

Importance of peer-support for teaching staff

The importance of peer-support for teaching staff when including children with special educational needs

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Abstract

Policies of inclusion in schools now transcend national boundaries, but much less is known about how teachers interact best with each other in order to establish a successful inclusion environment. This article reports a study where 43 teachers in three secondary schools across one local authority in Scotland were interviewed on a range of topics related to inclusion. One of the important themes to emerge was the importance of peer-support within staff groups. It was found that teachers could still hold positive attitudes towards inclusion, even if the management team and heads of department within the same school were not regarded as being particularly supportive in this respect. Peer support was highlighted as a valuable component enabling teachers to feel that they were able to successfully include children with special needs. Moreover, the importance of peer support was perceived as superseding other support across the three secondary schools. Some implications for a possible role for educational psychologists (school psychologists) in helping to establish peer support networks for teachers are considered.

Introduction

The context for inclusive education is grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and other UK acts e.g. Children's (Scotland) Act 1995. The term 'inclusion' replaces 'integration', which was used in the 1980s, with regard to including children who were identified as having special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools (Allan, 2006). Inclusion has involved several dimensions including the implications for belonging to the local community or school and was an attempt to improve upon integrating children in mainstream provision with minimal support i.e. '*...physical movement of the child from one place to another without a concomitant expectation of necessary change by the mainstream school*' (Vassie, 2002, p.2).

There are various definitions of inclusion – this is one example,

'...inclusion is defined as the provision of services to students with special needs in the regular classroom as opposed to pulling students out of the classroom to receive these special services'. (Ross, 2002, p.7)

There are differing views as to what exactly the concept of inclusion involves and this will influence opinion in this subject area. A full debate of this issue would be outside the realm of this paper but it is worth considering what inclusion could potentially entail. For some, inclusion in school could be all children being educated in their local school where full facilities would be put in place to ensure that children with special needs are not disadvantaged educationally and socially from their peers. Other people may argue that inclusion could include specialist provisions which are separate to mainstream schools because the children are socially included with their peers who also have a range of special needs. The UK government's report entitled *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (DfES, 2004) stated that '*...all teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs and all schools should play their part in*

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educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability (p.7).’ This would suggest that specialist provisions for children with the more extreme special needs e.g. SEBD, ASD should not exist outside the local community, if at all.

In the case of inclusion, it could be hypothesised that if the key members of the change implementation process (i.e. the teachers) are unhappy with or not supportive of the fundamental principles of this process then it surely follows that there may be some difficulties with the execution and operation of the policy. There are almost weekly reports in the press of teachers who are finding it increasingly difficult to teach children who have special educational needs (e.g. Aitken, 2005; Smith 2005). Hannah and Pilner’s (1983) review of teacher attitudes found that an important element in the inclusion of children with special needs was that of the attitude towards the child from the class teacher. In their opinion, this was a variable that was never properly taken into account during the implementation of inclusion policies. Subban and Sharma (2006) found that, ‘...*there remains some concern about implementing inclusive education in the mainstream classroom*’ (p.51).

The analysis of concerns seems to indicate that many teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion but still have concerns regarding adapting and modifying the classroom arrangements (Westwood, 2005). There is always a difference between the opinions of teachers and the practicalities involved in implementing inclusive practices, as there will be in many organisations. Being sympathetic to the philosophy of including children in mainstream education seems to be fairly common in the teaching profession (e.g. Salend & Duhaney, 1991; Better Behaviour, Better Learning, 2001; Smith, 2005). However, there seems to be a gap between a general

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acceptance of inclusion principles and the actuality of being supportive in its implementation (Mushoriwa, 2001; Bradshaw & Mundia, 2006; Subban & Sharma, 2006). A review of the literature on teacher attitudes was conducted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) which highlighted variations in attitudes depending on the child (e.g. nature of and severity of difficulties/disabilities) and teacher's characteristics (e.g. age, training). They also made suggestions for future research to be carried out in order to understand the reasons for the perceptions of inclusion that teachers have e.g. a study into the quality of the teacher training available to students, and a longitudinal case-study approach to understanding teachers' attitudes to implementing inclusions policies. The purpose of this article is to illustrate the kind of research that educational psychologists (EPs) can usefully carry out into teachers' perspectives on inclusion.

