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Cadbury Trust

Policy Options for Special Educational Needs in the 1990s

Seminar Paper 2

TOWARDS EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS FOR ALL

Special Educational Needs Policy Options Group

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Policy Options for Special Needs Education in 1990s

Towards Effective Schools for All

This paper is the second in a series of six which will deal 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 service.

It is over a decade since the 1981 Education Act on special needs came into operation. Some of the momentum generated and enthusiasm awakened for improving this aspect of education has been dampened by the far reaching legislative measures introduced under the Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988.

The Education Reform Act has taken little account of SEN interests in introducing a National Curriculum with regular testing, powers for schools to become grant maintained (GM) outside LEAs and the local management of schools.

The effect has been to engender anxiety that recent developments would be undermined and confusion over the future of the education of children with SEN. This confusion has arisen in part from new policies and practices, which though including some positive elements have introduced a system which makes a minority even more vulnerable to majority interests in a context of tight financial resources. At the time of writing, new legislation concerned with promoting GM schools and the setting up of a funding agency for schools (FAS) is going through parliament.

This includes some basic changes to the 1981 Education Act which raise significant issues about the future of the statutory assessment system and special educational provision.

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 Cadbury Trust** have funded the seminar series.

Plans are being made for subsequent seminars and policy booklets over the next two years.

The seminars take the form of a presentation of a paper by a leading person on the topic area with a critical response from the two discussants.

A small group of participants with widely differing perspectives on special needs education are invited - MPs, local authority councillors, LEA officers, DFE OFSTED, heads of voluntary bodies, headteachers, teachers, psychologists and other professionals from health and social services, researchers and academics.

Our aim is that these papers will 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.

The first seminar paper by Peter Housden has been published by NASEN - Bucking the Market: LEAs and SEN.

Steering Committee

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Mr. Tony Dessent, Senior Assistant Director, Nottinghamshire LEA

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Disclaimer

The views in this document are those of the contributors and may not respresent those of their employers or of The National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN). The document has been edited on behalf of the Steering Committee by Seamus Hegarty.

Introduction

Towards effective schools for all

This collection of papers consider the issues of effective schools both in the special and mainstream sectors.

Mel Ainscow: Senior Lecturer University of Cambridge, Institute of Education reconsiders his own thinking on the whole aspect of special education provision at this the second seminar held on 1 March 1993. Mel Ainscow's paper was then followed by contributions from Brahm Norwich, Institute of Education, University of London and Tony Kerr, Head of Direct Educational Services, London Borough of Harrow.

The papers also include a summary prepared by Phillipa Russell, Council for Disabled Children of the main points raised in the open discussion and is concluded by Seamus Hegarty, Deputy Director of The National Foundation for Educational Research.

Towards Effective Schools for All

Mel Ainscow

In the first paper in this series dealing with policy options for special educational needs in the 1990s, Peter Housden presented a 'daunting canvas' with respect to the ways in which we respond to vulnerable children in our schools. He went on to explore some of the powerful forces stacked up against attempts to create a more inclusive education policy. Nevertheless, as Housden suggests, the situation is not hopeless. The last ten years or so have seen significant progress towards the creation of a more equitable education system. Consequently our efforts must be concentrated on creating strategies that build upon these achievements whilst, at the same time, minimising the potential damage that might be created by certain aspects of the current reform agenda.

My contribution to the debate about this vital issue will be to argue that the perspective that dominates thinking and practice in the special needs field works to the disadvantage of the pupils we set out to serve. I will also argue that responses based upon this dominant perspective, however well-intentioned, may inhibit attempts to bring about overall improvements in schooling. These two arguments lead me to suggest that a reconsideration of the special needs task can help in the creation of more effective schools for all pupils.

The early part of the paper summarises the critique that leads to my main argument. I will then describe some of the outcomes of three development projects that have led me to explore an alternative perspective to the special needs task. The paper concludes with some thoughts about the implications of my argument.

The Individual Pupil Perspective

The perspective that informs recent legislation and, therefore, guides the organisation of responses to children who experience difficulties in school has been characterised as an 'individual gaze' (Fulcher 1989). This leads educational difficulties to be defined in terms of pupil characteristics.

This individualised perspective on educational difficulties arises, in part at least, from certain assumptions about the purposes of schooling, the nature of knowledge and the process of learning. In their most extreme form, these assumptions lead to a view of schooling as a process by which those who know (i.e. the teachers) are employed to transmit their knowledge to those who need to know (i.e. the pupils). With this in mind, schools are organised in ways that will facilitate this transmission process efficiently and are, therefore, assumed to be rational (Skrtic, 1991). Consequently, pupils who are perceived as being unable or, indeed, unwilling to take reasonable advantage of the opportunities that are provided are taken to be in some way deficient. Therefore the focus is on them as individuals and those of their attributes that would seem to be preventing their progress.

Over the years many approaches have been used to provide help to children experiencing difficulties in school. Differences exist with respect to how their difficulties are defined, the forms of treatment that should be used and the organisational formats that are preferred in order to provide additional help. Whatever the style, however, the dominant perspective is usually individualised, thus requiring a process of identification and assessment based upon a scrutiny of those attributes that are assumed to be interfering with the individual child's learning.

Why, then, do I suggest that this individualised perspective could work to the disadvantage of the pupils it is intended to help? Surely a focus on the problems of individual pupils is a basis for positive actions that can help overcome difficulties. The case rests on the following five sets of arguments:

1) the impact of labels;

2) the framing of responses;

3) limitations of opportunity;

4) the use of resources;

5) the maintenance of the status quo.

Let us consider each of these in turn.

The impact of labels

The issue of labels and how they can influence people's expectations of one another is now a familiar theme for most teachers. The period since the Warnock Report has been characterised by an emphasis on attempting to avoid the use of labels. Indeed the 1981 Education Act set out to reduce labelling by eliminating the use of categories within special education. Unfortunately this attempt failed, resulting in the introduction of a new set of categories. In particular, the term 'special educational needs' has become a super-label used to designate a large number of pupils as being in some way special and, by implication, disabled.

Most responses to special needs necessitate some form of identification process that runs the risk of placing a category label around a child's neck. Whilst sensitive teachers are often aware of this danger and attempt to reduce its effect, the process of labelling continues to limit the expectations we have of certain children and damage their morale as learners.

The framing of responses

The second set of arguments with respect to the individualised perspective are to do with the way in which it influences the style of teaching responses that are provided. Focusing attention on particular children in an individualised way leads the school population to be divided into 'types' of children to be taught in different ways or even by different types of teachers. Furthermore, since certain pupils are perceived as being special, it seems common sense that they must require special forms of teaching. I have to say that during my career I have spent considerable time and energy attempting to find special ways of teaching that will help special children to learn successfully (e.g. Ainscow and Tweddle, 1979). My conclusion now is that the search for such specialised approaches tends to be a distraction. Whilst certain techniques can help particular children gain access to the process of schooling, these are not in themselves the means by which they will experience educational success. Furthermore, framing our responses in this way tends to distract attention away from much more important questions related to how schooling can be improved in order to help all children to learn successfully.

