BACKGROUND AND STUDY

This poster communicates the preliminary findings of a qualitative, small-scale project under the umbrella of ICCIP, (Kingston University) investigating the process of change by exploring discourses and practices related to ‘reasonable adjustments’ as used and understood by different stakeholders. Shared values, beliefs and meanings for inclusion, verses exclusion are explored through diverse voices. The following questions are aimed to be addressed:

• How are reasonable adjustments perceived by different stakeholders and through the voice of the child?
• What are the prevailing discourses in the context of reasonable adjustments?
• How are reasonable adjustments supported within a multi-professional context?

The reasonable adjustments duty has become prominent and statutory for schools and settings in England since 2007 and has been preceded and framed by various policies.

Since December 2006, when carrying out their functions public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- Encourage participation of disabled persons in public life
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Eliminate disability related harassment
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination

The use of positive discrimination if necessary


Recently the SEN Green Paper (DfE, 2011) suggested that there are around 2 million children and young people identified as having a special educational need or who are disabled and that they can feel frustrated by a lack of the right help at school or from other services; in line with a suggestion in the same document for schools to share good practice, and in an uncertain political context that can affect inclusive attitudes in a macro and micro level, it was considered appropriate to shed light on effective practices, policies and attitudes within a context that inclusion is seen as a lived experience.

METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative interpretative research paradigm where different voices are explored – one of the tools is the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2005);
- Appreciative inquiry (Cooperider and Whitney, 2008) to identify good practice in a particular setting and communicate it to other settings;
- Invitations into strengths, optimism, and possibilities rather than taking a deficit orientated stance towards provision;
- Policy analysis in a macro and micro level to ensure that the integration of policy analysis with analysis of actors’ perspectives provides a bigger picture (Ogza, 1990);
- Realization that policies are not implemented unproblematically as a top-down approach, but are dynamic, contextualized, creative and asymmetrical (Solomon, 1994) and certainly not straightforward (Ball, 1998).

The study took place in an Inner City Voluntary Aided Primary School that has had an outstanding OFSTED for Inclusion. It has been undergoing an Inclusion kite-marking project including an Inclusion SEC designed by the LA and has been involved in the Achievement for All project (2009). All these processes can be indicators of reflective activity in the context of inclusion.

In the context of this project three primary school children that are on the school’s inclusion register for an identified additional educational need or disability from one form entry inner-city primary school in London were selected. Evidence was collected from children in a child friendly way, in line with the aforementioned Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2005).

The professionals working with these children were interviewed in a semi-structured way to shed light on different voices around the practical implementation of reasonable adjustments and to identify ways their expertise supports settings in making those adjustments successful.

The project’s time frame was laid out in two phases in order for reflection to take place on behalf of the researchers and the setting before findings are finalized. The first and longer phase has been completed. The remaining interviews will be carried out in October 2011.

In the school’s SEN policy: We believe that a child’s special educational needs exist in context. They can be relieved or exacerbated by environmental factors including the educational setting. Therefore our first response to meeting the needs of children with SEN is to examine our own classroom practice and to see if it can be changed to better meet these needs. (School policy)

Schools’ culture and ethos play a fundamental role on the conceptualisation of SEN and the interpretation of inclusive policies. They are acknowledged as a catalytic parameter for the development of inclusive cultures, policies and practices (OFSTED, 2001). This is in line with the ‘paradigm shift’, as it has been identified in discussion at the United Nations, where a declaration on the Rights of People with Disabilities has been adopted and come into force, underlying a transformation throughout the world that is required to bring equality and rights for disabled people to help create inclusive societies (Reiss and Mason, 1990 in Alur and Timmons, 2009).

Ethos and discourses

- Legal discourse was not the prevailing one in the school context.
- The protection and rights that children are entitled to under Equalities Legislation was not part of the dominant discourse.
- The fact that Educational/SEN discourse was the prevailing one could mean that reasonable adjustments are a medium for what is perceived as inclusion, as a value in the setting rather than just a legal requirement. It can be claimed that Reasonable adjustments were found more within the following wider frame of social pedagogy, as shaped by Fielding and Moss (2011) and inclusive values (Booth, 2011):

In this context:

- Children are valued and treated as individuals.
- Parents/ carers are valued and this transformed from their statements; it was also clear, however, that the school could reflect further on issues of shared understanding on perceptions about disability, discipline and progress.

So:

- The SEN Green Paper’s proposals about ‘choice and giving parents much more control’ to be taken as the one above into consideration.
- Contextualization and work in a multi-professional context that is essential to families and schools to continue to offer more real choice and control with a realisation that:
  - all families are different, and can function best when their unique values and preferences are acknowledged and catered for;
  - all families are entitled to normal and complex lives, and are capable of developing further these;
  - the well-being and development of children depend upon the well-being of all other family members and of the family as a whole;
  - the well-being of families depends upon the quality of their informal social supports as well as the availability of high quality formal supports (Moore and Larkin, 2008).

IMPLICATIONS

- Enhancing parental understanding and informed involvement in their child’s education.
- Ensuring increased access to opportunities for children with SEN and their families.
- Enhancing understanding, building alliances and sharing competencies and knowledge.
- Succesful implementation of a school and family partnership.

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Photo of the playground taken by pupil from indoors