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Seminar Paper 7

PROVISION FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF SERVICE USERS

Special Educational Needs Policy Options Group

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Paper 2 *Towards Effective Schools for All*

Paper by Mel Ainscow, Senior Lecturer, University of Cambridge, Institute of Education.

Paper 3 *Teacher Education for Special Educational Needs*

Paper by Peter Mittler, Professor of Special Education, Dean of School of Education, University of Manchester.

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POLICY OPTIONS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE 1990s

Introduction

This book is the seventh and final one in a series which has dealt with central policy issues in the field of special educational needs.

The need for a series of national policy seminars and papers arose from widely felt concerns about the future of special educational provision in the wake of the fundamental changes which are currently occurring in the education services.

It is over a decade since the *Education Act, 1981* on special educational needs came into operation. There has been considerable policy change since then with the introduction of the *Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988*, the *Education Act, 1993* and the recent *Code of Practice, 1994*. The more recent changes have taken place since the policy seminar series began. It has been in this context that a steering committee (see members below) with a national and diverse overview including headteachers, administrators, voluntary and professional associations, research and academic perspectives formed itself to arrange this policy seminar series.

The ESRC and the Cadbury Trust have funded the seminar project.

The seminars take the form of a presentation by a person on the topic area with a critical response from two discussants. A small group of participants with widely differing perspectives on special needs education are invited - MPs, local authority councillors, LEA officers, DfEE and OFSTED representatives, heads of voluntary bodies, headteachers, teachers, psychologists, professionals from health and social services, researchers and academics.

Our aim for these policy papers has been to bring to a wider audience the outcomes of the ideas and discussions which take place at these seminars. In doing so we seek to contribute to the on-going debate and policy formulation in the area of special educational needs.

Changing Values

Micheline Mason

For my talk I wish to develop a theme opened by Mel Ainscow in his paper entitled *Towards Effective Schools for All* (Policy Paper number 2). To my mind Mel hit the nail on the head when he made one important statement:

'Thus the main concern is with what can be learnt from the difficulties experienced by some pupils about the limitations of provision currently made for all pupils.'

I wish to share with you some of the things that we, the users of special education, have learnt about the education system and where it leads.

Labelling

First of all Mel talks about the problem of labelling children 'disabled'. Labels are not the problem, however; it is the values we attach to the labels which matter. Disabled people know that, like black people, we have to *keep* the label and *change* the values. This is the only way we can become proud of who we really are. For us it is a recognition that we are ordinary people put into extraordinary situations by oppression - by attitudes and barriers created by non-disabled people which prevent us from participating in ordinary life on an equal basis as others. We have reclaimed our right to define ourselves, as have people with learning difficulties and mental health system survivors. Euphemisms such as 'differently abled,' or 'special needs' only serve to add to the confusion that surrounds our issues.

The 'Individual Gaze' quoted by Mel has been identified as the 'medical model' by disabled people, and we know that following that path has trapped us in the role of perpetual 'patient' - passive and in need of altering or improvement by others. We have rejected this model, except of course when we are ill, and even then allopathic medicine versus holistic medicine continues the debate.

Autonomy

Disabled people have recognized the difference between segregation (your choice) and autonomy (our choice). We have realized that we are the experts when it comes to living with our impairments in a world which has no place for us. We know that we have been over-managed by well-meaning parents and professionals, and that we can, and indeed *must* take back the responsibility for our own lives. This is the first step to becoming full participants and leaders in society.

We do not believe our impairments are our biggest problem. It seems very difficult for the outside observer to believe that what seems so awful to them, could be something we are quite content to accept and live with. When disabled people are able to choose and control our own 'therapies', there are many marked differences - firstly, we choose much less of them, and secondly they are always seen as a means to a goal which fits into our overall lifestyle and objectives, such as joining the school swimming team or learning to drive. Young people in particular, when given the opportunity to participate in a lively and stimulating environment, invent their own therapies which are fun and 'inclusive', such as disco dancing as physiotherapy, or singing kareoke as speech therapy. The experience of imposed therapies on young people is most often described as 'abuse'. One day the non-disabled world is going to have to stop running away from hearing this, and start listening instead.

Disabled people have redefined the meaning of the word 'independence'. We have observed that the majority of people in western society are living lives of deep, inner isolation. This is the inevitable result of the 'individual gaze' - a description of a habit of thinking based on the Cartesian model which has dominated our thinking for over 200 years. In this model the world was assumed to be like a machine which could be understood by studying its components in ever-increasing detail. It was hoped that the invention of tools like the electron microscope would help us to understand life itself. Instead, scientists learnt that the early mystics may have had a better grasp on the truth - that all life seems to be connected to all other life in ways which suggest there is not division, only the illusion of division. It points scientists in another direction, that of studying the relationships between things rather than the things themselves.

Disabled people know that they are dependent on others to live. We also know that this is equally true, if less obvious, for every living thing. We have also learnt that caring for others is a human need. We know this because it is a role which has been traditionally denied to us, and for which we have had to fight. Therefore, our lives only make sense in the context of community and collaboration. It is building relationships between us that 'cure' our disabilities and turn our experiences into gifts rather than deficits. There need not be a debate about this. You only have to look at the current 'outsideness' of most disabled or otherwise 'needy' people to see the stark reality. Disabled people have defined independence as being in control of your own life, rather than the idea of 'managing without help'. It is all right for people to need each other.

Interdependence without loss of control

The concerns about children having too much individualized help in school is missing the point because of the misunderstanding about independence. When a school employs someone to act as a facilitator for a child to participate as fully as possible in the life of the school, and the child is empowered by the relationship, it works. When a school wants to employ someone to protect them from their fear of the challenges this child may bring, and the child feels constrained and disempowered by the relationship, it does not work. From our point of view, the acceptance of our interdependence without loss of control of our lives, is like breaking free from a prison. We are no longer constrained by our physical or intellectual limitations, but can create lives for ourselves which are bound only by our ability to imagine. Alone, the most athletic of us can only jump a matter of feet into the air. Working in collaboration with others, we can fly to the moon.

Training and specialists have an important part in our lives. I love people who really know a great deal about their subject, and who are willing to study and learn things which I do not have the time or the inclination to do for myself. For example, I know of two women who have met most of the families in which a child is born who has brittle bones, which is my impairment. When I became a parent to a child with this condition, these two women were of immense help to me. They saved me from years of unnecessary worrying and doubt. However, I do not want them controlling my life. I want them to communicate what they know so that I can use this information as I think best. This is the role which hardly exists and which parents, schools and we ourselves need lots of. I see them as 'servants' in the best sense of the word. This seems to be a challenge to the concept of a professional who wants to remain more knowledgeable than their 'clients'.

Equal opportunities

Disabled people are changing the background situation in which these debates are happening. Our fight for a Civil Rights Bill will eventually succeed, and exclusion on the grounds of impairment will be seen for what it is, an unacceptable form of discrimination. At the same time, our increasing visibility, as active and powerful adults, the rapid development of useful technology, the fruits of years of 'Equal Opportunity Training' by disabled people, are creating completely different expectations in young disabled people, and in some parents. You cannot rely on their patience whilst endless debates are had amongst professionals who hold different value systems.

Disabled people have focused on compulsory segregation within the education system as a block to progress. We are convinced that the resistance to inclusion which is still rife within mainstream society, will not be broken until people have to face their fear head-on. Fear is a painful emotion and most of us spend our lives avoiding it. It is better that these young people and parents who are committed to change, have the right to be the pioneers on behalf of the more faint-hearted. Whilst force can be used by LEAs and school governors to prevent access to mainstream schools, then neither the will, nor the resources need ever be forthcoming to make inclusion a reality. The concept of the 'continuum of provision' will continue to institutionalize the medical model of disability into eternity.

