DISABLIST BULLYING:

AN INVESTIGATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to explore the knowledge and confidence of student teachers in relation to disablist bullying. Two centres for Initial Teacher Education, one in each jurisdiction, were selected for recruitment of participants. Stranmillis University College provided the sample of both primary and post-primary student teachers from Northern Ireland. The School of Education at Trinity College, Dublin and the University's three Associated Colleges of Education (Marino Institute of Education, Froebel College of Education, and the Church of Ireland College of Education) provided the sample for the Republic of Ireland. Adopting a mixed methods approach of four focus groups and a paper questionnaire (n = 257), data were collected and analysed relating first to students' knowledge and confidence in the discrete areas of special educational needs and bullying, and then in relation to disablist bullying. The study highlights the high importance attributed to SEN and bullying by student teachers but also the sporadic provision and low confidence in meeting the needs of children with SEN. The study also reveals that none of the participants in either jurisdiction have received any guidance at all in relation to disablist bullying as part of their Initial Teacher Education. The study concludes with recommendations to address this shortcoming, including the urgent need for practical, solution-focused and evidence-based courses at ITE and CPD level in both jurisdictions.

Keywords: disablist, bullying, special educational needs, SEN, teachers

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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CASE STUDY #1

"It was my first year placement of four weeks, and I was halfway through the first week before I met this particular group of girls…As I entered the girls changing room it was clear from the outset, that one girl had a severe physical disability, having a number of fingers stumped or missing with very obvious scar and burn marks on her hands, arms and face. I quickly observed that although the girls were all talking amongst each other about their weekend plans etc, this girl appeared more isolated and although involved in some conversation there also was a noticeable sarcastic tone hidden within some comments while others made comments for her to hurry up and a few helped her change. It was clear from this that the girls were impatient with regard to her changing time and some were frustrated at having less time on the court. Later during the lesson (hockey), it was clear to see that she had difficulties hearing and therefore following commands and again appeared isolated. It was obvious there was a tension within the group and some girls were carrying out 'girl bullying' and hostility towards her…This was all very overwhelming and I was worried that I would not be able to cater for her needs, but I was assured by the classroom teacher of her support and help.

The class teacher later on discussed further with me about her case. She had been involved in a firework accident … [The class teacher] also said that she felt the girl 'played up' and 'used' her disability to hold up games and 'knew' how to manipulate the situation and warned me to be careful to make sure I maintained control over the group.

At the start when she arrived back the teacher said that the female PE staff had tried to help her with her kit and difficult things like taking on and off shoes and socks however, then the girl had started to make accusations against them, and 'tell wee stories'. The class teacher shared that it was a difficult situation as they wanted to support her as much as possible but it was difficult and frustrating to do so while still keeping a safe distance.

The school had provided a classroom assistant for her, but she very rarely came to the PE class and only sat on the sidelines when she did come, occasionally helping to explain tasks but in my opinion, I found her more of an unhelpful presence in the room that a useful aid. I also found this extremely difficult and to be honest if I had not have had the classroom teacher there this would have been extremely difficult to manage as a first year placement. The teacher from my perspective was doing a lot to support this girl but had taken a back foot to guard herself and did not have a lot of school funding in place to fully support her needs with regards equipment.

…The experience of such rare circumstances though has stood me in good stead for future placements and gave me an insight into how bullying can work both ways between the teachers and the pupil with the disability and made me reflect on both sides of the coin and use caution when dealing with these circumstances as they are not always black and white."

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH INTO BULLYING

Research into bullying has become an issue of immense and growing international concern in recent years. Although the systematic study of bullying may be considered to be relatively new, this is not to suggest that bullying itself is a novel phenomenon. Indeed Rigby, Smith, and Pepler (2004) recount how there was much public discussion of bullying in English public schools in the Nineteenth Century following the publication of Hughes' novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857) where the fictional hero is targeted by the school bully, Flashman. Rigby (2002) takes us back further still to the Jewish Psalms where, he argues, there are countless instances of persecution and victimisation which, today, would be termed bullying. For instance the Psalmist writes that "I am surrounded by enemies, who are like man-eating lions. Their teeth are like spears and arrows; their tongues are like sharp swords" (Psalm 57, 4) and adds that "All my enemies and especially my neighbours treat me with contempt; those who know me are afraid of me. When they see me in the street they run away" (Psalm 31, 11).

Although bullying is not new, the systematic study of the nature and incidence of school bullying is often considered to have begun as recently as the 1970s in Scandinavia with the work of Dan Olweus, seen by many as the 'father' of research into bullying. In the autumn of 1983 Olweus was invited to lead the first major systematic anti-bullying intervention in schools in Norway following the suicide of three boys in late 1982, most likely as a direct consequence of bullying (Olweus, 1993). The evaluation (using 130,000 pupils as a representative sample) of this initial nationwide intervention in primary and post-primary schools revealed an impressive reduction in incidence of bullying of 50%. Many elements of this intervention have been developed and integrated into what is now marketed as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, one of the most widely implemented programmes in the world. Indeed, as Jimerson and Huai (2010, p. 579) note in their review of international interventions, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program "... has served as a blue-print for various adaptations across nations".

Despite three decades of systematic research into bullying prevention, there is however still no universally accepted definition of bullying. Perhaps the most widely cited definition is by Olweus (1986, 1991, cited in Olweus 1993, p. 9) who writes that "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more

other students". This definition has three key characteristics (frequency, duration and intentional harm) which are often reflected in other more recent definitions. Olweus goes on to specify (1993, p. 9) that 'negative action' is when someone intentionally inflicts physical injury or discomfort, or causes harm through the use of words or through gesture. He emphasises the repeated, regular incidence of the 'negative actions' but does not rule out the possibility of a single incident being regarded as bullying 'under certain circumstances'. He further notes that bullying can be carried out on one or more individuals by one or more others. However, in any incident of bullying Olweus stresses the presence of an 'imbalance in strength' or an 'asymmetric power relationship' (1993, p. 10) where the student exposed to the 'negative actions' has difficulty defending themselves against the bully(ies).

International definitions of bullying have proliferated in recent years (see Rigby, 2002) with different emphases in relation to regularity, degree of intent and power imbalance. For instance, while some researchers insist on the repeated nature of bullying (e.g., Besag, 1989; Lane, 1989; Roland, 1989) others (e.g., Arora, 1996; Randall, 1991; Stephenson & Smith, 1991) argue that bullying can be a one-off experience whose consequences are nonetheless far-reaching.

In Ireland the definitions proffered by the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF, 2011) and the (Republic of Ireland) Department for Education and Science (1993) both stress the repeated nature of the bullying, the latter addressing the issue directly:

> "The Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF) defines bullying as the repeated use of power by one or more persons intentionally to hurt, harm or adversely affect the rights and needs of another or others." (NIABF, 2011).

> "Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others. Isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour, which should not be condoned, can scarcely be described as bullying. However, when the behaviour is systematic and on-going it is bullying". (DES, 1993, p. 2).

In more recent years there has been an attempt to define and address particular forms of bullying. While Olweus (1993, p. 10) identified just two distinct forms of bullying, direct bullying 'with relatively

open attacks on a victim' and indirect bullying 'in the form of social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group', recent research interest has focused on more specific aspects such as physical bullying, racist bullying, sectarian bullying, homophobic bullying, girls' bullying, cyber-bullying and disablist bullying. Indeed, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) has recently issued information and guidance for schools on preventing and responding to sexist, sexual and transphobic (SST) bullying.

DISABLIST BULLYING

In working towards an understanding of disablist bullying, it is first important to clarify what is meant by disability or special educational needs (SEN). The term 'special educational needs', now widely used in educational contexts, was first coined in the *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (The Warnock Report, Department for Education and Skills, 1978). In moving away from a medical / deficit model of disability and the rigid categorisation of children as 'handicapped' or 'non-handicapped', the Warnock Report defined the three fundamental aims of education to be enjoyment, independence and understanding, and argued that, although these goals are shared by all children, some children simply need more support in order to help achieve them. In this social model of disability the onus thus lies with the school / educational context to make any necessary adjustments to meet the particular needs of that child in accessing the curriculum:

> "We refer to the group of children – up to one in five – who are likely to require some form of special educational provision at some time during their school career as "children with special educational needs" (DES, 1978, p. 41).

However, as Warnock herself notes in her 'new look' at SEN (Warnock, 2005), the move away from categories of disability has in some cases led to an even greater tendency to label children, this time as belonging to one single category of 'SEN children'. This represents the antithesis of what was originally intended, as Warnock explains:

> "... the desire to avoid categories of disability into which children could be slotted and in which they would possibly remain indefinitely, led to a tendency to refer

> to children with very different needs as if they were all the 'same', i.e. special educational needs (SEN) children" (Warnock, 2005: p. 19).

The Warnock Report (1978) also called for the 'integration' of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools, and, importantly, identified three levels of integration: (i) locational (where special schools or units are situated close to or within mainstream schools), (ii) social (where children with and without SEN eat, play and travel together), and (iii) functional (representing shared participation in educational programmes). This report marked the beginning of the inclusion movement which has been strengthened by a raft of international agreements such as the Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO, 1994) and more recently by legislation in both jurisdictions in Ireland (Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs [EPSEN] Act, 2004; Special Educational Needs and Disability [Northern Ireland] Order, 2005).

Definitions of SEN proliferate. The Northern Ireland *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (DENI, 1996, p. 1) issued under Article 4 of the Education (NI) Order 1996 and operative from 1 September 1998 notes that the term 'special educational needs' is defined in the legislation as 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made'. Children have a learning difficulty if they have 'significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age and/or have a disability which hinders their everyday use of educational facilities' (ibid.).

In the Republic of Ireland the *EPSEN Act* 2004 defines special educational needs as "... a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition" (p. 6).