Limitations of opportunity

My third concern is to do with narrowness of opportunity. This charge has often been made about segregated forms of education (e.g. Ainscow 1989). In particular it has been argued that special schools and units by the very nature of their size, resources and populations, are forced to provide

a curriculum that is narrow, restricted and, at times, restricting. In my view similar criticisms can be made of some of the responses made to pupils said to have special needs in primary and secondary schools.

As a result of focusing on selected attributes of individual pupils said to have special needs, it is usual to provide some form of individualised intervention. This may include the presentation of tasks or materials designed on the basis of an analysis of the child's existing attainment; or it may involve additional adult help in order to facilitate their progress. Despite the potential value of these responses on some occasions, we need to recognise that they can also lead to situations where pupils spend large parts of the school day working alone. If this is so, it is surely to their disadvantage. Most of us learn most successfully when we are engaged in activities with other people. Apart from the intellectual stimulation that this can provide, there is also the confidence that comes from having other people to provide support and help as we work. If children with special needs are working alone for much of their time in school, none of these benefits can accrue.

It is worth adding that the presence of additional adults in a mainstream classroom to provide support for individual pupils can also limit opportunities. Too often the support teacher or classroom assistant becomes a barrier to integration standing between a particular child and the rest of the class, rather than acting as a facilitator of learning opportunities. Their presence may also have the effect of encouraging the class teacher to pass on responsibility for the so-called special child.

The use of resources

Issues to do with the use of resources are my fourth area of concern. Central to this argument is a tendency to conceptualise responses to special needs solely in terms of a need for additional resources. Of course, this is a complex issue. Resources are undoubtedly important and schools would obviously benefit from increased investment. Commonsense would argue that better buildings, more equipment and books, smaller classes and teachers with good skills and high morale must be to the advantage of all pupils. However, seeing the issue of special needs as being dependent on further resources seems to have a negative impact, not least in terms of its capacity to demoralise teachers. This process has been explained with respect to the development of policies for integration in a number of different countries by Gillian Fulcher (1989). She concludes that the ways in which many of these policies are formulated leads to situations whereby schools argue for further resources *before* they can respond positively to pupils regarded as being special.

An outcome of this more-resources argument has been an increase in the numbers of pupils that become categorised in order that they can be provided with additional help. This is a paradox of policies that are established with the intention of providing integrated provision for pupils with special needs - they often seem to lead to an increase in the numbers of pupils placed in categories of exclusion. This appears to be an international phenomenon. For example, Slee (1991) refers to the introduction of the category of 'integration students' in Australia. Officially these young people are referred to as students with problems in schooling. Gradually the numbers of students placed in this new category have increased as teachers argue for more specialised resources.

Fulcher (1989) identifies similar trends in a number of countries, not least in England as a result of the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act. She notes:

> '... the report is about 20 per cent of the school population or one in five children seen as likely to have special educational needs at some stage in their school lives. While the notion of special educational needs was presented as a non-categorical

> approach to providing special education services the phrase retains the politics of a traditional discourse on disability and is ultimately defined as disability... It is of course an extraordinarily political act to infer 20 per cent of the school population have an impairment but this is the political logic underlying the notion of special educational needs.' (p. 247)

Evidence from the United States points to even greater moves to create new categories of exclusion as a means of gaining further resources for schools (Anderson and Pellicer, 1990). Indeed, Ysseldyke et al (1983) suggests that approximately 80 per cent of all schoolchildren can be classified as learning disabled by one or more of the procedures currently used in the USA.

One final point is worth considering with respect to this resources issue. We need to ask questions about the origins of any additional resources that are provided for children designated as having special needs. My suggestion would be that they are often diverted from the general school budget provided within a particular school system. If this is the case we are witnessing a procedure whereby the 'victims' of our schools systems' failures are provided with extra help by diverting finance in such a way that it becomes likely that *more* victims will be generated.

The maintenance of the status quo

The final set of arguments with respect to the individualised perspective is to do with its role in the maintenance of the status quo within a school. It is here that I wish to argue the case that this perspective not only works to the disadvantage of particular pupils but also acts as a barrier to overall school improvement. The dominant approach to the special needs task assumes that the problem is the child's. As a result it excludes from consideration other factors that lie in larger social, political and organisational processes that are external to the individual (Skrtic, 1991). Consequently the organisation and curriculum of schools remain largely unquestioned and are assumed to be appropriate for the majority of pupils. In this way opportunities for improvement are missed.

An interactive view

During recent years attempts have been made to move beyond this individualised perspective. This has led many of us to promote an interactive view. Here educational difficulties are explained in terms of a mismatch between the characteristics of particular children and the organisational and/or curriculum arrangements made for them (e.g. Wedell, 1981; Dessent, 1987). Support may be directed towards helping the child to meet the demands and expectations of the system, if this is assumed to be fixed or - for the time being at least - unchangeable. Or it may be directed towards making modifications to the system to extend the range of pupils that can be accommodated. In many respects, the current 'state of the art' approaches (e.g. whole-school approaches, differentiation) are informed by this perspective. Furthermore it is a view that is seen as arising as a result of dissatisfaction with approaches based solely upon pupil characteristics which are seen as being based upon a 'deficit model' (Dyson, 1990).

The frame of reference in this interactive model focuses attention on individual pupils and the way they interact with particular contexts and experiences. Those of us adopting this perspective have, in recent years, tended to argue for the use of the term 'individual needs' rather than 'special needs' (e.g. Ainscow and Muncey, 1989). Responses chosen in the light of this perspective include curriculum adaptations, alternative materials for pupils or extra adult support in the classroom. Sometimes, these responses are seen as being of benefit to pupils other than those designated as

having special needs.

Whilst I see the move to this interactive perspective as a significant step forward, I believe that it still carries with it many of the disadvantages and potential dangers of the individual characteristics view.

An alternative perspective

Since I regard responses informed by this individual pupil perspective as limiting opportunities for many children, I believe that we must find better ways of conceptualising and responding to educational difficulties. Furthermore this has to be seen first and foremost as an ethical issue that has to be addressed by all those involved in the business of education As Dyson (1990) suggests:

> '... the fact remains that the education system as a whole, and the vast majority of institutions and teachers within it, are approaching the twenty-first century with a view of special needs the same as that with which their counterparts approached the present century. That view, for all its avowed concern for the individual child, promotes injustice on a massive scale. It demands to be changed.'

The approach I am wishing to promote can be seen as a 'curriculum perspective'. Here educational difficulties are defined in terms of curriculum tasks and activities, and classroom conditions. Indeed they are assumed to arise as a result of the curriculum as it is currently provided and that it is through an examination of curriculum questions that improvements can be achieved. Thus the main concern is with what can be learnt from the difficulties experienced by some children about the limitations of provision currently made for all pupils. Furthermore the assumption is that changes introduced for the benefit of those experiencing difficulties can improve learning for all children (Hart, 1992).

