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Citation for published version:

Riddell, S 2008, The classification of pupils at the educational margins in Scotland: Shifting categories and frameworks. in L Florian & M McLaughlin (eds), *Disability Classification in Education*. SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 109-128. <http://www.isec2005.org.uk/isec/abstracts/papers_r/riddell_s.shtml>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Published In:

Disability Classification in Education

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The Classification of Pupils at the Educational Margins: Shifting Categories and Frameworks

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Introduction

This paper identifies social theories currently in play in the field of special education, drawing on literature from Scotland, the wider UK, Europe, North America and Australia. Particular reference is made to the Scottish policy context, placed within a wider UK and national context. An underlying assumption is that theories of special/additional support needs and disability are crucial in terms of understanding policy responses in school and the wider society. As Kirp (1982) noted, the way in which a 'social problem' is constructed says a great deal about how it will be resolved. In an earlier paper (Riddell, 1996), I suggested that the following sociological perspectives were in evidence: essentialist, social constructionist, materialist, post-modern and disability rights. Here, I argue that these perspectives are still evident, but can be grouped under the broad headings of functionalist and critical paradigms. As noted by Fulcher (1989), discourses are malleable and words such as inclusion can be used by different interest groups to refer to almost diametrically opposed concepts. A theme running throughout the paper is that language and taxonomies, far from being innocent descriptors, are deployed tactically by different actors for a range of strategic purposes. It is therefore always important to consider who benefits from the dominance of particular discourses.

What is special education?

Booth (1996) noted that there is often a reluctance to be clear about what is meant by special education and special/additional support needs, with the result that commentators may be operating with different concepts. It is evident that special education, and those considered to be in need of it, are shifting rather than fixed constructs. For example, at the present time in the developed world, it is evident that separate institutions still exist for those at the social margins, including children with behavioural problems and those with severe mental health or learning difficulties. The term special education has often been used to refer to these types

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of segregated institutions. At the present time, in most developed countries, it is evident that the trend is for disabled children and those with special/additional support needs to be accommodated within mainstream schools. Following the Salamanca statement (UNESCO, 1994) inclusion has been accepted as the policy orthodoxy of the European Union and member states. However, this does not mean that segregation is a dying concept, but rather that its form is changing, with far more emphasis on placement in special units within mainstream schools. This can be an invisible form of segregation, since the child's name may appear on the mainstream roll, whilst spending virtually all of his or her time in a separate location removed from the wider school community. Munn et al (2000) noted that, whilst the stated aim is to reintegrate children placed in special units back into the mainstream, this goal is scarcely ever achieved as the child increasingly drifts away from their peer group.

It is important, therefore, to be sensitive to the shifting construction of special education, and to the fact that segregation increasingly takes place within mainstream settings. At the same time, there are shifting patterns in the construction of which pupils are deemed to require special or additional education. There is growing evidence from social attitudes research in Scotland and the wider UK that the population is sympathetic to the inclusion of people with physical or sensory impairments or learning difficulties (see, for example, Scottish Executive, 2003), and placement in mainstream schools for these groups is generally non-contentious. However, teachers, backed up by their unions, are expressing growing concern in relation to a perceived increase in the number of disruptive and violent pupils (Tomlinson, 2001). Including these children in mainstream classes is claimed by teachers to run counter to the UK government's desire to raise attainment, particularly for socially disadvantaged groups.

To summarise, special education and the child with additional/special educational needs are construed differently at different points in history and within different cultures. Following Bogdan and Knoll's (1995) distinction between special education sociology, which applies existing constructs uncritically, and the sociology of special education, which deconstructs theories and practices, this paper problematises the core assumptions, categories and practices underlying constructions of special education. In the following sections, I review the sociological theories which underpin the construction of disability and special/additional support needs, the proponents of particular theoretical positions and the type of special education policy supported by particular theories, whether implicitly or explicitly..

