

Let's Collaborate with Kim on experiences of inclusion in secondary schools

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

inclusion, inclusive education, experiences, classroom, achieve, special educational needs, research, sen, similarities, participants, work, debates, felt, photos, thought, kim, doctoral training, southwest, focus, podcasts

SPEAKERS

Catherine McDonald, Kim Collett

Catherine McDonald 00:01

Hello, and welcome to Let's Collaborate a podcast from the South West Doctoral Training Partnership. I'm your host, Catherine McDonald. And joining me for this episode is Kim Collett from the University of Exeter. And Kim is looking at comparing experiences of inclusion in secondary schools. Kim, can you tell us a bit more about that?

Kim Collett 00:22

Yeah so my study is looking at inclusive education, and looking at what the direct experiences are of those who are actually living inclusion in the classroom. So looking at the experiences of the young people that are in the classroom, and also the teachers and the teaching assistants, and then comparing those experiences and those views on inclusion, to see what similarities and differences there are, and what that tells us about inclusive education. And also whether that offers us something we can then work from inclusion at the moment, although it's been part of the global and local agenda for decades, isn't actually being achieved. And there are lots of debates and arguments and theories as to why that is, but it's very tricky to implement it. So by trying to think about what the experiences are of those in the classroom, to try and understand it more, hopefully, we might have a base we can work from to try and improve the situation.

Catherine McDonald 01:10

And how are you defining an inclusive education?

Kim Collett 01:14

Well, that's part of the problem really, is that it isn't actually something that we are comfortable in defining in a universal way at the moment. So the definition that's used in policy and used in a lot of theoretical debates is quite ambiguous and quite vague. Some still align it with special educational needs, which is where its origins lay. But there has been a move to be education for all so including every single child and young person in the education system, no matter what their needs, and background and characteristics. But what that actually then looks like and translates into practice is

something that we aren't sure of, we think of inclusion as an ethically good thing that we should be doing, and the right thing to do. And there's not really much argument that that's true. But actually how we implement that and what it looks like in the classroom, we don't actually know, there are ideas that it's about differentiating it about everybody being in the same place about socialising. There are all sorts of different ideas, but we haven't got an agreement on what it is. And my research is actually showing one of the possible reasons why that might be. Oh, can you share that with us yet? No, I can. So looking at the similarities and differences between my participants, it became clear through the analysis that actually there isn't one version of inclusion that's happening in the classrooms. There are in fact, six different versions of inclusion that my participants discussed and used as a lens to discuss their experiences. So sometimes it was about academic inclusion, sometimes social, sometimes about placement, sometimes about agency, sometimes about wellbeing, and sometimes about specific identity facets, like Sen D. So depending on which one of those was being discussed or felt affected whether somebody was included or not included. And actually more than one of those could be happening at the same time. So you could be included and excluded at the same time, depending on what perspective he looks at it from. And actually, it showed that there are dimensions within that. So academic inclusion is often spoken about. But actually my participants sometimes spoke about it as engagement and participating in the learning. Sometimes they spoke about it in terms of achieving the learning outcomes, sometimes about actually accessing the learning, and sometimes about the pedagogical choices that were made in the classroom. And each of those different versions had different dimensions within them. So again, it had a complex picture of lots of different types and versions and dimensions of inclusion. Sometimes were there sometimes weren't, sometimes were felt by some and not by others. But it was changeable and variable, which made it very difficult to say that there is one way of doing inclusion, because it was so changeable, and so many different factors within it. But hopefully understanding that helps us to actually then explore it in a bit more depth.

Catherine McDonald 03:51

Absolutely so that was going to be my next question, really, in terms of what you want this to inform or change and and is it simply an increased understanding and an awareness or?

