Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability: international perspectives on placement

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This paper reports findings about placement questions relevant to disability in education. It is part of a larger international study of the perspectives of 132 education practitioners and administrators in England, the USA and The Netherlands to several dilemmas of difference. Participants were interviewed about their perspectives to a presented placement dilemma about the consequences of having inclusive/separate placements for children with more severe disabilities/special educational needs. The data are presented in quantitative terms (degrees of recognition and resolution of dilemma) and qualitative terms (reasons, justifications and suggested resolutions). The findings show the continued recognition of this dilemma and commonalities in the resolution of the dilemma across the countries. Variations in responses to the dilemmas that relate to national differences are also discussed.

Keywords: dilemmas; placement; difference; disability; comparative

Introduction and theoretical background

Education systems have come to be guided by policies to raise educational standards, on the one hand, and by policies to promote inclusion, on the other hand. These policy priorities are evident in various Western-style countries and represent different and sometimes conflicting discourses about values, concepts and approaches to education. This study which focuses on including more students with disabilities/special educational needs into ordinary schools and classrooms is set within this international policy context.

An earlier study (Norwich 1993) examined the perspectives of teachers in the USA and UK to a set of possible dilemmas, including the dilemmas of difference. The assumed basic dilemma was whether to recognise, or not to recognise, differences, as either option has some negative implications or risks associated with stigma, devaluation, rejection or denial of opportunities. The dilemmas of difference relevant to students with disabilities were about identification (whether to identify and how, or not), curriculum (how much of a common curriculum was relevant to them) and placement (to what extent they learn in ordinary classes, or not). In the 1993 study most participants saw dilemmas associated with these three areas and their resolutions showed a similar set of perspectives. The findings were taken to reflect the balancing required in attempting to combine ways of meeting individual needs in inclusive ways, while trying to minimise negative implications and consequences.

This study was conceptualised in terms of the assumption that policy and practice decisions involve dilemmas. The term “dilemma” is often used as a way of talking about a difficulty or an issue. But, following Judge (1981) something more specific is meant in this study; a dilemma refers to a situation when there is a choice between alternatives when neither is favourable. The 1993 study was conducted in terms of “ideological dilemmas” (Billig et al. 1988) and examined dilemmas associated with difference and control. Notions of dilemmas associated with difference have also arisen in US legal studies (Minow 1990). From Minow’s theoretical perspective, dilemmas of difference are relevant to legislation in different areas of social policy, ethnicity, gender and disability/special educational needs. Billig et al. (1988, 163) explain that dilemmas arise from a “culture which produces more than one possible ideal world”. Given the tensions that can arise from different values, it follows that dilemmas are a condition of our humanity. We would expect therefore to find
dilemmatic ideas in political philosophy about the clash of social values, such as equality and individuality, which we do in the work of some political theorists, such as Dahl (1982) in the USA and Berlin (1990) in the UK. Dahl’s analysis focuses on what he calls the dilemmas of pluralist democracy. Dilemmas about control and difference have had little attention either in general education (Judge 1981; Berlak and Berlak 1981) or in special education (Artiles 1998; Dyson 2001; Ho 2004; Terzi 2007).

The general aim of the research reported in this paper was to examine the beliefs and judgements of educational professionals and administrators about a placement dilemma relating to students with severe disabilities across three countries. Whether to place students with severe disabilities in general or separate educational settings is one of the most challenging decisions in the field; it is a common, though not the only, way of framing the inclusion debate. The term “severe disabilities” is used to refer to those whose difficulties in learning are not mild or moderate; a distinction which, although not clear-cut, is often used to refer to low incidence (rather than high incidence) disabilities (Gray 2006). “Severe disabilities” also implies more normative agreement about the presence of a disability. In examining a placement dilemma about severe disabilities it is also assumed that many children with mild to moderate disabilities/SEN are more likely to be in general or mainstream settings, which reflects international trends towards greater inclusion. Though there may be uncertainty about whether some areas and degrees of disability/SEN would be called “severe”, teachers have expressed negative attitudes to including some broad areas, such as severe/profound intellectual disability and significant behaviour (or conduct) difficulties (Avramidis and Norwich 2002). These areas were the focus of this study.