Functionalist and critical paradigms

As noted above, theories of special education have been divided into two broad camps, functionalist and critical. Functionalist thinking is rooted in the ideas of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, which were set out a hundred years ago. Durkheim developed the view that social cohesion was a natural and desirable state, and conflicts which threatened this social stability were to be repressed. The aim of the healthy society was to include as many people as possible, and neutralise or reform those at the margins. Exclusion was thus seen as residual rather than endemic (Levitas, 1998). Within the current UK context, with a Labour-controlled UK government and a Labour-Liberal coalition in Scotland, the problem of social and

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school exclusion and inclusion have been high on the political agenda, and different discourses have emerged as ways of tackling exclusion. These have ranged from radical attempts to tackle poverty through wealth distribution, through to more conservative ideas associated with reforming or punishing the excluded. Finally, in all developed countries, there is an emphasis on active labour market policies, with the aim of hooking those at the margins into mainstream society through the redeeming properties of vocational education and work. As explained below, individualist and managerialist theories of special education, and the policies and practices which flow from them, fall under the broad heading of functionalist accounts since they are driven by the desire to define normal behaviour which will contribute to social stability..

Critical paradigms, on the other hand, rather than seeing conflict and challenge as abnormal, regard these as manifestations of unequal power relations or social interactions. Accounts located within critical social policy and socio-cultural theory tend to be more common in the academic rather than the policy literature, and often serve as challenges to common sense notions of how the world should be organised.

Functionalist paradigms

Essentialist or individual needs approaches

Early approaches to special education were informed by eugenic ideas which were in the ascendancy in Europe and the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Kerr and Shakespeare, 2002). Francis Galton distinguished between 'positive eugenics', which focused on encouraging good stock to breed, and 'negative eugenics', which focused on discouraging the mentally and morally unfit from reproducing. Those exhibiting mental or physical deficiency should be isolated from the rest of the population to avoid contamination. IQ tests, developed in the early twentieth century, provided educational psychologists with an additional tool to use in determining whose intelligence fell outwith the normal range. Lubeck and Garrett (1990), describing the construction of the 'at risk' child in the USA, noted that American pioneers of mental testing believed that intelligence was inherited and fixed rather than malleable, and was linked to racial origin. Henry Goddard, an early proponent of mental testing, was invited by the government to administer the Binet Simon scale and other performance tests to recent immigrants at the Ellis Island receiving station. The data showed that:

...83% of the Jews, 80% of the Hungarians, 79% of the Italians and 87% of the Russians were feeble-minded (Goddard, 1917, p. 252, in Laosa, 1984)

Translated into practice, eugenic thinking was sometimes brutal in its insistence on incarceration, but could sometimes adopt a more benevolent face, suggesting that identifying the weak and feeble-minded was essential in order to provide appropriate treatment. Tomlinson (1982) noted that the Egerton Commission of 1889 recommended access to basic vocational education for the blind to prevent them becoming a burden on the state.

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Early eugenic social theories played a pivotal role in shaping the development of special education in the US and Europe. In Scotland, individualised assessment leading to specialised and special education has been the traditional approach, although the focus has shifted from categorising handicaps to assessing individual educational needs (see Riddell, 2001 for a detailed account of the development of special education in Scotland). Prior to 1980, Scotland operated with nine legal categories of handicap (deafness, partial deafness, blindness, partial sightedness, mental handicap, epilepsy, speech defects, maladjustment and physical handicap). If a child was suspected of having one of these conditions, parents were legally obliged to present the child at a clinic for medical assessment with a view to ascertaining whether 'special educational treatment' was required. In urban areas, special schools were set up to deal with each of these conditions, whilst in rural areas children were either educated within local schools or sent to residential establishments at some distance from their homes. Until 1974, a certain proportion of children were deemed 'ineducable and untrainable', and the health board rather than the local authority had responsibility for their care.

Following the Warnock report (DES, 1978), legislation in England and Scotland replaced the legal categories of handicap with the overarching category of 'special educational needs' (SEN) whose definition was somewhat circular:

A child or young person has 'special educational needs' if the child or young person has a 'learning difficulty' which calls for provision for special educational needs to be made.