In Scotland, EPs work at three levels which may overlap. These are the level of the child/family, school/establishment and local authority. Within these levels, they have five core functions: consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research (Scottish Executive, 2002). The Education (Scotland) Act 1969 had made several functions mandatory for an educational psychologist (EP), one of these prescribed duties is 'the study of children with special educational needs' (Jindal-Snape *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, they are tasked with the responsibility of liaising and collaborating with teachers, especially when working with children with SEN. However, a recent study with secondary school teachers working on an aspect of inclusive practice within an educational establishment has revealed tensions and dilemmas, including problems in their relationship (Davies, Howes, & Farrell, 2008). Within this context, Boyle (2009), then an EP in a Scottish Local Authority undertook a study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with special needs. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and attitudes of teachers to inclusion in secondary

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schools, to better understand ways in which EPs could work and support positive teacher practice when working with children with special educational needs in mainstream settings. The results indicated that teachers were fairly supportive of the inclusion policy and reported that peer support was very important in the implementation of such a policy. This perhaps is not surprising as previous research has indicated the usefulness of informal and formal systems of peer support amongst teachers and others involved in the teaching profession, especially in a stressful or difficult situation (Schmitz & Brown, 2006; Roache, 2007). In this paper, we are presenting data from a part of this study which focused on the issue of peer support in the context of Departmental Culture, School Culture, Effort to Include, Management Support and Colleague Support, as this is pertinent to understanding where and how EPs might be able to support their teacher colleagues.

Methods

Participants

Three mainstream schools were chosen, from a usable total of six secondary schools, due to the relatively high response rates to an earlier questionnaire on teachers' attitudes to inclusion as part of the larger study (Boyle, 2009). Individual staff interviews were carried out in each of the three case-study schools. The teaching staff were recruited, in each school, by a combination of a request going in to the daily school bulletin requesting a volunteer from each department to be interviewed on their perspective of inclusion in secondary schools, as well as an item on each curriculum area's next departmental meeting. A co-ordinating Depute Head Teacher (DHT) was responsible for collecting the list of names within his or her secondary school. One member of staff was asked to represent each of the fifteen departments which formed part of the Scottish curriculum and which were represented in the

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initial questionnaire on inclusion (Boyle, 2009). Overall, 43 interviewees were recruited (Case Study School 1 had two departments where staff were unavailable due to absence; whereas the other two had the full complement of fifteen teachers each).

The researchers followed the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and voluntary participation and informed consent were obtained.

Design

Individual staff interviews were deemed to be the most successful method as confidentiality between the interviewer and the participant could be more easily maintained as well as providing direct opportunities for interviewees to have the prospect of responding to each question in as detailed a manner as s/he felt was necessary. There were seven questions in the interview schedule asking the teachers about their attitudes to inclusion. For example, one question focused on the views of teachers about the effects of inclusion policy and the importance that peer support played in the implementation of this policy. The complete schedule is included in this paper as Appendix A. The question, which is detailed below, provided the opportunity for staff to indicate the levels of peer support in their respective departments and the subsequent relevance to the implementation of the inclusion policy.

Question Four - Who in school supports you to facilitate inclusion?

And Supplementals: Do you feel supported by peers in your department with regards to facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?

Do you feel supported by your head of department with regards to facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?

Do you feel supported by your school management team in facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?

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Considering Lipsky's (1980) assertion about the inordinate amount of power that front-line staff have, it was prudent to use these probing questions to consider how powerful these influences were from others in the school. The question worked in a bottom-up process by considering peers and then working up to the school management team (cf. Center, Ward, Parmenter, and Nash, 1985). If a teacher regards him or herself as inclusive, but feels that they are not being properly supported i.e. there is some form of systemic failure; then it is appropriate that this is considered and thus investigated.

Procedure

The interviews were conducted by experienced EPs who worked in the same Scottish local authority as the first author. EPs were not assigned to schools that they currently worked in so as to avoid any bias. In total, nine EPs volunteered and attended a briefing session on the interviewing process so as to maintain consistency in data collection. All the interviews were recorded using digital recorders and were transcribed by the first author of this paper. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded in this way when they originally signed up for the project, and their permission was confirmed at the beginning of each interview.

