environment, adaptations in curriculum, teaching methods and evaluation procedures, engagement of specialist teachers and ensuring the availability of specific teaching and learning material in the regular schools. Further, to meet these challenges, government at central and state levels have introduced procedures, benefits and concessions to children with disabilities.

The most recent National Education Policy [4] is in alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal four (SDG 4) that ensures inclusive, equitable, quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. To ensure quality in teachers who impart education to children who have disabilities, the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act [34], established a council that certifies courses on Special education nationally and maintains a central register of rehabilitation professionals qualified from the RCI approved colleges and educational Institutes. Though the country is moving forward in terms of access, enrolment and retention of children with disabilities in schools, the quality of education needs to be further critiqued. It is also essential to gain greater insights and understanding of the challenges confronting stakeholders in this area and how they are being addressed.

The school education system in India is complex in its structures and administration. Each state has schools that have English and the state language as the medium of instruction. Irrespective of the main language of instruction, every student has to learn a minimum of two languages from entry into primary schools. For instance, if English is the chosen medium of instruction, the student has to opt for Hindi or the respective state language as the second language. The Educational Administration Board of the schools, which

oversee matters of curriculum and formal assessment, can be either central, state or in some instances, international Boards. Additionally, the schools can be categorised as government schools, government aided privately managed schools, or totally private schools. Though the fee structure may vary based on the type of funding, the school has to be affiliated to central, state or other Boards of Education and follow the prescribed syllabus and evaluation system, including the officially recognised text books. Government schools offer free education. Private schools have their own fee structures. Most states have a regulatory board for the fee structure of private schools. Parents who are financially able, decide on which type of schools they would like to send their children to [35]. Goswami [36], studying the choices of schools by parents for their children in the state of Assam, reported that considerations of costs, school proximity, security and discipline are of prime significance in their choice of high school for their children, particularly for their daughters.

3. Telangana—The Research Locale

Telangana, situated in the south-central part of India is the 29th state of India formed in 2014 with Hyderabad as its capital. Telangana covers an area of 1,12,077 km^2 and has a population of 3,50,03,674. [37]. Hyderabad, a metropolitan city, has a population of 6.9 million people. The city has schools affiliated to Central, State and International Boards with a large number of English medium schools. There are also Telugu (state language) medium schools, particularly those run by the state government. Sangareddy is a rural district in Telangana with a population of 1.52 million people (census, 2011). The schools in Sangareddy district have both, English and Telugu medium schools, though state board schools giving instruction in Telugu medium are greater in number. About 70% of the schools in the state are run by the state government, 28% constitute private schools and about 2% are government aided private schools and 1% of schools are central government schools, however, the enrolment in private schools is higher (52%) as against the government schools (45%) [38].

There are special schools for children with disabilities in Hyderabad and Sangareddy where children with disabilities tend to be enrolled in large numbers, mostly as a result of parental choice. The decisions made by these parents with regard to placement, are often based upon their preference for the smaller number of children in a class commonly seen in special schools, which they perceive as enabling greater individual attention by the teacher and affording greater safety for their child. The city of Hyderabad has a significantly greater number of special schools than Sangareddy district.

The RTE (2009) demands that 25% of the seats in the regular schools are to be reserved for children belonging to 'disadvantaged groups and the weaker section' of society. Disadvantaged group refers to those from scheduled castes (SC) or scheduled tribes (ST), and socially and educationally backward (*sic*) families and communities, while weaker section refers to those who are economically disadvantaged, (RTE, 2009, Section 2; Clauses d and e). This arrangement for free education has to be made in all schools whether administered by private, government or state or central boards. "Children with Special Needs" (CwSN) is the widely used expression to refer to all children including those with disabilities and those identified in the categories above. The government schools have support systems in the form of Resource Centres (called Bavitha centres) that provide access to qualified specialist teachers, therapists and special learning aids and therapy equipment. Private schools may appoint special educators, psychologists and therapists on a part time or full-time basis if they admit children with special educational needs, particularly those with disabilities, but this is not mandatory.

Telangana State, in common with others in India experiences significant disparity in terms of educational provision and the opportunities provided to learners from marginalised populations in urban and rural areas [39,40]. While in recent years there has been significant economic growth in many Asian countries, there is evidence of a widening of the socio-economic gap between a growing affluent Indian middle class and those who continue to live in poverty [41]. Recent studies have indicated that the economic divide

between urban and rural areas in India has been reduced [42]. However, this can in part be attributed to the migration of workers from agricultural communities into metropolitan cities in search of largely unskilled work, thereby expanding the population of urban poor within the country [43–45].

Thorat et al. [46] propose that the risks of marginalized communities such as those from scheduled tribes or scheduled castes, falling into long term poverty are higher than those for more privileged groups. The challenges faced by these communities is possibly greater in rural environments and is often exacerbated by poor access to adequate health care services [47], educational provision [48], and employment opportunities [49]. Tilak [50] has emphasised the two-way relationship between poverty and education and its impact upon the lives of individuals and communities. He has argued that a lack of equity in access to education, strongly influenced by household expenditure has created a significant and inverse correlation between levels of educational attainment and levels of poverty. His views are endorsed by other researchers who have investigated the challenges faced by families living in rural communities where the quality of education available in state schools is often lesser than that found in urban private establishments [51,52]. A study conducted in two districts of Telangana [53] confirmed that poor school infrastructure, under resourcing and teacher absenteeism were confirmed as barriers to the provision of an adequate schooling system in many rural communities within the state. Similar studies from elsewhere in India have indicated that such inadequacies often result in high drop-out rates, particularly in the earliest stages of secondary education [54–56].

Despite efforts to increase equity in the Indian education system through the passing of significant legislation as evidenced earlier in this paper, challenges in creating a more inclusive education system in India persist. As has been seen in other countries many of the difficulties that have confronted progress towards greater inclusive schooling in India can be related to attitudes towards minorities and marginalised groups, inadequacies in teacher training and poor resourcing of schools.

Developing positive attitudes towards inclusion is dependent upon teacher confidence, the challenging of stereotypical images of persons with disabilities and those from other disadvantaged and discriminated groups, and the provision of in-school support mechanisms. The attitudes of teachers towards marginalised populations has been thoroughly researched, both internationally [57–59] and in India [60,61]. Attitudes are invariably shaped by experience and the nature of contact with individuals from marginalised groups. However, the influence of tradition and culture cannot be overlooked as a causal factor in negative attitudes towards these groups and individuals. A study conducted in Ghana by Tamakloe [62] suggested that entrenched social and cultural perceptions of disability and pedagogy were a major obstacle to inclusive schooling. Preece et al. [63] reported research from Bhutan indicating that traditional and religious beliefs associated with karma often instilled an element of fatalism in respect of attitudes and expectations of children with disabilities. While India has developed rapidly as an economic and post-industrial country, it is apparent that such traditional beliefs continue to influence attitudes, particularly towards those with disabilities in some rural areas and that this is likely to provide a continuing challenge to the further development of inclusive education [64,65].

The training of professionals to work with students with disabilities has been identified as a critical factor in those countries where inclusive education has made significant progress [66,67]. Das, Kuyini and Desai [68], reporting the results of a survey of 349 primary school teachers and 318 secondary teachers in Delhi, concluded that the level of training in special education accessed by these teachers was low. Among primary school teachers 67.59% indicated that they had received no special education training, a similar figure of 67.72% was recorded for secondary school teachers. This study confirmed those of Myreddi and Narayan [69] and Sharma and Deppeler [70] in suggesting that the majority of teachers in Indian schools have received limited training to address an increasingly diverse school population. The resulting lack of confidence among teachers faced with a changing school population is unlikely to assist in the smooth transition towards inclusive schooling.

When considering research in the area of inclusive education in India there are significant gaps in the literature. In particular research that reports the effectiveness of pedagogical practices has been rarely reported, and in many instances where specific approaches are discussed, there is little empirical evidence to enable a discussion of efficacy or practical implementation. Where research into school practice has been conducted this has often been in the private sector with minimal attention given to the challenges faced by government schools. Similar disparities exist between the research conducted in urban and rural communities [15,71,72] with much of the focus having been upon those schools in the metropolitan state capitals.

4. Materials and Methods

The researchers conducting this study drew upon their experiences as both practitioners and researchers in the field of education, health and disability. Influenced by the capability theory developed by Sen [73] and Nussbaum [74], the researchers adopted an approach committed to the understanding the experiences of individuals most directly involved in the delivery and receipt of services. Both Sen and Nussbaum have challenged the notion that individuals with disabilities or their carers lack the ability to provide profound insights into their own situations. The investigators undertaking work for the research reported in this paper concur with this perspective, and thus sought to use qualitative research methods in order to provide those most affected by the provision of services to share their experiences.

The researchers adopted an interpretive methodology [75,76] that aimed through the use of instruments that would elicit qualitative data, to provide insights into provision made for children with special educational needs and disabilities within the specified locale [77]. Research of this nature draws upon qualitative data to provide insights into specific phenomena in a limited domain and as such does not aim to generalise findings beyond this environment. The research reported in this paper intended to provide data that could be used to assist in the development of provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities within Telangana State. The specific focus of the investigation enabled the researchers to draw conclusions that in common with most research of this nature, were not generalisable, but were sufficiently trustworthy to enable discussion with professionals in order to promote change [78–80]. Bassey [78] emphasises the value of local based studies, where the findings derived from qualitative data can be regarded as trustworthy in relation to the specific context and used to effect development or change.

A purposive sample of parents and professionals was obtained from schools located in urban Hyderabad (N = 5) and rural Sangareddy District (N = 5) in Telangana State. The schools were drawn from State Board, Central Board, English medium, Telugu medium, Government and Private schools in both locations (see Table 1 below). Having obtained informed consent interviews were conducted in the respondents' preferred language in each school. The sample of interviewees included head teachers, regular class teachers, specialist teachers, parents of children with a disability, therapists or support staff where available, and students with a disability and their peers (see Table 2 below).

Table 3 (below), provides details of how the professionals consulted for this research were qualified in their respective fields. Three head teachers out of four interviewed in Sangareddy and four out of five in Hyderabad had post-graduation and a teaching degree in education. Regular and special teachers were also qualified with the respective qualification in both places. The numbers interviewed varied across locations, as many in Sangareddy when approached, were reluctant to participate in the study when consent was sought, and therefore only those willing were included. The allied services of psychologist, social worker or therapist were based on the availability of services though many schools did not have such facilities.

Table 1. Details of the sample schools and students.

