

A PLACE TO LEARN

Inclusive Education for Children with Learning Disabilities

A Discussion Document

Psychological Society of Ireland Learning Disability Group

Authors:

John Colfer, Senior Psychologist, Brothers of Charity, Galway.

*Margaret Farrelly, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Brothers of
Charity, Limerick.*

Tony Greal, Senior Psychologist, Western Care, Mayo.

Frances Smyth, Principal Psychologist, Galway Association, Galway.

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FOREWORD

A PLACE TO LEARN.

The term integration has been much used in the last 30 years to refer to the participation of individuals with difference in school and community life. In more recent times, it has been superseded by terms such as mainstreaming and inclusive education to refer to the inclusion and participation of children with general learning difficulties in local mainstream schools. The issue of how children with learning disabilities should have their special educational needs met has been a subject of debate and research world-wide since the 1960's and has brought about considerable attitude change and subsequent changes in legislation in many countries. Most recently, the Irish Education Act, many of whose provisions have already been enacted, has further endorsed the need to promote the inclusion of all children in mainstream schools and in society generally.

The need for discussion on this issue and its implications for Psychologists working with students with learning disabilities has long been recognised by the Psychological Society of Ireland. In 1994, following publication of the Society's response to the Report of the Review Committee on Special Education, a subgroup of the Learning Disabilities group was formed with the brief of generating discussion amongst members on this topic. The group was comprised of Frances Smyth (Senior Psychologist, Galway County Association for People with Mental Handicap), John Colfer, (Senior Psychologist, Brothers of Charity Services, Galway) and Tony Grealy, Senior Psychologist, St. Michael's House, Dublin). Assistance was also offered to the group in the initial stages by Patrick McGinley (then Director of Psychology, Brothers of Charity Services Galway). Margaret Farrelly (Senior Clinical Psychologist, Brothers of Charity Services, Mid-West) joined the group in 1999 and has played an important role in bringing this document to fruition.

The group took on the brief of generating a discussion document on the issue of special needs education with specific reference to practice implications for Psychologists. A draft document was completed in 1996 and circulated to a number of members of the learning disabilities group in early 1997.

In recognition of the developments in relation to special needs education and practice in Ireland, and the increasing emphasis on inclusive education, a seminar was held in September 1999 at the Jury's Custom House Inn, Dublin. The seminar was attended not only by psychologists working in the learning disability field but also

psychologists employed with the recently established National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS).

Following this seminar, the document was further refined to reflect the above, with particular reference to the move to inclusive education and the implications for the profession.

A great deal of assistance has been provided to the group during the course of its deliberations and I am particularly grateful to Anne Halliday, Dympna Walsh, Denis Healy and Isabelle O'Donoghue, for their help over the last few years.

Signed: _____
Tony Greal, Chairperson.

INTRODUCTION

The Need for Guidelines for Psychologists.

For the past thirty years, psychologists have had a prominent role in initiating and expanding both educational and clinical services for children with learning disabilities. In the late sixties and seventies following the Commission of Enquiry on Mental Handicap 1965, when specialist educational provision expanded in Ireland, the role of psychological assessment in the identification and placement of children with learning disabilities became paramount. However, it became increasingly apparent over the next decade that the diagnostic model of assessment did not reflect the totality of the child's and family's experience and that this was not necessarily the best way forward.

In the late seventies and early eighties conceptual shifts in ways of thinking about children with learning disabilities began to emerge from parents as well as professionals, and a body of research literature accumulated suggesting that separating and excluding children from their natural school environment did not always have positive consequences. By 1978, when OECD embarked on a project - The Education of the Handicapped Adolescent, it was noted that integration had emerged as the dominant policy issue.

By the late eighties and early nineties, an exponential leap in the publication of literature debating the topic and the integration of children with learning disabilities in mainstream schools became a major research theme.

Psychologists in Ireland contributed proactively to this debate, and in the present climate of broader policy formulation at government level, are now poised to readdress roles and functions and contribute to a new inclusive model of service provision.

The purpose of this document is two fold. In the first instance to generate discussion among psychologists on the issue of inclusive education and the implications for the work of psychologists. Secondly, to highlight the need for clear policy guidelines for all psychologists working with children with learning disabilities in areas such as methods of assessment, report writing and recommendations for placement.

