

**NORTHERN IRELAND STUDENT TEACHERS' CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION DURING INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING.**

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*With the passing of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Act into law alongside the move away from academic selection for post-primary pupils by 2008 and a far reaching review of the curriculum, education in Northern Ireland is about to face its most radical change in fifty years. Issues relating to Inclusive Education are now pressing and in addressing such change, it is recognized that pre-service programmes must be reviewed to ensure that student teachers are equipped to teach effectively in classrooms that may be very different from their own learning experience. This study seeks to discover the factors influencing student teachers changing attitudes towards inclusion during a one year Post-Graduate Diploma in Education. The findings reveal that positive attitudes towards inclusion were tempered by concern about personal competency to teach in an inclusive classroom and by continued attachment to the current system of academic selection with which they were familiar. The effect of a successful teaching practice in the non-selective sector had the most positive influence on perceived competency and on general attitudes towards inclusion. This research concludes that those responsible for pre-service education in Northern Ireland should ensure that school based experience is also underpinned with an effective programme of academic study about inclusion-based practices*

The last three decades have seen governments worldwide promote inclusion as the preferred model for education. Defining the term inclusion however is by no means simple as it remains a contentious term giving rise to tensions and contradictions amongst policy-makers and practitioners alike. Issues surrounding definitions of disability; the continued exclusion of some pupils and the need for improvement in training and support systems all remain concerns that are international. A report by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education on Inclusive Education and Classroom Practices (2003) found that dealing with diversity or difference was one of the biggest problems in mainstream European classrooms.

While there has been considerable research that has focused on teachers and student teachers attitudes towards inclusive education and what may influence these attitudes, there still a lack of definitive understanding for the term that is both recognised and accepted across international boundaries. Despite attempts through initiatives and legislation such as The Salamanca Statement for Special / Inclusive Education: A Framework for Action, (1994) and The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), that aimed to find a common definition, the successful acceptance and implementation of inclusive policies will very often depend on historical and social precedents that are embedded in the existing systems of individual countries. In a recent comparative study of pre-service attitudes about inclusive education for example, Sharma, Forlin, Lorman and Earle (2006) reported more positive sentiments and attitudes by those in the western countries studied (Australia and Canada) than those found in the east (Singapore and Hong Kong). These findings raise important questions about the importance of cultural and social difference when attempting to understand attitudes towards inclusion and importantly the factors that might influence attitude change.

In Northern Ireland, a region of the United Kingdom (UK) that is still emerging from many years of internal conflict, the combined affects of history, tradition, religion and class related politics have bolstered the current system so that the organisation of post-primary education by academic selection at age eleven has prevailed long after it has been set aside by the rest of the UK and Europe. Since the recent passing of SENDA into law (September 2005), Northern Ireland has now the same legal responsibilities towards ensuring equality of opportunity for all learners as in the rest of the UK. The

present state supported system however, where learners are segregated aged eleven based entirely on the outcomes of two one hour written tests could well be considered by many to be anti-inclusionist in nature and certainly far from the UK government vision and aspiration for the make up of schools in the future (DfES 2004). The rigidly selective system has also helped to create a social divide that according to the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has produced *a disproportionate number of schools which combine low ability and social disadvantage thereby compounding the educational disadvantages of both factors* (DENI 2000: 10.3.11). The same research found that the attitudes of parents towards the education system was a reflection of their own educational experience. Those who had themselves attended selective schools viewed the system positively while those who attended non-selective schools were less so (8.2.2). It is possible to speculate then that personal experience may also have influenced the formation of attitudes towards inclusive education by those entering Initial Teacher Education (ITE).

In Northern Ireland the majority of those in pre-service training will have themselves attended a selective school where they would have experienced a singularly academic curriculum. In this educational environment contact with other peer learners who had even mild learning difficulties would have been unlikely. The cohort of Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) students who form the population for this study represent almost half of all those in post-primary training in Northern Ireland. Of these 125 student teachers, 72.4% had attended an academically selective school, while 27.6% had experienced non-selective schooling. Within the general school population in Northern Ireland these figures would be virtually reversed. While caution must be exercised in making negative assumptions about the influence of the selective system on the personal attitudes of student teachers towards inclusion it remains a factor to be considered.

Changes to the present system are currently underway however, and after more than a decade of debate and review culminating in two important reports on the future of post-primary schooling (The Costello Report 2004, The Burns Report 2001) alongside a major overhaul of the existing curriculum (CCEA 2004), by 2008 academic selection is finally to be set aside. A more inclusive model will for the first time require *all* teachers in every school to be ready to provide effective support for learners, including those with diverse special educational needs. This may include learners who may have health conditions or sensory impairment, physical disability, or display emotional and behavioural problems. They may also have to support those who belong to travelling communities or to whom English is a second language. The evolution of a genuinely inclusive education system from one that is still deeply attached to academic selection will also present challenges for providers of pre-service training. It is likely that current practice will require review and modification in light of the changing model for post-primary schooling.