School	Board of Education	Medium of Instruction	Management	Number of Students	Number of Children with a Disability	Details of Disabilities
			Hyderabad			
School 1	Central	English	Government	400	9	ASD-1; ID-4; SLD-2; SI-1; LM-1
School 2	State	English	Private	345	4	ID-2; LM-2
School 3	state	English & Telugu	Government	400	3	HI-2; SI-1
School 4	IB	English	Private	1000	20	ASD-2; ID-3; SLD-15
School 5	State	English	Private	520	8	ID-4; SI-1; HI-1; CP-2
			Sangareddy			
School 6	State	English	Private	160	14	ASD-2; ID-8; SI-2; SLD-2
School 7	CBSE	English & Telugu	Govt.	200	12	ASD-2; ID-6; SI-2; LM-2
School 8	State	English	Private	620	3	SI-1; ID-2
School 9	State	Telugu	Private	460	2	SLD-1 SI-1
School 10	State	English	Private	620	4	SI-4

ASD—Autism Spectrum Disorders; ID—Intellectual disability; SI—Speech impairment; SLD—Specific learning disability; LM—Loco Motor disability; HI—Hearing impairment; CP—Cerebral Palsy.

Table 2. Interviewees. (N = 54).

Participants	Head Teachers	Specialist Teachers	Regular Teachers	Support Staff	Parent (Child with Disability)	Child with Disability	Peer
Schools Hyderabad Schools N = 5	5	5	5	2	5	5	5
Sangareddy District Schools N = 5	4	2	4	1	4	4	3
Total	9	7	9	3	9	9	8

Table 3. Qualification of Participants—Professionals.

	Professional Participants	PG +Ed	Grad+ Ed	Grad + Spl Ed	P G + Spl Ed	Professional Qualification	Total
A	**Hyderabad**						
1	Head teacher	4	1				5
2	Regular teacher	1	4				5
3	Resource teacher			1	4		5
4	Psychologist					1	1
5	Social worker					1	1
B	**Sangareddy**						
1	Head teacher	3	1				4
2	Regular teacher	2	2				4
3	Resource teacher			2			2
4	Physiotherapist					1	1
	Total	**10**	**8**	**3**	**4**	**3**	**28**

PG—Post graduation; Ed—Education; Grad-graduation; Spl Ed—Special education

Table 4 (below) provides details of the gender of children with special educational needs, parents and child peers interviewed during field work. The gender of participants was not seen to have impacted responses.

Table 4. Gender details of CwSN, parents and peers.

Sl.No	Participant	Hyderabad	Sangareddy	Total
1	Father	2	3	5
2	Mother	3	1	4
3	Peer-male	3	3	6
4	Peer-female	2	1	3
5	CwSN-male	4	2	6
6	CwSN-female	1	1	2
	Total	**15**	**11**	**26**

5. Research Instruments

Questions for use in interviews were prepared for each group of participants, taking account of their varying roles and expertise and were piloted to ensure that the questions would elicit the data that would enable an interrogation of the two research questions. One school each in Hyderabad and Sangareddy, which were not included for the main study, were chosen for piloting the tools. The professionals in the schools including the head teacher, resource teacher, special teacher and a support staff, a parent, a student with a disability and a peer were interviewed using the guiding questions that were translated to Telugu. For those who preferred, some interviews were conducted in English. Any of the questions that seemed to be not conveying meaning in a clear manner or failed to elicit answers were reworded and checked for veracity before carrying out the substantive study. The instruments developed sought a range of data included basic demographic details, and the nature of support the students with a disability received in their primary school.

As a result of personal access challenges caused by the lock down situation due to the COVID 19 pandemic, interviews were conducted over the telephone. Although at the time of conducting the interviews home schooling had become the norm, the participants were asked to focus their responses based on the days when the students were going to school. The purpose of the research was explained to each participant in their preferred language in accordance with a previously approved code of ethics that was available to all involved in the study. Many were particular that their name or that of the school with which they were associated should not be revealed in any manner and were assured that this would be respected throughout the research process.

6. Data Management and Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to categorical coding [81,82]. Structural codes [83] were derived from the research questions. Following an initial reading of transcripts by the research team, codes were applied to utterances related to the two research questions. For example, the code AST indicated the Availability of a Support Teacher to work with students who had special educational needs. Inter-rater reliability was verified through a process of multi-analyst triangulation [84,85] whereby two members of the team coded independently and then compared their interpretation. A process of code reduction enabled 5 themes to be determined [86], these were then used to make comparisons between the two research locations of Hyderabad and Sangareddy.

The themes developed for comparative analysis across the two locations were as follows (Table 5).

Table 5. Five Themes used for Comparison Between Two Research Sites.

Theme	Definition
Practical support for students with SEN	Practical educational, social or therapeutic support was being provided to assist with the inclusion of students with special educational needs
Support available to teachers	Support and advice was provided to teachers by expert professionals including specialist teachers, therapists, counsellors or social workers in order to promote inclusive practice
Support available to parents	Support and advice was provided to parents by expert professionals including specialist teachers, therapists, counsellors or social workers to enable them to have confidence in the education provided for their child with SEN
Social benefits of inclusion	Parties involved in the research could see and were able to report the benefits of inclusive schooling
Factors that that inhibit inclusion	Parties involved in the research considered that there were factors that either prevented or slowed progress towards inclusive education

7. Results

Some appreciation of legislation and of the rights of all children to attend school was apparent across participants in both locations, though this was more common in Hyderabad than in Sangareddy. All the participants who were special educators in both places were also aware of the Rights of Persons with disabilities Act [31] while the other participants were less familiar with this legislation. In Hyderabad there was a general awareness by professionals of the intentions of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) [3] to ensure that children and their families would not be discriminated against and denied opportunities for learning. However, while specialist teachers appeared to be most familiar with the specific requirements of the legislation, general class teachers and parents were less confident in this regard. For example, a resource teacher from a private school in Hyderabad recognised that the RTE and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act replaced earlier legislation and had identified 21 categories of disability necessitating high levels of support for inclusive education to be achieved. Others amongst the Hyderabad participants were less clear in their understanding of the legislative expectations, being aware of the existence of policies but less confident of the content. There were also concerns expressed about the gap between legislation and its implementation. This was clearly articulated by a specialist teacher from a private school who observed that, "though many policies are made by the Government, still implementation is practically not easy."

An appreciation of the existence and purpose of legislation is essential for those parents and professionals who are seeking to ensure that children's rights are being adequately addressed. Policy is important in respect of both raising awareness and providing the foundations upon which schools and other services may build expertise and develop resources. The importance of policy was emphasised by a parent of a child attending a Hyderabad school who interpreted the RTE as a means of ensuring, "Zero rejection. No child should be denied admission to school."

Among the sample of teachers and school principals in Sangareddy, familiarity with legislation and local policies was limited. Those who were aware of such documentation realised that it was an important move towards securing rights but had limited appreciation of content or the processes through which improved access should be afforded.

While an understanding of the importance of current legislation was evident across both the Hyderabad and Sangareddy samples, the gap between legislation and practice was evident in the responses of both parents and professionals as will be seen later in this paper.

8. Practical Support for Students with SEN and Their Teachers

In Hyderabad, schools had established a number of systems and procedures to support the learning and social needs of children with special educational needs. The use of specialist teachers was seen as important in enabling such students to be included in learning, with regular class teachers reporting the support that they received in planning lessons and managing assessment procedures. Regular class teachers also identified the availability of a qualified psychologist as being advantageous in respect of identifying needs and providing practical advice.

A specialist teacher from a private school in Hyderabad expressed the opinion that, "The curriculum is modified as per child's need and eventually adapted for teaching and evaluating purposes. There are provisions of alternative assessments and evaluations. Use of simple assistive technology also exists." suggesting a well-organised support system within that school. The same teacher identified specific actions including the use of periods of "Brain Gym" the delivery of sensitization session with class groups to raise awareness of special educational needs, and support for teachers in the development of teaching resources, the promotion of a buddy system and delivery of individual education plans (IEPs), as a means of ensuring that all children could access learning. Where joint planning with specialist teachers did occur, the regular teachers identified this as beneficial.

The teachers seemed to recognize the strengths of the children with disabilities and provided them opportunities to exhibit these. One of the head teachers in a state Board private school in Hyderabad said, "...all children are happy. They do not see the children with disability differently in our school. In fact, a child who has his leg deformity is a lead singer in our school prayer. Every function in the school he sings prayer song."

Teachers in Sangareddy rarely had ready access to the support identified by their colleagues in Hyderabad, several reporting an absence of specialist teachers who could assist them with planning and delivery of the curriculum. These teachers reported limited opportunities to obtain special provision both in respect of educational resources and other professional support from psychologists and therapeutic staff.

However, the good will of teachers was recognised by the parents in Sangareddy. Referring to a regular teacher who provided support to children with special education needs in a government school, one of the parents of a child with intellectual disability noted, "I am happy with my son's school. The teacher teaches him after school hours if needed. He is doing well in school."

Teachers in both locations expressed concerns with regard to the difficulties of obtaining appropriate training for teaching students with special educational needs and disabilities. In Hyderabad all of the sample schools had employed a qualified special educator licensed with the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI). In Sangareddy, access to a specialist teacher was less assured, with one school having a full-time resource teacher who was well qualified, but others being dependent upon visiting professionals. General class teachers in both samples had little experience of teaching students with diverse needs and had received limited if any, professional development in this area. It was evident that investment in training had been focused upon specialist teachers despite the move towards greater inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.

9. Support Available to Parents

Parents were concerned that they should gain access not only to adequate schooling, but also to specialist support for their children with disabilities. The Government of Telangana provides financial assistance of Rs3016 for persons with disabilities, which assists families in accessing the services required for their children. However, this is not only a matter of having financial support. In both samples, comments were made regarding the challenges of obtaining appropriate psychological assessments or therapeutic support, this being dependent upon a child having a disability certification issued by the concerned medical board and being allocated a Unique Disability Identity Document (UDID) issued by the Department of Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities (Swavlambbancard.gov.in 2020).

In both locations, this documentation opens doors to additional financial support to persons with disability as well as travel concessions including for the escort, aids and appliances including wheel chairs, calipers and hearing aids, educational aids such as talking books for the blind and computers and calculators where required. However, if the schools do not have the therapeutic support, the parents arranged for the support at a cost. Parents in Sangareddy whose children attend private schools were less likely to have such access to therapeutic services as the number of centres are less in this district, and where these services were available this often entailed travelling to designated centres, which for some rural communities are difficult to access.

Awareness of the availability of services and rights of access to these was limited in the Sangareddy sample, with only one parent reporting that any therapeutic support was being provided. However, the students with disabilities in government schools had access to the arrangement made by the government adjacent to the schools through Bavitha centres, where physiotherapy, occupational therapies, speech therapy and allied services are provided and the students who needed these services could access them while at school as part of a timetabled activity. Rashtriya Bala Swasthya Karyakramam, (RBSK), a school health programme, which screens children in villages, anganwadis (rural child care centres), schools and colleges focus upon disability as one of its components. This involves early identification of disability and the management of intervention in support of families and children.

