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CHILDREN AND DISABILITY: SPECIAL OR INCLUDED?

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ABSTRACT *Children with disabilities are often seen as different from other children and in need of a special education. The idea that disability involves a personal deficit requiring treatment in separate settings is challenged by the New Zealand Disability Strategy. The Strategy sees disability resulting from environments that are designed to meet the needs and wishes of a non-disabled majority and that may, therefore, exclude the disabled. To create a more inclusive and socially just education system requires schools that understand the rights of all children to fairness and justice and that have the cultural and material resources to cater for diversity.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a process involving change. Children will gain knowledge and understanding through education, and will change in terms of what they know and what they can do. An education system of teachers, schools and other institutional arrangements may also be thought of as involving processes of change. Change may be generated by new understandings about how learning occurs or new ideas about the purpose of education in a particular cultural or historical context. Education systems may change in response to new demands made by communities and interest groups who want schools to reflect their preferred way of seeing the world and to meet their particular wishes and aspirations. In this paper I examine the role that special education plays in separating disabled children from others. I suggest that alternative understandings of disability and of education are necessary to transform schools and classrooms so that they meet the needs and aspirations of all children.

Educating All Children

In a democratic society it is generally expected that publicly funded state schools will offer equity of access and of opportunities for learning for all children. This values-based goal is often explicitly stated in significant documents. For example, the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1993) unequivocally states that it 'applies to...all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity...ability or disability...' (p. 3). Where there is evidence that schools are not successful in meeting their responsibilities for some children, then it may be said that the system needs to increase its ability to cater for those individuals or groups who do not learn well from present teaching strategies. The process of developing the system's capability in this way may be seen as an educative process which increases understanding and improves practice in the interests of children and young people, while also enhancing the knowledge and skills of the teaching profession.

One area that can be identified as requiring attention in this regard is that of children with disabilities, especially those who require higher levels of support in

order for them to participate fully in the education system. Attention to this area involves an opportunity for significant development in the capability of teachers and other educators to understand and respond to issues of disability and education.

At present, children with disabilities are often said to have 'special' education needs and may be assigned to 'special' classrooms, schools or other facilities separate from the mainstream of primary or secondary education. It might be suggested that one option for improving the education of these children is to increase the system's capability in 'special' education. This approach, however, is most likely to continue the locational separation of children labelled as 'special' from those not so labelled. Of greater significance is that it would also continue the idea that there are two kinds of children, 'special' and not special, and two ways of teaching children, those of 'special' education and those of 'not special' (mainstream) education. Increasing capability in special education would continue the ideas and practices of special education and would, therefore, involve limited change in the capability of mainstream education to cater for disabled children.

Children and Disability

Children with disabilities have often been excluded from mainstream settings. In this regard the democratic ideal that all children have a right to education at their local school in the culturally valued content of the National Curriculum has not been enacted for these children. Across countries and cultures there are teachers who have included disabled children and young people in their mainstream classrooms (Ballard, 1999) and there are schools and early childhood settings where this is part of an overall philosophy and practice (Ainscow, 1999; Purdue, Ballard & MacArthur, 2001). But where this is not the case, assigning children to 'special' education has allowed mainstream teachers to exclude those deemed 'special'.

These are not simple matters. There are different ideas, opinions and beliefs in this area. A particularly important issue is the wider social context in which, outside of disability communities, disability is predominantly seen as an issue of personal deficit or illness (Shakespeare, 1994; Sullivan, 1991). On the basis of this view it is seen as justifiable to exclude disabled people from mainstream schools because the disabled are deemed to be 'not normal' and therefore in need of 'special' treatments in terms of curriculum content and teaching strategies.

While a medical or sickness model that sees disability as an issue of impaired individuals and their limitations is common in the wider community, disability groups generally reject this idea and its implications for education. They are more likely to see disability as arising from disabling environments that deny them physical access to settings readily available to others, that do not support self-determination for disabled people and that disable people by denying them the same educational and employment opportunities that are available to those not seen as disabled (Oliver, 1989; Sullivan, 1991).

In the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001, p. 1), disability is described as 'the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living...' On the basis of this view, disability can be seen as a cultural issue in that the majority culture places less value on disabled people than on others, and so does not see why it should meet the particular needs and wishes of the disabled (Shakespeare,

1994). This means that disability can also be seen as a political issue of oppression and disempowerment because the disabled need to advocate in order to receive the same rights to resources, such as education, that others in the community expect and receive as an entitlement of citizenship (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996).

