

# Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Barker, Lucy (2021) 'A day in the life': Supporting trainee teachers in finding the 'Keys to inclusion' though a case study of one mainstream school's inclusion of a child on the autism spectrum. Eten Journal. pp. 19-45.

Published by: European Teacher Education Network

URL: <https://etenjournal.com/2021/05/17/a-day-in-the-li...>  
<<https://etenjournal.com/2021/05/17/a-day-in-the-life-supporting-trainee-teachers-in-finding-the-keys-to-inclusion-though-a-case-study-of-one-mainstream-schools-inclusion-of-a-child-on-the-a/>>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link:  
<http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/46275/>

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University's research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html>

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher's website (a subscription may be required.)

# **‘A day in the life’: Supporting trainee teachers in finding the ‘Keys to inclusion’ through a case study of one mainstream school’s inclusion of a child on the autism spectrum**

Lucy Barker<sup>1</sup>

**Key words:** Inclusion, special educational needs, trainee teachers, autism, collaboration.

## **Abstract**

Successful inclusion of students with autism in mainstream schools means a degree of challenge for trainee teachers which may require additional supports (Crossland and Dunlap, 2012). Therefore, there is a need to develop teacher education programmes that critically engage with issues of exclusion, diversity, and inclusion (Florian and Rouse, 2009). This paper addresses these issues, by systematically reflecting on the findings from a case study of a highly effective and inclusive mainstream primary school in the north east of England. A pupil on the autism spectrum was shadowed and observed by the researcher for one day. In addition, his parents and the staff at his school who were involved in supporting the pupil, were interviewed. The findings reveal that key practices, as outlined in the ‘Keys to Inclusion’ framework from an Erasmus + project, especially the ‘keys’ of collaboration and communication, were vitally important contributors in meeting the needs of a child with autism and fully including him in the school. The study has implications for Initial Teacher Training programmes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Barker is Senior Lecturer in Education at Northumbria University, Newcastle, England.

## **Introduction**

The inclusion of an increasing number of children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities in mainstream schools has become an international issue (Sharma, Loreman & Forlin, 2012). Over the last twenty years, a growing number of researchers have been studying factors for the successful implementation of inclusive education (Ainscow, 1997; Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse, 2007; Florian, 2009; Spratt and Florian, 2015). Norwich (2005) has argued for children with special educational needs to be educated in the same setting as their mainstream peers; an agenda commonly known as inclusion.

## **Definition of inclusion**

According to Rafferty, Boettcher, and Griffin (2001), inclusion refers to 'the process of educating children with disabilities in the regular education classrooms of their neighbourhood schools – the schools they would attend if they did not have a disability- and providing them with the necessary services and support' (p.266). This paper also draws from Booth and Ainscow's (2002) pivotal 'Index for Inclusion', which recommends that schools build collaborative relationships and improvements in the learning and teaching environment. The DfES (2004) refer to the 'quality of the school experience and about how far they (students), are helped to learn, achieve and participate fully in the life of the school' (p.12).

Furthermore, Anglim, Prendeville and Kinsella (2018) see inclusion as a 'need to foster participation among learners in mainstream classes and to focus on the quality of pupils' educational experiences' (p.74).

Sharma et al (2012) state that 'under an inclusive philosophy, schools exist to meet the needs of all students; therefore, if a student is experiencing difficulties, the problem is with the schooling practices not with the student' (p.12). This case study highlights one school's inclusive philosophy and ethos, where the emphasis is on the high-quality inclusive practice meeting the needs of a pupil with high functioning autism.

### **Inclusion of students with ASC**

The inclusion of children with autism spectrum condition (ASC) in regular educational settings is becoming increasingly common and the number of students continues to rise internationally. This not only has an impact on the mainstream schools but has implications for Initial Teacher Education institutes as they support aspiring teachers to be inclusive in their practice. Gavalda and Qinyi (2012) in their review of the literature found that there are four major factors involved in the education of students with ASC, namely, the individual characteristics/needs of students with ASC, schools, teachers, and support services together with family collaboration.

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

The National Autistic Society (2019) defines autism as a lifelong, developmental disability that affects how a person communicates with and relates to other people, and how they experience the world around them. Children with autistic spectrum disorders and the diagnosis 'Asperger Syndrome', experience difficulties based on a triad of impairments in communication, social interaction, and flexibility (World Health Organisation, 1995). The case profile in this paper describes a child who was diagnosed with 'Asperger Syndrome'. However, due to the controversy surrounding the term 'Asperger Syndrome', this paper will refer to the condition as 'high functioning autism' or Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

Although there are many benefits to an inclusive classroom, including opportunities for peer interactions, for the successful inclusion of children with ASC in mainstream schools there is a degree of challenge for students with ASC and their teachers and it may require additional supports (Crossland and Dunlap, 2012; Able et al, 2015). Research by the Autism Education Trust showed that 40% of children on the autism spectrum have been bullied. In addition to this, 56% of parents of children on the autism spectrum who had been bullied said that it caused their child to miss school or even change schools. While all children with SEND can present challenges to those who educate them, those diagnosed with ASC are unique in that their challenges are often invisible to educators, especially if they are on the high-functioning end of the spectrum (Young, McNamara and Coughlan, 2016). According to Gavalda and Qinyi (2012), as the number of students with ASC rise continually, there are three important elements for improving the inclusive practice of children with ASC, 'all of which can be related

to the teachers themselves, namely: attitudes, training and support' (2012, p.4073). Furthermore, an autism distinct pedagogy can complement an inclusive pedagogy (Florian, 2009) which require autism (and disability) friendly schools and classroom practices (Ravet, 2011).