#### *Seeking a definition for inclusion in the context of Northern Ireland*

Developing inclusive education will, according to Booth (1996), require two processes. The first is to increase participation of pupils within a culture and curricula of mainstream schools, and the second involves decreasing exclusionary pressures. Barton (1997) describes it as responding to diversity and being open to new ideas so as to empower all members of a community to celebrate difference. Jelly, Fuller and Byers, (2000, p.17) assert that mainstream schools can no longer allow policies and structures to cater only for the needs of certain pupils, thereby excluding others with special educational needs, and must provide *an ever more effective education for an ever more diverse range of learners*. Vlachou (1997) however, has contended that education systems are in fact constructed to include some children and exclude others based on the premise that their individual deficits made it impossible for some to cope in the mainstream environment. The expression *needs* could also be used to suggest dependency and inadequacy (Corbett 1996), while the separation of mainstream and special education may have perpetuated difference by promoting a medical view of disability were attention is placed on the child and his or her perceived disability. This model has permeated the beliefs, attitudes and practices throughout education. Slee (1997) warns that by separating pupils with *special learning needs* there is also the danger of deflecting attention from the improvement of general educational practices and the understanding of broader social and cultural forces that might shape them. Inclusion could be seen as the total education of learners with Special Educational Needs in mainstream education. (Skidmore 2004, Tomas and Loxley 2002, Dyson and Millward 2000, Carrington 1998). Integration would be seen as a less radical and probably more familiar concept where the existing school system and its curriculum is somehow modified or adapted in some ways to accommodate difference.

Despite the fact that the date has been set for radical changes to education since the Education Act (NI) (1947) the Department of Education (NI) has yet to present a definitive guide as to how inclusive education will look in context. While finding *evidence of good practice in schools in integrating pupils with a statement of special educational needs into mainstream classes* (p.25) the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) report (DE 2003) still identified inclusive education as a key issue for mainstream schools, particularly at post-primary level stating:

*..the need for a policy commitment to inclusion has been highlighted: Such a development is crucial to the overall promotion of better practices across schools, when including pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.* (p.25).

As the curriculum in Northern Ireland is set to become much more skills based than ever before (CCEA 2004), there may also now be real opportunities to embrace a more generative and far-reaching model of inclusive schooling. In English secondary schools research indicates that the distribution of children with Statements were disproportionately found in the lowest attaining schools (Lunt and Norwich 1999). Certainly the market style approach that followed the Reform Act (1988) has had a negative impact, with parents more likely to opt for schools with high profiles in academic performance. Such a system inevitably makes children who have perceived problems or are difficult to teach less attractive to school governors, principals and teachers alike. While the percentage of children in special schools has fallen there has also been a dramatic rise in the number of behavioural exclusions (Parsons 1999), and a consistent rise in the number of statutory assessments which have led to an increase in the number of learners with statements to 3% in 2000. It is difficult to ignore the fact that the move towards inclusive education has increased pressures and demands on educators and schools alike (Forlin, Hattie and Douglas 1996).

Northern Ireland has witnessed similar pressures were the system of academic selection already mitigates against the philosophy and vision of inclusion. Certainly as in the rest of the UK more pupils are today accommodated in mainstream schools (DE 2003) than in the eighties, but clearly this would not apply to selective schools. They may accept some children with statements but it is likely they will have some physical disability and are able to prove they are not intellectually restricted. Certainly those with challenging behaviours, language restrictions or mild learning difficulties will only be accommodated only within a pool of less than 70% of post-primary schools. The language of inclusion though frequently used in Department of Education (NI) documents does not as yet extend to any meaningful level across all schools in Northern Ireland. It might then be said that inclusion exists but it is generally to be found amongst those who have already been excluded by the system. Any of the reviews of inclusion and inclusive practices by the Department of Education, Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) should be viewed therefore as limited within the demarcation set by the rigid procedure for transferring learners to their post primary school. The changes to post-primary arrangements by 2008 will inevitably extend the intake of all schools therefore flagging up the inclusion agenda in a much more radical and meaningful sense.

Despite the current limitations that the existing system presents there is evidence that the Department of Education NI is looking ahead in readiness for change. The ETI has conducted a recent review entitled *The Future Role of the Special Schools* (2006). This report is focused on the huge challenge for schools in managing diversity within the current educational climate of inclusion (p.1) and surveyed all 49 special schools in Northern Ireland. The key findings emphasise a need for increased professional collaboration between special and mainstream schools. However the report also flagged up the lack of agreed definition of Inclusion and the varying interpretations of the Code of Practice across Northern Ireland. These are issues that will need to be addressed so that educational inclusion and cohesion as envisaged in the SENDA (2005) can be realised. Many of those who work in special schools also expressed their reservations as to the suitability of mainstream schools to meet the needs of pupils who experience more severe learning and behavioural difficulties requiring higher degrees of adult support. The report recommends that there is an *urgent need for DE to articulate a clear vision for special needs and inclusion, and to put in place effective mechanisms to ensure a continuum of provision to cater effectively for a diversity of need.* (p.11). There are clear indications that the special schools will have to change and develop as both a discreet provider but also through increased collaboration and support for mainstream schools. There is however no indication within this report of the demise of the special school in Northern Ireland. Teacher education for inclusion and for the provision of support for pupils with SEN still requires much development. Findings in an earlier research by the ETI on the inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools had identified the need for *a fundamental review of in-service, and initial teacher education* (2003 p.5).

