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Inclusion and exclusion in the early years: conversations with European educators

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This paper reports a study to investigate the views of early childhood educators working in a range of early childhood settings in four European countries, Denmark, Greece, Italy and the UK. Recent research into European perspectives on early education, special educational needs and inclusion is reviewed highlighting: a multinational call for action on teaching childten with learning difficulties; issues related to the inclusion (and exclusion) of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties; the prevalence of inclusive policies in parallel with some exclusive practices and attitudes, and issues of professional development to support educators' work with children with learning difficulties. Secondly, the rationale, aims and research design of the Comparative Approaches to Preschool Education: Special Educational Needs (CAPE: SEN) study are outlined. This survey of 113 European early childhood educators working, in the main, in mainstream/generic settings used three methods of data gathering: questionnaires, email conversations and face-to-face interviews. The paper draws on extracts from the data to discuss four themes: educators' personal/professional experiences; professional development; inclusion and exclusion; and the roles of parents. In conclusion, four structures to which future cross-cultural studies need to be related are identified.

Keywords: *Early childhood education; European; Exclusion; Inclusion; Learning difficulties: Special educational needs*

Introduction

This paper reports findings from the Comparative Approaches to Preschool Education: Special Educational Needs (CAPE: SEN) Project. The central focus of the project is educators' perspectives on a variety of issues related to work with young children with learning difficulties. The paper begins with a brief review of recent research into

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European perspectives on early education, special educational needs and inclusion, identifying recurring themes and common concerns. Secondly, the rationale, aims and research design of the CAPE: SEN study are outlined. Next, four key themes from the study of educators' perspectives on work with children with learning difficulties are presented: educators' personal/professional experiences; professional development; inclusion and exclusion; and the roles of parents. These themes are discussed with illustrative extracts from respondents' questionnaires, email dialogues and face-to-face interviews. Finally, the paper concludes with the identification of four key structures that will inform our future research in this field.

Inclusion in the early years: viewpoints from European research

In an extensive review of the literature on teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) show that whilst attitudes are generally positive, the nature and severity of children's needs strongly influence teachers' disposition towards inclusive practices. Their review draws on three major factors: child-related variables; teacher-related variables; and context/environment (p. 134). These factors inevitably reflect our own findings in relation to a wide range of preschool educators and also, perhaps significantly, across a number of European states:

> Consensual ideas about who or what is 'special' change, sometimes rapidly; all such definitions belong to particular historical moments and are reflected in contemporary policies … it goes without saying that other interpretations may well be made, dependent upon cultural determinants. (Clough, 2000, p. 5)

The focus of this paper is the early years of education, and thus the next section draws on selected recent research into early education and SEN in European contexts, and identifies key themes that have permeated the research field in the last 20 years.

A multinational call for action on special needs education

Some ten years ago, The Salamanca Statement: Framework for Action for Special Needs Education (Unesco, 1994) was drawn up by representatives from 92 governments and 25 international organizations. The Statement called for inclusion to be the norm and the conference adopted a 'Framework for Action' that would require all children to be accommodated in mainstream schools, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional and linguistic abilities or other needs; according to the framework, national and local policies should stipulate that disabled children attend the neighbourhood school 'that would be attended if the child did not have a disability' (p. 17). The Statement insisted on the provision of education for all 'within the regular system'. The Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education (CSIE) regarded such inclusive schooling as the best way to address discrimination in its various forms:

> Regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building on an inclusive

> society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (CSIE, 1995, p. 8)

The Salamanca Statement had economic as well as sociological, political and educational goals. It was bold and important, but as Clough argued:

> In this multinational urge *for* inclusion lies the danger of physical *inclusion* but curricular and emotional *exclusion* unless children are included for and of themselves, by teachers who are professionally and personally equipped to provide appropriate education for all. For inclusion is about a radical deal more than physical location. (Clough, 1998, p. 5; emphasis in original)

Vakil *et al.* (2003) take up this theme, calling for inclusive education that features developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and culturally appropriate practices, as well as specifically tailored support. It has been argued (Nutbrown, 1998) that early education at its best *is* inclusive education—perhaps because of its emphasis on individual needs, developmentally appropriate practice and intrinsic involvement of parents.

