

AHEAD Conference

*"You see things and I say Why. I dream things that never were,
and I say Why Not" George Bernard Shaw*

Opening Access to Teacher Education and
Practice for Students with Disabilities

Dublin Castle, 15th March 2012

ASSUMPTIONS
MODEL POLICY
COMPLEXITY
ATTITUDES
KNOWLEDGE UNDERSTANDING POLITICS
POLITICS EXPECTATIONS ECONOMICS
COLLABORATION DEPARTMENT
CYCLE UNDERSTANDING RESOURCES
FUNDS VALUES RESOURCES LEGAL
AWARENESS
EXPERTISE INERTIA CULTURE
PROTECTIVENESS PROGRAMMES
INFRASTRUCTURE TIME
INFLEXIBILITY
COMMITMENT IDEAS
FUNDING INCAPACITY
COMMUNICATION
EXPECTATIONS
SCHOOLS TARGETING FEAR
GATE-KEEPING
PROTECTIONISM
STRUCTURES MONEY
PROTECTION
ATTITUDES
POWER

 ahead

Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

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Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

Foreword

It is time to open access to Teacher Education Colleges to everyone in the community including students with disabilities. It is time to acknowledge the excellent teaching skills, creativity and ability that people with disabilities can bring to the teaching profession.

We heard from absolutely amazing teachers at this AHEAD conference on Access to Teacher Education. Sean Herlihy who works in St. Joseph's school for the Deaf showed us how he moves between two distinct languages in the classroom, English and Irish Sign Language. His deep understanding of the learning needs of his deaf students and his ability to connect with his pupils were obvious, as were the difficulties a non ISL speaker would have in trying to communicate to Deaf children.

We also heard from Sinead Burke a trainee teacher in Marino Institute who is teaching a class of boys in an inner city school. She enthralled the audience with her experience of dealing head on with name calling in the classroom and her skill in turning a potential bullying situation into a learning exercise on the power and dangers of labelling. Perhaps the most interesting outcome is that children don't see disability as a negative thing, they see a teacher who is interesting and fair and they, and they simply accept it.

Without doubt people with disabilities are an untapped asset to teacher education. They are different, they learn differently, communicate differently and this difference brings creativity to the learning experience of all children. After all many children have difficulties with learning that will be helped by a more child centred approach and a variety of teaching tools such as multi media and computers.

So what are the barriers to teacher education for people with disability and how can we break this cycle of exclusion? According to Dr. Ann Lodge from the Church of Ireland College of Teacher Education, the culture needs to change. Teacher education has a tacit culture of care and a status quo that is very paternalistic. Unfortunately this leads to over protectiveness and a lack of willingness to change the rules, after all if we see people as needing care we are unlikely to give them responsibility. Other issues were raised on the day in relation to the inflexibility of the entry policy to teacher education, in particular with regards Irish as an entry requirement irrespective if it is the language of the classroom, as is the case of deaf children.

The unacceptable truth remains that students with disabilities are under-represented in teaching as highlighted by Declan Traenor of Trinity College. The current policy on entry to teacher education no longer serves the needs of children with disabilities in the education system. We all know that education needs to meet the learning needs of all the children in the classroom with an eye to the future, but the question is how far are we prepared to go.

Ms Ann Heelan, Executive Director, AHEAD

Background to the Conference

Teaching is a wonderful profession. It has the power to transform people's lives.

In the past ten years AHEAD has seen the numbers of students with disabilities accessing higher education increase from less than 1 to 3.7% of over 6900 students. This is a result of the positive commitment that higher education institutions have to students with disabilities and to the development of disability support services. All students, including those with disabilities and specific learning difficulties doing their final examinations at second level have expectations of higher education and of careers. These students are ambitious and driven and are seeking equality of opportunity to access qualifications and careers and research carried out within the University sector demonstrates that they are finishing courses with the same first and second class honours as other students.

It is time to ensure that these highly qualified people have the same opportunities to make it into professions. At the moment they are hugely disadvantaged in accessing Teaching and in many cases are excluded from entry to teacher training colleges. This does not make sense and teaching should be open to everyone in the community with the ability and interest in becoming a teacher.

This conference is a first and is organised thanks to the belief of Ahead the National Access Office, the Irish Universities Association, St. Patrick's College of Teacher Education, the Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College and the Department of Education and Skills, in the importance of supporting students with disabilities undertaking a teacher education programme. This means that educators must think at the edges of the box and consider how to support the student with disabilities on work experience in the classroom. This conference set out to explore the implications for inclusive practice in teacher education and to review good practice nationally.

This conference was organised in collaboration with the Higher Education Authority, Irish Universities Association, the Department of Education and Skills and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra to take stock of and illuminate progress that has been made following the Choice Report and to chart clearly the practical steps that need to happen next. The 'Choice Report' (2009) 'Candidates with disabilities/specific learning difficulties: The Challenge for Colleges of Education' had recommended "Colleges should recognise the benefits that teachers with disabilities can bring to education and explore alternative routes of admission"

The conference paid particular attention to the challenges facing deaf students wishing to enter the profession and the potential for deaf teachers to greatly contribute to the education and development of deaf pupils.

The conference attracted a diverse and challenging range of speakers:

Dr Anne Lodge: Principal of the Church of Ireland College of Education who spoke on 'Policy Changes in Teacher Education: Implications for Inclusion'

Seán Herlihy: Past pupil and current Mathematics Teacher at St Joseph's School for Deaf Boys who presented on his experience of 'Teaching through Irish Sign Language'

Sinead Burke: who spoke on her personal experience as a fourth year teaching student with a disability in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education

Kathleen O'Leary: an experienced secondary teacher and member of school senior management who addressed the topic of 'Dilemmas of Difference: What does it mean for Teacher Education?'

Brendan O'Dea: Acting Head of the Teaching Council who gave an update on Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education

Vivienne Byrne: Access Officer at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra who gave a presentation on 'Supports in Teacher Education'

Declan Treanor: Director of Disability Service at Trinity College, Dublin who reflected on the 'Choice Report' 2009 and clarified what constitutes reasonable (and unreasonable) accommodations for students with disabilities undertaking professional courses.