In the present system additional educational requirements are not required by those teaching either in special schools or teaching SEN in mainstream and currently there is no specific plan in place to change this. Indeed, across the whole island of Ireland (North and South) there exists neither common agreement nor approach as to how those in pre-service programmes should be prepared for inclusive schooling (Kearns and Shevlin 2006). Lack of a coherent training plan to support teachers in becoming inclusive educators may seriously affect the successful embedding of a more inclusive culture within Northern Ireland schools.

#### *Attitudes of teachers towards inclusion*

The attitudes of classroom teachers has long been recognised as being key to the successful inclusion of learners with special educational needs into mainstream classrooms (Norwich 2002, Carrington 1999). Consistently research has shown that positive attitudes are one of the main predictors of the successful implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom (Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden, 2000, Bacon and Schultz, 1991). Studies of trainee teachers have tended to indicate more willingness to accept pupils with SEN than more experienced teachers (Forlin, Hattie, and Douglas 1996, Harvey 1985) citing educational background as an important influencing factor. Studies of both pre-service and in-service teacher attitudes towards inclusion of pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream classrooms have also shown that attitudes were affected by the quality of preparation received (Lambe and Bones 2006, Avramidis et al 2000, Wilczenski 1993), concluding that improving and increasing training provision at the pre-service phase of teacher education would be the most effective method of promoting better attitudes to inclusion. If student teachers complete their pre-service education without having developed positive attitudes towards inclusion this will be very difficult to change and may have a negative affect on the integration of learners with disabilities into mainstream settings (Lambe and Bones *in press*), Tait and Purdie, 2000 and Beare 1985) found that positive attitudes were evident in student teachers early in their initial training, concluding that improved provision at pre-service through a structured approach towards training for inclusion-based practices would be the best point to nurture these attitudes. While much research has focused on the views of practising teachers, it is in the pre-service period that offers significant potential to influence positive attitudes. Increased concentration on this phase of teacher education might in fact provide the best means to create a new generation of teachers who will ensure the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices in Northern Ireland. Abbott (*in press*) found that some head teachers in Northern Ireland felt that those in pre-service were not fully prepared for inclusive classrooms despite praising student teachers' *motivation and enthusiasm to learn*. Their solution was that, *Teaching Practice should entail student placement in a range of settings that included non-selective and special schools* (p.12).

#### *Initial teacher education, school based placement and inclusion*

Attitudes of student teachers in Northern Ireland towards inclusion will have important implications for the future development of ITE programmes and be used to inform and influence training needs in light of any rationalization required for the more inclusive system ahead post-2008 (Lambe and Bones 2006). The model for training student teachers in Northern Ireland has two traditionally recognised formats. One is a four-year Bachelor of Education programme and the other is a one-year full-time Post-Graduate Certificate (PGCE). Both are models that combine theory and practice. The PGCE programme (on which this study is based) combines block periods of practical, school-based teaching experience with periods of face-to-face academic and vocational study in university. During the year, the placements serve to offer the student teacher real-life experience as a practicing teacher within a school. Student teachers complete two teaching practice placements during their training year. The current selective school system affects the arrangements for these school placements that are equally weighted and eight weeks in length. The first will be spent in a non-selective school and the second in a selective (grammar) school environment. It is during the first placement where a student teacher will have most opportunities to work with pupils with diverse backgrounds and abilities including those who may have diverse special educational needs or challenging behaviours. It is here therefore that inclusive practices are more likely to be seen and experienced.

By the end of the PGCE year all post-primary student teachers will have gained considerable teaching experience in a selective and non-selective school. If perceptions about inclusive education can be affected by the quality of pre-service provision, then school based placement experience (a large and integral part of ITE) may be a crucial time to cultivate positive attitudes. This study seeks to explore some of the key factors that influence the changing nature of student teachers attitudes toward issues relating to inclusion and inclusive practices during a one year PGCE programme. It will consider the extent to which the attitudes of student teachers in Northern Ireland can be affected by extended

placements in very different school settings namely, a non-selective and a selective teaching environment

#### *Research Aims*

The research is Phase 3 of a twelve month study that follows a cohort of student teachers enrolled on a one year post-primary Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the University of Ulster. The first and second stage of the research (Phase 1 and 2) were initiated at the point of entry to the PGCE and after the first extended school- based placement respectively. The research method was quantitative and involved the use of a survey. The aim is to identify the key factors and experiences that can influence attitude change towards inclusion during pre-service training.

