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Student Voice in the Individual Education Plan Process and Inclusion

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Terminology

- IEP: defined as "a written document prepared for a named student which specifies the learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports necessary to achieve these goals" (NCSE, 2006, p. xii).
- IEP process: refers to all aspects involved in preparation, construction, implementation, evaluation, review and modification of IEP.
- Child/Student: any person up to 18 years.
- SEN: "special educational needs" means, in relation to a person, a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition and cognate words shall be construed accordingly (Ireland, 2004, p. 6).

Terminology

The Inclusive Education Framework (2011)

- Process
- Identification and removal of barriers
- Presence, participation and achievement of all pupils
- Emphasis on those at risk of marginalisation, exclusion, under achievement

EPSEN (Ireland, 2004)

A child with special educational needs shall be educated in an inclusive environment with children who do not have such needs unless the nature or degree of those needs of the child is such that to do so would be inconsistent with

(a) best interests of the child; (b) effective provision of education for children with whom the child is to be educated.

The Original Study

- **Focus:** Continuing professional development on the Individual Education Plan process: its impact on teachers' practice and on learning outcomes for pupils with special educational needs
- The study aimed to investigate:
 1. the impact of professional development (PD) on the IEP process on the understanding, knowledge and practice of teachers at primary and post-primary level;
 2. how the IEP impacts on practice;
 3. if/how the IEP is used as a tool to measure and improve learning outcomes for pupils with special educational needs.

From Original Study to Student Voice

- Key principles underpinning IEP process:
 - ✓ collaborative
 - ✓ with parental involvement
 - ✓ ongoing
 - ✓ setting of specific, measurable targets
 - ✓ with the child at the centre and involved through attendance at IEP meetings and contributing to development and review of IEP (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010; NCSE, 2006).
- Findings of our study highlighted issue of student voice in the IEP process, prompting exploration of how the rights of the child are acknowledged throughout this process.
- Consistent with research reporting little to no levels of child involvement (Rose, Shevlin, Winter & O'Raw, 2015; Prunty, 2011).
- Three main barriers: children's capacity; undermining authority; too much effort better spent elsewhere (Lundy, 2007).
- Of relevance to those who have it in their power to assist children with SEN in having a voice.

Voice of the Child

Article 12 of the UNCRC (1991):

- *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

Democratic Rights and Participation

- **Participation:** *the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives* (Hart, 1992, p.5).
- ✓ Means by which democracy is built.
- ✓ Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship.
- ✓ Confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice.
- ✓ The spiral of involvement fostering motivation, fostering competence.

Benefits of Increased Participation

- Research indicates that children's participation in decision-making is beneficial in many ways (Adams & Ingham, 1998; Devine, 1998; Flutter & Ruddock, 2004; Treseder, 1997; Willow, 1997).
- ✓ Improving quality of service provision
- ✓ Educational benefits
- ✓ Increasing children's sense of ownership and belonging
- ✓ Increasing self-esteem
- ✓ Increasing empathy and responsibility
- ✓ Laying groundwork for citizenship and democracy

Theoretical Framework

Hart (1992)	Shier (2001)	Lundy (2007)
8. Child-initiated shared decisions with adults	Level 5. Children share power and responsibility in decision-making.	Influence
7. Child-initiated and directed	Level 4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.	
6. Adult-initiated shared decisions with children	Level 3. Children's views are taken into account.	Audience
5. Consulted and informed	Level 2. Children are supported in expressing their views.	Voice
4. Assigned and informed	Level 1. Children are listened to.	Space
3. Tokenism		
2. Decoration		
1. Manipulation		

Methodology

- Two phases of data collection:
 - First phase: Quantitative (questionnaire)
 - Second phase: case studies (four primary and one post-primary school)
- Questionnaire designed to elicit teachers' perceptions of:
 1. the impact of CPD related to the IEP process on their knowledge, skills, understanding and practice;
 2. the impact of the IEP on practice, and
 3. their use of the IEP to measure and improve learning outcomes for pupils with SEN.
 - Purposive sample: participants recruited via postal survey ^(165 PGdSEN 2010-2011, 2011-2012 and 2012-2013)
 - Response rate: 50.30% - 83 teachers across a range of settings.