Dr. Lorraine Leeson: Director, Centre for Deaf Studies, Trinity College, Dublin who gave a presentation entitled 'Seeing is Believing' on 'Deaf Students Access to Tertiary Education in Ireland'

Dr. Elizabeth Mathews: Co-ordinator of the Deaf Education Centre in Cabra, Dublin who outlined the 'Proposal for Access to Initial Teacher Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People' that had been recently developed by the Education Partnership Group.

The Conference was introduced by Minister for Education & Skills, **Ruairi Quinn TD**, who had provided a videotaped address in advance of the day.

The Conference was attended by 120 people from across the sector including leaders in teacher education, the Department of Education and Skills, the Centre for Deaf Studies and The Teaching Council.

The Conference was concluded with a panel discussion and contributions from the audience in response to the question '**What Needs to Happen Now?**'

The panellists were:

Professor Kathleen Lynch: Professor of Equality Studies at the University College Dublin School of Social Justice

Brendan O’Dea: Acting Head of the Teaching Council

Dr. Mary –Liz Trant: Head of the National Office for Equity of Access to Higher Education at the Higher Education Authority

Dr. Michael O’Keeffe: Lecturer in Special Education at St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra

Philip Grehan: Primary Teacher at St Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys, Cabra

The panel was facilitated by **Dr. Michael Shevlin:** Senior Lecturer in Inclusive Education at Trinity College, Dublin

Additional facilitation was provided during the event by **Chris Chapman:** an independent facilitator from www.changeexploratory.ie. Chris has also compiled the content for this report.

Videos of the presentations of all speakers and copies of the PowerPoint slides used are available on the Ahead website: www.ahead.ie.

The intention of this report is provide an accessible document that will support the work of all those who are committed to our conference theme ‘Opening Access to Teacher Education and Practice for Students with Disabilities’

The report draws on the contributions of the speakers listed above and also inputs from those who attended the conference, including comments made in the Conference evaluation forms.

The conclusions and recommendations, at the end of this report, are offered by Ahead to provide a specific focus for actions in an attempt to ensure that the most is made of the deliberations from this conference.

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Recognising Progress

One of the objectives of the conference was to build awareness of the progress that has been made in Opening Access to Teacher Education and Practice for Students with Disabilities. The Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Ruairi Quinn in his opening address, (given via video), affirmed the commitment of his department to the inclusion and support of students with disabilities in higher education. In acknowledging some of the issues facing the Colleges of Teacher Education such as balancing robust quality standards in teaching with equality of access the Minister felt that the conference would be an opportunity to generate ideas and stimulate new thinking to confidently tackle these issues. The following is a summary of the significant progress made towards this goal to-date:

Structural developments

- In 1994/5, The 'Fund for Students with Disabilities' was established by the Department of Education to cover many of the educational support requirements for students with disabilities. In 2011, 6,100 students are supported by the 'Fund for Students with Disabilities', (approximately 11 times the number who had been supported in 2000)

Legislation

- The Equal Status Act (2000) outlined specific provisions for education, establishing the principles that students with a disability should enjoy equal access to courses, facilities or benefits provided by the third level institution and that a third level institution must provide reasonable accommodation, which may be defined as providing additional facilities, specialised equipment or adjustments to enable a person with a disability to access all college services
- Targeted funds for institutions such as the Strategic Innovation Fund and POBAL Funding available to the Institutes of education.
- The National Access Office (NAO) was established in 2003 to oversee policy and practice in educational access for those under-represented in higher education. With the publication of a National Access Plan 2005-2007, the NAO set out a number of goals to help improve equity of access to higher education in Ireland. A second National Access Plan 2008-2013 is currently being implemented and includes participation targets for students with disabilities in higher education.
- In 2008, Ahead published 'Good Practice Guidelines for the providers of Supports and Services for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education' and in 2009, Ahead published 'Charter for Inclusive Teaching & Learning'

Participation Rates in higher education

- In 2011, the HEA introduced annual core funding for access in all publicly-funded higher education institutions, providing additional financial support to support access and participation by students with disabilities and other under-represented groups.
- 59 students with disabilities were known to be on Teacher Training courses (26 in Colleges of Education – 0.7% of student body and 33 on postgraduate teacher training courses – 1.2% of total student body)

- 235 deaf or hard of hearing students were in Higher Education in 2011, compared to 81 in 2001 (a considerably smaller rate of increase than for students with disability as a whole)
- In 2011, Teaching Council Policy Paper published, based on new 3 'I's – Innovation, Integration and Improvement
- In 2012, Agreement between Department of Education and Skills and Colleges of Education to change practice in relation to 1965 Rules for National Schools health requirements Colleges of Education have agreed to join DARE scheme (Disability Access Route to Education) from 2013
- The CHOICE Report published in 2009 by the Heads of the Irish Colleges of Education documents the challenges for colleges of teacher education and outlines recommendations that include a clear pathway to inclusion
- Colleges of Education have agreed to join DARE scheme (Disability Access Route to Education) from 2013. This process will be initiated with the CAO Admissions in 2013 and open to students with disabilities in 2014
- A proposal has been submitted by the Teaching Council for B.Ed. ISL (Irish Sign Language)
- Proposal to pilot teacher education with Irish sign Language has been submitted by Dr. Elizabeth Mathews on behalf of the to Teaching Council for B.Ed. ISL (Irish Sign Language) NCSE Policy Document on Deaf Education published
- NCSE Policy Document on Deaf Education published

Keynote address

DR ANNE LODGE:

I was delighted to be given the opportunity to present this paper because it has provided me with an opportunity to reflect on current developments and significant revisions that are being undertaken at the moment for the B Ed programme and post-graduate diploma initial teacher education programmes. It has given me a chance to think about both the external structural issues and internal cultural issues that have mitigated against the creation of the type of equality climate in teacher education that we desire to establish and foster.

Without question, there are significant increases in the number of students with disabilities registered in higher education institutions. This is very much to be welcomed. But there is a clear recognition at the same time that there have been particular barriers to such access in the case of the primary teacher education sector.

Over the course of the last decade, the Department of Education and Skills and the Colleges of Education have considered the issue of access by candidates with disabilities to teacher education. Everybody who participated in these discussions recognised that there were particular complexities at play. These included regulations with regard to medical fitness that were outside the specific remit of the Colleges of Education and which I will discuss later on.