Reflecting on special educational needs in the Reggio Emilia preschools of Northern Italy (a country where national legislation effectively did away with all exclusive educational institutions in 1977), Phillips (2001) notes the lack of overt reference—an apparent de-emphasis—on perfecting the physical environment for 'access', but an emphasis on inclusive practice whereby children who are disabled have priority in being allocated places in preschool provision. This reflects the pedagogy of 'community' rather than the 'individual' and perhaps it is this that leads Nurse (2001) to observe:

> My impression of Reggio Emilia's response to children with special needs is that the preschools minimise the effects of disability and a slower rate of learning because the learning environment matches the developmental and social needs of the individual child ... A difference between the system in the UK and the Reggio response is the commitment to children learning as a group, from each other ... Reggio Emilia is a stable, prosperous and cohesive community. The preschools are a highly regarded part of that community which in turn values the group experience they offer to young children. Provision is local so the children are not placed in distant centres which isolate them and their families from their own community. (p. 68)

A thematic review of 'Early Childhood Education and Care' (ECEC) in 12 countries carried out by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) identified, as a key element of successful ECEC policy, 'a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support'. Such a policy, suggests the OECD, features 'an inclusive and flexible approach to diversity, without compromising quality'; the review suggested that such an approach means:

> mainstreaming children with special educational needs, whenever this is deemed in the best interests of the child. When inclusion is not feasible, more targeted programmes and projects can be developed to provide equality of educational opportunity and promote social integration for children living in disadvantaged communities. (OECD, 2001, p. 130)

Inclusion and emotional and behavioural difficulties

Even in the early years, the ostensible 'type' of difficulty greatly influences the willingness and capacity of early childhood educators to include children in ordinary mainstream settings; and specifically, pupil behaviour and the education of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) is a shared international issue. Behaviours that go against the social conventions of schools and communities threaten the social order (and, of course, even in the early years the calm of a kindergarten can be shattered when the behaviour of children with EBD confronts the usual system of quiet discipline and order). In Cyprus and Denmark, 'behavioural disorders' in schools have prompted national concern (Angelides, 2000; Egelund & Hansen, 2000). 'Challenging' behaviour is a matter of definition, and such definitions are established by virtue of the cultures in which those behaviours take place. As Angelides suggests:

> the role which schools and teachers play in the development of behaviour problems is major and substantial. This perspective gives rise to the interest in schools as units, and teachers and pupils are members of those units, and not as individuals with separate unique characteristics. They are, of course, unique individuals but, at the same time, they operate as integral parts of the same institution, under the same culture, so their behaviour must be studied in relation to the specific organisational context. (Angelides, 2000, p. 57)

Egelund and Hansen (2000) suggested that families played a clear role in the development of negative behaviour of their children. However, there are more positive ways to view the roles of parents; the OECD (2001) concludes that parental 'engagement' builds on parents' unique knowledge of their children and:

> Parental engagement is not an attempt to teach parents to be 'involved' (they already are) or to hold them solely responsible for difficulties a child may have. In democratic ECEC institutions, the approach of professionals is to share responsibility for young children with parents, and learn from the unique knowledge that parents from diverse backgrounds can contribute. (OECD, 2001, p. 117)

Inclusive policies but exclusive practices?

Croll and Moses's (2000) survey of LEA officers and head teachers in the UK identified 'widespread expressions of support for the principles of inclusion [but] a continuing level of support for separate special school provision' (p. 1). They identify 'support for inclusion as an ideal' but 'relatively limited influence of such an ideal on education policy'. A minority saw inclusion as 'a real hope' (p. 11), and for them, what stood in the way of inclusion was the existing system.