10. Social Benefits of Inclusion

When asked about the social benefits of inclusion, it was evident that positive attitudes had developed in several of the schools. The data from school students was particularly positive in this regard. Some of the typically developing students were aware of the challenges faced by their peers with special educational needs but did not see these as an obstacle to sharing a class with them. They often spoke in somewhat naive terms about the apparent disabilities of their classmates, identifying the more obvious characteristics of these, "(He) Walks differently.", "His one leg is weak and stiff."

Students with disabilities and special educational needs did not report negative attitudes from their typically developing peers and tended to focus on the positive exchanges that they had experienced. One student from a private school in Hyderabad reported that, "I share my colour pencils and other things in my pencil box." Another stated that, "I have a number of friends to play with."

Teachers had developed positive relationships with children with SEN and in some instances declared satisfaction when they observed that they made progress in their lessons. They were also aware of the benefits of inclusive schooling in fostering understanding on the part of their non-disabled students. As a regular class teacher from a Hyderabad Government School stated, "Inclusive education helps other children in class understand their peers with disabilities and I think it is healthy this way."

Respect for teachers who were supportive of children with special educational needs and disabilities was apparent with comments such as:"I like my teacher. She likes me . . . When I don't understand she will help me by sitting with me." providing evidence of the ways in which children felt supported and valued as members of a class.

Parents from both Hyderabad and Sangareddy believed that their children with disabilities benefited from school and enjoyed attending. All expressed a belief that teachers were doing the best that they could for their children, though some, such as this parents from a Hyderabad private school questioned whether better support for her child might be available in a special school, "Maybe a special school with qualified autism teachers will be beneficial to my son. There will be personal attention and the special teachers will know how to teach him."

For parents of children in Sangareddy the opportunity to choose a special school was limited and they were generally grateful for the school placement to which their child had been allocated.

11. Discussion

In both urban Hyderabad and rural Sangareddy, attitudes towards the concept of education for all were positive. This positivity was seen across professionals, parents and school students alike. However, views regarding where such provision should be made varied, with some parents and teachers believing that special school provision may remain the better option for their child. This lack of confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to deliver an inclusive education is typical of situations where teacher confidence has not been adequately developed through the provision of support systems or specific training [87].

In the samples considered for this paper, specialist teachers in Hyderabad had benefited from accredited professional development courses that had not been accessed by most of their counterparts in Sangareddy. The regular classroom teachers in both samples had not received specific training in special or inclusive education and this was seen as a critical factor in respect of the development of a more inclusive education system. The situation in these areas of Telangana State is similar to that found elsewhere in India, where studies have identified lack of adequate professional training related to inclusion as an obstacle to progress [60,88].

Reluctance of teachers to work in rural communities in India has been identified as an issue of some concern [89,90]. As the metropolitan cities have prospered, they have developed significantly in housing, medical facilities and social opportunities, which are greatly favoured by teachers. These are often unavailable in rural environments and this has been seen as a disincentive for some teachers when seeking employment. A similar situation relates to the availability of therapeutic professionals and other supportive systems and this has been identified as a factor that continues to disadvantage families who have children with disabilities across India [91]. In Sangareddy both parents and professionals identified this situation as a critical issue that needs to be addressed if equitable provision is to be made for all children and families.

Schools in both samples had made physical adaptations to the learning environment, with the installation of ramps and widening of doors as a common example of modifications that were made to buildings. In the urban schools access to specialist teaching materials is becoming the norm, less so in the rural district. An example of this can be seen in the provision of digital technology in some schools, affording improved access to communication systems and stimulating pedagogical resources for some learners [92]. Students with disabilities in rural communities have less opportunities to access educationally appropriate digital devices and may find themselves disadvantaged in learning. This situation has been further highlighted during the current COVID-19 pandemic [24]. Nevertheless, while meeting the emergency situation due to this pandemic by providing access to education through online learning for many children, the government endeavoured to reach children with disabilities by developing guidelines for e-learning content [93], and in so doing reiterated the importance of taking education to all children in the country.

12. Conclusions

The Government of India has made a major commitment to the promotion of greater equity and inclusion in its schools. Some progress has been made despite the complexities of the current systems such as the varied demands made by boards of affiliation of schools, the diversity in languages of instruction and the management systems which differ across government and private systems. However, much remains to be done to ensure that all students have access to an appropriate education that meets their academic, physical, social and emotional needs. The discrepancy between the availability of resources for inclusive education and therapeutic support between urban and rural areas is apparent, as is the availability of training for professionals. The situation identified in Telangana reinforces that reported in other studies from across India. Whilst there are many challenges and obstacles confronting the development of inclusive education within the country, the recognition of children's rights to an education that is equitable has been established and

accepted by many professionals. Parents are now more aware of the rights of their children to gain access to appropriate schooling and attitudes towards children with disabilities is improving.

The small scale research study reported in this paper indicates that whilst there is a willing ness to address the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities in both districts, the services provided currently fall short of those required to achieve greater educational inclusion. The data obtained will be used as the basis for discussion with both statutory service providers and those non-governmental organisations currently working in situ. Such discussions may assist in the formulation of an action plan aimed at improving services as well as providing a benchmark from which further progress may be assessed.

13. Recommendations

The findings from this research provide exemplification of the challenges faced by parents and children in obtaining appropriate services in the areas investigated. The disparity between urban and rural areas in this study confirms an issue identified in much of the literature reviewed earlier in this paper. It emphasises that inclusive education and therapeutic provision remains at an early stage of development in many areas and that common factors are influential.

Further research focused upon the provision of inclusive education in rural India should attempt to identify innovation and models of good practice. The exemplification and dissemination of such practices could significantly increase the confidence of parents and professionals in the ability of state governments to provide a more equitable service. It is important that researchers maintain a view of practice that is having an impact and ensure that this is shared with practitioners in order to support professionals working in schools.

The need for changes in the opportunities provided for the training and professional development of teachers is clear. Teacher competence is dependent upon their confidence to address the needs of a diverse population. This will only be achieved through the development of high quality training.

In rural communities, access to centralised therapeutic and other services is invariably difficult and it is therefore necessary to consider how effective services can be taken to where the needs are greatest, rather than expecting those who may have difficulties to travel in order to access these.

References

1. Ghai, A. *Disability in South Asia: Knowledge & Experience*; Sage: New Delhi, India, 2018.
2. Rose, R. Seeking practice informed policy for inclusive education in India. *Asian J. Incl. Educ.* **2017**, *5*, 5–22.
3. Ministry of Human Resource Development. *Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 2009.
4. *Ministry of Human Resource Development National Education Policy*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 2020.
5. Jha, J.; Ghatak, N.; Mahendiran, S.; Bakshi, S. *Implementing the Right to Education Act 2009: The Real Challenges*; Centre for Budget and Policy Studies: Bangalore, India, 2013.
6. Sarao, T. Obstacles and Challenges in Inclusive Education in India with Special Reference to Teacher Preparation. *Int. J. Educ. Appl. Res.* **2016**, *6*, 6–35.
7. Malkani, R. A qualitative and flexible case study to investigate the opportunities and challenges for primary education offered to first generation learners in the rural community in the state of Maharashtra, India. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Northampton, Northampton, UK, 2017.
8. Srivastava, M.; De Boer, A.A.; Pijl, S.J. Preparing for the inclusive classroom: Changing teachers' attitudes and knowledge. *Teach. Dev.* **2017**, *21*, 561–579. [CrossRef]
9. Singal, N. Inclusive Education in India: International concept, national interpretation. *Int. J. Disabil. Dev. Educ.* **2006**, *53*, 351–369. [CrossRef]
10. Singal, N. Challenges and opportunities in efforts towards inclusive education: Reflections from India. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2019**, *23*, 827–840. [CrossRef]
11. Mukherjee, M. Global design and local histories: Culturally embedded meaning-making for inclusive education. *Int. Educ. J. Comp. Perspect.* **2017**, *16*, 32–48.
12. Singal, N. Including Children with 'Special Needs' in The Indian Education System: Negotiating A Contested Terrain. In *Confronting Obstacles to Inclusion*; Rose, R., Ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2010.
13. Alkazi, M.R. *Fourth Annual Report: The Status of Inclusive Education of Children with Disabilities under the Right to Education Act 2009*; Centre for Research and Policy in Disability: New Delhi, India, 2015.
14. Srivastava, R. *Vulnerable Internal Migrants in India and Portability of Social Security and Entitlements*; Centre for Employment Studies Working Paper Series (WP 02/2020); Institute for Human Development: New Delhi, India, 2020.
15. Narayan, J. Inclusive Education in rural contexts: Thinking globally acting locally. In *Be the Difference: Equality and Equity in Education*; Verma, P., Panshikar, A., Gupta, Y., Eds.; S.R. Publishing House: New Delhi, India, 2019.
16. Chadchan, J.; Shankar, R. An analysis of urban growth trends in the post-economic reforms period in India. *Int. J. Sustain. Built Environ.* **2012**, *1*, 36–49. [CrossRef]
17. Shaw, A. Metropolitan City Growth and Management in Post-liberalized India. *Eurasian Geogr. Econ.* **2012**, *53*, 44–62. [CrossRef]
18. Kandhare, S.S.; Bharadi, H.H. Internal labour migration in India: Its trends and patterns. *J. of Econ. Soc. Dev.* **2019**, *15*, 78–85.
19. Rajan, S.I.; Sumeetha, M. *Handbook of Internal Migration in India*; Sage: New Delhi, India, 2019.
20. Mohanty, P.K. *Financing Cities in India: Municipal Reforms, Fiscal Accountability and Urban Infrastructure*; Sage: New Delhi, India, 2016.
21. Neelmani, J.; Sudeshna, S. Urbanization in India: An Impact Assessment. *Int. J. Appl. Sociol.* **2014**, *4*, 60–65.
22. Ansari, P. Internal migration: An analysis of Problems faced by the migrants in India—A step to the solution. *Political Sci.* **2016**, *6*, 7–9.
23. Hnatkovska, V.; Lahiri, A. *The Rural-Urban Divide in India*; International Growth Centre Working Paper International Growth Center: London, UK, 2013.
24. Kumar, P.K. Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on education in India. *Int. J. Curr. Res.* **2020**, *12*, 12582–12586.
25. Saikia, N.; Bora, J.K.; Jasilionis, D.; Shkolnikov, V.M. Disability Divides in India: Evidence from the 2011 Census. *PLoS ONE* **2016**, *11*, e0159809. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
26. *UNESCO Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4*; UNESCO: New York, NY, USA, 2015.
27. Biswas, A.; Agrawal, S.P. *Development of Education in India: A Historical Survey of Educational Documents before and after Independence*; Concept: New Delhi, India, 1986.
28. *Ministry of Law, Justice the Constitution of India Government of India*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 1950.
29. *Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of School Education and Literacy Samagra Shiksha: An Integrated Scheme for School Education*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 2018.
30. UNICEF. Available online: https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/education (accessed on 23 October 2020).
31. *Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016*; Gazette of India (Extra-Ordinary) Government of India: New Delhi, India, 2016.
32. *Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 1996.
33. *UNESCO Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*; UNESCO: New York, NY, USA, 2006.
34. *Government of India the Rehabilitation Council of India Act, 1992*; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 1992.