Kim Collett 04:00

Well, when I set out to do the research, I wanted it to be really practically beneficial. I thought comparing the groups might come up with particular pedagogical approaches, that would work really well. But actually, what it has is actually explored the concept of inclusive education more, which on the face of it feels like it's quite a theoretical finding. And what I'm hoping it will do is it will allow us to have a different focus in our debates on inclusive education. So try and move away from the current prominence of talking about inclusion as if it is one single universal thing that we can achieve. And actually, it's a complex thing that's got dilemmas and competing values and versions within it. And if we understand that, then hopefully we will shed more light and be more transparent about those difficulties and those challenges and actually be able to learn from those and look at them in a more holistic way that hopefully will pave the way forward for making a more inclusive experience because we'll know more about what it is and why it's so difficult to pin down. .

Catherine McDonald 05:01

Absolutely and so can I ask you about your methodology, how you're actually conducting the research?

Kim Collett 05:06

Yep, so my research, so I interviewed three different groups of participants. So one was young people without a label of SEND, which is special educational needs and disability. One was young people with that label, and one was teaching stuff. So I split SEND and non SEND. Because historically, SEND was the focus. And there's a legacy of that in practice, still, so I just thought it'd be interesting to see the difference between those. So what I did is a researcher driven photo elicitation interviews. So that's where I picked six photos of classroom activities. And we use those as a focus for our discussion. So we looked at those photos, and I asked them, whether they reflected their own classrooms, what they thought about the particular activity, to be able to elicit in depth discussions about what they experienced and what they felt. I've then got them to choose one of those photos that best resonated with them. And they wrote a caption to explain that choice, which we use in the second set of interviews, so that each participant could reflect on other participants experiences, to help reflect and to help show similarities and differences. And to help me understand what those might be by asking them what they thought the differences and similarities were and why

Catherine McDonald 06:18

It sounds like really enjoyable research to be doing. You know, being in that sort of classroom environment, I bet you've put some right characters.

Kim Collett 06:25

Yes, it definitely really interesting research. And having that creative element of having the photographs to focus on, I think, built up a lovely report made people feel relaxed, made them feel able to talk about their own experiences. And to be able to hear such varied experiences of different classrooms across the Southwest was really interesting. And some really unexpected examples that were given some quite negative, which was perhaps more distressing to hear, but also some great examples of teaching practice going on and students loving what they're doing, which was fantastic.

Catherine McDonald 06:58

And experiences that need to be heard, whether positive or negative, I guess. So that all sounds fascinating. I'm I'm interested in now one final question, what would your advice be to someone who's thinking about taking on a PhD? What would your advice be?

Kim Collett 07:14

I think there's loads of advice you could give somebody starting a PhD, I think the most important one is to really know why you want to do a PhD, because it's difficult. And there will be times where you're sick of it, there will be times where you doubt yourself, there'll be times where you don't want to do it. There'll be other times where it's joyous and fabulous. And you will love it. And it will be so interesting. But you need to be able to have your underlying motivation. And make sure that that is concrete enough to see you through the troughs, as well as being able to cope with the peaks

Catherine McDonald 07:45

and a hard thing to balance with life sometimes.

Kim Collett 07:48

Yeah, so I do mine part time. So I work as well. And I have two young children. So being able to balance all of these things can be quite tricky. So I made sure that I have a really clear plan of what I want to achieve. And I have my quick wins list where I have tasks that are less than 20 minutes that I can do. So if I've got a really busy week, even if it's just formatting a reference, I know I've done something towards achieving my PhD. So that works really well for me, but I think that you just have to figure out what works for you in your life.

Catherine McDonald 08:17

Sure, you have to do that and break it down into those attainable goals.

Kim Collett 08:21

Yes

Catherine McDonald 08:22

Absolutely, Kim, thank you so much for joining us for his episode. It's been lovely having a chat with you. And thank you for listening to Let's Collaborate from the South West Doctoral Training Partnership. This was produced in collaboration with research podcasts and recorded at the SWDTP conference in 2023. Don't forget to subscribe wherever you receive your podcasts.