Some 20 years after Italian legislation (in 1977) introduced a national policy on inclusion and virtually eliminated schools for students 'with disabilities', Cornoldi *et al.* (1998) surveyed 523 Italian teachers, who expressed clear support for the concept of inclusion and willingness to teach children with learning difficulties, but less than 25% thought they had sufficient skills and training. Cornoldi *et al.* comment:

> The majority of teachers in Italy do not receive specific university training in special education; however, some in-service training and seminars are offered ... the issue of teacher training is very significant even in countries with mandated inclusion practices. (p. 354)

They point, however, to an interesting demonstration of Italian teachers' positive attitude when they comment: 'It is clearly possible for teachers to favour the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classes without feeling that they have had sufficient training to maximise their teaching efficiency in serving these students' (p. 254). Learning and development of all children—particularly crucial in the early years—depends upon and is influenced by many factors; settings, teachers, environments and communities are just a few of those human factors which impact on the successful inclusion of children in mainstream settings.

Denmark has pioneered many projects of integration, with the integration of pupils with various learning difficulties into mainstream classrooms having increased over the years in line with national policy. Attendance in preschool education in Denmark is not compulsory, but such provision is used by 98% of preschool-aged children and 1.25% of primary-aged pupils attend special schools and classes which are for pupils with 'more serious disabilities' (Amtsrådsforeningen, 1998). Because of the high number of women in the workforce in Denmark, public preschool provision has been developed such that, in 1997, the number of 2–5-year-olds attending kindergarten was 86.2 % (Bureau 2000/PMF_FOLA, 1997).

In 2000, Egelund reported an increase in referral of Danish pupils with learning difficulties:

> the number of pupils referred to special classes and schools has increased by approximately one-third since 1990. This rise has been caused by a sharp increase in the number of children diagnosed as having severe emotional disturbance, ADHD or autism, while other categories, such as general developmental problems and speech, language and learning difficulties, have remained relatively constant. The reason for this development is not known, but it is thought to reflect developments in diagnosis, as well as the attitudes of teachers and psychologists. (Egelund, 2000, p. 93)

Inclusion, special educational needs and professional development

Teacher professional development is a key factor in successful inclusion (Poulou & Norwich, 2000) and the appropriateness of teachers' qualifications were found wanting in a US study:

> Only a minority of teachers have completed any early childhood education programme, much less a merged early childhood/early childhood special education programme that would provide the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary for working effectively with young children with developmental delays. The need for ongoing staff development for preschool teachers becomes even more urgent in light of their limited access to special educators in many early childhood programmes. (McDonnell *et al.*, 1997, p. 272)

In England a survey of 141 special needs coordinators (Crowther *et al.*, 2001) showed that 72% relied on 'occasional training events' or professional development days as their only form of SEN training; none had specialist-route Master's degrees and only 13% had certificate-level qualifications in SEN. Emphasis in training appeared to be 'predominantly of a practical nature'.

Our selective review of the literature highlights four key themes which cross geographical and cultural borders:

1. There is an evident climate of policy change across Europe.
2. A multinational commitment towards (and inclusive response to) education of children with learning difficulties has been established.
3. A commonality of concern exists about the education of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
4. The espousal of inclusive ideologies continues in parallel with, and in contradiction of, the perpetuation of exclusive practices.

These themes are amongst those that prompted, and are variously addressed by, the Comparative Approaches to Preschool Education: Special Educational Needs (CAPE: SEN) Project, which forms the basis for the remainder of the paper.

Comparative approaches to preschool education—special educational needs (CAPE: SEN): overview of the study

CAPE: SEN rationale, aims and methodology

The CAPE: SEN Project seeks to broaden understanding of perspectives on teaching young children (from birth to 7 years) with learning difficulties in several European countries and in a variety of educational approaches. This comparative study aims to contribute to the development of policy through the articulation of a variety of effective practices that enhance living and learning experiences of young children who are disabled or who experience learning difficulties. This paper reports a survey of preschool educators, working in a variety of forms of preschool education, in four European countries and is organized around four key themes:

1. practitioners' personal/professional experiences;
2. professional development;
3. inclusion and exclusion;
4. the roles of parents.