Bullying related to a child's SEN is commonly known as 'disablist bullying'. This type of bullying has been defined by the NIABF as 'hurtful, insulting or intimidating behaviour related to a perceived or actual disability' (NIABF, 2010). Bristol City Council (2006, p. 18) lists numerous possible manifestations of disablist bullying, a list which includes:

- The regular use, consciously or unconsciously, of offensive and discriminatory language, particularly the widespread use of terms like 'idiot, spastic, moron and cretin' as generic insults or terms of abuse;

- Verbal abuse and threats;
- Disablist graffiti;
- Disablist comments in the course of discussions in classroom;
- Spreading rumours that cause a young person's impairment to be questioned, ridiculed or insulted;
- Public ridicule e.g., imitating an individual's manner of speech or movement, interfering with necessary equipment;
- Disablist jokes, insults and comments;
- Physical or sexual assault against a person or group because of their impairment;
- Refusal to cooperate / work with someone because of their impairment or behaviour;
- Making a disabled person feel unsafe e.g., pushing, shoving;
- Refusing to meet a disabled person's access needs;
- Isolation or exclusion from social groups.

Research into disablist bullying is still very much in its infancy but international studies have revealed higher rates of incidence among children with SEN than among those without (e.g. Carter & Spencer, 2006; Mencap, 2007; Monchy, Pijl, & Zandberg, 2004; Norwich & Kelly, 2004). In one recent study Mencap (2007) carried out a survey of 507 children and young people with a learning disability in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The respondents were aged between eight and nineteen and attended special schools or mainstream schools or both. The survey reported that 82% of children and young people with a learning disability have experienced bullying. This bullying was carried out not just in schools but also on the street, at the park, on the bus, at youth clubs and in leisure centres, and took a number of forms: 77% reported that they had been verbally abused, 60% had been physically hurt, while 40% had been left out of activities or had had their belongings taken from them. Disturbingly, Mencap (2007) also found that for 4 out of 10 bullied children who told someone, the bullying did not stop, leading Mencap (2007) to suggest that "Adults do not always believe children with a learning disability when they report bullying, or they don't treat it as a serious matter." (p. 10).

Livesey et al. (2007) note that society in Northern Ireland is becoming more diverse both in terms of ethnicity and the full participation of persons with disabilities. They report that their research among 2,312 Northern Ireland school pupils (n = 993 Year 6 [primary], n = 1,319 Year 9 [post-primary]) has raised concerns about bullying on the grounds of, among other things, disability, and has highlighted the need to change attitudes. Specifically, 44.1% of Year 6 Pupils felt that a pupil's disability could make them 'more likely' to be bullied while 34.7% thought that a disability 'doesn't make a

difference'. Among the Year 9 Pupils, 49.9% thought that a pupil's disability could make them 'more likely' to be bullied. In making their 'recommendations', Livesay et al. (2007) note that in terms of 'monitoring', "Consideration should be given to the monitoring of incidents of bullying that involve ... pupils with disabilities." and that "Parents of pupils with disabilities should be consulted regarding the experiences of their children and should be able to provide an input into school policies and practices." (p. vii). In terms of 'Initial Teacher Education', Livesey et al. (2007) 'recommend' that "Initial teacher education should sensitise trainee teachers to the issue of bullying and require that they study examples of good practice in schools." and that "Teachers should be supported through induction and early professional development to effectively utilise more positive behavioural strategies in the classroom." (p. ix).

It is important, not least given Warnock's critique of the over-simplification and generalisation associated with the term SEN (Warnock, 2005), that research into disablist bullying does not see all children with SEN as forming one homogenous group. Warnock herself (2005) singles out children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and who have autism spectrum disorder (ASD) as being particularly likely to experience inclusion in mainstream schools as a "... painful kind of exclusion" (p. 39).

This concurs with the findings of Humphrey and Symes (2010a) and Wainscot et al. (2008) who note that children with ASD are more likely to be bullied than pupils with other or no SEN. Moreover, in a qualitative study involving 36 pupils with ASD (aged 11-16) from 12 secondary schools in the north-west of England, Humphrey and Symes (2010b) highlight the particular challenges faced with adopting an anti-bullying intervention based around social support for children with ASD as the majority of the pupils with ASD did *not* enjoy positive relationships with their peers and did *not* seek help from them. Some of the pupils with ASD explained that this was due to internal traits associated with autism such as difficulty in joining in group activities, some did not trust their classmates' intentions, while others still expressed a clear desire for solitude ('I just like being by myself'). The implications of this are made clear:

> "Such statements raise an interesting quandary. It is important that the pupils' desire for solitude is acknowledged. However, it is perhaps these pupils that then become the most vulnerable to bullying and teasing – having few or no established social networks to call upon for support." (Humphrey & Symes, 2010b, p. 88).

Humphrey and Symes (ibid.) consequently identify the potential for this to become a cyclical pattern: when pupils with ASD are bullied, they are less likely to make the effort to build friendships with their peers, which, in turn, leaves them more likely to become isolated and bullied. For these children the

ideal of inclusion is far from realised, for, as Ainscow (2007) stresses, inclusive education has evolved from a term describing *where* children are educated to a much more challenging concept which refers also to the participation, acceptance and achievement of all pupils in school.

Therefore, it would appear from much recent research that often children with SEN are more likely to experience bullying, and that inclusive education which it is argued, 'will beget a younger generation that is more tolerant and accepting of difference' (Thomas, 1997) can lead to isolation, lack of understanding and bullying. Frederickson (2010), however, addresses the question of whether informing the peer group about a particular child's SEN can in fact lead to greater understanding and acceptance and thus less bullying.

In an extensive review of the literature Frederickson (2010) reports that some studies (such as Newberry & Parish, 1987) have shown that peer acceptance can be greater for more clearly apparent needs and disabilities (e.g. severe learning difficulties or hearing impairment) but not for less obvious specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) or low achieving pupils. As Frederickson (2010) notes, "... in these cases there is nothing to signal to classmates that these pupils are deserving of special consideration" (p. 9). Frederickson (2010) cites Morton and Campbell (2008) who found that it was the class teacher who was the most persuasive source (rather than other professionals or parents) in presenting explanatory information to peers about a classmate with autism. Frederickson (2010) also considers the varying forms of friendship formed between children with SEN and their peers, noting that on a continuum between exclusion and best-friend status, the level of friendship was often that of helper-helpee. While some (e.g. Marks, 1997; Van der Klift & Kunc, 2002) would argue that such asymmetrical friendships are of little value, Meyer et al. (1998) note that such a helping relationship is greatly valued by parents and teachers. Indeed, Grenot-Scheyer et al. (1998) challenge the opinion that friendships must be reciprocal and mutual to be of value.

Guidance to teachers in dealing with disablist bullying in particular remains relatively scarce. In the UK the *Safe to Learn* materials include one publication which addresses *Bullying Involving Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities* (DCSF, 2008). This comprehensive document considers legal duties for schools in relation to pupils with SEN; preventative strategies (e.g. school policy, listening to the voice of pupils with SEN, using the curriculum to tackle disablist bullying) and also response strategies (e.g. use of appropriate sanctions, peer mentoring). On a local level the guidance offered by Bristol City Council (2006) is also detailed and, in addition to the topics covered by DCSF, also offers guidance on supporting victims and monitoring and recording incidents. In Ireland (North and South) there is no specific guidance offered to schools on disablist bullying with the exception of the recently published (and very brief) pamphlet on the subject by the Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum (NIABF, 2010).

The current seed project set out to investigate student teachers' (North and South) knowledge of, and confidence in, dealing with disablist bullying. The project also aimed to identify priorities for North / South Initial Teacher Education in moving towards improving the preparation of teachers to address effectively the issue of disablist bullying in schools.

In particular the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What do student teachers in North / South ITE know about (i) bullying (e.g., definition, nature, prevalence, prevention, policy), (ii) disability / special educational needs (SEN), and (iii) disablist bullying?
2. How confident do student teachers feel about dealing effectively with cases of disablist bullying in schools (i.e., reactive strategies)?
3. How confident do student teachers feel about adopting preventative interventions (e.g., curricular work) in schools (i.e., proactive strategies)?
4. What are the key priorities for ITE in developing students' knowledge of disablist bullying on a North / South scale?

CASE STUDY #2

"During my school placement I encountered a year 9 class in which one pupil had severe cerebral palsy. Because of his physical disability this pupil could not easily circulate around the school building. The school set up a mobile classroom and arranged where possible for the teachers to teach his class in this mobile classroom (although for certain subjects this was not possible). This particular pupil had come from one of the main feeder Primary schools in the area, which meant that there were a number of pupils who had transferred across with him. The school ensured that these pupils were all kept in the same class in order to ease the transition to secondary school.

In my time at the school I noticed the caring nature with which this class treated one another and, despite the challenges that came from his disability, the class as a whole seemed to look out for one another. This was also a reflection of the particular individuals within this class and the ethos with which they had come through Primary School. It was encouraging to see how these pupils had not only adapted to dealing with a disability that affected the class as a whole, but also they had taken it upon themselves to look after one another and ensure that the particular child with the disability did not feel limited or left out." (post-primary student)

METHODOLOGY

ETHICS

Guided by the ethical principles and protocols of the British Psychological Society, the Psychological Society of Ireland, and the British Educational Research Association, ethical approval for the research was granted by the Ethics Committee of the School of Education at Trinity College, Dublin.

METHODS

A mixed methodological approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was utilised. A staged process began with qualitative analysis of focus group discussions, followed by questionnaires providing a descriptive overview of knowledge and attitudes, which served to supplement the qualitative data.

PARTICIPANTS

Two centres for Initial Teacher Education (ITE), one in each jurisdiction, were selected for recruitment of participants. Stranmillis University College (SUC) provided the sample of both primary and post-primary student teachers from Northern Ireland. The School of Education at Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), and the University's three Associated Colleges of Education (Marino Institute of Education: MIE; Froebel College of Education: FCE; and the Church of Ireland College of Education: CICE) provided the sample for the Republic of Ireland. All prospective participants were emailed a letter of invitation; with follow-up phone contact where required. Those expressing an interest were sent brief emails explaining what participation would entail, and other necessary information.

FOCUS GROUPS

Following pilot studies in both centres of education, 18 student teachers participated in the focus groups (2 per centre). Whilst 11 (61.11%) were studying to become primary school teachers (SUC: n = 6; TCD: n = 5), the remaining 7 (38.89%) were studying to become post-primary teachers (SUC: n = 4; TCD: n = 3). In line with previous research involving teachers, and reflecting course enrolment at both

centres, females were overrepresented within the sample (88.24%). Males represented 16.67% of the total sample, all being from SUC (n = 2 primary, n = 1 post-primary).