This study (Phase 3) explores the changing attitudes of student teachers in Northern Ireland towards inclusion after they had completed two extended teaching practice experiences in non-selective and academically selective schools. In particular it seeks to pinpoint the key points within the programme that attitude change occurs.

#### *Method*

##### *Participants*

The population consisted of the same 125 student teachers enrolled at the University of Ulster for the award of PGCE (post-primary) who completed Phase 1 and 2 of the overall study. These student teachers were studying eight subject areas including, Art and Design, English, Geography, History, Home Economics, Music, Technology and Design and Physical Education. While the population he group represent almost 50% of all students studying for a post-primary PGCE in Northern Ireland and the research focused upon those training for the post-primary sector because it is here that developing inclusive practices are seen as most problematic.

##### *Instrument*

The approach to this part of the research was quantitative and involved the re-administration of the survey designed by Lambe and Bones (2006) and used in Phase 1 and 2 of the research. Of the 125 surveys administered 108 were completed and returned, representing a return rate of 86.4%. From this number 28% were male and 72% female reflecting accurately the gender breakdown for the whole PGCE population in Northern Ireland. Table 1 sets out the characteristics of the students who participated.

*Table 1*

**Student characteristics**

Student characteristics <i>n</i> =108		
Gender	Female	72%
	Male	28%
Age	21-25	70%
	26-30	16.7%
	31-35	4.6%
	36-40	2.5%
	40-47	1.8%
School	non-selective	27.6%
	selective	72.4%
School type	All boys	15%
	All girls	30.2%
	Co-ed	53.7%

#### **Research Questions**

During the first week of the PGCE course class discussions between the students and subject tutors that explored beliefs about the purpose of schooling (part of the introductory programme), had yielded the following themes:

1. beliefs about the purpose of schools and attitudes towards organizational issues within teaching;
2. concerns or anxieties about teaching within an inclusive educational classroom;
3. personal beliefs and attitudes towards the ideology of inclusive education.

Because these were themes of major importance to the future of education in Northern Ireland it was decided to construct a survey in order to obtain more detailed information about student attitudes

towards them. The survey (validated in the two previous studies) contained 27 statements relating closely to the issues elicited from the discussions and allowed three types of response: *agree*, *disagree*, and *don't know*. There were important reasons for using the same survey as in Phase 1 and 2. One of the research aims was to observe the changes that occurred in student attitudes to inclusion as the PGCE year progressed and the times selected to administer the survey needed to be key moments in the year. Phase 1 was conducted at the start of the programme at a point when student opinions were as yet uninfluenced by either theory or classroom experience. Phase 2 involved the re-administration of the survey immediately the students had returned from the first teaching placement in a non-selective school. To complete the quantitative aspect of the research the same survey was administered once more (Phase 3) immediately after the completion of the second teaching practice experience which was in an academically selective school. Changing the survey each time would have adversely affected the validity of the findings and since they were administered at least three months apart this ensured a sufficient gap between each so that the respondents were unlikely be able to recall and possibly be influenced by) their previous responses.

#### *Data analysis*

Formic Data Capture software was used in the analysis of the survey and allowed other factors such as gender, age and whether the respondent had personally experienced selective or non-selective schooling to be considered. It also provided the means to measure and compare any changes to the survey responses before and after teaching experience. The survey was anonymous and the students were informed as to the purpose of the research in advance of it. This information was also repeated in writing at the start of the survey. Because Northern Ireland has yet to definitively specify how it will interpret inclusion post-2008, and as a pre-requisite to completion of the researcher-administered survey the students were given a working definition of inclusion that stated inclusion should be taken to mean *mainstream schools accommodating a full diversity of pupils*. They were also given a definition for special educational needs taken from The Education Act (1996, 56.part iv,312), stating that *A child has special educational needs ... if he has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him*.

The findings are presented in tabular form and show in percentages student responses to the survey pre-Teaching Practice (Time 1), post-Teaching Practice 1(Time 2) and post-Teaching Practice 2 (Time 3). The second teaching practice is completed a few weeks before the PGCE year ends.

#### **Findings**

As the PGCE year progressed there was a consistent and steady increase in respondents who felt that all teachers should experience teaching pupils with special needs (Statement 1). Agreement increased steadily after each teaching practice (82.2%-91.5%-95.5%). There was an increase of more than 10% in responses favouring streaming as the most effective means of dealing with different abilities after the first teaching practice in a non-selective school (Statement 2). This reduced slightly (59.6%-52.8%) after completion of the second teaching practice in an academically selective school. There was a small increase across the year in those who felt that schools should be more than somewhere to promote academic achievement from 68.2%-71.9% (Statement 3). By the end of the PGCE programme only under one third (28.4%) felt that removing academic selection would be the best way to ensure the system catered for all pupils (Statement 4). The don't know responses were almost unaffected at any point during the year while there was a considerable minority of almost 40% who still appeared to support the present system. Student teachers were consistent throughout the PGCE year that the pursuit of academic excellence should not be the most important role of a school (Statement 5). At the start of the programme almost 60% of student teachers felt that schools should not be able to exclude pupils because of special educational needs (Statement 6). However, agreement reduced steadily after each teaching practice (57.5%-53.8%-49.4%). The don't know responses stayed constant at around one third. By the end of the year student teachers were still equally divided across the categories in their responses to Statement 7. Mainstream schools should have the final say in which pupils they can enrol