### **Initial Teacher Education**

Ravet (2011) observes that at some point in their career, teachers will teach students with ASC. Therefore, it is important that teachers are well prepared to facilitate appropriate pedagogies for students with ASC in mainstream primary. Alexiadou and Essex (2016) state that throughout Europe and beyond, teacher education courses are required to actively promote inclusive practice and to develop relevant 'skills' of future teachers, so that graduates are able to respond to diverse student populations in their mainstream classes (Rouse and Florian, 2012). Pantic and Florian (2015) endorse the call for teacher educators to prepare teachers as 'agents of change'. This they purport is becoming common in policies and literature around the world. They argue that 'inclusive practice requires the collaboration of teachers and others such as families and other professionals where agents of change work purposefully with others to challenge the status quo and develop social justice and inclusion' (Pantic and Florian, 2015, p.233).

### **Purpose of the study**

Gavalda and Qinyi (2012) believe the need for teachers to understand the unique characteristics associated with autism is at an all-time high. There is empirical research related to assisting teachers in educating students with ASC in inclusive settings, (e.g., Harrower and Dunlap, 2001; Crosland and Dunlap, 2012). However, there is little research available about the needs of their educators, particularly trainee teachers. This information is needed to provide support for trainee teachers educating students with ASC in mainstream classrooms.

Furthermore, Crossland and Dunlap (2012) believe that there needs to be more research in typical settings and contexts across the school day. They go on to say that few studies have been carried out in the classroom context during typical daily routines and activities.

The case profile in the case study, is of a pupil, Aiden who has been diagnosed as being on the higher end of the autistic spectrum. The pupil was shadowed and observed during two one-day visits to the school by the researcher. The views of Aiden's parents; the head teacher and a local authority adviser for students with autism, were sought to explore how the school successfully includes Aiden throughout the school day.

The key purpose of this case study is to analyse the inclusive practice of one mainstream school to be used as part of materials preparing teachers for inclusive practice. This case study and materials for reflective practice with trainee teachers is important and fills a gap in the research, where collaborative approaches for inclusion, can be shared as good practice and trainee teachers can use the approaches described in their own practice during placement and beyond throughout their teaching career. These key features of good practice for schools are described below in terms of a conceptual framework. Able et al (2015) found that in addition to their lack of preparation and training for including children with ASC in their mainstream classrooms, teachers noted they do not receive adequate support within their schools. This case study is a response to this research and shows one school's commitment to a collaborative approach to inclusion.

### **A European commitment**

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) made a pledge, across Europe, to the principles, policy and practice for inclusion and the need to work for schools for all, where 'institutions include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning and respond to individual needs' (UNESCO, 1994, p.iii). The UK subsequently changed legislation to ensure that children with special educational needs are educated in mainstream local schools with typically developing peers, rather than in separate special schools unless it is the wish of the parents (DfEE, 2001). Additionally, in the UK parents of students with special needs may choose a regular or special school for their child. 'Children may be placed in their neighbourhood school and provided with several hours of support, typically from a teaching assistant (TA), a visiting advisory teacher and, possibly, speech or other therapy input from health professionals' (Frederickson, Jones and Lang, 2010, p.64).

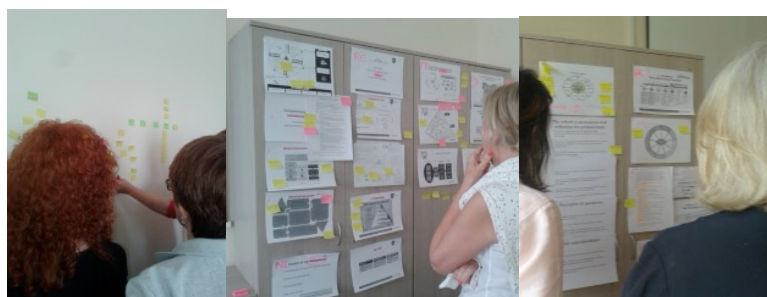
### **Conceptual Framework- The Keys to Inclusion ('REACCH')**

This case study reveals several key practices that were important contributors in meeting the needs of a child with autism and fully including them in the school. These key practices by the school correlate with the 'Keys to Inclusion' as described in the Erasmus (2017) project 'Go-Prince' that the author from the UK, was involved with. 'Go-Prince' is an acronym for the project title; 'Developing Good Practices: Inclusive Education in Early Childhood'.

The 2014-18 Erasmus+ 'Go-Prince' project developed and explore the 'Keys to Inclusion'; Reflection, Adaptation, Ethos, Communication, Collaboration and Holistic view (REACCH) framework. I argue that these 'keys' are fundamental features of inclusive practice.

The REACCH framework was created through discussions in the early Erasmus+ project meetings, as colleagues from the participating universities; UK; Turkey; Lithuania; Denmark; Belgium; Portugal; and the Netherlands, worked collaboratively, to collate ideas and consensus on the most important key practices associated with inclusive practice. Each 'Key to Inclusion' is part of a framework for schools and trainee teachers to use, enabling them to unlock the potential for each unique child and breaking down barriers to allow for full participation.

The REACCH framework is importantly offered as an effective tool to utilise in ITE tutorials trainee teachers, to explore and reflect on the pedagogical actions for inclusive practice, observed in their practicum placement schools, and as a process with which to evaluate their own competencies and confidence in facilitating inclusive strategies for children with SEND in mainstream classrooms.