Clusters of questions were developed regarding knowledge, attitudes, and confidence regarding, for example, policy, legislation, and official publications in each of the key areas of enquiry: (i) SEN, (ii) bully/victim problems, and (iii) disablist bullying (see Appendix A). Examples of questions include: 'What is the legislation in Northern Ireland regarding children with SEN?', and 'Has anybody come across anything similar to that that ...'. The semi-structured approach to the data collection concluded with participants being asked to suggest alterations to current ITE provision.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

			Primary (P)			Post-Primary (PP)		
	n	*%*	*n*	*% tot*	*% P*	*n*	*% tot*	*% PP*
NI	10	*55.56*	6	*33.33*	*54.55*	4	*22.22*	*57.15*
RoI	8	*44.44*	5	*27.78*	*45.45*	3	*16.67*	*42.86*
Total	18	*100*	11	*61.11*	*100*	7	*38.89*	*100*

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

A total of 259 questionnaires were completed and returned for analysis (Northern Ireland: n = 65, 25.3%; Republic of Ireland, n = 192, 74.7% [2 missing]). The majority of respondents (89.96%; n = 233) were studying to become primary school teachers (80.69%, n = 188 of these were from the Republic of Ireland). Only 10.81% (n = 28) were preparing to teach at post-primary level (78.57%, n = 22 of these were from Northern Ireland).

Questionnaire content was presented in a similar sequential style as with the focus groups (i.e., SEN, bully/victim problems, disabiist-bullying: see Appendix B). Response option formats included multiple choice, forced choice, and Likert scales. Examples of questions include: 'I feel confident in my ability

to teach children with SEN', 'I know the relevant legislation regarding bullying in schools', and 'I feel confident in my ability to implement preventative strategies to tackle disablist bullying in schools'.

Table 2: Questionnaire Participants

	N	%	Primary (P)				Post-Primary (PP)			
			n	*% tot*	*% P*	*% Return*	*n*	*% tot*	*% PP*	*% Return*
NI	65	*25.30*	43	*17.37*	*19.31*		22	*8.49*	*78.60*	
RoI	192	*74.13*	186	*80.69*	*72.59*	*86.98*	6	*2.31*	*21.40*	*5.88*
Total	257	*100*	229	*89.96*	*100*		28	*10.81*	*100*	

* 2 respondents did not indicate whether they were studying in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland

CASE STUDY #3

"As a student teacher, on my first teaching placement, I was acutely aware of the importance of involving myself in all aspects of school life, and so decided to use my free Thursday afternoons working as a classroom assistant within the school's Learning Support Centre. Although the classrooms of this Learning Support Centre were located alongside the mainstream school subject areas of Science and Maths, there was a clear barrier between the mainstream pupils and those pupils with Special Educational Needs, who resided in the area nicknamed as "The Unit."

Working in the LSC allowed me to gain a valuable insight into the teaching and learning of pupils with Special Educational Needs, but more than this is, it highlighted the social impact of the separation of these pupils from those in the mainstream classes. By clearly distinguishing between mainstream and SEN pupils, social interaction was minimal at break and lunch times, and in most cases this interaction was of a very negative nature. The teachers within the LSC, although consummate professionals in their working within the classroom with pupils of SEN, almost seemed to acknowledge that bullying was a day-to-day issue for their pupils, when not inside the classroom. This resulted in teachers leaving their classrooms open at break and lunch time for their pupils to reside in, rather than frequenting the playground or cloakrooms alongside their peers.

Undoubtedly this situation was far from ideal. All pupils, regardless of learning need and support, should be able to interact and socialise with peers, without the fear of bullying of any type. The pupils I worked alongside within the LSC all suffered from low self-esteem, and many lacked the social skills of their mainstream peers. Cohesion between the two groups could only enhance these life-skills and attitudes, preparing pupils for the greater goal of life after school, or more importantly in this case, life outside "The Unit" classroom. " (post-primary student)

RESULTS

FOCUS GROUPS

From a thematic analysis perspective, focus group data were analysed using Template Analysis (TA: see Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 1998). Thus, a coding template which summarised the a priori themes identified as important to the research was developed (the TA approach allows for these codes to be modified or dispensed with if they do not prove to be useful or appropriate to the data). In a hierarchical manner, the template allowed for the meaningful organisation of broad themes (e.g. 'SEN', 'Disablist Bullying'), encompassing successively narrower, more specific ones (e.g. 'Participants' Experiences', 'Recommendations for ITE').

THEME 1: SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

The participants all reported the existence of some SEN content in their ITE courses, although the positioning and extent of this content varied quite considerably between institutions. For some students there was limited compulsory SEN content with only an oversubscribed optional module in the final year (e.g. primary B.Ed. students at SUC) while for others there were lectures each week through first, second and third year (FCE). Many of the students spoke of the value of practical strategies gained in relation to working with children with SEN in the classroom, while those students who had followed a more theoretical course were less favourable in their comments:

> "You know, if we think maybe about our curriculum classes, for numeracy or literacy. They're SO hands on, and very practical. Em, if they'd taken the area of special educational needs, and you know, and implemented classes like that then we would have found it a lot more helpful than in Education [Studies], you know, everything is very hard to pin down and it's quite airy fairy a lot of the time. But if it was almost taken as a curricular subject or the way we are taught that, it would be a lot more helpful" (SUC, primary).

The primary students attending FCE, MIE, and CICE all had short (two to three week) placements in Special Schools. Post-primary students at SUC had spent two days in Special Schools, while primary students at SUC and post-primary students at TCD had not spent any time in Special Schools. For those who had experienced the Special School environment, the feedback was generally very positive,

with students noting the value of learning 'hands-on' teaching strategies, seeing the work of the different therapists, and also gaining a deeper, and at times very practical, understanding of the nature of disability:

> "... one day ... they put us on into the wheelchairs and we went round the school [...] they said even pupils kind of perceive or teachers kind of feel that people in wheelchairs should be treated like everybody else, but like they said try you to get to this classroom and there's like a ramp and I struggled getting up it, and like I'm quite a big guy like but it was quite tough so it was really good actually seeing that from the pupils' perspective." (SUC, post-primary).

There was a general feeling expressed by many of the participants that the most successful approach to teaching about SEN was to have a balance between the theory (understanding the nature of a condition) and learning about the practice (classroom strategies). One student claimed that "the most beneficial part of the special needs was actually learning the theory and then going out and seeing it" (SUC, post-primary), while another was more forthright in demanding more practical responses:

> "... any sort of comfort zone that I'd be in teaching kids with disabilities, eh, would come born from my purely practical experience that I got on my teaching placement, and not necessarily anything I learnt in College, to be honest. And I think what College did was direct you, to sort of highlight what to be looking for rather than has it gone to the next step. I think [...] if you want to send out 120 teachers confident you need to take them to the next level and I think you're on level one and you need to go to level two, that's the way I would see it." (TCD, post-primary).

This preference for practical expertise is reflected in the responses to the subsequent questions regarding students' knowledge of relevant SEN legislation in the respective jurisdictions. The students from both jurisdictions had often heard of the main pieces of legislation but were generally unable to say anything further, as the following responses illustrate:

[Interviewer "What is the EPSEN Act?"]

- "I don't know that one." (TCD, primary);
- "Can't remember." (TCD, primary);
- "Ah, I know the name of it." (TCD, primary).

As one post-primary student commented, the demands of practical teaching were such that they showed little interest in legislation per se, only in how it impacted on the daily experience in the classroom:

> "We'd a very limited period of time and we were coming at, it we were wanting more practical advice. We were, we were people sitting in a classroom with 30 kids and in one case I had nine kids with a disability in my class and nobody was telling me what to do with them. So we were very much coming into the elective with the more practical and not really interested in legislation" (TCD, post-primary)

Participants were also asked to talk about their experiences in the classroom working with children with SEN. The students had worked with pupils with a very wide range of SEN, including autism, hearing and visual impairment, Down's Syndrome and Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. There was, for many, a need to learn quickly on the job, often under the guidance of the more experienced classroom teacher or Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) / Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). Some students clearly felt ill-prepared to meet the needs of pupils with SEN:

> "I feel like we're prepared and given a lot of theory behind it, but as far as putting that into practice, I wouldn't feel that I was sufficiently able to do it" (SUC, primary).

Others recognised the need to supplement the initial "foundation" with "on-the-job experience" (SUC, post-primary). Some students also made the point that the learning gained on placement depended very much on the nature of the placement school, its pupils and perhaps crucially on the level of expertise of its staff:

> "I mean I was very lucky in that the school I went to has a huge number of children with special educational needs ... and I talked to [course tutor] about it when I was doing my essay, and I said what school it was and he said that 'oh that's the school that has best practice in Ireland'. So I was very lucky that I learned a huge amount from the school, but I would say that a lot of people learned nothing from their school, like when I was describing in the classroom what we did in the school, other people were amazed because they didn't get near that." (TCD, post-primary)

When asked to make recommendations for the improvement of the SEN section of their ITE courses, participants gave a number of responses, such as spending longer in mainstream schools (with a SEN focus), more time in Special Schools, more SEN-related module input throughout the course including more practical strategies and advice from practising teachers, more support during placement and better resources such as books or websites. As one student concluded, there is a certain irony in student teachers being taught about a new, learner-centred (Northern Ireland) curriculum by means of a theoretical approach:

> "... the new curriculum is all more hands on coz that's the way you learn, but yet a lot of what we're doing, is all theory and you don't get the practice." (SUC, primary).

THEME 2: BULLYING

Participants were then asked about the anti-bullying content of their ITE courses and were asked to give their opinion of the training they had received. Here, just as with SEN, there was considerable variation between institutions.

Not all of the students from SUC had elected to take the final year 'Pastoral Care' option (where a sizeable part of the module focuses on bullying) but those who had taken the module appeared to appreciate its usefulness in dealing with a range of forms of bullying, from cyberbullying to relational bullying among girls. As one post-primary student commented "I think we did really cover everything ..." (SUC, post-primary). The main exposure to anti-bullying work among the participants from the Republic of Ireland (primary and post-primary) was at TCD, rather than the Associated Colleges of Education (FCE, MIE, CICE). Here the students were universally positive about the level of detail which the course tutor had provided on the topic during Psychology lectures.