Results and Discussion

The format for the display of the results will be by theme and will take the form of a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The schools have not been separated as the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of how teaching staff support their peers in implementing inclusion.

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The thematic analysis produced the following themes:

- Departmental Culture
- School Culture
- Effort to Include
- Management Support
- Colleague Support

Table 1, below, summarises the individual questions that were put to the interviewees during the interviews. The vast majority of staff (76.7%) felt that they were supported by their peers within the department with only 9.3% feeling that this was not the case. The remaining group did not respond (14%), which was a mixture of the interviewer not following up on this question and interviewee not feeling that s/he could respond as they might be identified, which could cause difficulties for that staff member. This is a recurring theme in that it has been intimated that peer support is an important mechanism for success in teaching practice, especially when working with children with special needs. Similarly, 74.4% of staff felt that they were supported by their Heads of Departments (HoDs) which, again, went some way to enabling staff to feel that support was available if so required within the department.

When it came to the question of whether the staff felt supported by the school management team to facilitate inclusion there was a reduction to 65.1% of staff in this category. Whilst still being a majority, there were still some staff who could not give an affirmative response to this question. However, note must be taken of the various percentages of staff responses which were classified as 'not given', which means that the teachers did not respond to the question. They may have felt that they could not give an answer for a particular reason, which may or may not be related to the issue of being identified in a negative way, despite reassurances from the researcher and

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interviewing EP that this would not happen. It seems that one very important aspect for inclusion is that staff are supported within their department either by the HoDs and/or peers, and what happens outside of the department may not have as significant an impact on a teacher's ability to facilitate inclusion. From the EPs' perspective it is important that they have awareness of whether this support is being provided to the teachers and what role they can play in this. This should be an opportunity for the EP to facilitate and build on the possibilities for peer support in schools and to ensure that this type of collegial support is emphasised from a psychological perspective.

INSERT TABLE 1 AROUND HERE

Departmental Culture (13 of the 43 respondents gave responses under this theme)

In many occupations peer support is at the crux of facilitating a strong framework for quality working (Ellison, 2008), and teaching is no different vis-à-vis inclusion. Knowing that there is no stigma attached to asking a colleague for support with a class or individual children is a powerful mechanism for assisting teaching staff to continue to work effectively with children who have special educational needs, as has been indicated by the experienced teacher, in the quote below.

“I am very privileged to work in a department where they help each other out ...and I feel quite able to say to the colleague next door I'm having problems with them and we help each other out” (English, 27 years of teaching experience).

In a similar manner to the previous quotation, the following quote highlights the importance of a strongly inclusive department.

“...we work as a team in Science, not just our specialist subjects, but we all work together; my colleague and I work together in differentiating materials ...because we both have several pupils who depend on that, so I think it's the ethos within our department that we all pitch in and help out in any way we can” (Science, Probationer).

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The added value of linking with other departments and discovering what colleagues are doing elsewhere in the school, whilst working with children who have special needs, also received mention, as is shown in the following quote from a relatively inexperienced Technical teacher.

“Definitely the whole school contributes. I think departments feed off one another” (Technical, 2 years).

The departmental culture is important to individual staff members as they try to support children with special educational needs, as is highlighted in the following two quotations. Interestingly, the two teachers have different lengths of service and represent different curriculum subjects but both highlight the usefulness of having a supportive department in order to facilitate inclusion.

“If there is a pupil who is just disrupting the class and it’s just not working...principal teacher is willing to take that pupil which is a great help” (Art, 1 year).

“Yes, certainly in the Maths department they are very much together as a department and we support each other in everything, basically” (Maths, 30 years).

Within subject departments it could be argued that it is teachers interacting with each other that contribute towards a feeling of inclusiveness in the staff group. The teacher cited below indicates that s/he feels supported within the department because of the discussions on ‘tactics’ for working with various pupils that can emerge from informal dialogue between colleagues. It seems likely that the creation of formal networks may not be necessary; instead the availability of facilities for staff to interact informally can enhance discussions about how best to support various coping strategies.

“ in terms of staffroom discussions just discussing ideas on how other teachers deal with them(is helpful). Did you have them last year?... Have you had incidents of similar patterns of pupils behaving in a similar way?... I have

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tried this what do you think?... I find peer discussions in the staffroom of a huge benefit” (Science, 2 years).