Special Education

The beliefs and practices of special education are closely aligned with the view that disability is primarily an issue of a child's impairment and deficit (Skrtic, 1995). Special education exists to cater for children who are deemed sufficiently different that they do not belong within ordinary school settings alongside others from their community. In special education the categorisation of difference is based on ideas of what is normal and what is not normal from psychology and medicine, and is problematic. Many children who would have been categorised 10 or more years ago as requiring 'special' education would not be so categorised today, and now participate in mainstream schooling. It is not the children (for example, those with Down Syndrome) who have changed but the willingness of the mainstream to accept responsibility for them and to value their presence. That being the case, it would seem evident that the categories themselves are more tools of control and administration than diagnostic groupings that are meaningful for teaching (Skrtic, 1995), and act for disabled children as a form of 'cultural exclusion' (Slee, 2001, p. 168).

The validity and educational usefulness of special education categories is further challenged by evidence that Maori children (Bevan-Brown, 1989; Wilkie, 2001) and children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than other children to be assigned to special education facilities (Sapon-Shevin, 1989). This indicates that being assigned to special education does not reflect a meaningful diagnosis of a kind that might be expected to lead to reliable strategies for a special form of teaching or for remedial intervention. Rather, some children are being seen as not fitting the expectations of some teachers and so are moved out, to be educated elsewhere, in special education. Although this form of separate education is supported by many parents, teachers and other professionals, reviews of research show that disabled children in mainstream settings achieve more in academic and social learning, and in community involvement out of school, than comparable children in segregated special education settings (MacArthur, Kelly & Higgins, in press). In this context it is evident that maintaining special education is a political, rather than educational, decision. That is, governments continue to support special education because, for diverse reasons, some parents want special education for their children and because some professionals, against the evidence (Skrtic, 1995), continue to claim that there is a rational basis for special education.

It is important to note that special education is not just a matter of special facilities or locations. The term 'special education' refers to a way of thinking about children as different, distinctive or 'other' and a way of thinking about teaching that is embedded in the medical and psychological deficit models of the special education field (Biklen, 1988; Davis & Watson, 2001; Slee, 2001). Maintaining special education, therefore, involves a commitment to maintaining a particular way of thinking about children with disabilities that sees them as separate and not to be included in how we think or act toward other (non categorised) children (Brown & Riddell, 1994).

If disabled young people were graduating from special or mainstream schools to find a meaningful place in the economic, social and political lives of

their communities, then present education thinking and practice for disabled students might be supported. However, despite the commitment and effort of everyone involved, this is not the case and disabled people often experience difficulties in areas of employment, social acceptance and in having their voice heard (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001; Sullivan, 1991). It is in this context that some parents, teachers (from special and mainstream education) and disability advocates are working toward an alternative that would end the exclusion of disabled children from others in the education system and see them included as of right in local schools that have been transformed so that they have the understandings, values and resources to teach them well.

An Inclusive Education

The terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' are frequently used as indicating an alternative to special education but lack agreed definitions and have different meanings in different contexts. Probably the most frequent use of the term inclusion is to refer to children with disabilities participating in mainstream education. However, some educators note that the idea of 'inclusive' education must refer to all, not only to children with disabilities (Booth & Ainscow, 1998). Inclusion in this definition, therefore, refers to education that ensures participation by all children who may be excluded as a result of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or other difference that is given significance within a particular cultural context. Inclusive education is then seen as a process of reducing barriers to learning for all children (Ainscow, 1999).

A further difficulty with the terms 'inclusion' and 'inclusive education' is that they are often taken over and used by special education interests, and in this way are seen as being part of special education policy and practice (Slee, 1996). It is essential to recognise that although special education may adopt inclusive terminology, the 'deep structures' of special education that involve issues of 'power, control, dominance and subordination...' for disabled children would, nevertheless, continue under a new guise (McDonnell, 2003, p. 267).

If disabled children are to be genuinely included in the mainstream of education, this cannot involve special education thought and practice. Categorising and naming children as 'special' identifies them as different from others, and different in ways that are not valued in present mainstream schools and society. What is needed for the inclusion of presently devalued disabled children is a cultural transformation in ideas about disability, about schools and about teaching.

