INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS: EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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WAXMANN
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Preface

Educational institutions should offer a safe and secure environment for young people. Part of that should be educational equity, which is a measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education. This publication on “International Insights: Equality in Education” analyses and discusses educational equality from different angles.

All 22 contributions reflect on the current situation of 11 European countries. All of them are part of the Bologna process and are dealing with the challenges of the development of a European Higher Education Area. This ongoing process is reflected in the present publication, with a specific focus on equality in education.

The contributions to this publication are as varied as the countries in the European education area. Not only do the authors cover aspects like inclusion and inequality, internationalizing education, and accessing education, but they also deal with learning foreign languages, education for the future, assessment, feedback and student success, lifelong learning and teacher training. Furthermore, many of the contributions are linked to different aspects of the LGB(T+) community and gender and education. This also includes LGB(T+) rights and their implementation in the legal systems of European countries.

All contributions also share a common focus: They are all linked to the European education context and to equality in education, which is steadily gaining significance in the context of the European unification and integration process, and to European teachers’ training. The individual contributions are not arranged alphabetically by topic, but by author. The authors have the full responsibility of accuracy and authenticity of their contributions. All contributions are double-blind reviewed by reviewers and the scientific committee to ensure an adequate standard.

We hope this publication will catch your interest!

Vana CHIOU, Greece
Oliver HOLZ, Belgium
Nesrin ORUÇ ERTÜRK, Turkey
Fiona SHELTON, United Kingdom
Instead of an Introduction

In contributing to this important publication some uplifting memories are triggered. In 2018 I was invited to deliver a keynote at the Homo’poly conference in Buxton. I was inspired to learn more about work being undertaken by activists and advocates to facilitate LGBT+ inclusion in learning communities in countries other than my own, often in challenging circumstances.

I didn’t plan on becoming an LGBT+ activist or advocate, but somehow, without formal funding or sponsorship, in the UK over the past ten years I have played a key role in facilitating a national cultural shift towards LGBT+ inclusion of pupils, parents and LGBT+ staff in the primary and faith school sectors especially.

My own LGBT+ advocacy work was triggered whilst serving as a London school leader; pupil voice revealed widespread homophobic bullying and prejudicial language in my (then) primary school. In response I ‘came out’ to the whole school community and devised an LGBT+ inclusion leadership and staff training programme which I have now delivered to many thousands of education professionals across the UK and overseas, reaching faith leaders, the UK schools’ inspectorate OFSTEM and reaching government department level. To my surprise my work has now also won multiple awards, but winning awards is not why I do it.

As a survivor of sustained familial rejection and homophobic bullying I (like too many others) am living proof that education in a hostile learning community leads to poor mental and physical health, low attendance, impaired academic outcomes and potentially life-long struggles with anxiety and depression leading potentially to drug and alcohol abuse or to self-harm and suicide. I did not choose (as I am sure you didn’t) to become an educator to facilitate learning communities within which young people are eroded from within, purely for being who they were born to be.

I was invited to speak at Homo’poly Buxton as a result of not only my work, but also my Bloomsbury Education book ‘Celebrating Difference – A Whole School Approach to LGBT+ Inclusion’. Although I have presented my work in international contexts before, I was interested to learn more via Homo’poly about the rationale, successes and challenges of the European countries represented. I also enjoyed the accompanying text ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’ by De Witte, Holz and Geunis which I thoroughly recommend. It became very clear that despite some often-significant differences in our social, political and cultural contexts, compassion for our wonderful, naturally diverse young people is our shared core value.

Ten years of work in the field of LGBT+ Inclusion has revealed to me not only an unprecedented level of often unreported human suffering due to school-based bullying and prejudice, but also that challenge to LGBT+ inclusion often occurs when time isn’t taken to work with misconceptions about what the rationale of the work is and more importantly what it isn’t.
Objections such as ‘promotion of LGBT+ lifestyles’ and ‘sexualisation’ or ‘confusion’ of young people still prevail; we must therefore be more robust in countering these damaging clichés, not only with facts but with regular reminders of our compassionate prime directive and the scale of human suffering caused by LGBT+ prejudice and bullying.