In achieving this, a high level of collaboration between psychologists working in Learning Disability Services and psychologists in the National Educational Psychology Service will be needed.

INCLUSION AND DISABILITY

The emphasis on participation and access to a normal lifestyle is central to the concept of inclusion and inclusive education. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) states that “inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and exercise of human rights” and “the fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have”. The fact that the term inclusion has begun to replace integration should be seen not just as a change in terminology but as a change in emphasis on what needs to change. Porter (1995) outlines the main differences between the integration and inclusion approaches. In the former, the emphasis is on the pupil and required pupil change through assessment – prescriptive programmes and placements. With inclusion, the focus is on the school and the necessary changes required for facilitating full participation and integration. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) in asserting that integration of children and youths with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools captures the complementary ideals fundamental to inclusion as the necessary framework only through which integration can be realised.

The Centre for studies on Inclusive Education (CSIE 1996) suggests that an inclusive school should:

- Reflect the community as a whole and not be exclusive or neglecting.
- Promote collaborations – with pupils – parents and other schools.
- Promote equality – where all members have rights and responsibilities and the same opportunities for participation in its education.
- Be barrier free – in terms of buildings, curricular and support systems.

Inclusion is allied to the social model of disability which sees the barriers to inclusion, either environmental, physical, or social, as creating the experience of disability. This contrasts to the medical or functional limitation model of disability where the prime focus is on intrinsic deficits with resultant emphasis on treatment usually in segregated settings (Halliday 1993). In the social model, the focus is on the changes necessary in schools so that all children can be included on an equal basis.

The statement by the Minister for Education & Science (November 1998) that in integrated settings “each child assessed as having a special educational need will have an automatic entitlement to a resource to meet that need”, has provided a major impetus for inclusive education in this country.

RESEARCH LITERATURE

Much of the research in this area focused initially on comparisons of outcome results for children with learning disabilities in ordinary/mainstream school placements versus those in more segregated special schools and special class placements. In general, the findings of this research highlighted the benefits to the student with a learning disability of being educated along with non-disabled peers.

- Casey et al. (1988) followed the progress of 36 children with Down's Syndrome in London for two years. Students were matched for ability in both mainstream and segregated settings. It was found that the children attending mainstream schools performed better on all outcome measures including expressive language, comprehension, numeracy, verbal fluency, drawing ability and reading.
- In 1990, Sloper et al. undertook a detailed study of one hundred and seventeen children with Down's Syndrome examining academic gains. Once again, children attending mainstream schools made greatest gains in academic attainments in reading, writing and number.
- Pre-schoolers with disabilities have been found to experience a wide range of benefits in mainstream educational settings including more appropriate social interactions (Guralnick, 1978); equivalent developmental gains to non-disabled peers (Ispe and Matz 1978); and decreased inappropriate play (Guralnick et al. 1996).
- Haring (1990) reported quality of life gains for students with learning disabilities in mainstream settings based on assessment of social relationships.
- Lipskey and Gartner (1989) in a review of efficacy studies of special education environments in America concluded: "there is no compelling body of evidence demonstrating that segregated special educational programmes have a significant benefit for students".
- Baker et al. (1994) conducted three meta-analyses and concluded "special needs students educated in general educational environments do better both academically and socially than comparable students in non-inclusive settings".

Many researchers notably Haring (1990) have referred to positive gains in general development and attitude in non-disabled classmates of children in mainstream schools. Certainly this often raised concern that classmates will 'lose out' has not been borne out in research findings.

In a review of the literature on the integration of children with severe learning disabilities by Peter Farrell (1997), the methodological issues involved in the comparison of outcome studies of children in integrated versus segregated educational settings were addressed. The

problems in making such comparisons were highlighted in terms of the complexity and variability both of the children and their settings.

Ultimately, therefore, the primary research question “is mainstreaming better?” has not been a profitable one. More recently, research has switched attention to an examination of the conditions that make for successful mainstreaming. It is in this area that a great deal more research will have to take place. Much of the literature now addresses guidelines for effective inclusion (Villa 1999, Falvey et al 1995, Stainback & Stainback 1996).