Policy contexts
This paper focuses on placement issues in the USA, England and The Netherlands as part of a wider recent study of dilemmas of difference. The reason for a comparative study was to examine similarities and differences in the beliefs and values of professionals in different education systems. From one perspective, all national education systems are different in terms of their distinct historical, political, constitutional and (school) educational backgrounds. From another perspective, some national similarities may be identified when there have been communication and exchange of ideas and practices between countries and where they confront similar policy questions because of shared general political traditions – for example, liberal/democratic commitments. Pijl and Meier (1991) distinguished national school systems in terms of being two-tracked (special – general schools systems as separate tracks) and continuum orientated (gradation of provision from general to separate/special provision). Though this distinction may be less relevant some 16 years later, it is useful as a characterisation of the systems up to the early 1990s (see EUDSEN 2003); these authors characterised the English system, the base country for this study, as continuum orientated or (multi-tracked, using the term from EUDSEN 2003). It was decided to compare the English with another characterised as a continuum-oriented system, namely the US system. Another reason for the comparison with the USA was that the English SEN system was influenced by the preceding US legislation, in particular, the statutory status of the individual educational plan. It was also decided to compare the English with a two-tracked system, that of The Netherlands. While the system in The Netherlands has been historically two-track, there have been moves towards greater inclusion and a continuum-oriented system (EUDSEN 2003). Nevertheless, The Netherlands has continued to have proportionately more students in separate settings than the USA or England (Vislie 2003).

The US context
In the USA, Federal legislation under the Constitution’s equal protection clause established rights to “free appropriate public education” since the mid-1970s (McClughlin and Henderson 2000). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 (EAHCA, also
known as PL 94-142) was the precursor of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1990 (IDEA), which has been revised in 1997 and 2004. The overall proportion of all US students between the ages of 6 and 21 who qualified for special education under the IDEA framework has been 9–10% (US Department of Education 2006). Though US national averages conceal state variations, they show that only about 20% of those receiving special education spent more than 60% of their lessons outside regular classes, and only about 4–5% were full time in separate settings (US Department of Education 2006).

The system requires the provision of “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) – by means of an individual education plan (IEP). More recent revision of the IDEA in 2004 has required, among other provisions, collection and examination of placement data to prevent inappropriate over-identification or disproportionate representation by race and ethnicity of children as children with disabilities. Other legislative provision has focused on different methods of identification (response to instruction) and early intervening services. States are required to ensure “full education opportunities”, implying a full continuum of special education and related services and decision-making about the IEP has to take into account that placements are in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

What counts as the least restrictive environment has been a continuing issue in US special education policy and legislation. There has been a tension between the IDEA requirement that the placement of students be decided in terms of individual needs and that a full continuum of placements be available to meet these needs, on the one hand, and for regular education class to be the preferred placement, on the other hand (McClaughlin and Henderson 2000). This tension, which reflects the placement dilemma, has been resolved in some key court cases that have informed revisions of the IDEA about what LRE entails. As Howe and Welner (2002) explained, student placement in separate settings cannot now be justified by administrative convenience, it has to be to the benefits for the individual student.

**The Netherlands context**

Special education provision in The Netherlands has been historically segregated. By the mid-1990s, the proportion of all children attending special schools full-time had doubled over 20 years to about 4% (Pijl and Pijl 1995), being among the highest European levels (Vislie 2003). More recent national statistics for 2005 show a lower percentage of children of compulsory school age with SEN in segregated settings – i.e., 2.23% (Ministry of Education 2006) (children with learning and mild intellectual disabilities have since been removed from the special education data).

The moves to more inclusion came from a growing group of policy-makers, educators and parents who believed that segregation had gone too far (Pijl and Van den Bos 2001). But compared to other countries, especially the USA and UK, parents in The Netherlands have not been prominent partners in the special needs/inclusive education debates. The Netherlands Association of Parents of Children with Down syndrome, did manage, however, to lead in persuading primary schools to accept children with Down syndrome (Scheepstra, Nakken and Pijl 1999). Early developments in the 1990s aimed to build the capacity of primary schools to include children with special educational needs/disabilities (Weer Samen Naar School, the WSNS policy). It focused on primary children with learning disabilities and mild intellectual disabilities and was underpinned by a change in funding, the formation of regional clusters of special and regular schools (15–20 schools) and the development of mainstream school support systems. The WSNS policy was extended in 1998 to secondary special schools. For children with more significant special needs (sensory, physical and intellectual disabilities and behaviour problems), funding from 1996 was linked to the pupils themselves wherever they were educated, at special or regular schools (“backpack” policy). Although parents can state a preference for a regular school rather than a special school, regular schools are not required to accept
children with special educational needs. However, schools need to show clearly that they are incapable of appropriate provision, if placement is denied in these circumstances (Pijl and Veneman 2005). Soon after the backpack policy, it was found that most schools were not ready to accept children with special educational needs either in terms of teaching capacity or required materials/facilities (Weber 1997), a trend which continues to the present.

