**Inclusive Education : What has happened in the last 30 years?**

**Richard Rieser 2009 unpublished written for book to be edited Tony Booth**

**What has been the nature of your involvement in the desegregation and mainstream participation of disabled children in England in the period 1978-2008?**

Thirty years ago I was in my first year of teaching at Hackney Downs , an ex-grammar school which had only been comprehensive for four years. The intake was predominantly Afro-Caribbean, Asian and Turkish with around 20% white. Like in many Inner London Schools the staff were highly politicised and strongly organised in the NUT. I had previously done a post graduate research degree at LSE, a three year stint in a factory, taught part time in further and higher education and completed a PGCE.

The staff in the Humanities department spent a lot of time developing a more comprehensive curriculum, combining world history, geography and an understanding of society and beliefs, combined with English. We did a lot of team teaching. In the Upper School I taught geography and under the CSE Mode 3 we had the possibility of shaping the curriculum and assessments, to both draw on the experiences of our pupils and to be interesting and stimulating. We relied heavily on course work and engaged the majority of our students. However, those with special educational needs were not well served by what was provided. I remember having a long haired pupil from a nearby special school, on outreach for Geography, and not being told until after a term that he was deaf and relied on lip reading.

Soon after starting, the Warnock Report was hotly debated and the trade union response to the proposed integration it advocated was to perceive it as a threat to teachers’ jobs and conditions. This was because from 1978 the Labour Government had had to go ‘cap in hand’ to the international Monetary Fund, following a speculator driven ‘run on the pound’ against Labour’s policies and the IMF had demanded cutbacks in public expenditure.

Similar fears shaped the response of the ILTA (Inner London Teachers’ Association, NUT) to the 1985 Fish Report, which advocated the closure of many of Inner London’s Special Schools ( over 3.5% of pupils were in such schools). As a Local Association, and then the ILTA, General Secretary, I shared the opposition to such measures without seeing the contradictions. As left wing teacher activists we were passionate about defending and expanding comprehensive education, mixed ability teaching, Mode 3 exams and developing stimulating and relevant curricula. The Black Paperites were attempting to move the agenda backwards and following James Callaghan’s speech on education in 1978, comprehensive principles came increasingly under attack.

As a disabled person myself, at this time I saw disability as only a personal issue, even though I had hated the Physically Handicapped School assigned to me, refused to go, threw tantrums and was sent to a very peculiar ‘progressive’ private school! It was not until I was identified for redeployment because I was disabled, as well as my trade union activity, that I challenged this discrimination . For the first time I understood that the model we had on comprehensives was wrong, as it did not include all children-in particular it did not include disabled children.

Having won my grievance against compulsory redeployment, the ILEA seconded me to work on disability and the curriculum from 1987-1990. This led to my being introduced to Micheline Mason, a disabled activist and parent of a disabled child, who was passionate about inclusive education. We were jointly commissioned to write a handbook on Disability Equality for the soon to be abolished ILEA, to leave to the successor boroughs.

I was on a steep learning curve, having to challenge much of my thinking about myself as a disabled person and my views on inclusive education. I joined the newly founded Alliance for Integrated Education.

‘Disability Equality in the Classroom: A Human Rights Issue’ (1990), which we had authored, was much in demand and led to many talks and presentations. In 1992 Comic Relief approached us to write and produce a training pack on inclusive education for teachers. ‘Altogether Better’(1994) sold more than 10,000 copies and was used very widely as a training resource. Comic Relief, as part of this initiative, funded the first trainings for disabled Disability Equality Trainers to work with schools. This eventually led to Disability Equality in Education’s network of DET trainers.

In 1992 I was asked by Philipa Russell to join the Council for Disabled Children (CDC), which represents the voluntary sectors’ views to Government. We set up a working party on inclusive education, following a rejection by the Council of CSIE’s Inclusion Charter. This working group produced an influential policy on Inclusive Education. In particular it was agreed that there should not be a policy of compulsory segregation. This was then agreed by the Special Education Consortium and was influential in getting the Government to revise Section 316 of the 1996 Education Act in the 2001 Act. This removed the caveats against mainstream placement of ‘efficient use of resources’ and ‘appropriate provision’. These had been used in a number of high court cases to refuse parents mainstream placement. This work was important to shift the thinking of MENCAP, ASBAH, SCOPE, RNIB, RNID and Contact a Family. In 2006 a new CDC Inclusion Working Group was set up in the wake of the backlash against inclusion. The resulting document (2008) is excellent, again adopted unanimously by the sector and provides a united response to the detractors of inclusion.