This is clearly a major project requiring that present mainstream education develops curricula, school services and teaching strategies that do in fact cater for 'all' children, including those with disabilities. A most important part of this development would involve educating teachers about disability theory (Oliver, 1989; Shakespeare, 1996; Sullivan, 1991) and about theories of equity and social justice for all children (Fraser, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998). The goal would be for educators to understand the role of cultures in assigning meanings and values to people's differences and in creating and sustaining the unquestioned assumptions that result in oppression and exclusion of disabled people and others in minority positions. Present thinking about disability sees many disabled children excluded from mainstream schools ('special' children belong somewhere else). A significant change in how we think of disability is required if disabled children are to be included alongside their peers.

If we change how we think, our theory of how things are and should be, we can then change our practice so that it is grounded in new theory and interpretations. This will change our schools. What is needed is to change from a theory of 'special education' which creates two kinds of children, separating out from others those deemed 'special', to a theory of education that addresses equity and social justice for all children, without categorisation and separation, and through valuing difference and diversity. This requires a transformation of present mainstream education policy and practice.

Transforming Education for All Children

Historically, education has not been for all children. For example, there have been times when education was primarily for children of the wealthy, when girls and women did not have equal access to areas of the curriculum or to some areas of professional education and when some children experienced discrimination because of their culture and the colour of their skin. To the extent that these pressures for exclusion have been overcome, this has not been achieved through some form of remediation or special education. Change has occurred through political action that has protested at discrimination and advocated for justice (Cook & Slee, 1994/5).

At present it may be said that education is still not for all children. Some, disabled children for example, are excluded. Other children, such as those from some minority cultures, are less well catered for in terms of their academic needs and aspirations and there is concern to increase their participation and achievement. In this regard the Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard (2003), in presenting his 'education priorities for New Zealand' has called for the 'development of inclusive pedagogies that value...diversity in our student population' (p. 11). Catering for diversity does not mean sending children elsewhere to be educated. It means recognising the right of children to an education alongside others. It means valuing all children, including those whose difference results in them not being well attended to at present and who do not have the cultural and material resources and teaching that they need to succeed.

In terms of disability, valuing student diversity would be consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001) which states a 'vision for a non-disabling society' which is seen by disabled people as one '...that highly values our lives and continually enhances our full participation' (p. 5) and that in education 'ensures that no child is denied access to their local, regular school because of their impairment' (p. 16).

Transforming Processes

To value diversity and to include all children in effective teaching requires a transformation of present educational theory, strategies and organisational arrangements. The complexity of the issues involved are made clear in research that describes schools that include all children and in accounts of schools that have committed themselves to working in this way (Ainscow, 1999).

What is evident is that transforming education to include all children could not involve the theory and practice of special education. A transformation of present education policy and practice could not be based on special education because special education is 'fixated on determining scales of deficiencies' and results in limited opportunities for those students assessed as not belonging (Slee,

1996, p. 112). To become part of special education requires an assessment. This determines that, on a scale of IQ or other constructed dimension of cognitive, physical, sensory, social or emotional status, a child is sufficiently different in comparison with others that he or she belongs elsewhere. Theirs is to be the separate world of special education, away for part of the time or perhaps for all of the time from the children, culture, resources and curriculum of ordinary classrooms. The field of special education also involves assessments on scales of 'special needs'. These are to determine who is to qualify for teacher aide support, for example, or who is to become 'high needs' or 'very high needs' in order to access the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (Ministry of Education, 2004). For children without disability, the resources of the state school system are there as of right. For children categorised as 'special', their access to resources is not assured until they prove themselves sufficiently different to qualify. In such ways special education theory and practice constructs, maintains and institutionalises difference (Davis & Watson, 2001) and does not address diversity in the context of the wider population.

It is not uncommon for those working in special education to claim that inclusion is now part of their philosophy and practice (Clark, Dyson & Millward, 1998). I suggest that this is not possible. By its very title, 'special' education creates a separate field of education thought, content and instructional strategies. The expert knowledge claimed by special education to justify these separate approaches is grounded in pathological models of disability and curative (and, therefore, normative) models of teaching. Analysis suggests that these are unsound in theory (Skrtic, 1995) and ineffective in practice (MacArthur et al., in press).