Sense and Nonsense Relocated

Colin Low

It seems to be my fate always to be on the wrong side in discussions of special education. It is not so much a case of wanting to agree as, perhaps counter-suggestibly, to disagree with the person I last spoke to. This is partly a matter of complexity. Notwithstanding the need to take account of competing values and practical considerations to which others in this series have alluded, no subject, it seems, is more susceptible to the righteous and one-dimensional advocacy of those who, in Mel Ainscow's words, 'aspire to absolute generalizations' (Ainscow, 1993). In face of this, it is difficult at the very least not to want to say 'yes, but ...'.

I am reminded of one of the most thought-provoking observations I ever heard on the subject of special education, in which Dennis Mongon, then of ILEA, described his ambivalent reactions to the question of resources. Whenever people assumed a worried air and said, 'Oh dear, this will need a lot of resources', he wanted to reassure them and say, 'not necessarily - there are a lot of things that can be done at little cost if only the *will* is there.' On the other hand, when people said, 'that won't need much in the way of resources', he immediately wanted to reply by insisting that they should not get away with doing things on the cheap. This powerfully underlines the persistent ambiguity of the subject and the liability of people's positions both to depend on and to be evaluated in terms of where other people are coming from.

I want to talk not about resources, but about the questions of inclusion and segregation, labelling and differentiation, in an attempt to illustrate, from my experience of working with these issues from a range of standpoints in the voluntary sector, the pitfalls of an absolutist and one-dimensional approach of whatever pedigree. Perhaps I could pursue the notion of being in the wrong place for a little longer.

Integration

Peter Mittler, back in 1994, in his concluding comments to the fifth seminar in this series, said: 'During the 1970s and 1980s, educational integration was seen by many as a moral imperative and its attainment took on some of the elements of a crusade.' From my positions in the National Federation of the Blind and the Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Teachers and Students, I was part of that crusade. We may have felt we occupied a piece of the moral high ground, but I cannot say we ever felt we had attained anything like an ideological hegemony. We were all too conscious of what Seamus Hegarty (1994) has termed the 'asymmetry between segregated and integrated provision in terms of the extent to which they are expected to justify themselves by reference to empirical outcomes', and it certainly felt like an uphill struggle to get a fair hearing for the reasonable aspirations of disabled people in the face of what seemed very much like the entrenched self-interest of the special school establishment.

We were very much criticized at that time for adopting an absolutist stance towards integration and, I would say, subjected to a good deal of misrepresentation and abuse. It certainly felt like being in the wrong place at the time. Sometimes this was so wilful and perverse that it could only be put down to self-interest, but I was much more interested in the kind of self-justifications which should probably be more accurately described as self-serving than self-interested.

Peter Housden (1993) has said that the concept of hegemony 'embodies the notion that

over time the force of ideas rests in their connection with social forces and that the conflict of ideas reflects and articulates (sic) wider social conflicts, though not in a simple or linear fashion. Thus we are not here dealing with an idealized debate about the intellectual basis of British education.'

This is undoubtedly true, but ideas remain important. They are an important part of the armoury with which opposing forces battle for supremacy. They are particularly potent if they can be used to link desired outcomes with dominant values and beliefs, 'commonsense' consensuses and taken-for-granted assumptions. It can be particularly efficacious for persuading people of the value of what one is doing if one can show that one is doing good. This may often require a degree of artifice and even self-deception in the process known as mystification. Ideas can be advanced with greater conviction and defended with greater tenacity if they are actually believed.

However, the positions to which ideas lend support cannot continue to be espoused, at any rate with the same confidence, if those ideas can be shown to be mistaken. I was therefore at pains in the late '70s and early '80s to lay bare some of the confusions and misapprehensions which underlay the justifications of segregation and the attacks on integration in the hope that the injection of an element of rationality into the debate would enhance the ration of light to heat. In particular in a paper entitled 'Sense and nonsense about integration' (Low, 1979), I identified a number of intellectual devices which were used to discredit integration and accord a spurious air of legitimacy to the ideas of segregation.

Intellectual devices

The first depicted integration as a matter of treating everyone, disabled and non-disabled, alike. This was used to caricature integrationists as wanting to close down all special schools and abandon disabled children to the rigours of the ordinary school, without any of the special support they clearly need there if integration is to succeed. Alternatively - though curiously sometimes by the same people - the argument that integration means treating everybody the same was used to object to some of the forms of special support which we thought would be most helpful to disabled people, such as a higher school leaving age, on the ground that they singled the disabled out for special attention in a manner incompatible with integration.

A second clutch of arguments seemed to run: 'Never mind the width, feel the quality. It is the quality of provision that counts, not where it is made, whether in the ordinary or the special school. Certainly mere placement in an ordinary school does not of itself guarantee integration.' But it does not preclude it either. Indeed, all other things being equal, it must enhance its prospects. If it is not a sufficient condition, it is certainly a necessary one. To say that because it does not guarantee full functional integration, locational integration is not worth undertaking at all is the clearest case of making the best the enemy of the good.

A third argument, the argument from failed cases, rejected integration in all cases because it did not work in some; while a fourth condemned integration as too 'dogmatic' and 'doctrinaire'. What is really required, it was said, is a range of different types of provision capable of accommodating the different needs of each individual child and offering a genuine choice to the parents of disabled children.

To assess the validity of that argument, it is necessary to see what we were in fact saying. This was stated precisely in a memorandum (Low, 1975) I submitted in 1975 to

Lord Snowdon's working party on the integration of the disabled which said: 'This memorandum argues for a presumption in favour of integration based on handicapped people's common humanity with unhandicapped people and their membership of the same communities. On this basis integration should be defended as a value to be pursued unless there are very good reasons to the contrary, and not just if all other things are equal or it can demonstrate a clear balance of advantage.' This is akin to the qualified duty to integrate now contained in Section 160 of the *Education Act, 1993* - though doubtless with fewer qualifications. More recently I characterize this in the following way: the principle of integration 'rests essentially on the belief, succinctly distilled by the Warnock Committee in the sentiment that "so far as is humanly possible, handicapped people should enjoy the opportunities for self-fulfilment enjoyed by other people".' Note 'so far as is humanly possible'. Some people have been won over to the principle of integration, but still hold it in a rather watered down form: integration is all right if all other things are equal. We should try to do a bit better than that and hold on to 'so far as is humanly possible' - so far as is humanly possible (Low, 1992). This is the position I still hold today.

Peter Housden (1993) spelled out the strategic imperatives implicit in this injunction when he spoke of only countenancing segregated solutions in the context of a 'general and determined long march towards inclusive provision'.

Towards the beginning of the 1980s things began to change. I attended an Open University seminar where Warnock seemed to be dismissed as too reformist and total integration of all handicaps was called for without much regard for the dynamics of how this desirable state was to be brought about. I felt like a thief fallen among good men. The re-formed disability movement began to call for full inclusion as a human right and this was echoed by the Centre for Studies in the Integration of Education - though with greater regard for the question of timing.

Catering for differing needs

At about the same time I acquired greater responsibility within the RNIB. We gave greater priority to integration for those children whose only handicap was visual, but I found I also had to have regard to the children in our schools with profound, complex and multiple difficulties in addition to their visual handicap who clearly gained from specialized programmes which it would be extremely difficult to mobilize in the ordinary school, with staffing ratios better than unity affording high levels of one-to-one care and attention on a round-the-clock basis. (With moves towards the integration of a singly handicapped during the 1980s, this is the population for which our schools wholly now cater to the point where today all but one provide for this group and 71% of the pupils in them have three or more additional handicaps. Even if one includes the remaining school for more academic pupils, there are still only 39% of children in RNIB schools with no additional handicap.)

