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Exploring Professional Knowing, Being and Becoming through Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (IPAA) Framework

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Abstract: Despite extensive changes in early childhood inclusive education policy and practice, various barriers continue to inhibit access and participation of children with special needs in inclusive schools. Often mentioned barriers include negative beliefs, lack of understanding of inclusive pedagogy and the effectiveness of professional development to improve teacher knowledge to reduce these barriers. This study reports on a Thai Bureau of Special Education professional development partnership program with an Australian inclusive school in which 16 early childhood teachers from Thailand participated. This community of practice inquiry project generated qualitative data from pre- and post-professional workshops semi-structured interviews and analysis of teachers' professional learning journals during the inquiry phases of the project. Thematic analysis of the data showed that the international professional learning immersion program exerted an influential impact on the teachers who participated suggesting; teachers developed better understandings of children with special education needs by creating a mindset for change.

Introduction

Increasingly, the complexity of inclusive learning environments and the need to transform practice to meet the needs of all children (OECD, 2015; UNESCO, 2014) demand that teachers engage in continuous professional learning. Despite extensive changes in early childhood inclusive education policy and practice, large numbers of preschool children with Special Education Needs (SEN) in the poorest regions of the world are still either not enrolling or failing to build the strong foundation needed for further learning (UNESCO, 2012). A large body of research points to the unacceptably high rates of ineffective teaching and neglect of children with SEN in early childhood settings (Algood, Hong, Gourdine, & Williams, 2011; Jaudes & Mackey-Bilaver, 2008; Samuels, 2009; Shank, Greenberg, & Lebens, 2011). The effectiveness of educating children with SEN receive in early childhood learning settings depends on several factors. Among them, are teacher professional knowing, being and becoming. International commissioned research reports consistently draw attention to inclusive education quality and equity (UNESCO, 2012; UNICEF, 2004) as the process of eliminating barriers from education (OECD, 2015; Roberts, 2016).

Despite considerable reform efforts at improving teaching in inclusive schools, not much research into teachers' professional knowing, being and becoming inclusive practitioners appears to have been conducted. This research project addresses the question: How does participation in international professional learning immersion program in which

Inclusive Pedagogical Approach in Action (IPAA) is used as a pedagogical framework, transforms professional knowing, being and becoming?

Literature Review

Florian (2009) utilised a community of practice approach to investigate teachers' understandings of inclusive pedagogy and found that inclusive pedagogy represents a significant paradigm shift from teacher directed teaching to students with SEN as contributors of knowledge. Florian's paradigm shift idea is significant for transforming traditional beliefs about children with SEN, thus many teachers found it difficult to implement. Florian and Black-Hawkings (2011) examined teachers' professional being, knowing, and acting as inclusive teachers using IPAA framework in two Scottish primary schools. They found that IPAA framework extends what is ordinarily available to every student whether they are labelled as SEN or not. They stressed that it is a pedagogical approach that "focuses on everybody in the community of the classroom" (p. 820). IPAA is based on a philosophy that transforms deterministic views of ability and children's cognitive development and replaces them with the concept of transformability (Spratt & Florian, 2014).

Another piece of research in this field is by Makoelle (2014) who explored inclusive pedagogy with selected inclusive practitioners in one education district of South Africa. The findings indicated that the teachers did not have a universally accepted definition of inclusive pedagogy but the different meanings the teachers associated with inclusive pedagogy, were related to their context, philosophies, and underlying assumptions of SEN and ability. These perspectives are consistent with earlier findings that teacher beliefs and practices of inclusion if situated in positivist orientations, advocates a change of behaviour in the learner. However, if framed in constructivist perspective, supports full inclusion and privileges learning through discovery (Artiles & Dyson, 2005; Florian & Kershner, 2009). This indicates that philosophical assumptions influence teachers' knowing being and becoming inclusive teachers. According to Rouse (2009), teacher 'doing', 'knowing' and 'believing', in terms of their inclusive classroom practices, are interrelated. This observation reinforces the role of teacher professional learning to influence teachers' professional being, knowing and becoming inclusive professionals. It suggests that teacher professional learning must focus on transforming the philosophical assumptions of teachers in order to shift their perspectives to new ways of working to cater to the needs of all children.