In this context it is important to note that while special education will not help us achieve inclusion, the literature examining what we mean by inclusion offers no certainties either. Writers in this area acknowledge that an agreed definition of inclusion is elusive and that understanding of this complex area involves ongoing processes of research and conceptualisation (Ainscow, 1999; Slee, 2001). Nevertheless, what is clear is that special education is a process of separating some children from others in terms of how we think about them, how we resource them and how we teach them and, therefore, is inevitably in opposition to the development of inclusion (Booth, 2002; Slee, 1996, 2000).

It is also the case that transforming education to achieve inclusion cannot involve the theory and practice of mainstream education as it is constituted at present. In part, this is because present mainstream education often relies on special education to categorise and cater for children with disabilities. Further, while present mainstream practices often exclude disabled children and young people (Ballard, 1999), they also exclude others whose cultural or experiential differences are not yet well understood or catered for in many schools (Bevan-Brown, 1989; Vincent & Ballard, 1998). Transformation for inclusion, therefore, requires a transformation of the educational theory and practice of the present mainstream state school system so that responsibility for all children is clearly evident in curricula, teaching and organisational arrangements.

To undertake this responsibility may require, for example, more than one teacher in some classrooms. In this regard it is important that the focus is on teachers. This is because it is a teacher whose professional role it is to teach and who has the professional responsibility to understand how to teach so that all children may learn. Others, such as a teacher aide, may have a significant role in the classroom but it is a teacher who must be fully responsible for each and every

child in the class and who must ensure that every child has a challenging and effective programme of learning based on a curriculum designed for 'all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, belief, ability or disability, social or cultural background, or geographical location' (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 3). Some mainstream teachers will need to have skills in working with students who communicate through sign languages or assistive technologies. Others will have curriculum knowledge that will help extend present curricula to include areas not covered at present. For example, students with severe multiple disabilities have not had a place in the mainstream of many high schools and have not been included in high school curriculum development. The work of teachers in these and other areas will help ensure that we strive to achieve 'quality teaching for diverse students' (Alton-Lee, 2003). In an inclusive system, teachers and their work would not have 'special' or other labels. Such terminology separates some teachers and some students from others, fragmenting our concept of what education and teaching is. Inclusive teaching recognises that, in a democracy, schools should meet the needs of all children without categorisation and separation.

Transforming the mainstream will not be achieved by focussing on instructional technologies for learning or on prescriptive strategies claimed to engender social relationships. Mechanistic models of teaching applied to categories of children lack theoretical and empirical support (Skrtic, 1995) and such instrumental approaches limit the skill range of teachers (Hayes, Lingard & Mills, 2000, p. 3). Instead, transforming the mainstream will require identifying from the complexities of present mainstream teaching those practices that produce high-quality learning across the diversity of all children. In this way the features of high quality teaching (Alton-Lee, 2003) and of 'productive pedagogies' (Lingard et al., 2001), developed within the teaching profession, will be used to further advance the knowledge and practice of all teachers. Such an approach acknowledges the need for teachers to identify 'barriers to learning and participation' that students may experience and to work individually and collectively to determine what needs to be done to improve the education of any child (Booth, 2002, p. 63).

In present systems, access to resources is often recognised as a barrier to participation. Transforming the mainstream requires that all children have access to the resources (such as desks, books, physical access) and expertise (such as teachers, Braille literacy, Deaf language and culture) that are necessary for their education. These must be available *as of right* and as part of regular education, not part of a 'special' education discourse or categorical allocation system. Inclusive education would stop labelling some needs as 'special' needs and would no longer require teachers and parents to justify a case for 'special' equipment or services. In an inclusive system, all such resources are educational resources. Teachers may also need equitable access to resources. These may include issues such as appropriate class size, appropriate pre-service and in-service teacher education, and adequate time and staffing to undertake the professional work of inclusive teaching.

Nancy Fraser (1997) suggests that social justice requires attention to both fairness in terms of the resources we have (distributional justice) and acknowledgement and valuing of who we are (recognition justice). In this latter regard, transforming education so that it is inclusive requires that we respect and value differences and no longer isolate some people into separate schools or classes, as we have done in the past. This would require that we make a genuine

place in inclusive schools for students who at present are often not included. For example, a young person with significant intellectual disabilities must have a place in the high school curriculum and a place in a high school that she or he *wants* to be part of, and that genuinely wants her or him. This requires work on the curriculum, work on the school as a community of diverse people and work to articulate the purpose and importance of education in a participatory democracy for all children and young people, no matter their differences.