This perspective is critical of the limitations of an individual pupil frame of reference, even where this is used to raise questions about the adequacy of curriculum organisation and practice as currently provided for individual pupils. It assumes that a wider frame is needed, focusing on curriculum organisation and practice as currently provided for all pupils. The task involves continually seeking ways of improving overall conditions for learning, with difficulties acting as indicators of how improvements might be achieved (Ainscow and Hart, 1992).

This wider perspective, therefore, involves teachers becoming more skilled in interpreting events and circumstances, using the resources of other people around them as a source of support. Its focus is on the improvement of learning conditions as a result of a consideration of difficulties experienced by certain pupils in their classes. In this way pupils who experience difficulties can be seen more positively as a source of feedback on existing classroom conditions, providing us with insights as to how these conditions can be improved. Furthermore, given the shared experiences of individuals within a given context it seems reasonable to assume that these improvements are likely to be to the advantage of others in the class. Thus widening our perspective with respect to educational difficulty can be seen as a way of improving schooling for all. In other words, an emphasis on equity is a means of achieving excellence (Skrtic, 1991). Consequently, the perspective on educational difficulties I am proposing means that the special needs task is reconstructed as a process of school improvement.

It has to be recognised, however, that making this shift from an individualised perspective to a curriculum perspective is very difficult. It requires individuals to break out of a set of assumptions that may well be deeply rooted as a result of their previous experience. It requires them to reject

the traditional search for specialist techniques that can be used to ameliorate the learning difficulties of particular pupils. Instead the focus has to be finding ways of creating the conditions that will facilitate and support the learning of all children.

This new perspective may also be seen as being potentially subversive since it encourages teachers, and others involved in education, to question the status quo of schooling. In addition to raising issues about existing teaching methods it may, for example, lead to concerns about curriculum content, school organisation and assessment policies.

These changes are, therefore, not easy to achieve. Indeed, in the present context of this country with massive innovation overload; increased emphasis on competition; moves to encourage the sorting of pupils into groups assumed to have similar attribute and increased interest in differentiation, the dominant view of educational difficulty is likely to be further reinforced.

If we are to progress, it is important for us to understand the ways in which our existing perspectives determine our attitudes, values and beliefs, and lead us to predict the nature and meaning of incoming information (Nias, 1987). In other words, we need to be sensitive to the ways in which the circumstances and problems we face are, to use the terms of Schon (1987) 'named and framed'. Schon argues that ''through complementary acts of naming and framing, the practitioner selects things for attention and organises them, guided by an appreciation of the situation that gives it coherence and sets a direction for action.''

As I have defined it, the individual pupil perspective is an approach to naming and framing problems experienced by pupils and teachers that takes little or no notice of the wider environmental, social and political contexts in which they occur. Focusing attention on particular pupils in this individualised way leads the school population to be divided into 'types' of children to be taught in different ways. This has the effect of deflecting attention from the issue of how schooling might be improved in ways that would facilitate the learning of all pupils,

In encouraging teachers to consider an alternative perspective to the special needs task, I am wishing them to name and frame educational difficulties in ways that lead them to be seen as sources of understanding as to how teaching and classroom conditions can be made more effective.

Shifting perspectives

In recent years I have been involved with colleagues from the University of Cambridge Institute of Education in three projects that are concerned with teacher and school improvement. Involvement in these initiatives has helped me to understand the potential of taking a curriculum perspective and to explore some implications. The projects are as follows:

Special Needs in the Classroom

This UNESCO teacher education project involves an international resource team in developing a resource pack of materials. These materials attempt to encourage and support teachers in making the shift to a curriculum view of special needs. The pack has been used in over 30 countries.

Developing Successful Learning (DSL)

Here teachers in secondary and middle schools in Bedfordshire working with a team from the Institute of Education (i.e. Susan Hart and Mel Ainscow) have been developing partnership approaches to staff development. The concern is with finding ways of ensuring that the needs of all pupils are adequately catered for within the

National Curriculum.

Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA)

This project involves 25 schools in south-east England and Yorkshire working collaboratively with a team from Cambridge (i.e. David Hopkins, Geoff Southworth, Mel West and Mel Ainscow) in a programme of school improvement. The sample includes primary, secondary and special schools.

All three studies adopt an action research approach in which teachers, supported by Institute staff, explore innovatory ways of responding to day-to-day concerns in their workplaces. As an approach to research this presents a variety of problems, particularly for those who aspire to absolute generalisations. On the positive side, however, it is a way of working that requires the academic researcher to engage with the problematic nature of school and classroom life; to become much more sensitive to the varied perspectives of those involved and to collaborate with practitioners in attempting to improve existing circumstances.

For the purposes of this present paper studies using this collaborative approach to action research allow us to evaluate the potential of certain types of intervention as teachers attempt to experiment with their responses to special needs.

The UNESCO Resource Pack

In the development of the UNESCO Resource Pack the work of Donald Schon (1983, 1987) concerning professional development has been particularly important and helpful. Schon stresses the importance of what he calls 'professional artistry' as a basis for the improvement of practice.

His analysis leads him to be highly critical of existing approaches to professional development in a number of fields, including that of teacher education. The central problem, he argues, lies in the doctrine of technical rationality that dominates thinking within the professions. Embedded in technical rationality is the assumption that a profession is an occupational group whose practice is grounded in knowledge derived from scientific research. As a result professional competence is seen as the skilful application of theoretical knowledge to the instrumental problems of practice. Within such a view of practice, artistry has little place.

Schon argues that such a view of professional knowledge and practice is inadequate in a number of ways. In terms of our concern here specifically, he suggests that although technical rationality portrays professional competence as a technical problem-solving competence, the problems of the real world do not present themselves as given. Rather they are messy, indeterminate and problematic situations that arise often because of conflicting values. Such problems cannot be resolved by the use of techniques derived from theoretical research but call for what Schon calls 'artful competence'. This is a process of clarification of a problematic situation that enables the practitioner to redefine their problems in terms of both the ends to be achieved and the means for their achievement.

As a result of his analysis Schon argues that the technical rational model should be replaced by an emphasis on what he calls *reflective enquiry*. This leads him to seek approaches to professional development that encourage practitioners to reflect upon taken for granted knowledge that is implicit in their actions.

Within the UNESCO project we have been exploring approaches that are informed by Schon's arguments. The traditional, individualistic perspective in special needs work can be seen as an

example of the technical rational model with all its limitations and disadvantages (Iano, 1986). In seeking ways of working that are based upon reflective enquiry, therefore, we are attempting to overcome the domination of this perspective. Our hope is that by helping teachers to become confident in their own abilities to learn from their experience we can help them to break out of the individualised gaze.

In addition to reflective enquiry our other area of emphasis is with social processes as a means of facilitating professional development and learning. Effective schools seem to be characterised by a culture of *collaboration* leading to shared beliefs. Whilst our project does not always operate at the whole school level, it does emphasise the importance of collaboration at all levels of the school system as a means of facilitating problem-solving and learning. In this respect we have accepted the argument of Handy and Aitkin (1986), who state:

> 'Groups allow individuals to reach beyond themselves, to be part of something that none of them would have attained on their own and to discover ways of working with others to mutual benefit.'