There is, I believe more of a ‘public relations job’ to be done in relation to work on LGBT+ inclusion; we can’t assume that our honourable intentions on behalf of our diverse young people will land positively with parents, media and politicians in a manner that reduces anxiety and enables us to work positively with ingrained prejudices and misunderstandings.

Even as I write, in the UK city of Birmingham teachers are going to work at school having to endure vocal and sometimes hateful protest against their compassionate representation of LGBT+ identities and families within the school curriculum; recently I stood by the gates of the UK Parliament and watched angry protestors, many of whom were deploying faith-based prejudice, in an attempt to preclude schools from teaching about LGBT+ lives and experiences.

Despite such challenges, Scotland has recently announced a mandatory LGBT+ inclusive curriculum and France a nationwide anti-homophobic bullying strategy. I am currently leading the entire Isle of Man education community on journey towards positive LGBT+ inclusion and the important work and research undertaken by those involved in the wonderful Homo’poly project has already and will continue to inspire further positive change.

Our journey towards compassionate LGBT+ inclusion faces many challenges; by disseminating the positive impact of our best practice via research projects, conferences and books such as this, we can hope to draw the prevailing global narratives back not only to the light, but also to the joyful colours of the natural rainbow of human diversity.

I don’t believe educators get thanked enough, so on behalf of every young person whose life will be improved by your projects I want to thank you. If our collective work makes a difference to even one young life then the challenges, the protests and yes even the hate will have been worthwhile.

Kindness and compassion require bravery; thank you for your courage and thank you for Homo’poly.

Love and light

Shaun DELLENTY, United Kingdom
Scale of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction of Dancers –
Results of the Pilot Study

Maria Aleksandrovich & Herbert Zoglowek

People have asked me why I chose to be a dancer.
I did not choose. I was chosen to be a dancer,
and with that, you live all your life.

Martha Graham, 1991

Nowadays dance and the professional life of dancers are becoming the subject of scientific interest. Researchers are focusing on investigating different aspects like motion biomechanics, eating disorders, personality traits, possibilities of dancers’ career transition, as well as therapeutic influences of dance. However, studies of dancers’ professional satisfaction at various stages of their career are not numerous. The aim of this article is to discuss the theoretical basis and the first empirical results of a pilot study on the process of the construction of the Scale of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction of Dancers (SCSPSD), developed for measuring the self-evaluation of success and professional satisfaction of dancers. When constructing the scale, we based it on the results of the study of traits of successful dancers (Nixon, 2012; Chua, 2014), the idea of subjective well-being (Desmet & Pohlmeyer, 2013), claims of the Life Satisfaction Scales (Diener, 2006) and data on research of personality traits of ballet dancers (Aleksandrovich, 2004). The research was conducted in 2016–2017 in Poland, using the SCSPSD. The study group consists of professional and amateur dancers (40 dancers: 30 females, 10 males; Mean Age = 21,1 y.o.). The results obtained in the pilot study allowed us to suppose, that the Scale of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction of Dancers is a reliable tool to assess the career success and professional satisfaction of dancers.

Key words: dancers, scale of career success, professional success, professional satisfaction

1. Introduction

Nowadays dance and the lives of professional dancers feel a new wave of public and scientific attention. This attention to the life and the career of exceptional dancers comes from the curiosity about motivation of being creative and achieving high levels of performance. Live of professional dancers can be difficult. Every year thousands of young dancers all over the world start their dance education and only a few exceptionally talented dancers graduate and gain the professional level. The fields of classical and contemporary dance are very competitive and challenging. In everyday life, dancers face intensive physical training, often connected with injuries and stressful psychological challenges. Even though, the number of dance graduates is growing. Dancers are highly motivated performers, who contend with the
fleetingness of their profession and who perform constantly perfecting each movement on the way to success. For us, scientific curiosity concentrates on the study of the feeling of success and the dancers’ professional satisfaction.