35. Buser De, M. A Framework for the Study of Parental Preferences in School Choice: With Special Reference to Underprivileged Families in Urban India, Global and the Local: New Concepts and Approaches. In Proceedings of the Papers, Consortium for Asian and African Studies (CAAS), Seoul, Korea, 27–28 October 2016; Available online: http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ofias/caas/activities/ (accessed on 30 November 2020).

36. Goswami, N. Costs, Security and Discipline: Gendering the Debate on School Choice in India. *Indian J. Gend. Stud.* **2015**, *22*, 243–264. [CrossRef]

37. Government of Telangana, Telangana State Portal. Available online: https://www.telangana.gov.in/about/state-profile (accessed on 3 November 2020).

38. Jeyaranjan, J. Aspects of Education in Telangana. Available online: https://www.telangana.gov.in/PDFDocuments/Telangana-Social-Development-Report-2017-Part3.pdf (accessed on 30 October 2020).

39. Agrawal, T. Educational inequality in rural and urban India. *Int. J. Educ. Dev.* **2014**, *34*, 11–19. [CrossRef]

40. Sarthak, C.; Shivani, M. Urban rural disparity in education in India. *Int. J. Res. Soc. Sci.* **2019**, *9*, 639–650.

41. Imai, K.S.; Malaeb, B. *Asia's Rural-Urban Disparity in the Context of Growing Inequality*; International Fund for Agricultural De-velopment (IFAD) Research Series: Rome, Italy, 2018.

42. Tripathi, S.; Yenneti, K. Measurement of Multidimensional Poverty in India: A State-level Analysis. *Indian J. Hum. Dev.* **2020**, *14*, 257–274. [CrossRef]

43. Khan, M.I. Migrant and non-migrant wage differentials: A quintile decomposition analysis for India. *Indian J. Labour Econ.* **2016**, *59*, 245–273. [CrossRef]

44. Datta, A. Pride and shame in the city: Young people's experiences of rural–urban migration in India. *Child. Geogr.* **2018**, *16*, 654–665. [CrossRef]

45. Kumar, V.V.; Reddy, A.S.; Sathish, K. Comparison between Rural and Urban Socio-Economic Indicators in India. *Int. J. Eng. Sci. Comput.* **2019**, *9*, 21863–21867.

46. Thorat, A.; Vanneman, R.; Desai, S.; Dubey, A. Escaping and Falling into Poverty in India Today. *World Dev.* **2017**, *93*, 413–426. [CrossRef]

47. Sreenu, N. Healthcare infrastructure development in rural India: A critical analysis of its status and future challenges. *Br. J. Heal. Manag.* **2019**, *25*, 1–9. [CrossRef]

48. Radhakrishna, R.; Ravi, C. Multidimensional Aspect of Child Poverty in India. *Indian J. Hum. Dev.* **2016**, *10*, 302–316. [CrossRef]

49. Kishor, R.; Singh, K. Poverty and Unemployment: Opportunities and Challenges in 21th Century for Rural India. *Uttar Pradesh-Uttarakhand Econ. J.* **2018**, *14*, 84–88.

50. Tilak, J.B.G. (Ed.) Education Poverty in India. In *Education and Development in India*; Palgrave Macmillan: Singapore, 2018; pp. 87–162.

51. Mander, H. *Looking Away*; Speaking Tiger: New Delhi, India, 2015.

52. Malkani, R.; Rose, R. Learning from the voices of first generation learners in a remote community of Maharashtra, India. *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2018**, *14*, 104–127.

53. Kavitha Kiran, V.; Umadevi, L. Study on child perceived barriers to school inclusion in Telangana. *Adv. Res. J. Soc. Sci.* **2016**, *7*, 170–174.

54. Kamble, S.V.; Dalbert, C. Belief in a just world and wellbeing in Indian schools. *Int. J. Psychol.* **2012**, *47*, 269–278. [CrossRef]

55. Prakash, R.; Beattie, T.; Javalkar, P.; Bhattacharjee, P.; Ramanaik, S.; Thalinja, R.; Murthy, S.; Davey, C.; Blanchard, J.; Watts, C.; et al. Correlates of school dropout and absenteeism among adolescent girls from marginalized community in north Karnataka, south India. *J. Adolesc.* **2017**, *61*, 64–76. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

56. Goel, S.; Husein, Z. Gender, caste, and education in India: A cohort-wise study of drop-out from schools. *Res. Soc. Stratif. Mobil.* **2018**, *58*, 54–68. [CrossRef]

57. Czyż, A.K. Attitudes of Polish Schools' Teachers towards the Idea of Inclusive Education for Disabled People. *People Int. J. Soc. Sci.* **2018**, *4*, 542–554. [CrossRef]

58. Supriyanto, D. Teachers' Attitudes towards Inclusive Education: A Literature Review. *IJDS Indones. J. Disabil. Stud.* **2019**, *6*, 29–37. [CrossRef]

59. Moberg, S.; Muta, E.; Korenaga, K.; Kuorelahti, M.; Savolainen, H. Struggling for inclusive education in Japan and Finland: Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. *Eur. J. Spéc. Needs Educ.* **2019**, *35*, 100–114. [CrossRef]

60. Bhatnagar, N.; Das, A. Attitudes of secondary school teachers towards inclusive education in New Delhi, India. *J. Res. Spec. Educ. Needs* **2014**, *14*, 255–263. [CrossRef]

61. Tiwari, A.; Das, A.; Sharma, M. Inclusive education a "rhetoric" or "reality"? Teachers' perspectives and belief. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2015**, *52*, 128–136. [CrossRef]

62. Tamakloe, D. A Case Study of Preschool Teachers' Pedagogical Behaviors and Attitudes toward Children with Disabilities. *Int. J. Whole Sch.* **2018**, *14*, 83–103.

63. Preece, D.; Murray, J.; Rose, R.; Zhao, Y.; Garner, P. Public knowledge and attitudes regarding children with disabilities, their experience and support in Bhutan: A national survey. *Early Child Dev. Care* **2020**, *190*, 1–15. [CrossRef]

64. Borooah, V.K.; Iyer, S. *Vidya*, *Veda*, and *Varna*: The influence of religion and caste on education in rural India. *J. Dev. Stud.* **2005**, *41*, 1369–1404. [CrossRef]

65. Surie, P. Traditions, Values and Religion: Social Welfare in India and China. In *Social Welfare in India and China*; Gao, J., Baikady, R., Govindappa, L., Cheng, S.L., Eds.; Palgrave Macmillan: Singapore, 2020.

66. Pijl, S.J. Preparing teachers for inclusive education: Some reflections from the Netherlands. *J. Res. Spéc. Educ. Needs* **2010**, *10*, 197–201. [CrossRef]
67. Tristani, L.; Bassett-Gunter, R. Making the grade: Teacher training for inclusive education: A systematic review. *J. Res. Spéc. Educ. Needs* **2020**, *20*, 246–264. [CrossRef]
68. Das, A.; Kuyuni, A.; Desai, I. Inclusive education in India: Are the teachers prepared? *Int. J. Spec. Educ.* **2013**, *28*, 27–36.
69. Myreddi, V.; Narayan, J. Preparation of special education teachers: Present status and future trends. *Asia Pac. Disabil. Rehabil. J.* **2000**, *10*, 1–8.
70. Sharma, U.; Deppeler, J. Integrated Education in India: Challenges and Prospects. *Disabil. Stud. Q.* **2005**, *25*. [CrossRef]
71. Kalyanpur, M. Equality, quality and quantity: Challenges in inclusive education policy and service provision in India. *Int. J. Incl. Educ.* **2008**, *12*, 243–262. [CrossRef]
72. Narayan, J.; Patnaik, N. *Inclusive and Special Education Services in Rural Settings*; Oxford University Press (OUP): London, UK, 2020.
73. Sen, A. The idea of justice. *Philos. Soc. Crit.* **2014**, *41*, 77–88. [CrossRef]
74. Nussbaum, M. The Capabilities of People with Cognitive Disabilities. *Metaphilosophy* **2009**, *40*, 331–351. [CrossRef]
75. Creswell, J.; Shope, R.; Plano Clarke, V.; Green, D. How interpretive qualitative research extends mixed methods research. *Res. Sch.* **2006**, *13*, 1–11.
76. Yanow, D.; Schwartz-Shea, P. *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*; Routledge: London, UK, 2016.
77. Tranh, N.C.; Thanh, T.L. The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *Am. J. Educ. Sci.* **2015**, *2*, 24–27.
78. Bassey, M. Creating Education through Research. *Br. Educ. Res. J.* **1992**, *18*, 3–16. [CrossRef]
79. Bassey, M. *Case Study Research in Educational Settings*; Open University: Buckingham, UK, 1999.
80. Anney, V.N. Ensuring the quality of findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *J. Emerg. Trends Educ. Res. Policy Stud.* **2014**, *5*, 272–281.
81. Creswell, J. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*; Pearson: New Jersey, NJ, USA, 2008.
82. Willig, C. *Qualitative Interpretation and Analysis in Psychology*; McGraw Hill: Maidenhead, UK, 2012.
83. Saldaña, J. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2009.
84. Patton, M.Q. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, 4th ed.; SAGE: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2015; ISBN 978-1-4129-7212-3.
85. Amankwaa, L. Creating Protocols for Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. *J. Cult. Divers.* **2016**, *23*, 121–127. [PubMed]
86. Lichtman, M. *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide*, 3rd ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2013.
87. Van Mieghem, A.; Verschueren, K.; Struyf, E. Professional development initiatives as a lever for inclusive education: A multiple case study using qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). *Prof. Dev. Educ.* **2020**, 1–14. [CrossRef]
88. Sharma, U.; Das, A. Inclusive education in India: Past, present and future. *Support Learn.* **2015**, *30*, 55–68. [CrossRef]
89. Walia, K. Reform of teacher education in India. In *Reform of Teacher Education in the Asia Pacific in the New Millennium: Issues Concerns and Prospects*; Cheng, Y.C., Chow, K.W., Mok, M.C., Eds.; Springer: Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 2004; Volume 3.
90. Blum, N. Small NGO schools in India: Implications for access and innovation. *Comp. A J. Comp. Int. Educ.* **2009**, *39*, 235–248. [CrossRef]
91. Kumar, S.G.; Roy, G.; Kar, S.S. Disability and rehabilitation services in India: Issues and challenges. *J. Fam. Med. Prim. Care* **2012**, *1*, 69–73. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
92. Choudhury, A.; Verma, P. ICT: New vista towards inclusive practices. In *Be the Difference: Equality and Equity in Education*; Verma, P., Panshikar, A., Gupta, Y., Eds.; S.R. Publishing House: New Delhi, India, 2019.
93. *NCERT Guidelines for Development of E Content for Children with Disabilitie*; Developed by subcommittee of experts constituted by the Ministry of Education; Government of India: New Delhi, India, 2020.