*Table 2*

#### **Theme 1: Student teachers attitudes about the purpose of schools and attitudes about organizational issues of teaching.**

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Don't know (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>
<i>1. I think all teachers should experience Teaching pupils with special educational</i>	Time 1 82.2 Time 2 91.5	Time 1 12.1 Time 2 4.7	Time 1 5.6 Time 2 3.8

<i>Needs</i>	Time 3	95.5	Time 3	4.5	Time 3	0
2. <i>I think that streaming is the best practice for dealing effectively with pupils of different abilities</i>	Time 1	48.1	Time 1	37.5	Time 1	14.4
	Time 2	59.6	Time 2	24	Time 2	16.3
	Time 3	52.8	Time 3	32.6	Time 3	14.6
3. <i>It is more important for schools to promote academic achievement than social inclusion</i>	Time 1	13.1	Time 1	18.7	Time 1	68.2
	Time 2	9.4	Time 2	22.6	Time 2	67.9
	Time 3	16.9	Time 3	11.2	Time 3	71.9
4. <i>I think that changing the education system in Northern Ireland from selective to a non-selective one is the best way to cater for all pupils</i>	Time 1	15.9	Time 1	39.3	Time 1	44.9
	Time 2	20.8	Time 2	39.6	Time 2	39.6
	Time 3	28.4	Time 3	38.6	Time 3	33
5. <i>The most important role of a school is to ensure academic excellence</i>	Time 1	15.8	Time 1	15.9	Time 1	68.2
	Time 2	16	Time 2	14.2	Time 2	69.8
	Time 3	14.6	Time 3	13.5	Time 3	71.9
6. <i>Mainstream schools should not be allowed to exercise policies and structures that cater only for the needs of certain pupils thereby excluding others with special educational needs</i>	Time 1	57.5	Time 1	24.5	Time 1	17.9
	Time 2	53.8	Time 2	34	Time 2	12.3
	Time 3	49.4	Time 3	21.8	Time 3	21.8
7. <i>Mainstream schools should have the final say in which pupils they can enrol</i>	Time 1	27.4	Time 1	38.7	Time 1	34
	Time 2	29.8	Time 2	30.8	Time 2	39.4
	Time 3	36.4	Time 3	30.7	Time 3	33

As the PGCE year progressed Statement 1: *I have no experience in working with special needs education* became increasingly less relevant and by the end of the year 82% of student teachers now had experience of working with learners with special Educational Needs. Concern about personal efficacy (Statement 2) was reduced dramatically by the end of the programmes from 57.4%-43.5-30.3%. The main reduction was seen after the first teaching practice when it reduced by almost 14%. There was less reduction after final practice in a selective school (a further 3%). By the end of the programme however there were still almost 40% of student teachers about to enter the teaching profession who were concerned about their ability to teach in an inclusive classroom. There was a significant increase in agreement with Statement 3: *I think some people claim to have special educational needs to get extra attention and special treatment* between the first and second teaching practice experiences. By the end of the programme 46.1% of respondents agreed with the statement. There were only small variations in responses throughout the year to Statement 4: *Emotional and behavioural problems are often just an excuse for lack of self discipline*. By the end of the year just over one third agreed this was statement but 43% disagreed. There was a steady increase in responses agreeing that pupils with EBD should be excluded if they are disruptive. (17.8%-27.4%-31.8%) The most significant increase was after the first teaching practice (17.8%-27.4%). These figures were drawn from the *don't know* category and by the end of the year there was no change in the number who disagreed with this statement (46.6%). The majority of respondents felt that parents were responsible for their child's behaviour (Statement 6) and these responses stayed similar throughout the year. By the end of the programme 57.3% respondents felt it was impossible to accommodate too many differences in one classroom (Statement 8) while the disagree and don't know responses were equally split. The

Table 3

**Theme 2**  
**Concerns and anxieties about teaching in an inclusive educational setting**

Statements	Agree (%)	Don't know (%)	Disagree (%)	
1 <i>I have no experience in working with special education needs</i>	Time 1	47.2	Time 1 3.7	Time 1 49.1
	Time 2	15.1	Time 2 1.9	Time 2 83
	Time 3	16.9	Time 3 1.1	Time 3 82
2 <i>I am concerned I will not have the skills required to teach special educational needs in an inclusive setting.</i>	Time 1	57.4	Time 1 21.1	Time 1 21.5
	Time 2	42.5	Time 2 23.6	Time 2 34
	Time 3	39.3	Time 3 21.3	Time 3 39.3