In summary, then, the 'Special Needs in the Classroom' project attempts to help teachers to become more confident and skilful in developing their own practice. It does this by encouraging them to use the resources of others around them (including their pupils) to stimulate their reflections upon difficulties that arise in their classrooms. Our research in a number of countries since 1988 suggests that where this approach is successful it helps teachers to become more confident about their ability to cater for pupil diversity.

Developing successful learning

Our project in Bedfordshire, 'Developing Successful Learning', uses an approach to school-based professional development which involves creating partnerships between teachers to review and develop aspects of their professional work. The underlying principle is that we can most effectively enhance the learning of pupils by creating conditions which positively foster and support the learning of *teachers*. The ideas and support materials have been developed by a group of teachers working in a small number of Bedfordshire schools. During 1991-92 these materials were trialled and refined by fifteen other schools in Bedfordshire. A video has been produced by the project team and the materials have been revised to incorporate the insights and experience of this wider group. The project is jointly financed and managed by a consortium consisting of Bedfordshire LEA, two Bedfordshire schools and the University of Cambridge Institute of Education.

The initiative which led to 'Developing Successful Learning' was originally prompted by concerns about how to support teachers in meeting the individual needs of all children within the new statutory framework of the National Curriculum. Considerable progress had already been made in Bedfordshire schools developing whole-school approaches to meeting individual needs. In order to build upon this work, the Authority designated some funds and invited applications from schools to join a working party whose function would be to consider ways of promoting curriculum differentiation and entitlement within the new context. Two secondary schools were selected: Samuel Whitbread and Sharnbrook, each of which designated its Learning Support Co-ordinator plus one other teacher to take part in the project. The LEA Support Service Co-ordinator, and one peripatetic support teacher were also invited to participate.

Over the next year, team members met to reflect on and learn from their own efforts to create conditions that would foster the learning of all students in their classes. They sought to identify good practice that was already going on in their schools, and experimented with ideas and

approaches arising from their discussions.

Gradually the group came to the view that the most important way to create conditions for successful learning for students was to foster and support the professional learning of teachers. They turned their attention to thinking about what helped their own learning as teachers and the kinds of conditions which best helped them to reflect upon and improve their practice. As a result they came to the following four conclusions:

- that teachers learn from their own and one another's experience;
- that they learn best by reflecting upon practice in the context of normal teaching;
- that they benefit from the opportunity to talk ideas through with a colleague arising from shared experience;
- that they need (and have a right to) support in developing their practice.

These conclusions led them to the idea of a partnership approach to professional development. What is distinctive about this approach is that it aims to create opportunities within normal teaching time for teachers to work together and support one another in reflecting upon and developing their professional practice.

To explore more fully the potential and pitfalls of this approach, team members set up partnerships with colleagues and continued to meet regularly to learn from their experiences.

They began to keep a record of what they were learning, and eventually wrote these ideas up as a set of 'Guidelines for Co-ordinators' which could be used to introduce and support the development of the approach more widely in the Authority.

Over the past year, these ideas and materials have been trialled in thirteen schools, and have helped to support the development of a diverse range of successful initiatives. In some schools, a particular focus has been chosen for the partnership work (e.g. behaviour management; collaborative group work). In others, partnership work has been used to foster interchange of ideas amongst colleagues who would not usually have an opportunity to observe and learn from one another's teaching. In all cases, however, the same principle of professional learning applies; that partnerships should operate in an open-ended way, so that new understandings and possibilities for development can be generated by the partners themselves through their shared experience.

Experience so far suggests that adopting a partnership approach to professional development helps to create a more collaborative culture in schools. Teachers involved express surprise at just how much they feel they have gained from having access to one another's classrooms and ideas. Talking about teaching in a way which enhances professional understandings becomes increasingly part of everyday experience. It seems that what begins as an isolated 'initiative' increasingly becomes a way of life.

Schools as learning organisations

In considering how teachers can be helped to adopt a wider perspective on the special needs task it is important to recognise the impact of overall school policy. Our work in the IQEA project involves us in working with schools to refine and evaluate a model of development and a programme of support that strengthens a school's ability to provide quality education for all its pupils. The goal is enhanced learning outcomes for both pupils and teachers such that a school becomes effective as a 'learning organisation' (Harrison, 1992). In other words, we are seeking to develop conditions in schools that support reflection and collaboration amongst teachers in the

belief that this is a way of fostering the learning of all pupils.

There is now extensive research as to the impact of schools on children's learning and to those features that seem to make certain schools more effective (e.g. Stoll, 1991). There is also considerable evidence that indicates that the structures and cultures of schools impact upon the ways in which teachers perceive their work and their pupils (e.g. Ball, 1987; Keddie, 1971; Woods, 1979). Our work is concerned with finding ways of developing these structures and cultures in ways that provide improved learning conditions. When this is successful we believe that it involves teachers in moving towards a wider, curriculum perspective to the special needs task in their schools.

As a result of a recent study carried out in primary schools Rosenholtz (1989) makes a distinction between what she calls 'stuck' (or 'learning impoverished') and 'moving' (or 'learning enriched') schools. Stuck schools, she argues, are characterised by a highly individualised way of working. Interestingly such schools tend to have a well-established working culture - that of each teacher looking after him or herself. Such a culture leads to lack of certainty about policy and roles, low morale and, it seems, poor academic standards.

When questioned in more depth teachers in these stuck schools reveal certain common attitudes. First of all there is the way they see themselves as teachers and their own professional learning. When asked many of these teachers suggested that it takes something like three years to develop the skills and techniques necessary to be an effective teacher. Once these have been acquired it seems that life as a teacher becomes relatively straightforward. The picture we see, therefore, is of a school that is organised in ways that encourage teachers to develop coping strategies which, once established, are rarely altered. Indeed in such a school a teacher is probably wise not to take any risks or make any changes since if these go wrong the individual is likely to be held personally responsible.

Rosenholtz reports a very different situation in those schools she describes as 'moving'. Here she finds a much more collaborative culture, with teachers planning together, sharing ideas and resources, and helping one another in responding to problems that arise. Consequently teachers in such schools often see themselves as 'lifelong learners' forever seeking to explore new ways of working and seeking further refinements in their repertoires of teaching responses.

It is worth considering the implications of this analysis for our special needs task. Here again Rosenholtz's research points to very different attitudes in her moving and stuck schools. So in the moving schools teachers report that there are certain children who cause concern, whose progress or behaviour are unsatisfactory. The teachers report that they are holding meetings to discuss the needs of these children and exploring some alternative teaching approaches. On the other hand, teachers in stuck schools give very different responses. Overall their replies tend to locate their explanations of difficulties in the children themselves and, often, in their home circumstances. Here, perhaps understandably, teachers who feel isolated and unsupported are relieved to be able to divert attention away from possible inadequacies in their own practice.

It would seem, therefore, that the culture of a school has a significant impact upon the ways in which teachers perceive themselves, their professional development and their pupils. This is, of course, complex territory and it would be unwise to jump to simplistic conclusions. Nevertheless this evidence can be supported by many other studies that point to the importance of school culture in creating more effective schools (e.g. Little, 1990; Nias et al, 1989).