**The English context**

With more devolution, it is necessary to distinguish between the English, Scottish and Welsh systems. In the English system, special educational needs are identified at three levels of increasing need for additional provision. The first two are school-based: School Action and School Action Plus (with support from local authority (LA) services), that are decided by professionals within schools (DiES 2002). The third level follows a LA multiprofessional assessment after which the LA decides whether to issue a statement of SEN (record of individual educational needs, provision required and placement). The statement, similar to the US IEP, is a legal-style contract between the LA and parents with legal protections and rights for judicial redress. In 2005 about 18% of all children in England were recorded as having some degree of SEN (DiES 2005) – about 3% with statements and 15% with SEN without statements. About 40% of all children with statements were in special schools, about 1.3% of all school-aged children.

The Education Reform Act 1988 had a major impact on SEN, through radical changes to school governance, market-style reforms to the system and provision for raising school attainments through an assessment-oriented National Curriculum. Following successful lobbying, the government introduced a SEN Code of Practice (DfEE 1994), to promote whole-school policies and practices for the wider group of those with SEN without statements. Though the SEN Code of Practice regulated some of the hard edges of the market-style schooling, continuing tensions have persisted in schools and LAs between raising standards and the inclusion agendas (MacBeath et al. 2006).

Despite recent national initiatives focusing on a broader notion of inclusive education, there have been continuing problems associated with specific policies and practices about SEN/disabilities. Concerns have been about the nature and extent of inclusion, the usefulness of the concept of SEN and the future of statements (Audit Commission 2002; MacBeath et al. 2006; Warnock 2005). The House of Commons Select Committee on Education, which scrutinises government education policy, has produced a SEN Report (GB. Parliament. House of Commons 2006). One of its key conclusions was about the government’s confused messages about inclusion.

**Aims and focus of the study**

The above summary shows some of placement tensions in the countries that are assumed in this study to be about certain aspects of difference and differentiation – whether or not to recognise and respond to learner differences. This is because there are positive and negative conceptions in our society about human differences and what we call differentiation in education. The negative perspective is that “difference” reflects lower status, less value, perpetuating inequalities and poor-quality provision and unfair treatment. The positive perspective is that “difference” reflects the recognition of individuality and individual needs and interests. The tension between these conceptions of difference underlies the assumed dilemmas of difference. The dilemma is that both options – to recognise and
respond to, or not to recognise and respond to, difference – have negative risks. When applied to the question of placement of children with more severe SEN/disabilities in ordinary classrooms, the dilemmatic framework assumes that being taught mainly in ordinary classrooms leads to less access to scarce and specialist services and facilities, while being mainly in separate settings leads to feeling excluded and not being accepted by other children.

The specific aim of the study reported in this paper was to examine the perspectives of education practitioners and administrators in specific school systems in the UK (England), USA and The Netherlands about whether they recognised a placement dilemma for students with severe disabilities/SEN, and if so, how they resolve the dilemma. These findings were part of a wider study of various related dilemmas of difference (identification, curriculum and placement). (A full account of the study is available in Norwich 2007).

Methods

Settings and participants

Participants involved 50 English, 50 US and 32 Dutch professionals and administrators (total of 132) working in special and general school education. Given the nature of the study and the research resources involved, it was decided to focus on one part or region of each country. In the USA, the state was on the east coast, in The Netherlands the area was in the north of the country and in England in the south-west region. Location of the study was decided on opportunity and access. The rationale for selecting these countries was explained above. Two local authorities in each country were selected, a city urban and a rural authority, involving six areas across the three countries. Overall, there were 51 visits to schools, centres and administrative offices.

Participants in each of these areas worked in ordinary schools, special schools and support services, in primary and secondary schools, and were class, resource/support and senior teachers. In each of the three countries, between four and eight national government administrators/advisers also participated in the study (see Table 1 for breakdown of participants’ roles). The selected special schools specialised in severe/profound learning difficulties/disabilities and emotional and behaviour difficulties, as these are often seen as more challenging for inclusion, as discussed above.

Data generation

After considering various approaches to exploring beliefs about dilemmas (see Norwich 2007 for details), an exploratory semi-structured interview method was selected to generate the data. All participants were interviewed about their perspectives to and judgements about the presented placement dilemma which was in the form: “If X then A, if not X then B, where A and B are negative consequences or risks.” “Children with more severe disabilities (needing special education) taught in general classrooms” represented X, while “Are less likely to have access to scarce and specialist services and facilities” and “are more likely to feel excluded and not be accepted by other children” represented A and B respectively (see Figure 1). The presented tension was in terms where all the interviews were conducted in English of two negative consequences, though other consequences were presented by participants during interviews.