3 <i>I think some people claim to have special educational needs to get extra attention and special treatment.</i>	Time 1	38.1	Time 1	21.9	Time 1	40
	Time 2	36.8	Time 2	24.5	Time 2	38.7
	Time 3	46.1	Time 3	20.2	Time 3	33.7
4 <i>Emotional and behavioural problems are often just an excuse for lack of self-discipline.</i>	Time 1	29.6	Time 1	24.1	Time 1	46.3
	Time 2	30.8	Time 2	19.2	Time 2	50
	Time 3	34.9	Time 3	22.1	Time 3	43
5 <i>Pupils with emotional and behavioural problems should be excluded from mainstream classes as they disrupt other pupils' progress.</i>	Time 1	17.8	Time 1	35.5	Time 1	46.7
	Time 2	27.4	Time 2	31.1	Time 2	41.5
	Time 3	31.8	Time 3	21.6	Time 3	46.6
6 <i>It is a parent's role to ensure their child behaves properly</i>	Time 1	60	Time 1	24.8	Time 1	15.2
	Time 2	55.2	Time 2	24.8	Time 2	20
	Time 3	58.4	Time 3	19.1	Time 3	22.5
7 <i>I think that parents are often to blame for their child's poor behaviour.</i>	Time 1	65.4	Time 1	14	Time 1	20.6
	Time 2	54.8	Time 2	26.9	Time 2	18.3
	Time 3	56.2	Time 3	18	Time 3	25.8
8 <i>I think it is impossible to try and accommodate too many differences in one classroom.</i>	Time 1	52.3	Time 1	24.3	Time 1	23.4
	Time 2	57.8	Time 2	26.5	Time 2	15.7
	Time 3	57.3	Time 3	21.3	Time 3	21.3
9 <i>Education has a first duty to look after the interests of pupils who are trying to learn</i>	Time 1	59.3	Time 1	13	Time 1	27.8
	Time 2	52.4	Time 2	25.7	Time 2	21.9
	Time 3	59.8	Time 3	12.6	Time 3	27.6
10 <i>I think you need to be a special kind of teacher to teach pupils with special educational needs.</i>	Time 1	50.9	Time 1	23.2	Time 1	25.9
	Time 2	53.8	Time 2	23.6	Time 2	22.6
	Time 3	65.2	Time 3	11.2	Time 3	23.6
11 <i>I think you need a special interest in special educational needs to be an effective teacher of SEN.</i>	Time 1	51.9	Time 1	14.2	Time 1	34
	Time 2	61.3	Time 2	14.2	Time 2	24.5
	Time 3	68.5	Time 3	9	Time 3	22.5
12 <i>A teacher should be concerned with educational issues and not be expected to deal with a pupil's emotional and behavioural problems.</i>	Time 1	8.4	Time 1	23.4	Time 1	68.2
	Time 2	5.7	Time 2	5.7	Time 2	88.7
	Time 3	14.6	Time 3	9.1	Time 3	76.1

majority of respondents (59.8%) agreed with Statement 9: *Education has a duty to look after the interests of pupils who are trying to learn*. This number decreased slightly (59.3%-52.4%) after the first teaching practice in a non-selective school. This returned to the original figure after the second teaching experience in a selective school. The *don't know* responses raised significantly after the first practice (to 25%) but returned to 12% after the second practice. There was a significant rise in respondents who agreed with Statement 10: *I think you need to be a special kind of teacher to teach pupils with special educational needs* by the end of the programme. While there was a small increase after the first practice this increased overall by almost 15% over the year with a considerable majority (65.2%) believing that a special kind of teacher was needed to teach pupils with SEN. There was a steady rise in agreement with Statement 11: *I think you need a special interest in SEN to be an effective teacher in SEN* after each teaching practice. Overall there was a 16% increase by the end of the year with a significant majority (68.5%) of student teachers who believed that a special interest in SEN was needed for a teacher to be effective. Throughout the year there was strong disagreement with Statement 12: *A teacher should be concerned with educational issues and not expected to deal with a pupil's emotional and behavioural problems*. This disagreement was strongest after the first teaching practice in a non-selective schools were 88.5% of student teachers felt that a teacher should be concerned with a pupils emotional and behavioural problems not just educational issues. However, this dropped by more than



12% after the second practice in the selective setting. By the end of the programme 76.1% of respondents agreed with the statement.