In both jurisdictions, the students noted the value of learning in more detail about previously unconsidered aspects of bullying: one SUC student (primary) commented that the course had made her realise that as well as supporting the victim, "the actual bully could need support and it's definitely made me think more, about, you know, the bully" (SUC, primary) whereas one student (primary) from the Republic of Ireland was struck by the realisation "that some children can kind of draw it [the bullying] on themselves" (TCD, primary). Conversely, one of the students who had not chosen to take the Pastoral Care option at SUC noted that he had never touched on the causes or impact of bullying and admitted that his reaction to a bullying incident would be to deal with it purely instinctively:

> "You deal with it naturally. And that has the potential to be an ineffective reaction. I mean I don't know, or, I don't know why or what causes bullying; I don't know what the outcomes for people that are bullied are. I mean formally I've never, I've never even touched on it ..." (SUC, primary).

As with the discussion of SEN, there was a feeling among many of the students that *practical* advice on preventing and dealing with bullying were what they most wanted. For the one-year post-primary students at TCD, this emphasis was perhaps most keenly felt. One student remarked that "I think we don't really have time to reflect on the philosophical aspects of our jobs. We're just trying to keep our heads above water" (TCD, post-primary). Another student, however, saw the value of the more theoretical approach, but acknowledged that the true value of this may not be immediately evident:

> "I think that ah in about four or five years time when you've mastered the practical skills, it's then you sort of then you root down to where you philosophically stand as a teacher, what you really want for your pupils. I think we don't have time for that

> when you're a student teacher. I think that's a luxury but I think that it's a necessary luxury to learn about in college and I think, personally, I think that education, education, sort of would be, em, ah, a poorer place to be without it." (TCD, post-primary).

Again, as with SEN, the students were broadly familiar with the legislation, with most realising the need for schools to have an anti-bullying policy, but exact details appeared rather 'sketchy'. As one student commented, "I can't remember the details of it now, as I say, what I did was for exam purposes" (TCD, primary). One student from Northern Ireland appeared very knowledgeable about school policies, but this was, as he explained, due to the fact that he had chosen to complete his final year dissertation on cyberbullying and as part of it had looked specifically at school policies.

In terms of their confidence in dealing with bullying in schools, several of the students mentioned the fact that their response would depend partly on the module input but also partly on their own life experiences, especially for those who themselves had experienced bullying as a victim. The notion that responses to bullying by student teachers could be instinctive ("it's built into you and it's almost maybe second nature without you thinking about it" SUC, primary) was voiced by one student who had not received any training in relation to bullying. Another went further and explained how bullying was different from SEN because everyone had some experience of it at some point in their past:

> "... we've all gone through school ourselves and at some level you've either been an onlooker or perhaps you've been bullied yourself and you have your own personal experience with that, so bullying, it's very different from special educational needs because you have almost personal experience with which you can relate." (SUC, post-primary).

For the majority who had received some input, in the event of a bullying incident, students reported that they would refer to school policies, access online resources, consult College notes on bullying, work with parents and address the issue through the curriculum.

Students' experiences of bullying on school placement also varied from little or no incidence (and the misuse of the term bullying by some primary pupils to refer to routine fall-outs) to more serious cases of sexual intimidation and cyberbullying.

When asked to make recommendations for their ITE courses in relation to anti-bullying work, the opinions varied widely. For those students from Northern Ireland who had not received any anti-bullying training, there was a feeling that the current optional content was insufficient to meet the needs of the classroom:

> "I think that the two areas (SEN and bullying) that we were looking at today need to be done in a lot more detail. Definitely!" (SUC, primary).

Those from Northern Ireland who had taken the final year Pastoral Care optional module appreciated the discussion of bullying scenarios and also the role play techniques employed to bring the theory to life. Students from TCD were very satisfied with the anti-bullying content they had received, with one student remarking that they had all the information they would need, and that only more time in classrooms would add to this but "they can't really send you out on a week's bullying experience"! (TCD, primary).

THEME 3: DISABLIST BULLYING

None of the students in any of the focus groups had received any input during their ITE in relation to disablist bullying per se, even though the majority of the students had considered (as separate subjects) both SEN and bullying.

However, when asked to recount any experiences they might have had while on teaching placement, several of the students (from both jurisdictions) were able to relate incidents of disablist bullying in primary and post-primary contexts.

In many cases, children with SEN were deliberately excluded by their mainstream peers. One student explained how a child with Down's Syndrome was frequently left out of activities and spent lunchtime walking around the playground with her Special Needs Assistant (SNA) (TCD, primary). Another male pupil with ADHD was not usually included in lunchtime games of football and when he was, "they wouldn't pass him the ball, because he seemed to, didn't know what to do when he got it" (TCD, primary). A further primary student reported that a child with autism was not picked as a partner to pick wildflowers one day because her peers felt that, due to her very poor coordination, they would not be able to pick as many wild flowers as the others (TCD, primary). One student explained that the relationship was more complex: the peers were happy to provide practical help for the child with SEN (pack her bag, note down her homework) but they did not want to be friends on equal terms ("they didn't want her that kind of way" TCD, primary).

None of the students reported any physical abuse carried out on pupils with SEN, but there was one reported case of verbal bullying. One student told the story of a (post-primary) girl injured in a firework accident, where the other girls in the class simply "didn't know how to deal with her" resulting in "snide comments" and being "picked on" by her peers, especially in the PE changing rooms (SUC, post-primary).

In some instances, the example set by the teacher themselves was highlighted as crucial. In one case a 'mature' student teacher told of her daughter (with ADD) who was "always set up as being different to everybody else" by her P1 teacher. The student reported that her daughter's experience at primary school was "miserable" because of the exclusive (rather than inclusive) attitude of the P1 teacher to her daughter, and that this influenced the behavioural pattern of her peer group for the remainder of her time at primary school. The student explained how "the girls in her class treated my daughter the way that teacher treated my daughter" and claimed that such a negative example by the teacher was simply "fuelling the bullying as much as the children doing the bullying in the classroom" (SUC, primary).

In other instances, students told of how the attitude of the teacher had a significant *positive* impact on the inclusion of a child with SEN. For example, one post-primary student reported a positive reaction when the PE teacher of a child injured in an accident brought in specialist equipment and spoke to the group of girls beforehand to help them understand what to expect. Similarly, a primary student reported that her own brother's experience (with ADHD) in a mainstream class improved significantly when the teacher stopped running class competitions for behaviour where no one ever wanted her brother in their group because of his outbursts, and where the teacher began to insist that on the football pitch you must pass to everyone before a pupil is allowed to score (TCD, primary). Furthermore, in the case of the girl with autism (see above) alienated as the class picked wild flowers, the student teacher began to ask the pupils to form groups of three rather than two, and regularly changed the groupings to encourage greater acceptance and less opportunity for bullying.

In some cases students reported that the perpetrator of the bullying in mainstream schools was themselves a child with SEN. In some cases this bullying could be targeted towards other children with SEN, in other cases towards children without any SEN. The students found such cases challenging to deal with, as one student teacher explained in relation to one P7 boy with spina bifida:

> "... he was very bright, ah, extremely good at maths and I guess he was the biggest boy in the whole class, he was very snide, with people, it wasn't [usually] physical bullying, but his intelligence made him so superior to the other people in the class that that you know, you know, he was able ... to really, really get at people. It was, it was almost strange to see somebody so young with the ability to really, really get at people ..." (SUC, primary).

The same student later recounted that the pupil with spina bifida did also sometimes engage in a form of physical bullying, and confessed that he found this particularly difficult to deal with, given the degree of disability:

> "I would take the most classes for P.E. and [he] would play up you know if we were playing football ah [he] would just, ah, kick somebody's leg, just trip them because they were running past him and somebody would fall, ah, how do I, how do I deal with that? To the other ones I'd give them a wee fundamental movement skills exercise to do, can't give it to [him], he's physically disabled. I found it very, very difficult to find any way of sort of reprimanding him, so yes, by necessity the bullying was almost tolerated." (SUC, primary).

In other cases, by contrast, the presence of children with SEN in a mainstream class was experienced as something overwhelmingly positive by the class. In such cases, the students recounted how the school (teaching staff and pupils) provided a welcoming and supportive environment; one in which the child was truly integrated into the life of the school; where the child was valued as an equal; and where, as a result, the other children in the class appeared to become more accepting of others' differences, even in other classes. As one primary student explained, "that was inclusion working in my eyes": when a child with a disability in another class walked by (with a "noticeable limp") the pupils in this class would walk straight on past without staring or passing comment. This led the student teacher to conclude that "it benefitted the whole class more than it benefitted the boy" (SUC, primary).

In another instance, a student recounted the experience of a girl with a hearing impairment whose mainstream peers learned some basic sign language and would alert her if the teacher had begun to explain something and she was looking the other way. In a further discussion one primary student suggested that the success of inclusion depends on the age at which the children are integrated:

> "I had senior infants and because, there was a boy with Down's Syndrome in class and because he had been in class since junior infants it was just completely fine with everyone, and you know, and they didn't even notice and they all played with him, and they, it was fine. But I found then that in the older classes when one of the children had just been introduced into the class it was more of a big deal for them; they; they you know responded ... I think and some of it is out of and I think it's terrible to say but out of fear. It I mean it is someone different ... and, then, they, just, you know completely blank the child in the class ... So I think, when ... I found that when they're integrated from the very start, like they were just part of the class at that age like that was senior infants they were all fine, and then I think as they get older there's a little bit more, you know tension involved ..." (TCD, primary).

Finally, several recommendations emerged from the focus groups for ITE courses in relation to disablist bullying: that there should be an attempt made to bring the hitherto separate subject areas of disability and bullying together to raise awareness of the issues; that such content should be

practical and supported by video / real case scenarios; that there needs to be room to debate the many challenges such as the degree to which the peers should be informed of a child's SEN; that student teachers should be given realistic expectations of how difficult it can be to deal with disablist bullying; and that all of the advice should be based on recent research into "what's been tried and tested" (TCD, primary).