This new category was intended to emphasise that special educational needs were not solely located in the child, but were due to the relationship between the child and the school. Control of the special education terrain shifted from medical practitioners to educational psychologists, who orchestrated the process of assessment and recording. Teachers were accorded only a subordinate role in assessment and diagnosis.

Despite the official rejection of the idea that special education should be reserved for those identified as having medical deficits, categorical thinking proved to be highly resistant to change. For example, Scottish official statistics continued to gather information on children with special educational needs based on impairment categories. Indeed, the number of categories continue to expand, so that language and speech disorder and autistic spectrum disorders are now reported separately. Complex and multiple difficulties are now sub-divided into a number of different categories. This is in marked contrast to the Warnock Report's ambition of replacing multiple (medical) categories with one over-arching category. Attention deficit (hyperactive) disorder (AD(H)D) is an example of a 'new' disability which is currently enjoying a surge of popularity, seen by parents as a 'label of forgiveness' (Slee, 1995) and by drug companies as a money-making opportunity (Lloyd and Norris, 1999).

To summarise, the individualised, or essentialist approach, which regards mental or physical deficits as being rooted in the individual, is the traditional approach to special education throughout the developed world. Challenged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is currently enjoying something of a resurgence. Parents and

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voluntary organisations, supported by allies in medicine and psychiatry, have campaigned for the re-adoption of particular labels, often with a view to accessing resources or avoiding more stigmatising categories. The individual needs approach also creates a triangular tension for resource allocation, with parents, professionals and bureaucrats pulling in different directions. In practice, professionals may be co-opted into the work of the bureaucracy, ensuring that their assessments do not conflict with budgetary controls (Riddell et al, 2002).

At the time of writing, new legislation is about to be introduced in Scotland which, whilst still located within an individualised approach, recasts the categories. The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 scraps the category of special educational needs, replacing it with a wider category of additional support needs, encompassing not only disabled children, but also socially disadvantaged children, the children of travellers, refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers, and children looked after by the local authority. Proponents of the legislation maintain that its purpose is to ensure that a wider group of children receive detailed assessments and have programmes in place to meet their needs. On the other hand, it could be seen as an effort by the state to spread the special educational net wider, justifying the social exclusion of growing numbers of people,, whilst passing to schools the responsibility for the management of competing resource claims. This point is discussed further below in the section on materialist approaches.

Managerialist or systems based approaches

A particular branch of sociology of special education draws on a range of approaches to management, based on the fundamental assumption that if organisational systems are correctly aligned, public sector institutions will operate smoothly and effectively. In the UK, the new focus on the management of special education was driven in large measure by the emphasis on 'integration' within the Warnock Report (DES, 1978). The abandonment of the special remedial class and the inclusion of more children with learning difficulties in mainstream classes required a reformulation of the curriculum, pedagogy and classroom organisation. In Scotland, a report published by HM Inspectorate (SED, 1978) argued that children with learning difficulties should be educated alongside their peers, but should not be subjected to a curriculum which might be too difficult or to teaching methods geared to the average child. Rather, the onus should be on the mainstream teacher, assisted by the newly-styled learning support teacher, to accommodate the needs of each child through the use of differentiated teaching materials and appropriate pedagogy. The use of standardised assessment tests was discouraged, and classroom observation was seen as a better method of gaining information about pupil strengths and weaknesses

The role of the learning support teacher or 'special educator' in comprehensive schools has dominated discussion in the professional literature. For example, Dyson and Gains (2000) point out that the emergence of the 'whole school approach' resulted in problems of 'uncertainty, ambiguity and conflict', as learning support teachers, known as Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in England, were expected to adopt significant management and legal responsibilities for which they often lacked training and institutional back-up.