Was I going soft? I do not think so. For a start, our position had always been that special schools had a continuing if somewhat altered role for the most severely handicapped for as far ahead as one could foresee. Then again, I think I can fairly claim, in contrary fashion, to have remained vigilant for any signs of back-sliding on the policy of integration.

The fact is that even the most committed integrationist has still sensibly to take a two-pronged approach to special education. There was a general consensus to this effect during these seminars. I cannot here reproduce his theoretical underpinning, itself a summary, but Peter Housden (1993) delineated this with care in the first of the series in the following terms: 'Subject to certain safeguards, needs of vulnerable children are most likely

to be met by maximizing their inclusion in the mainstream of the education service.' Having said that, it is essential to understand 'that children have different needs and that learning objectives and support have to be tailored to these differences ... Any mainstream school which is seeking to provide for a wider range of children must be resourced to provide effectively for this differentiation ... There can be no compromise with the principle that effective differentiation is critical to effective integration.' However 'special schools and related provision will continue to have an important part to play in our service in meeting the needs of pupils who cannot, for whatever reason, be offered inclusive environments with sufficient differentiation' - that small percentage of children who have 'needs that are manifest, complex and lifelong. Many will receive an excellent and appropriate education in special schools.'

Human rights

Today it seems that many of the old battles over integration have been won - not completely, of course, but very largely. There may still be some way to go in practice, but the issue of principle has largely been settled. As Peter Mittler (1994) said in his conclusion to the fifth seminar: 'The commitment in principle to what we now call inclusive education has increased and there is wide agreement in the UK and in many other countries that this is the right goal to pursue.' The debate is no longer between integration and segregation but between the sophisticated integrationist position mapped out by Housden and the relatively unencumbered demands for full inclusion emanating from some educational theorists and certain sections of the disability movement. Thus the argument should not be recited and the chief threat to a balanced approach be seen as coming from those who want to pursue a policy of integration at any price and work on transforming institutions at the expense of work with individuals.

Many arguments are advanced in support of this position, but here I just want to touch on two of the well-springs from it - the concern with human rights and the so-called 'social' model of disability. Len Barton (1995) has given expression to the first of these directly: 'Full inclusion in society is ... a human rights issue involving participation, choice and empowerment. Issues of justice and equity are central to the demands for inclusive education. There is no room for complacency. This is a serious struggle.'

This last sentence perhaps reveals the true significance of this perspective which is elsewhere made explicit: 'Educational issues are contentious in that they involve struggles over meanings, acceptable practices and desirable outcomes ... They involve struggles between different interest groups motivated by alternative/antagonistic values ... What is vitally important is that the issue of segregation versus inclusive education is viewed as not merely concerned with resources or different educational philosophies, but rather fundamental values. It is about different conceptions of the good society, of images of self-identity and the relationships between education and society. Thus the demand for change is not solely educational. It is about the structural and social conditions of society itself.' (Ibid.)

As Max Hunt (1994) said: 'The assertion of a fundamental human right to attend the same school as the child next door with consequent obligation on the LEA to provide the resources to make it work, has few points of contact with debates about the educational needs of an individual child.' The two kinds of proposition serve different functions and operate on different levels. The one is instrumental, addressed to answering the empirical question 'What works best for a particular child?' The other is expressive - of the identity

and status of disabled people - or if it is instrumental, it is instrumental for a different purpose, namely, that of advancing a particular political and social agenda.

As we have seen, those who espouse the human rights approach adhere to the interest group/social forces view of ideas. But that does not render their ideas immune from rational criticism any more than those of the segregationists. Nor, as Brahm Norwich (1993) has pointed out, does invoking the spirits of justice and fairness. Viewed as an analytical concept and not just a rhetorical device, we can see that human rights reasoning is *a priori* and thus partial in an area which self-evidently requires to be guided by both values and facts. The right to education may be a question of value, but where it should take place is at best a mixed question of values and facts. The insistence on rights is also absolute in a situation where, as we have seen, the most that should really be claimed in a world of practicalities and countervailing considerations is a strong presumption, not an absolute right.

We are finally left with the expressive thrust of the emphasis on human rights, but individual functional and instrumental consideration can hardly be ignored. As Max Hunt (1994) said again: 'Inclusion as a general policy objective derived from an essentially modern position is no guarantee of achieving significant educational gain.' The disability movement, let alone the population of disabled children, is not a homogenous group. One should be suspicious of expressive monoliths, especially when they seek to advance some people's agendas on the back of other people's education.

Inclusion

The social model of disability gives powerful support to the advocates of an inclusive approach who reject the individual pupil perspective which they see as based too much on a 'deficit' model (Ainscow, 1993). In reacting against the negative stereotyping of disabled people, which in Norwich's (1993) terms features them as 'all different', the social model goes to the opposite extreme and projects disabled people as 'all the same'. There is nothing inherent about disability, it is said. If a disabled person is at a disadvantage, it has nothing to do with his or her individual characteristics. Rather it has to do with the discriminatory arrangements made by the rest of society which do not adequately accommodate the needs of disabled people. In the present context, this means that the supposed 'deficits' of individuals should in reality be ascribed to 'deficits' in school organization, class-room conditions, assessment policies, curriculum content and pedagogical practice.

This is seriously flawed. This 'doctrine of indistinguishability' (Low, 1994) embraces a spurious egalitarianism which threatens to obscure consideration of the individual needs which many disabled children obviously do have, however one chooses to refer to them. Instead of thinking of disabled people as either all different from or all the same as non-disabled people, it is surely more correct to think of them as having important things in common with non-disabled people but also as differing from them in important respects as well. Norwich (1993) is right when he says that individual models are often misrepresented as ignoring social and organizational processes. But their distinctive feature is that they do justice to individual factors as well in a way that social models do not. It is a question whether some versions of inclusivism do not rule out consideration of individual factors as a matter of principle, so that inclusion and differentiation represent a contradiction in terms. How far can there still be special needs under inclusivism? (Low, 1994).

How that may be, as Housden (1993) says: 'There can be no compromise with the

principle that effective differentiation is critical to effective integration?' More moderate inclusivists usually suggest that this should take the form of a common core of provision plus differentiated provision for the particular needs of the individual child. But here again in the resistance to applying labels which usually goes along with this notion, there is a flabbiness which is badly in need of some toughening up. Individual provision can never be wholly individualized in the sense that we approach each child with a clean sheet free from any preconception. Norwich (1993) is right when he suggests that, both conceptually and organizationally, it is simply not possible to identify and provide for individual needs without the use of general frames of reference based on the similarities and differences between individuals and anchored in language. What we can do, however, is seek to ensure that the labels we use for conceptualizing and systematizing individual needs do not automatically attract negative connotations.

Despite these weaknesses the inclusive approach has made considerable headway in recent years, no doubt because of its spuriously democratic and egalitarian ethos. Because of its weaknesses, I continue to feel in the wrong place and out of joint with the times in which we live, though now for somewhat different reasons than before. In these circumstances, I believe the only course to pursue is that chartered by Daniel Bell (1989), the American sociologist, which he described as 'steering to the right of the left, and to the left of the right, seeking always the road of freedom and intellectual decency'.