In all, 113 preschool educators from four European countries (Denmark, Greece, Italy and the UK) participated in the study. Data included 81 questionnaire responses, 21 email dialogues and 11 face-to-face interviews (see Table 1).

Our aim was to take some 'snapshots' of views and practices from opportunistically available sources, and thus we make no claims as to the representative nature of the sample. A range of settings and approaches were represented in our sample that included educators working in fee-paying, charitable and state provision and a range of curricular and pedagogic approaches. Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents across three types of preschool provision in the four countries.

Postal and email questionnaires were administered, some participants chose to return anonymous responses; others added contact details and requested continued involvement in the project. Email dialogues emerged from exchanges (over about

Table 1. Sources of data for the CAPE : SEN study

Country	Questionnaires	Email dialogues	Face-to-face interviews	Total respondents
Greece	19	4	5	28
UK	31	4	6	41
Denmark	12	6	0	18
Italy	19	7	0	26
Total	81 (72%)	21 (18%)	11 (10%)	113

three weeks) that began with the posing of pre-prepared questions and, as exchanges developed, included follow-up questions in response to participants' comments. The 11 face-to-face interviews lasted between 65 and 100 minutes and were largely life-historical in nature. Computer-assisted analysis (using NVivo) of the three data sets led to the identification of four commonly shared themes.

The remainder of this paper uses extracts from the data to discuss the four themes: (1) practitioners' personal/professional experiences; (2) professional development; (3) inclusion and exclusion; and (4) the roles of parents.

Practitioners' personal/professional experiences

Of the 113 respondents, 109 said they had some experience of working with children with learning difficulties: some of these with a single child, others having worked with several children with a variety of needs. Six people said they had 'considerable' experience over many years. Most participants said they had worked with children with general language and developmental delay; several had worked with children with Down syndrome and a small number had experience of working with children identified as having 'multiple difficulties'. The learning difficulties and needs most commonly listed by practitioners as exceptionally demanding were (in order of severity):

Table 2. Distribution of respondents across three types of preschool provision in the four countries

Country	Total respondents	Independent fee-paying	Charitable/ voluntary	State/state funded
Greece	28	17	0	11
UK	41	11	11	19
Denmark	18	8	0	10
Italy	26	7	0	19
Total	113	43 (38%)	11 (10%)	59 (52%)

- emotional and behavioural difficulties (including ADHD);
- autistic spectrum disorder;
- multiple and physical learning difficulties.

The particular identification of these learning difficulties is reflective of other studies on teachers' perceptions of EBD (Daniels *et al.*, 1999; Poulou & Norwich, 2000).

Only two respondents said they had specific responsibility in their settings for managing provision for children with learning difficulties. Respondents had a variety of roles and responsibilities in their preschool settings (though these are too complex to summarize here). What they have in common is the fact that they all had regular and direct teaching contact with children. The majority of participants in the study were working in provision that could be called 'mainstream', with a responsibility for educating children with learning difficulties alongside their peers of the same chronological age; eight identified their setting as being some form of 'specialist' provision for children with learning difficulties.