2. Definition of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction

Career is defined as “the individually-perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviors associated with work-related experiences and activities over the span of a person's life” (Hall, 1976, p. 4). The concept of success is not explicitly defined (Kay, 1996). Success can be generally understood as the sum of various successes in certain social roles such as partner, chief, parent, and friend or part-time, as a success that a person achieves in a particular field, for example, a career, advancing, being a valued manager (Maxwell, 1994). Success is a highly individual phenomenon, which can be described as “accomplishment of an aim or purpose” and “the attainment of fame, wealth, or social status” (Oxford Dictionaries, online). Success “does not occur in the abstract; it occurs with respect to some set of standards or expectations, whether of oneself or of others” (Grigorenko & Sternberg, 2016). Speaking about success, people more and more often put a higher attention to the intrinsic factors of success (sense of responsibility, need to achieve something, self-esteem, individual development, joy from the work) than the extrinsic ones (wealth, influence, status, material accomplishment) (Eith, Harald & Claudia, 2011).

Theories of professional development show that there are some psychological variables that determine professional success. Among them are:

- intelligence and abilities,
- interests and needs,
- system of value,
- personality traits and temperament,
- emotional factors,
- environmental variables (upbringing and family environment).

Career success is the “accomplishment of desirable work-related outcomes at any point in a person's work experiences over time” (Arthur et al., 2005, p. 179). Our research was conducted in the frame of the Positive Psychology that states being successful is defined as “living a life of meaningful achievement, having a positive experience of life and making a positive difference to others” (Jordan, 2013). Career success can be defined as a four-dimensional integrated framework, which includes:

- external achievements,
- external feelings,
- internal achievements,
- inner feelings (Dries, Pepermans & Carlier, 2008).

At the same time career success is the result of personal experience and the accumulation of real achievements (Meade, 2000), so that career success contains objective career successes and subjective career successes (Hughes, 1958). Subjective career success includes:
– realization of goals,
– self-identity,
– perceived opportunities for promotion (Heslin, 2005).

Personal career success is guided by objective factors, as well as by those less evident and depended upon the subjective interpretation (Shockley et al., 2016).

Professional satisfaction can be defined as positive attitudes and feelings of a person towards the working environment (Staples & Higgins, 1998). Satisfaction depends on:

– balance between what a person invests and receives back at work,
– level of individual needs satisfaction at work,
– level of person’s expectations fulfilment (Czajka & Szumski, 1987).

3. Career Success and Professional Satisfaction in Dance

Professional dancers spend a huge amount of time focusing on their profession. What is more, everyday life of a young dancer who is working towards a professional dance career also goes around dancing. If someone wants to dance professionally, he or she has to work on it professionally. However, a career in dance can be unpredictable and can include the periods of instability and unemployment. That is why dancers should develop skills in administration, advocacy and marketing, and be ready to take on additional employment (Kogan, 2002).

George Balanchine claimed: “I don’t want dancers who want to dance. I want dancers who need to dance” (Balanchine, online). This “need” creates a strong basis for the future, challenging and precision work of the dancer’s body and technique. Professional dancers have a relatively short time for their dance career development. However, a career in professional dance, especially ballet, is constant dedication and commitment. It requires such a level of “need” and love to the art of dance, that it would be enough to put years of hard, everyday training to throw out all of the days of the dancer’s professional life. In such a situation, being a successful professional dancer does not normally happen by accident. Dance is essentially a motivating activity, which gives opportunities for psychological and physical development and self-actualization. Among the intrinsic factors of success in a professional dance career often mentioned are:

– love of the art of dance,
– ambition, which motivates a dancer,
– work ethic, which helps a dancer to achieve his/her goals,
– self-awareness, which allows a dancer to reach new career levels,
– knowledge seeking, which makes a dancer open for new experiences.

Among the extrinsic factors of success in professional dance careers, researchers mention the following:

– full-time employment of a dancer at a national or international dance company,
– leading role(s) performance,
– highest ranking of a dancer in a company,
– finalist or winner at national or international level dance competition,
– dance talent recognized for by national or international organization (Chua, 2015).

From the practical point of view the components leading to professional success in art of classical dance are:

– discipline,
– musicality,
– diligence (Tciskaridze, 2014).

Defining dance success, Ureña (2004) used such objective indicators of the ballet dancers’ as rank and reputation within the company. Chua (2014) enriched the above definition by adding as indicators of dance success the experience of performing lead roles and the winning of national or international awards.

4. Methodology of Research

The empirical research was conducted by Maria Aleksandrovich in 2016–2017 in Poland, using the Scale of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction of Dancers (SCSPSD).