Colleagues in the Erasmus project 'Go-Prince' collaborate to find the 'Keys to Inclusion'

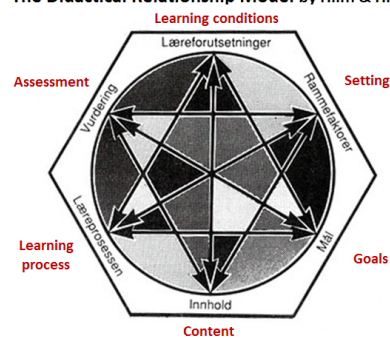
The 'Go-Prince Erasmus' project created the framework 'REACCH' with the acronym meaning: Reflection; Ethos; Adaptations; Communication; Collaboration and Holistic view. This conceptual framework for key practices was then used to showcase examples of good practice and effective inclusion in primary age institutions and early years' provisions in the participating countries. The materials from the project are used to support teachers and trainee teachers in developing their inclusive practice. Each country involved on the project focused on one 'Key to Inclusion'. A discussion below shows how each key was developed and adds value to the conceptual framework:

### Reflection (Danish colleagues)

Reflection is considered as a process or activity that is central to developing practices and teachers should constantly question their beliefs and practices (Sharma, 2010). According to Dewey (1933), three characteristics that most affect how teachers think and act like reflective teachers are open-mindedness, responsibility, and whole-heartedness. Such teachers are receptive to new information, others' viewpoints and to different types of diversity (Garmon, 2005, in Sharma, 2010, p.103). These teachers are deliberate in taking responsibility for their actions and consequences. The last characteristic, wholeheartedness, is a fusion of the first two characteristics (Sharma, 2010). According to Dewey (1933), this characteristic binds a teacher's commitment to open-mindedness and responsibility.

The didactical relationship model by Hiim and Hippe (1989) is regarded as a practical – theoretical process, where student teachers and teachers develop concepts of teaching and learning through systematically practising and critically reflecting on educational work.

The Didactical Relationship Model by Hiim & Hippe





The model describes the relations between fundamental educational concepts: pupils' learning resources and needs, pedagogical framework conditions and scope, educational aims and goals, subject matter, and content, teaching and learning methods, and forms of assessment. Reflection on the model always starts with the learning conditions and two essential questions are asked: What are the didactic relations in the educational situation, seen by different participants, especially pupils? How may relations be improved? (Hiim 2006, p.20).

The UK's SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) puts the responsibility for inclusion at the centre of its core message for teachers, as they should 'make sure that a child with Special Educational Needs (SEN) gets the support they need – this means doing everything they can to meet children and young people's SEN and ensure that children and young people with SEN engage in the activities of the school alongside students who do not have SEN' (p.92).

### **Ethos of inclusive pedagogy (Lithuanian colleagues)**

Inclusive education strives to provide equal opportunities for every child. The term 'inclusion' has largely replaced 'integration' and is intended to represent a different concept, where children 'feel' included. The role of teachers in developing inclusive education is central to its effectiveness. Consequently, teachers' attitudes, as well as their behaviours, play a crucial role in successful implementation of inclusive education; key factors of which are the positive ethos, with a values-based commitment to inclusion.

The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2001) issued a profile of Inclusive Teachers, a framework of core values of an inclusive teacher. The first core value is 'Valuing Learner Diversity'. Cultural diversity can be found in the context of ethnicity, culture, gender, plurality of languages, religion, mental and physical capabilities, and health. To be able to recognise cultural variables within a group of children, teachers need to develop cultural sensitivity and awareness that involves self-reflection; the ability to stand back from themselves and critically reflect on their own cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes. An inclusive school and teacher take responsibility for promoting education equity in the classroom, treating every child as equally important and valuing the individual. Seeing parents as equals, an inclusive teacher also strives to create and maintain positive relationships with them.

### **Adaptations (Turkish colleagues)**

Another key that leads to the successful inclusion of young children is 'adaptations. This is the process of adjusting or modifying materials, the environment, interactions or teaching models to support the individual child. Adaptations is an umbrella term that includes accommodations and modifications. In general, adaptations allow children with special educational needs to participate in inclusive settings by *responding* to their needs. Accommodations accomplish the objective of responding to the child's needs without modifying the curriculum, in other words, accommodations make a difference to *how* the child is learning, not *what* the child is learning. Modifications refer to adaptations which change or lower expectations or standards and include changes in instructional level, content, curriculum, or assessment. Each child is unique, and adaptations are specific to the needs and environment.

The classroom or learning environment must be transformed to ensure that 'all learners see themselves as belonging to a school community' (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000, p278). However, research has found that teachers vary significantly in their ability or willingness to make adaptations (McLeskey and Waldron, 2002).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was introduced in the 1990s (Meyer, Rose, and Gordon, 2014). UDL is commonly cited as an educational approach that has inclusionary practices in the classroom (Vitelli, 2015), as it provides a framework of principles for curriculum development where instructional goals, assessments, methods, and materials can be customized and adjusted to meet individual needs. UDL provides an equitable, flexible, success-oriented curriculum with:

- *Multiple means of representation* to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,
- *Multiple means of expression* to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know, and
- *Multiple means of engagement* to tap into learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

UDL is intended to increase access to learning, and thereby inclusive practice, by reducing physical, cognitive, intellectual, and organizational barriers to learning, as well as other obstacles.