In contrast to what has been mentioned above regarding the positive benefits of supportive colleagues, another teacher highlighted the difficulties that may arise from a negative atmosphere towards inclusion within a department. The suggestion is that teachers were affected by this, especially as this teacher was a probationer who was at a crucial stage of development and, as such, may have found it difficult to ignore the levels of negativity that appear to have existed. It could be argued that this should be a career development stage where the probationer teacher needs positive role models in order to form his/her schema of inclusive education in such a way that can help form a positive outlook regarding teaching children with special needs in the class.

“Again there are peers who do support you, but there are peers who are not good examples and probably that adds to the survey, I think again with any job you can pick up good habits and bad habits, and if you have a poor mentor or you are surrounded by peers who all have a negative attitude, then its going to affect you” (Religious Education (RE), Probation).

The final statement under this theme links one teacher’s belief that his/her department is inclusive with the notion that all the staff working together for the benefit of the pupils would ultimately would bring benefits to the staff.

“I think by nature a PE department is very much an inclusive department; everyone is involved” (Physical Education (PE), 34 years).

Within this theme of departmental support, it was interesting to note that there did not seem to be any differences in views across departments or by length of service. The key aspects seemed to be that there was good leadership from the Head of Department and/or the staff working as a collective group to support the policy of inclusion within their subject area.

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School Culture (13 of the 43 respondents gave responses under this theme)

By its very definition, school culture will have a holistic influence as it transcends departmental boundaries. The first teacher quoted under this theme puts forward the point that inclusion is about the whole as opposed to the sum of its parts. This view that inclusion is about all teachers and staff becoming involved fits with Lipsky's (1980) study of ground level staff who have discretionary power to influence the application of government policy.

"I would say it's not a kind of Senior Management issue or a Principal Teacher issue that inclusion is supported by all staff, including people who don't technically have a lot of experience" (Guidance/Pupil Support, 12 years).

The ethos of the school, it could be added, might not be solely grounded in just the teaching staff, as is shown in the previous interview, but is wider and more encompassing as it is also influence from non-teaching school and external agency staff which helps contribute to the overall school ethos (cf. Barnes, 2005). Another teacher commented on the importance of having all staff involved in the inclusion process as a means of creating a more welcoming and effective environment.

"We just support one another. There are other non-teaching people who help you to be inclusive as well. Office staff and even the janitors, they kind of go un-noticed but they support in things we want to do. The majority of things we want to do probably would not get off the ground without the whole school helping." (Technical, 2 years)

The prospect of new appointments adding freshness to the staff room culture and an individual's practice may not be obviously linked to inclusion, but the perspective from another teacher suggests that newer teachers are able to energise more experienced members of staff to adapt their practice based on what they are seeing from the former. Interestingly, no mention is made of these new teachers being seen as a threat to the more established teachers. On the contrary the more experienced

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staff seem to have welcomed and embraced the opportunity to attempt new approaches to supporting children in the class.

“We have a lot of new staff who have just been like a breath of fresh air. Pardon the cliché but that’s what its like and they come in with fantastic new ideas and a whole new approach to what they are doing and I think maybe older teachers who have been here for some time are now beginning to steal from those ideas and breathe a bit more life into their classrooms again.”
(Guidance/Pupil Support, 12 years)

The importance of staff from different departments being able to come together and discuss various elements of practice is suggested by a teacher as being useful for a school to work well. This reflects the message of a document ‘A Framework for Improving Teaching’ (Ainscow, 2000) which encouraged teachers to reflect on various aspects of their practice. The point was made here that, as there was no large staffroom, teachers tended to stay within their own departments; therefore there was not as much opportunity to interact and possibly to form inter-departmental relationships to the benefit of staff and pupils alike.

“However the fact that we don’t have a staffroom in this school is a major detrimental effect on all staff. In the past in (other school before merger) we had a staffroom where we could all come together and an awful lot of information was passed between staff there ...the fact that we are all in bases all over the school has had a negative effect, I think.” (Drama, 14 years)

Effort to include (21 of the 43 respondents gave responses under this theme)

Both teachers in the next examples refer to the importance of consulting with colleagues, as many teachers may have worked with a particular pupil with special needs and come up with effective strategies that worked in the class. This is a valuable and readily available resource which is possibly underused in some schools.