The Colleges of Education have multiple obligations and these coloured the consideration being given to the issue of access. These issues included:

- the duty of care of teachers of young children in a school setting;
- our duty of care to our students;
- whether there is an obligation on the Colleges to ensure that all graduates can find a job on exit;
- the need to provide adequate supports and accommodations to enable all students, regardless of need, to participate fully in the Initial Teacher Education programme.

These discussions have enabled the Colleges of Education to think deeply about the place of inclusive education within teacher education itself and to consider whether the structures and cultural context of Teacher Education Colleges operate to hinder or enable equality of access and participation.

External Barriers

It is important that we take cognisance of some key external barriers in the first instance. The 1965 Rules for National Schools, as laid down by the Minister and the Department of Education, required not only that people would be certified medically fit to practice on entry to the profession, but also had to be similarly certified in order to gain access to initial teacher education programmes. That regulation created a very real structural barrier for those who, for whatever reason, might not be certified as medically fit to practice. It should be noted that the College were informed quite recently by the Department of Education and Skills that this regulation has now been removed. This should theoretically enable access to Teacher Education colleges.

Structural Regulations:

A further structural barrier relates to the level of proficiency in Irish required of those entering primary teacher education. Since the foundation of the State, there has been an expectation that primary teachers would play a key role in the transmission of the national language. The Minister noted in his speech that the Irish language requirement of a minimum of a C3 in higher level Leaving Certificate Irish or its equivalent blocks access to primary teacher education for specific groups, such as members of the deaf community, who cannot meet that requirement.

We must acknowledge that the Irish language requirement also blocks access to primary teacher education for other groups. People with specific learning disabilities within schools may never have been facilitated in accessing higher-level Irish. Thus, they are prevented from considering the option of primary teaching as a career. Those who came to Ireland from overseas and who have not had the opportunity to learn Irish similarly have no access to primary teacher education. As a consequence of these structural constraints, the Irish primary teacher education cohort remains a particularly homogenous one.

Raising minimum standards:

We also need to take cognisance of the fact that the Teaching Council has proposed that from 2016 onwards, we actually raise the minimum entry requirements in Irish. From that year, onwards it is proposed that we would require a minimum of a B1 in higher level Irish. It would also raise the entry requirements for English and Mathematics; the former would be raised to a minimum of B1 in higher level English and the latter to either C3 for higher level maths or A1 for ordinary level maths (Teaching Council 2011). Again, I'm left wonder as to how this impacts on those potential applicants with specific learning disabilities who may not achieve these grades?

Essential components of the programme:

Thanks to the current substantial revisions of the B.Ed and Post-Graduate Diploma programmes, teacher educators are having to consider what we define as the core components of a teacher education programme. It has given us an opportunity to tease out and identify what we believe that the characteristics of teacher education graduates should be – what are the core competencies that they require, what knowledge do they need, what are the core attitudes and values we hope that they hold?

This approach enables to us look far more critically at programme content and to be able to equality-proof it. There is an opportunity to be more flexible in the assessment instruments used and in our engagement with schools. It has also allowed us to encourage greater, structured reflective engagement by students in the life of the school and on their own practice as developing professionals. And the current revisions also provide an opportunity to consider how initial teacher education for the primary system might be provided in a more accessible manner.

Culture of teacher education:

I want to give some in-depth consideration to this issue. Dr. Catherine Furlong and Dr. Maeve O'Brien did an excellent paper at a conference on initial teacher education in early July 2011 in St. Patrick's College Drumcondra in which they examined the culture of care within colleges of education and compared and contrasted it to a culture within the universities that is much more focused on knowledge-engagement.

They discussed career identity of teacher educators which they identified as being primarily relational in its focus. This, they argued, reflects professional identity formation of primary teachers, because many of us who work in Colleges of Education began our professional careers as primary teachers who carry the emphasis on care and relationships with us into the third level context.

Furthermore, I'm very much aware that students within Colleges of Education often talk about the most important dimension of their experience in the College being their sense that their lecturers know them and care about them. For them, this relational approach to staff-student interaction is very, very important, and certainly my own students in Rathmines talk frequently about this. I know that my colleagues in Rathmines value the whole sense of engagement that they have with students, that relational dimension of their academic work provides significant emotional feedback within a very busy professional context.

And without question, the culture of care is a positive one, and the last thing I would want to do this morning, is to diminish or in some way undervalue the affective domain and the value of professional engagements underpinned by an ethic of care. However, I want to express a note of caution, because care can be expressed both positively and negatively. As Ball (1997) argued, the very element of an institution that can cause it to be very successful for some groups may actually be undermining or negative for others.

In its most positive form care is empowering, it builds confidence and it fosters independence. However, when expressed more negatively it can create climates of both dependence and distrust. So we have to be mindful in how we analyse the culture of care.

People with disabilities as colleagues, as our Boss?

We have to bear in mind that if we as teacher educators perceive ourselves as professional givers of care we must then reflect on how we perceive the recipients of that care. Do we see the recipients of that care as our equals, as co-constructors of knowledge and people who share in our professional identity? Or, do we see the recipients of care as people who we protect but also surveil? If the lens through which we view those with disabilities is a stereotypical one, we will tend to perceive them as deficient, as less able to take care of themselves. If this is the lens through which we view those with disabilities, then it can be very difficult to perceive the potential student with a disability as one's equal, as a capable professional giver of care, as a teacher or a principal.

And we need to be very careful in this regard. We also need to reflect on the arguments we make giving reasons why we should avoid giving those with disabilities access to teacher education. Let me share a few examples: I've heard arguments

made that we shouldn't permit people with disabilities to access teacher education for their own good. They might not get a job afterwards. Now if I was to take that approach to every applicant to my own institution in the current climate could I let anyone in?

Who is the Gate Keeper?

Do we focus to too great a degree on whether people with disabilities will be able to meet the requirements of examined teaching practice? It is important to consider the ways in which professional bodies operate gate-keeping practices to police who does and does not gain entry to their profession. Stanley et al (2011) argue that professional bodies for nursing, teaching and social work frequently operate as gatekeepers who actually prevent those who are perceived as being the service users, rather than the service providers, from gaining entry to those professions. The required competencies laid down by many of those professional bodies may actually operate to exclude people with disabilities because they are perceived only as service users.