Case Studies

- A focus group interview with the school principal, the student's resource/learning support teacher(s), the student's class teacher(s), the student's special needs assistant and other relevant personnel to elicit adults' experiences, understanding and use of the IEP (5 focus group interviews in total).
- Individual interviews with parent/guardian and with student to elicit their experiences of the IEP (10 individual interviews in total)
- Document analysis to investigate the use of the IEP in planning, learning and recording/monitoring outcomes; documents to include the IEP, teachers' plans (short and longer term), assessment records, school report for student with SEN, school policy on special needs and inclusion.
- Observation of teacher's practice and student's learning to document the use of the IEP in planning, teaching, learning and recording/monitoring outcomes; minimum of one visit per school, totalling five school days.

Non-Participation

- Almost 95% of teachers surveyed reported that pupils do not receive a copy of their IEP.
- Almost 11% reported that pupils are not made aware of IEP targets.
- Almost 27% reported that pupils are not provided with information on progress on the IEP targets.
- Almost 30% reported that pupils are not provided with opportunity to express their views.
- 55.4% reported that pupils do not attend IEP meetings.
- Almost 16% reported that the views of pupils are not taken into account.

Reasons given for non-participation of children

- *Not at the age group I teach (Teacher).*
- *Older children may be told informally (Teacher).*
- *Depends on age (Teacher).*
- *I just whisk it away and make my notes, my lists but I don't know I think he might put pressure on himself if he thought – 'I have to do this' So I think the IEP is more for me or for us around him and not for _____ (Parent).*

Consistent with the first of three key barriers to children's participation commonly reported in research and identified by Lundy (2007).

Participation: Assigned and Informed

- Children receive a copy of their IEP: reported by 4.8% of teachers.
- Pupils made aware of their IEP targets: **Yes** reported by 34.1% and **sometimes** reported by 54.2% of teachers.
- Pupils provided with information on their progress towards achievement of IEP targets: **Yes** reported by 30% and **sometimes** reported by 40% of teachers.

Ways in which children are informed

- *IEP in classwork folder with evidence*
- *Information given at IEP meeting/conference*
- *Pupils are present at IEP meeting and sign IEP.*
- *Informally in conversation, discussion, feedback.*
- *Shown when they reach a target on display board.*
- *"you can read X amount of words. That's one of your goals/targets" (Teacher)*
- **Child is Aware of targets:** *"... work on addition words, subtraction words, multiplication, I am only on addition words now ... And I work on telling The News, three bits of news" (Child)*
- *"Yes in an informal way, e.g., if one target was that _____ will read 100 basic sight words with 100% accuracy on 10 occasions, I will show _____ word test from Term 1 and Term 3 and compare his progress, improvements" (Teacher)*
- *Results of assessments discussed with pupils: "orally. I keep their IEP in the same folder as their weekly plans so they are always visible to me and I often discuss various aspects with the pupil in question" (Teacher)*

Consistent with rung 4 of Hart's Levels of Participation Ladder

Young People are Given an Opportunity to Express their Views

- Pupils attend IEP meetings: **Yes** reported by 18.9% and **sometimes** reported by 24.3% of teachers.
- Pupils provided with an opportunity to express their views: **Yes** reported by 28.4% and **sometimes** reported by 45.7% of teachers.

How children are provided with opportunity to express their views

- *Informal talk with pupil (13)*
- *Senior pupils only (10)*
- *Ask pupils to identify topics they need help with, would like to improve, practise, learn.*
- *Pupil interview (5)*
- *Teacher-constructed questionnaire (6)*
- *'My Thoughts About School' (NEPS) (5)*
- *Discuss programme with pupil (2)*

Reasons for not providing children with opportunity to express views

- *Not a practice which has happened in this school.*
- *Not promoted within the school.*
- *Not encouraged by head of the learning support.*
- *A meeting of 5 or more adults would be very daunting for the child.*
- *Junior school, children quiet young.*
- *Parents often reluctant to involve child.*
- *Maybe unfairly, but generally I would feel the children would not be capable of making decisions about academic progress just yet.*
- *Range of children's needs; school for Mod and SPLD.*
- *Not for pupils who are non-verbal or have severe learning disability.*
- *Challenging behaviour issues, unreasonable.*
- *I'm not sure why, they just are not. Maybe we should think about it.*
- *Due to time constraints.*
- *We didn't think of asking the pupil.*

Consistent with the first and third of three key barriers to children's participation identified by Lundy (2007).

Children are Listened To

- *The children are made aware of what they are expected to learn for every lesson and they know what they are working towards. We also speak to the children about what they find difficult and how we can work to make these things easier.*
- *Data gathering from children*

Consistent with Level 1 of Shier's model. Is there reflection of a shade of Lundy's Audience here?

