

**Improving classroom skills around SEND in England? Issues with policy implementation.**

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**Background**

This paper in the symposium examines the process of policy implementation in relation to the IDP, and argues that although the underpinning, strategic level vision is clear, and that an apparently workable dissemination process has been put in place to support SEND education in the classroom, the reality of the first year of implementation raises important issues relating to the impact of the IDP at classroom level.

The desire to improve classroom provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) has been an important policy focus for decades. Recently, a number of high profile inquiries have reported on SEND issues. The Rose Report (2008) focused on dyslexia teaching and learning, while the Bercow Report (2008) made recommendations regarding provision relating to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN); and the Lamb Report (2009), from the inquiry into parental confidence in the SEN system. In addition, government policy (e.g., the 1997 White Paper, Excellence in Schools), and new legal requirements (e.g., those arising from the 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act) have confirmed the strategic commitment to SEND education in schools.

A key policy initiative designed to improve the expertise of classroom staff in providing for pupils with SEND, the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP), under the aegis of the National Strategies, has provided resources for practitioners in relation to dyslexia, speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), and the autism spectrum. A further module of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties will be published in 2010. The IDP is one of a range of SEND initiatives funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) designed to improve teacher workforce skills in this area. These initiatives are being evaluated by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), the University of Warwick.

**Research Questions**

The foci of the research presented in this paper are:

- Existing classroom provision for SEND pupils
- The understanding of the IDP
- Dissemination of the IDP
- Perceptions of the impact of the IDP in schools and classrooms

**Methods**

In relation to the IDP, the CEDAR evaluation seeks to identify the understanding of the IDP by different actors, and to track the implementation of the IDP, 2008-2011. For the purposes of this paper, the key actors involved in the research are 25 SENCOs, 16 CPD managers, 22 experienced teachers, and 18 NQTs (in 2008-09) drawn from 28 schools in 21 local authorities (81 school staff in total) who were interviewed by telephone in the spring of 2009, and the autumn of 2009 (and will be interviewed again in the autumn of 2010). In addition, in December 2009, questionnaires were completed by 218 headteachers, 325 SENCOs and 287 experienced teachers from a stratified, random sample of 1000 schools (excluding the interview schools) from the 30 LAs in the evaluation sample.

## Frame

The interviews were analysed thematically. All the transcriptions were coded individually against themes that were pre-determined by the research team (deductive analysis), and emergent themes that were revealed by analysis of the transcripts (inductive analysis). The development of the coding system was a recursive (iterative) process, with interviews being read and a coding system constructed, and then the transcripts were re-read to identify which elements fitted the initially identified themes, which themes were emerging and hence new patterns were identified in the data to produce superordinate main categories with subordinate themes. The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics are referred to in the paper.

## Research findings

The evaluation is still in progress, but findings from the first year of this longitudinal project (2008-2011) suggest weaknesses in the top down implementation model that was adopted to deliver the IDP. Interviews with IDP leads at LA level (the focus of another paper in the symposium) indicate that there is a high degree of awareness and understanding with regard to the aims and focus of the initiative. Further, LA IDP leads also express high degrees of satisfaction with the Regional Hub model of dissemination adopted at the LA level of the programme. However, a more varied picture emerged of the extent of IDP dissemination success at school level (the focus of this paper). At this level, there were both differences between and within schools. The underpinning model of dissemination adopted for the IDP was that of 'cascading', where a body of knowledge and practice is transmitted, in its entirety, from strategic to operational to service delivery level. In this case, the IDP was intended to ultimately impact through individual teachers in classrooms. However, the evaluation results, thus far, indicate that rather than transmission being represented by a cascade of knowledge, the metaphor of 'trickle down' might be more appropriate. The extensive knowledge and weight of national strategy has, it appears, so far resulted only in a limited impact of the IDP in individual classrooms.

The evaluation findings so far suggest a number of casual factors underlying weaknesses in IDP dissemination. These factors are associated with:

- The top-down approach adopted for dissemination
- The length of the initiative, stretching over three school years
- The diverse approaches to IDP-related CPD in schools
- Competing school-level priorities, which impact negatively on the implementation of the IDP

Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that the types of impact found from analysis of the school interviews so far, although limited, closely mirror those found in a four-year study of the introduction of science in primary schools as part of the National Curriculum (Harland & Kinder, 1997). The Harland and Kinder hierarchical model of outcomes of CPD activity is drawn on to help explain some of the variation in impact of the IDP at classroom level.

## References

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