Colleges are not part of the gate keeping process for entry to a profession. The equality legislation clearly states that education institutions are service-providers. We teach and assess programmes and give those who successfully complete them the required qualifications for entry to particular professions. In my view, we do not share the gatekeeper role of professional regulatory bodies which may attempt to prevent individual groups of people gaining access to a profession.

Teaching Practice:

We also need to think about how we assess the teaching practice component of the programme. O'Donoghue (2005) found that ideas around what makes a healthy and a morally appropriate teacher very much informed the way in which young men in a particular college were assessed for teaching practice over several decades. The comments in the teaching practice reports that he analysed demonstrated that these young men were assessed on their physical and mental well-being rather than what they were actually doing in the classroom. In many ways a judgement of being sound in mind and body, as well as being sexually, morally and emotionally safe, resulted in them being regarded as good teachers.

If we wish to change institutional cultures one of the things we need to think about is the fact that it is one thing to change institutional policy, but the real challenge is in changing the hearts and minds of those who actually carry out those policies.

Thinking Differently

For the few students with disabilities who have gone through our colleges, one of the challenges is that they have had to be the flag bearers for the rest of the disabled community. This can put huge pressure on the individual who may feel constantly pressured to be seen to be at least as good, if not better, than everyone else, in order simply to be seen to be a competent teacher. Other members of our student population do not have to bear that particular pressure.

We need time as teacher educators to critically consider and reflect on our own attitudes, our own modes of engagement, our own programme outcomes, the competencies that we assess, the ways in which we provide opportunities for people to engage.

A perfect example is how our assumptions can impact on how willing we are to provide accommodations. Vickerman and Blundell (2010) reported that in the UK quite a number of academic staff in third level institutions dismiss examination outcomes where reasonable accommodation has been provided as not being of equal value, and being in some way questionable. Such suspicion can result in a question mark over whether the person who had reasonable accommodation is really fully qualified. There is a distrust expressed by some academic staff that the provision of reasonable accommodation means the person has not quite measured up.

So finally, there are a number of key issues that require critical interrogation and real discussion: for example, how we balance the rights of children who are in the care of teachers with the rights of entrants to teaching? At the moment we are blocking some people from the possibility of becoming teachers because we're concerned with what we perceive as the rights of the children they would teach, without taking on board that the children have the right to be taught by someone with a disability, so that they have an opportunity to learn about the genuine diversity of society.

So to sum up we need to be careful about

- The assumptions we make about people with disabilities
- Creating opportunities to interrogate our own perceptions and practices.
- Accessing information about models of good practice, nationally and internationally.
- Ensuring on-going consultation with the students with disabilities themselves, so that people who are directly impacted by all of this have a genuine voice and a genuine input into all of this.
- Leadership for attitudinal change bearing in mind that it is insufficient to change policy. People's practices only change to reflect that policy when hearts and minds have been changed.
- Thinking differently about people with disability and realising that all of us are differently abled.

Thank you all very much.

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In Teaching, A Little Goes A Long Way...

Sinéad Burke, primary teacher.

The paper will address my engagement with the Bachelor of Education and will aim to reflect upon my experiences as a teacher with a physical disability. Achondroplasia is a restricted growth condition, the prominent physical difference between my student peers and I, is that my limbs are shorter than average size.

Since before I can remember, I have always wanted to be a primary school teacher. Not once, did it ever occur to me, that my difference may hinder such a profession, my passion and drive outweighed such impedances.

A question which is often posed in my direction is, 'how do the children react towards you?' From my fledging educational experience, I have discovered children to be a most open and accepting audience. Naturally, questions are asked with answers given at an age-appropriate level. However, once a bond of mutual respect is formed, and the teacher understands and employs fairness, one's height, weight and race make little difference to the children.

The three years which I spent engaged in the Bachelor of Education programme were some of the most enjoyable, most rewarding and most challenging days I have experienced. Prior to the course, vocabulary such as differentiation, integration, strands and strand units were alien to me. I was ignorant to the true role of the teacher and the challenges which he / she may face whilst trying to cater for the diverse needs in their classroom. The enriching education provided me with a wealth of opportunities to explore my uniqueness as a teacher, my curriculum preferences and resources to compliment the methodologies studied in Coláiste Mhuire's lecture halls.

Having a disability has gifted me with a widened perspective on life and particularly teaching. It greatly influences my practice and perhaps even infiltrates into the opinions and bias' of the children I am fortunate to teach. I am in complete agreement with the tale that 'teaching is a vocation', one is called to the profession due to their passions and interests, difference and assumed difficulties should not hold one back!

Teaching through Irish Sign Language

Sean Herlihy, Maths teacher

I attended St. Joseph's Schools for Deaf Boys in Cabra, North Dublin. This is one of the main educational establishments for Deaf students in Ireland.

In school, pupils were segregated according to the level of deafness they had and different methodologies were applied. If you had some level of hearing like I had, then you were taught through speech with some sign if the teacher had any. Lip-reading however, is not an exact science and neither was the fluency of the majority of my educators. Misunderstandings ensued which led to frustration and impatience, which led to low self-esteem. Lack of explanation in order to reinforce students' understanding created an ethos of 'cannot' amongst the pupils, which also led to low confidence. This has meant that there are very few Deaf people attending third level education. The barrier to communication at school culminated in students leaving with very low literacy levels and acquisition of world knowledge. This in turn has meant that Deaf people as a group have been relegated to the lower echelons of blue-collar employment. On the positive side, it is in the Deaf schools that Deaf children began to mix with other children that share similar experiences and the socialisation of Deaf people takes place. On the positive side, some teachers did provide information in sign and when they did, we really sat up and took notice, for it was in those moments that we really learnt. It is in this environment, I knew that as an adult, a Deaf adult, I could make a difference in the Deaf child's learning process.

It is so vital that young Deaf people, particularly in the turbulent adolescent years have access to Deaf role models in their educational environment. I was moved by the number of Deaf students who have approached me since saying how it has really made them think about their future life choices. Knowledge is power and I really want to be a vehicle to pass this knowledge on.