**Table 4**  
*Theme 3*

<b>Student teachers' attitudes about the purpose of schools and attitudes about Organizational issues of teaching.</b>						
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>		<b>Don't know(%)</b>		<b>Disagree (%)</b>	
1 <i>I would prefer to teach in a selective educational system if I had the choice.</i>	Time 1	44.9	Time 1	23.4	Time 1	30.8
	Time 2	28.3	Time 2	26.4	Time 2	45.3
	Time 3	46.1	Time 3	20.2	Time 3	33.7
2 <i>I don't think I would have done as well academically if I had been in an inclusive classroom when at school.</i>	Time 1	19.4	Time 1	54.4	Time 1	26.2
	Time 2	31.7	Time 2	35.6	Time 2	32.7
	Time 3	30.7	Time 3	35.2	Time 3	34.1
3 <i>I think I would have benefited from being part of an inclusive classroom.</i>	Time 1	29.2	Time 1	52.8	Time 1	17.7
	Time 2	34	Time 2	42.5	Time 2	23.6
	Time 3	45.5	Time 3	38.6	Time 3	15.9
4 <i>I enjoyed school and never had any real problem with learning.</i>	Time 1	71.3	Time 1	7.4	Time 1	21.3
	Time 2	78.3	Time 2	2.8	Time 2	18.9
	Time 3	71.9	Time 3	5.6	Time 3	22.5
5 <i>It is more important for schools to promote social inclusion than academic achievement.</i>	Time 1	22.9	Time 1	30.5	Time 1	46.7
	Time 2	27.6	Time 2	26.7	Time 2	45.7
	Time 3	36	Time 3	22.1	Time 3	41.9
6 <i>The best way to ensure equality of provision is for all pupils to be educated in an inclusive classroom.</i>	Time 1	20.8	Time 1	50.9	Time 1	28.3
	Time 2	18.3	Time 2	49	Time 2	32.7
	Time 3	24.7	Time 3	41.6	Time 3	33.7
7 <i>Having pupils with diverse special educational needs in the classroom is unfair to other pupils who may be held back.</i>	Time 1	39.3	Time 1	24.3	Time 1	36.4
	Time 2	44.8	Time 2	22.9	Time 2	32.4
	Time 3	45.5	Time 3	22.7	Time 3	31.8
8 <i>Parents should have the final say in which school their child attends.</i>	Time 1	34.6	Time 1	23.4	Time 1	42.1
	Time 2	25.7	Time 2	36.2	Time 2	38.1
	Time 3	34.8	Time 3	22.5	Time 3	42.7

Agreement with Statement: 1: *I would prefer to teach in a selective educational system if I had the choice* stayed similar at the beginning and the end of the programme (44.9%/46.1%). However, agreement dropped significantly from 44.9% to 28.3% after the first practice in a non selective school only to rise again by a significant 18% after the second teaching practice experience in a selective school environment. There was a considerable rise in agreement to Statement2: *I don't think I would have done as well academically if I had been in an inclusive classroom when at school* by the end of the first practice (19.4%- 31.7%). This stayed steady until the end of the PGCE year with 30.7% of respondents in agreeing they wouldn't have done so well themselves academically in an inclusive classroom. By the end of the programme the group were even split across the three categories. Conversely the number of respondents who felt they would have personally benefited from being part of an inclusive classroom (Statement 3) rose from 29.2% at the start of the programme to 45.5% at the end. Most of this number was drawn from the original *don't know* category responses. By the end of the year 36% of respondents agreed with this Statement5: *It is more important for schools to promote social inclusion than academic performance* but there were considerably more who disagreed (41.9%). This figure had only changed by less than 5% by the end of the year. Those who were uncertain declined steadily over the year from 30.5%-22.1%. Those who agreed that inclusion was the best way to ensure equality of provision (Statement 6) rose only by 4% by the end of the year. The *don't know* responses slipped steadily after each teaching practice from 50.9%-42.60% at the end of the year. Responses to Statement 7: *Having pupils with diverse special needs in the classroom is unfair to other*

*pupils who may be held back* stayed fairly steady throughout the year. An increase in agreement however did emerge after the second teaching practice from 30.3% to 45.5%.

Agreement with Statement 8: *Parents should have the final say in what school their child attends* stayed constant across the PGCE year (approximately one third) and 42.7% of respondents by the end of the programme disagreed that it should be a parents right to decide which school their child attends.

### Discussion

Analysis of the three survey results at the end of the PGCE programme indicate that the most significant changes in student teachers' attitudes related to beliefs about the ideology of inclusive education and concerns about their role as a teacher within an inclusive educational classroom

Some of the positive attitudes towards inclusion expressed early in the PGCE programme continued to increase after each teaching practice placement. In particular there was the steady increase in respondents who felt that all teachers should experience teaching pupils with special needs and by the end of the second placement 95.5% of student teachers agreed with this statement. While this was gratifying in light of government expectations for all teachers and the imminent changes to post-primary arrangements in Northern Ireland, the research however, also revealed some noteworthy inconsistencies. Despite agreeing that all teachers should teach learners with SEN, a large minority retained attachment to traditional educational practices such as streaming and a personal preference for teaching in a selective educational system remaining almost unchanged between the first and third survey (44.9%/46.1%). Significantly however, this figure had dipped from 44.9% to 28.3% after the first practice in a non-selective school suggesting that while immersed in the non-selective sector student teachers appeared increasingly positive about teaching in a more inclusive setting and yet on completion of the placement in the traditional grammar school attitudes appear to have been more negatively affected. By the end of the study more than half (57%) of the student teachers expressed the belief it was impossible to accommodate too many differences in one classroom. This is an important finding in light of anticipation that all teachers should expect to teach learners with special educational needs. To ensure successful implementation of a more inclusive system post 2008 it will imperative that training provision for those about to enter the profession is designed so as to promote positive attitudes. It may require a radical re-think of current practice so as to ensure that the positive attitudes expressed at the beginning of the programme are maintained and nurtured throughout the pre-service year.