Research findings on early childhood inclusive education indicate that many early childhood teachers are not adequately prepared to teach children with SEN (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2013, 2014, 2015; Kemp, Kishida, Carter, & Sweller, 2013). Recommendations pertaining to educational inclusivity, equity, and quality generally point to increasing teachers' knowledge in inclusive pedagogy. Within inclusive education, beliefs about knowledge and knowing (epistemic beliefs), have been linked to the ability and motivation to practice inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Spratt, 2013). IPAA framework has been found to support inclusive professional to think, know, feel and act as inclusive teachers and coherently document inclusive pedagogy in action (Deppeler, Loreman & Smith, 2015; Florian & Black-Hawkings, 2011; Spratt & Florian, 2014). Florian and Spratt (2013) recommend that although the framework was initially designed in the context of a teacher education project, it has wider applicability as a research tool for exploring inclusive pedagogy in action.

It has been argued that the understanding of IPAA can shift teachers from categorising children based on their disability and instead, consider each child as a capable learner (Spratt & Florian, 2014). The effective use of IPAA framework can transform

learning and developmental risks into successful outcomes for children with SEN because inclusive pedagogy believes that every child's capacity to learn is changeable: what teachers choose to do (or not to do) in the present can alter a child's learning capacity for the future (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive pedagogy problematises and replaces 'bell-curve' thinking with the notion of 'transformability' by focusing on social justice through interrogating the dilemmas of access and equity in education (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

In this sense, inclusive teachers are required to organise additional support and become actively engaged with all learners (Rouse, 2009). To become an inclusive professional, involves a continuous development of professional autonomy, resourcefulness, practical and ethical responsibility as well as working with and through others (Spratt & Florian, 2014). In IPAA framework, every child is seen as an "active meaning-maker, who uses their personal and social resources to make sense of the world as they experience" learning with inclusive teachers (Nind, Flewit, & Theodorou, 2014, p. 342). IPAA framework reflects a deliberate effort to improving the learning environment for all children rather than addressing the deficits or needs of particular children (Boettcher, 2007). Engaging educators in reflecting consciously on their own practice can contribute significantly to their knowing, being and becoming, and yield gains in ways they teach all children to maximise their educational experiences (Dall'Alba, 2004; Florian, 2009).

An aspect of conceptual understanding not addressed sufficiently by previous research is how teachers are transformed through professional immersion in contexts different to their own to both interpret in physical and conceptual terms, the various changes that occur in their learning journey of becoming inclusive practitioners. These perspectives are important, as they are needed for ultimately understanding which teacher development models are making the most gains for teachers. In addition, teachers who work in inclusive schools do not simply absorb new pedagogical methods; what they learn or fail to take on board is affected by both their philosophical beliefs about students with SEN and by how they make sense of the concept of inclusion.

Methodology

This study explored Thai teachers' participation in international professional learning immersion program facilitated with IPAA framework (Florian & Spratt, 2013). The purpose was to describe and critically analyse teachers' transformative experiences in relation to their professional being, knowing and becoming inclusive teachers. It utilised the theory of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) for its design to support critical reflection and action (Donohoo, 2013). A community of practice informed methodology promotes dialogue and inquiry for supporting a learning environment in which practice is improved (Stoll, 2010). This methodological perspective is situated in a social cognitive perspective, wherein professional knowledge of an individual and the process of its acquisition can be directly related to observing, dialoguing (Ligorio, 2012), and working with others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and external facilitators (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Dyer & Loytonen, 2012).

According to Drew, Priestley, and Michael (2016), "professional inquiry requires space for dialogical working, and a sustained period of engagement" (p. 96). This is crucial for this international professional learning immersion project because if the Thai teachers are to make sense of new and complex ideas advocated in the IPAA, engage with international colleagues, change their existing professional philosophies and beliefs about children with SEN, and enact new ways of professional practice, then they need a sustained period of mutual engagement.

The exclusions that children with SEN experience in inclusive classrooms are not simply the result of ignorance, but are in response to cultural, institutional and professional socialisation over time. Therefore, research on groups of teachers in an international professional learning immersion program is a valuable approach for identifying conceptual difficulties associated with the implementation of inclusive pedagogy, as well as the transformation that occurs when teachers observe and professionally learn with, from and through others in a professional learning community (Dyer & Loytonen, 2012; Stoll, 2010). Identifying such impact is a first step to improving teachers knowing, being and becoming inclusive teachers.