Implications

What, then, are the implications? How can schools be helped to create the conditions in which teachers become more reflective about their practice? Certainly there is now an impressive range of research evidence that points to the features of effective schools (e.g. Mortimore et al, 1988; Rutter et al, 1979). This gives us a clear picture of what things are like if a school is successful in its improvement activities. However, it is rather less helpful in suggesting what to do in order to bring about such improvements. This is one of my worries about the new approach to school inspections, influenced as it clearly is by the effective school research. The approach being introduced seems to assume a rather simplistic view as to how school development occurs. Those of us who have been around schools for some years know from experience that things are usually much more complicated. Changing schools takes time, it is full of uncertainties, it may be helped by rational planning but ultimately it is most influenced by social and micro-political processes (Ball, 1987).

The IQEA Project

In our IQEA project we have been working closely with schools to gain a better understanding of what happens when a school makes progress in policy development and improvements in its practice. It is difficult to summarise our findings so far since we see different factors at work in particular schools. Nevertheless we detect an overall pattern of activities in those schools that experience some success.

First of all, success seems dependent upon the establishment of priorities for development. However, this is in itself a complex business. The recent emphasis on school development plans has encouraged most schools to make statements of their development priorities. Too often, however, these statements remain some individual or group's well-intentioned rhetoric. To bring about changes in policy and practice there has to be a strategy for converting the rhetoric into actions.

Strategies may take many forms, these variations being dependent upon particular situations and concerns. What seems to be most important is what happens when attempts are made to implement the strategies. This seems, in our experience, to be the critical stage, during which success or failure takes shape.

When a school attempts to introduce its proposed change, using its planned strategy, it is almost inevitable that a period of destabilisation occurs. This period of destabilisation, or 'internal turbulence' as Huberman (1992) calls it, is as predictable as it is uncomfortable. Indeed research studies suggest that without a period of destabilisation, successful, long-lasting change is unlikely to occur (e.g. Louis and Miles, 1990). Yet it is at this point that many initiatives fail to progress beyond the early implementation phase. It is when new ideas or ways of working impact upon the daily lives of individuals that negative reactions occur. At this stage schools may react in a variety of ways. Some, for example, tend to back-off when the turbulence is experienced. Reasons are usually found to abandon the strategy for change. This may involve the introduction of an alternative strategy or, particularly in current circumstances, a new priority for development may be determined. In this way we may see a gradual decline in staff morale as a result of continued experience of failed attempts at innovation.

What then of those schools that succeed? How do they cope with destabilisation? Our research suggests that they are sensitive to the need to create conditions that support staff as they struggle with the demands created by the innovation (Ainscow and Hopkins, 1992). In other words their strategy includes a willingness to make changes in school structures in order to encourage development activities.

Key conditions

Once again it is difficult to make generalisations about what the key conditions are since these will vary to some degree from school to school. Overall, however, it seems that the following areas are often important in providing support to staff as they attempt to develop new ways of responding:

Teacher Learning

In successful schools teachers meet together regularly to discuss aspects of their work, share ideas, plan and help one another in problem solving. They also spend time in one another's classrooms, observing one another's practice and providing feedback on new approaches.

Leadership

Teachers in these successful schools are aware that different teachers take on leadership roles. Indeed, many colleagues seem prepared to take the lead at one stage or another. Leadership roles frequently arise through staff working groups, which are appointed with specific goals, a timeline, and considerable authority. In most of these schools, virtually every staff member takes part in a working group sooner or later.

Student Involvement

An important factor in supporting policy creation can be the reactions of students in the school. When they are unaware of the reasons for change, they may unintentionally act as a barrier to progress. Some of our successful IQEA schools have found ways of overcoming this problem by involving students in the change. For example, a school that is introducing resource-based learning has enrolled some students as resource centre assistants.

Vision

Perhaps the most significant role for the headteacher, or other senior colleagues, is to nurture an overall vision for the school. In one large secondary school, for example, the headteacher occasionally holds meetings of the whole staff during which he muses about his views on important educational ideas. Staff members report that this helps them see their own work within a broader picture of the school's mission. Similarly, in a small primary school, teachers refer to the headteacher's habit of 'thinking aloud' about policy matters as she mixes informally with the staff. Again, this seems to help individuals as they think about overall school policy.

Celebrating Success

Equally as important, staff members celebrate their success. For example, they may positively reinforce one another's work through informal discussion in the staffroom; by collecting and displaying press cuttings about the school in the entrance hall; and in some instances, by accrediting their classroom practice through academic awards. In these ways, they are maintaining enthusiasm and generating ownership of and clarity about the school's aims and vision.

What happens, of course, is that as schools work on creating the conditions that will support their strategy for development they are in effect making changes in the deeper culture of their organisation. In this way the school's capacity for dealing with change is increased and the

groundwork is laid for future innovations. In other words, the school becomes a 'learning organisation'.

It is important to note, however, that whilst the internal turbulence may be reduced at the school level, the pressures of individual learning are still the same on teachers. What is different is that the culture of the school is increasingly supportive of their developmental efforts. As teachers experience a more supportive environment within the school, so they are more able to endure the threat of new learning. As they begin to adapt their own teaching and learning practices in their classrooms so they begin to see that the learning of their pupils is enhanced. This evidence itself gives the teacher confidence in the change and increases their commitment to the new approach. In this way, the impact of development is on the culture of the school, the professional development of teachers and the learning outcomes of pupils.

Some implications

In management theory a distinction is sometimes made between efficiency and effectiveness (West and Ainscow, 1991). Put simply, efficiency is to do well 'doing things right' whereas effectiveness is concerning with 'doing the right things'. I believe that this distinction helps us to understand some of the mistakes that have occurred in the special needs field. So much of our time and effort has been used in attempts to develop and refine intervention strategies for individual pupils. Regrettably we have paid much less attention to conceptualising what it is we are trying to achieve.

As a result we have seen the expansion of policies and practices that, despite good intentions, often seem to work to the disadvantage of the pupils they set out to serve. I have also argued that these responses also tend to inhibit overall improvements in schools.

The central message of this paper is that those of us engaged in attempts to foster forms of schooling that are inclusive must pay careful attention to the ways in which we 'name and frame' our activities. Specifically we should reconceptualise the special needs task in terms of school improvement (and, quite possibly, school reform) and teacher development. Such a perspective will enable us to recognise the importance of contextual influences on the learning of all children, thus avoiding the limitation and dangers of the individual pupil view.

Having said that, it is important to keep in mind the challenges that arise in attempting to shift our perspectives. This is a particular problem for many of us who have spent our careers in the special needs field, where thinking has been dominated by technical-rational assumptions (Iano, 1986). As we know, this doctrine assumes a belief in science-based professional action. It also ignores conflict by assuming consensus about ends and by attending exclusively to means. In this way it encourages a concern with efficiency rather than effectiveness.

The successful adoption of the approach outlined in this paper also presents challenges to teachers in general. It represents for them a radical change from the tradition that has reinforced the idea that special needs are the responsibility of specialists. Consequently care must be taken as we attempt to introduce these changes to colleagues who are already hard pressed.