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Management discourses within special education became even more dominant with the advent of new public management from the 1980s onwards. Informed by the ideas of economists such as von Hayek, and drawing on behaviourist psychology, the central thesis of new public management is that everything associated with the workplace can and should be measured. Targets are essential to human motivation and effective management and external regimes of accountability are necessary to discipline the actions of otherwise self-serving professionals (Pollitt, 1993; Clarke and Newman, 1997). Within the field of special education, questions were increasingly asked about the performance of children with special educational needs and the extent to which the funds allocated to this area of education were delivering improved results.

In Scotland, Individualised Educational Programmes (IEPs) were seen as the vehicle for raising standards and improving accountability for children with special educational needs, and were couched in terms of the Scottish Executive's raising standards programme. Guidance issued in 1999 indicated to schools that IEPs should be formulated for all children in special schools and units, children with Records of Needs in mainstream and those receiving 'significant planned intervention'. The IEPs were to include long and short term targets, and a level of 80% success in achieving targets should be aimed for. Research on the implementation of IEPs suggested that teachers welcomed the opportunity to chart the progress of individual children against personal goals, but were hostile to the idea of accountability at the level of the institution or the individual teacher (Banks et al, 2001).

In the US, there is a longstanding commitment to the use of IEPs as a means of accountability. Instituted under the terms of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act 1975 (PL 94-142), about 12 per cent of the pupil population in US schools has an IEP, compared with about 4 per cent of the Scottish school population. Gallagher (1972) argued that legal contracts should be established, 'with parents as equal partners in the plan, using objective measures of goal attainments, and developing punitive consequences of failure to deliver' (Goodman and Bond, 1993: 411). Legal sanctions for failure to achieve objectives were necessary, according to Gallagher, because 'bureaucracies such as educational systems will move institutionally only under threat or duress' (Gallagher, 1972: 531).

More recently, there has been concern that the expansion in the use of IEPs may lower expectations, and the No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, makes it obligatory to include students with disabilities in states' wider target-setting programmes. Evidence from small scale studies continues to suggest that students with disabilities may be excluded from the general curriculum:

Teachers often...provide extensive modifications, particularly to performance expectations, believing that they were just accommodating a student's disability. Administrators questioned accommodations that were so extensive that they effectively changed the content and the expected student performance. Lack of guidance and assistance to teachers resulted in lowered expectations and created haphazard performance goals for students under the guise of full participation in standards. (McLaughlin and Tilstone, 2000: 57).

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The Labour/Liberal coalition administration in Scotland continues to channel considerable monies towards local authorities and their schools to promote inclusion. For example, funds have been put aside for Alternatives to Exclusion, to raise standards in Scotland's schools (the Excellence Fund), and SEN Innovation Grants. A major educational initiative in 1998 was to pilot New Community Schools, which sought to provide integrated services to children, and was directly linked to the social justice agenda. Finally, the Discipline Task Group in its report *Better Behaviour- Better Learning* (Scottish Executive, 2001) recommended that funds be allocated to local authorities to enable the employment of additional staff, such as classroom assistants and home-school link workers, to support positive behaviour.

Along with these 'carrots' have been the 'sticks' associated with new public management, including targets and national standards, which local authorities and schools have been asked to meet on threat of their funding being reduced, negative inspections and even potential enforcement by the Scottish Executive. Within special education, there have been two particular performance measures of note: reducing absences due to school exclusion; and timing to produce a Record of Needs. However, as is the case in the US, the Scottish Executive has been fairly reluctant to hold local authorities to account with regard to their provision for children with SEN. Targets for reductions in the number of exclusions were dropped in 2004, and figures for 2002/03 (SE 2004b) show a higher number of exclusions (36,946) than the target baseline set by the social justice agenda of 34,831 in 1998/99. Records of Needs have been abolished and no timescales apply to the production of IEPs. In many ways, schools and local authorities are being given considerable freedom to self-regulate in this area, but the trade-off here is weaker public accountability.

In the following section, I consider critical paradigms in the field of special education.