Research Context and Participants

The Special Education Bureau of the Office of Basic Education in Thailand initiated the project with the purpose of enhancing the knowledge and skills of Thai early childhood teachers through participation in international professional learning immersion programs. This is in response to special needs and inclusive education improvement initiatives to increase teachers' professional knowledge so that they can support all children with SEN (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2015; Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly & Dempsey, 2013). It is believed that enhancing teacher knowledge can address some of the complex demands of teaching children with SEN in Thai inclusive schools. Throughout the project, there has been a strong emphasis on inclusive pedagogy, values, beliefs and practical skills.

The study was qualitative and focused on the experiences of 16 Thai preschool teachers (4 males and 12 females) who were purposively selected from various provinces by the Director General of the Special Education Bureau in consultation with local provincial directors. The program took place over a three-week period (15 working days) in a large inclusive school located in the Southeastern suburbs of Melbourne in Australia. Due to professional placement constraints, for example, classroom space and the availability of one-to-one teacher mentors, the visiting teachers were split into two groups of eight teachers in each group. The first group participated in the program in July 2016 and the second group in March 2017 in the same school.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred in four stages. First, we collected baseline data through face-to-face individual semi-structured interviews with all the 16 selected participants in Bangkok in Thailand prior to the immersion program in Australia. The interviews focused on the teachers' demographic details, prior knowledge, beliefs and experiences in teaching children with SEN. The baseline data also included information on the teachers' understanding of inclusive pedagogy and their expectations in participating in the international immersion program in Australia. The first author, a bilingual academic, conducted the interviews in the Thai language with audio recording, transcribed the data and later translated it into English. Each interview session lasted about 35 minutes.

The second stage involved initial analysis of the baseline data to identify the teachers' experiences, contextual beliefs, experiences and understandings of inclusive pedagogy. The researchers then used the initial findings from the interviews to develop contents for the professional workshops using IPAA framework as the philosophical guiding tool. A three-day professional learning workshop was organised for all the 16 teachers by the two researchers in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop also included information on the Australian

education system, early childhood education, inclusive education policies and the culture of Australian people because none of the teachers had been to Australia except the first author who studied in Australia for more than six years.

At the third stage, the participants travelled to Melbourne in two cohorts for the professional experience component of the program and were placed in the inclusive schools in the South-eastern suburbs of Melbourne for three weeks. The placement school was chosen on purpose because it was designated as an exemplary inclusive school, and the principal and teachers were willing to mentor the visiting teachers. On the first day of the immersion program, the principal organised a welcome workshop on the profiles of the school after which each visiting Thai teacher participant was assigned to a local expert teacher mentor. Each of the visiting teachers kept a professional journal and documented their everyday learning experiences, which they discussed with their mentor teachers at the end of each school day. The first author served as facilitator and interpreter whenever the Thai or the Australian mentor teachers encountered some communication difficulties.

Stage four of the project involved an open professional sharing forum on the final day of the immersion program in the schools' professional training room. We collected additional data during the open discussion of the teachers' experiences. We used the discussion forum as a form of community of practice to perform a collaborative initial analysis of the data using an inductive approach to mark text segments into each category and identify key ideas and emergent themes (Thomas, 2006). For example, during this initial analysis, the teachers worked in pairs to compare their data, identify common and important threads, wrote it down on sticky notes, and then posted them on a board for observation and comments by all participants and researchers.

At the final analysis stage, we used a thematic approach to complete the analysis of data, drawing on the IPAA framework (see Table 1). This involved close reading of all the data set to get familiar with the content, gain an understanding, develop themes and compare with the themes developed in the initial analysis with the participants. At this stage, contradictory points of view and new insights were gained and appropriate quotes that convey the core themes were matched (Creswell, 2015).