I took my new thinking into the NUT. First I wrote a motion to set up a programme to get equality for disabled teachers, which was won at Union Conference in 1989 and is still continuing. A more difficult struggle was to persuade the NUT to accept a policy of Inclusive Education. After several debates, in 1996 a motion supporting the principles of the Salamanca Statement(UNESCO 1994) was agreed by a narrow vote. By 1998 a similar motion setting up an Inclusion Working Party was unanimously carried. However, the full time officials, in particular John Bangs, Assistant Secretary Education, consistently undercut these policy positions telling me it was a matter of membership loss. In my experience, working with mainstream and special schools all over the country, this was not true. These policy resolutions were important in convincing the Labour Party that it should move towards inclusive education. As Chair of the renamed Alliance for Inclusive Education, in 1996, I was part of a delegation to meet with David Blunkett, Shadow Education Secretary. David told us of his own experience attending a special school for the Blind which he left with no qualifications and that he supported a move to inclusive education. When elected, New Labour set up the National Advisory Group on SEN which I was invited to join, where I pushed for a policy of much greater inclusive education. In the autumn of 1997 the Green Paper ‘Excellence for All’ was published with a strong push towards more inclusive education. However, the Independent Panel of Special Educational Advisors ( IPSEA) were concerned the Green Paper would bring about a loss of legal right to a statement. They organized some 800 parents to oppose this and the result was a weakening of policy in the 1998 Action Plan for SEN.

Throughout the 1990s I was an advisory teacher for disability equality/inclusion in the London Borough of Hackney and I supported and trained many of the schools to develop more inclusive approaches. I supported the successful transition of a number of disabled pupils from special to mainstream schools. With Linda Jordan( one of the parent leaders that set up inclusive education in Newham ), as Hackney SEN Officer, we were able to set up a number of resource bases for children with autism and sensory impairments. However, there was strong opposition from special school headteachers who were, and continue to be, paid on a higher pay scale than their mainstream colleagues. The privatized education authority in Hackney in 2000 appointed one of these heads to chair the special education review and of course they went for a segregated model. Since 2001 Hackney seemed to have moved away from inclusion.

In 2001 David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, told the Alliance that he owed us an apology as he had not been able to make headway on introducing more inclusive education and shutting more special schools, because powerful forces were arrayed against the Government on this issue. However, under his watch the SEN Code of Practice had been streamlined, with a strong principle of inclusive education and the 2001 SEN and Disability Act had been passed, which did provide more support for parents who wanted mainstream placements for disabled children. It also gave greater rights to parents of disabled children who wanted segregation. This legislation also extended the protection of the DDA to all disabled pupils, the right not to be treated less favourably and to have reasonable adjustments made for them in their schooling.

**What were these forces?**

The special schools committee of the NAHT(National Association of Head Teachers) has been a strong lobby for maintaining and increasing the role of segregated education. In 2003 the Baroness Ashton, as Junior Education Minister, set up the Special Schools Working Group. With no representatives of mainstream inclusive schools, this report led to more money for special schools and the rebuilding of brand new special schools. A number of local campaigns against the closure and reorganization of special schools were also organized in Gloucestershire, Essex and Newcastle. Headteachers worked through groups of parents to oppose change. The Conservatives got involved in these campaigns and David Cameron as Shadow Education Secretary pushed for a moratorium on special school closures. Since becoming leader of the Conservatives Cameron has commissioned an enquiry into inclusive education which has branded it a ‘damaging ideology’. Baroness Warnock decided inclusion was misguided. In her original report in 1978 she had argued for more integration, to break the link with medical labels and introduce special education assessments. She said her change of view was based on visits to some special schools and her daughter’s experiences of trying to include a pupil with autism in her class. When Baroness Warnock and David Cameron debated with us it was clear they had little experience of visiting inclusive schools and they were arguing against poor integration.