- Where placements have been characterised by the use of team teaching or co-teaching approaches, significant benefits have been highlighted for children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers (Madden 1983, Stainback & Stainback 1984, Fish 1985, Wang and Baker 1986, Rainforth and York-Barr 1997).
- Successful mainstreaming arrangements have been characterised by the use of key personnel such as specialist advisory teachers and special needs assistants (Thomas 1985).
- The use of support personnel as well as key advisory personnel was also found to be of benefit. Hegarty (1987) placed particular emphasis on the importance of available expertise provided by psychologists.
- Peer tutoring has also been highlighted as an important teaching approach as has parent assisted teaching schemes (Topping and Wolfendale 1985, Topping 1988).

Summary.

Ultimately, we are all faced with the issue of whether we want a society in which some children must prove in carefully designed and conducted studies that they should be included in the mainstream of their communities and attend their local schools alongside siblings and neighbourhood peers.

Fundamentally all children with disabilities have a right to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers throughout their school life (Hall 1996).

“When proper arrangements are present, inclusion works for all students with or without disabilities in terms of mutually held positive attitudes, gains in academic and social skills and preparation for living in the community” (Stainback & Stainback 1996).

As Biklin (1985) stated “the practice of integration... is not fundamentally a question that science can answer. From science, we

can learn the effects of such a policy.... or how to make it work better but science cannot tell us that integration is right”.

LEGISLATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION – INTERNATIONAL STATEMENTS.

In the United States, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL94-142) was enacted. By 1976 all states had passed laws subsidising public school programmes for students with disabilities. This act was reauthorised as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA PL101-476) extending the right to free public education to all children in the least restricted environment.

In Britain, the Warnock Report of 1978 emerged as the impetus for integrated education. Subsequently, the 1981 Education Act in the U.K. embodied the concept of needs based assessment as opposed to the previous provision-centred approach and signalled a substantial move forward from pre existing conceptualisations of special needs provision.

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly at its 48th session adopted the standard rules of the equalisation of opportunities for persons with disabilities. In relation to education, Rule 6 states, “general educational authorities are responsible for the education of persons with disabilities in integrated settings. Education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of the national educational planning, curriculum development and school organisation”. (United Nations, 1994).

The UNESCO 1994 Salamanca Statement signed by ninety two countries asserted that “integration of children and youths with special educational needs is best achieved within inclusive schools”. In 1996, UNESCO published the report, “Legislation Pertaining to Special Needs Education” which was based on the results of a world wide survey of the laws in fifty two countries relating to special educational needs. The survey information was analysed under eight headings with integration being one of these.

The definition of integration of pupils with disabilities and /or learning difficulties in mainstream schools identified by UNESCO was given as “mandatory pedagogic integration” or “school based integration”. UNESCO found that twenty seven countries legislated for this type of integration. In their analysis of the different international laws, UNESCO found that the principle of school based integration - mandatory pedagogic integration - was conditional in some countries

on the proviso that “some children have such disabilities and /or learning difficulties that education in a special school is necessary”. This conditional view of school based integration was expressed by the majority of countries in distinct ways. 1) The prima facie right of a child with special needs to be educated in ordinary school, subject to II) an ordinary school having the capacity to meet those needs. The report outlines legislation and approaches to integration in different countries. While obviously some countries continue to adhere to a more segregated approach to the education of children with learning disability, the majority of countries surveyed have made explicit their commitment to the principles of integrated education. The State of Victoria, Australia, is described as offering a useful focus on specific principles underlying integration. They are listed as

- The right of every child to be educated in a regular school;
- provision to be organised according to student needs rather than disabilities;
- resources in school services should be school based;
- decision making should be collaborative;
- all children can learn and be taught ;
- integration is a curriculum issue.

In China, students with disabilities must be admitted to regular schools with parents having a right to appeal to school authorities if their child is not admitted.

Italian law states that disabled pupils may be enrolled in a regular school with assistance and if they are, the class they go into “shall not be composed of more than 20 pupils”. The same law ensures a support teacher in each class with individual teaching of 6 hours a week.

Norway has the lowest rate (0.7 per cent) of enrolment in special institutions outside the local school system.

Sweden has ‘almost all disabled pupils integrated into ordinary schools’ as a result of policies from the 1980s.

While Spain’s 1990 law emphasises the principles of normalisation and integration, there are also a number of provisos in legislation to keep a minority of such pupils in separate special schools.