Participants were shown a booklet with the dilemma in a written form. There was an initial explanation of what was meant by a dilemma with reference to the dilemmatic format. Participants’ views and their justifications for holding these views were explored through an argumentative style of interviewing. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1. Breakdown of participants, by role, across three countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>England</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>% No.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>% No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE resource teachers/supervisors/SEN coordinators, ordinary school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Senior teachers, ordinary school 2 3 9 4 8 9 7
Class teachers, ordinary school 5 10 2 6 3 6 10 8
Senior teachers, special school/centre 5 10 4 13 7 14 16 12
Class teachers, special school 7 14 5 15 7 14 19 14
Resource teachers, special school/centre 4 8 3 9 2 4 9 7
Counsellors/psychologists/therapists 7 14 3 9 6 12 16 12
Teaching assistants 1 2 – – 3 6 4 3
School district/LEA/Board administrators 2 4 4 13 3 6 9 7
Administrators/advisers in state/national SE departments
8 16 4 13 7 14 19 14
Totals 50 100 32 100 50 100 132 100

European Journal of Special Needs Education 293
in full and analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The semi-structured interview style made it possible to explain the terms used; for example, severe disability, recognition and resolution, to check about the participants’ understanding of them.

In The Netherlands, where participants were fluent in English, all the interviews were conducted in English; nevertheless, the dilemma booklet was provided with Dutch and English versions. Two rating scales were used for participants to give their ratings of the recognition and resolution of the dilemma. Resolution ratings were requested only if they had recognised the dilemma (the four-point scale included the descriptors: not at all, marginal significant, considerable and cannot decide). Interviews were conducted on an individual basis. The BERA ethical guidelines were applied. All participants consented to the interviews on the basis of an explanation of the purposes of the study and the use of the data. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured. There would be no reference to themselves as individuals, their service or school or their authority/district. All participants were also sent a summary of the findings.

Data analysis
Dilemma recognition and resolution ratings were analysed using SPSS, while qualitative data (about 500 pages) were analysed using the NVIVO programme (a software programme that aids the sorting of qualitative text in terms of categories). Transcriptions were analysed in blocks: recognition and resolution responses for each country separately. The text was analysed for 1st-level themes to identify distinct themes that applied across responses in one country. This was an editing approach that emphasised the interpretation of meanings in the text in a grounded theory style (Drisko 2000). The other sets of country interviews were then analysed, using the previous themes as relevant, otherwise new themes were formulated. There were 53–75 placement recognition 1st-level themes and 47–68 resolution 1st-level themes across the groups. The aim of the 2nd-level thematic analysis was to identify commonalities across the 1st-level themes and to relate these to a conceptual model of the kinds of responses expected for this dilemma. This thematic analysis used a template approach, where themes were derived jointly from topdown (conceptual analysis) and bottom-up influences (emergent 1st-level themes) (Drisko 2000).

The top-down conceptual analysis used in the 2nd-level analysis derived from a conceptual analysis of possible recognition and resolution responses to a dilemma, in the form used in this study, as discussed above. Four broad possible recognition options are possible in this analysis and were found to apply in the analysis of the 1st-level themes:

Placement:
- If children with more severe disabilities (needing special education) are taught in general classrooms, then they are less likely to have access to scarce and specialist services and facilities,
- If children with more severe disabilities (needing special education) are NOT taught in general classrooms, then they are more likely to feel excluded and not be accepted by other children.

Figure 1. Formulation of placement dilemma.
B. Norwich

(1) a tension is recognised and experienced; applied in the 2nd-level theme “tension”;
(2) a decision has been made through some balancing, but there is still some tension; applied in the 2nd-level theme “resolved tension”;
(3) this questions the validity of the dilemma by questioning the link between the option and negative outcome for one or both options; applied in the 2nd-level themes about “moderate/deny negative consequence”;
(4) this presents other outcomes for either option, which could be negative or positive outcomes, applied in the 2nd-level themes about “other outcomes”.

The derivation of the 2nd-level themes for resolving the dilemma also followed from dilemmatic assumptions:

(1) it was assumed that some resolutions would take the form of balancing, applied in the 2nd-level theme about “balancing common/different aspects”;
(2) there would be some recognition of the persistence of tensions in the resolutions, applied in the 2nd-level theme “continuing issues”.

The categories arising from this 2nd-level analysis (8 recognition and 10 resolution categories) are shown in Table 2.

An independent coder checked the reliability of 1st- and 2nd-level coding. 1st-level coding was repeated for interview excerpts across three of the six areas of data. For all 18 excerpts there was 100% agreement with the original 1st-level sorting. Checks on the 2nd-level sorting of the 1st-level themes were done by comparing the original sorting with an independent sorting by another researcher, after a full briefing about the meaning of these 1st-level and 2nd-level themes. This comparison showed agreement levels of 80–89%.

Results

Limited space requires that selected findings are presented (see for further details Norwich 2007).