### **Collaboration (Portuguese colleagues)**

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) stresses the importance of effective co-operation between class teachers, special education professionals and support staff, as well as the involvement of resource personnel such as advisory teachers, educational psychologists, speech, and occupational therapists. It also states that the education of children with special educational needs is a shared task of parents and professionals, and thus recommends the development of a co-operative partnership between school, teachers and parents who should be regarded as active partners in decision-making.

The term collaboration is often considered ambiguous. Nevertheless, most authors agree that collaboration includes working together in supportive and mutually beneficial relationships. The models of collaboration between teachers, parents, and other professionals in schools, implemented to meet diversity are recognised as powerful, successful strategies to every educational context (Wood, 1998). Furthermore, teachers have reported a need for collaboration to support inclusion (Finke et al, 2009).

### **Communication (Netherlands)**

Open and clear communication is of the utmost importance for the teacher, the parents, and the child. Schools and parents need each other for successful education. Furthermore, personal contact between teachers and parents is important and contributes to the school culture. Constructive communication is vital when teachers, parents and children want to work together in a cooperative manner (Zhang, 2011).

Communication skills and positive relationships are competencies teachers should have or develop. Communication with children should be an integral part of the teaching opportunities of a teacher, including conversations at both group level and individually. The best way to talk with young children is to join an activity they are involved in or initiate a new activity. In that way the teacher will be able to find out the child's thoughts and ideas. It

requires the teacher's verbal skills of active listening, connecting to the child's language level, summarising, questioning, and considering the individual needs of the child.

Communication with parents is also crucial and the teacher should see the parents as partners in the child's learning and development. It is the teacher's responsibility, however, to use and develop skills and techniques to ensure the most effective communication for all.

### **Holistic view (Belgian colleagues)**

With a growing body of world research emphasizing the importance of holistic approaches to education, early childhood educators are being challenged to incorporate a teaching practice that focuses less on the traditional milestones of academic development, and more on the complete physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of a child.

A focus on the well-being and total development of the child and not simply the academic progress of a child is important, but especially so for those children with special educational needs. Like the areas of learning outlined in the guidance *Development Matters for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2012) in England, Belgium considers nine areas which they consider important for early years' development: emotional health; gross motor development; fine motor development; language and communication; artistic expression, understanding of the physical world; understanding of the social world; logical and mathematical thinking and self-organisation and entrepreneurship. Development in these areas can be different from child to child. It considers them as a complex entity, and therefore offers educators, teachers, and parents a framework to identify talents in children and support deep-level learning.

### **Key research questions:**

How does the case study school fully meet the needs of Aiden, a child with ASC?

What practices do Aiden's parents, teachers and teaching assistants find successful for educating and fully including Aiden in the school?

Which 'Keys to Inclusion', from the Go-Prince REACCH framework, are used to allow Aiden full participation in the mainstream school?

How far can the “Keys to Inclusion (REACCH)” framework be used *‘in developing skilled, confident and effective teachers who can successfully include learners with SEN within mainstream classrooms?’* (Robinson, 2017, p.164).

### **Case study**

‘The primary purpose for undertaking a case study is to explore the particularity, the uniqueness of the single case’ (Simons, 2009, p.3). The school is the bounded system (Smith, 1978, in Simons, 2009) in the case study which intends to demonstrate the influence of key actors and interactions between them. In telling a story through the case profile of Aiden, we see the inclusion policy in action (Simons, 2009).

### **Case profile**

A case profile highlights understanding the case through the person and serves to illustrate the issues. The following case profile of Aiden is presented as an example of good inclusive practice in the school, where a child with ASC is fully included and educated. Despite many students on the autistic spectrum, attending mainstream schools, the process of facilitating their learning and participation remains a complex and poorly understood area of education (Barnard et al., 2000; Davis and Florian, 2004).

### **Ethical approval**

Ethical approval was sought and gained from Northumbria University to carry out the case study. Informed consent was gained from Aiden’s parents to observe him in school. The parents of Aiden, the teaching assistant, the head teacher, and advisory teacher gave their consent to being interviewed and quoted.

### **Background**

Aiden was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, or high functioning autism at the age of six. Although acknowledging that all children have unique needs, children with high functioning autism often have difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour and interests. People with high functioning autism are of average or above average intelligence. They do not always have the learning

disabilities that many autistic people have, but they may have specific learning difficulties. They have fewer problems with speech but may still have difficulties with understanding and processing language. Academically, Aiden is very capable, and he has strengths with mathematics, particularly with number and pattern and can give answers and describe orally his thoughts in English and other subject lessons but is often reluctant to write. Aiden displays repetitive and obsessive behaviours and often needs very specific, clear instructions for him to focus on a task.

Aiden is 8 years old and lives with his mother, father, and older sister, who does not have any special educational need or disability. His mother is a teaching assistant in a special school. Aiden started his formal education at a different local mainstream school until the age of five. Whilst Aiden attended this previous school his parents were told every day about his challenging behaviour and this was often done in the presence of other parents. Aiden's parents felt that the messages they were receiving about Aiden were very negative and that the ethos of the school was not inclusive. During this time, his parents became frustrated and disappointed with the lack of understanding of Aiden's needs from the school's perspective and the attitudes of the staff towards Aiden, labelling him as a 'social and behaviour problem'. Aiden was at risk from exclusion and his parents were very concerned. Indeed, children on the autistic spectrum are on average 20 times more likely to be excluded from school than their peers. One in five (21%) are excluded at least once, compared with approximately 1.2 percent of the total student population (Barnard et al., 2000). Aiden's parents decided to move Aiden to another nearby primary school. Since starting his new school, Aiden was supported, and his poor behaviour choices have reduced. His parents are very happy that Aiden has been a fully inclusive member of the school.