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The Changing Role of Parents

Robina Mallett

Introduction

I am a parent of three daughters, two of whom have special educational needs and require ongoing medical intervention.

I appreciate the opportunity this seminar provides firstly to give a response to the previous paper and to reflect on the latest measures for involving parents in the education of children with 'special needs'. I will then describe some of the ways in which parent users' perceptions are being utilised in monitoring and planning services within one authority and suggest why such collaboration seems less well developed in relation to health and social service provision. Finally I would like to offer some thoughts on how user perceptions of children themselves might be sought and to what effect.

Interagency working?

The last paper, entitled 'Meeting special educational needs - options for partnership between health, social and educational services' (Policy Paper, number 6), was presented by Tony Dessent. In it he discussed the exhortations for partnership in recent legislation and the barriers both within and between these agencies that obstruct collaborative working. A range of structural possibilities that could facilitate co-operation were described.

I recognised the tensions and blockages which Dessent registers. My own experiences seem to be reiterated daily in conversation with other parent and professional members of Supportive Parents for Special Children, the Avonwide support group which provides my later examples of collaborative working.

At individual family level, interagency working is frequently described as 'virtually non-existent'. Parents find themselves to be the keyworker who knows everyone involved with a child and either communicates between them or prompts liaison. Ownership of responsibility is debated then evaded. Staff who work creatively within 'their own' field are sceptical about the possibilities for more sharing of expertise.

Atomisation is a significant feature of the context in which Avon's parents and professionals find themselves. We face local government reorganisation with fear and frustration. A family could already be working with more than one of the four different health authorities and six sector social services. We are shortly to lose the single LEA on whom we can focus and must next adapt to services set up under four unitary authorities. The resultant increased fragmentation will be costly. It will reduce the opportunities for strategic planning of services across our area and complicate matters for users and providers. We anticipate a difficult phase when we will have to work hard to establish agendas with newly instituted administrations preoccupied with internal issues. I regret that all the upheaval is not for the benefit of more joint working in the interests of children.

If Dessent is correct in his statement 'Ultimately for co-operative working to operate successfully it must be in both the interests of the customer/consumer *and* of the agencies themselves', it seems that we do not yet have the mechanisms in place to secure this particular interest as a priority for the agencies.

The Education Act, 1993 and parents

Predictably I am in agreement with Philippa Russell's opinion that 'Perhaps the greatest

potential for positive change in resolving inter-professional boundary issues has come from the changing role of parents.' Onerous and difficult as it can be, I am convinced that expecting parents to be actively involved in dialogue about service delivery is essential. Within education the latest Act and guidance require and thus legitimise our contributions at an individual level, while the partnership concept encourages this on a wider scale.

Through schools (and pre-school establishments) having 'regard to the *Code of Practice*' parents should henceforth be involved at early stages of the identification of need and the planning and reviewing of programmes for their children. They should also have support, if they wish, to do so.

Through the requirement to publish SEN policies schools will be acknowledging their ownership of responsibility to meet the majority of special needs amongst their pupils. By identifying the structures and personnel employed to manage tasks, describing opportunities to complain and relating the way money is distributed, SEN policies will increase parents' access to information they need as partners in making processes work most effectively. That policies must be reviewed and reported on annually means there can be an expectation that improvements are sought and that feedback from parents will be taken seriously.

Things may still not go smoothly. Although there are expectations that mainstream schools must increase the range of need they are qualified to meet, and that statements will have more clarity about which responsibilities belong to school and LEA, there may well be problems getting provision delivered.

The governing body

When the help specified in a statement is not forthcoming, parents have no recourse to a Tribunal (whose decisions will be watched warily by authorities and schools). Instead they must challenge their governing body or resort to Judicial Review or Secretary of State.

Child and parents can be piggy in the middle while a school's governors and LEA argue about what is reasonable for the school to manage. Governing bodies vary widely in their special needs expertise and despite their increased responsibility for delivering provision specified they are likely to have less training in future. (After April 1995 I understand that no central government funding will be earmarked for governor training - GEST 1 is to become a School Effectiveness Grant which does not differentiate between the development needs of governors and school staff, LEA funding through GEST 5 has been scrapped.)

Named persons

Notwithstanding the difficulties of supplying and sustaining enough 'Named Persons', I am hopeful that such support will be available to a far larger group of parents than those getting to a Proposed Statement.

Much friction and suspicion is avoided if parents participate comfortably at school-based stages, confidence in strategies used can allay the fears that drive some parents to 'the protection of a statement' (Lunt and Evans, Policy Paper 5). However, since most school staff are a long way off having sufficient SEN training, support, non-contact time, resources and materials to permit the differentiation which would guarantee adequate provision for all, except the most complex difficulties, simply supporting parents will not remove the pressure for statements as a means of both identifying needs and allocating appropriate resources.

Beyond the individual: parent support groups

Nor will providing Named Persons *per se* produce widespread improvements unless some structure exists to support these volunteers and make use of the information they obtain about the good and bad practice they meet while supporting parents and pupils.

My image of parental involvement is not one of limiting their input to feedback about an individual child or school. In the past change has been due to case law established by the efforts of separate families, and to an extent this will continue with Tribunal judgements setting the parameters.

However, ours is a time of consumer rights, self-help and disability movements and this parent generation is accustomed to the idea of support groups. Having the support of a Named Person should help reduce the paralysis that individual parents can suffer when they feel isolated, ill-informed and unsure; having parent colleagues within a support group can enable the development of a range of services to offer a consumer view, monitor services and disseminate information between agencies and parents.

Directly and indirectly, via our children's experience, we are receivers of both good and bad practice and are generally motivated to tell of either - particularly when safe ways are offered.

In Avon, Supportive Parents for Special Children (SPSC) has established several 'safe' feedback routes that, hopefully, do not prejudice any individual family's relationships with professionals. User perceptions are also considered when developing services.

LEA officers and parents achieve a regular exchange on problems and policies through termly meetings at which most of the voluntary groups concerned with children who have special needs are represented. General difficulties with service delivery are discussed - planning errors apparently due to insufficient interagency working are frequently pointed out, the effects of resourcing discrepancies on specialist provision are relayed, as are policy developments.

In Avon, parents sit on working parties with more specific tasks - for example producing guidelines on the level of difficulty anticipated to invoke LEA support for pupils with specific learning difficulty, LEA advice for annual reviews, standard letters describing Disabled Persons Act sections 5 and 6 procedures and the LEA parent handbook.

Parents have been invited to contribute to education committee seminars when new policies are being debated.

Our LEA has recently introduced a tariff system for funding special educational provision according to the profile identified on a matrix of needs. As an idea it sounded horrific at first. However, through establishing discussion about the aims of transparency and consistency, the pitfalls we could envisage, the possible arrangements for allocating resources and the methods of informing all users of its working, a range of parents were consulted at an early stage, in a genuine way. The matrix and tariff are currently being described to parents throughout the county via a series of SPSC Open Meetings and we are monitoring the problems experienced in delivering the system.

Council members, LEA officers, medical and social services personnel share the platform at our Open Meetings and are consequently able to have valuable dialogue that is not related to an individual disputed case. We celebrate and aim to spread good practice via differentiation workshop evenings, where we hope to improve the local networks between

those concerned with SEN issues. We support joint working parties at pre-school level and are running governor training sessions about the 1993 Act. SPSC members are asked to speak at gatherings of medical, social services and educational personnel.

We try to help parents acquire necessary 'Clarification of Boundaries' (Dessent's Policy Paper, number 6) through staffing a telephone helpline, providing trained volunteer parent-helpers and recently by writing our own leaflets about the roles, responsibilities and contact points of the main medical personnel parents may meet, if they have children with additional needs.