UNESCO commented in their report that the conditions for successful integration were very well described by a French circular in 1976 which stated that integration “will be most successful if it is supported by the child, the teachers and the administration”.

UNESCO also analyses information under other headings. Twenty two countries show a range of approaches with regard to identification, assessment and placement, with assessment being the

main focus, and interdisciplinary co-operation and consultation with parents being the main theme in the assessment of children with special needs.

Twenty two countries based curriculum entitlement on a normal or mainstream curriculum while twelve countries viewed a special curriculum as the appropriate provision.

Twenty four countries made specific reference in legislation to parents' rights and duties in assessment, identification and placement, and integration, while a further twenty six countries made no reference to parents.

The above summary thus serves as an international framework within which to examine the development at both philosophical and practical levels of the educational provision for children with learning disability within the Irish context.

LEGISLATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION – THE IRISH CONTEXT

The Education Act which was passed by the Oireachtas and became law in 1998, is the culmination of almost two decades of commissions, research and representations by parents, advocates and professionals. (Blue Report 1983; Green Paper 1984; Needs and Abilities 1990; Accommodating Difference 1993; SERC 1993). Since 1990 government policy has been to create no further special schools for pupils with learning disabilities. (Gash, Walsh and O'Reilly, 1996).

In relation to the education of children with severe and profound levels of learning disability, not until 1993 with the O'Donoghue case was the right to appropriate education established. Arguments based on the principle of zero exclusion and the legal precedents and decisions leading up to PL 94-142 in the United States were advanced on the side of plaintiff. (Gash, Walsh & O'Reilly, 1996).

As recently as October 31st, 2000, Mr. Justice Barr in a 70 page reserved judgement in favour of Jamie Sinnott, a man with Autism, underlined his right to primary education based on need not age and went on to criticise the state for not only failing to provide basic primary education for Jamie Sinnott but also continuity of education, necessary ancillary services including speech, occupational and language therapy, health care and sufficient psychological and medical assessment. Furthermore, he pointed to the failure to provide an appropriate curriculum for him with continuous revision in consultation with his mother. This ruling will therefore have major implications for the quality of education and support services deemed necessary for all children with significant learning disabilities.

While the Education Act is not fully enacted and therefore many of its provisions cannot yet be relied on in court, many sections have been enacted with relevance to inclusive education for children with learning disabilities.

(i) Section 6.

This sets out the objectives of the act and states that all individuals concerned in the implementation of the Education Act, including psychologists, should have regard to these objectives. Reference is made to the constitutional rights of all children including those with disabilities and how the act intends to enforce or give practical effect to these constitutional rights. The rights of parents to send their children to a school of their choice is given emphasis and reference in this section is also made to the need to promote best practice in teaching methods and to support the ongoing skill development of teachers. In particular, Section 6 promotes equality of access to and participation in

education for all children and ensures the rights of parents to send their children to a school of their choice.

(ii) Section 9.

This section deals with the functions of the school and included here is the statement that all schools must establish and maintain an admissions policy which provides for maximum accessibility to the school.

(iii) In Section 13 (2) of the Act , the importance of the role of the psychologist working within the educational system is highlighted.

(iv) Section 15.

This section deals with the functions of the Board of Management. In Section 15 (2) (d) the Board of Management is required to publish school policy concerning the admission to and participation by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs. Schools must ensure that regardless of the policy, the principle of equality and the right of parents to send their children to the school of their choice is respected.

(v) Section 21.

This section deals with the issue of school grants and states that the position of equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs should be addressed. The school plan should be a public document available to all stake holders in the school. While no individual provision within the Act guarantees right of access for children with disabilities, when all provisions are taken in their entirety, it is clear that the Act attempts to address the equality of access issue for students with disabilities.

The Act also addresses the issue of pupil participation in school and attempts to break down any barriers to learning for students with disabilities. The Act makes provision for support services including technical aids, adaptations to environments, transport for students with special needs and psychological services.

The Act provides for psychologists to include advisory functions at systemic level to schools in developing a special needs policy and also at the level of the individual child. Psychologists are assigned the role of advising and reporting to the Minister on educational matters based on research on general international practices.

Implications for Supports for Children with Special Educational Needs.

Since the 1998 Education Act was passed, a number of significant ministerial announcements and circulars have been issued.