“But keep asking questions of other people and in departments where maybe another department has the same pupils; say ‘How do you deal with this pupil?’ Have you found something that works?” (ICT/Business, 11 years)

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As was previously mentioned, another teacher referred to the support of colleagues but also indicated that teachers should be prepared to try very different strategies in order to find a method that works across the range of children in the class.

“Getting advice from other teachers and, I think, just trying things, even things you might initially think that’s not going to work or that’s going to lead to a disaster and that’s going to lead to a riot, give it a try because sometimes the kind of out there things do actually end up being the most effective.” (RE, 6 years)

Teachers supporting teachers was found by Ainscow (2000) to provide ‘*...clear evidence that teacher partnerships that include planned opportunities...to carry out peer coaching can be powerful in creating stimulus for such professional development*’ (p. 79). This is supported by the evidence emerging in the present study, which indicates that this is still a powerful and often underused strength to teaching in special education. Although Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) have argued that the role of EPs should be primarily about direct work with children and consultation should exist only as a supplementary activity, this is an area where EPs can provide support, especially as in Scotland they also have responsibility for in-service training of teachers. These might include areas related to understanding SEN and/or teaching/learning/behaviour management strategies to facilitate a more conducive learning environment. Also, as other studies have suggested, teachers and principals see the EP’s role as that of consultation and providing advice as well as working with children (e.g., Mägi & Kikas, 2009).

Management Support (12 of the 43 respondents gave responses under this theme)

In order to facilitate inclusive principles in the classroom, it is vital for teachers to feel supported by either or both departmental and senior management within the school. If

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this is the case, then teachers have more opportunities to operate effectively with all children in the class, as the following teacher commented about a senior colleague,

“(She) is very good at supporting teachers to teach children in the class”
(English, 27 years).

The above response from the class teacher indicates the importance of teachers being able to teach with the knowledge that support will be available to facilitate the basic principle of working in a classroom i.e. teaching the subject with support from school management.

Colleague Support (17 of the 43 respondents gave responses under this theme)

One teacher suggested that it was only by speaking with colleagues that she had developed an understanding of what inclusion was. There is no mention of training in the form of INSET or CPD courses, which is worth noting.

“Nothing in particular, just chatting with other people I haven’t read anything about it” (Maths, 30 years).

Following on from a similar point that was made under the theme of *Departmental Culture*, another teacher emphasised the importance of sharing good practice with colleagues, especially when working with children who have special needs. It seems that this level of support is very encouraging in that teachers are not left to feel that they are struggling with a class or group of pupils. It could be argued that this collective effort will allow teachers to find their individual area(s) of expertise and be able to pool skills in order to teach effectively all children in the department.

“We share good practice, and if I was having a problem with a pupil and found it difficult to include them in the class, we will discuss ways around that. Someone may have an idea to keep the pupil included or we sometimes share classes or swap classes over, sometimes we can swap pupils over to try and make sure we can include everyone” (PE, 4 years).

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Another teacher, with a vast amount of teaching experience, put forward a perspective that illustrates the importance of working as a team so that problems can be dispersed amongst a group of teachers, thereby making it easier to deal with rather than feeling isolated.

“In actual fact, using team work, using the team who are there who may have an expertise that you may lack, you have not developed with this particular person or this particular group. When it’s a shared problem it becomes not a problem, it becomes a work in progress and people actually do very well as a result and then you are recognising that other people have something to contribute to your professional development” (Modern Languages, 34 years).

It would seem that it is the support of peers and colleagues that is the most important element.

“I think the biggest influence in the way I try and approach inclusion is just through general conversation with peers and colleagues” (Science, 2 years).

As has been suggested earlier in this paper, support from colleagues seems to be the most valued aspect that the class teacher has in relation to supporting inclusion and peer support and, it could be argued, makes up for the training that staff do not feel they are getting elsewhere. The value of informal support from EPs cannot be ignored such as discussions in school corridors or in the staff room.