Placement recognition and resolution ratings

Table 3 shows that the most frequent recognition rating in each country group was “significant” – for Dutch (41%), English (44%) and US participants (26%). This overall consistency of ratings was reflected in the statistically non-significant chi-square analysis ($\chi^2 = 14.6, df = 10, p > 0.05$). Taken overall, a large majority of participants in each country recognised a dilemma to some extent. There were few “uncertain” ratings about this dilemma. A minority split their responses, with the most frequent basis for splitting responses across the three country groups being more severe versus less severe difficulties/disabilities. For the majority who split their responses, the most frequent rating was “significant” for the aspect where they recognised a dilemma.

Table 4 shows that the most frequent resolution rating for the US and English participants was “significant”, while for the Dutch participants it was “marginal”. However, more Dutch participants split their resolution responses than gave a “marginal” resolution rating (these differences did not reach statistical significance: $\chi^2 = 13.5, df = 10, p > 0.05$). US and English participants, who split their resolution position, mostly gave significant resolutions for aspects where they recognised a dilemma, while Dutch split responders mostly gave more
Table 2. Breakdown of 2nd-level recognition and resolution themes across three countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement dilemma recognition</th>
<th>Placement dilemma resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tension</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence of issues despite some resolutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved tension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A decision has been made but some tension/issue persists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Balance included/separate provision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A balance between ordinary class and separate setting is required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate/deny reduced specialist provision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question/deny link between ordinary class placement and reduced specialist provision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student and parent participation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and parents to participate in decision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate/deny feel excluded</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question/doubt link between separate setting placement and feel excluded consequences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accept separate specialist provision</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some separate specialist settings are accepted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive aspects inclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive consequences of ordinary class placement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limits to inclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are some limits in ordinary class placements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive aspects separation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive consequences of separate setting placement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promote positive contacts, attitudes, reduce feelings of exclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find ways to have positive contacts, promote positive attitudes and avoid feelings of exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depends</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether there are tensions depend on various factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enhance flexible specialist services/staffing in ordinary schools</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop specialist services adapted to ordinary school settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Comments arising from dilemma but not directly relevant to it)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systemic/national changes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and practice approaches needed to enhance inclusion across system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depends</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution depends on various factors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments about resolution but not directly relevant to it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

296 B. Norwich
“marginal” resolution ratings. An overall majority across the country groups saw some degree of resolution (marginal, significant or considerable ratings).

**Recognition and resolution ratings, by role**

Ratings were analysed in terms of four general roles (administrators, support professionals, special school professionals and ordinary school professionals), though cell sizes prevented statistical analyses. The most frequent recognition rating across all the roles was “significant” in the Dutch and English groups. Only two of the US role groups had the overall “significant” recognition rating: one had “considerable” (administrators), while the other had “not at all” (support professionals). Resolution ratings across roles tended to be less consistent across the country groups. For US and English resolution ratings, modal ratings were lower than the overall “significant” rating in two of the role groups (“marginal” and “uncertain”). Dutch special school professionals were the only role group with a higher resolution rating – “significant”. Ordinary school professionals in all three countries were consistently less optimistic about resolutions – “marginal” modal resolution rating.

**Themes to explain recognition and resolution levels**

For each country group, the most frequent 2nd-level recognition theme was “tensions”. For the other more frequently used themes (more than 30% of participants), only Dutch and English participants saw some “negative aspects of inclusion”, while only Dutch participants also saw some “positive aspects of separation”. “Resolved tensions” was only used more frequently by US participants. However, some participants in each country questioned

Table 4. Breakdown of placement dilemma resolution ratings across three countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement dilemma</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognising dilemma</td>
<td>43(86%)</td>
<td>27(84%)</td>
<td>43(86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not recognising dilemma</td>
<td>7(14%)</td>
<td>5(16%)</td>
<td>7(14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>50(100%)</td>
<td>32(100%)</td>
<td>50(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Bold type represents most frequent rating in each country; not at all/marginal + marginal/significant represent responses across these levels.

**European Journal of Special Needs Education** 297

Table 5. Summary of responses to the placement dilemma across three countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement dilemma</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>The Netherlands</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most frequent 2nd-level explanations</td>
<td>(&gt;30%) of recognition ratings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(*Means shared with another country group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Tensions (10/18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolved tensions (3/7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments (2/10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moderate/deny feeling excluded (2/3)
*Tensions (7/19)
Positive aspects separation (3/9)
*Other negative aspects
inclusion (3/8)
*Moderate/deny reduced
specialist provision (2/5)
* Tensions (7/19)
* Other negative aspects
inclusion (6/13)
*Moderate/deny reduced
specialist provision (2/3)