We cannot force structural or attitudinal change but I think we are able to help them happen.

Parent partnership projects elsewhere will have different ideas about utilising parent perceptions; whatever structures and methods they develop, it is important that these schemes evolve as parent rather than officer-led. User ownership and independence are fundamental. Without them parent partnership schemes will be just another LEA department.

What of Health and Social Services?

It is significant that the user involvement I have described is concerned mainly with education; Dessent's policy options were proposed to stimulate wider interagency planning and working.

When health or social services are the major determiners of provision, user-involvement appears to be at a more primitive stage. In part this may be because pre- and post-school parents are more isolated and there are fewer opportunities for concerted action. Perhaps more importantly, there is also less information about the relevant legislation, entitlements and methods of applying pressure to improve services.

For parents to insist on improvements in medical and social service delivery, including more interagency collaboration, I believe they will need to know more about the *Children Act*, the *Disabled Persons Act* and the *NHS and Community Care Act*. If they were offered access to this information (perhaps via a handbook tailored for a locality, such as that produced by Powell and Purshouse in Sheffield) they could do far more to achieve what they need.

Cost effectiveness: long-term perspectives

Dessent feels it is perhaps too easy to automatically accept that 'co-operative working is a self-evident good' and predicts that in future the need for co-operative working will be more critically questioned. While any doubt exists, I will - as a parent and as an observer of their effects on children - welcome whatever research is required to prove the need for such co-operation, on grounds of cost effectiveness as well as 'common sense'.

Co-operation does not mean that all agencies involved are represented at every step and stage of the way, but implies that duplication, contradiction, dereliction could be minimised. All of these are costly to parents and professionals in emotional and financial ways.

It strikes me more and more that we cannot afford to look at each intervention in a child or family's life as an isolated, one-off incident. Children with needs that are extra, i.e. 'special' rather than usual, do not disappear; they get older, reach other stages, require different services. We need to take a long-term view of the cost effectiveness of working in ways which actively involve them and those with parental responsibility for them.

Having experienced two very different preschool children's centres, my partner and I have been made acutely aware of the effects of different approaches to parents. The qualifications and salary bills attached to both may have looked identical but one deskilled and antagonised us, the other set us up as positively disposed, potential partners for future relationships.

I have since come across many parents whose expectations of professionals involve much mistrust and antagonism - very often to discover their early experiences were similar to ours at the first centre. Comparing the outcomes for children and families exposed to the two regimes would be fascinating - it could well provide evidence of the cost effectiveness of collaborative working.

The issue has relevance beyond the early years. Many preschool youngsters requiring extensive medical intervention will have special educational needs and be involved long-term with medical and social services. We need to consider the value of building partnership relationships and co-operative working patterns between agencies within a long-term perspective.

We should also be concerned about the costs of not doing so. We have a cohort of parents who have expected consideration while their children were of school age - will they accept the situation as it currently is for those of 19 and over with disabilities? The costs of poor practice can include the expense of dealing with challenges through complaints procedures, tribunals and ombudsmen, as well as years of difficult relationships for parents, their children and professionals.

User perceptions of children and young adults

Finally, I would like to say something about the user-perceptions of young people themselves. I welcome the coming emphasis on 'ascertaining the child's wishes'.

At first sight perhaps this seems just a reminder to ask how a student feels about their progress or their choice of options, merely a prompt to involve them more in decision making.

I would like to think that the phrase will lead to more mainstream staff finding time and ways to familiarise themselves with children's experiences of their learning situation - the social and emotional context as well as their capacity for learning. This can only make our relationships and work with them more effective.

The mainstream environment can be a harsh one.

If you look, sound, move or learn differently and also perform most tasks less well than most others, you may well feel isolated and useless. When your experience of the world seems different from that of your peer group, it can be hard to make friends. The judgement of your peers is nearly always perceived acutely, to feel of value you must sense your worth to others.

I do not have the impression that the majority of school staff feel prepared with a repertoire of strategies to try when they see a child suffering socially. There seems rather a tendency to feel inadequate, to overlook the pain or perhaps hope things will sort themselves out. Ignoring or evading the issue of low self-esteem may well mean staff are jeopardising any subject teaching; they are also showing they do not care enough.

Friendships may be intact, or at least within the normal ebb and flow of childhood relationships, yet children can still feel they are failing.

How do staff ensure that pupils who need additional provision experience enough success? Many may not achieve by the same criteria as those who do not need extra support, but, to be effective, teachers need to know just what are appropriate (potentially rewarding) challenges for their SEN pupils.

It is still common to find that subject teachers differentiate only by expecting less from the same teaching input. This is surely as damaging to a child's self-esteem as denying them the chance to be there in mainstream with everyone else in the first place.

I am sure most parents expect those educating their children to take some responsibility for their pupils' social well-being and the emotional effect of challenges/work they set for them. I hope staff know something of these and yet perversely I find myself anxious about how they reach their conclusions about what my children think and feel. I suspect many other parents feel the same.

Both our younger daughters have difficulties with speech and language. The OPCS Survey of prevalence of disability among children, 1989, estimated 13 per 1000 children are communication disabled, fewer than those disabled by behaviour but more than by locomotion or intellectual functioning. When your child has difficulties communicating you have a particular need to feel confident that those both asking them questions and receiving their answers have adequate skills - your child's self-esteem, learning and safety are dependent on this. This is particularly so when decisions are being made and a young person's views are sought at transition points.

It will not be satisfactory (as happened recently with our 14 year old) if staff ask that a student fill in a section of an Action Planning document and then simply take their response at face value. When asked for her opinion of her strengths and interests/issues for discussion, O listed trampolining, horseriding, badminton, piano, drama and swimming. O last went horseriding and trampolining as part of family birthday outings years ago, she can return a shuttlecock probably three times during an hour in which she is fed shots, she plays very basic piano for a 20-minute lesson once a week and has given up Saturday morning drama club because she hated it so much. Anyone reading her form might assume that out of school this was a busy, confident child with a full social diary; the truth is very different. Whatever the question was, O did not understand it, her answer was misleading.

To relieve my anxieties (which as with countless parents could be interpreted as overprotectiveness or inability to let go) I need faith both that my children are being helped to practice expressing their opinions, feelings and wishes and that adults working with them are interested enough in their perceptions to develop a repertoire of ways to 'hear' and respond to them.

Active listening

One set of valuable techniques is described by Gordon in his book 'Teacher Effectiveness Training' (Gordon, 1975). Knowing about 'Active listening' and Gordon's structured approach to problem solving would help staff become skilled at 'hearing the message' (rather than the words used), and would also enable them to allow children more often to create their own solutions to the predicaments they perceive. (There can be a danger that children with SEN are directed more often than they need to be.) Gordon's approach can be used to great effect with all children, it is not a 'special' method for 'special needs' pupils.

Group work

Several parents and support staff associated with our 14 year old's school were anxious

that something be done to improve the low self-esteem and poor social skills of many children with SEN.

The opportunity arose for an experienced teacher to set up a project to tackle this as part of her MA. Having been involved in some Circles of Support I was keen that these vulnerable pupils were not further segregated - I preferred to think of a mixed group supporting each other within the wider school community. The teacher concerned felt differently, choosing to start with the underconfident, isolated pupils. She did lots of work seeding the idea of a lunchtime club with them.