INSERT FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE

Figure 1 highlights what could be considered to be the optimum link between attitudes and support. This study has indicated that both personnel resourcing and the attitudes to inclusion of colleagues are important to effectively support children with special educational needs. Consideration is given to the fact that there are two types of support - that which is provided by colleagues, but also that which is supplied by management

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in the way of material and/or personnel resources. It is argued here that the optimum connection is between 'good attitudes' and 'plentiful resources' as this brings important aspects of inclusion together. The attitudes of the teaching staff are crucial to successful inclusion, and in Figure One this is shown to be reinforced by support from management by way of resourcing. Effective inclusion could still take place if 'good attitudes' were mixed with 'scarce resources', as 'peer support' would come to the fore. However, for how long this would be effectual is open to doubt, as teachers operating in a 'scarcely resourced' environment might well find it increasingly more difficult to be supportive of colleagues. Pushed to the extreme, this scenario would eventually become 'scarce resources' mixed with 'poor attitudes'; which would be the least conducive option and might well lead to a breakdown in the inclusion policy of the school.

The above findings indicate that support from other members of staff with helpful strategies, and using reflective practices as part of their teaching procedures (Ainscow, 2000), were valued by the majority of teaching staff in the three secondary schools involved in this project. Previously, Swafford (2000) has indicated that peer support among staff is an important aspect to building successful approaches to good classroom management.

The findings of this study, albeit with a small sample, have emphasised the importance of peer support between teachers and others involved in the schools such as EPs for making inclusion policies work. It is important, however, to remember that the sample size and the setting of this study might make it difficult to generalise the findings. More studies of similar nature need to be conducted to get a clearer and more reliable

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picture. It is also important to bear in mind that the findings presented here represent teacher perceptions and do not necessarily demonstrate the inclusion policies are actually working well in the three schools involved. Further evidence of a different nature would be necessary to bear this out.

Conclusion

Teachers being able to consult with each other on a professional level coupled with more informal levels of support are highlighted in all three case-study schools as being helpful for staff in coping with difficult class situations. Whilst there was often a perception of support from the school management team, this was not always the case. There is likely to be an important role here for EPs in providing support as well as in-service training, including facilitating better support from more experienced staff and senior management. An important aspect which was highlighted in all the case-study schools was that of peer support both within and across all subject departments.

Sharing information and strategies on individual pupils across departmental boundaries seemed to be a key element of being inclusive that helped teachers. This is an area that should be developed so that it becomes a legitimate and recognised strategy that would be financed, if necessary, as it is likely to produce motivated teachers who want to be inclusive. Irrespective of the personal opinions of EPs about inclusion they have an opportunity, as well as an obligation, to contribute to recognised inclusive strategies which enhance the smooth running of schools, thereby ensuring that staff and students achieve positive outcomes.

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There are implications for practice resulting from this study for the EPs. They are in an ideal position to support teachers without impinging on the organic and informal support that teachers might be providing each other. In their role of providing in-service training, EPs could support teachers, irrespective of their position or years of experience. The EPs work closely with teachers on a regular basis and this can provide them with the opportunity to understand their training needs as well as informally seeking information about these needs.

Similarly, one of the roles that EPs play is that of working collaboratively with the teachers. Within this role, there can be a facilitation of peer-based support which would be evidentially based upon further studies of this nature. Teachers put forward the information that peer-support is crucial for working effectively with children who have special needs, but it is the EPs who are in the best position to encourage and organise the realisation, within schools, that this method of working is crucial for a positive and inclusive environment.

This study has shown that teachers regard peer-based support as being extremely important for supporting children with special needs but EPs may not, hitherto, be as prominent in facilitating this type of within-school support as it appears to be moving away from direct work with children. However, whilst a central role of EPs is clearly to support children directly, we contend that doing this through teachers is an invaluable and appropriate use of resources which offers credibility with teaching staff and affords a mechanism to provide an effective intervention based on proven methods of peer support.

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The conclusions of this paper are based on the findings from one study of one local education authority in Scotland and generalisations beyond this area may not be possible. Nevertheless, the paper certainly provides some useful implications for practice within the sphere of educational psychology. A more detailed study is required in order to ascertain whether these results would be replicated in different cultural situations and whether inclusion policies did in fact work better in supportive environments. This would be enhanced by a cross-cultural analysis, possibly involving a stratified random sample of schools, which would provide a clearer understanding of peer-support and how it can be facilitated by EPs. Gaining an understanding, through a survey of the profession, as to the best method for EPs to assume this type of activity and as to whether it would be regarded within the field as a useful undertaking would provide additional valuable information for practitioners.