Principles/underlying assumptions	Associated concepts/actions	Key challenges	Research and teaching themes	Themes reflecting our findings
Difference must be accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning	Replacing deterministic views of ability with a concept of transformability	'Bell-curve thinking' and notions of fixed ability still underpin the structure of schooling	Understanding learning and development	From tradition, culture, and religion to scientific knowledge
Teachers must believe (can be convinced) they are qualified/capable of teaching all children	Demonstrating how the difficulties students experience in learning can be considered dilemmas for teaching rather than problems within student	The identification of difficulties in learning and the associated focus on what the learner cannot do often puts a ceiling on learning and achievement. Teachers must change their beliefs that some children are not their responsibility	Understanding Social Justice	From incapability and fear to courage and influence;

The profession must continually develop creative new ways of working with others	Modelling (creative new) ways of working with and through others	Changing the way we think about inclusion (from 'most' and 'some' to everybody	Becoming an Active Professional	From Rigid self-centred practice to interprofessional networking.
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Table 1: Summary of IPAA framework showing relationship between the principles of inclusive pedagogy and the research core themes (Adapted from Spratt & Florian, 2014)

Ethical Considerations

The research received ethical approval from Monash University (No.122). The researchers obtained informed consent from the school principal, mentor teachers and teacher participants from Thailand to use their data in publications. Although it is not possible to guarantee full anonymity in this study because of its public nature, we have sought to minimise the risk of identification by referring to only the participants as TC1, TC2...TC16.

Results

The findings showed that involvement in this international professional learning immersion program exerted a powerful influence on the teachers who participated. In turn, this created a new mindset for changing professional practice in inclusive schools with the potential for supporting all children with SEN. In the sections that follow, we identify some of these influences, with reference to themes and data from the study where evidence showed deepened understanding of inclusive pedagogical knowledge about SEN and transformation in beliefs about teaching young children with SEN.

From Tradition, Culture, and Religion to Scientific Knowledge

Pre-immersion data showed that a number of the teachers used religious and traditional perspectives to describe children with SEN: "It is all about reincarnation" (TC3), "reincarnation is a Buddhist belief if you do something bad in your previous life ...it will affect you when you come back to this world again (TC7), some children may reincarnate with a disability" (TC11). Others associated SEN to "destiny... if you don't have a bad destiny, you cannot have disability" (TC8).

It is significant that participation in this project also uncovered how religion played a role in structuring the teachers' pre-existing professional knowing, being and doing. Participants mentioned that their positive attitudes towards teaching children with SEN were a way of providing good service in order to avoid retributions incurred through the process of reincarnation. The participants explained their understanding as consequences of cultural and religious socialisation in Buddhist philosophy:

Our religion teaches us to do good things. We love the children with SEN and we try our best to educate them (TC15).

If you are good to them, you will not receive punishment with a disability when you reincarnate; we strongly believe that if you commit an offense against someone you will pay a price for it in many forms (TC7).

It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult in carrying out effective inclusive practice than in societies where culture and religion negatively influence educational philosophies and practices. The research also suggests that the teachers' pre-existing practices were based on pity and medical model (Makoelle, 2014). As a result, they

often considered the children with SEN as the problem. For example, some participants opined that they have been “saddened to see children with SEN” (TC7), the presence of children with SEN and the ways they “struggled to learn made them stressed” (TC2) and often “worried because... don’t know if they were doing their best for them” (TC16).

Teachers are meaning-seekers, thus the values, beliefs, and sense of their identity are crucial to change in professional practice (Ligorio, 2012). Evidence from the data showed that the professional workshops and the international immersion program which utilised a community of practice provided abundant opportunities for the teachers to dialogue with others and find meaning around their individual and collective responsibilities as inclusive teachers. This meaning-making process culminated in shifting the teachers’ beliefs about SEN and ability. This may be attributed to two factors. First, is the inclusion of scientific discussion in the professional learning workshops, and second, is their participation in the international professional learning immersion program where the teachers collaboratively engaged in learning with, through and from their Australian counterparts. We found significant evidence of a shift in the teachers’ mindset from religious and traditional cultural causes of SEN to scientific discussions. This is interesting, confirming the idea that transformation is possible through distributed dialogue depending on the counterparts and the means involved in the dialogue (Ligorio, 2012).

Research suggests that the self is constantly in movement and in transformation, as such meanings are experienced as movements (Hermans & Kempen, 1993). These movements and transformations are influenced by contextual situations such as personal and cultural history, future perspective, and people and tools one may be exposed to (Ligorio, 2012). For instance, the participants described their transformations in the following ways:

Australian teachers never talked to us about religious things, they discussed teaching methods that work for everybody (TC4)

The Australian teachers showed us how to plan lessons for everybody (TC9).

