Hidden Voices: the impact of the inclusion of visually impaired pupils

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Introduction

The research seeks to determine the impact of the inclusion of visually impaired pupils on the teaching and learning of others. Through comparative case studies, it examines the extent of any changes of pedagogy and philosophy in teachers and any factors that bring about or hinder effective classroom practice and outcomes for all pupils following the inclusion of blind or visually impaired pupils (VIPs).

Context & Knowledge Gap

VI is often an overlooked condition
- not always straightforward to determine (eg: younger pupils, those with additional SEN)
- under-reported in educational data

Pressures on inclusion in the UK
- performativity climate, standards agenda, league tables
- staffing levels & teacher retention
- funding constraints
- academisation

Lack of empirical evidence
- vast majority of studies on inclusion are concerned with the impact on pupils with SEN and how to address their needs.
- these studies largely describe minimum effort inclusion, where no specific effort or changes were made.
- the few studies on the impact of SEN pupils on others discuss SEN in general and rarely address any specific conditions.

Research Questions

- To what extent is the inclusion of a VIP a trigger for change?
  - short-term – practical
  - longer-term – planning, teacher attitudes
- To what extent is any change sustained and sustainable?
- Does greater awareness of universally beneficial strategies make inclusion more possible and palatable?

Findings

Impact of VI inclusion on teachers – new understandings
- changes to conceptualisation of SEN and inclusion
- loosened hold of a ‘right’ way to teach something
- reappraisal of purpose and learning outcomes of an activity.
- challenged assumptions about others’ capacity to learn in a given modality.
- awareness of clarity of their instructional language.
- promoted closer working relationships with support staff.
- no significant increase in planning and preparation time.

Impact of VI inclusion on other pupils
- wider diet of learning activities, extending demands placed on language, memory and concept-forming.
- increased self-direction promoted through clarity of classroom layout and teacher instruction and expanded choice of resources.
- vehicle for development of verbal communication skills.
- opportunities to develop social skills and understanding and acceptance of difference in naturalistic ways.

Impact

- contribution of empirical evidence of effective practice to the discussions on the desirability and effectiveness of inclusive educational policies.
- may contribute to better acceptance of VIPs within a classroom and to a reduction in any resistance on the part of a school in accepting a VIP on roll.
- may give clearer understanding of when a pupil does or does not require tailored or specialist VI teaching.

Methods

- 3 settings – KS2 and KS3 – 13 teachers – 8 support staff
- 6 month time-frame
- online survey of all staff at start and end of research period
- classroom observations
- interviews with teachers at end of research period

References


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