2. % of 1st-level themes that are shared
with other countries
45% 36% 43%

3. Differential use of 2nd-level themes,
by recognition level
More “tensions” with higher ratings; more
“other negative aspects inclusion”,
“positive aspects separation” +
“moderate/deny neg. consequences”
with lower ratings
More “tensions” with higher
ratings; more “positive aspects
separation” + “moderate/deny
reduces specialist provision”
with lower ratings
More “tensions” with
higher ratings; more
“resolved tensions”,
“positive aspects
separation” + and both
“moderate deny neg.
consequences” with
lower ratings

4. Most frequent
2nd-level explanations (>30%) of
resolution positions
(Proportions of 1st-level themes
shared with another country in
brackets)
(*Means shared with another country
group)
*Balance included/separate provision (4/7)
*Enhance flexible service/staffing (4/9)
*Balance included/separate
 provision (7/11)
*Enhance flexible service/
staffing (5/10)
Limits to inclusion (3/11)
*Continuing issues 2/4
Systems/local change needed 1/7
*Balance included/
separate provision (8/16)
*Enhance flexible service/
staffing (5/10)
*Continuing issues (1/6)
5. % of 1st-level themes that are shared with other countries
50% 42% 44%
6. Differential use of 2nd-level themes, by resolution level
None None None

298 B. Norwich
the validity of the placement dilemma (above the 30% level). For US participants questioning was mainly in terms of whether the students “feeling excluded” consequence, while for English and Dutch participants, it was mainly in terms of question the “reduced specialist provision” consequence.
Participants across the country groups used similar 1st-level recognition themes that were covered by the most frequent 2nd-level themes (36–45% were shared). Further analysis showed the expected relationships between recognition levels and kinds of explanations used in each country (cell sizes were too small for statistical analyses). Participants with higher recognition ratings tended to refer to themes about “tensions”, while those with lower ratings tended to see positive aspects of separation and questioned one or other negative consequence in the dilemma.
The most frequent way of resolving the dilemma across each country was in terms of a “balance between included and separate provision” and the need to have “enhanced flexible services and staffing”. However, Dutch participants, who were less optimistic about a resolution (“marginal” modal rating rather than “significant” for US and English participants), also saw the need for “systems and local change” and considered that there were “limits to inclusion” and “continuing issues” over placement.
Participants across the country groups used similar 1st-level resolution themes that were covered by the most frequent 2nd-level themes (42–50% were shared). Finally, there were no relationships between the resolution themes and the resolution ratings. For example, the “continuing issues” theme was used across different resolution ratings in each country.

1st-level themes underlying explanation for recognising the dilemma
• “Tension”: there were four themes (1st-level) that expressed the perception of tensions (2nd-level) in response to this dilemma that were similar in the three country groups. These Table 6. Most frequent ratings for US and English placement recognition and resolution levels and most frequent 2nd-level resolution themes: 1993 and 2005 studies.
USA England
Recognition 1993 study (n = 38) 2005 study (n = 50) 1993 study (n = 43) 2005 study (n = 50)
Modal rating Significant Significant Significant Significant
2nd-level themes
(3 most frequent, with some ties)
Not available Tensions
Resolved tensions
Comments
Moderate/deny feeling excluded
Not available Tensions
Other negative aspects of inclusion
Moderate/deny reduced specialist provision
Resolution
Modal rating Significant Significant Significant Significant
2nd-level themes
were about problems in building in-class support, regular teachers not being used to, nor trained to, teach students with severe disabilities and that the tension was because of gaps or shortages of resources and about the personal experience of the tension. The position of an English special school deputy head teacher, for example, expresses a perception of “tension” in terms of access that no amount of financial resources would compensate for: I can’t see any way where even with all the money in the world you can actually do that in a mainstream classroom.

By contrast, a US Federal administrator explained how the “tension” felt: if they’re in the general ed. class room what are they doing? They’re doing some kind of modification of the general ed. curriculum. What should they be doing? Should they be learning how to get about in the community, doing some kind of transportation, mobility training, doing some independent living skills, and so forth? And then, of course, are we limiting them by not providing them full access to that general ed. curriculum with a content expert in the general ed. classroom? And then, of course, if they don’t have that kind of access to other kids, can they feel a part of the school community as a whole?

There were three themes that expressed the perception of “tensions” that were similar in only in the US and Dutch groups. These were about poor teacher attitudes to inclusion, that for some students with severe disabilities it was hard to support them in ordinary class and that some students felt the need to conceal going to a special school. A Dutch advisory teacher explained how some students experienced going to special school: there are children in this school who are feeling bad that they are going to a special school, some with Down syndrome. They feel very sorry that they are here … when they are at home, they don’t dare say “I am at this school”.