They talked about barriers that teachers create consciously or unconsciously (TC13).

When we shared our beliefs, they asked us to prove it (TC1).

It is not possible to prove reincarnation; spiritual things are difficult to prove, so we just left it that way (TC15).

Their discussions on universal approach made sense to us more than what we believed (TC12).

It appears that a repositioning of the teachers’ entrenched beliefs regarding children with SEN might have been activated by their professional interaction with the Australian professional mentors. Professional interaction gives power to teachers to develop new ways of thinking about themselves. In particular, knowledge sharing acted as a source of personal and cultural transformation (Ligorio, 2012). Participants also described how the project had opened up insights into the practices of Australian teachers: “The Australian teachers enjoyed teaching children with disabilities” (TC13), they showed no sign of fear or distance” (TC5), “they taught us how to apply what we learnt in the workshops and make it relevant to children with SEN (TC6). Another teacher added that “it was good when they saw the real practice and how the teachers here were doing it” (TC8). These perspectives described above appeared to have fostered a change in thinking of what effective inclusive practice entails.

From Incapability and Fear to Courage and Influence

As understood from the teacher narratives, the diversity among children with SEN was a factor that made the work of teaching in inclusive classrooms difficult for the teachers

prior to their participation in the professional learning immersion program. The reflections of three teachers precisely exemplify this perspective, which was evident throughout the data:

Children with SEN are better off in special preschools (TC10).

If we include them with other children, teaching becomes difficult and stress levels in the classroom increase (TC2).

It is a great burden to us and affects our teaching performance (TC14).

These perspectives demonstrate professional incapability and fear of working with difference in an inclusive setting. It appears that although the teachers were aware of the challenges in their professional practice, they seemed to have run out of ideas to address them. Further pre-immersion comments suggest that participants considered an inclusive program for young children too difficult, and would prefer it “begins from upper primary education (Grade 4 to 6) (TC5), thinking that as children mature “they will automatically acquire behaviour skills” (TC11). The teachers expressed their biggest challenge as “trying to prepare materials and programs that meet every child’s developmental needs” (TC8). The teachers’ discomfort of working with children with SEN appears to be associated with children with significant behaviour issues:

I don’t feel comfortable working with children disruptive the class (TC14).

It is too much of a stress and time commitment...more often it is difficult because you don’t know what to do (TC4).

The international immersion program was purposefully developed to establish a collaborative knowledge sharing and to disrupt and challenge existing beliefs, values and practices. Post-immersion findings show the related impact on the teachers professional knowing, being and becoming inclusive teachers. For example, two participants declared:

I learn the strategy of how to use visual materials and structured teaching to individualised instruction for children with disabilities (TC16).

Now, I know how to make several visual materials and how to use them in teaching. (TC8).

Further comments from teachers indicate their transformation in ways they view teaching and learning. For example, there was a discussion about different children with SEN having varied potentials rather than a focus on their special needs. They also shifted their perspectives from scolding children for their learning challenges to a view which considers ongoing support as positively enabling children with SEN to make progress in their learning. Many comments related to how the program contributed to this change in mindset included:

We learned a lot from the Australian teachers, they plan their work well before they do their work (TC7).

They are calm and support every child (TC5). They don’t use abusive words, they always encourage the children (TC8).

In our schools, some teachers tend to use threats including I will beat you if you don’t stop that! You can’t stay in this group, you are too destructive ... Aaah, you’re just too troublesome, look at what you’ve done! I am tired of you! (TC13).

We learned from our mentor teachers how to respond to behaviour issues in a positive way (TC6).

We are building our courage gradually to do a good practice when we are back home (TC12).

These perspectives demonstrate that courage to teach is a great influence on teaching; it requires the teacher to listen and care for all children (Florian & Black-Hawkings, 2011). Teachers exert great influence through their pedagogical behaviours because children tend to model behaviours on what they see others do. Therefore, the courage to teach must connect with passion and responsive learning relationship.