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

KNOWLEDGE OF SEN LEGISLATION

Just over one-third of respondents 'agreed' (30.9%, n = 79) or 'agreed strongly' (3.9%, n = 10) that they knew the relevant legislation regarding SEN in schools. A further 38.3% (n = 98) reported that they were 'unsure'.

TRAINING IN SEN

The overwhelming majority of respondents felt that it is important for student teachers to be trained to meet the needs of pupils with SEN (98.8%, n = 255: 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'). However, whilst 45.5% (n = 118) of respondents felt that their Initial Teacher Education course(s) had prepared them to meet the needs of children with SEN, over half reported a lack of confidence in their ability to teach students with SEN (55.3%, n = 142: 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', or 'Unsure').

CONFIDENCE IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH SEN

Respondents were asked to rate their confidence in meeting the needs of students with different categories of SEN (i.e., cognitive and learning difficulties; social, emotional and behavioural difficulties; communication and interaction difficulties; sensory difficulties; physical difficulties; medical conditions / syndromes).

COGNITIVE AND LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

In terms of cognitive and learning difficulties, it was not surprising that respondents did not feel confident in their ability to meet the needs of students with either profound and multiple learning difficulties (74.1%, n = 191 'not confident' and 16.3%, n = 42 'unsure') or severe learning difficulties (62.5%, n = 160 'not confident' and 27.0%, n = 69 'unsure'). In contrast, respondents did report greater confidence in relation to students with moderate learning difficulties (41.5%, n = 107 'confident' [16.3%, n = 42 were 'unsure']). Greater levels of confidence were evident in relation to mild learning difficulties (65.3%, n = 169 'confident' [27.8%, n = 72 were 'unsure']).

Interestingly, whilst respondents reported high levels of confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students with dyslexia (53.7%, n = 139 'confident' [32.4%, n = 84 were 'unsure']), the converse was found in relation to dyscalculia (53.8%, n = 137 'not confident' [27.8%, n = 71 were 'unsure']). Findings in relation to dyspraxia were mixed, with 32.9% (n = 85) feeling 'confident', 32.2% (n = 83) not feeling confident, and 34.9% (n = 90) 'unsure.

SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DIFFICULTIES

Whilst over half of all respondents reported confidence in meeting the needs of students with ADHD (55.8%, n = 284 [28.5%, n = 73 were 'unsure']), just under half reported confidence in relation to students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (46.1%, n = 271 [37.9%, n = 97 were 'unsure']).

COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION DIFFICULTIES

Similar levels of confidence were reported in relation to how respondents felt they could meet the needs of students with speech and language difficulties, Autism, and Asperger Syndrome, with just under half of respondents reporting confidence in these areas: 41.7%, n = 108; 46.0%, n = 119; 45.2%, n = 117 respectively. These levels of confidence were also mirrored by the fact that over one-third of respondents felt 'unsure' about their ability in these areas: 40.2%, n = 104; 32.0%, n = 83; 35.9%, n = 91 respectively.

SENSORY DIFFICULTIES

In relation to meeting the demands of students with sensory difficulties, it was not surprising to find that respondents felt less than confident in their ability. For example, whilst 81.9% (n = 212) reported a lack of confidence in relation to students who are blind, over half felt less than confident in relation to students who are partially sighted (58.7%, n = 152 [27.8%, n = 72 'unsure']), have severe / profound hearing loss (58.3%, n = 151 [25.9%, n = 67 'unsure']), or mild / moderate hearing loss (40.9%, n = 106 [32.4%, n = 84 'unsure']). Two-thirds reported a lack of confidence in their ability to help students with multiple sensory difficulties (66.8%, n = 173 [25.1%, n = 65 'unsure']).

PHYSICAL DIFFICULTIES

Similarly to sensory difficulties, over half of all respondents reported a lack of confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students with physical difficulties: muscular dystrophy (64.3%, n = 166 [23.6%, n = 61 'unsure']), spina bifida and / or hydrocephalus (61.2%, n = 158 [24.8%, n = 64 'unsure']), significant accidental injury (56.2%, n = 145 [29.5%, n = 76 'unsure']), and cerebral palsy (51.7%, n = 134 [26.6%, n = 69 'unsure']).

MEDICAL CONDITIONS / SYNDROMES

When asked about their confidence in relation to meeting the needs of students with medical conditions / syndromes, over two-thirds of respondents reported confidence in relation to asthma (79.1%, n = 205) and diabetes (67.2%, n = 174). Also, whilst half of respondents reported that they felt confident in their ability to meet the needs of students with Down's Syndrome (49.6%, n = 128 [24.8%, n = 64 'unsure']), half reported a lack of confidence in relation to anaphylaxis (51.4%, n = 131 [22.0%, n = 56 'unsure']). Equal numbers of respondents were either 'confident' (36.5%, n = 94) or 'not confident' (36.0%, n = 93) in relation to students with epilepsy, and 42.1% (n = 109) were not confident about their ability in relation to meeting the needs of students with mental health issues (28.6%, n = 74 were 'unsure').

RESPONDING TO SEN IN THE CLASSROOM

When asked what they would do if they had a student with SEN in their class, it was extremely positive to find that none of the respondents would 'ignore them', with only one respondent saying that they would leave it up to a SENCO / SNA to deal with. The following responses received the highest ratings among the respondents: 'differentiate my teaching according to their needs' (97.7%, n

= 253), 'talk to the child's previous teacher' (91.9%, n = 238), 'ask for advice from another teacher' (93.4%, n = 242), 'carry out some personal research, such as reading about the condition' (88.4%, n = 229), and 'contact the child's parents to learn more about the child and their needs' (88.4%, n = 229). The next highest response rates were found for: 'refer to their Individual Learning Plan (IEP)' (88.0%, n = 228), 'let the parents know what provisions I make for the child' (81.9%, n = 212), 'refer to my notes from college on that particular SEN' (81.1%, n = 210), 'contact an expert – e.g., Educational Psychologist, local / national organization' (76.1%, n = 197), 'speak to the child [where appropriate] and ask them about their needs' (74.5%, n = 193), and 'make sure that all pupils [both with SEN and without] received an equal amount of attention' (74.5%, n = 193).

PLANNING FOR SEN PROVISION IN ITE

Large number of respondents suggested that SEN provision in ITE programmes could be enhanced by, for example, having 'more practical strategies for the classroom' (82.6%, n = 213), 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (76.0%, n = 196), and 'more guidance on completing Individual Education Plans for children with SEN' (72.5%, n = 187). Over half of the respondents suggested: 'more guidance about how to work effectively with SEN classroom assistants' (66.3%, n = 171), 'greater focus on working with children with SEN in mainstream school placements' (60.9%, n = 157), and 'longer placements in special schools' (53.1%, n = 137). Less than half saw any validity in having 'more input on SEN throughout all years of ITE' (48.1%, n = 124), 'more guidance on the early identification of different SEN' (47.3%, n = 122), 'case studies to consider in college' (44.6%, n = 115), 'more information about the roles of SENCOs /SNAs' (44.2%, n = 114), or 'more background information about the nature of different SEN' (40.3%, n = 104). Interestingly, less than one-third of the respondents felt that it would be beneficial to have more input regarding 'relevant legislation' (32.2%, n = 83) or 'child protection issues in a special education setting' (27.1%, n = 70).

MANAGEMENT OF BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

The view that the existence of bully/victim problems in schools is an important issue was endorsed by nearly all respondents (98%, n = 253). Similarly, the vast majority of respondents agreed that dealing with such incidents is part of the responsibility of the classroom teacher (94.2%, n = 244). However, contradictory to the legislation in both jurisdictions, only 47.3% (n = 121) respondents felt that it was a legal obligation to implement a school-wide anti-bullying programme, and 65.2% (n = 167) felt that there was similar requirement to be proactive in combating bully/victim problems within classes / schools. Whilst 95.3% (n = 244) agreed that it was a legal obligation to have an anti-bullying policy,

only 26.8% (n = 69) of respondents reported that they knew the relevant legislation regarding the management of bully/victim problems in schools (37.4%, n = 96 were 'unsure'). In terms of having to deal with bully/victim incidents, whilst teachers and schools receive both direct and indirect support and guidance from their respective Departments of Education (e.g., enhanced training), only 23.4% (n = 60) of respondents felt that there was a legal obligation for schools to have an anti-bullying coordinator.

COUNTERING BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.8%, n = 167) reported that they felt confident in their ability to deal with such incidents should they arise in school (27.5%, n = 71 were 'unsure'). Whilst 29.8% (n = 72) did not have to deal with any incidents of bullying in the course of their teaching placements to date, over two-thirds (68.6%, n = 166) had to deal with seven or less incidents. Four respondents (1.6%) reported that they had to deal with between 8 and 12 incidents.

When asked about how would respond to a report of bullying behaviour when qualified, over three-quarters of respondents said that they would 'refer to the school's anti-bullying policy' (80.7%, n = 209), 'record the incident' (80.3%, n = 208), or 'monitor the situation' (77.6%, n = 201). Over half of respondents reported that they would 'speak to all parties involved (victim and bullies)' (69.5%, n = 180), 'report the problem to more senior staff (e.g. Year Head/Head of Pastoral Care)' (66.8%, n = 173), or 'raise the issue of bullying with the whole class/school' (51.7%, n = 134). Fewer respondents reported that they would 'contact the parents of all parties involved' (42.1%, n = 109), 'seek to give an appropriate sanction to the bully/bullies' (26.3%, n = 68), or 'pursue a non-punitive approach' (12.4%, n = 32).

TRAINING AND PLANNING FOR COUNTERING BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS

Unanimously, *all* respondents 'agreed' (22.8%, n = 59) or 'strongly agreed' (77.2%, n = 200) that it is important for teachers to be trained to deal with bully/victim problems. Large number of respondents suggested that provision for countering bully/victim problems in ITE programmes could be enhanced by, for example, having 'more practical strategies for responding to incidents of bullying' (81.7%, n = 210), and 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (70.4%, n = 181). Whilst 52.9% (n = 136) felt that 'more information about school bullying-prevention strategies' would be useful, 44.7% (n = 115) felt that 'case studies to consider in College' could be useful. Less than one-third of respondents felt that 'greater focus on bullying during school placement' (29.2%, n = 75), 'more detail

regarding the relevant legislation' (27.6%, n = 71), or 'more background information about different types of bullying' (26.1%, n = 67) would be useful additions to ITE.