Article

An Historical Review from Exclusion to Inclusion in Western Australia across the Past Five Decades: What Have We Learnt?

Dianne Chambers [1,*] and Chris Forlin [2]

1   School of Education, The University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle 6160, Australia
2   International Education Consultant, Perth 6000, Australia; chrisforlin@outlook.com
*   Correspondence: dianne.chambers1@nd.edu.au; Tel.: +61-8-9433-0170

Abstract: Current practices regarding inclusive education vary enormously depending on a wide range of issues, specifically the context and culture of an education system. To maximise the validity of data, and to avoid contextual confusion, this review focuses on one state in Australia, that of Western Australia. By applying a review of five-decade archival data, changes to education for learners with disability in this state are critiqued. Analysis involved applying five a priori themes to review educational reform practices. These were related to legislation and policy, support, curriculum, teacher education and parental choice. Discussion teased out the impact of these changes on the competing paradigms of special and inclusive education, and models and challenges of implementing effective inclusive practice for all learners in one Australian state. Critical reflection provides valuable insight into futures planning for all educational systems to reform practice to become more inclusive.

Keywords: Western Australia; inclusive education; disability; policy; curriculum; teacher education; parental choice

1. Introduction

There is little doubt that in most countries changes in the education of learners with disability have been highly noticeable and have altered significantly across the past half century. With the general exemption of less developed countries, where change has been fraught with a range of other local challenges, most countries now have well-established processes for supporting learners with disability. These changes have been underpinned by international declarations and conventions emanating from agencies such as UNESCO and UNICEF and local country legislation and policy. Since the 1980s, the internationally accepted philosophy of education has been to work towards a more inclusive approach to education. Commencing with an integrative model, then moving towards an inclusive approach, this has been considered as the most equitable way to educate all learners, including those with disability.

This has, nonetheless, not been an easy model to implement. Countries vary enormously in their cultural diversity and in their ability to respond to inclusion [1]. Local beliefs, values, attitudes and knowledge about children with disabilities and their needs similarly vary immensely and are frequently firmly embedded within local historical contexts making change difficult [2]. All these impact on the ability of different systems to provide appropriate and effective education opportunities and support for learners with disability.

A major area of concern in most systems has been how to effectively prepare teachers for their changed role. Considerable research has found that general education teachers continue to blame their lack of appropriate pre-service preparation for their unwillingness to be involved with inclusive education, or the difficulties they face with implementing it [3]. This finding has led to many systems developing new models of teacher preparation with greater collaboration between teacher training institutions and schools [4,5]. In some regions, such as Australia, the training required for all teachers to support learners with

disability has been legislated through a set of education standards. The nationally administered Australian Qualifications Framework [6], stipulates the standards to be achieved for teachers on completing their preservice training. In Australia, most students with special educational needs are now included in regular classes. Across all systems, though, a range of schooling options continue to be offered, especially for students with high and profound support needs [7]. In less developed countries, teacher preparation remains a major concern with reported poor-quality and overall lack of general trained teachers, often large class sizes, teaching being a less desirable career, minimal support, and inadequate infrastructure and resources [1].

Linked with teacher knowledge about teaching learners with disability is the issue of curriculum. Initially, only students who were able to keep up with the regular curriculum could be included in mainstream schools. More recently, it is generally accepted that curriculum adaptation is necessary to enable access for learners with disability. While the content and expectations of achievement remain like their peers, access to or presentation of the curriculum will most likely require modification [8].

The increased involvement of parents in their child's schooling has also changed the teacher-parent relationship in many systems and increased school accountability [7]. Although it was parent advocacy in the 1970s that led to educational acceptance for learners with disability, it is only in more recent years that governments have acknowledged the rights of parents and actively encouraged them to participate in school-based decision making.

1.1. Australian Education System

Australia has both federal and state/territory education systems. As overall responsibility for education is decentralised to the states and territories, each jurisdiction is responsible for setting its own education Acts, policy and directions. There remains, however, some influence at a national level. The Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment [9] is responsible for the development of national policies and the provision of programs for early childhood and higher education. It also provides additional funding to states and territories to support learners with disability to access primary and secondary schooling. This national funding is allocated through a process of data collection called the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on school students with disability (NCCD). Information collected through this process determines the number of students requiring additional funding at four different levels of need:

- Support provided within quality differentiated teaching practice (no federal funding allocated),
- Supplementary adjustments,
- Substantial adjustments, and
- Extensive adjustments.

The Australian Government calculates the students with disability loading in recurrent funding. This funding is allocated directly to individual Education Departments for children attending government schools, or to Catholic Education systems, and directly to schools that are registered as Independent.

1.2. Research

To gain an understanding of how education systems have managed the change from minimal or no education for learners with disability through to inclusion, this research considered an in-depth review of one system in Australia. It was envisioned that the challenges in providing an overview of change in more than one system would result in limited validity with far too many differences to make any assumptions about how the move towards inclusion had really impacted on a region. This review, therefore, aimed to investigate the impact of cultural, political, social and historical changes for learners with disabilities in the state of Western Australia.

2. Method

An historical perspective was provided through a review of relevant documentation and artefacts across the past five decades in Western Australian education. Documented evidence from national and state legislation and policies was critiqued. Data from published research and reports were extracted from the literature in relation to impacting on educational reform practices in the education of learners with disability. Data were obtained from educational archives, published research, historical books, national and local education reports, committee minutes, Education Acts and legislation. A number of article databases were accessed including EBSCO, A+Education, Education Source, ERIC and Google Scholar. Keywords used in a variety of combinations included: inclusion, special needs, education, Western Australia, WA, legislation, policy, teachers, teaching, pedagogy, curriculum, support, services, environment and parent/s. Literature was included in the paper if it had relevance to the time periods under consideration and was specific to the Australian or Western Australian context. Additional gray literature (including legislation) was located using internet search engines, and through use of the authors own reference collections.

Data were analysed using five a priori themes [10], extracted from the literature in relation to impacting on educational reform practices in the education of learners with disability. These themes were:

1. Policy and legislation;
2. Support and environment/learning spaces;
3. Curriculum;
4. Teachers, teacher training and pedagogy;
5. Parental choice.

Definitions

In Western Australia, the use of the term 'handicapped' was the practice in the 1970s and this was defined as "A person whose physical and/or mental well-being is temporarily or permanently impaired, whether congenitally or through age, illness, accident, or socio-economic conditions or by an emotional-behavioural disorder, with the result that his self-dependence, schooling, or employment is impaired" [11] (p. 202).

The definition of the term disability in this paper is the one used in the most current School Education Act (1999) of Western Australia, which identifies disability as:

(a) "attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments; and
(b) which is permanent or likely to be permanent; and
(c) which may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature; and
(d) which results in (i) a substantially reduced capacity of a person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility; and (ii) the need for continuing support services" [12] (Part 1, Section 4, p. 4).

3. Findings and Discussion

Each a priori theme was considered for changes across three timeframes (1970s to early 1980s; late 1980s to early 2000s; and mid-2000s to end of 2020), covering the past half century of education for learners with disability in Western Australia.

3.1. Theme 1: Policy and Legislation
3.1.1. Timeframe 1970s–Early 1980s

Following the introduction of the normalisation principle by Wolfensberger in the Scandinavian countries in 1972 [13], worldwide philosophies for the education of learners with disability began to change intensely. From a rights-based perspective, a strong movement began to encourage learners with disabilities to be educated in regular schools. A key early influence was Public Law 94-142 [14] which in 1975 legalised the structure

needed to implement a policy of integration in the USA. This law was widely seen as the foundation for change and, supported by the Warnock Report in the UK in 1978 [15], these were utilised by many countries internationally, including Australia, to inform local policy development.

Prior to the 1970s, education was not a right for children with disabilities in Australia. Groups such as the Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled (ACROD), however, began to stimulate increasing interest in the development of special education throughout the 1960s. A Senate Standing Committee on the education of the handicapped (the term used at that time) led to the establishment of an Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission. One of the major foci of this Committee was "the particular needs of schools for the handicapped, whether mental, physical or social" [16]. Two key recommendations on special education requirements that emerged from this Report were (1) the need for early identification and intervention providing professional support to parents and siblings of children with handicaps, and (2) adequate training of teachers in sufficient numbers through pre- and in-service training [17]. By 1974, the Federal Government had committed extensive funds to support education including special education and teacher development. A specific grant was made during 1973 for the employment of 50 additional college academic staff at teacher training colleges to support the number of students undertaking courses in special education.

With this increased focus on the needs of learners with disability, national and local policy began to refer to the integration of children with handicaps into the education system. By the end of the decade, it was expected that all students, including those with high support needs, should be included in an education facility, with an emphasis on integration wherever possible. Although many students were still being offered placement in a segregated special school in Western Australia, this was still an improvement from previously when these children were not in education at all but placed in Activity Centres or asylums.

In the early 1980s in Australia, a noticeable move towards the integration of learners with disability was becoming well established. At this stage, though, the Education Act 1928–1970 of Western Australia [18] did not contain any definition of disability and referred only to children with disability in the context of placement options. This was not added until the new Act was enacted in 1999. Reports on progress of integration in Australia, nevertheless, were not very favourable. The Western Australian Beazley Report in 1984 [19] concluded that school sites were not adequately meeting the needs of learners with disability, but retained the perspective that if including students with disability in regular classes the children with whom they were to be included were not to be affected adversely. At a national level, the Gow Report [20], in the following year, found that while the concept of integration was commendable, the problems associated with implementation were impeding its progress. At this stage, while all jurisdictions in Australia expressed some commitment to integration in principle, there was no legal mandate to formalise this integration. Decisions regarding the inclusion of learners with disability in regular schools relied on local school choices.

3.1.2. Timeframe—Late 1980s to Early 2000s

From the late 1980s, greater attention internationally was given to addressing inequalities in education and the community. While not specifically focusing on students with disability, at Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Conference on Education for All [21], noted that access to basic education for all should be a focus for all countries. This declaration was the forerunner of subsequent powerful agreements impacting the education of students with disability which were signed and ratified by many countries around the world. Of particular importance to the global special education community was the 1994 release of the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education [22]), which was a consensus of direction on education for students with disability; informed by the

principle of inclusion with the aim of making all schools more effective. Key elements consisted of inclusion of all, celebration of individual differences, and appropriate response to the needs of all students.