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Appendix A

Finalised Interview Questions

1. *What does the term 'inclusion' in relation to schools mean to you? i.e. Describe it in your own words.*
 - a) *What has led you to your understanding of inclusion (e.g. books, personal experience, authority, policy, research etc.)?*
2. *In what way, if any, do you think that your perception of inclusion has been affected in relation to the rest of your department? Why?*
 - a) *Do you feel more or less inclusive since you joined this department?*
 - b) *Has the departmental culture affected you either in a positive or negative way with regards to inclusion?*
3. *The results of the recent survey conducted by Chris Boyle have shown that after one year of teaching there is clear evidence that secondary teachers become less inclusive*
 - a) *What are your views about this (Do you think that it is accurate)?*
 - b) *Why do you think this is?*
 - c) *Do you think this applies to you? If so, Why?*
4. *Who in school supports you to facilitate inclusion?*
 - a) *Do you feel supported by peers in your department with regards to facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?*
 - b) *Do you feel supported by your head of department with regards to facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?*
 - c) *Do you feel supported by your school management team in facilitating inclusion? (Yes/No – Why?) Any examples?*
5. *Tell me about ways you have adapted your own teaching and learning methods over the last three years to accommodate children with special needs.*
 - a) *Please give specific examples*
6. *What specific resources would you like to see introduced to help you support children with ASN in the classroom who come under the following categories?*
 - a) *Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*
 - i. *Why would this support help?*
 - b) *moderate learning difficulties*
 - i. *Why would this support help?*
 - c) *severe learning difficulties*
 - i. *Why would this support help?*
 - d) *Autistic Spectrum Disorders (including Asperger's)*
 - i. *Why and how would this support help?*
7. *What advice would you give to other teachers so that they could effectively include children with special needs in their class?*

Tables

Table 1 - Support to Facilitate Inclusion in School

Question Four (n=43)	Yes	No	Not¹ Given
Do you feel supported by peers in your department with regards to facilitating inclusion?	33 (76.7 %)	4 (9.3 %)	6 (14 %)
Do you feel supported by your HoD with regards to facilitating inclusion?	32 (74.4 %)	4 (9.3 %)	7 (16.3 %)
Do you feel supported by your school management team with regards to facilitating inclusion?	28 (65.1 %)	11 (25.6 %)	4 (9.3 %)

Figures

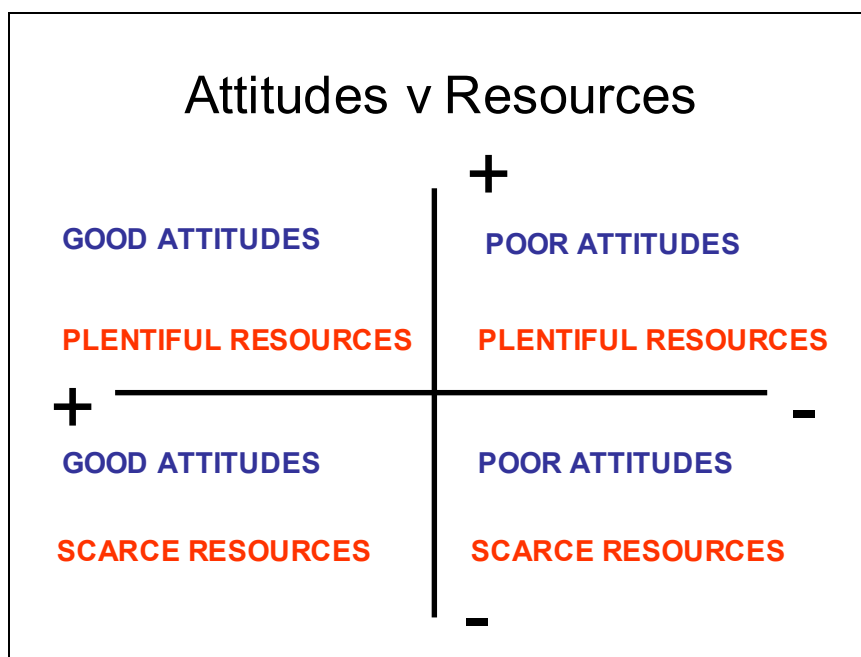


Figure 1 - Attitudes v Resources

¹ Or could/would not give a response.