My daughter was resistant to the idea at first - saying that she did not need anything else 'special', but would rather hang around like everyone else. This wish highlighted one of things that was missing for her, she had no one to hang around with, rather she stood on the edge and felt unable to get into her chosen group for fear of saying something wrong and making a fool of herself.

In a few weeks the teacher facilitating the lunchtime club has enabled this group to become their own support group. One of their ground rules was confidentiality; another was not to assume that what happened within the club would occur elsewhere in the school - after all participants might react differently when they were around other people.

When I recently left my daughter after a speech therapy appointment at school, she slipped off to join her group of friends at the place they now wait for each other. Having shared fears and fun together they appreciate each other's care and attention and are practising the exchanges which make up friendships. I was wrong to mind them sharing their similar experiences of school life and I am rather pleased. O is at last getting better at stating her wishes and concerns in settings outside home.

Class work

I have also been impressed by the opportunities Circle Time allows for all children to talk about things that matter to them, including their impressions of school life.

Happily, Circle Time is a regular feature of the primary school our youngest daughter attends, so when she was unhappy at the start of a new school year she decided herself that asking for Circle Time could be a way of solving her problems.

New children had joined her class, some had mimicked her speech; she had felt completely ignored when she had tried to participate in unsupervised group work away from the classroom and she had been hurt by being called handicapped. These three sources of discomfort took several days of active listening to surface because of her language impairment.

Soon after her request, Circle Time was fitted in at the end of an afternoon. Apparently she spoke first and carefully explained why she had been feeling sad about going to school. As the bean bag was passed around other children described what made them unhappy - being excluded by friends, picked on by older sisters, told off when they were not doing anything etc. They could all empathise with each other, A's emotions did not stand out, they settled in amongst the others'. Later on in the process her teacher asked her what would help her not to feel sad; when she was unable to say for herself the teacher asked if she would like everyone to remember that she needed a little longer to say things and A acknowledged this would help. The teacher was thus able to give the new class members the strategy that the old hands were familiar with. That day the class came out 20 minutes late - there were so many things to share.

Again this technique helps pupils to express concerns and give teachers feedback about their perceptions as users. It also encourages everyone to pay attention to and take responsibility for each other. In this age of attainment scores and league tables I value such goals enormously.

Reference

Gordon, T (1975) *Teacher effectiveness training*, P H Wyden.

Partnership with Parents: Some Challenges and Opportunities

Philippa Russell

'The relationship between parents and professionals should be a partnership and ideally an equal one ... for although we tend to dwell upon the dependence of many parents on professionals' support, we are well aware that professional help cannot be wholly effective, if at all so, unless it builds upon the parents' capacity to be involved. Thus we see the relationship as a dialogue, with parents and helpers working in partnership. Professionals have their own distinctive knowledge and skills to contribute to parents' understanding of how best to help their child. Parents can be effective partners, but only if professionals take note of what they say and how they express their needs and treat their contribution as intrinsically important.'
(Warnock Report, para 9.6)

Background

The concept of partnership with parents was first formally introduced by the Warnock Committee in 1978; The Committee firmly stressed the importance of supporting parents in a new and more pro-active approach to assessment of their children's SEN. The Warnock Committee proposed the appointment of a 'named person' to support parents during assessment and described the role as 'essentially counsellor and adviser'. The current debate about the role of the 'named person' illustrates a much wider debate about what is meant by 'partnership' and about how parents can be most positively involved in their children's education.

The 'named person' was included within the 1981 Act at the last minute and in response to a strong lobby from voluntary and some professional organisations (in particular the Council for Disabled Children). The role was never developed in any guidance or regulations, except in *Circular 1/83* which stated that 'the Secretary of State hopes that LEAs will ensure that the person or persons selected will have knowledge of the education service and be familiar with the kinds of difficulties experienced by children with SEN. It is also important that they should be able to establish good relationships with parents.' In implementing the 1981 Act, the majority of LEAs either combined the roles of named officer and named person or simply gave names of relevant voluntary organisations to parents when carrying out statutory assessments. One or two pilot projects (in particular SNAP in Wales, the Newham Parents' Centre and the Camden Elfrida Rathbone Parent Advocacy Project) were established but there was no development at a national level.

During the passage of the *Education Act, 1993* and the consultation period on the *Code of Practice*, the voluntary sector argued strongly for a developmental approach to the role of the named person - pointing out that the advent of the SEN Tribunal made it particularly timely to identify effective and practical local support systems for parents during statutory assessment - and preferably at an earlier stage.

The debate about the role of the 'named person' symbolised the much wider debate about what constitutes partnership. The Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on the 1981 Education Act and the Audit Commission (1993) had both reiterated the paucity of good practice with regard to the *real* involvement of parents in educational decision making. The Audit Commission noted parental dissatisfaction with poor collaboration; lack of information on criteria for assessment and allocation of resources and parental

perceptions of marginalisation in key decision-making. The House of Commons Select Committee also commented that the potential contribution of the voluntary sector had been largely untapped and criticised the failure to implement individual advisory and befriending schemes through the role of the 'named person'.

Family support: current issues in policy and practice

The debate about 'partnership with parents' in contributing to assessment and provision to meet their children's special educational needs has to be put firmly in the context of wider changes in policy and practice for family support. The past decade has seen a spate of new legislation - in particular the *Children Act, 1989*; the *NHS and Community Care Act, 1990*; the *Education Act, 1993*; the *Disability and Discrimination Bill, 1995* and the *Carers (Recognition and Services) Bill, 1995*. All have major implications for statutory and voluntary agencies working with *parents* and families of children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs. The same decade has seen a new focus upon 'needs' led assessment, with the concept of individualised packages of assessment and care and a major commitment (in principle at least) to supporting children with special needs or disabilities and their carers in their local communities.

But the rhetoric has not always matched the reality. The new aspirations to *listen* to consumers has led to further debate about who actually *is* the consumer (i.e. the parents or the child). The concern about resources has led to anxiety amongst parents that they will encounter 'rationing' and have to present themselves as 'needy' rather than as consumers in order to access support. As the OFSTED report on *Access and Achievement in Urban Education* commented, there are many factors such as unemployment, poverty and social disadvantage 'beyond the school gate' which can inhibit parental participation and directly affect children's achievements at school.

Much of the research into the lives of children with disabilities and their families is relevant in an educational as well as a social care context and offers important lessons about future partnerships with parents. Baldwin and Carlisle (1994), in a major review of current services for disabled children and the relevant messages from recent research, have highlighted seven key conditions for effective partnership with parents in assessment and decision-making, namely:

- The availability of sufficient information and advice in order to make an informed choice.
- Recognition of the emotional and social context of assessment and the degree of stress which many families already live under.
- The need to consult with parents *and* children and to avoid duplication of assessment arrangements and to see integrated assessment and planning systems as critical to success.
- The avoidance of simplistic notions about 'integration' and to ensure that specialist services can be provided where children and parents need them.
- Avoiding blame and celebrating successes.
- Ensuring that parents understand the purpose of any assessment; the stated outcomes and are active partners in any review process.

- Acknowledging that many parents have poor experiences of professional support and will need information, training and support to become partners; the appointment of a 'key worker' or named person will be critical to real participation in decision-making.

Baldwin and Carlisle, whilst looking primarily at the practical *social* support of children with disabilities or special needs and their families, claim nonetheless that these conditions have equal relevance to the concept of parental partnership in an educational context. The 1980s had seen a major debate about what partnership might mean. Cunningham and Hilton (1985) hypothesised that there were three primary models, in particular:

Styles of parent/professional partnerships

1. The Expert

The professional is the 'expert' and parents defer to his or her 'expert' advice.