However these uninformed views struck the right political note in Parliament and New Labour did not then defend their good policy of inclusion. At the Education Select Committee hearings on Special Education 2006, set up to respond to Warnock’s pronouncements, Lord Adonis, Minister for education, did not even admit that the Government had a policy of inclusion. No evidence was given to support Warnock’s assertions to the Select Committee, indeed there was a great deal of evidence to show inclusive education working, where staff are supported and trained and schools have an inclusive ethos. However, there was also considerable evidence of parental dissatisfaction, for example the bullying of their disabled children and lack of the right support. In my view this situation has arisen because Government, schools and Local authorities do not understand what is needed to develop inclusive education. Too often poor integration passes for inclusion. The current Lamb Enquiry is examining how to improve parental satisfaction with the SEN system.

By 2003 I was the full time director of Disability Equality in Education and was approached by the DFES to carry out some action research into how schools were coping with the new Duty to make reasonable adjustments. We sent questionnaires to 9000 schools and over 400 responded saying they were making adjustments for pupils with all the main categories of SEN and they would be happy for our team to visit and film. We ended up visiting 41 schools across England ( 20 secondary, 18 primary, 2 early years and 1 special). We were most impressed with the range of good practice. The essential features were a leadership team committed to an inclusive ethos, a can do attitude, strong links with parents and pupils, a positive approach to behavior, using support from beyond the school and an emphasis on removing barriers and finding solutions. The resource was published in 2006 as 3 DVDs of filmed good practice, a CD Rom with training materials and a ring binder. These were made available free to schools. However, DfES stated because of new anti-bureaucracy rules schools could only be sent the pack if they asked for it! It was not publicized and no journalists were invited to the launch by Lord Adonis. (Implementing the Disability Discrimination Act in Schools and Early Years DfES 2006)

The DDA has come to schools in two tranches -Reasonable Adjustment Duty 2002 and the Duty to Promote Disability Equality 2006/7. Most schools are not taking these duties seriously. Only a minority have had training and the majority do not have a Disability Equality Scheme. The recent Secretary of State’s Report (Dec 2008) says the DCSF will write to schools to remind them of their duties. A proper enforcement agency backed up by effective training is necessary. Between the DCSF and Disability Equality in Education 4000 people have attended a day’s training on the duties. This means at least 17,000 schools have had no effective training on the Duty to Promote Disability Equality. This is apparent in a survey of 76 Disability Equality Schemes in the Report which shows a large majority did not even score 50% on the statutory requirements.

OFSTED had carried out a number of investigations focused on inclusive education in 2005. They identified that only around 20% of mainstream schools were effectively inclusive. In 2006 using some criteria that are not reproducible OFSTED found that the best location for disabled pupils to be educated were not special schools or mainstream schools, but mainstream schools with resource provision. This provision had specialist teachers with expertise of inclusion.

In 2004 the Government produced a 10 year plan for SEN/Disabled students called ‘Removing Barriers to Achievement’. The emphasis here is on most children’s needs being met in mainstream inclusive schools. But the definition of inclusion has changed. Inclusion can now occur in a special school or a Pupil Referral Unit according to the DFES/DCSF. They have taken the idea that inclusion is a process something we put forward in 1994 and missed the point that presence is a precondition. They have not understood the key thinking in the Inclusion Movement that barriers in environment, attitudes and organization need to be addressed to meet the needs of all. Instead they rail against fitting all children into “one format” or “one size fits all” rather than understanding that this contradicts the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act to alter and remove barriers to accommodate the needs of all. They miss the social relations that are essential to be built with the community and reduce inclusion to mere improvements in attainment. This was recently stated by Sarah McCarthy-Fry, the latest minister in charge of SEN in her statement to the UNESCO ICE Conference in Geneva on Inclusive Education.

“**The concept of inclusive education in England: excellence and equity**

The UK approach to inclusion is founded on five key principles:

• Every child has a right to an excellent education, and to achieve the highest standards assessed against the common benchmark of an inclusive national curriculum.