Through the life-historical interviews practitioners conveyed a number of stories about the origins and development of professional careers. Maria, a teacher working in Crete, said:

> Failure produces failure so they create a negative feedback. That may cause behavioural problems. The children in my class hadn't got at all behaviour problems because they had a good communication and excellent relation to the other children. I learned this by my working when I am a young teacher with my dedicated colleague who gave her life work to children with troubles. From her example I made my decision to be committed to such children. (Maria)[1]

Another teacher from the UK told us:

> I was a teacher in a junior school. When I had my first child she had cerebral palsy. I learned quickly—from the inside—how difficult it can be in the school system. I really wanted her to go to school with the children she knew at Toddler Group. I had to fight so hard for that. So, when I decided to return to work I got a job in an ordinary school that admitted pupils who were disabled. My daughter changed my career as well as making me a mother. (Marianne)

These extracts remind us of the influence of personal experience on career decisions. Though not all decisions to work with children with learning difficulties are taken as a result of a life event, personal accounts of inclusion and exclusion can make powerful and persuasive arguments for inclusion (Perera, 2001) and, for some, work in inclusive settings and services is not necessarily 'accidental' but rooted in personal experiences and influences (Clough & Corbett, 2000).

Professional development

Preschool educators were asked about their professional development and the extent to which they felt this equipped them for their work with children with learning difficulties. Table 3 shows that, across the countries, the majority (87%) reported that they derived much of their knowledge and understanding of work with children with

Table 3. Rating of professional development and the impact of experience on educators' professional insight and knowledge

Country	Total respondents	High-level professional development and impact on practice	Adequate training	Poor, little training provided or ineffective	Knowledge derived from experience
Greece	28	5	13	10	24
UK	41	5	11	25	37
Denmark	18	4	10	4	14
Italy	26	6	15	5	23
Total	113	20 (18%)	49 (43%)	44 (39%)	98 (87%)

learning difficulties through direct experience in working with them. Typical comments were:

> I learn such a lot by working with the expert—the child himself [*sic*]: nobody knows better than him. (Preschool teacher, Italy)
> Learning from the child is the most valuable training. (Pedagogue, Denmark)

So, in respect of actual formal and ostensible training, some 43% rated their training as 'adequate', saying:

> It was OK, gave me some basic knowledge, but not enough—not by any means. (Teacher, UK)
> Yes, my training helped me in general information but I would have been grateful to have more offered, more opportunity to learn. (Preschool teacher, Italy)

Of the 18% who rated their professional development highly as a factor in equipping them to meet the needs of young children, it appeared that higher degrees were a significant factor:

> I gained such confidence from the understanding and reading I did for my Master's degree, I now feel I really have a grasp of inclusion issues and of teaching children in the early years who are different from the majority. (Master's graduate and nursery manager, UK)
> When I finished my Master's, my professors proposed me to continue for a PhD, that was something I couldn't do that time. Maybe in the future I will continue for a PhD because I really adore to be in touch with research and studying and I learned so much from my Master's. (Kindergarten teacher, Greece)
> I have never looked back, I learned so much doing the MA, but I also learned—and this is perhaps more important—I learned to ask searching questions about systems and practices. (Teacher, independent school, UK)

In the main, the participants who said they highly valued their professional development in the field were experienced professionals who took advanced professional development programmes such as postgraduate diplomas or Master's degrees in areas related to early education, special educational needs and inclusion. One characteristic of such programmes is their sustained approach to identifying and solving professional

difficulties to enhance practice through systematic, self-critical enquiry, and an equally critical exposure to the literature.

Some 39% rated their professional development experiences and opportunities as 'poor'. Responses fell into two groups: those who had training but regarded it to be unhelpful or ineffective in meeting their needs, and those who felt they had too few opportunities for professional development:

> I really want to learn more and was really keen, so I went to this course and it was just handouts and talking at you—no real help at all, no discussion with others about their experiences and how they coped. (Nursery nurse, UK)
> I wait and wair and I write and I ask and ask. 'Please let me learn more, I say—to help children who struggle behind', but no, nothing. (Pedagogue, Denmark)

Clearly experiences of and opportunities for relevant professional development varies and our findings suggest that this is an issue, in all four countries, which would benefit from further study.

Inclusion and exclusion

In their study of Italian teachers' attitudes, Mega *et al.* (1998) found that teachers of younger children reported more positive attitudes than did secondary teachers, and such attitudes are important if inclusive early education is successfully to be achieved. Two studies of UK early childhood educators' personal views on inclusion revealed differing views on the desirability and practical possibilities of including young children (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002, 2004).