Critical paradigms

Materialist or critical social policy approaches

Materialist approaches in the sociology of education have sought to understand the link between education, the reproduction of social relations within capitalism and the way this relationship is regulated by the state. In the 1970s, neo-marxist writers such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggested that social and curricular divisions in school corresponded directly to those in the labour market. Children in vocational programmes were prepared for their future role in blue collar jobs, whilst the academic elite were groomed for their future place in the professions. The label 'learning difficulties' might be applied to some of these children, but academic excellence was not expected of those destined for manual work and therefore poor literacy and numeracy skills were regarded as less of a problem.

Willis (1977), in his classic text *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, presented a slightly more complex picture. Working class boys who understood that their future lay in hard manual labour responded by celebrating a particular version of masculinity. School was to be treated as a 'laff', since it had very little relevance to their future lives. Studious boys were labelled the 'ear 'oles'

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and were treated with the derision suggested by their name. Girls who conformed to the role of the supportive home-maker were dubbed 'good as gold'. Willis characterised the lads' rejection of schooling as a form of heroic resistance, since it allowed them to assert a degree of agency, whilst forcing them into a life of exploitation. Were the same group of lads to be observed in a contemporary classroom, the label of behavioural difficulties, learning difficulties or ADHD might well be attached to them.

Over recent years, behavioural difficulties have been regarded as classroom management problems and there has been less analysis of competing sub-cultures and their relationship to the capitalist social relations. This, of course, reflects the fact that government funders of research want to know what behaviour management strategies work in school, and are unsympathetic to the message that behavioural difficulties are an unwelcome by-product of unequal social relations. The implicit social determinism underlying neo-marxist accounts is difficult to incorporate into New Labour approaches to social inclusion which regard social cohesion, rather than conflict, as a natural and desirable state.

A body of literature has sought to apply a materialist analysis to the construction of special education. For example, Tomlinson (1985) argued that special education was expanding to embrace an increasing number of children, most of whom were male and from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, reflecting the collapse of the youth labour market particularly in the field of manufacturing. The following three reasons were advanced for this deliberate restructuring of the education system: professional vested interest, comprehensive school dilemmas and the declining youth labour. As a proportion of the population, she noted that in 1946 it was thought that 2 per cent of the population had a 'disability of body or mind', whilst a further 8-9 per cent of children were thought to be likely to make inadequate progress in schools. By the time of the Warnock report (DES, 1978), the proportion of school children estimated to have learning difficulties had increased to 20 per cent. As Armstrong (2003) pointed out, the expansion of special education was accompanied by an increasing tendency to pathologise the behaviour of black pupils. 'Special educational needs', he noted, 'is a convenient tool for legitimising discrimination, racism and the lack of opportunities generally for young people'. (Armstrong, 2003: 121).

In Scotland, it is clear that, in accordance with Tomlinson's argument, the official recognition of the SEN category has expanded. Since 2003, the Scottish Executive has collected and published data on children with SEN who do not have Records but have IEPs, as well as children who are recorded. Whilst a greater proportion of children with special educational needs are now being educated in mainstream schools, almost one in five such children are not always in mainstream classes (SE 2004a). The numbers of children in special schools has remained remarkably consistent for at least 20 years and continues to account for about one per cent of the total school population (SE 2004a). Spatial exclusion is therefore experienced by a good number of children with special educational needs.

The social class differentials noted by Tomlinson are also evident in Scotland. Tisdall and Riddell (2004) noted that a disproportionately high number

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of children eligible for free school meals are excluded from school (SE 2004b). There have been concerns that children who are looked after by the state are not having their special educational needs recognised, perhaps because local authorities are not acting as 'good parents' in taking forward the assessment procedures (Borland et al. 1998). A disproportionate number of looked after children are excluded from school (SE 2004b). Boys are also more likely than girls to be identified as having SEN, excluded from school and placed in special schools and units. In 2003, 70 per cent of pupils with SEN, 67 per cent of pupils attending special schools and 80 per cent of those excluded from schools were male (SE 2004a, 2004b).