In Australia, 1992 saw the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) [23], which stated that students with disability must receive an appropriate education without discrimination as a result of their disability. At this stage there was a transition to using the term inclusion in policy although in reality the method employed was still very much an integrated approach. In 1993, the Shean Report [24] reviewed the equity of services provided to learners with disability in Western Australia. In this report it was argued that " . . . inclusion is not appropriate for all children" (p. 79), and placed importance on " . . . retaining the existing range of placement options" (p. 98).

Unlike the previous 1928 Education Act, the new 1999 School Education Act of Western Australia [12] (Part 1, Section 4) included a definition of disability identifying it as meaning a condition:

(a)   "which is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments; and
(b)   which is permanent or likely to be permanent; and
(c)   which may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature; and
(d)   which results in—
    (i)   a substantially reduced capacity of a person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility; and
    (ii)   the need for continuing support services" (p. 4).

The definition provided some clarity around the identification of students with disability but was broad and conversely, could be used to exclude students from receiving support if they did not meet the definition; particularly students with specific learning disability.

By early 2000, all states and territories had developed their own policies on services for learners with disability. Inclusive education was viewed as an essential component of social justice and the provision of equitable access to schooling. Policy statements reflected the DDA, although implementation varied significantly depending upon systemic regional and local personnel and financial resources.

3.1.3. Timeframe—Mid-2000s to End of 2020

During this time frame, strong legislation introduced in the USA also had an impact on other countries around the world, including Australia. The introduction of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Amendment Act 2004 (IDEA) [25], superseded Public Law 94-142 [14] and ensured services to children with disability in the USA through early intervention, special education and appropriate services.

Internationally, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [26] also had a significant influence on the way that the rights of people with disability were viewed, not only in education, but in society. Article 24 specifically addressed education and clearly stated that persons with disability must have access to inclusive education on an equal basis with others in their community and that they are to be provided with accommodations and supports to be successful. Australia was an early signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Sitting under the DDA (1992) in Australia, the national Disability Standards for Education (DSE) were enacted in 2005 [27], developed to make explicit to education providers and consumers their rights and responsibilities in relation to students with disability. The DSE required that all education providers ensured enrolment in appropriate settings, access to curriculum, participation in educational activities, provision of support services and that students with disability were not victims of harassment. These standards were wrapped around concepts of reasonable adjustments in the classroom, and access on the same basis as peers. The DSE was significant legislation as it provided guidance for both teachers and parents regarding suitable accommodations and adjustments for students with disability in the classroom. In Western Australia, in the current educational environment,

educational bodies rather than individual schools, provide guidance to teachers and parents on inclusive education through policies at a sector level which incorporate legislative requirements. Even though Australia now has national policies on education promoting inclusion, and anti-discrimination Acts aimed to ensure the rights of children and youth to inclusive schooling, access to inclusion still varies considerably between government and non-government systems, jurisdictions, regions, and local schools. Inclusion is a focus in policy but in reality, it remains an option within a continuum of placements.

3.2. Theme 2: Support and Environment/Learning Spaces

3.2.1. Timeframe—1970s to Early 1980s

By the early 1970s, like many other countries, a fairly comprehensive dual system of education had been established in all states and territories in Australia. Categorical special schools for students with a range of specific disabilities had emerged so that students were educated with those with similar disabilities. Such schools were autonomous in their management and situated on separate sites from regular schools. Class sizes were generally between five and 15 students depending upon their specific needs. Where available, special education-trained teachers were employed and supported by a range of unqualified teacher aides.

In Western Australia, the late 1970s saw the establishment of socio-psycho-educational resource centres (SPER centres). Not designed as special schools (although acting in a remarkably similar vein), they were provided as an alternative school to give temporary support to learners who were not coping with the demands of regular schools. Finding the inclusion of some learners in regular schools to be challenging due to failing to " . . . produce acceptable behavioural responses to the normal classroom setting despite efforts by the teacher with assistance from a variety of sources" [28] (p. 15), they were offered placement in a SPER centre. This placement could be up to two years before they were expected to be integrated back into their local school.

Regular primary and secondary schools mainly enrolled students without disability, although students with learning difficulties were included by default and when identified usually separated into remedial classes. Class sizes were relatively large, usually between 30 and 40 students. There was no expectation that students in the remedial classes were to complete the regular curriculum. Towards the end of the decade, the philosophy of segregated education for students with disability had been challenged and a movement towards reintegrating these students back into regular schools had commenced. The concept of social inequality and empowerment was introduced.

3.2.2. Timeframe—Late 1980s to Early 2000s

The movement away from placement of children with disabilities in segregated facilities to greater inclusion in regular schools dramatically changed the nature of special and regular education during this period. The integration into regular schools initially focused on learners with mild disability, although it was widely acknowledged that the role of regular teachers would still need to change.

This movement resulted in a continued debate about how regular schools could best support these learners. Several major publications referring to widespread community consultations concluded that provision of the level of support needed in terms of personnel and facilities to ensure the safety and hygiene of learners with disability was beyond reasonable expectations for regular schools [29,30]. They further concluded that any gains obtained by including learners with high support needs would be outweighed by the disadvantages and would be detrimental to existing students.

To resolve this issue, most jurisdictions reviewed existing support structures and aimed to establish ways to provide some middle ground between special and regular schools. In Western Australia, several environmental changes were made. Following the Beazley Report, a new policy 'Changes to Services for Children in Need of Educational Support' in1984 [31], outlined significant changes to the existing organisation of govern-

ment services. Newly established Education Support Centres were designed to cater for students with mild to moderate disabilities. While autonomous with their own principal and teaching staff, these centres were placed on site of regular school buildings with the intention to help promote increased opportunities for their students to participate in regular class activities. Where there was insufficient need for a centre, individual Education Support Units were provided within regular schools, consisting of one or two classes under the management of the regular school.

In addition, schools began to employ increasing numbers of unqualified education assistants to support teachers, especially when including learners with disability into regular classes. The role of the assistants commenced by withdrawing students for individual or small groupwork, but gradually began to move more towards working with students within the regular classroom.

Inevitably, some special schools were closed, and the teachers became support teachers in regular schools. The degree of involvement of learners with disability from the Education Support Centres or Units in the onsite regular schools, however, varied enormously as it was dependent upon the relationships between the two principals and the ethos of both schools. Although the Education Department had established a policy that supported inclusion, based on the recommendations from the Shean Report and the existing Education Act, it simultaneously retained the right to prevent the inclusion of students deemed unsuitable. The education policy in 1993 [32] stated that where three criteria of significant deficits in (a) adaptive behaviour; (b) academic achievement; and (c) intellectual functioning of two or more standard deviations below the mean, were met, students were still eligible for placement in education support facilities.

3.2.3. Timeframe—Mid-2000s to End of 2020

While the inclusion movement in education was still gaining momentum during this period, the continuum of services offered to students with disability remained in place. There were education support centres and special schools available for students to access, and some specialised language development centres, and centres catering for students with specific disability, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder [33]. Along with the existing provision, purposeful planning of new schools began incorporating a composite model. Instead of building a separate, segregated school or centre, these are now being merged in the planning and building of the school (both primary and secondary sites), known as a One School Model [34]. These specially designed settings include appropriate modifications and accommodations to the physical environment to address the needs of all potential learners, in line with the Disability Standards in Education 2005 [27]. Modifications may include lifts (in multi-story sites), ramps, wide-opening doors for access, large class sizes, modified furniture, toilet facilities, and access to technology.

In 2011, a panel review of school funding in Australia, known locally as the Gonski Report, revealed large gaps and inequities between students, with differences in educational outcomes, often attributed to differences in social economic factors and community position [35]. The panel concluded that " . . . every child should have access to the best possible education, regardless of where they live, the income of their family, or the school they attend" (p. xiv). The report stated that the best way to achieve equity was through funding reform, and a new model of increased school funding was suggested, including greater clarity around individual state and federal funding. The new model suggested funding per student, with an additional load for students with disability. As jurisdictions across Australia used different definitions for disability, it was also determined that a Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability [NCCD] [36] would take place annually to determine the number and level of adjustments provided to students with disability. From 2018, funding for students with disability from the Australian Government has been based on the NCCD data.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, there was an emphasis in the education system on decentralisation in order to ensure local requirements could be met in schools. The decentrali-

sation involved a move from centralised special education consultants to district support groups, which could be more responsive to schools and gain a deeper understanding of the issues for schools in different geographic areas. As part of the decentralisation of education support, Independent Public Schools (IPS) were introduced [37], where schools could apply to be independent, and work from a one-line budget. This form of budgeting allowed schools to make individual decisions about how and where the funding would be best applied in the school to meet the needs of all learners. The IPSs included regular schools, education support centres and education support schools and required a school board to be formed to assist with the operations of the school. The IPS system allowed schools to hire staff as required, for example, social workers or speech pathologists, who may not normally be part of the school's regular staff.

3.3. Theme 3: Curriculum and Pedagogy

3.3.1. Timeframe—1970s to Early 1980s

In the 1960s and 1970s, state-based education departments in Australia began to develop special schools to accommodate students with disability. In regular schools the curriculum that was expected to be taught to students was also state based and detailed in regards to the content and when it was expected to be covered, which was not always accessible for students with disability. In special schools, specific curriculum was developed by individual schools, often with a life-skill focus, to support students in gaining appropriate daily living skills such as self-care, money concepts, and travel skills. The main aim of many of the life-skill curricula was to assist the students to be active members of society and potentially access the workforce on leaving school. Some commercially available programs were used by some special schools, such as the Walker Social Skills Curriculum [38].

3.3.2. Timeframe—Late 1980s to Early 2000s

Outcomes-based education (OBE) became a popular educational approach in Western Australia around the 1990s [39]. While this approach was said to be useful as it examined the outputs of curriculum and then moved backwards through curriculum design, there were many issues with the implementation of this approach in schools in WA. Berlach and McNaught describe the difficulties with the implementation of an outcomes-based curriculum as being poorly handled by education authorities. The documentation was convoluted and difficult to comprehend, assessments were time-consuming and insufficiently competitive and, of most concern, the underlying philosophy of OBE was incompletely considered. Teachers were dissatisfied with the OBE system and an unprecedented loss of experienced teachers from the system was reported. The use of outcomes to measure student progress was promoted for all students, including students with disabilities. The OBE approach was discontinued in 2008 in Western Australia with the reintroduction of a K-10 Syllabus.

3.3.3. Timeframe—Mid-2000s to End of 2020

A unified Australian curriculum was released in 2010 to be used by all states and territories in Australia [40]. There have, however, since been local state variations applied to some of the subject areas in the curriculum. In Western Australia, teachers access the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) version of the curriculum. The WA Curriculum, as it is known, includes access to ABLEWA (Ability Based Learning Education Western Australia), an assessment tool and curriculum materials for students with disability and additional learning needs [41]. The ABLEWA provides access points to the curriculum for students who may be working at a level lower than pre-primary and therefore may not be able to access the regular curriculum levels. In addition to using ABLEWA to provide appropriate curriculum, teachers can also take a three-pronged approach to devising learning objectives for students with disability that may be drawn from one or more of three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum; the curriculum materials; general capabilities; or cross-curriculum priorities [42], although the curriculum is recommended as the starting point.