#### Key to Inclusion - Ethos

As schools become more inclusive there is a strong need for head teachers to clearly define and articulate a vision of inclusion (Gavalda and Qinyi, 2012, p.4074). The head teacher at the case study school was passionate about 'fostering a climate in which the school embraces the success and achievement of all students' (Horicks, White and Roberts, 2008 in Gavalda and Qinyi, 2012, p.4074). The *Index for Inclusion* (Booth and Ainscow, 2002) is a set of materials to guide schools through a process of inclusive school development. It is about building supportive communities and fostering high achievement for all staff and students. Corbett's

(2001) seminal work draws upon the *Index for Inclusion* and highlights the ‘connective pedagogy’ of a school, where the ethos enables teachers to feel confident about their approaches to inclusion. The head teacher in this mainstream school is instrumental in the facilitation and collaborative practice of staff, parents, and external support, to make the school fully inclusive.

In the interview with the head teacher, she states that:

*‘Every pupil with SEN and/ or a disability in our inclusive school has an entitlement to fulfil their optimum potential. This is achieved by ensuring the wellbeing of all students so that they can access the curriculum and learn within an environment sympathetic to their learning needs. We have high expectations for all students including those with an identified special need’.*

All the staff at the school have completed training on the Autistic Spectrum Condition with a specialist leader and therefore are able to meet Aiden’s needs due to a collaborative approach. Aiden has one key teacher who is very skilled and knowledgeable about autism through the training he has had. The school adopts a streaming approach to teaching and learning where children are grouped according to attainment. This means that Aiden is taught by a variety of teachers in school which in turn ensures shared responsibility to meet his needs.

Symes and Humphrey (2011) assert that teaching assistants have become the primary tool in facilitating the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities. There is a teaching assistant who support Aiden in mathematics and English lessons. However, the teaching assistant is not always with him, for example whilst he is in the playground. This is to enable Aiden to develop his independent skills and friendships. Students with ASC are often assigned a teaching assistant who works one to one with the child, known as the ‘Velcro effect’, which has implications for pupil independence and lack of social interaction with peers (Blatchford et al, 2009). Similarly, the ‘Least Restrictive Environment’ (LRE) in the USA emphasises that full inclusion is about making sure every child has the chance to participate in school activities. With a focus on sociocultural theory LRE proposes that learning is social, and research and interventions related to learning and development require a focus on not

only the characteristics of the individual but also the student in interaction within activity settings (Rueda et al., 2000).

### **Key to inclusion - Collaboration**

The school feels that collaborative work between external experts in ASC and the educational context is imperative for successful inclusive practice. Since a diagnosis of ASC will not explain what happens to a child in school, it is necessary to see each child with ASC as an individual and review and adapt the provision for them. An advisory teacher from the local authority visited this school regularly to observe Aiden and offer guidance to the school on how to meet his needs. The teachers in a study by McGregor and Campbell (2001) asked for educational psychologists to spend more time in classrooms and to specify more practical strategies for teaching children with ASC and for managing their behaviour effectively. Some believe that initial teacher education programmes cannot adequately prepare teachers for teaching this challenging group of students: instead, improved contact with external specialists has been recommended (Barnard, Prior, and Potter, 2000). Citing Burns and Mutton (2014), Carter (DfE, 2015, p.21) recommends models of 'clinical practice' whereby pre-service teachers draw on 'the practical wisdom of experts' whilst engaging in rigorous trialling and evaluation so that they might 'develop and extend their own decision-making capacities or professional judgements' (DfE, 2015, p.22).

Some believe that parents are considered the definitive experts on their children's needs and that effective intervention is dependent upon their support (Gavalda and Qinyi, 2012). Close collaboration between families and schools is necessary to enable a successful home-school partnership. Parental involvement and communication between the home and the school are crucial if the inclusion of children with SEND is successful. The advisory teacher liaised with Aiden's parents to ensure that the right advice from their knowledge of Aiden was given to the staff in school who were supporting Aiden. Aiden's parents, teachers and teaching assistants used a logbook to send back and forth daily or weekly messages, concerns, and celebrations of his success. The occupational therapist comes into school to assess Aiden's fine and gross motor skills and plans a programme of work to address his needs.<sup>[11]</sup> A pupil profile has been created with Aiden so that all adults in school are aware of his strengths and needs. This means that throughout the day, anyone who is contact with Aiden can understand



and help meet his needs.

The advisory teacher insists that;

*'collaboration is of vital importance, so that everybody works together in school, to provide the best provision for Aiden. He then gets a consistent message about behaviour, expectations and the support he needs across the school day.'*

### **Key to Inclusion - Communication**

Boutot (2007) asserts that the student with ASC will feel more a part of the mainstream education classroom if his or her teacher and parents are in regular communication. Parental involvement not only benefits students and creates active participation by the parents in the school community, but also increases parental satisfaction in the processes related to inclusive education (Timmons and Breitenbach, 2004). The school staff appreciate that Aiden's parents know him best and find the conversations with his parents very useful, so that adults supporting him can ensure the best provision for Aiden.

The adults who work with Aiden communicate with each other daily on the day's timetable and Aiden's needs. They make sure that Aiden is aware of the day's events through a visual timetable (see appendix 1) approach and communication verbally. Aiden has also been taught how to use a planner so that he can use organisation lists and make additional plans and notes for homework. Aiden also uses task organisers to manage time and organise tasks. The planner enables Aiden and his parents to understand what has happened each day and whether Aiden has homework or needs to remember to bring items into school, for example his PE kit. The communication between teachers, teaching assistants, parents and head teacher is very clear and open.