Teaching is a vital profession. Nothing is nobler and yet more humbling than to aid the personal and educational development of young men and women. A good teacher instils confidence in one's students, encouraging them and paying them heed. A teacher of Deaf students would also be able to communicate with them in a medium that they understand, Irish Sign Language. This teacher would lead by example, incorporating visual descriptions in sign within the curriculum in order to enforce understanding. Sign language would be the medium of instruction. A good teacher is patient, kind and motivated yet firm— an egalitarian role model with a genuine interest in furthering his/her pupils knowledge and a willingness to prepare them for the world, post-secondary school.

Dilemmas of Difference: An Exploration of Personal and Educational Experiences

Kathleen O' Leary, teacher.

Brahm Norwich (2008) asserts that the basic dilemma is whether to recognize and respond or not to recognize and respond to differences as either way there are some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection or denial of relevant and quality opportunities. And so with Marta Minow (2005), an American scholar, we raise the question: when does treating people differently emphasise their differences and hinder or stigmatise them on that basis? And when does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatise or hinder them on that basis. From my many years as a professional in the classroom who also uses a wheelchair my perception is that the norm as set out by 'experts' who measure individuals with difference against those without; ultimately 'normalcy' becomes the stick to beat us, the goad to drive us and the ruler to measure us.

Schools at every level throughout the land reflect the growth of diversity in our society; a society in a state of flux that is being challenged on a daily basis by a variety of cultures and religions against a backdrop of a shrinking economy and resources. So the delivery of a high standard of appropriate educational provision in our schools has become increasingly problematic. Within the walls of these educational institutions we sort and sift and categorise and organize and similarly behind the doors of our classrooms we offer designations black and white; older and younger; Catholic and Protestant; gay or heterosexual; able-bodied or disabled; weak or bright and so a framework is put in place of implications, of opposition or tension within. We measure and weigh, we band and stream. We direct our students towards Higher or Ordinary level – and within the established structure lie the expectations we have of what the outcome will be. Thus, we may be unconsciously asking the student to accept his/her own position at the bottom of the educational pyramid and consign them to a lifetime of failure.

There are many ways in which constructions of disability can affect disabled people's chance of inclusion and participation in ordinary mainstream environments and everyday situations. People with disabilities may allow invisible barriers to be placed between themselves and others. In turn, people in the shared environment may have their own constructions of disability and interpret them accordingly. It is likely therefore that the interface of a disabled person with the non-disabled world brings a multiplicity of interpersonal relationships which constantly shift until an accommodation is arrived at. This accommodation is often unspoken, a silent shift of place and space in the way in which the different parties may interact. It is my experience that this 'accommodation' will result in a negative shift in nuance, in attitude to the person with a disability.

These are thoughts born out of an examination and reflection on my own experiences both as a person with a disability and as a mainstream secondary teacher over a period of twenty four years. Briefly, I was born with a brittle bone condition, which rendered me unable, to walk and resulted in a lot of broken limbs over the early years

of my life. There were no social workers, no physiotherapists, no psychologists, no schools and even no teachers in my life. Amazingly, my mother taught me to read and write at the age of four and I embarked on a programme of 'free range' learning that is still ongoing.

There is a glass wall between disabled people and others in the non-disabled world. To survive one has to confront this wall and either allow oneself to be categorised as someone to be 'minded' or literally pass oneself as non-disabled. This involved, in my case, maintaining high standards of teaching, classroom management and ongoing engagement with extra-curricular activity, but also putting my body under considerable stress.

In reference to the constructions of disabilities mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it is clear to me now that, unwillingly at first but deliberately later on my decision was to act the part of the non-disabled person at work and when socialising. I have no doubt that this was necessary at the time if I was to win acceptance, find inclusion and become a professional in my chosen career. I have no doubt that turning a blind eye to the absence of suitable facilities, resources or aids helped my colleagues and employers to 'accommodate' me in their construction of my place in the scheme of things. Conversely, one could say that I had conspired in my own restriction by not speaking out and making what I now know to be reasonable demands.

What does it say of me and of the educational/school system that it took me twenty years to ask that school functions and celebrations be held in an accessible venue, with even more importantly an accessible bathroom? More significantly, what does it say to others in similar positions currently trying to find their place in schools, classrooms and other environments? I put on that mantle of non-disabled person and wore it all my life really without much effort and certainly with a great sense of ability in my being. I am not advocating this for anyone else as everyone must find, define and construct the reality that works for them. Certainly if I had gone the path of being 'minded' in the early 1980's when I began teaching, I would have been given a 'nice' little slot away from the 'rough and tumble' of engagement with students from all kinds of backgrounds with a multiplicity of talents and difficulties. I would not be involved in the creation of school policies, or sit on committees other than as a form of tokenism. I would not have been given positions of responsibility or be encouraged to present for promotion. I would not have been considered as co-ordinator of Transition year, a new and innovative programme bridging Junior and Senior school, which I ran quite successfully for five years. I would not have become a Year Head and member of the senior management in my school; no, I would have been cushioned from real life and thrown some crumb from the table from time to time – sidelined from the vitality of ongoing participation in the progression of shared experiences with colleagues and students. Put simply, I could not afford the luxury of presenting as a disabled person.

Structures and systems must bend and stretch if people with disabilities are to become valued and included members of that society. Attitudes and expectations must move to meet the challenge and raise expectations. If institutions react as if threatened in these situations then no real inclusion will take place for the person,

indeed, neither individual nor institution can thrive and grow when such situations continue to exist. Both groups must rise to the challenge, take the plunge and immerse totally so that both are forging ahead together in a shared and equal society where difference is recognised and valued in its' own right.

So, am I in the box or outside? Am I on the margins or at the heart of things? The truth is probably that I inhabit both camps as disabled person and as professional, with hopefully the insights to marry the two to the benefit of all my students. I am pleased and proud that I persevered and that I may have made some difference in my own way, whether inside or outside the box.

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Choice Matters: Professional Competence / Fitness to practice issues and the inclusion of disabled students in teacher training education and employment

Declan Treanor, Trinity College Dublin

Abstract

In 2009 the Advisory Group on Candidates with Disabilities submitted a discussion document entitled 'Candidates with disabilities/specific learning difficulties: The Challenge for Colleges of Education', to the Conference of Heads of Irish Colleges of Education (CHOICE, April 2009). This document outlined recommended procedures for Colleges of Education (CoEs) to ensure that they are inclusive and encouraging of both disabled applicants to the teaching colleges, and also to students completing teacher training and transitioning into employment. This aspirational document clearly states the requirement of a supportive environment for disabled students, whilst they progress through teacher training, as a realistic goal.