A small number of the preschool educators in our survey were unequivocally supportive of inclusion:

> Teachers are charged to educate children without presuppositions. Our job is to do the best for these young ages. So I have the opinion that, we teachers, we shouldn't talk at all of special education or special schools, but just of the relation of teacher–student. When we love children we all—specialized or not—can find ways to offer them and prepare their participation in the open society. (Kindergarten teacher, Greece)

Table 4 shows the three categories of response from the participants who said they believed that:

Table 4. Educators' beliefs on inclusion and exclusion

Country	Total no. of respondents	All children should be included	In principle, but it depends on their difficulties	No inclusion
Greece	28	2	25	1
UK	41	3	36	2
Denmark	18	5	12	1
Italy	26	1	23	2
Total	113	11 (10%)	96 (85%)	6 (5%)

- all children be included;
- children should be included 'in principle'; or
- children with learning difficulties should not be included.

The most commonly held view was positively for inclusion *in principle*, as long as additional and appropriate support was available and the inclusion of pupils with learning difficulties did not disrupt the rest of the class, a view that accords with other studies such as that reported by Croll and Moses (2000). Such a view might be said to reflect the 'Yes-but' factor. Some said:

> About educating children with learning difficulties and generally with all kind of difficulties, I believe in their total inclusion in the normal classes. The benefits are many for them and their education is effective. But there must be of course a good organized program, which is according to their needs and to the needs of the other children.
>
> Depends on the degree of the condition the children have. A child who has mobility problems could not pose any insurmountable problems, but a child with severe autism would be too disruptive and would affect the learning process for the rest of the children.
>
> Ideally they should be included, yes—but there are not always the right resources for them.
>
> Children should be included, provided that there is adequate teaching support available to enable all class members to receive equal attention during lessons. That is the important thing.
>
> Yes, they should be included but only if this can be achieved without disturbing the normal children and the child with special needs. It should promote tolerance in children without disability and enhance learning in those with a disability.

This 'yes-but' factor is clearly continuous, and is still to be found in the comments of two respondents who said that children with learning difficulties should not be included, arguing that:

> Children with complex needs need experienced staff and relevant resources, i.e. strategies to work on challenging behaviour, lifting equipment related to children with mobility difficulties and changing facilities.
>
> Some children should not be included because they could create an uncomfortable environment.

Summarizing, many of the 'yes-but' respondents called for inclusion only if there were adequate support available for the child, a factor reported in several studies (Croll & Moses, 2000; Emanuelsson, 2001; Karsten *et al.*, 2001). However 'support' is defined, it is clear that issues of support for the teaching and learning of children with learning difficulties are at the forefront of educators' minds when deciding whether or not it is possible (or desirable) to include a child in a 'mainstream' setting.

The roles of parents

There was broad agreement amongst our respondents that, especially in the early years, parents should palpably be involved in their children's learning and development programmes (see Table 5), and this should come as no surprise in a survey of early years professionals. However, 'parental involvement' clearly meant different things to different professionals.

Table 5. Educators' beliefs on parental involvement

Country	Total respondents	Full involvement	Some involvement, but …	No involvement
Greece	28	22	4	2
UK	41	31	7	3
Denmark	18	11	7	0
Italy	26	15	11	0
Total	113	79 (70%)	29 (26%)	5 (4%)

In an email dialogue, Pilly blames some behavioural difficulties on lack of parental support for children at home; she said:

> I have the opinion that the lack of the language is combined with other factors that lead to learning problems such as environment deprivation. Parents do not all help their children because they have bread-winning to take care of. So the children do everything by their own without any control of the family.