On the 5th November, 1998, the Minister for Education & Science Micheal Martin announced major initiatives in special education services for children with special educational needs.

The measures involved are aimed at ensuring that all children with a special educational need, irrespective of their location and disability, will receive the support they require to participate fully in the education system. Children will have an automatic entitlement to resources which include:

- Special teaching support for all children attending schools on a fully integrated basis who have been assessed as having special educational needs.
- Child care support in the form of special needs assistants to be provided for all children with special needs including those in special schools, special classes and ordinary schools.
- Where a group of children attend an ordinary school or adjacent schools, the support can be in the form of full time resource teachers and /or special needs assistants or part time resource teachers and/or special needs assistants depending on the needs of the children.
- Recognition of the distinct educational needs of all children with Autism /Autistic Spectrum Disorders whose condition so requires the provision of a special dedicated class with a pupil ratio of 6:1. Each class will have the support of a special needs assistant.
- Children with severe or profound learning disability will have an entitlement to special needs assistants per class of 6 children.

Along with the developments at government level, a major development at professional level was the establishment of the National Educational Psychology Service. The functions and roles of psychologists within the service were outlined in a document published in September 1998. In the light of the above, the influence of psychologists on the development of inclusive educational practices for children with learning disabilities cannot be underestimated.

THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST - PAST

Despite the concerns and criticisms of the use of standardised intelligence tests to categorise and place children who have been found to be different in separate special systems, and to exclude them from their natural environments, there is little to suggest that this practice has changed. In fact, there would seem to be even more pressure to quantify children's cognitive needs in order to include them in provision which is by and large resource driven.

In response to the prevailing concern within the profession in relation to the inappropriateness of such systems, the Psychological Society of Ireland and Learning Disabilities Group held seminars, workshops and conferences throughout the eighties and nineties and a formulation of best practice began to emerge to include integrated education, partnership with parents, needs assessment and the establishment of a comprehensive schools psychological service.

Halliday (1996) pointed to the need for psychologists to review their professional practice and in particular the appropriateness of using I.Q scores especially in view of the fact that with the development of psychology, "we can and generally do offer more to people's lives other than psychometric measurement". During a Theme Conference in response to the report of the Special Education Review Committee (1994) it was pointed out that it would be a serious under-utilisation of psychologists expertise to have them merely assessing and reporting on children. Further comment suggested that such assessments must be broad enough to take all the factors in a child's life into account, i.e. family; environmental circumstances; school situation and social context. Instruments should be used in conjunction with assessment of the other factors and these instruments must be appropriate to a clearly defined purpose for each assessment.

Parents at the conference expressed frustration with their treatment by agencies dealing with children who have special needs, stating that there is a closed and secretive approach to reporting the findings of assessments to them which is a breach of parental rights under the constitution. (Murchan & O'Reilly, 1994).

Factors in the traditional assessment role of psychologists include the following.

- A dual system whereby children identified in a certain category could not be catered for in the ordinary school system. The psychologist's role therefore became more and more limited to screening and placement.
- Unrealistic and unmanageable waiting lists limited the amount of time for follow-up that could be done.

- Budgetary constraints limiting psychologists to one off assessments.
- Relatively inexperienced psychologists often found themselves working in isolation without access to a senior colleague, making it extremely difficult to challenge traditional concepts of children's needs.

In its submission to the Review Committee on Special Education which was delivered in 1991, The Psychological Society of Ireland identified the need for a clear, specific and unequivocal recommendation that all children with special needs should be educated within the mainstream school system with their peers of the same age. The society highlighted the principle that all children belong and should be catered for in their local school regardless of degree or nature of disability.

In the society's response to the government's Green Paper in 1992, it was stated that while The Psychological Society of Ireland welcomed the paper's objective to include persons with disabilities in ordinary schools, clarification was sought as to the minority of children with special needs who the Green Paper envisaged would not benefit from ordinary schools.

The Psychological Society of Ireland issued a statement to all national newspapers in response to the INTO's document *Accommodating Difference* (1993). It stated that it could not agree with the INTO's solution to the problem of resources not being made available in ordinary schools as being the segregation of children with special needs.

The National Educational Psychological Service is now established and will have a major part to play in the future development of educational services.

THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST – PRESENT AND FUTURE.