While there is no specific requirement for the use of planning formats, or stipulation of the format to be used, the DSE [27] refers to programs taking into account the intended educational outcomes and learning needs and capacities of the learner with a disability. Most schools and educational sectors utilise individualised programs to identify and record the needs and key learning objectives for learners with a disability. There is no one standard format for these individualised programs, and examples include an Individual Education Plan (IEP), Curriculum Adjustment Plan (CAP), Individual Behaviour Management Plan (IBMP), or Developmental Learning Plan (DLP). There is an expectation that, where feasible and appropriate, special education settings will teach an adapted version of the national curriculum, through making reasonable adjustments to the instruction, curriculum and environment allowing for personalised learning and individualised support [42].

Between 2012 and 2014, support for schools in the form of an initiative titled More Support for Students with Disabilities (MSSD) was instigated for all states and territories, including Western Australia, utilising funds from the Federal government (specifically, Department of Education and Training). Independent evaluation of the initiative suggested that the objective to " . . . build the skills of teachers and increase school capacity to better meet the educational needs of students with disability" [43] (p. 9) was achieved well, with some obvious capacity building noted in many schools and sectors. While only a short-term initiative, the MSSD focused attention on improving the learning and educational outcomes for students with disability.

3.4. Theme 4: Teachers, Teacher Training and Pedagogy
3.4.1. Timeframe—1970s to Early 1980s

During this period, teachers were trained either as generalist primary or specialised secondary teachers in Australia. For teachers wanting to work in special schools, separate training was offered. Teachers expected to be able to obtain a job working in the area for which they had trained. In addition, classes were homogenised with grading of students within year groups, so that teachers would be mainly working with students of like abilities. Teachers built up expectations of achievement and behaviour within the age groups in which they taught. Most students were of Australian, Aboriginal or British descent. Teachers experienced little diversity within regular classes.

Teacher training was considered a full-time course with an expectation that they would be on site at their training college five days a week. Training for regular schools focused on generic skills based on limited theory with a stronger emphasis on practical teaching skills and strategies. At the beginning of the 1970s, teacher preservice training courses did not include any compulsory units of study on teaching students with disability. Separate courses were offered for those who wanted to prepare to teach in a special school where the greater emphasis was on teaching life skills in preparing students for living in a family and the community. By the mid-1970s, though, the main training colleges in Western Australia required all students to take special education courses in their first and second years of study. These were focused on medical issues associated with specific categories of handicap and did not provide an integrated approach. It was not until the early 1980s that training colleges offered the first additional one-year diploma in special education that was non-categorical and focused on competent teaching techniques and procedures irrespective of medical condition.

Pedagogy remained didactic, teaching to the average of the class with limited modifications, especially for learners who were gifted or deemed to be 'slow learners'. Desk layout was rigid with students placed in rows and classes grouped according to ability. It was not uncommon for the brightest students to be placed in the front rows and the weaker ones at the back of the classroom.

3.4.2. Timeframe—Late 1980s to Early 2000s

As inclusive education gained momentum in Australia, teachers voiced increasing concerns about their inability to provide for learners with disability. Many questioned the

appropriateness of inclusive education. There was little evidence to support this inclusion from an academic standpoint, although it was generally perceived that it had social gains.

Teachers voiced fears about being judged on their abilities if they were unable to support learners with disabilities, especially those that exhibited particularly challenging behaviours. They cited a lack of training, large class sizes, disruption to their regular teaching, parents of learners without disability being unaccepting of inclusion and their frustration in being unable to cope with the new challenges. At this stage including learners with a disability in a regular classroom was not mandated in Australia and so many teachers opted out.

3.4.3. Timeframe—Mid-2000s to End of 2020

With the strengthening of expectations around inclusive education, teachers began to experience teaching more students with disability in regular classes, and this is now considered the norm and is legislated. While recent research reports that teachers still complain about being unprepared to teach students with disability, teacher education programs require courses in the area of special/inclusive education in order to achieve accreditation as a university program [44] and to meet graduate teacher standards. Training for teachers, however, does not always allay concerns [45], and crowded university curriculums may not allow significant time for practical training, as opposed to philosophical approaches. Australian Professional Standards for Teachers [46] require that graduate teachers " . . . demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements and teaching strategies that support participation and learning of students with disability" (p. 11).

There is an increasing requirement that teaching practices, for all students, are evidence based and data driven to ensure the efficacy of the practice [1]. The scientific approach to teaching requires evidence that a practice actually works and is the most efficacious [47]. Individualised, student-centred learning approaches are now seen as appropriate pedagogy to address the learning needs of students [48].

3.5. Theme 5: Parental Choice

3.5.1. Timeframe—1970s to Early 1980s

Parental choice in education placement for children with disability was virtually non-existent in the 1970s. This was clearly enunciated in The Education Act, 1928–1970 of Western Australia, which although receiving minor amendments, was not repealed until 1999. In the Act, specific recommendations for children with disability were contained in Section 20A(1), covering children requiring special education and in Section 20B(1) for those with severe disorders. These sections pertain only to placement options and make it very clear that parents do not have any right to choose the placement for their child. Section 20A(1) Children requiring special education (Education Act 1928–1970) states that:

> Where it appears to an advisory panel that a child of not less than 6 years of age nor more than leaving age has a mental or physical disorder or disability of such a nature that the interests of that child would be best served if he were to attend a school providing education of a kind specially suited to persons with such a disorder or disability, the Minister may, on the recommendation of the panel, serve on the parent of the child a direction in writing requiring the parent to cause the child to attend such school or schools as is or are specified in the direction during such times as are so specified (p. 38).

Section 20B(1) Children with severe disorders (Education Act 1928–1970) states that:

> Where it appears to an advisory panel that a child has a mental or physical disorder or disability of so severe a nature that the presence of that child in a Government school would disrupt the normal operation of the school the Minister may, on the recommendation of the panel, serve on the parent of the child a direction in writing directing the parent to refrain from causing the child

to attend any Government school and whilst the direction remains in force the Minister shall refuse to permit the child to attend any Government school (p. 39).

Parents who attempted to challenge such directives were invariably seen as 'trouble-makers' and unwelcome in their child's school. This directive resulted in a number of children with severe disorders being unable to attend any government school.

3.5.2. Timeframe—Late 1980s to Early 2000s

Over the next period, parents became increasingly more involved in the education of their children with disability. Parent advocacy and support groups were cultivated and constituted an important and vocal voice in promoting and advocating for inclusion. These were frequently supported by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs). Family-centred services became common for children with disabilities in the 0–5 age group, and more funding and support services were made available by the states and territories and NGOs to encourage early intervention.

3.5.3. Timeframe—Mid-2000s to End of 2020

Decisions about placement in a specific educational setting are now made with significant input and choice from parents, and any disputes about the feasibility of the placements are addressed by an advisory panel who guides the Director General about education placement [49]. Parents have much greater input into the educational planning for their children, often in the form of an Individual Education Plan (IEP), which is a collaborative document detailing the key goals and objectives to be met by the child. As parents have significant knowledge of their children's abilities and needs, they are logical and necessary partners in the educational process [50]. Parents also have heightened knowledge of process and procedures involved in the schooling system and their rights in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act [23] and Disability Standards for Education [27], due to the increased access to online information.

With the initiation of Independent Public Schools, parent representation on school boards is now a commonplace and expected occurrence. This representation provides further impetus for parental input into the school's objectives, priorities and general policy directions [51]. All schools have a website where information about the school is readily available.

Parental choice in relation to therapy has grown due to the implementation of an Australia-wide National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) [52], which provides funding resources to support the needs and build independence of people with disability. Therapies may be provided during school time (in consultation with the school), and are parent controlled, rather than being fully determined by the school, as happened in the past.

4. Conclusions

Based on this historical perspective, through an analysis of documents and artefacts, it is possible to obtain an overall picture of how Australia, and in particular Western Australia, has transitioned from providing no education or schooling to students with high and profound support needs to making education available to all students within their local inclusive school. Mirroring international declarations, many important reforms underpinned by national legislation and local policy have led this change in Australia. The move towards inclusion for all remains, nonetheless, a movement in flux, with new amendments and opportunities being introduced through a continuous improvement regime. Australia is somewhat unique as education is governed locally within each jurisdiction but committedly supported fiscally by additional federal funding. Legislation is national, yet jurisdictions can enact their own policies without interference from a central government. Inevitably, this has led to different approaches to the education of children with disabilities, a variety of support structures, and alternative schooling arrangements across the states and territories.

Nevertheless, the competing paradigms of special and inclusive education remain. In many ways, education reform is cyclical, in that old ways become new ones: only under new terms and embedded in different philosophies. Of key importance, though, is that all children now have access to education and no children are confined to activity centres or asylums. In reality, the range of educational placement options available continue to be the same as in the 1970s, although placement selection is now reversed. While initially movement was from segregated facilities into integrated ones, it is now from inclusive settings into more segregated ones. The names of the schools are less stigmatising and school sites expect to cater for considerably more diverse student populations, but it remains that for children with the most challenging needs, education for them is with a specialist teacher in a separate classroom.

The latest model to emerge in Western Australia for newly developing government school sites is a fully inclusive approach to physical placements for all students. Students who would have previously gone to a segregated special school, an education support centre or a mainstream school will now have the choice of attending a school that is a combination of all three options, which the Department of Education have termed a 'One School Model' [34,53]. Under this new model the designated school site will have one overarching principal, with an associate principal taking the role of supporting students with special needs. These students may be placed in the regular classroom, or in a special classroom where their needs will be best met. The One School Model has some correlation to the Inclusive Special Education theory suggested by Hornby [54], in particular the necessity for close collaboration with parents and school staff.

This new model has strong implications for the involvement of parents in decision making. From the analysis, it is evident that parental involvement in their child's education has increased significantly over the past fifty years and that it has now reached a stage where the rights of parents have been firmly embedded within Australian legislation and policies. Decisions about placement choices for learners with special education needs are made with substantial input by parents, alongside a comprehensive team of relevant stakeholders. Parents are in general more aware of and knowledgeable about options for their children and can be extra demanding about accessing these. Parents are involved in much more intensive discussions with their school, moving in advance of supporting the school through Parents and Citizens fundraising activities, to being engaged in greater decision making through participation on school boards and other endeavours that allow their voices to be heard. Accountability by schools has also increased exponentially, with a considerably greater openness about their curricula and pedagogy, and the supports that they provide to learners with special needs.