And when Dommi was interviewed, she told the following story:

> We allowed admission of a child who had difficult behaviour, eventually we found that the problem was ADHD. The parents were so anxious, and did not believe it was true. This was their only child and they blamed his behaviour on the staff in the kindergarten. Everyone—all the staff—we felt under scrutiny, parents watching us all the time for how we behaved with him. He was … everyone was doing their best but it was terrible. Really, really terrible.

Reasons given for not involving parents, but for giving them information, were that some parents themselves have their own difficulties. Their involvement in preschool, some participants felt, would make things more difficult for the children and for the staff (in all cases, this was said in relation to children with EBD). So, whilst one teacher said:

> Parents should be informed about what is happening with their child. They have a right to the infotmation. They should be told.

Another suggested that:

> Parents should be involved but, in some cases, they cause even more difficulties for the professionals. These parents often have illiteracy and emotional and, oh, all sorts of difficulties themselves.

Such responses however, were not common, and more typical statements were:

> Parents should have as much involvement as possible as this gives the parents a greater understanding of what is being achieved and that parents can reinforce these values in the home environment.
>
> Family is very important and they take care of the child when he is not in the kindergarten. Parents know their children better than any specialists—like the psychologist, who sees them for 10 or 30 minutes or whatever once in a while … Parents are central and can tell us about their children.

Responses which emphasize the importance of parental involvement seemed to be underpinned by two main reasons:

- *parents are the primary carers* and, as such, should have full involvement in decision-making because they are the constant factor;
- *parents need further opportunities to learn* about their children's needs and programmes and services to support them.

Such arguments are well rooted in the literature on parental involvement in preschool education in general (Nutbrown & Hannon, 1997; Nutbrown, 1999; Whalley, 2001) and, as such, the findings of this aspect of our survey might have been expected.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have set out the findings from a study of views and practices in inclusive early years education in four European countries. Whilst we make no claims to any generalizability of our findings, we believe that the study has illuminated some of the key structures that will provide a platform for the development of future research. We summarize these as follows.

1. *The importance of personal/professional experience in the development of individual educators' attitudes and practices to exceptional children and their families*: such responses may be variably supportive or inhibitive of the development of inclusive ideology and practice.
2. *The importance of properly resourced and critically informed continuing professional development at an advanced (and accredited) higher education level*: such work typically emphasizes contextualized, research-based enquiry, and is generally seen as more effective in personal, professional and institutional transformation than more traditional forms of categorical and psycho-medical conceptualizations of learning difficulties.
3. *The prevalence of 'hierarchies of tolerance' which reflect principled expressions of inclusive ideology in parallel with the maintenance of practices which effectively and selectively exclude*: we identify this as the 'yes-but' factor, which is commonly drawn upon to justify exclusive policies and practices, which are themselves often cited as 'in the child's best interest'.
4. *The primacy of the role of the parent and home in children's early learning and development*: in the main, early years educators would immediately agree that this role is critically important to children's development, though there is widespread definition of 'parental involvement', its nature and form.

In generating the above statements, we are aware that we have effectively reduced the manifest and complex variety of a number of specific and culturally unique experiences and policies into a set of quasi-universal 'truths'; these should, however, be examined against a different set of observations which point up the differences—rather than the similarities—that exist between the countries, contexts and participants of our study. Thus, in developing further the comparative aspects of our study,

we shall need to find ways of understanding and relating (within the generalizations above) the locally specific phenomena that are emerging within the larger picture. These include the differing:

- ideological traditions of educational policy and practice;
- national priorities for educational development;
- economic and geopolitical factors;
- culturally embedded individual responses to difficulty.

Whilst this might form an obvious checklist for any cross-cultural and comparative enquiry, in the context of the present study the understanding of these structures becomes vital if, as a European community, we are to discover and develop together borderless and maximally inclusive practices. Ten years on from Salamanca, it is essential that we learn from differing practices how a common, if rhetorical, commitment to human rights may be realized in the lives of *all* children.

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Note

1. Transcripts in this paper are presented without any correction of grammatical errors realized by respondents, many of whose native language is not English.

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