In this respect the roles adopted by those of us perceived as being special needs specialists is vital. Increasingly our focus must be on working in ways that encourage the teacher reflection and collaboration that is at the heart of school improvement. It is through the success of school-based initiatives based upon these ideas that attitudes and practices will be developed. We have to demonstrate that they can succeed.

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Towards Effective Schools for All

A response by Brahm Norwich

In this seminar series we are considering policy options and this involves considering a range of options. Ainscow's approach is to consider a particular perspective and offer an alternative one. This is one way of framing the policy option task - to decide between alternative perspectives which inform practical policy options. This is a higher order approach to the task and one I can support.

Adopting this approach, however, involves some problems. These problems emerge when any perspective is not supported in the context of wider and alternative philosophical perspectives.

As Ainscow himself says, his perspective represents basic assumptions about:

- the purposes of schooling;
- the nature of knowledge;
- the process of learning.

Looking at matters from one perspective is to view a wide range of matters which are well beyond the specifics of effective schooling in a certain way. Adopting one perspective has the effect of cutting out different and contrary ways of looking which may be grounded in other concerns and practical considerations. It is also not uncommon for such a singular commitment to one perspective to be presented as an ethical issue - usually in terms of justice and fairness. This Ainscow also does in his paper. Presenting a perspective with assertions that justice is on your side may make it seem compelling, but I think that there is a need for caution. Perspectives asserted in the name of justice do need to be substantiated, particularly when so many considerations have to be balanced in coming to practical decisions about what is fair.

Ainscow does not avoid this trap in his paper; he does not consider the basic question of how inclusive we can expect effective ordinary schools to be. He outlines practical developments and strategies deriving from his chosen perspective, but leaves unexamined matters concerned with the crunch question of whether effective mainstream schools can be fully inclusive.

I will start by questioning the grounds for his case against the individual perspective. In doing this I will present a different perspective which I think includes aspects of his, but does not reject or ignore aspects of an individual perspective. This option involves seeing individual and social perspectives as in a dynamic tension and potentially a constructive one.

He is against what he calls the 'individual pupil perspective' - his basic attitude to this perspective is that it works to the disadvantage of the pupils it is meant to serve.

I cannot go through all the points relating to his case against the individual perspective, but I can question some key ones.

Labels

He rightly notes that the 1981 Act sought and failed to eliminate categories and labels - he identifies SEN as a super-label.

However, by wanting to define all general labels and labelling practices as negative, like many others, he wants to abandon all labelling. This wish to avoid generalities expresses a view about the

nature of knowledge which I see as untenable and impractical.

His approach leaves open and unanswered practical questions of how identifying and providing for individual needs can be done without the use of general concepts which pick out similarities and differences between individuals.

It has been said that:

(i) From one view, we are all the same;

(ii) From another view, some individuals are like other individuals and different from others;

(iii) From yet another view, we are all different.

I consider that the anti-labelling perspective in SEN only accepts the first and third views, wanting to deny the second. I would propose the alternative that we need all three views and that so long as one and three are not ignored, then the second view is tenable, if the general concepts of similarity and difference are not treated as absolute and final.

Style of teaching responses

He says that the individual gaze leads to dividing children into types to be taught in different ways, and that he has come over the last few years to seeing this as a distraction.

I find this position strange because it accepts that some children gain access to schooling through certain special techniques, yet these are not, he contends 'the means by which they will experience educational success'.

This is asserted rather than justified, perhaps because as he then says the more important question relates 'to how schooling can be improved in order to help all children to learn successfully'.

His position here reflects his denial of the some-similar-some-different view I mentioned before. So, he turns attention away from some teaching approaches for some children in line with his focus on the all-people-the-same, all-people-different views.

A more tenable alternative view would be that we should not choose in a fixed either/or way between questions of improving schooling for all, improving schooling for some and improving schooling for each individual. These agendas need to be co-ordinated as they are inherently inter-dependent. Improving schooling for some depends on improving schooling for all; but, improving schooling for all could also require improving schooling for some as part of the overall improvement.

Limiting opportunities

He says that the individualised intervention for children with SEN in ordinary schools provides narrow and limited opportunities for these children, irrespective of whether it involves individual assessment and programme planning or additional adult help in the classroom.

He recognises the values of these responses on some occasions, but then ignores their positive potential by focussing mainly on the potential negatives of too much learning in isolation. Assertions that we learn best when engaged in learning with others are hard to accept as generalities, given what he has said before about the positives of individualised interventions. I will deliberately not refer to instances of apparently successful individualised interventions as these can seemingly be taken apart to support an anti-individual perspective.

The use of resources

He sees the individual perspective to special needs as leading to requests for additional resources. Though he recognises that resources are 'undoubtedly important' for him, this approach demoralises teachers and reinforces the trend to request additional resources through Statements.

Again, he recognises a positive and then ignores it to focus mainly on the negative.

Maintaining the status quo

Like others who go for an exclusively socialised perspective, he sees the individual perspective as maintaining the status quo. He represents the dominant approach in SEN as assuming that the problem is exclusively the child's, ignoring social and organisational processes.

Much could be said about this, but not here. But it is worth saying that the individual perspectives are often not portrayed accurately in their diversity, particularly as ignoring external factors; for example, in the negative comments about deficit and medical models. The differences between a bio-medical and a more systemic bio-psycho-social medical model are often ignored.

Also, the critical question is not whether to go for an individual or interactionist perspective - we are all interactionists now but for what version of interactionism. The one I would promote would be open to explaining difficulties in learning in terms of the interaction of social, psychological and biological terms with reference to internal and external factors, while taking account of whether these factors were actually and potentially alterable or not.

It would not be the one which ignored the fact that external difficulties can become internal ones - that school or teacher difficulties can become a learner's difficulties; nor one that assumes that talk of difficulties and disabilities is necessarily demeaning if in the context of personal strengths, positive action and a wider respect for all people. The alternative perspective - which he calls a curriculum perspective - I see as an example of a social perspective. This is evident in his definition of educational difficulties arising as a result of the curriculum as currently provided.

It would be unreasonable from a teacher's perspective to ignore curriculum tasks, activities and classroom learning conditions as sources of learning difficulties. But what about what the learner brings to these tasks and conditions and the wider social environment outside the school?

Of course, much can be learned from difficulties experienced by some children about provision for all pupils. But, that does not mean that changes introduced for the benefit of some will necessarily benefit all - it may do, but not necessarily. So, I would question general assertions such as 'it seems reasonable to assume that these improvements are likely to be to the advantage of others in the class' I would also question that changes introduced for all will necessarily benefit some. It seems to me that to be able to decide on such matters is of the essence of the relationship between special and mainstream education. It is partly a practical/empirical matter and not solely an ethical/perspective one. I see statements like 'an emphasis on equity is a means of achieving excellence' as rhetoric which conceals actual and potential tensions between these values.