In addition to having a stronger voice in the education of students with special needs, an extensive review of the empirical literature about parental involvement and inclusive education by Afolabi [55], revealed a " . . . strong and meaningful relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement and that parents' beliefs, expectations, and experiences, are important ingredients that support better learning outcomes for children" (p. 196). Establishing and maintaining an effective and positive relationship between parents and schools will, therefore, need to be an essential component of the new fully inclusive model of physical placements within the one school brand. Enacting this model will result in larger numbers of parents of learners with disabilities vying for the same outcomes and opportunities that they previously accessed within a smaller and more focused special school system.

Parents of learners with special needs do not want equal opportunities but equitable ones for their children. Inevitably, this will require schools to provide differentiated options for some learners, which may be seen by parents of learners without special needs as being discriminating against their children. It remains to be seen whether parents of learners with special needs will consider the support available within this new model reasonable and equitable compared to the facilities and supports that were previously provided in the segregated special schools. The model may also challenge parents' perceptions of whether

their rights of choice are being enabled or constricted within a much more diverse and larger schooling organization.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, D.C. and C.F.; formal analysis, D.C. and C.F.; methodology, D.C. and C.F.; writing—original draft, D.C. and C.F. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Forlin, C. Best Practice Adjustments for Students with Disability: A Report for the National School Resourcing Board. 2019. Available online: https://www.dese.gov.au/swd/resources/research-report-best-practice-adjustments-students-disability (accessed on 23 November 2020).
2. Beacham, N.; Rouse, M. Student Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs about Inclusion and Inclusive Practice. *J. Res. Spec. Educ. Needs* **2012**, *12*, 3–11. [CrossRef]
3. Forlin, C.; Chambers, D. Catering for Diversity: Including Learners with Different Abilities and Needs in Regular Classrooms. In *Life in Schools and Classrooms: Past, Present and Future*; Springer: Berlin/Heidelberg, Germany, 2017; pp. 555–572. [CrossRef]
4. Florian, L.; Rouse, M. The Inclusive Practice Project in Scotland: Teacher Education for Inclusive Education. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2009**, *25*, 594–601. [CrossRef]
5. Forlin, C. (Ed.) Responding to the Need for Inclusive Teacher Education: Rhetoric or Reality? In *Future Directions for Inclusive Teacher Education*; Routledge: Milton Park, UK, 2012; pp. 3–12.
6. Australian Government. Australian Qualifications Framework. 2013. Available online: https://www.aqf.edu.au/ (accessed on 24 November 2020).
7. Forlin, C.; Chambers, D. Diversity and Inclusion and Special Education. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2020. [CrossRef]
8. Otukile-Mongwaketse, M.; Mangope, B.; Kuyini, A.B. Teachers' Understandings of Curriculum Adaptations for Learners with Learning Difficulties in Primary Schools in Botswana: Issues and Challenges of Inclusive Education. *J. Res. Spec. Educ. Needs* **2016**, *16*, 169–177. [CrossRef]
9. Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. Schooling. 2020. Available online: https://www.dese.gov.au/schooling (accessed on 4 January 2021).
10. Miles, M.B.; Huberman, A.M.; Saldana, J. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed.; Sage Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2014.
11. Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled (ACROD). Open Letter from Australian Council for Rehabilitation of Disabled. *Aust. Occup. Ther. J.* **1972**, *19*, 202.
12. Government of Western Australia. *School Education Act 1999*. Government of Western Australia. 1999. Available online: https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/law_a1960.html (accessed on 25 November 2020).
13. Wolfensberger, W. *Normalization: The Principle of Normalization in Human Services*; National Institute on Mental Retardation: Toronto, ON, Canada, 1972.
14. United States Congress. Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Pub. L. No. 94-142; 1975.
15. Warnock, H.M. *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*; Special Education Needs, Her Majesty's Stationery Office: London, UK, 1978.
16. Karmel, P. *Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission*; Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission: Canberra, Australia, May 1973. Available online: https://apo.org.au/node/29669 (accessed on 23 November 2020).
17. Drummond, N.W. Special Education in Australia: With Special Reference to the Developments in the Education of the Handicapped in the Decade of Rehabilitation, 1970–1980; 1978. Available online: https://download.onlinefreetrial.xyz/book/show/3310247-FILE (accessed on 11 March 2021).
18. Government of Western Australia. *Education Act 1928–1970*. Government of Western Australia: Perth, Australia. 1970. Available online: https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/prod/filestore.nsf/FileURL/mrdoc_18804.pdf/$FILE/Education%20Act%201928%20-%20%5B06-00-00%5D.pdf?OpenElement (accessed on 25 November 2020).
19. Beazley, K. *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education in Western Australia*; Western Australia: Ministry of Education: Perth, Australia, 1984.
20. Gow, L. *Report of the Working Party on Special Education on Commonwealth Policy and Direction in Special Education*; Commonwealth Department of Education: Canberra, Australia, 1985.
21. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Final Report: World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs. 1990. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000097551 (accessed on 23 November 2020).
22. United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. 1994. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427_eng (accessed on 5 January 2021).

23. Commonwealth of Australia. Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Available online: http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2012C00110/Download (accessed on 23 November 2020).
24. Shean, R. *The Education of Students with Disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties*; Report of the State Government Taskforce; Western Australia Ministry of Education: Perth, Australia, 1993.
25. United States Congress. Individuals with Disabilities in Education Amendment Act. Pub. L. No. 108–446; 2004.
26. United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) | United Nations Enable. 2006. Available online: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html (accessed on 4 January 2021).
27. Commonwealth of Australia. Disability Standards for Education 2005. 2005. Available online: http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767 (accessed on 4 January 2021).
28. *Education Facilities in Western Australia for the Child with Special Needs*; Education Department of WA: Perth, Australia, 1977.
29. Ashman, A.F.; Bayne, B.; Mangan, J. *Resourcing Methodology, Resourcing Instrument, and Algorithm for Students with Disabilities and Their Schools*; Report submitted to the Inclusive Education Branch, Education Queensland, Brisbane; University of Queensland: Brisbane, Australia, 2002.
30. Jenkinson, J.C. *Mainstream or Special? Educating Students with Disabilities*; Routledge: Milton Park, UK, 1997.
31. Vickery, R. *Changes to Services for Children in Need of Educational Support: Statement of Education Department Policy*; Education Department of Western Australia: Perth, Australia, 1984.
32. Ministry of Education. *Policy and Guidelines for the Education of Students with Disabilities*; Western Australia Education Department: Perth, Australia, 1993.
33. Department of Education. Education Support Centres and Schools. 2020. Available online: https://www.education.wa.edu.au/education-support-centres-and-schools (accessed on 5 January 2021).
34. Department of Education. John Butler Primary College. n.d. Available online: https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/overview.do?schoolID=5835 (accessed on 15 December 2020).
35. Gonski, D. Review of Funding for Schooling—Final Report. 2012. Available online: https://www.dese.gov.au/uncategorised/resources/through-growth-achievement-report-review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools (accessed on 25 November 2020).
36. Education Services Australia. What Is the NCCD? 2020. Available online: https://www.nccd.edu.au/wider-support-materials/what-nccd?parent=/understanding-nccd&activity=/wider-support-materials/what-nccd&step=-1 (accessed on 15 January 2021).
37. Department of Education. Public School Councils and Boards: Information Package V. 1. 2020. Available online: https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/l9872k (accessed on 5 January 2021).
38. Walker, H.M. *The Walker Social Skills Curriculum: The ACCEPTS Program*; Pro-Ed: Austin, TX, USA, 1983.
39. Berlach, R.G.; McNaught, K. Outcomes Based Education? Rethinking the Provision of Compulsory Education in Western Australia. *Issues Educ. Res.* **2007**, *17*, 1–14. Available online: http://www.iier.org.au/iier17/berlach.html (accessed on 25 November 2020).
40. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). About the Australian Curriculum. n.d. Available online: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/about-the-australian-curriculum/ (accessed on 23 November 2020).
41. School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA). ABLEWA—Abilities Based Learning Education, Western Australia. 2014. Available online: https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/resources/ablewa (accessed on 16 December 2020).
42. Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Meeting the Needs of Students with a Disability. n.d. Available online: https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/meeting-the-needs-of-students-with-a-disability/ (accessed on 16 December 2020).
43. PhillipsKPA. Evaluation of the More Support for Students with Disabilities Initiative 2012–2014. 2015. Available online: https://www.dese.gov.au/uncategorised/resources/phillips-kpa-mssd-final-evaluation-report (accessed on 4 January 2021).
44. Stephenson, J.; O'Neill, S.; Carter, M. Teaching Students with Disabilities: A Web-Based Examination of Preparation of Preservice Primary School Teachers. *Aust. J. Teach. Educ.* **2012**, *37*, 5. [CrossRef]
45. Forlin, C.; Chambers, D. Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education: Increasing Knowledge but Raising Concerns. *Asia Pac. J. Teach. Educ.* **2011**, *39*, 17–32. [CrossRef]
46. Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. 2011. Available online: https://www.aitsl.edu.au/docs/default-source/national-policy-framework/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers.pdf (accessed on 25 November 2020).
47. Forlin, C.; Chambers, D.; Loreman, T.; Deppeler, J.; Sharma, U. *Inclusive Education for Students with Disability: A Review of the Best Evidence in Relation to Theory and Practice, Canberra*; Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations & Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth: Canberra, Australia, 2013. [CrossRef]
48. Hattie, J. *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximising Impact on Learning*; Routledge: Milton Park, UK, 2012.
49. Department of Education. Disabilities Advisory Panel. 2001. Available online: http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/policies/disabilities-advisory-panel.en?bbp.9.policyID=9835075&bbp.s=10&bbp.e=select&bbp.10.pane=0&bbp.v=7&bbp.i=d0.l.1.1.1.1.1.3.1.1.1.1.1&g11n.enc=UTF-8 (accessed on 23 November 2020).
50. Kurth, J.A.; McQueston, J.A.; Ruppar, A.L.; Toews, S.G.; Johnston, R.; McCabe, K.M. A Description of Parent Input in IEP Development through Analysis of IEP Documents. *Intellect. Dev. Disabil.* **2019**, *57*, 485–498. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

51. Department of Education. Independent Public Schools. n.d. Available online: https://www.education.wa.edu.au/independent-public-schools (accessed on 4 January 2021).
52. National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA]. What Is the NDIS? 2021. Available online: https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/what-ndis (accessed on 15 January 2021).
53. Afolabi, Q.E. Parents' involvement in inclusive education: An empirical test for the psycho-educational development of learners with special educational needs (SENs). *Acad. J.* **2014**, *6*, 196–208. [CrossRef]
54. Collier, P. New Schools for Perth's Northern Suburbs. 2014. Available online: https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Barnett/2014/02/New-schools-for-Perth%E2%80%99s-northern-suburbs-.aspx (accessed on 23 November 2020).
55. Hornby, G. Inclusive Special Education: Development of a New Theory for the Education of Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. *Br. J. Spec. Educ.* **2015**, *42*, 234–256. [CrossRef]