The study group consists of professional and amateur dancers (40 dancers: 30 females, 10 males; Mean Age = 21,1). The statistical analysis was conducted with help of confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis.

Scale of Career Success and Professional Satisfaction of Dancers

SCSPSD is a questionnaire that can be used to measure professional satisfaction of dance career among ballet dancers, modern dancers, folk dancers, as well as amateur dancers. The scale is based on the characteristics of the successful dancer (Nixon, 2012; Chua, 2014), ideas of subjective well-being (Desmet & Pohlmeyer, 2013), the theoretical approach and statements from the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, 2006), as well as on the own data from the study of personal characteristics of successful ballet dancers (Aleksandrovich, 2004). The pilot theoretical structure of the scale is presented in the Table 1.

The pilot structure on the scale consisted of 51 statements and included an assessment scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The process of validation took place in 2016–2017 in Poland on the group of professional and amateur dancers. Below we present the description of the scale’s factors (see Table 1).

5. Results

The analysis of the scale’s reliability, carried out with the use of Cronbach’s $\alpha$, showed the progressive indices for the scale dimensions (see Table 2).

On the level of our pilot study we performed reliability analysis of each of the dimensions. Three dimensions have good internal consistency: Subjective success is characterized by $\alpha = 0.87$; Objective success / achievements and Body shape satisfaction are characterized by
Table 1: The pilot theoretical structure of the SCSPSD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Examples of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective success</td>
<td>– I feel I have high achievements in dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I feel I am an example for others in dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– In most ways my dance career is close to my ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective success / achievements</td>
<td>– I am finalist or winner at national or international level dance competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I have got prizes at the dance competitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I am the highest-ranking dancer in the company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career satisfaction</td>
<td>– If I was able to start my dance career over again, I would change almost nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I am satisfied with opportunities of career growth and promotion in my dance company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I am satisfied with my salary and allowances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social recognition</td>
<td>– Other professionals evaluate highly my dance talent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Other people ask me, what to do, to start dancing like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– The other dancers of the company recognized my dance talent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>– I am satisfied with the support I get from my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Members of my family are also connected to dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Family and children do not disturb my dance career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body shape satisfaction</td>
<td>– I am satisfied with my body abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I feel my body is created for dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Thanks to dance I have a nice and able body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for after dance career</td>
<td>– In future I would like to have my own dance school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– I would like to teach others to dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– In future I would like to be a choreographer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Results of the reliability analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjective success</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective success / achievements</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career satisfaction</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social recognition</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body shape satisfaction</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for after dance career</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner cohesion of the scale</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
\( \alpha = 0.82 \). Four dimensions have acceptable internal consistency: Career satisfaction is characterized by \( \alpha = 0.75 \); Family support is characterized by \( \alpha = 0.74 \) and Social recognition is characterized by \( \alpha = 0.71 \).

The Inner cohesion of the scale is characterized by \( \alpha = 0.94 \), meaning that internal consistency the SCSPSD is excellent and it measures what we want it to measure. So, the obtained results allowed us to continue further investigations of the SCSPSD’s psychometrical characteristics.

6. Conclusion

There are no doubts that dance teachers, policy makers and dancers themselves are interested in finding a way for success in professional dance. For us, as researchers, it is fundamentally interesting how dancers themselves evaluate their career development and how deeply they are satisfied with the work they do. Such knowledge suggests there is an implication among the educators and talent mentors, who are looking for the appropriate educational and nurturing strategies to support the development of talented dancers.

The current data obtained at the pilot stage allows one to suppose that SCSPSD is a reliable tool, which encourages one to undertake further research on a larger population of dancers and further assess the psychometric properties of the scale.

In the course of further analysis, it will be necessary to lower the number of dimensions and to evaluate the quantity of statements within specific dimensions for further exploratory factor analysis. What is also planned, is checking the model in confirmatory factor analysis.

Our research shows also a high interest of the participants in our research questions. In combination with the first statistical results, it makes us optimistic to elaborate a reliable instrument to analyse the self-evaluation of professional career development of dancers. Summing up, it is important to underline, that “success is achieved by people who know what success means for themselves” because “success is a mental attitude, a mind-set, and the quality of this mental attitude allows people to make the most of their other training and skills” (Nixon, 2012, p. i).