DISABLIST BULLYING

Nearly one-third of respondents (30.8%, n = 79) reported that they did not feel confident in dealing with an incident of disablist bullying (45.5%, n = 117 were 'unsure'). When asked what would guide their response if an incident of disablist bullying occurred, whilst 54.1% (n = 138) reported that they would revert to 'school policy', 43.5% (n = 111) said that they would seek 'advice from a more experienced teacher(s). Interestingly, just over one-third (35.3%, n = 90) reported that they would use 'natural instinct'. More worryingly, only 12.2% (n = 31) reported that they would rely on 'knowledge gained from ITE'.

Respondents were asked to offer some details about whether they thought that proactive or reactive strategies were more effective in ensuring that students with SEN were not bullied in schools. In terms of proactive strategies (i.e., raising the issue in advance in order to try to prevent an incident occurring), examples of responses included:

> "Whole school ethos compounded in classroom discussion through awareness teaching" (SUC, primary).
>
> "Children are likely to bully disabled children because they don't understand their condition. An awareness might help reduce the stigma / taboo of a disability." (SUC, post-primary).
>
> "Peer mentoring, work with bystanders – whole school approach." (SUC, post-primary).
>
> "Using class activities such as videos or case studies to teach pupils about sen bullying. Use anti-bullying strategies and get students to help draw up a anti-bullying programme that is to be used throughout the school." (SUC, post-primary).
>
> "Creating a learning environment where bullying is shown not to be tolerated, and difference is accepted." (SUC, primary).
>
> "Inclusive environment where there is awareness, acceptance, sensitivity and equality – especially in the playground." (SUC, primary).
>
> "Celebrating difference with in the classroom may remove the elephant in the room so to speak + go some way to eliminate misconceptions" (SUC, primary).

> "Helping other pupils understand the condition may help. ie explaining that they are not 'weird' etc. and that there are reasons why they act that way and how they can react to help the pupil fit in." (SUC, post-primary).

> "In SPHE discussing 'the rights & needs of all students'. Make it a whole class activity & explore ways of preventing bullying e.g. through role-play." (TCD. primary).

> "Bullying should be addressed as a whole – not specifically aimed at SEN pupils." (SUC, post-primary).

In terms of reactive strategies (i.e., in response to an incident), examples of responses include:

> "Incidents cannot be ignored, must be made aware of in order to stop the problem happening." (SUC, primary).

> "I would like to say option a [proactive]. However I feel that children will respond more when it is more real to them and they have a situation to think about." (SUC, primary).

> "Learning from punishment of others not to get involved again." (SUC, primary).

> "Bullying will always occur but I feel having the correct and effective response will stop the bullying from progressing and possibly prevent the bully targeting another." (SUC, primary).

The vast majority of respondents reported that they did not have to deal with any incidents of disablist bullying during their teaching practice placements (87.7%, n = 214). Nineteen respondents (7.8%) had to deal with 1 incident, 9 (3.7%) had to deal with 2 incidents, and 2 (0.8%) had to deal with 3 incidents. If they had experienced an example of disablist bullying, respondents were asked to describe what they experienced and what their feelings were about the incident(s). Examples of responses included:

> "Often both the bully and victim had a SEN and their needs and outlooks caused them to clash and / or point to the other as different. It was a difficult experience to engage both parties and achieve dialogue." (TCD, primary).

> "A child with cerebral palsy was being mocked for not being able to play football. My feelings towards this incident were shock and confusion. (TCD, primary).

"The children in the class essentially bullied the child who had ADHD and other "underlying problems". He was blamed for things he did not do + was ganged up on by the class. It was difficult to know who was telling the truth as the child constantly told lies." (TCD, primary).

"Bullying is bullying regardless of "victim"." (TCD, primary).

"I have never encountered it. The children were very helpful and accepting of those with special needs!" (TCD, primary).

TRAINING AND PLANNING FOR COUNTERING DISABLIST BULLYING

In terms of striving to develop student teachers' knowledge of disablist bullying, over three-quarters of respondents (76.9%, n = 193) reported that ITE programmes should include 'more practical strategies for dealing with incidents of disablist bullying'. Over one-third felt that it would be useful to get 'advice from practising classroom teachers' (49.8%, n = 125), have 'more background information about disablist bullying' (45.4%, n = 114), have 'case studies to consider in College (39.0%, n = 98), or have 'a dedicated website on disablist bullying for students/teachers' (36.7%, n = 92). Fewer felt that it would be useful to have 'more detail regarding the relevant legislation' (27.1%, n = 68), 'CPD course next year' (24.3%, n = 61), 'greater focus on disablist bullying during school placement' (21.1%, n = 53), or 'links to external agencies' (18.7%, n = 47).

CASE STUDY #4

"On recent teaching experience I was made aware of a young boy in Primary 2 who was autistic. The young boy had a full time assistant with him and she even sat, almost cradling him in assembly and they always had to leave assembly a few minutes earlier. As he wasn't in my class I didn't get to know him very well. I think noise was a big problem for him as even during the singing in assembly he covered his ears. I often saw him outside my classroom window running around the playground with his assistant playing tig.

Just after Easter of last year 2010, a special assembly was held by the SELB Autism Advisory and Intervention Service to demonstrate to the children that sometimes children can be a bit 'different' to us and how we can help them in the classroom and in the playground etc.

The assembly was presented through a story called 'Looking after Louis' and acted out using 4 puppets, Sam, Amy, Louis and Sophie.

The story presents different times during the school day when Louis does things that are 'different' or 'strange' to the other children, such as running through a football game with his arms swinging without notice, or not talking to anyone in the class, or cross reactions from the children as Louis is allowed to do things they would never be allowed to do, such as playing outside during class time.

The assembly became interactive during a question and answer time with the reader of the story posing questions to the children about what they had just seen.

After the assembly all the classes went back to their individual classrooms with each class getting a teacher resource pack containing worksheets for the children. My class never did any of these worksheets during the time I was there but we did have a class discussion about the assembly. The teacher asked questions such as 'who do we know in this school who is like Louis' (and the children all said the boy in p2), and 'how can we be better friends to him'. The children came up with some very good ideas, such as not laughing, asking him to play with us in the playground, being kind.

I'm unaware as to whether or not the SELB service were invited by the school or whether they just came uninvited." (primary student)

DISCUSSION

The aims of the current research were threefold: first, to explore the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of student teachers in relation to SEN; second, to explore their knowledge attitudes, and perceptions in relation to bully/victim problems; and third, to explore their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of 'disablist bullying'.

(I) THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN RELATION TO SEN

Some initial encouragement must be taken from the finding that almost all of the questionnaire respondents (98.8%, n = 255) felt that it was important for student teachers to be trained to meet the needs of pupils with SEN. However, in relation to their knowledge of SEN, it emerged from both the questionnaire and the focus groups that only a minority of respondents (45.5%, n = 118) felt that their ITE prepared them adequately to teach children with SEN in their classrooms and a similar minority (44.7%, n = 115) felt confident in working with children with SEN. In particular the questionnaire items which focused on respondents' level of confidence in relation to specific categories of SEN revealed a very wide range with few students showing confidence beyond the most common conditions. For instance, while four out of five students were confident in dealing with cases of asthma and two thirds of students were confident in dealing with diabetes, less than one in ten students were confident in working with children with Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties and only one in five were confident in working with pupils who were blind. Given the rise in the number of children with SEN now being educated in mainstream schools as part of the 'inclusion agenda' first championed by the Warnock Report (DES, 1978) and subsequent legislation in both jurisdictions (EPSEN, 2004; SENDO, 2005) this suggests that, to date, ITE has failed in its aim to prepare student teachers adequately for the current challenges of the classroom.

It is of some encouragement that, when asked in the questionnaire about how they would deal with a child with SEN in the classroom, almost all of the respondents (97.7%, n = 253) would differentiate their teaching to meet the child's needs. The other strategies most highly rated by the respondents (speaking to the class teacher or another teacher, carrying out some personal research on the SEN or speaking to the child's parents) also indicate that student teachers know how to access further information and strategies, even if their own knowledge, confidence and skills are limited beyond the most common SEN.

However it is clear that there is a disparity between respondents' very positive perception of the value of SEN in ITE and their assessment of the current provision and resulting lack of confidence as they enter the profession.

When asked to make recommendations for ITE courses, the respondents showed little interest in more legislation, 'theory' or the background to different SEN, and instead wanted practical advice and practical strategies, preferably from those with direct classroom experience. As one student explained "We were people sitting in a classroom with thirty kids and in one case I had nine kids with a disability in my class and nobody was telling me what to do with them" (TCD, post-primary). Although some of the participants in the focus groups could see the value of more philosophical discussions about disability and inclusion, such a sentiment was rare. Most showed little factual knowledge of the legislation and expressed little desire to learn more about the particular nature of any SEN, preferring instead to hear from teachers what actually 'works' in the classroom. This again has implications for those who plan and deliver ITE courses in both jurisdictions.

Furthermore, although the early identification of children with SEN is central to developing policy in both jurisdictions (e.g. DENI, 2009) it was suggested by less than half of the respondents (47.3%, n = 122) as an area which would enhance ITE. It is also important to note that more students (60.9%, n = 157) wanted a greater focus on SEN in mainstream placements than wanted longer placements in special schools (53.1%, n = 137). Perhaps this too is a reflection on the growing inclusion of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools, who in the past would have been educated predominantly in special schools.

(II) THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN RELATION TO BULLY/VICTIM PROBLEMS.