This paper discusses the recommendations outlined in the CHOICE document, identifying the significant under-representation of disabled students, the lack of promotion of teacher training as an option for this cohort of students, and the lack of disability awareness amongst college staff. In many professions, grey areas still exist around exactly which competencies are regarded as 'core', and these are not always clearly defined in the learning outcomes of a programme. For the purposes of this discussion, a review of international practice was conducted to determine how other countries manage this complex issue. In the United Kingdom (UK), The Disability Rights Commission (DRC, 2007) has concluded that an arbitrary occupational health form is unhelpful to either public or professional bodies, and that a set of core competencies needs to be identified and upheld. It can be concluded, therefore, that a clear fitness to practice and disclosure policy document needs to be implemented, which takes account of relevant legislation that protects disabled students from discrimination, and which sets out guidelines for reasonable accommodations, competency levels, disciplinary procedures and disclosure of disability.

The paper will examine CHOICE recommendations from the perspective of disabled students and their concerns about discrimination, and also from the perspective of academics and professional bodies that must support disabled students/teachers whilst maintaining professional standards. Additionally it will outline mechanisms to address areas of concern in the recruitment, retention, progression, fitness to teach, disclosure and transition to employment for students and qualified teachers with disabilities.

Key areas for further work:

- Statistical information on the number of students with disabilities studying teacher training is unknown. Only fifty nine student applied for assistance via the HEA Fund for students with disabilities;
- Promotional information for potential applicants with disabilities on CoEs websites was not obvious;
- Fitness to practice policies and procedures are required and CoEs need to learn from other HEI who have developed policies and procedures;
- The Student Medical Information form proposed by CoEs, with their implicit assumptions about the 'risk' from disabled people within teacher training, discourages positive organisational cultures. There is evidence that disabled people, where they recognise that they are covered by equality legislation, gain real confidence from this legislation and feel empowered to negotiate with HEIs about adjustments.
- The influence of the statutory and regulatory frameworks requiring physical and mental fitness is less obvious at the employment stage. There is a widespread practice of health screening which is frequently not related to the specific job role. This has the potential to lead to discrimination and to deter disabled people from applying for jobs or from disclosing disabilities and long-term health conditions.
- The Teacher Training Council should review their competence standards to ensure that any negative impact on disabled people is eliminated. They should provide guidance on reasonable adjustments and consider what other guidance is required to encourage others (such as HEIs) to adopt an enabling approach to disabled people.
- A framework of professional standards of competence and conduct, coupled with effective management and rigorous monitoring of practice, is the best way to achieve equality for disabled people and the effective protection of the public.

Full paper is available on the Trinity College webpage:

<http://www.tcd.ie/disability/banner/Links/Conf-papers.php>

Teaching Council Abstract

Brendan O’Dea, Acting Principal.

The Teaching Council, established six years ago promotes teaching as a profession through quality assurance and professional standards and are key players in improving access for students with disabilities. It is responsible for the accreditation of teacher training programmes, the induction and probation of new teachers, in recognising qualifications, registering teachers and establishing codes of practice and conduct for teachers. Furthermore similar to the fitness to Practice hearings from the Medical profession, the Teaching Council will play a role in Fitness to teach for teachers.

Teaching is changing, continuously evolving to meet future needs and teachers will operate in a completely different landscape in five years time. One significant change is the work the Teaching Council is doing with the NQIA and TLA to align learning outcomes for initial teacher training with the national framework of qualifications. The focus on learning outcomes and competencies for teachers facilitates discussions on fitness to teach and the Teaching Council certainly have a role here to set up a framework of clearly defined competencies.

Such competencies designed to equip newly qualified teachers with the skills to implement quality learning that delivers on educational priorities such as literacy, numeracy, information communication technology and inclusion will also facilitate a more inclusive context for teacher education. This together with a review of entry requirements would facilitate entry to the profession by groups currently under-represented so that teaching will be for everybody.

Seeing is Learning: Deaf Students Access to Tertiary Education in Ireland

Dr. Lorraine Leeson, Centre for deaf studies, trinity College, Dublin

This paper looks at some key issues relating to deaf students' access to tertiary education in Ireland including the importance of ensuring deaf children's access to deaf role models; wellbeing and deafness; numbers accessing third level; barriers to access; benefits to including deaf students in third level settings.

Figures for deaf and hard of hearing students accessing third level institutions in Ireland since 2001 are reviewed, but a significant issue is the fact that there are no distinctions made in the data between signed language users and non-signed language users, making it impossible to quantify how many members of the Irish Deaf community are actually participating in and completing third level education pathways. Another issue is that the extent of interpreting (Irish Sign Language (ISL)/English) is not recorded in any central point, nor are progression/retention rates looked at in relation to interpreter provision or lack thereof. A significant challenge is ensuring that there are enough appropriately qualified interpreters in place nationally to meet the demands at third level: currently we only have anecdotal evidence that suggests that there is a problem in this domain. This is a challenge that AHEAD and the HEA can help to quantify by ensuring that data collection does not combine figures for deaf, hard of hearing, blind and visually impaired students (HEA) and that distinctions between deaf ISL users and non-signing students are also recorded. This will serve to better quantify progress for inclusion of ISL users at third level, a group that is currently at least 10 times less likely to hold a tertiary education qualification than a 'hearing' Irish citizen.

Access to Initial Teacher Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People: a Proposal from the Education Partnership Group

Dr Elizabeth S. Mathews, Coordinator - Deaf Education Centre

This presentation outlines a recent proposal by the Education Partnership Group on providing access to Initial Teacher Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) people in the Republic of Ireland. The Education Partnership Group is a consortium of organisations working with and for the Deaf Community.

While the number of D/HH teachers working in the post primary sector has increased in the last number of years, the same has not been the case in primary education. As such, D/HH children rarely have access to native and fluent Irish Sign Language users in the classroom or D/HH adult role models. This has implications for the linguistic and social development of these children.