Parents and school communicate daily, about Aiden's needs. At first there were phone calls home about what was working for Aiden in school. Now Aiden's parents prefer communication via email every day so that they know the how well the day has been for Aiden. The emails consist of positive statements and celebration of good news. If there are any concerns, a face-to-face meeting or phone call is more appropriate. His parents say that the school staff are genuinely interested in their child and they receive positive comments.

*'If there are any behaviour issues, we know that there must have been a reason for the behaviour, and we feel that the teachers and the head teacher are very good at analysing the root cause of the behaviour and dealing with it appropriately'.*

This is in direct opposition to his previous school where the comments from school staff members to his parents were always perceived as negative about Aiden. The staff at this school appreciate that Aiden's parents know him best and find the conversations with his parents very useful, so that all adults supporting him can ensure the best provision for Aiden.

Extra-curricular clubs, like cooking and Lego club, have been set up in school, so that Aiden can participate in activities with his peers. Adults support at these clubs, for him to develop his personal communication skills as well as his fine motor skills.

### **Holistic view**

All adults involved with Aiden see the whole child. Aiden's social and emotional learning needs are met as well as his physical and mental needs alongside his academic education. The aim is to fully include Aiden in the life of the school and beyond. For example, in the past if Aiden is taking part in a school performance, his parents will come and watch the dress rehearsal. This is so that Aiden can feel included, and his parents can see Aiden perform as he sometimes finds the actual performance on the day, too daunting. However, recently Aiden successfully performed the lead role in the play and his parents sat proudly with the other parents to watch on the opening night. Aiden has found forming friendships difficult in the past. Aiden does find the rules of children's outdoor games difficult to understand and will often avoid these types of games. Observations of Aiden over the two one-day visits, saw him sitting and conversing with others during lunchtime and whilst in the playground. Aiden will join in with activities such as keyboard tuition in a group and cooking but does not initiate conversation with his peers at these times. The teacher or teaching assistant working alongside Aiden encourages Aiden to answer questions about the task he is doing and work with others.

### **Adaptations**

Reasonable adjustments are made to meet Aiden's needs in terms of assuring his well-being, behaviour, emotions and feelings, his achievements and especially his social interaction.

The children in each year group at the school where Aiden attends are set for Mathematics and English lessons, according to their ability. Aiden is very able academically and is in the highest set for mathematics and a high set for English. He can articulate his answers and thoughts well in English lessons but does not always want to write.

Vygotsky (1978) focused on the connections between people and the sociocultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. A Vygostkian approach is used to support Aiden in lessons, using scaffolding and writing frames, Vygotsky (1978) argued that a child gets involved in a dialogue with the "knowledgeable other" such as a peer or an adult and gradually, through social interaction and sense-making, develops the ability to solve problems independently and do certain tasks without help.

The teacher or teaching assistant who support Aiden in English lessons also encourage independence and use a reward system to extrinsically motivate him. If he completes his written work, he gains time to play on an I-pad. He also uses the I-pad as a technology aid to record his work and likes to record work on a computer.

### **Key to Inclusion – Reflection**

Teachers and teaching assistants reflect on Aiden's needs and progress using elements of the 'Didactical Relationship Model' (Hiim and Hippe, 1989) as discussed above. The purpose of inclusion is to facilitate students' engagement as a collaborative part of the academic and social unity, and to ensure academic progression whilst maintaining the students' wellbeing. The team around the child, who work directly with Aiden meets regularly with Aiden's parents and with Aiden to discuss any matters that will impact on Aiden's social inclusion and academic attainment in school. Their reflection of the learning conditions, assessment approaches, the setting, goals, the learning process, and the content are evaluated regularly so that Aiden's needs are met.

### **Discussion/conclusion**

Robinson (2017) found a correlation between the collaboration of a professional learning community and practitioners' confidence and skills in enacting inclusive practice. The literature on including children with ASC (Gavalda and Qinyi, 2012) and the results of this case

study reveal that, collaboration and communication between teachers, teaching assistants, parents and professionals who advise schools on strategies for inclusive practice were vitally important 'Keys to Inclusion' for fully including a child on the autistic spectrum into a mainstream school.

The search for what constitutes 'good practice' in inclusive schools continues. This case study aimed to highlight the good practice in an inclusive school where the pupil is supported appropriately to overcome any barriers to learning, and where the parents feel confident that their child is included in the whole life of the school.

It is proposed by Sharma (2010), that reflection on their teaching practices allows pre-service teachers to develop their confidence and attitude to include all students. Sharma (2010) continues by saying that 'true reflection necessitates that teachers work closely with other teachers and professionals and seek feedback from their colleagues about their practices' (p107). The author uses this case study of Aiden and the inclusive school he attends as a case study in seminars with trainee teachers on both post-graduate and under-graduate courses. Feedback from trainee teachers shows that the case study and REACHH framework, helps them to compare and identify the collaborative and holistic approaches needed to fully include students with ASC or other SENDs in mainstream classes, whilst on practicum placement. As McIntyre (2009) argues:

'if even a complex idea such as inclusive pedagogy, merits a place in the ITE curriculum, then student teachers will not only be introduced to the relevant practical suggestions (clearly conceptualised and rigorously justified) in the university, but will also have opportunities in the schools to explore their feasibility and to debate its merits of practicality' (p. 605).