At one level, it was heartening to see that the modern teacher accepts the very real existence of bully/victim problems in schools and the important role that teachers play in countering such insidious behaviours and attitudes. However, there was no evidence of any detailed knowledge or understanding of either the legislation or the policy in this area. Involvement in bully/victim problems, either directly (i.e., as a bully, a victim, or as a bully/victim) or indirectly (i.e., as a bystander) is a reality of school life for the vast majority of children and young people. As student teachers, it is unfortunate that over two-thirds (68.6%, n = 166) of the respondents in the survey indicated that they had to deal with bullying incidents whilst on teaching practice. Like many issues, the key to countering bully/victim problems is having the requisite knowledge of the phenomenon (e.g., nature, types, sex differences, effects) and an appreciation of how to apply this knowledge in real settings, through prevention and intervention programmes. In terms of receiving such tutelage,

there was clear appreciation, regardless of participants' 'home' College, for the curriculum input they had received. However, whilst input was more 'direct' for TCD students, being provided by internationally acclaimed researchers, participants from SUC received tutelage in the area only if they selected an optional module (Pastoral Care) that explored bully/victim problems as part of its content. As noted by one SUC participant who did not select the elective module:

> "You deal with it naturally. And that has the potential to be an ineffective reaction. I mean I don't know, or, I don't know why or what causes bullying; I don't know what the outcomes for people that are bullied are. I mean formally I've never, I've never even touched on it ..." (SUC, primary)

Heartening also was the finding that, to respond to incidents of bully/victim problems, many of the participants in the study would actively seek help and support, whether in the form of 'policies' or 'people'.

Noteworthy was the finding that *all* respondents to the survey felt that teachers should be trained to deal with such problems. Consistent with the results regarding SEN, participants voiced their opinion that ITE should contain more practical advice and practical strategies for countering bully/victim problems, preferably from those with direct classroom experience.

As highlighted in the focus groups, student teachers, especially Higher Diploma students, do not really have time to reflect on the philosophical aspects of their jobs – "… We're just trying to keep our heads above water" (TCD, post-primary). In the absence of any direct and meaningful input at the curriculum / module level in ITE across the jurisdictions, the continual up-skilling of teachers' knowledge and practice in this area through Continual Professional Development (CPD) could be a viable alternative. Indeed, considering that recent graduates will initially be investing much energy honing their teaching methodologies and differentiation strategies in the classroom, short and focused CPD courses, delivered either face-to-face, by distance, or via blended strategies could build upon the good foundations laid in ITE (e.g., introductory psychology and sociology) and the newly acquired practical experience from the 'chalk face'. In terms of 'state dependent learning' the potency of such education and training could be enhanced through the matching of syllabus content with current classroom practice, where the content of the CPD may be more salient. As noted by one TCD student, they had received all the information they would need, and only more time in classrooms would add to this but "they can't really send you out on a week's bullying experience"! (TCD, primary). In terms of viability, this suggestion regarding the importance of CPD provision is supported by The Teaching Council's (2010) 'Draft policy on the continuum of teacher education'. Specifically, the draft policy advocates the enrichment of teachers' professional knowledge, understanding, and capabilities throughout their careers. Indeed, the draft policy asserts that CPD is both 'a right and a responsibility' and that, following the adoption of a coherent national framework

for CPD, renewal of registration with The Teaching Council will be subject to the receipt of satisfactory evidence in relation to engagement in CPD. In identifying priority areas for CPD, the draft policy includes 'inclusion' as one of the key national priorities. Thus, the argument has been won, at least on paper, that disablist bullying (and its constituent parts: SEN and bully/victim problems) requires ongoing attention in the continuum of teacher education.

(III) THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT TEACHERS IN RELATION TO DISABLIST BULLYING.

Outside of the considerable, and necessary, attention paid to the school curriculum, teaching methodologies, and differentiation strategies, the topics of SEN and bullying are, arguably, those that most exercise the minds of teachers. As confirmed in the above sections, pedagogical input regarding these issues in ITE provision is sporadic, with students receiving a smorgasbord of course content that is not 'core', which is wholly dependent upon the local expertise or interest of lecturers in their chosen College, or their personal choice when choosing 'elective' modules for further study.

Of significant interest to the current research project is the finding that whilst students did have the opportunity to gain some level of knowledge and understanding of SEN and / or bullying, none had received any input during their ITE regarding disablist bullying (i.e., the interaction of the two areas). Despite this, there were examples of how a positive school ethos, coupled with a successful approach to 'inclusion', yielded positive interactions between pupils with SEN and their counterparts without SEN. However, several of the students were able to relate incidents of disablist bullying that they had experienced whilst on teaching practice. Whilst it could be argued that some of these incidents may have occurred regardless of whether the child had a SEN or not, it is probable that the vast majority of incidents were enacted because of, or specifically targeted at, the SEN (e.g., "Often both the bully and victim had a SEN and their needs and outlooks caused them to clash and / or point to the other as different. It was a difficult experience to engage both parties and achieve dialogue." and "A child with cerebral palsy was being mocked for not being able to play football. My feelings towards this incident were shock and confusion."

As with SEN and bully/victim problems more generally, the question arises here again as to the preparation (or not) of students for teaching practice and the 'non-teaching' related events that occur in classrooms and the wider school environs. Whilst nearly one-third (30.8%, n = 79) of respondents reported that they did not feel confident in dealing with incidents of disablist bullying, just 12.2% (n = 31) said that they would rely on what they had learnt in the ITE if confronted by disablist bullying. Worryingly, just over one-third (35.3%, n = 90) reported that they would revert to 'natural instinct'.

The 'inclusion' argument has been won, at least in principle. In practice, however, it is evident that more 'inclusion' is needed, not only in terms of course content, whether at ITE or CPD level, but also in the schools and daily practice of teachers. As the old adage goes, 'If you don't know it, you can't teach it!' Whilst examples of good practice were highlighted, the salience of this quote was highlighted by one respondent who identified the critical role that teachers play in the transmission of prejudicial attitudes. As with any form of prejudice, the very real potential exists for the prejudicial thought to be translated into discriminatory behaviour. Thus, in the absence of any direct input at a programme level of knowledge about disablist bullying, we should not be surprised to learn that teachers will act upon their long-held, and oft wrong, assumptions about SEN and disability. Such an approach will continue to 'disable' rather than 'enable', students, with all of the very real potential for disablist bullying to occur.

Perhaps the most challenging example of disablist bullying that a teacher may have to counter is where the perpetrator, and possibly the victim too, has a SEN. Exemplified in the research was an example of a student with spina bifida who was viewed as being a bully, one that relied upon their superior intellect coupled with indirect bullying techniques (e.g. snide comments). This confirms what we know from previous research about the role of social cognition in bullies - bullies not only rely upon direct physical strategies, they may be 'thinkers' rather than the stereotype of being a 'thug'.

Yet again, in terms of planning for future ITE provision, the respondents asserted that ITE should contain more practical advice and practical strategies for countering disablist bullying, and again preferably from those with direct classroom experience. As noted above, there is a valid argument as to whether such input should be at the ITE or CPD stage of the teacher's career development.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to establish student teachers' knowledge and confidence in dealing with disablist bullying and has discovered that to date none of the student teachers in either jurisdiction has received any formal guidance in this important area as part of their ITE courses. Hitherto there has perhaps been an assumption that such bullying did not take place, that it was of little significant or that student teachers would themselves be able to draw the connections between the areas of study of SEN and bullying in order to allow them to deal effectively with such incidents of disablist bullying.

However, this study has highlighted the falseness of any such assumptions of students' knowledge and confidence in relation to disablist bullying for two main reasons:

First, as indicated above, the level of knowledge and confidence of student teachers in the associated areas of SEN and bully/victim problems, even as discrete domains, is variable at best with provision sporadic across institutions and inconsistent even between programmes in the same College. This study has revealed poor knowledge of legislation relating to bully/victim problems or disability; patchy knowledge of even relatively common SEN, especially among those who had not chosen elective modules in SEN or bullying; and an alarmingly low rate of confidence among students in dealing with children with SEN in their classrooms (less than half of participants felt confident). This is particularly disappointing given that the rise in the number of children with SEN in mainstream schools has been a feature of the education system at all levels and in both jurisdictions for some time: the relevant legislation promoting the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools in both jurisdictions (EPSEN Act, 2004; SENDO, 2005) has been in force for at least six years.

Second, this study has added further evidence to confirm the importance but also the complexity of the issues which are associated with disablist bullying. Through the interviews and questionnaires, participants spoke of their confusion in knowing how to respond to such incidents which may have involved the deliberate isolation or victimisation of a child with SEN, either by a child without a SEN or by another child with a SEN. This serves perhaps as a useful reminder that children with SEN can be the victim, the bystander, or the perpetrator in incidents of bullying. The level of complexity associated with some of the cases recounted in this study (see also the Case Studies between chapters) further strengthens the argument for the topic of disablist bullying to be included as part of the ITE and CPD courses in both jurisdictions, rather than leaving student teachers to make instinct-led, and potentially damaging, responses to often immensely challenging incidents.

There remains of course much further research which should be carried in this developing area. This study was focused on a relatively modest sample of 257 students in a small number of institutions in Belfast and Dublin. It would be of immense value and interest to carry out further research across other ITE institutions in Ireland, as well as a comparative study involving ITE institutions in England, Scotland and Wales where inclusion legislation has been in place for even longer.

In conclusion it is imperative that ITE in both jurisdictions acts to address the serious issues raised in this study, taking into account the recommendations made by the participants in relation to SEN, bully/victim problems and their nexus in disablist bullying. As we approach an era in Higher Education where students are paying ever higher fees, there is surely a need to provide value for money, offering comprehensive, evidence-based practical advice informed by classroom practice coupled with appropriate placements and grounded in the latest research findings.

This study has highlighted disablist bullying as one of the most challenging and complex issues which student teachers are facing in the modern classroom, an issue which ITE providers surely cannot afford to ignore any longer.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

T1) SEN

i1: Actual Course / Module and Content.

i2: Attitude / Opinion of the Course.

i3: Policy and Legislation.

i4: Confidence and in Practice.

i5: Participants' Experiences.

i6: Recommendations for ITE.

T2) Bullying

i1: Actual Course / Module and Content.

i2: Attitude / Opinion of the Course.

i3: Policy and Legislation.

i4: Confidence and in Practice.

i5: Participants' Experiences.

i6: Recommendations for ITE.

T3) Disablist-Bullying

i1: Understanding the cross section between SEN and bullying, and ITE.

i2: Actors, causes, and consequences.

i3: Confidence and in practice.

i4: Participants' experiences.

i5: Recommendations for ITE.

