Inclusion Through Different Eyes

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Inclusion Through Different Eyes

ABSTRACT

This is a single site qualitative case study to investigate how inclusion is understood, and put into practice in one classroom within a school that has inclusive values. The focus classroom, Room 2, is a new-entrant/year one classroom. The participants included the principal, the class teacher, the teacher aide, the ORS funded teacher, a child with high needs on the ORS scheme and her mother and four peers from the class (ORS refers to the Ministry of Education’s “Ongoing Resourcing Scheme” for students with ‘High and Very High Needs”). The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is inclusion understood by the various participants?
2. What are the values and practices in the classroom and the wider school that are associated with inclusion?
3. How do children experience a classroom that focuses on being part of an inclusive school community?

Social constructionism was used as the theoretical framework to explore the participants’ understandings and experiences. Data were gathered through observations, semi-structured interviews, and archival data. The emerging themes were identified and linked back to the research questions.

The findings show inclusion was understood to be welcoming and teaching all children, not just those with disabilities, reflecting the diversity with the wider community. The values and practices associated with inclusion included building a sense of community, clear values, caring relationships between children, staff and families and good collaborative practices. The children experienced the classroom as a safe positive place, where they helped each other and enjoyed learning. There were also some tensions between the values and practice identified that may inadvertently contribute to students with disabilities being perceived as different.
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I would like to acknowledge the school and the participants for their generous and valuable contributions to this research. It was a pleasure to spend time in Room 2 and I felt the welcoming nature of the school and class in person. I also wish to thank my thesis supervisors, Jude MacArthur, and Wendy Holley-Boen for the guidance, support and positivity throughout this research. Finally, a thank you to my family and friends who have been supportive throughout this study.
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