References


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Dyslexia Spells Trouble
Disclosure and Discrimination within the UK Primary Teaching Profession

Sarah Charles

This paper seeks to investigate whether the dominance of a standards drive approach to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and the UK teaching profession has perpetuated attitudinal barriers to the recruitment and employment of students with dyslexia. Perceived strengths and challenges that those with dyslexia may bring to the profession and their employability prospects, on disclosure, are explored. The research employed mixed methods, incorporating the implementation of both an online questionnaire, completed by 214 stakeholders (comprising primary Initial Teacher Education lecturers, school staff, trainee primary teachers and parents of primary school children) and 11 semi-structured interviews. Findings suggest many stakeholders perceive dyslexia negatively. It is a disability couched in deficits rather than difference. This research found a small number of strengths such as empathy, inclusive practice and ease of identification of children with dyslexia are attributed to those training to teach with dyslexia. Stakeholder concerns of those entering the profession with dyslexia, are identified as being – ability to cope with the demands of the profession; the inability to teach particular age groups/subjects; the level of support needed to ensure success and retention following qualification. This latter concern constitutes a key finding of this research, as the level of support afforded by universities is perceived as being unrealistic in the workplace. A significant majority of stakeholders demonstrated a negative attitude towards the notion of people with dyslexia entering the teaching profession, believing that parents should be concerned if their child is being taught by someone with dyslexia. Both of these findings could have serious implications on the future disclosure of those with dyslexia. This research has found that fear of stigmatisation and potential discrimination, which deter those with dyslexia from disclosing on course and job applications is justified and real. This research concludes that employability chances are lessened upon disclosure of dyslexia.

Key words: dyslexia, Initial Teacher Education, primary teacher, disability, discrimination

1. Contextualisation

The British Dyslexia Association (2013) estimates that within the United Kingdom (UK) 10% of people have some form of dyslexia, with dyslexia now constituting 70% of all disclosed disabilities within UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, 2014). Whilst there is much research about the identification of dyslexia and subsequent support for students with dyslexia in HE (Jamieson & Morgan, 2008; Pavey, Meehan & Waugh, 2010), there is little research regarding students with dyslexia training to be primary teachers (Griffiths, 2011; Cameron & Nunkoosing, 2012).
Whilst some authors recognise the potential benefits that teachers with dyslexia can bring to the profession such as creativity (Attree, Turner & Cowell, 2009), empathy (Burns & Bell, 2011) and inclusivity (Riddick, 2010), Griffiths (2011) asserts that those with dyslexia, “[a]re often seen as threats to standards and a burden, requiring extra work rather than a valuable source to promote understanding and acceptance of disability in schools” (p. 2). Furthermore, despite the introduction of a range of inclusive legislation including the Disability Discrimination Education Act (DDA, 1995), the Special Education Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001) and the Equality Act (2010), Beverton, Riddick, Dingley, English and Gallannaugh (2008) assert that when applying for ITE courses and teaching positions, many applicants with dyslexia still fear discrimination and are reluctant to disclose. For Griffiths (2011), it is the dominance of a standards drive approach to ITE that has perpetuated attitudinal and environmental barriers to the recruitment and retention of students with disabilities, including dyslexia.

The emphasis on standards, within the UK, has been underpinned by the introduction of literacy and numeracy skills tests, which prospective teachers have to pass in order to gain entry on to programmes that award Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), and the revised Teachers’ Standards (TDA, 2012) which state that all UK teachers must have met minimum standards in written and spoken English. The requirement, for primary trainee teachers, to demonstrate that they have high levels of literacy has been linked to improving literacy standards in schools thus raising the question of whether those individuals with difficulties in reading/writing, and indeed also numeracy, should be allowed to teach (Beverton et al., 2008).

2. Research Methodology

This research utilised mixed methods to secure valid and reliable data with which to answer the research question (Bryman, 2008). Through an exploitation of the strengths of different methods, a fuller understanding of human phenomena was gained (Rocco, Bliss, Gallagher & Perez-Prado, 2003). Informed by Greene, Caracelli and Graham’s (1989) identification of five purposes for a mixed method approach, this research is categorised as developmental since it utilised a sequential two-phase approach (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The initial, quantitative method (an online questionnaire), referred to throughout as ‘Phase 1’ of the data collection, was used to inform ‘Phase 2’, a qualitative method (semi-structured interviews).