In particular, this presentation focuses on the uniqueness of the deaf education field and the need for D/HH adults working as teachers in that sector. Nonetheless, it highlights the similarities between the situation facing D/HH people and that of people with disabilities more generally. The presentation will include a brief analysis on the barriers that exist at present and how those barriers might be addressed the

establishment of a particular teacher training programme for D/HH people. It summarises progress so far and the possible implications for the deaf education sector.

The specific situation of deaf students and teachers

Deaf people are in the region of ten times less likely to hold a tertiary education qualification than an average person and are thus far less likely than others to encounter positive role models.

Functional literacy on leaving school for the majority of deaf children is equivalent to the levels of an average 8 ½ / 9 year old.

Mental health problems are four times higher in the deaf population than the 'mainstream'. Research has shown three key predictors of self-esteem for deaf children, which are closely related to mental health:

- The presence of parents with a positive attitude towards deafness
- The availability of clear and accessible communication within the home
- Whether or not the deaf child identifies with others within the deaf community

Deaf children in mainstream settings often come to feel that it's normal to be lonely.

The ability of deaf teachers to empathise with deaf students contributes considerably to their social and emotional well-being. Deaf teachers also offer positive role models to parents. The numbers of deaf teachers remain small.

Teachers of deaf children generally need to be aware of structural differences between Irish Sign Language and English to ensure communication works within both languages. There is no current requirement that teachers of deaf children can sign to their students. (currently in the region of 6.500 ISL users between the Republic and Northern Ireland) – NCSE has recognised the need for deaf children to have access to ISL and role models.

Deaf teachers tend to focus on use of visual aids – in this respect they can be a positive role model for others.

Deaf students on Teacher Education Programmes are seen to have a positive influence on other students and teachers around them, helping them to reflect on their teaching and necessary competencies.

Inspections are sometimes undertaken by people who don't have the language skill to understand what is being communicated in the classroom.

There is no infrastructure, as yet, to support deaf lecturers in their workplace.

A proposal for access to Initial Teacher Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people has been developed by the Education Partnership Group. This includes replacing requirement for Gaelige with ISL on the curriculum and establishing a BEd ISL entry route from September 2016. (see:http://www.cidp.ie/downloads/CIDP_Proposal_Complete.pdf). This proposal is currently being considered under Regulation 3.

What is becoming clearer as we engage with these issues?

During the conference, participants were asked to capture what it was that was becoming clearer for them as they listened to the presentations and engaged with the issues.

Below is a summary of the main points that emerged.

Encouraging Inclusion: Enablers

- The importance of involving people with disability. The Commission for People with Disabilities recommended that people with disabilities are involved in decisions about them and highlighted the importance of involving them in policy making, “*nothing about us without us*”¹
- More teachers with disabilities are absolutely necessary in the system to push at the boundaries, change attitudes and to provide role models for children with disabilities in education.
- There needs to be more modelling of inclusive education and accessible materials within teacher education programmes. It is vital to raise people’s horizons re ‘what is possible’ and demonstrate the value to institutions of the richness of diversity
- Awareness within the teacher education sector has grown around diversity issues, there is a growing acceptance of a culture of entitlement and recognition of the need for joined up thinking and the ‘urgency’ of the problems
- Inclusion depends on the skill and knowledge of staff so staff training in disability awareness at all levels will support teachers to confidently make decisions about inclusive practices in the classroom classroom because they are inadequately informed about the impact of impairments and what works.

Attitudinal difficulties have an impact on the transition to teacher education

- Attitudes must shift from the medical model to a social and rights model .Whilst recognising real practical difficulties and the essential requirement for supports – cultural change is needed to underpin inclusion and encourage students to have expectations of teaching careers. Many professional staff such as careers counsellors may lack the right information to enable them to advise young people with disabilities to make appropriate choices and may inadvertently make negative assumptions about the capacity of students with disability, discouraging them from following courses of their choice, thus acting as a “gate keepers”.
- The concept of “**what normal is**” and what a teacher is needs to be challenged. Do we see students with disabilities as the recipients of that care or as our equals, people who share in our professional identity.
- Negative attitudes and assumptions about students with disability expose students with disability to prejudice, a lack of expectations and inappropriate guidance. We need to challenge concepts of what ‘a teacher’ is and what ‘normal’ is.

¹ Commission Report on the Status of People With Disabilities, Government Publications, 1998

Structural changes underpin inclusion

- Positive arrangements such as DARE are proven to work in giving students with disabilities equal chances to succeed in getting in to higher education and undoubtedly improve the participation rates of students with disabilities into all higher education institutions. A policy of supplementary entry will work equally well in teacher education and enable students with disabilities who have the potential to can teach and teach well – but are ‘differently abled’ – ‘equal and different’, to access teacher education courses. While many positive moves have taken place in higher education, it is critical that a systematic approach is taken within institutions that links admissions arrangements with disability support and support on all aspects of the course including pedagogical supports and school placement supports .
- It is imperative at national level that Irish Sign language is given recognition as a language. This would be a key step in piloting teacher education for Deaf students who would complete their course using ISI instead of the Irish Language.
- Legislation / Policy can push change and impact on attitudes / awareness – the role of Teaching Council is critical here in championing inclusion and in drafting clear guidelines on fitness to practice issues and on identifying clear teacher education Competencies.
- Reliable Data is required to track entry and progress of students with disabilities into teacher education.

Panel Discussion

What needs to happen next?

Professor Kathleen Lynch reminded us that this work sits in a wider context of a lack of diversity (not just in relation to disability) in senior appointments more generally. She highlighted too that there had been no profiling of people working in Higher Education since 2004 and that there could be no accountability without information. “People with disabilities need to get onto the stage”. She recommended that all teachers and all children should be receiving modules in relation to equality and diversity.

Brendan O’Dea focussed on the key role of the competencies and how they were interpreted. He expressed his concern that visual disability hadn’t been more a part of the day. He recognised the need for the Teaching Council and other parts of the system to continue to “listen, learn and move forward”.

Dr. Mary-Liz Trant acknowledged the critical nature of the current moment. A necessary level of awareness of the problems has been achieved, the next stage is to ‘transform the landscape’ and make real progress in improving the representativeness of the profession. She recognised the need for a connected up approach that addresses difficult issues of culture just as much as issues of structure.