There were three themes that expressed the perception of “tensions” that were similar in the
US and English groups. These were about how noise affects learning, that students with severe disabilities did not get what they needed in ordinary classes and that decisions about the “least restrictive environment” were hard to make.

- “Other negative aspects of inclusion”: there was only one theme (1st-level) expressing the belief that there were negative aspects to inclusion that was used across the three country groups. This was about severe behaviour difficulties being harmful in ordinary classes. An English teacher who worked in a behaviour unit explained the seriousness of this:
  
      I mean, they have a job to do and they have 30-odd children in each class, and if one of them is behaving in a way that is affecting other people’s learning, then that’s a serious issue that’s got to be dealt with.

  There were three themes that expressed this position for the US and English participants. These were about typical students not getting what they need, peers accepting students with severe disabilities but not as friends, and these students being unwelcome in general classes. Two themes expressing this position were used by Dutch and English participants. These were about peers not accepting children with moderate/severe disabilities and those with severe emotional/behaviour difficulties feeling excluded in regular school.

- “Resolved tensions”: there were no themes (1st-level) expressing a resolved tension position that were used across all three groups. One theme about the majority being

300 B. Norwich

included, but the minority being in a separate setting was used by US and Dutch participants. Two themes about having specialist services in resourced schools, but not in all local schools, and having separate classes, but with social mixing elsewhere, were used by US and English participants. One theme about maximising time in ordinary classes was used by Dutch and English participants.

- “Moderate/deny reduced specialist provision”: there was only one theme (1st-level) across the three groups that questioned the link between ordinary class placement and reduced specialist provision; in other words, it questioned the validity of the dilemma. This theme was about it being possible to build teaching capacity in ordinary classrooms for some students with more severe disabilities. For example, a US administrator explained this position in these terms:

      The intention is to include them, so from a policy perspective the schools are getting the specialists, the services and the resources and at the school level they’re making decisions about how to best use those. What we see in the high-flying schools is an ability to integrate those specialists with general education for all ranges of performance levels for students.

Questioning the dilemma was also expressed by some Dutch and English participants in terms of it being easier to provide for students with more severe disabilities in primary classes.

- “Moderate/deny feeling excluded”: there were two themes (1st-level) across the three groups that questioned the link between placement in a separate setting and feeling excluded consequences, the other way of questioning the validity of the dilemma. These were about a minority or no students with more severe disabilities caring about being apart and them being unaware of being separate. The former theme was used more by US than participants in the other country groups.

- “Positive aspects of separation”: there was one theme (1st-level) across the three country groups expressing this position. This was about students with more severe disabilities liking or feeling relieved in separate settings, and was expressed in these terms by a US elementary school teacher:

      I’ve even had children say it to me, like “when is it my time to leave? When am I going to go to Mrs whoever’s room? How many more minutes?” , because whatever their disability may be it is difficult work.

Dutch and English participants used a similar theme that focused on those with severe emotional and behaviour difficulties. Participants from these countries also saw positive aspects of separation in terms of better access to peer groups for students with more severe disabilities in separate settings.
Ist-level themes underlying resolutions of the dilemma

- “Balance included/separate provision”: there were three themes (1st-level) that suggested finding a balance between ordinary class and separate setting as a resolution to the dilemma in each country group. These were about mixing ordinary and separate placements, reducing numbers in special settings and part-time and short-term placements in ordinary classrooms and schools.

-European Journal of Special Needs Education 301-

One theme (1st-level) about flexible withdrawal arrangements was used by US and English participants. Four themes about better special and ordinary school collaboration, trying resourced inclusion before separate provision, reverse inclusion and having special classes or units in ordinary schools were used by Dutch and English participants.

- “Enhance flexible services and staffing”: there were two themes (1st-level) that suggested developing specialist services adapted to ordinary school settings as a resolution to the dilemma in each country. These were about improving the training of teachers and administrators and making additional and appropriate resources available to ordinary schools.

Other themes suggesting more collaborative teaching and better staffing, resourcing and planning were suggested as a resolution in only two country groups.

- “Continuing issues”: one theme (1st-level) which indicated the perception of persistent issues, despite the suggested resolutions was used across all country groups. An English SEN advisory teacher expressed this position in these terms: I think there will always be an issue. I think so because you can never, I don’t believe that you can lump, I can’t think of a more appropriate word really, these children with disabilities together under one umbrella, they are all individual and what works for one child isn’t going to work for another and there will continue to be a need for some children to be educated within a special school environment.

- “Limits to inclusion”: there were several themes (1st-level) which indicated a position that there are some limits to ordinary class placements across each country group, though they were used more by participants from The Netherlands than the other countries. These themes were about will and commitment being a sticking-point, some willing, while others unwilling to change, ordinary class teachers being unable to meet needs and there being a limit to what regular school can do.

