

0300

The impact on trainee teachers of placements in SEN schools during the PGCE Primary year

Sharon Sutton, Helen Bilton

University of Reading, Reading, Berkshire, United Kingdom

Background

The Government has made SEN a priority for schools (Every Child Matters (DfES 2004)) and in response the TDA have recognised the importance of training teachers in areas related to SEN and inclusion as a way to achieve these goals (i.e. Inclusion Development Programme). In recent years ITT BA programmes have had the flexibility and additional time to place students in Special Schools or Units. However this opportunity is difficult for shorter condensed ITT programmes such as the PGCE. Due to the time restrictions, demands of the taught curriculum and the need to obtain the Standards to achieve QTS; the same goal has been problematic for PGCE students. The University of Reading has found a way to address this gap by offering an extended Special Study which focuses on SEN and the opportunity for placements in Specialist schools.

Research Questions

There is overwhelming agreement amongst teaching staff and other stakeholders that successful inclusion of all learners is an important aim for schools (Farrell, Dyson et al. 2007). Several factors impact this; teachers attitudes is a crucial one (Evans and Lunt 2002). It is therefore important to offer teachers (and trainee teachers) opportunities for guided experience from which to increase opportunities to work with this group of learners.

At the University of Reading we wish to continue on the positive work by colleagues in the BA programme and extend the opportunity for increased taught and practical experience in special needs. We wish to provide teachers for our local demands in both mainstream schools, for those students wishing to become SENCOs in time and for those wishing to move into Special Education.

Methods

An initial search of the literature and government guidelines revealed the work completed on BA degrees. With the recent launch of the Government's programmes designed to support one year ITT provision(TDA Special Educational Needs and Disability ITT training resources) the focus is now turning to ways to best support further embedding SEN into the curriculum.

During 2008/9 the PGCE Primary programme at the University of Reading revisited the way in which SEN is addressed throughout the course. The Special Study module was rewritten to incorporate this new focus as well as student feedback and so now is a blended learning module based on the acquisition of a deeper understanding and greater knowledge of various SENs and strategies used to help children learn. In 2009/10 this was extended to include placements in special schools. This presentation will focus on a pilot of six carefully selected volunteer students on the preparation, placement and after thoughts of these SEN placements in three local SEN schools.

Methods - This research is qualitative in nature and involves both observations and interviews. After gaining ethical consent, semi - structured interviews were conducted prior to and at the end the placement . An independent interviewer was used to ensure students were able to convey their thoughts and opinions without concern about the impact to their course and to meet ethical guidelines. Interviews were also conducted with the other stakeholders (i.e. supervising tutors, Head teachers of SEN schools, mentors and Head teachers of the Summer placement schools).

Frame

This research is interested in exploring impact. Trainees often have limited opportunities to work with children with additional needs unless this is self directed or previous to starting the PGCE programme. For students without these possibilities, there is little scope for increasing the confidence that comes with experience. This research will focus on the student experience within the context and the perceptions of the other stakeholders.

Research findings

At the time of this submission the initial findings and analysis are taking place. The preparatory meetings and planning with students and other stakeholders has been very constructive and positive. However as the placement is scheduled for March the interviewing has not yet taken place. Informal comments from students have revealed concerns about personal ability to teach in a specialist setting, behaviour management and general competency. The overwhelming impression given is their desire to "get it right", to do their best for the children they will be teaching. Schools have also revealed a positive reaction to this initiative and shared concerns about the overall problems in recruiting new members of teaching staff. These are the areas that will be followed up at interview and observation.

DfES (2004). Every Child Matters: Change for Children. Nottingham, DfES Publications.

Evans, J. and I. Lunt (2002). "Inclusive education: Are there limits?" *European Journal of Special Needs Education* **17**(1): 1-14.

Farrell, P., A. Dyson, et al. (2007). "Inclusion and achievement in mainstream schools." *European Journal of Special Needs Education* **22**(2): 131-145.