I conclude that the REACHH framework can be used successfully by ITE providers as a tool to contributing to '*developing skilled, confident, and effective teachers who can successfully include learners with SEN within mainstream classrooms*' (Robinson, 2017, p.164).

### **Future research**

There is a growing amount of literature on student teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion practice for example, Beacham and Rouse (2012). There is currently a gap in the literature in this area. As Park and Chitiyo (2011) argue, focussing on the attitudes of teachers

towards children with autism is important because it may provide an invaluable source of data used in the development of teacher training and professional development programmes.

Further research is needed into how trainees can become more confident in their approach to inclusive practice. The materials and activities from the Erasmus+ Go-Prince project outlined in this paper support trainee teachers in inclusive approaches. By reflecting on the 'Keys to inclusion' framework it is hoped that trainee teachers can transfer the key practices needed for inclusion into their practice placements, their NQT year and beyond. The 'REACCH' framework for inclusive practice is used by trainee teachers and teachers in seminars and workshops, to evaluate the practice of this mainstream school. As part of the Initial Teacher Training undergraduate programme at Northumbria University, trainee teachers can critically reflect on the school they undertake their final practicum placement, with this school which is exalted as an example of effective inclusive practice and use the REACCH framework to reflect on the needs of any child with SEND in the mainstream classroom.

The author is currently carrying out a phenomenological study with undergraduate students who are in their final year of their Primary Education degree. The study explores the lived experience of trainee teachers on practicum placement and the challenges they face, when trying to implement their own inclusive practice. The competencies and confidence of trainee teachers with inclusive practice are explored. A future research question is posed.

'How can the REACCH 'Keys to inclusion' framework support trainee teachers in improving self-efficacy when including all learners in practice whilst on practicum placement?'

Using the REACHH framework could empower trainee teachers in becoming true agents of change and working purposefully with others could be a reality and trainee teachers could successfully challenge the status quo and develop social justice and inclusion from the ground up (Pantic and Florian, 2015).

The website <https://www.goprince.eu> give further background to the project and the case study of Aiden, as well as other case studies and materials.

## References

Able, H., Sreckovic, M.A., Schultz, T.R., Garwood, J. D., and Sherman, J. (2015) Views from the trenches: Teacher and student supports needed for full inclusion of students with ASC, *Teacher Education and Special Education* Vol.38 (1) 44-57.

Ainscow, M. (1997). Towards Inclusive Schooling *British Journal of Special Education*, Vol.24(1), pp.3-6.

Alexiadou, N., and Essex, J. (2016) Teacher education for inclusive practice – responding to policy, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 39:1, 5-19.

Anglim, J., Prendeville, P., and Kinsella, W. (2018) The self-efficacy of primary teachers in supporting the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 34:1, 73-88.

Avramidis, E., Bayliss, P., and Burden, R. (2000) Student teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16 277-293.

Barnard, J., Prior, A. and Potter, D (2000) *Autism and Inclusion: is it working?* London: National Autistic Society.

Beacham, N. and Rouse, M. (2012). Student teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and inclusive practice, *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 12(1) 3-11.

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., Martin, C., Russell, A. and Webster, R, (2009) *Deployment and Impact of Support Staff project*, London: DCSF.

Black-Hawkins, K., Florian, L., and Rouse, M. (2007). *Achievement and inclusion in schools*, London: Routledge.

Booth, T. and Ainscow, M. (2002). *Index for Inclusion: Developing Learning and Participation in Schools*, UK: Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Boutot, E. A. (2007). Fitting in: Tips for promoting acceptance and friendships for students with autism spectrum disorders in inclusive classrooms, *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(3), 156-161.

Corbett, J. (2001). Teaching approaches which support inclusive education: A connective pedagogy. *British Journal of Education*, 28, 55-59.

Crosland, K., and Dunlap, G. (2012). Effective Strategies for the inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. *Behaviour Modification*, no.36 (3): 251-269.

Davis, P., and Florian, L. (2004). Searching the literature on teaching strategies and approaches for students with special educational needs: knowledge production and synthesis, *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* vol.4, 142-147.

Department for Education (DfE) (UK) (2012) Statutory framework for the early years' foundation stage. London, UK Department for Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-foundation-stage-framework--2>

Department for Education (DfE) (2014). Special educational needs in England. London, UK Department for Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2014>

Department for Education (DfE) (2015). Carter review of Initial Teacher Training. London, UK Department for Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carter-review-of-initial-teacher-training>

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2001) *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act*. London: The Stationery Office.

DfES (2004) Every Child Matters: Change for children,  
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130403155730/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DfES/1081/2004>

Dewey, J. (1933) *How we think: A restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to education process*, Boston: Heath.

Erasmus (2017) Developing Good Practices: Inclusive Education in Early Childhood (Go-Prince) <https://www.goprince.eu>

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) (2001) *Inclusive Education and Effective Classroom Practices*. Odense: European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education.

Finke, E. H., Light, J., and Kitko, L. (2008) A systematic review of the effectiveness of nurse communication with patients with complex communication needs with a focus on the use of augmentative and alternative communication *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, Vol.17(16), pp.2102-2115.

Florian, L. (2009). Towards inclusive pedagogy. In Hick, P., Kershner, R., and Farrell, P. (Eds.), *Psychology for inclusive education: New directions in theory and practice* (pp.38-51). London: Routledge/Falmer.

Florian, L., and Rouse, M. (2009). The inclusive practice project in Scotland: Teacher education for inclusive education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 25, Issue 4, 594-601.