- “Systems and local change”: there was only one theme (1st-level) about the policy and practice approaches needed to enhance inclusion across system across the groups, though it was used more by the Dutch than US or English participants: this was about the need for smaller classes. Other themes were specific to each group with some reflecting national contexts, in The Netherlands (for example, “need for more pilot inclusion trials” and “legislation for more inclusion”) and in England (for example, “remove school targets and league tables”).

Discussion

The dilemmatic framework

A large majority in each of the three countries recognised the placement dilemma to some degree. Some 14–16% of participants did not recognise the dilemma across the country groups. This indicates a continued recognition of this placement dilemma (Norwich 1993). It also shows that the dilemma of difference assumption is empirically testable (Clough 2006). Other findings were also consistent with a dilemmatic framework. First, the emergent 1st-level themes tended to fit the theoretically informed 2nd-level themes. Second, the predominance of the 2nd-level resolution themes “balance included/separate provision”, “enhance flexible services and staffing” and “continuing issues” reflect expected resolutions to a dilemma. Third, those with lower versus higher recognition ratings
sampling a range of professionals and administrators.

**National differences**

Though most participants in each country saw a significant placement dilemma, fewer US than Dutch and English participants did so. This difference can be linked to the recognition explanations. Only US participants used “resolved tension” themes more frequently, such as, there is “part-time regular class inclusion”. These explanations relate to the relatively low use of separate settings in the two US school districts and the state in the study. This is also in line with the relatively lower proportion of overall US students with SEN in separate settings outside regular schools compared to The Netherlands and UK. US participants can be interpreted as having a more settled set of perspectives to the recognition of the placement dilemma than those in the other two countries. The most frequent US and English resolutions for this dilemma were at a significant level, while resolutions in The Netherlands were mostly at a marginal level. This lower Dutch optimism can be related to their most frequently used resolution themes. More participants in The Netherlands referred to the need for changes to the system, with specific themes about the need for greater schools’ commitment to restructure for inclusion, more pilot inclusion trials, more legislation promoting inclusion and support for schools to be more inclusive. Participants in The Netherlands also recognised continuing issues and limits to inclusion more than those in the other two countries. These findings can be understood in terms of the historical system of separate provision in The Netherlands, which has not been challenged and reformed to the extent found in the USA or England (Vislie 2003).

The most frequent English 1st-level themes used to explain the significant resolution of the placement dilemma were similar to US and Dutch themes. However, the English participants referred more to “continuing issues” compared to US participants. This might reflect current English concerns about the nature and extent of inclusion (Warnock 2005; GB. Parliament. House of Commons 2006). However, the findings show an English pattern of resolution themes similar to that in The Netherlands, balanced provision and enhanced flexibility with the recognition of continuing issues. The themes that might differentiate the English from the Dutch modal resolution ratings were those in the Dutch group: limits to inclusion, need for national systems change (legislation, funding, trials, etc.) and the gap between ideals and practice.

**Concluding comments**

Despite interesting country-specific variations, it is concluded that there is evidence from three countries that professional beliefs fit a dilemmatic framework. This prompts a question about whether the relative lack of interest in a dilemmatic approach may have deeper roots. As some political theorists have noted (Berlin 1990), recognising value tensions involves accepting some crucial losses. In pursuing commonality (inclusiveness, equality) and relevance (differentiation), the aim is to have it both ways as far as possible. But sometimes this balancing can be hard and resolutions can leave residual tensions, as some participants also recognised. Participants in this study tried to resolve the tensions about the placement of students with more severe disabilities/SEN by opting for a balance between included and separate provision. This balancing took different forms depending on national and local conditions as well as the characteristics and needs of the students. But the balancing involved enhancing flexible services and staffing and there was also a general recognition that resolutions only went so far – i.e., that there were limits to placement in ordinary classes for those with the more severe disabilities, though mostly in the group from The Netherlands. This paper has presented a theoretical argument with empirical evidence for a dilemmatic approach to questions about placing children with more severe disabilities/SEN in ordinary classes. It needs to be seen in conjunction with the findings of the wider study that included examination of the related identification and curriculum dilemmas. The framework presented here not only contributes to understanding issues within this field, it also helps to inform practical thinking about educational policy options.
Note
1. Though statistics are collected on a different basis, the national percentages in separate special schools can be interpreted as showing a difference between the overall use of full-time separate settings across the three countries. The percentages of school-aged students in the three countries in separate special schools are recorded as USA, 0.42% (2006), England, 1.3% (2005) and The Netherlands 2.23% (2005) (see for further details Norwich 2007).

References
Ho, A. 2004. To be labelled or not to be labelled, that is the question. British Journal of Learning Disabilities 3, no. 1: 86–92.

304 B. Norwich