Social constructionist approaches

Thus far, we have reviewed social accounts of special education which locate difficulties in learning within the individual child, within the management structures of the organisation or within wider social structures rooted in economic relations. In this section, we explore the use of interactionist ideas in the sociology of special education. Goffman (1968) challenged the thinking of Durkheim and Parsons by questioning the extent to which behaviour is an expression of a rigid system of defined status and roles. For example, in his work *Asylums* (1968), Goffman examined the 'career' of mental patients and prisoners in their respective closed institutions. His aim was to understand the way in which individuals make sense of the world and negotiate their social identity, often in very difficult circumstances. This may well involve resisting unwelcome labels imposed by others in establishing their own definition of the situation. The familiar criticism of interactionist work is that, in emphasising the power of individual agency, it may underplay the power of wider social forces, such as those associated with gender or class. Mehan (1992) noted the criticisms of 'ultra-relativism' and 'sentimental egalitarianism' which have been levelled against the interpretive paradigm. Nonetheless, he argues that this approach may contribute usefully to the study of educational inequality by introducing cultural elements into highly deterministic macrotheories, injecting human agency into theories accounting for social inequality and opening the black box of schooling to examine the reflexive relations between the institutional practices and students' careers.

The socio-cultural approach advocated by Mehan is particularly evident in a number of recent Swedish studies which seek to understand the reification of labels in the field of special education. For example, Hjerne and Saljo (2004) explore the use of the term ADHD/DAMP in Swedish schools in the context of 'the politics of representation' (Mehan, 1993). They comment:

ADHD/DAMP as a category, thus, has established itself within schooling, and in this sense is both a social fact and a resource that is actively used for dealing with problems. It has implications for the manner in which teaching is organised and for the use of limited resources. It will also have consequences for the student's educational career, and obviously, a neuropsychiatric diagnosis, indicative of a brain injury, will play a critical role identity formation of young people. (Hjerne and Saljo, 2004: 7)

Their analysis of verbal exchanges in pupil-student welfare team meetings illustrates the way in which professionals focus on evidence which supports the emerging idea

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that particular pupils have a specific form of neural deficit, seeking only confirming rather than disconfirming data. Virtually no attention was paid to the classroom environment, the approaches or actions of the teacher or the curriculum, which might provide alternative explanatory accounts for individual children's failure to learn. Many parents accepted the professionals' diagnosis quiescently, and only one example is given of a parent offering a counter-narrative which challenges the teacher's version of events. However, they do not deny the salience of the wider social context in which the school is located, suggesting that the use of categories such as ADHD/DAMP must be understood in terms of changes in public schooling in Sweden, as the principle of universal education provided in comprehensive schools is increasingly challenged. As noted by Lloyd and Norris (1999), disputes over the label ADHD have been taking place in many parts of the world.

A further example of the exploration of the establishment and contestation of labels in special education may be found in the Scottish study of dyslexia conducted by Riddell, Brown and Duffield (1994). Drawing on interviews, surveys and observation, the researchers noted the different understandings of dyslexia promoted by different groups. Voluntary organisations and some doctors tended to believe that dyslexia was inherently different from other forms of learning difficulty. They believed that the condition was physiological in origin, favoured forms of psycho-metric assessment designed to identify discrepancies in ability and promoted particular teaching methods which were best delivered by specially trained teachers. Educational psychologists, education officers and teachers, on the other hand, believed that children with specific learning difficulties (their preferred term), did not represent a discrete group but were part of a continuum, with a diverse array of abilities and difficulties attributable to environmental and individual factors operating interactively. According to this perspective, there was no absolute dividing line between children with 'common or garden' learning difficulties and others. The preferred form of assessment was classroom observation of difficulties in order to devise a range of teaching strategies, to be implemented by the class or learning support teacher, without the need for intervention by an educational psychologist. Faced with a refusal to acknowledge dyslexic children as a discrete group with specific problems and teaching needs, parents often became extremely frustrated, and adopted a range of strategies including engaging independent psychologists to conduct assessments and, in England, taking appeals to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal.