From Rigid Self-Centred Practice to the Idea of Inter-professional Networking

The findings of this study also uncovered shifting perspectives from rigid self-centred pedagogical approaches to the idea of full participation, which can be enacted through working in professional teams. Pre-immersion interviews suggest the teachers worked in professional silos, trusting their individual capabilities in order to teach all children with SEN. For example, “therapy sessions were provided to children with SEN without the involvement of classroom teachers” (TC1). Another teacher narrated, “everybody worked separately and we rarely shared ideas together when we taught the children”. The common practice discussed consistently by the participants suggests, “the main teacher is the one who does the teaching whilst the assistant teacher sits at the back and manages children with challenging behaviours.” These isolated practices also extended to the therapists as reported by one teacher:

The therapist doesn't work with us they do everything on their own in pull-out rooms, we don't know what goes on there. We meet them during staff meetings and they tell us what we should do in our classrooms with the children (TC10).

Resistance to collaboration for knowledge sharing was highlighted a number of times by the teacher participants. One teacher shared: “Many of us don't want to ask for help because our colleagues would think of you as professionally weak” (TC11), and others noted: “Every teacher keeps doing his or her own things because they don't want to appear as if they know nothing” (TC13). Participation in the professional learning program, however, appears to have acted as a stimulus for change in beliefs about the potential of inter-professional working to address some of the teaching and learning challenges regarding children with SEN. One participant affirmed that “it is an exposure to them, the professional learning workshops on IPPA deepened their understanding of the community of practice” and that, they “learned a lot about how to listen to others”. Another teacher reiterated:

The Australian teachers are all up to it. They worked with therapists together. They plan in a group and team-teach; this is interesting...we learned from them how to work as a team; it's what we plan to do from now on (TC7).

The findings demonstrate how the project has catalysed transformation in professional knowing, being and becoming through the experience of theory in practice. However, it is not possible to make any claims about the project's impact on the teachers' classroom practice in Thailand. A follow-up study on the teachers' classroom practice would make this visible. Despite this, a claim can be made that as the Thai teachers worked together with the Australian teachers, they were opened to possibilities to analyse and reflect on their own professional views and beliefs, which may influence their practices. Some of the participants explained that the “promotion of dialogue and inquiry occurred” (TC9 &TC2) for the purpose of supporting a learning environment in which professional practice is improved (Dyer & Loytonen, 2012). Two participants acknowledged that the Australian teachers were collegial in their professional approaches:

The Australian teachers listened to us, they were patient and valued our ideas and always encouraged us to speak our mind (TC14).

This is different to our practice back home where only superiors speak. In Australia, every teacher can speak and contribute ideas...this is great! (TC16).

These perspectives demonstrate that a well developed international professional learning immersion program can be a powerful platform for supporting teachers to become inclusive practitioners (McAteer, 2013).

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that participation in the international professional learning immersion program in which IPAA was used as a pedagogical framework, influenced the teachers' professional knowing, being and becoming. Three potential areas of professional transformation occurred. These are, re-orienting mindsets from tradition, culture, and religion to scientific knowledge; transforming beliefs of incapability and fear to courage and influence, and shifting perspectives from rigid self-centred practice to inter-professional networking. The study demonstrates that the ways in which teachers transform their knowing to become inclusive professionals are multiple. According to Wenger (1999), effective development of teachers' competency involves participation in a community of practice, a concept that

...refers not just to local events or engagement in certain activities with certain people, but to a more encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities (p. 4).

The perspectives shared by the teachers in this study reinforce the community of practice idea that the understandings that help teachers to become competent educators are not accomplished by transferring the rules of teaching and handing over the tools of practice. Instead, knowledge and professional competence is conceptual and embodied in ways of seeing, interacting and learning with, from and through others (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this project, the IPAA framework, which was utilised to scaffold teachers' understanding of inclusive practice, contains concepts that are more than ordinary words. The professional transformations described by the teacher participants did not occur by simply describing IPAA or telling teachers about it. To a high degree, it involves engaging teachers in communities' of practice questioning their values, assumptions skills and knowledge concerning education, learning, and society for their transformability (Florian & Spratt, 2013).

The results have demonstrated that the act of transforming teachers' professional knowing being and becoming, involves negotiating 'a series of institutional rules, rituals, conventions, categories and designations to developing a self-identity as a teacher (Webb et al. 2002). For example, through an interrogation of previous practices with the IPAA framework, the teachers expressed a formation of new identity, developing new beliefs that all children can learn when the right support is provided. This suggests that the shifting and fluid nature of inclusive education fields demand from inclusive teachers to continuously learn and develop their practice (Hodkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008; Clark, Zukas, & Lent, 2011). An important contribution of this project is how the Thai teachers described their shifting perspectives from fundamentally imposing categories or deterministic views about children's ability to the view that considers every child with SEN as capable individuals (Bourdieu, Passeron & de Saint Martin, 1994).