Young People are Supported to Express their Views

- *Continuum of support; 'My Thoughts about School'*
- *Discussion with pupils.*
- *Use of self-assessment systems: KWL, traffic lights, self-evaluation checklists.*
- *"If child is not able to contribute to the IEP, need some way of getting them involved, e.g., 'Smiley Faces'" (Teacher: Focus Group interview).*
- *"Have adapted ADHD checklists to access views of the child (e.g., circle subject)" (Teacher: Focus Group Interview).*

Reflecting Level 2 of Shier's model and element of Voice in Lundy's model.

Young People's Views are Taken into Account

- **84.2% of teachers surveyed reported the views of pupils are taken into account.**
- *In situations where the child expresses a wish to have something included/omitted, account is taken of this in the IEP process.*
- *IEP targets will be discussed and pupil feedback will be taken.*
- *Discussion with pupils on methods they find easier/ areas of interest.*
- *Pupils give input, particularly in social integration targets. Also involved in stress/anxiety targets; usually not involved in curricular/academic targets.*

- ❖ **Reflecting Level 3 of Shier's model and shades of Audience and Influence in Lundy's model.**
- ❖ **Represents the mandatory level of participation according to UNCRC.**

Young People are Involved in Decision-Making Processes

- **Pupil involvement in modification of IEP targets: Yes reported by 9.6% and sometimes reported by 34.9% but no reported by 53% of teachers.**
- **However, further analysis reveals that pupils who are involved are consulted and informed but not necessarily making the decisions with adults.**
- *Suggesting area with which they are having difficulty.*
- *Involved in deciding on a realistic target, e.g., how many stickers they could earn and what reward they might like.*
- *Have opportunity to record their own progress on IEP targets (yes 3%; sometimes 20%; no 70%); through checklists, individual progress charts, personal reports in folders, use of rubrics, self-evaluation checklists.*

Relates to Level 4 of Shier's model, rung 6 of Hart's ladder of participation and elements of Audience and Influence in exercising right to freedom of expression in matters affecting the child, but essence is not entirely captured in the examples provided, which are few.

Young People Share Power and Responsibility in Decision-Making

- *Resource teacher will chat with pupil informally about their needs, how they are finding their work, do they feel the strategies being used are helpful to their learning or not? Could we try another approach? What do you think might be helpful to your learning?*
- *If changing a programme, for example, the LS/RT would discuss the old and new programmes with the child and they'd decide together to try the new one.*

Relates to Level 5 of Shier's model, rungs 7/8 of Hart's ladder of participation and elements of Audience and Influence in exercising right to freedom of expression in matters affecting the child, but again, essence is not entirely captured in the examples provided, which are few.

Young People Share Power and Responsibility in Decision-Making

"If it's talking about me I wouldn't want to be cos I know it's supposed to be my work what's going on but I'd rather not cos I prefer my Mum tell me what's going on cos I don't like just being there like They're not telling the truth cos he's there"
(Child)

Symbolic or Real

Findings reveal:

- Varied levels of participation, however, clustering at and below Level 3 of Shier's model, which is the level of participation that is mandatory for organisations and nations that have adopted or endorsed the UNCRC.
- Students with SEN of the teachers participating in this study do not typically experience involvement in the decision-making processes that affect their experience of the IEP, and do not typically share power and responsibility in decision-making regarding the IEP.
- Scant (if somewhat corrupted) examples of more meaningful levels of children's participation in terms of audience and influence.
- Explanations for lower levels of children's participation provided by their teachers are consistent with two of three barriers typically reported in previous research: capacity of the children to engage in meaningful decision-making processes and time constraints indicating that effort is better spent on other tasks.
- Issue of participation is more complex in relation to children with SEN.

Implications

- Action taken to ensure that children are involved at each of the stages in the IEP process at which decisions are made which impact on the child in school and in the classroom.
- Particular attention paid to mechanisms and resources required for supporting children with SEN to express their views, to be involved in decision-making processes and to share responsibility for decision-making.
- Securing changes in practice requires a shift in mind set and school culture so that children's views are not only valued and respected but regarded as integral to and embedded within decision-making.
- The necessary changes to practice and school culture may be facilitated by professional development and by reconsideration of policy, and in particular policy requirements.
- CPD on the IEP process needs to consider learning outcomes and learning experiences for their course participants that focus on developing their understanding, expertise and communicative competencies in relation to the procedures, practices and policies that enable children to share power and responsibility in decision-making regarding the IEP process.