My doubts about his proposed perspective do not apply to the specific development work he refers to - I share his doubts about an over-emphasis on a technical approach to teaching, which ignores reflective inquiry and a consideration of the values underlying practices. The emphasis on school-based staff development and collaborative partnerships between teachers has much to offer in this field, as does the work he refers to on programmes of school improvement. What I do question is whether such practical developments can only be derived from the version of a

curriculum perspective which he presents. I would contend that much that is beneficial in such developments can be derived from a perspective which recognises the dynamic tension between individual and social aspects of education.

Finally, I will touch on the question which I think he ignores:

Can effective mainstream schools be fully inclusive?

I consider that this is partly a value issue, but also a conceptual and empirical matter. This might seem too obvious to be worth saying, but it is worth saying because it is a different view from one which sees integrative or inclusive values as the single driving consideration. It is different in accepting that there are other values which need to be considered alongside the inclusive one - for example, taking account of individual interests or needs, taking account of what individuals believe is in their interests and adopting ideals which are practicable. This is where empirical considerations are important.

I believe that to adopt this perspective leads to seeing the question of inclusive education or integration as complex, and one involving uncertainty and balance. Taken literally, it would be hard to assert that an effective ordinary school could be fully inclusive, if this implied full time inclusion in age-appropriate classrooms of children with profound learning difficulties. But the response may be that this depends on what it means to have inclusive education and effective schools - well, yes it does and that is why the question is also a complex conceptual one.

There is not time to deal with the questions I raised in detail here, but I would like to present three distinct kinds of answers to the questions:

a) ordinary schools can be expected to develop provision for the full diversity of children without distinct/separate internal and external systems of support;

b) ordinary schools can be expected to develop provision for the full diversity of children with distinct/separate internal and external systems of support;

c) ordinary schools can be expected to develop provision for a wider diversity of children than they do, with distinct/separate internal and external systems of support, but that some pupils with significant difficulties may have their needs met partly in distinct/separate special classes, units or schools.

On the important condition that the distinct organisational units are clearly inter-linked into other systems, I favour the third kind of answer because:

- its vision acknowledges the importance of different values,
- it is open about the balance and potential tension between these values,
- it sees the need for trying out new patterns of organisation and,
- it is practicable.

I am also aware of the negative connotations associated with terms like separate and special. I believe that those referred to by terms of difference should be involved in choosing the terms used. As a final comment, I would like to say that I find it hard to see how we can do without some differentiation either in our language or systems of organisation. But what we can do without is the unfair devaluation of difference; putting this more positively, what we can do is work for valuing difference and individuality.

Towards Effective Schools for All

A response by Tony Kerr

I must start by thanking Mel for his honesty and directness in discussing so openly and publicly the way he has changed his position over the last ten years. When I first read his paper and found that he now holds some of the basic beliefs I came to ten years ago, I must confess to a momentary lapse into self-congratulation, but the example of Mel's own rigour has enabled me to understand the way he has moved on to a more subtle and complex approach to school change, while I had stayed in the past, trapped in an over-simple view.

I was lucky, in retrospect, that the assumptions I brought to one of my first teaching jobs were so clearly contradicted by the responses of the supposedly 'special' children I was trying to help. What I thought I had to offer was an expertise in 'diagnosing' their precise failings so as to bridge the gaps and help them read. Uncomfortably, though, most of their progress seemed to come despite my methods, not because of them, and appeared to depend on deeper factors than the linguistic code I was trying to make accessible. I found it impossible to motivate in a 20-minute 'booster' lesson children who had just been caned for throwing a piece of paper, nor could I arouse much lust for literature with the library seven floors up and the lifts out of bounds to pupils. As I watched a more experienced colleague help a determined child glean the meaning from newspaper articles about the Mad Axeman, I understood how vital were the factors of self-esteem, motivation and relationships compared with the arid technology of blends and trigraphs that I had to offer.

Later, in Sweden, I was challenged by a system not always dramatically more effective than ours but founded on quite different assumptions: about the fundamental equality of people, about rights rather than charity or compassion.

Later still, as a trainee educational psychologist, I came into contact with some of the best aspects of what EPs had to offer: a rigorous search for evidence, a view that one should try to change organisations and curricula to fit the needs of children before trying the converse, a commitment to minimum intervention, and an awareness of the price in stigma that children paid for being 'helped'.

Perhaps we should each question why we believed what we did for so long , before going on to look at Mel's third way, his attempt to be genuinely interactionist and to develop schools. Why **was** the individual model so popular with Mel and his colleagues, while the alternative view was so appealing to some EPs? Can we now build a synthesis from the key features of each?

The short answer to the first question is that the individual model is the most comfortable one for many of those involved in the system. Mel hints at this in his discussion of the role of the individualised perspective in the maintenance of the status quo. He mentions, but almost as a regretful aside, that the model leaves unquestioned the organisation and curriculum of schools, but he does not acknowledge that this is one of the main reasons the model has been so popular. Nor does he mention the many other powerful interest groups for whom the individual perspective is comfortable. It has undoubtedly increased the status of those who teach children with special needs, providing them with a visible area of specialist expertise that corresponds to the subject knowledge of other teacher colleagues. It has provided a rationale for the individually-inclined among psychologists, therapists, special education advisers and others, and, most of all, it has given parents and children themselves a plausible explanation of failures to learn. Small wonder that the

model has been popular - how welcome it must be for the education professional in private practice whose skills can be acknowledged through words such as 'Consultant' - just like the high-status doctors whose role also forces them to mend what is wrong rather than sorting out the system that gives rise to it.

None of this means that the individual explanations are false, nor, let me emphasise, that there was a professional conspiracy to hide the 'truth'. But it does mean that these explanations are not neutral, and adopting them has implications that go far beyond the learner in the classroom. I would go further here than Mel, and say that the individual assessments which are presumed to be necessary for the individual approach to work are often based on a model so mechanistic in its implications that it is internally self-contradictory and defeats it own aims. It is not only the presence of extra adults in the classroom that can undermine and stigmatise a child, but the very process of being singled out as needing help. The Warnock Committee took expert advice, and thought about their task long and hard, but, in our partial implementation of their recommendations, we have still come up with an assessment model which resembles a visit to an exhaust-repair centre more than it does an educational intervention. I laughed when my daughter was given unnecessary extra reading teaching in her Swedish school, but I applauded the attempt to make a withdrawal visit normal for everyone, and I still can't say that the money was spent less effectively than it would have been in Britain.

This isn't the place for a long discussion of why EPs in turn have believed what they believe; but once you have had the striking experience of watching a slow-learning child 'overachieve' in the hands of the right teacher, or have watched a supposedly deeply disturbed child flourish in response to praise, it is easy to lose some of your faith in precise assessments of individual learning needs. Although we felt the same frustration that Mel now experiences at the defects of the individual model, this led some of us to go beyond the information given, into an overreaction the other way - an assumption that the only legitimate change was at the level of schools or departments.