Transformation for inclusion requires recognition of difference, not pressure to assimilate. In New Zealand this includes resourcing Maori to participate on their terms under the Treaty of Waitangi. Inclusive schools would support and be responsive to the expectations of cultural minorities for self-determination. Until this is achieved, educators may need to consider how separate development that is chosen by a minority in order to sustain its language and culture may be part of an education system that is working toward inclusion.

Cultural Change

Transforming education to include all children requires that we see education not as a 'technical problem' of systems capability but as 'cultural politics' focussed on the 'protection of citizenship for all' (Slee, 2001, p. 173). At present the dominant cultural position is that some children are of less value than others. This means that the political position of these children, their place in relations of power, is one in which they are unable to have their identity recognised and to have their needs met as of right. As the Education Review Office (2003) has pointed out, the need to change this exclusionary environment is signalled in the government's policy to achieve 'an inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities of equal quality to all students' (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 5, cited in Education Review Office, 2003, p. 4).

In Australia, the Queensland Ministry of Education has a commitment to inclusion that Roger Slee, Deputy Director General of Education Queensland, sees as 'reconstructing our notion of what a school is' (Slee, 2003). Education Queensland commissioned a major study of classroom practices, the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS, Lingard et al., 2001), and is developing policy informed by this and guided by consultation with a Ministerial Task Force on Inclusive Education. Inclusion in this context involves the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students, gay and lesbian students, students with disabilities and others whose needs and wishes are not being effectively addressed in schools at present.

From extensive classroom observations the QSRLS identified features of effective pedagogies and emphasised that "classroom practices [should be seen] as a social justice issue" (Lingard et al., 2001, p. 136). Social justice is seen as involving both "who gets how much of schooling", which is an issue of distributive justice, and "what it is they are getting", which the QSRLS refers to as curricular, pedagogical and assessment justice related to recognition politics (Lingard et al., 2001, p. 135). From this research the transformation of schooling would involve 'productive pedagogies'. These are for all children, and emphasise high demands and intellectual quality in teaching interactions; connectedness, which includes connection of student learning to student background knowledge and to knowledge beyond the classroom; supportive classroom environments; and recognition of difference, which includes an understanding of cultural knowledges and group identities (Lingard et al., 2001, p. xiii; see also Watson, 2002). Inclusion

in education, therefore, requires an understanding of the complexities of teacher-child interactions, responsibility for the diversity of children in schools and knowledge of theories of social justice and education.

To undertake this work a number of Queensland schools are using the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) to guide principals, teachers, governors, parents and children in a process of critical assessment and ongoing development of school policy and practice. The Index for Inclusion suggests strategies for creating inclusive cultures (these involve values that support the highest level of achievement for all children); inclusive policies (these ensure that supports are available for all children); and for evolving inclusive practices (these are practices that reflect an inclusive culture).

From observations of teachers the QSRLS identified key features of effective teaching and teacher-child relationships. These are similar to the features of quality teaching for diverse students identified by American researchers Newman and Associates (1996) and in a 'best evidence synthesis' by New Zealand researcher Adrienne Alton-Lee (2003). Alton-Lee's findings on quality teaching include teachers focussing on student achievement; pedagogical practices that create inclusive and caring 'learning communities' (p. vi); and effective links between the school and other contexts in which students live. Such findings, which are greatly more detailed than summarised here, could form a basis for ongoing teacher development that would support education for inclusion.

A transformation toward inclusion, however, must acknowledge that schools are embedded in wider community cultural contexts. In New Zealand, this involves our commercial-competitive model of state education in which schools may choose to value their market position over a commitment to social justice (Lauder, Hughes & Watson, 1999). If a school determines that it will cater for students who are not valued in the majority culture, this may negatively affect its ability to compete with other schools for students from the majority culture. In this way the dominant New Zealand culture and its neo-liberal ideological preference will act against a more just school system and, in that case, a 'serious project of cultural struggle and change' would seem called for (Armstrong, 2003, p. 256).

CONCLUSION

It is evident in this overall context that 'inclusion' is a complex idea and that we are working out what an inclusive education may look like while schools are transformed so that they support inclusion and reduce exclusion. A definition of 'inclusion' at present may best be said to be premature (Ainscow, 1999). However, it seems evident that working toward inclusion must involve, as the New Zealand Disability Strategy suggests, looking thoughtfully and critically at how 'people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living...' (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001, p. 1). Working from this idea would see education for inclusion as central to issues of fairness and justice and central to the democratic rights of all children.

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