As already outlined, much has occurred over the past two decades both nationally and internationally to bring about the inclusion of all children with disabilities in the education system. Current educational strategies and policies see the entitlement to inclusive education for all children with learning disabilities as a viable goal. The role of the psychologist therefore, needs to change from deficits based assessments to a more dynamic assessment process in collaboration with the child and family, educators and other support services personnel.

A psychological assessment must be viewed as just one part of a planning process for the education of the child in terms of goals, curriculum, resources and any other additional specialist therapeutic inputs.

Assessment.

The use of psychometric tests will need to be viewed as only one part of the psychological assessment and should not be used in isolation. While standardised intelligence tests used appropriately will continue to be useful, new techniques of assessment will be required to include environment referenced information. This will derive from collaboration across disciplines and with family members. The AAMR multidimensional approach to diagnosis, classification and systems of supports (American Association on Mental Retardation 1992) is a good example of a more comprehensive approach to psychological assessment.

In terms of assessment therefore, the primary role of the psychologist will be,

- to identify the child's needs so that their right to specialist resources can be established.
- To use a child centred and process oriented approach which will be interactive, ongoing and linked to the child's future educational plan within the principles of full participation in school, family and community life.

Ongoing Intervention/Support.

With more emphasis on interactive broad based assessments, increased opportunity should be available for psychologists to engage in ongoing therapeutic interventions and support involving the individual, family, school and community.

Following the child's placement , the psychologist will have a key role in drawing up a comprehensive individual educational plan which will address all areas of the child's development and not just their academic attainments or classroom related goals.

Psychological Reports.

The psychologist will need to prepare an in-depth holistic personal profile on the child outlining

- the child's emerging skills and strengths across all domains i.e. cognitive, self-help/adaptive, social, emotional.
- The type of support required by the child in terms of resources both technical and personal to optimise the child's opportunity for learning in an inclusive ordinary school setting.

Psychological reports will need to be comprehensive and available to parents and educators.

The Role of Parents.

As parents are essential in the process of making decisions about educational provision for their children, they need to be made aware of all the options and models available with due regard to the advantages and disadvantages of each option.

The psychologist has a crucial role in helping parents decide the most appropriate location for their child's educational service. While previously, this decision was often determined by the location of supports and resources, now such support can be requested in the school setting where it is felt that the child will make the best progress in all aspects of their life and development.

The psychologist therefore:

- must work in partnership with parents whereby they empower parents to make informed decisions concerning their child's placement.
- Inform parents of the kinds of supports and resources which can be made available in ordinary schools towards meeting the child's special needs.
- Be mindful and respectful of parental preferences and wishes.
- Be familiar with the range of supports available and know how such supports can be requested and accessed.

The task of advising parents can be a difficult one so all psychologists should ensure that they are informed on legal and ethical issues, different models of educational provision and up-to-date research

information so that they can be a resource and support to parents and families, schools and local communities.

Ultimately, it is the parents who must make the decision concerning a particular provision, but they are entitled to appropriate advice, support and information from the psychologist in doing so. Where conflict arises between professional opinion and parental choice, the psychologist will need to state best practice and supply sufficient information to the parents to assist them in their choice. In cases where parental choices are deemed to be contrary to the best interest of the child, a collaborative meeting with the parents and with all support personnel in the child's life should take place, and a group consensus sought. The optimal development of the child's potential in the context of his/her family, school and community must be the primary concern of good professional practice on the part of the psychologist.

Systems.

While the principle of inclusion places the focus on identifying how the school may need to change its structures and system in order to meet the needs of a particular child rather than on how the child needs to change or develop in order to fit into the school system, psychologists cannot implement an inclusive approach to education without the support and active involvement of the entire education system.

The fact that fully segregated options continue to exist and are widely available is contrary to the notion of inclusion and there is often an inherent conflict of interest for psychologists in trying to implement an inclusive philosophy of education within the context of education provision for children with special needs which is available in the country. This can pose difficulties for psychologists, especially those who work in segregated settings or who are employed by agencies which support special schools and facilities. However, regardless of these considerations, the most important issue which remains for psychologists is that if they are recommending a special segregated facility that they are very clear as to why such an option is considered necessary.

Continued professional training and development for all psychologists in current thinking and professional practices related to the educational support for children with learning disabilities and their families needs to be resourced.