The questionnaire was composed of a Likert scale and number of open-ended items. Statements relating to those training to be primary teachers, with dyslexia, and potential attributes were worded to evoke a response on a spectrum ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree -with scores assigned to each response. This allowed the researcher to locate an individual on a linear continuum from highly positive, through neutral, to highly negative.

Whilst questionnaires are good at providing descriptive information they do not always elicit deeper explanations and thus data can be ‘thin’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In keeping with the constructivist epistemology of this study, interviewing allowed for negotiated, co-constructed data (Fontana & Frey, 2000). Building on data obtained from the questionnaires, the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for some digression and elicited richer information than in a written response alone (Punch, 2009).
The method of data analysis employed throughout this research followed a general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). Miles and Huberman’s (1994) ‘transcendental realism’ model of data analysis, comprising of three main components – data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing – served to inform the model of data analysis employed throughout this research.

During the first phase of data collection, a purposive sample of 214 participants completed online questionnaires. The sample comprised of four subgroups: primary ITE educators, primary school staff (currently involved in supporting/mentoring primary ITE trainee teachers), parents of primary children in classes where a trainee teacher was on professional placement and trainee teachers currently on primary ITE programmes. The subgroups were not intended to be representative of the general teaching, student and parent population per se as it was decided that a representative sample, given all possible demographic variables, would not be possible and thus would only constitute a pseudo-representative sample (Christopoulos, 2007). During the second phase of the data collection process, three primary ITE lecturers, three primary school staff, three primary ITE students and two parents participated in semi-structured interviews. A random sampling technique was employed from a list of participants, from each subgroup, who had agreed to participate.

3. Findings

Likert scale responses and content analysis of open ended questions of Phase 1 and 2 data, given by the stakeholder subgroups, revealed a number of strengths and challenges that were identified in relation to those, with dyslexia, training to be primary classroom teachers.

3.1 Strengths Identified by Stakeholders

Empathy was the most frequent positive trait identified by respondents at both Phase 1 (52.8%) and 2 (81.8%) of the data collection process. Similarity of experience, due to the likelihood of having experienced challenges in their own learning/education, was given as the key reason underlying the belief that someone with dyslexia would be more empathetic to children with dyslexia than teachers without dyslexia.

At Phase 1, 34.1% of respondents showed agreement that trainee teachers with dyslexia are more inclusive in their classrooms than those without dyslexia. At Phase 2, 54.5% of the interview participants agreed that people with dyslexia, training to be teachers, are more likely to be inclusive in their own classroom practice. However, some respondents were at pains to suggest that this inclusivity, would not extend to all children, only those with dyslexia.

At Phase 1, 20.6% of respondents agreed that a trainee teacher with dyslexia is more likely to be creative in their classroom approach/learning strategies employed, than someone without dyslexia. At Phase 2, over 50% of the interview showed agreement. However, many responses also showed negativity, suggesting that their creativity stemmed from the need to mask poor literacy skills/issues with their own competency in reading and writing through the avoidance of text heavy resources.
3.2 Challenges Identified by Stakeholders

At Phase 1, 72.4% of the total sample showed agreement with the statement that those with dyslexia will struggle to cope with the demands of the teaching profession, compared to their non-dyslexic counterparts. Interview responses revealed what different stakeholders believed constituted the ‘demands’ of teaching. These included external pressures such as parents, Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and Local Authority inspectors. The accurate completion of paperwork, writing on the board and writing feedback in children’s books were also identified as major concerns.

The belief that trainee teachers, with dyslexia, will struggle to teach reading and writing was upheld by 70.1% of the sample, at Phase 1. Based on this data, during the interviews, further questioning was employed to establish whether respondents believed particular subjects and/or age phases may prove more challenging for those with dyslexia compared to those without. At Phase 2, 2 participants stated they believed that someone with dyslexia would struggle to teach any child, of any age, and thus should not enter the teaching profession. Concerns regarding the teaching of younger children were expressed by 4 participants. These concerns centred upon the technicality of the English language and the requirement to teach phonics. Conversely, for 3 respondents, teaching children in the older age ranges posed more of a threat due to the complexity of texts. Art, Physical Education, Mathematics and Music were all identified as being the most suitable subjects to be taught by someone with dyslexia, due to being less text based.