Gavaldi, J.M.S, and Qinyi, T. (2012) Improving the process of inclusive education in children with ASC in mainstream schools, *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences* Vol.46 4072-4076.



Harrower, J.K., and Dunlap, G. (2001) Including children with autism in general education classrooms: A review of effective strategies, *Behaviour modification*, vol.25, 762-784.

Hiim, H. (2006) Epistemological Perspectives in an Approach to Teacher Research. Online at: [http://actionresearch.gr/AR/ActionResearch\\_Vol1/Issue01\\_04\\_p19-30.pdf](http://actionresearch.gr/AR/ActionResearch_Vol1/Issue01_04_p19-30.pdf)

Hiim, H., & Hippe, E. (1989) revised edition (1998). *Undervisningsplanlegging for yrkeslærere (Vocational Education and Didactics)*. Oslo: The University Press.

McGregor, E., and Campbell. (2001) The attitudes of teachers in Scotland to the integration of children with autism into mainstream schools. *Autism* 5, no.2: 189-207.

McIntyre, D. (2009) The difficulties of inclusive pedagogy for initial teacher education and some thoughts on the way forward. *Teaching and Teacher Education* Vol. 25: 602-608.

McLeskey, J., and Waldron, N. L. (2002) Inclusion and school change: Teacher perceptions regarding curricular and instructional adaptations, *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 25 (1): 41-54.

Meyer, A., Rose, D.H., and Gordon, D. (2014). *Universal design for learning: Theory and Practice*. Wakefield, MA: CAST Professional Publishing. <http://www.cast.org/our-work/publications/2014/universal-design-learning-theory-practice-udl-meyer.html#.XQyDTC2ZNPM>

Nafsika, A. and Essex, J. Teacher education for inclusive practice: Responding to policy, *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 2016, Vol.39(1), pp.5-19.

NASUWT Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs (June 2013). <https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/advice/in-the-classroom/special-educational-needs.html>

National Autistic Society (2019) online at: <https://www.autism.org.uk>

Norwich, B. (2005) *Special teaching for special children? Pedagogies for inclusion* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Norwich, B. (2013) *Addressing tensions and dilemmas in inclusive education: Living with uncertainty* Oxon: Routledge.

Office of National Statistics (2005) *Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pantic, N. and Florian, L. (2015) Developing teachers as agents of inclusion and social justice, *Education Inquiry*, 6:3, DOI: [10.3402/edui.v6.27311](https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.27311)

Park, M. and Chtiyo, M. (2011) An Examination of Teacher Attitudes Towards Children with Autism, *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 11(1), 70-78.

Rafferty, Y., Boettcher, C., and Griffin, K. (2001) Benefits and Risks of Reverse Inclusion for Pre-schoolers with and Without Disabilities: Parents' Perspectives. *Journal of Early Intervention* Vol.24(4), pp.266-286.

Ravet, J. (2011) Inclusive/exclusive? Contradictory perspectives on autism and inclusion: The case for an integrative position. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, Vol 15 (6) 667-682.

Robinson, D. (2017) Effective inclusive teacher education for special educational needs and disabilities: Some more thoughts on the way forward, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol.61, pp.164-178.

Rouse, M., and Florian, L. (2012) *Inclusive Practice Project: Final Report*. University of Aberdeen online at: <http://thesendhub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/inclusive-practice-project-final-report.pdf>

Rueda R., Gallego M.A., and Moll L.C. (2000) The Least Restrictive Environment: A Place or a Context? *Remedial and Special Education*. 2000;21(2):70-78.

doi:[10.1177/074193250002100202](https://doi.org/10.1177/074193250002100202)

Sharma, U. (2010) Using reflective practices for the preparation of pre-service teachers for inclusive classrooms. In Forlin, P (Ed.) *Teacher Education for Inclusion: changing paradigms and innovative approaches*, London: Routledge.

Sharma, U., Loreman, T., and Forlin, C. (2012) Measuring teacher efficacy to implement inclusive practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* Vol.12 no.1 12-21.

Simons, H. (2009) *Case Study Research in Practice*, London: Sage.

Spratt, J., and Florian, L. (2015) Inclusive pedagogy: from learning to action. Supporting each individual in the context of 'everybody'. *Teaching and Teacher Education* Vol.49 89-96.

Timmons, V., and Breitenbach, M.A. (2004) *Inclusionary practices for children with autism spectrum disorders*. Collaborative report from the University of Prince Edward Island and the Department of Education of Prince Edward Island, PEI.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1994) *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education*, Paris: UNESCO.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2005) *Guidelines for inclusion: ensuring access to education for all*. Paris: UNESCO.

World Health Organisation (1995) *International Classification of Disability – version 10 (ICD-10)*. Geneva: WHO.

Vitelli, E. M. (2015) Universal design for learning: Are we teaching it to preservice general education teachers? *Journal of Special Education Technology* 30(3) 166-178.

---

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: The development of higher psychological processes*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wood, D. (1998) *How children think and learn: the social contexts of cognitive development*. (2nd ed.) Oxford: Blackwell.

Young, K., McNamara, M., Barry. C. (2017) Authentic inclusion-utopian thinking? -- Irish post-primary teachers' perspectives of inclusive education. (Report) *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2017, Vol.68, p.1

*Lucy Barker is a senior lecturer at Northumbria University, Newcastle, England. She teaches under-graduate and post-graduate students in Education about diversity and inclusive practice. l.a.barker@northumbria.ac.uk*