Increased importance may need to be placed in helping student teachers establish a fuller understanding of the philosophy of inclusion and in developing teaching strategies that support ways to take full account of *sameness*, while paying due regard to *difference* and *diversity* amongst individuals learners. By the end of the study 82% of student teachers claimed experience in working with learners with Special Educational Needs in a mainstream setting. This showed a dramatic increase on the results from the first survey taken at the start of the programme but these figures remained almost unchanged between the end of the first and second practice. Efforts should now be employed so that all student teachers are ensured equitable teaching experiences.

Significantly, though perhaps unsurprisingly, responses indicate that the second practice provided few opportunities to further develop competency in inclusive teaching.

Pre-service education in NI is designed to be cyclical and aims to build competence as the year progresses and so these findings may point to the need for review of the programme design so as to build upon the positive effects of the first placement in the non-selective school environment. In light of Head teachers comments (Abbott *in press*) that ITE providers might reconsider the present model of school-based experience with more time and weight placed on a non-selective school placement. Since 70% of learners attend non-selective schools the rationale for equally weighting both practices in time and contribution to the overall course assessment may itself need to be questioned. Reducing time spent in the selective school might also offer space to expand placements into special school or unit settings. This would be a radical change from traditional custom and practice of the current model used by all pre-service providers in NI. However, placing much stronger emphasis on gaining increased quality experience in a non-selective setting might be an important step in improving pre-service provision in preparation for the advent of a much more inclusive system.

On completion of the PGCE programme just over one third of respondents felt it was more important for schools to promote social inclusion than academic performance but there were considerably more who disagreed (41.9%). This figure had only changed by less than 5% by the end of the year. While more than one third of student teachers believed they wouldn't have done so well themselves

*academically* in an inclusive classroom, there was however a significant rise in those who felt they would have *personally* benefited from being part of an inclusive classroom (from 29.2% at the start of the programme to 45.5% at the end). There appears to be evidence that some student teachers may feel that inclusive education can have a negative influence on academic success and work may need to be done to demonstrate that support for inclusive practices will not 'dumb down' the learning experiences and opportunities for some learners. However, beside this the marked increase in those who felt there were also important personal and presumably social benefits in being part of an inclusive classroom was encouraging. It may be that ensuring student teachers gain quality teaching experiences in a well managed, successful and supportive non-selective environment may provide the best opportunity to increase positive attitudes towards inclusion.

### Conclusion

This research study has been undertaken within the context of history and against emerging policy and legislation. It is also in advance of what may be the most widespread and radical changes to the education system that Northern Ireland has experienced since the introduction of the tripartite system (Education Act (NI)) in 1947.

In concluding however it is important to be cognisant that uncertainty may still lie ahead. Lack of cohesion within local politics has placed the future of a more inclusive system in something of a balance. If the establishment of a local administration is not agreed by November 2006 the UK government plans to implement the new arrangements for post primary education. However, if the political parties can agree and a regional administration be established by then, the decision to implement or not will be in the hands of local politicians. As there still exists a lack of consensus on the new system this may well mean a return to further review and debate. Whatever the final outcome, the combination of decreasing birth-rate and general demographic changes are already beginning to affect enrolments causing selective (grammar) schools to face a reducing population from which to select. Issues relating to inclusion and inclusive practices are also unlikely to recede in importance because of the legal responsibilities now placed on systems and institutions to uphold anti-discriminatory laws.

Early in the in pre-service year student teachers in Northern Ireland had expressed clear views about the benefits and challenges that inclusive schooling presents (Lambe and Bones 2006). They articulated the belief that inclusion was important for social integration and for building self-esteem, of upholding human rights and for promoting better understanding of diversity while offering equality of opportunity to all learners. However, they had also showed concern about how to make inclusion work in practice. In common with many more experienced teachers they perceived difficulties in coping with large classes and in managing resources effectively. More worryingly they expressed a concern that they might not actually feel competent to teach in a classroom that tries to accommodate too many diverse needs at one time. At the end of the pre-service year while perceptions about personal efficacy had considerably increased, these anxieties remained. The belief in the philosophy of inclusion was for many students tempered by such concerns and by a continued attachment to the current system of academic selection with which they were familiar.

The effect of a successful teaching practice in the non-selective sector had the most positive influence on perceived competency and on general attitudes towards inclusion and inclusive practices. This research concludes that those responsible for ITE programmes in Northern Ireland should also underpin such practice with an effective programme of academic study that Slee (2001) describes as *interdisciplinary studies of exclusion and inclusion* (p.120). This then, may provide those in pre-service with the level of confidence and competence needed to be truly effective teachers in the more inclusive classrooms of the future.

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