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011), citing Alexander, refer to inclusive pedagogy as "the art of teaching and its attendant discourse" (Alexander, 2004, p. 11). The findings of this study demonstrate that inclusive pedagogy and its related practices are not straightforward for the participants; it requires commitment and continuous learning to move away from bell-curve thinking that sees some children as too difficult to educate (Florian, 2009; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive pedagogy in early childhood education involves teaching activities and educational programs that acknowledge, support, "respect as well as respond to ... differences in ways that include learning in, rather than exclude them from what is ordinarily available" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 814).

This study also uncovered that discourses and traditional beliefs about children with SEN can act on pedagogic epistemology, disrupt inclusive teaching and lead to exclusion of children who are constructed as deficient (Smith and Long (2014), unless teachers are given a space to question and transform their values and beliefs (Jones & Gillies, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 2005). The implication that can be gleaned from this study is that teachers whose professional knowing and beings are structured by negative cultural beliefs can possibly be transformed by making alternative practices visible to them. In other words, they need to participate in professional learning programs that are different from what they are usually accustomed to in their own contexts (Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler & Guang-xue, 2013; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008; Sharma & Deppeler, 2005).

These findings are consistent with numerous studies, which demonstrate that learning in a community supports teachers to develop competence in inclusive pedagogy (Fulk, Swerlik & Kosuwan, 2002; Haikin, 2009; Sharma, Forlin Deppeler & Guang-xue, 2013; Sukbunpant, Arthur-Kelly & Dempsey, 2013). Beliefs and perceptions are formed through cultural, social and institutional practices (Cardona, Florian, Rouse & Stough, 2010). Therefore, the transformation of teachers must involve opening up professional learning spaces where they can reform their philosophical and epistemological embodiment. It means exposing professionals to a variety of practices and contexts where they can nourish themselves with new ideas. According to Thomson (2001), becoming a transformed professional is “to bring us full circle back to ourselves, first by turning us away from the world in which we are most immediately immersed, then by turning us back to this world in a more reflexive way” (p. 254). Dall’Alba (2009) also argues that, every profession has their own embodied routines and what constitutes good practice; learning to engage with these in the present will determine the future becoming of the professional. Finally, this study has demonstrated that becoming a competent professional is not a wholly individual or isolated enterprise (Dall’Alba, 2009). A key concept in the IPAA framework that allowed this to happen is how the participants have the opportunity to learn with and through others, reinforcing the work of the inclusive professional as located in everyday practices that are entwined with what others do.

Conclusion

In this study we explored the question of how participation in an international professional learning immersion program in which IPAA is used as a pedagogical framework, transforms professional knowing, being and becoming. We found that the use of IPAA framework in professional learning promotes professional transformability of knowing and doing as argued by Florian and Pratt (2014). It demonstrates that linking IPAA framework to a community of practice with expert professional mentoring can transform conceptions of SEN and positively impact inclusive pedagogy, removing most, if not all the repressive elements of certain beliefs and traditions on children’s ability. The most vital aspect of this international immersion project is how it afforded the participants a unique platform to openly talk about their professional practice. In view of the inhibiting effect of certain pedagogical practices (Florian, 2009; Rouse, 2009), we suggest that professional learning must establish approaches where teachers can own their professional learning. We believe that a sense of ownership will encourage a critical engagement of difficult philosophical and epistemological issues regarding ability and special needs. This type of teacher education where expert mentoring is provided as a community of practice would support both mentors and mentees to extend knowledge and understanding of special needs education beyond what is possible through an individual teacher.

Limitations

Sixteen teachers participated in this study therefore, we cannot generalise the findings to all Thai teachers. In addition, we acknowledged that if we had included the perspectives of the Australian teachers this would have enriched the study results. A further limitation is the selection process since the Ministry selected the participants without our inputs. Finally, we cannot claim the teaching impact aspect of this study; the full impact of this program needs a follow-up research to establish how the teachers are implementing their new knowledge in practice.

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