Dr. Michael O’Keeffe picked up that much progress had been made in the area of mature students and this demonstrated the willingness of colleges to change. He thought this provided a model for working that could be built on. He emphasised the importance of making clear public statements re desired goals, widening access services on the ground and learning from people who have made their way through the system.

Contributions from the floor picked up:

- The potential to unlock things by re-defining the job of teacher, enabling educational inputs to be made in more different ways.
- The DES’s reluctance to collect data regarding the employment of teachers with disabilities (ASTI are gathering data on this through their own on-line survey)
- The need for some hard thinking around notions of ‘normality’
- That people with disabilities see ‘attitudes’ as the biggest issue, whereas people in ‘the system’ tend to talk about funding
- That the Trade Unions don’t make their views known on these issues
- That it is important to share experiences between countries
- That raising academic entrance requirements may further disadvantage people with disabilities in the immediate term
- That ISL needs to be consistently accepted as a first language
- That we need to take these challenges personally, especially re each of us taking responsibility for contributing to the required shift in attitudes
- That conversations started at this conference need to continue.

Identifying the questions we need to address in order to make further breakthroughs

Participants were also asked to identify the key questions that needed to be grappled with for progress to be made

Questions for the teaching council

- How can we ensure that choices between mainstream and specialised education work as well as possible for the student?
- How do we balance issues of equality of access with 'fitness to practice' and child protection, safety etc?
- How can core competencies evolve in such a way that they will support and encourage greater diversity within the profession and not be barriers?

Questions for the department of education

- How is the evolution of league tables affecting this agenda?
- Can the Department consider how students who are DEAF with Irish Sign Language can gain access to teacher education given that the mandatory Irish Language requirements are totally inappropriate to them?

Questions for the colleges of teacher education

- Should differential entry criteria be considered?
- Where are the boundaries re 'reasonable accommodation', where things become just too difficult? Are there differences, in this respect, between primary and secondary education?
- How can we encourage people to disclose their disabilities by providing guarantees that this will be in their interest?

Systematic Questions?

- How to achieve a cultural shift towards acknowledging diversity and that a holistic view of the person is good for society? How to change attitudes?
- How do we ensure 'the system' as a whole and institutions in particular are continually challenged, so that change processes overcome inertia?
- How can we get to the point where people with disabilities are adequately represented in Teacher Education?
- What actions can be taken immediately that will help us progress? Especially, given resource issues?

Conclusions and Recommendations

Access to higher education has improved dramatically over the past ten years and this is to be welcomed. A combination of positive conditions created throughout the system including an infrastructure of legislation promoting equality of treatment; positive admissions policies such as DARE and more flexible teaching and learning pedagogy within higher education institutions; together with the allocation of significant additional funding by the HEA to provide for additional costs of education for disabled students, has been instrumental in improving access.

While there is great willingness within teacher education to include students with disabilities, nevertheless the conference has drawn our attention to the many barriers and difficulties experienced by students with disabilities in making the transition into teacher education courses. The complexities of the issues have long been recognised and the Heads of the Colleges of Teacher Education prepared a CHOICE report in 2009 that clearly outlined a pathway to inclusion with definite milestones for including students with disabilities in teacher education. These recommendations need to be re-visited and implemented if thinking is to ever change about disability and if the route into teacher education is to be more straightforward for students with disability. The CHOICE recommendations include positive strategies proven elsewhere such as putting clear national guidelines in place, making changes to the admissions policies, ensuring adequate support to incentivise colleges of teacher education to become more inclusive and to dealing with the negative assumptions and prejudices about the ability of students with disabilities.

Suggestions:

Short Term:

- Introduce the DARE supplementary scheme to teacher education colleges in 2013.
- Provide information to prospective students with disabilities with an interest in teacher education through information leaflets, college prospectuses and the Better Options Fair for students with disabilities.
- Encourage colleges of education to include information for students with disabilities in their prospectus and websites.
- The Student Medical Information form proposed by CoEs, with their implicit assumptions about the 'risk' from disabled people within teacher training, discourages positive organisational cultures. The proposed format needs to be reviewed into a more positive document underpinned by a positive approach and aligned admissions information formats used within the university sector.
- Ensure that the approach to Fitness to practice health screening process is related to the actual competencies and tasks of the job. There is a widespread practice of health screening, which is frequently not related to the specific job role. This has the potential to lead to discrimination and to deter disabled people from applying for jobs or from disclosing disabilities and long-term health conditions. The Teaching Council in collaboration with the Teacher education colleges and AHEAD and the sector produce Guidelines on school practice in teacher education.

- The teaching council and colleges of education establish a Sounding Board of students and teachers with disabilities to inform future policy and practice.
- Organise further events to raise awareness of disability and to build confidence amongst professionals of the managing disability in a classroom setting.

Medium Term:

- The Teaching Council should review their competence standards to ensure that they do not impact negatively on disabled people and a key step would be to link with professional bodies to ensure clear core competencies for teaching practice.
- Guidelines on the provision of reasonable adjustments is an important step in building confidence in implementing inclusive practice and this can be carried out in collaboration with AHEAD and the Sector.
- The Colleges of Education together with the Centre for Deaf Studies draft a plan to introduce teacher education with Irish sign Language, as proposed by the speaker Dr. Elizabeth Mathews.
- The inclusion of Deaf students who use Irish Sign Language in teacher education will require admissions policies to be more flexible with regard to the mandatory requirement for the Irish Language, it would need to recognise Irish sign Language as an alternative in admissions policies. .
- Liaise with the National Disability Authority to be informed about progress on discussions taking place with the Department of Justice towards recognition of Irish Sign Language by the Irish Government.
- Conduct research into the experience of teachers with disability.
- **A framework of professional standards of competence and conduct, coupled with effective management and rigorous monitoring of practice, is the best way to achieve equality for disabled people and the effective protection of the public.**
- Finally, there is a need to carry out research into discrimination in the HE sector within nursing, teaching and social work courses. There is anecdotal evidence of students being excluded from professional courses based on disability grounds - but no clear research has been carried out in this area. This would assist HEIs in ensuring their courses are inclusive, thus benefiting all by making a more diverse culture.



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