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire

For the purposes of this questionnaire we are using the following definitions:

Special Educational Needs (SEN): where a pupil has 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made'. Children have a learning difficulty if they have 'significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age and/or have a disability which hinders their everyday use of educational facilities' (NI Code of Practice, 1998, p.1).

Bullying: 'A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students' (Olweus, 1993, p.9)

Disablist Bullying: 'a specific form of bullying motivated by prejudice against disabled people. This can be related to a perceived or actual disability/additional need.' (Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum, 2009, p.1).

Instructions:

There are a number of different types of question, as outlined below:

i. Statements: with which you rate your agreement level, are the most frequent type of items in this survey.
   - These statements are attempting to assess your opinion and attitude, and there are no right or wrong answers.
   - Each statement is followed by five options rating your level of agreement with the preceding statement.
   - Options: Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).
   - Please circle the option which most closely reflects your response to the preceding statement.

ii. Rating Scale: in which you will be asked to give a rating on a scale of 1-5.

iii. Multiple choice: which may be forced choice (circle one option), or free choice (circle all that apply). You will receive a prompt indicating which type of response is required.

iv. Qualitative answers: these are the items where there are no fixed response options. These allow you to express your opinions more freely. These may be included in multiple choice responses (e.g., Other (please specify)).

Section 1: Background information

Please circle your chosen response

A. What is your gender?

a. Female.
b. Male.

B. What level are you preparing to teach at?

a. Primary.
b. Post-primary.

C. Where on the island of Ireland are you completing your Initial Teacher Education?

a. Northern Ireland (NI).
b. Republic of Ireland (RoI).

Section 2: Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Definition of Special Educational Needs (SEN): where a pupil has 'a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made'. Children have a learning difficulty if they have 'significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of their age and/or have a disability which hinders their everyday use of educational facilities' (NI Code of Practice, 1998, p.1).

Please circle your chosen response

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

1)	It is important for student teachers to be trained to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.	SD	D	U	A	SA
2)	I feel confident in my ability to teach children with SEN.	SD	D	U	A	SA

3) Rate your confidence (where 1 is least confident and 5 is most confident) in meeting the needs of children with each of the following SEN. ***Please circle your chosen response***

Cognitive and Learning Difficulties	least				most
1. Dyslexia	1	2	3	4	5
2. Dyscalculia	1	2	3	4	5
3. Dyspraxia	1	2	3	4	5
4. Mild Learning Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
5. Moderate Learning Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
6. Severe Learning Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
7. Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5

Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	least				most
8. Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
9. ADD/ADHD	1	2	3	4	5

Communication and Interaction Difficulties	least				most
10. Speech and Language Difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
11. Autism	1	2	3	4	5
12. Asperger Syndrome	1	2	3	4	5

Sensory Difficulties	least				most
13. Severe/profound hearing loss	1	2	3	4	5
14. Mild/moderate hearing loss	1	2	3	4	5
15. Blind	1	2	3	4	5
16. Partially Sighted	1	2	3	4	5
17. Multi-sensory impairment	1	2	3	4	5

Physical Difficulties	least				most
18. Cerebral Palsy	1	2	3	4	5
19. Spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus	1	2	3	4	5
20. Muscular dystrophy	1	2	3	4	5
21. Significant accidental injury	1	2	3	4	5

Medical Conditions/Syndromes	least				most
22. Epilepsy	1	2	3	4	5
23. Asthma	1	2	3	4	5
24. Diabetes	1	2	3	4	5
25. Anaphylaxis	1	2	3	4	5
26. Down Syndrome	1	2	3	4	5
27. Mental Health Issues	1	2	3	4	5

4a) Catering for a child's SEN is primarily the responsibility of the SENCO SD D U A SA

4b) Catering for a child's SEN is primarily the responsibility of the SEN Classroom Assistant SD D U A SA

5) If I had a child with SEN in my class I would ... *(NOTE: Please circle all that apply)*

a. Ignore them.
b. Leave it up to their SENCO to manage.
c. Leave it up to their SEN Classroom Assistant to manage.
d. Refer to their Individual Education Plan (IEP).
e. Contact an expert (e.g. an Educational Psychologist, a local / national association or school dealing with the specific special need).
f. Differentiate my teaching according to their needs.
g. Ask for advice from another more experienced teacher.
h. Refer to my notes from college on that particular SEN.
i. Carry out some personal research, such as reading about the condition.
j. Talk to the child's previous teacher.
k. Speak to the child themselves (where appropriate) and ask them about their needs.

l. Contact the child's parents to learn about that individual child and their needs.
m. Let the parents know what provisions I was making for the child.
n. Make sure that all pupils (both with SEN and without) received an equal amount of attention.
o. Other *(please specify)*: _____

6) I know the relevant legislation regarding children with SEN in schools. SD D U A SA

7) The most important NI legislation relevant to the area of SEN is ... *(NOTE: Please circle only one option)*

a. The Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.
b. The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.
c. SENDO (2005) [The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order].
d. None of the above.

8) I feel that my Initial Teacher Education course(s) has prepared me to meet the needs of children with SEN. SD D U A SA

9) I think the following additions to Initial Teacher Education would help to prepare me more fully to teach children with SEN in schools... *(NOTE: Please circle all that apply)*

a. More background information about the nature of different SEN.
b. More guidance on the early identification of different SEN.
c. More practical strategies for the classroom.
d. More detail regarding the relevant legislation.
e. More guidance regarding child protection issues in a special education setting.
f. More information about the roles of SENCOs.
g. More guidance about how to work effectively with SEN classroom assistants.
h. More guidance on completing Individual Education Plans for children with SEN.
i. Case studies to consider in college.
j. Advice from practising classroom teachers.
k. Greater focus on working with children with SEN in mainstream school placements.
l. Longer placements in special schools.
m. More input on SEN throughout <u>all</u> years of Initial Teacher Education.
n. Other (please specify):
_____

Section 3: Bullying

Definition of Bullying: 'A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students' (Olweus, 1993, p.9)

Please circle your chosen response

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

10) Bullying is an important issue in schools today. SD D U A SA

11) How many instances of bullying have you had to deal with in the course of your teaching placements to date? *(NOTE: Please give a numerical response)*

_____

12) It is important for student teachers to be trained to deal with bullying. SD D U A SA

13) I feel confident in my ability to deal with a bullying incident should it arise in school. SD D U A SA

14) Dealing with bullying issues is not the responsibility of the everyday classroom teacher. SD D U A SA

15) I know the relevant legislation regarding bullying in schools. SD D U A SA

16) Legally all schools are required... *(NOTE: Please circle all that apply)*

a. To have an anti-bullying policy.
b. To have an anti-bullying co-ordinator in the school.
c. To do nothing (i.e., there are no legal obligations on schools in this jurisdiction).
d. To implement school-wide anti-bullying programmes.

e. To be proactive in combating bullying within classes / school.

17) Once you are qualified, if a pupil reported they were being bullied by another student(s), what would you do? *(NOTE: Please circle all that apply)*

a. Refer to the school's anti-bullying policy.
b. Report the problem to more senior staff (e.g., Year Head/Head of Pastoral Care).
c. Speak to all parties involved (victim and bullies).
d. Record the incident.
e. Monitor the situation.
f. Contact the parents of all parties involved.
g. Raise the issue of bullying with the whole class/school.
h. Seek to give an appropriate sanction to the bully/bullies.
i. Pursue a non-punitive approach.
j. Other *(please specify):*

_____

18) Which of the following additions to Initial Teacher Education would prepare you best to deal with bullying in schools? *(NOTE: Please circle one answer only)*

a. More background information about different types of bullying.
b. More practical strategies for responding to incidents of bullying.
c. More information about school bullying-prevention strategies.
d. More detail regarding the relevant legislation.
e. Case studies to consider in College.
f. Advice from practising classroom teachers.
g. Greater focus on bullying during school placement.
h. Other *(please specify)*:

_____

Section 4: Disablist Bullying

Definition of Disablist Bullying: 'a specific form of bullying motivated by prejudice against disabled people. This can be related to a perceived or actual disability/additional need.' (Northern Ireland Anti-Bullying Forum, 2009, p.1).

19) How many instances of disablist bullying have you had to deal with over the course of your teaching placements to date? *(Please give a numerical response)*

_____

20) If you have experienced (an) instance(s) of disablist bullying, can you describe what you experienced and what your feelings were about the incident(s). You may choose to select one or multiple cases.

(NOTE: Please use the space provided below. If you require additional space use the back of the page or include separate page(s) when returning the completed questionnaire)

Please circle your chosen response

Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Unsure (U), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA).

21)	It is important for teachers to be able to respond effectively to instances of disablist bullying.	SD	D	U	A	SA
22)	As a student teacher, I would feel confident in dealing with an incident of disablist bullying.	SD	D	U	A	SA
23)	A child with a SEN/disability can also be a bully.	SD	D	U	A	SA
24)	I am aware of the legislation relating to disablist bullying.	SD	D	U	A	SA

25) If an incident of disablist bullying occurred, what would *most* guide your response?

(NOTE: Please circle one answer only)

a. Natural instinct.
b. School Policy.
c. Knowledge gained from Initial Teacher Education course(s).
d. Advice from a more experienced teacher(s).
e. Your own personal experiences as a pupil.
f. Other *(please specify)*:
_____
_____

26) In your opinion, which of these strategies is most effective in ensuring that children with SEN are not bullied in schools? *(NOTE: Please select only one of the options)*

a. Proactive/Preventative strategies *(i.e. raising the issue in advance in order to try to prevent an incident occurring)* – Please give details

_____

_____

_____

b. Reactive strategies *(i.e. in response to an incident)* – Please give details

_____

_____

_____

c. Other – Please give details

_____

_____

_____

27) I feel confident in my ability to implement preventative strategies to tackle disablist bullying in schools. SD D U A SA

28) What would help *most* as we strive to develop student teachers' knowledge of disablist bullying? *(NOTE: Please circle only one answer)*

a. More background information about disablist bullying.
b. More practical strategies for dealing with incidents of disablist bullying.
c. More detail regarding the relevant legislation.
d. Case studies to consider in College.
e. Advice from practising classroom teachers.
f. Greater focus on disablist bullying during school placement.
g. A dedicated website on disablist bullying for students/teachers.
h. CPD course next year.
i. Links to external agencies.
j. Other *(please specify)*:

_____