Parents need expert advice - but the 'expert' model can lead to dependency and parents feeling de-skilled. It may also lead to 'shopping around' and pursuit of the definitive professional who will 'cure' the child's difficulties.

2. The Transplant

Professionals may choose this model if they feel they have relevant expertise but also see the importance of the parents as a resource. In effect some of the professional expertise is 'transplanted' to the parents. The parents are partners, albeit junior ones, but are heavily dependent upon professional supervision.

3. The Consumer

The professionals see parents as consumer; the professional role is to provide a range of options and the necessary information from which to choose. The parents have the right but also the responsibility - to decide and select what they wish to do to help their child. The parents are seen as having 'equivalent expertise' but the professional is still consultant and instructor. A consumer involvement can acknowledge different phases and styles of involvement according to family circumstances, hence parents can choose to delegate some responsibilities to professionals. But the relationship is based on mutual understanding and respect.

If 'partnership' does not work: some parents' perceptions of working with professionals...

4. The 'Passive' Parent

Parents feel too disempowered; too tired and too little respected to become actively involved.

5. The 'Warrior' Parent

The 'Warrior' parents have no confidence in partnership. They see relationships with professionals as running battles to get the 'best' for their child. Parents need to feel valued and to be helped to negotiate; the advent of the SEN Tribunal and the growing numbers of judicial reviews are salutary reminders that 'passivity' will probably be on the decline if parents are not seriously involved in their children's assessments and reviews.

The implementation of the *Education Act, 1981* (without a clear concept of what the role of the 'named person' and 'parent partnership' might be) was rapidly followed by a number

of pilot schemes to try and establish a key-worker or adviser role for parents during statutory assessment. There was wide recognition that the new procedures for statutory assessment (with the significant 'sea change' of access to professional advice within such assessment arrangements) were both challenges and opportunities for parents. But many parents did not contribute to their children's assessment; there was widespread dissatisfaction with the time-scales and the conduct of assessment procedures and parents continued to feel isolated and afraid of complex and often bureaucratic procedures. Parents in an Elfrida Rathbone parent advice project described the process as *the Maze* and developed a very effective training pack for the professionals working with them to illustrate the process (or lack of it) for identifying appropriate special educational provision.

Two local initiatives which subsequently have considerably affected the development of Parent Partnership Schemes and the implementation of the role of the named person were the SNAP (Special Educational Needs Advisory Project) in Wales and the Camden Elfrida Rathbone Parent Advocacy Project in North London. Both developed parent advice services which were designed to implement a 'named person' role; were planned in close association with the LEA and relevant voluntary organisations; and have now run for nearly a decade, with independent evaluation.

Both schemes also highlighted the importance of adopting *flexible* approaches to involving a wide range of volunteers from the local community. Both have demonstrated that traditionally 'hard to reach' parents (for example parents with learning difficulties or from ethnic minorities) can be supported and that schemes can facilitate more open discussion about parents' real wishes and feelings and about their children's needs. The LEAs concerned have found the use of independent advisers constructive and local and national voluntary organisations have contributed to the development of flexible and 'easy to use' training materials.

Evaluation of both SNAP and the Camden Elfrida Rathbone schemes have identified a number of key issues for development within both Parent Partnership Schemes and any local initiatives to appoint named persons or provide a wider range of support. Following implementation of the *Education Act, 1993* the Council for Disabled Children established a working party on the role of the named person, which drew upon a national survey (carried out by MENCAP); contact on specific issues with the network of Parent Partnership Scheme co-ordinators and voluntary organisations which already linked with the Council in various ways and with the LEAs who are now expected to appoint 'named persons'. The Council's working party identified a range of key queries relating to the role of the named person and its effective development as set out below. The setting of an agenda for action on *all* aspects of partnership with parents was seen as particularly important because there was growing evidence that many voluntary organisations (and LEAs) were debating the role of the 'named person' out of context and without relating that role to the wider network of support services within the locality. Anxieties about the *resourcing* of the named person role were in effect obscuring an audit of what support services were already available in a particular community and how these resources could be utilised more effectively to promote partnership.

In effect, there was increasing awareness that the growing debate about *who* should be appointed as named persons would be largely ineffective without a much wider reappraisal of the *context* for parent partnership and the *rationale* for such partnerships.

A potential *agenda for action* for DFE, LEAs and the voluntary sector will need to address:

The role of the voluntary sector:

- Discussing with the LEA what resources the voluntary sector can offer to parents and pupils (in particular the wider range of support, information and advice services which provide the context within which the named person will operate).
- Discussing with the LEA what contribution can be made to the recruitment, appointment, training and support of named persons and raising any issues or concerns relating to named persons and parent support.
- Agreeing with the LEA what information will be useful to parents during assessment; clarifying referral arrangements to any services in the voluntary sector and in particular considering possible support at the *early stages of assessment* (i.e. prior to statutory assessment).
- Contributing to the recruitment, training and support of named persons and befrienders at all levels of the assessment system.

Many voluntary organisations in recent months have thought again about their initial enthusiasm about 'named persons'. But most acknowledge that much of the initial thinking about parent support and representation through the named person role at the time of the 1981 Act was simplistic and optimistic. 'Named persons' or parent advisers can only work effectively if the 'system' is accessible and supportive. One member organisation of the Council for Disabled Children commented succinctly that: *'the named person in 1995 was in danger of becoming a role for the Arch-Angel Gabriel (hence unachievable and largely irrelevant) whereas the role of the named officer was crucial to partnership and voluntary organisations and LEAs have new and collaborative responsibilities to think more globally about a climate of partnership within which any effective scheme for parent advice and representation would flourish.'*

But the debate about the role of the named person has been helpful. The issues set out below further clarify an *agenda for action* for parent partnership over the coming decade, namely:

What is the key role of a parent adviser, named person or advocate?

- Befriender?
- Adviser?
- Representative?
- Advocate?
- Can he/she work for parents and children?

Accountability and liability?

What constitutes a reliable, competent and confident parent advice service? Who should recruit/train and support? The *Household Survey* of 1995 has pointed out that there 'has been a proliferation of advice and information services in the past decade'. Some LEAs and Parent Partnership Schemes and their voluntary counterparts are already working with

FIAC (Federation of Independent Advice Centres), the Volunteer Centre and local volunteer bureaux. IPSEA provides specially recruited and trained independent advice. But the Scottish implementation of the role of the named person permits parental nominations of 'friends and neighbours'. Should we be 'policing' the information systems for parents - or does it not matter? Voluntary organisations - like their statutory counterparts - are now sued for negligence in advice services.

Right from the start...

The focus of parent advice services has been around statutory assessment and appeal. But the *Code of Practice* challenges schools to involve parents actively right from the initial identification of a potential special need. Lessons from literature on disabled children and early identification clearly underlines the importance of investment in *early* support. How can we shift parent empowerment back into the early parts of the system - and who helps schools?

The Disability Equality Movement...

Disability equality has come late to the 'equal opportunities' movement. But the Disability and Discrimination Bill is a reminder of the importance of involving disabled adults to a much greater extent as advisers and advocates - and as role models for parents and children. Where do LEAs and schools begin?

Family Support - and social policy changes...

Circular 6/94 reminds schools of their duty to set out their arrangements for working with parents in school SEN policies. But some parents find partnership with any statutory service impossible. 'Parents with problems' may be parents who need social services or other agencies to give practical support. An active parent advice and support service may identify other problems in families' lives.

The 'Public Parent'...