Psychologists working in different settings, e.g. Community Care, Voluntary Agencies and the National Educational Psychological Service will need to liaise with each other in order to clarify their respective roles with regard to children with learning disabilities. The development of the National Educational Psychological Service within all schools should facilitate the work of psychologists employed by the

Health Services. Educational psychologists are familiar with the ethos of schools, teachers' attitudes towards pupils with learning disabilities and their capabilities of meeting those needs. Such information will be essential in designing appropriate educational provision for any individual child.

A MODEL OF COLLABORATION

The Minister for Education & Science, Micheal Martin, in a statement in January 2000 indicated that a Planning Group had been established in his department to prepare a report on the structures and policies needed to develop comprehensive support services which would:

- Allow for co-ordination of services.
- Promote integration within schools.
- Provide a local and national information service.
- Ensure expert assessment of needs.
- Establish an objective appeals mechanism.
- Allow for the development and implementation of models of best practice.

In order for A National Co-ordinating Group to be effective it must include a broad range of expertise engaged in the education of children with all levels of learning disabilities. This group should include representatives from both Health and Education to reflect current expertise and experience in the field of learning disabilities.

Co-ordinating groups at regional level must have as their functions:

- Collaboration on best practice procedures for moving forward the principle of inclusive education for children with learning disabilities in line with the objectives of the 1998 Education Act on access and participation.
- Development of partnership models between existing specialist services and general provision.
- Dissemination of up-to-date information and practice guidelines to all those involved with children with learning disabilities.
- Organisation and promotion of awareness among all the professionals and encouragement of continued professional development and training for personnel involved in the education and care of children with learning disabilities and their families during the school years.
- Addressing local issues and resource concerns.
- To act as an advisory body to local stake holders.

- **The establishment of active collaborative teams attached to local education support centres and centres with expertise from Education, Health and Voluntary agencies.**
- **Liaison with the National Co-ordinating Group.**
- **The co-ordination of the training of personnel where specialist input is necessary eg. Assistive technology, Visually Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Autism .**

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Psychologists have a leading and proactive role to play in the move forward to meaningful inclusion of children with learning disabilities.

Psychologists will need to move towards a more broad based central model of collaborative problem solving.

A shift of emphasis, will be necessary as illustrated in the following table.

Role of Psychologist.

Traditional Model	Current Model
Emphasis on placing child within available provision	Child and family are centre of a planning process.
Emphasis on cognition	Emphasis on all aspects of development including emotional, social and community.
Placement	Individual education plan and inclusion.
Once off narrowly defined assessment	Ongoing collaboration with teachers, family and other members of support team in the school.
Isolated independent professional	Interdependent member of team. Professional as partner who shares information and knowledge.
View child solely in terms of deficits.	View child as a valued member of family and community.
Clinic based assessments	Home and school based assessments.
Promoting segregated service options	Community inclusion using formal and informal supports.
Pathological Model/ Medical Model.	Social/Educational Model.

Concluding Remarks.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this document, we have witnessed notably in the last five to ten years very significant changes in the general landscape of services and supports to children with special educational needs. The philosophy of normalisation and inclusion have been most influential in shaping the service developments for people with disabilities.

Possibly most importantly of all, evidence from research conducted in the field over the last number of years has provided us with important information on how students with a variety of learning needs can achieve to their potential in mainstream school environments.

All of these factors have enormous implications for Psychologists who work with children with special educational needs and their families. Now more than ever, Psychologists must remain in touch with evidence from research, current thinking on approaches to assessment and intervention as well as emerging legislative change.

In line with this, this group considers it imperative that priority is given to the development of professional practice guidelines on assessment and intervention on educational issues pertaining to students with special educational needs for Psychologists be they employed by the National Educational Psychology Service, Learning Disability Agencies or direct Health Board Services. This major undertaking will require commitment and collaboration from all of these agencies.

The group believes that practice guidelines on assessment of students' special educational needs are urgently needed.

With the gradual introduction of new school Psychological Services, there is an urgent need for clarity as to the role of Psychologists working in this Service with students with general learning disability. A joint collaborative working group comprised of Psychologists working in the Learning Disability field and representatives of the National Educational Psychology Service may assist in clarifying these matters and provide necessary impetus for the development of professional practice guidelines highlighted above.

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