To summarise, struggles over the creation and negotiation of categories within the field of special education are still taking place and social interactionist theories have a great deal to offer in terms of understanding the material consequences which ensue. In the final section, we consider the impact of the sociology of disability, a relatively new influence in the field of special education.

Civil rights approaches

A very different social type of social theory and action has developed via the adult-dominated disability movement. According to early social model theorists such as Oliver (1990) and Barnes (1991), within capitalist societies disabled people are systematically excluded or marginalized. Whilst impairments may have real effects, these are not automatically disabling. Rather, disability is always experienced

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within a specific social context and it is always political, cultural and economic arrangements, rather than impairments, which exclude. Recently, the sociology of disability has diversified. For example some of the literature on learning difficulties adopts a strong social constructionist position (Goodley, 2001). Shakespeare and Corker have emphasised the historical contingency of disability, describing it as 'the ultimate postmodern category' because of its mutability. Abberley (1987, 2002) has drawn attention to the fact that many impairments arise as a result of war, disease and global economic oppression.

The social model of disability has had a major impact on everyday thought and action, and has led to significant political progress for disabled people. As we noted above, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) reflects a view of impairment as being located in the individual, but at the same time requires providers of goods and services and education to make anticipatory adjustments. Employers are also obliged to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that discrimination does not occur in the workplace. The GB Disability Rights Commission has rights of formal investigation, which are likely to be strengthened by forthcoming legislation which places a duty on public bodies to positively promote equality for disabled people.

We noted above some of the shortcomings of the DDA and other anti-discrimination legislation. In particular, the fact that the onus lies on the complainant to demonstrate that they are covered by the legislation has been a drawback, although in the future it will no longer be essential to demonstrate that a mental impairment is a result of a 'clinically well-recognised condition'. The new public sector duty is also likely to be significant, forcing public bodies, including those responsible for education, to demonstrate that they are taking action to redress former injustice and achieve progress towards a fairer distribution of social goods. This suggests that the initial medical model unperpinning is weakening, and the legislation is moving much reflecting social model thinking more closely.

Taking a case to court is still dependent on individual parents (and children) deciding to do so, and knowledge of the DDA is therefore of paramount importance. Early baseline research on the DDA in Scotland showed that, whilst local authorities were well informed and had undertaken a risk analysis to ensure that they complied with the law, parents and schools had little knowledge and understanding of the legislation (Cogan et al, 2003). Subsequent research (Edson, 2005) demonstrates that knowledge and understanding is slowly growing, but a third of parents and half of schools still reported that they knew little about the provisions.

Despite the power of the social model as an analytical tool and a driver of social change, only a small number of studies have explicitly adopted this approach in ethnography (Riddell, et al, 2001) and in life story accounts (Armstrong, 2003).

Conclusion

It is evident that many social theories jostle for position in making sense of the field of special education. This paper grouped theories under two broad headings, functionalist and critical paradigms. The former are based on the idea that stability and cohesion are natural and desirable social states, whilst the latter see tension

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and conflict as an inevitable product of capitalist social relations. Functionalist accounts have traditionally reflected the view that the role of special education is to identify those children who should be excluded or marginalized because of the threat which they seemed to pose for the social order. Over recent years within developed countries, a growing emphasis has been placed on inclusion as a key ingredient in the creation of a modern knowledge economy. However, debates continue with regard to which children should be excluded from the mainstream classroom and what sort of provision should be made for them. These struggles were often over the allocation of scarce educational resources, as government insisted that more attention should be placed on recognising the needs of individual children, whilst targeting resources on improved educational output. Efforts to commandeer additional resources, or justify exclusion often hinged on claiming particular labels of forgiveness or justification.

Whilst functionalist accounts tended to be favoured by parents, practitioners and policy-makers because of their focus on how to achieve social improvement, critical paradigms provided important insights into the forces of change and challenge. Given the array of social forces operating in the field of special education, each perspective contributed distinctive understandings into the ways in which the field of special education had developed thus far, and the tensions and challenges which continue to shape its future direction.

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