Sir William Utting, in *Children in Public Care* (1993), highlighted the consequences for children 'looked after by the local authority' when the local authority 'as public parent' failed to play that role in education and other assessments. How do we reinterpret the parental role when the natural parent is not involved?

The way forward

The issues raised above and the wide range of concerns raised by Parent Partnership Schemes, the voluntary sector and some LEAs indicate that the effective implementation of the Warnock concept of *parents as partners* is still in its embryonic stage and likely to be a process of evolution and 'learning from experience'. Some key messages for the future include the need to consider how best to:

- **Support Parent Partnership Schemes:** they offer new opportunities for local developments and networks - but can only be effective with strong local partnerships across all agencies.
- **Link with the wider range of advice and information services** (such as Citizen Advice Bureaux; local councils of voluntary service; national and local disability and special needs organisations providing adviser services) to discuss potential problem areas such as vetting of volunteers; indemnity insurance; payment of expenses; contract arrangements; shared training arrangements.

- **Create local and regional networks;** many parent partnership schemes feel 'isolated' and of 'low status'. Creating peer support for named persons and Parent Partnership Scheme co-ordinators will be critical.
- **Develop flexible training packages** (including distance learning materials) - a national consortium with a newsletter and periodic training events could access Parent Partnership schemes and LEAs to a wide range of *existing* material.
- **Clarify relationships between the voluntary sector and LEAs in all aspects of parent partnership** - there has been concern that the debate about 'named persons' has monopolised attention at a time when LEAs and the voluntary sector should be addressing a broad range of issues relating to parent advice and support and developing joint working arrangements.
- **Involve child health and social services departments** both of which have experience in providing a range of advice, information and support services and which may be crucial contributors to partnership with some parents.
- **Clarify all available local resources** within the LEA and the voluntary sector and through local trusts and other sources of support.
- **Help schools at the earlier stages of the school-based stages of assessment** and acknowledge the need for personal support and counselling for some parents at this stage, as well as for accurate and positive information on *how* to support their child's special educational needs.
- **Acknowledge transitions:** children and parents change.

In conclusion

Developing active partnerships with parents will continue to be a challenge. Notwithstanding a 'charter culture', many parents feel de-skilled and anxious during assessment arrangements. More open debate about criteria for different levels of assessment and allocation of resources may mean that parents will feel that assessment is 'competitive' and that conflict is more productive than collaboration. Some LEAs and voluntary organisations have developed new and creative working relationships. Parent support groups offer solidarity, advice and friendship - to LEAs and schools as well as to other parents. As one parent commented at a recent parent workshop:

'We (parents) have to see ourselves as allies with professionals; open warfare helps nobody. But we deal with so many professionals all the time (ten is an average in this group!). We may have already learned to be 'warrior parents' even if we hate that role. Really, we all need to see partnership as something dynamic, that has to be worked for, that will cause problems, but in the end which is something we can't do without. We parents all carry our personal histories. We remember the people who did (or didn't) help our children; the expectations we had (and often lost) for the future. Partnership is not only about getting the procedures right. It is about understanding parents' feelings and emotions and about valuing - and celebrating - the diversity of our children who are labelled as having special educational needs. Partnership has to be earned. It is everybody's business.'

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the next decade will be the balance of parents and their *children's* interests. The *Children Act, 1989* established the key principle of children's rights to participation in decision-making with the 'paramount welfare of the child' as the key factor in any decision-making about a child's future. Parents and children may not always agree. But, with the Carers' (Recognitions and Services) Bill expected to be implemented early in 1996, there is clear recognition across a number of local authority departments that parents and carers *and* their children have distinct but reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Balancing those sometimes conflicting interests will be a major challenge - but also an opportunity for more open decision-making.

References

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Summary of Discussion

The discussion touched on a number of issues raised during the four papers. The first matter to be discussed was the difference between integration and inclusion. It was stated that the issue is not one of segregation versus integration as schools operating integration programmes might not be inclusive. Children can be integrated but not included in the school life and activities, was how several people expressed this viewpoint. Other participants identified two conflicting themes. One focused on individual needs and rights; the other focused on the child as the unit of resource as part of the workings of a market system with the operation of league tables. For some participants in the seminar this raised questions about how to plan locally without much national coherence, in what were described as fragmented situations. Other participants questioned whether political parties, such as the Labour party, had coherent ideas and policies about inclusion.

The trend in the discussion was reversed slightly by comments about the danger of talking down past achievements in the special needs education field. Saying how bad the situation is and then giving examples to illustrate this was identified as one way of talking down achievements, rather than celebrating them.

Calls for national government to take on more responsibility in this field was also expressed. This would involve greater co-ordination of inter-service work and all that this entails in terms of inter-professional and inter-service collaboration. Enhancing teacher training in this field was seen as part of how national government could enhance matters in the field. Central guidance and common sense were supported by some participants, but not in the form of rigid structures, procedures and criteria.

Another perspective was that special educational needs was a moral maze in which there were difficult decisions at key turning points. Others felt that the general principles in the field were clear and widely subscribed to, but that there were uncertainties about how to move forward at a local level.

The specific focus of the discussion on special educational needs then prompted comment about what had not been mentioned. Someone commented on the rise in unemployment and the major effects this has had on education and special education. Others called into question the drift to employing learning assistants rather than teachers for support work in the mainstream schools. The seminar was reminded by a few participants that the discussion was about the wider issue of the fight of powerless people to advance their interests; that it was not just about disability. Some participants asserted that the matter was about the power to bring about a more equal society and for a more humane value system.

This brief account of the discussion illustrates the key points which emerged in the interplay of points and counter-points.

Conclusion

Brahm Norwich

This seminar and the associated paper concludes the policy options series on special educational needs. The final seminar was not planned at the start of the series, but as we drew towards the end, the steering committee felt that a fitting way to conclude would be to invite some service users to express their views about certain issues or aspects raised by the series. As the four papers in this pamphlet show, this invitation was responded to in different ways. The two parents of children with disabilities focused mainly on matters that concern parents as service users. The two contributors with disabilities tended to focus more on the major conceptual and value positions and issues raised in the previous policy seminars and papers.

Overall, this set of four contributions illustrates certain key aspects of this field. One is that the important issues in special educational needs relate to wider issues in social policy and administration about the role of market type schemes for allocating resources, the roles and responsibilities of parents, schools, local education authorities and central government, the inclusion and participation of disadvantaged sections of society in mainstream activities. These contributions also illustrate how policy matters in this field cannot ignore the practicalities of policy implementation and the quality of outcomes in terms of what actually happens face-to-face in educational settings. This links ideas and ideals with the concrete reality and shows how fundamental questions are inextricably connected to practical schemes and outcomes. The papers, especially the first two by Micheline Mason and Colin Low, raise basic questions about how disabilities and difficulties are conceptualised in terms of causation and consequences and about the justification of value commitments. These are central to policy options in special educational needs and will continue to exercise those who grapple with future policy decisions.

It might be inappropriate for those involved in organising the policy seminar series to draw firm conclusions about the value and impact of the series. Nevertheless, as a member of the steering committee I have a personal view about the series. The seminar series and associated policy papers have been successful in terms of the initial objectives. Seminars have been well attended and have provided a forum for an informed national examination of current directions and future options for special needs education. The series has brought together people from different positions with different interests and perspectives, including politicians, civil servants, professionals, members of voluntary associations, academics and other interested parties, to learn, to find out, to analyse and to debate matters. Seminar participants have been challenged by an encounter of differing perspectives and readers of the series papers will have a record of these ideas and perspectives. The series can be seen to represent an authoritative summary and analysis of special educational needs policy matters which are of national and international interest.