There was agreement, at both Phase 1 and Phase 2, that those training to teach with dyslexia will require more support within the classroom/on placement, with 75.7% agreeing/strongly agreeing that this was a concern. For the majority of interviewees, concern was expressed regarding transition from university to employment. It was claimed that the level of support afforded by universities to those with dyslexia was not available in schools, due to budgetary constraints and this led to concerns centred upon retention.

At Phase 1 of the data collection process, 54.7% of the total sample agreed/strongly agreed with the statement ‘If a person discloses, on an application form, that they have dyslexia this may decrease their chance of being invited to an interview’. School staff demonstrated the most negative attitude towards employability – with 84% in agreement, suggesting that chances of being invited to interview are weakened by disclosure. At Phase 1, 65.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement ‘I would employ a person with dyslexia as a classroom teacher’. During Phase 2, 64% of participants also stated that they would not employ someone who had disclosed dyslexia on their application form. Reasons underpinning such claims related to the notion of risk, particularly in light of external pressures such as Ofsted and the potential impact on a schools rating.

The notion of a spectrum of severity, of dyslexia, emerged throughout several of the interviews which then served to influence the overall answer given to the question as to whether someone with dyslexia should be allowed to enter the teaching profession. Of the 11 respondents interviewed, 7 indicated those with ‘severe’ dyslexia should not enter the profession. A number of these respondents continued to state, however, that those at the ‘mild’ end of the dyslexia spectrum would not cause a concern to the profession. Reasons underlying the
concern centred upon notions of risk to standards – with a perceived negative impact on standards, the perceived lack of support in schools, to support those with severe challenges and concerns about parental complaints. For 3 of these respondents, the notion of screening was raised. Here there was the suggestion that there needs to be screening at the point of entry to establish severity of dyslexia and potential impact/ability to meet basic expectations of the role.

Teaching was not the only profession identified as being unsuitable for those with severe dyslexia. Medical professions (such as nursing, pharmacy and veterinary practice) were identified by 72% of the interview respondents as being unsuitable.

4. Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate a wide range of stakeholder attitudes towards those training to be primary teachers, with dyslexia. Of interest were the strengths and challenges that stakeholders perceive those with dyslexia bring to/face in the profession and whether these impact on their perceived suitability and employability within the profession.

Empathy was a key strength identified by the majority of respondents. This finding is supported by Morgan and Rooney (1997) who concluded that, teachers with dyslexia have the advantage of understanding their own strengths and weaknesses as learners and are, subsequently, more empathetic and patient as classroom practitioners. Similarly, the work of Burns and Bell (2011), which focused on the development of the identities of teachers with dyslexia, concluded that these teachers felt that they understood the barriers to achievement that their pupils had undergone and their own feelings of exclusion, thus having an advantage over their non-dyslexic counterparts. This then raises the question as to whether empathy is something which can only be developed through direct experience or whether it can be facilitated via other means.

It is believed that that a consequence of increased empathy is a more supportive and inclusive classroom environment (Duquette, 2000; Morgan & Rooney, 1997; Riddick, 2003). However, again, as with empathy, several respondents were at pains to suggest that this inclusivity would not extend to all children as inclusive education is a wide remit encompassing gender, social class, as well as those children with disabilities (Humphrey et al., 2006). Knowing how to promote inclusion, within the primary classroom, for children with dyslexia was not seen as extending to having a working knowledge on how to promote inclusion for children with alternative disabilities such as being physically disabled.

Embedded within the responses of those who agree that people with dyslexia are more inclusive in terms of classroom practice, is the belief that people with dyslexia have experienced a range of both successful and unsuccessful strategies that they can draw upon, thus ensuring that they employ a range of inclusive strategies within their own teaching. This concurs with the participants of Riddick’s (2010) study, with dyslexia, who stated that they believed that having dyslexia gave them an insight to using a range of learning strategies.

Riddick and English (2006) and Attree et al. (2009) concluded that those with dyslexia display creative abilities, which, potentially, are seen by prospective employers as being an attractive quality. However, we need to question here, which type of employer? Linking to