• However, children have different educational needs. Therefore the state must secure a wide diversity of high-quality educational places – in early years settings, mainstream schools, special schools, specialist units, colleges, training opportunities and higher education, from birth to age 19 and beyond.

• Inclusion is not achieved by forcing children into a single format, but rather by giving parents a genuine choice within a diverse, quality-assured offer of schools and other learning settings, backed up by appropriate learning support.

• The best way to secure both excellence and inclusion is to personalise learning to enable every child, whatever their needs, to access the full national curriculum and achieve good progress at every Key Stage. Personalised learning is best delivered as a partnership between pupils, parents, educators and support services. The outcome of effective personalised learning is that every young person, regardless of background or educational needs, can achieve his or her full potential.

• The best measure of inclusiveness of an education system is not attendance and participation – important as these are – but variance in attainment levels. In the UK, it is a top priority to narrow the gaps (variances) in progress and attainment between pupils from disadvantaged social backgrounds and their peers. This entails setting high expectations for every child, nationally, locally and at school and teacher level, and eliminating excuses for under-performance based on the pupil’s origin or family circumstances.”

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user\_upload/Policy\_Dialogue/48th\_ICE/Messages/UK\_MIN08.pdf

These views explain why the UK Government is insisting on reserving on Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Already 44 countries have ratified the Convention without seeing the need to reserve on inclusive education. At the launch of the Secretary of State’s Report on the Duty to Promote Disability Equality, Sarah McCarthy-Fry, in answer to a question on why the Government was insisting on a reservation on inclusive education said “ Even if all children’s needs could be successfully met in the mainstream the Government would still wish to maintain a choice for parents of special schools”.

**How has the Government adopted such a revisionist policy on inclusive education?**

The private company Capita has charge of the National Strategies and last year the Regional Inclusion Advisors were also merged into their SEN Disability team.

The Government is getting concerned by the widening gap between the bottom quartile and the rest in terms of measured attainment. This is a product of the restructuring of education around improvement in measured attainment which has been the main impetus of New Labour’s ‘Education, Education, Education’. Standardized testing has focused on only one form of learning –academic/linguistic at the expense of other types of learning and intelligence.

These results are the currency of an internalized market which has been opened to private companies through City Academies, PFIs and the running of Local Authorities.

In a more balanced view inclusive pedagogy would be part of the school improvement process, but currently the strategies and OFSTED do not encourage an inclusive pedagogy.

**What do you see as the barriers to the inclusion of disabled children in the mainstream in England?**

A minority of schools are inclusive and continue to be so, though a number of schools we included in the RAP project seem to be moving backwards under external pressure e.g. moving from mixed ability teaching to streaming.

The main barriers are attitudes of staff and lack of training in disability equality and inclusion for all staff.

The pressure faced by classroom teachers with planning, assessment, standardized tests and league tables.

Classroom teachers need to be enabled to change their style of pedagogy, to be transformative and become the facilitator of learning.

A competitive rather than a collaborative pedagogy.

Far too many disabled children report bullying(70% in SoS Report). This needs addressing by developing an ethos of respect and engagement.

There has been a big increase in funding, but this is often not used in the most effective manner.

A large number of teaching assistants are now employed to support disabled pupils in mainstream(150,000). This is often seen as a barrier by young people to their development of social relationships with their peers.

TAs tend not to have much training and are not always included in planning with teachers.

The curriculum is taught in a boring way.

The methods of assessment are too narrow and exclude many learners.

Behavioural difficulties are not seen as impairing conditions under DDA

Schools do not have a differentiated behavior policy.

There is a lack of understanding of the history of disabled people’s oppression and it is not taught as part of the curriculum.

There are not enough materials for the curriculum which feature disabled people.

There are far too few disabled staff to act as role models.

Schools are not held accountable for their disability discrimination. There is a failure to enforce the DDA and Duty to Promote Disability Equality.There is no end date when all school environments have to be fully accessible.

Teacher training does not develop inclusive pedagogy

OFSTED do not understand or check disability equality.