Can we, then, find some common ground, or would the very search just be another example of avoiding the real issues? Perhaps we should consider whose interests are served by the current focus on school development as the answer to most of the problems of apparent special educational needs? Do we believe that if followed through properly, these approaches would solve all the problems? A cynic might say that the new emphasis had gained acceptance just in time to provide a comfortable retirement income for all those advisory and support staff that LEAs are currently shedding, or to offer Governors a way 'of doing something about special needs' without breaking the bank or turning too much upside-down. After all, a few days of INSET with some follow-up visits is a lot cheaper than radically revising the curriculum, and it could earn some favourable publicity too. But this would be cynical indeed. Most schools adopting an institutional development approach will be doing so because it really is the right starting point, and provides a foundation without which any individually focussed support is both less effective and more expensive. They will certainly intend to follow through in detail any INSET they start, and are more likely to be prevented by the top-heavy bureaucracy of the National Curriculum and its assessment than by any wish to hide awkward facts.

But it is as well to keep the dangers in mind. If the individual model helped some of us hide uncomfortable truths about underachieving schools and support services, the school development model could serve the same function for other awkward facts, like the uncomfortable reality that children do differ in significant ways as well as having basic human qualities in common. However much we may wish it otherwise, no one who has taught children with special needs could deny that

some of them do have definite impairments, sometimes obvious and sometimes very subtle. Even more uncomfortable, though, is the cost of repairing the damage done to children abused by their parents and teachers. Of course, money can never put such things right, but neither can the absence of resources or their redirection from therapy to legal proceedings. So it is absolutely right to look first at the school as an organisation, and to examine very critically the curriculum, but it is also right to provide the special individualised help, even if it is both expensive and hard to offer in a way that does not cause painful and counterproductive stigma.

So, yes. Mel, by all means let us 'reconceptualise the special needs task in terms of school improvement (and, quite possibly, school reform) and teacher development', but let us do it with the aims of correcting the balance, of ensuring that we do 'drain the swamp' as well as shooting alligators, and of ensuring that we use the most effective and least stigmatising interventions first.

But please don't throw your own former baby out with someone else's bathwater. While we are busy with school improvement, let's make sure we close the feedback loop and evaluate our organisational development in the light of data from the individual children's learning. At present, we stop the evaluation at the point when we have found some tentative but plausible conclusions. Mel's discussions of his work on a reflective practioner model includes plenty of them: experience suggests that adopting a partnership approach helps develop a collaborative culture; teachers reflecting on their own experience decided that they need and have a right to support in developing their practice; 'where this approach is successful' it helps teachers to become more confident about their ability to cater for pupil diversity, and so on. Now I believe in these things, too, but we will need something more concrete to convince the sceptics. Mel puts his finger on it when he says that we have paid too much attention to intervention strategies, and not enough to defining what it is we are trying to achieve.

So there's a useful task for the next few years. Decide what we want, try some ways of getting there, and evaluate them by their effects on individual children, not just on teachers. It all sounds very easy enough. After you, Mel, and I'll be right behind.

Towards Effective Schools for All

Discussion - Phillipa Russell

Defining Special Educational Needs - The Impact of Labels

The Education Act 1981 had been widely welcomed for the abolition of 'categories' of children with particular disabilities and special needs and for the move towards an individualised and hopefully more child-centred approach. But participants acknowledged Mel Ainscow's challenge that *individualising* needs could:

a) create perverse incentives to identify and classify special needs primarily as a way of ear-marking additional resources;

b) increase discrimination because of negative perceptions of the consequent behaviours of learning difficulties associated with identification;

c) lead to the provision of support not through inclusion but through exclusion, with children either removed from the classroom through strong beliefs in separate 'expert' services or excluded as a means of demanding attention and resources in order to meet the child's needs;

d) in addition he felt that the new management and funding structures (in particular the impact of LMS on the '18 per cent') create incentives to either group of children and define school responses in accordance with their new 'labels'. They may also encourage some schools (in particular those in the GMS sector) to reject children with identified special needs as unacceptably expensive 'cost centres'. Accountability for all children may therefore be easier to achieve without the new forms of categorisation and the negative expectations they carry with them.

Counter arguments

However, there were also counter-arguments. Although participants shared concerns about the dangers of self-fulfilling 'labelling' and the former over-dependence upon a medical/technical model of assessment and accessing of provision, there were corresponding concerns:

a) Some children have such complex needs (which in turn require support from a wide range of services outside the school system) that individual identification of need, planning and review must be seen as a participative and exploratory exercise which can involve children and families and the full range of relevant professional agencies in a collaborative and ecological approach to meeting the children's special needs. Such an ecological approach is fully congruent with the concept of an effective and reflective school, which is able to develop purposeful relationships with user families and also with a wider range of individuals and agencies who can provide relevant advice and support.

b) Definitions of 'need' have always been malleable. Indeed we have progressed over the past decade from definitions which present need as an absolute concept to more relative definitions which have moved from 'problem solving' to meeting children as part of their own community, culture, family and peer group. But some

definition of 'need' will always be a prerequisite for accessing resources. Definitions of 'need' also underpin the broadly welcomed 'welfare principle' of the Children Act (which firmly places 'best interests of the child', not the system, at the heart of its provisions) and the NHS and Community Care Act. Parents have argued not so much that defining special needs is in itself negative as that the assessment process has been deficit-laden and has resulted in resources following fights rather than creative attempts to resolve difficulties.

c) The professionalisation or 'medicalisation' of special needs has not been unique in the human services arena. All statutory services have seen major shifts from the notion of the professional as privileged gate-keeper to resources (and hence more powerful than consumers). The Citizen Charter culture and increased recourse to litigation to resolve differences (or claim services) have coloured professional assessment and will continue to create challenges. The new Tribunals at the end of the assessment route will still persuade some parents (and schools) to over-state need in order to receive support. In a declining economic situation and with LEAs' capacities to fund broader-based whole-authority approaches to the full 20 per cent of special needs reduced, it may become even more tempting to push children towards the 'two per cent' rather than the '18 per cent' of children with SEN.

d) Some participants speculated as to whether avoidance of labels could not in some instances indicate avoidance of important equal opportunities issues. We have seen growing emphasis upon celebrating differences and acknowledging social and cultural diversity in terms of race and gender. But 'disability rights' have been seldom addressed in mainstream schools. A resourceful school should develop ways of enhancing awareness of diversity and avoiding confusions about the *inability* of disabled people.

Responding to Diversity - Inclusion and School Improvement

The extensive literature and development work in the field of school improvement offer exciting opportunities for the creation of more effective schools. But schools which accept the challenge of identifying, supporting and *keeping* children with special needs have in turn to address a range of question and challenges:

a) How do schools and teachers meet the needs of children with problems? Should they indeed determine that they *can* meet the needs of all children within an educational culture which is increasingly directed through the market place and where parental pressure for special provision (however defined) is growing? And, if schools consider that they cannot meet all special needs without advice and support, how do they 'solve' or 'shunt' the children who do not quite fit?

b) Inclusion is the important educational principle which is likely to lead us into the 21st century. Integration was always variously defined - the Warnock categorisation of stages of integration as locational, social and functional, reminded us of the dangers of simplistic notions about placement as an end in itself. But a number of contributors underlined the significance of inclusion starting with the whole-school policy to ensure that schools really can accept the challenge of pupils with additional needs.

c) Do we need to beware of over-expectations of the school's capacity to cope? Are there some children where the best of current knowledge about interdisciplinary working and relevant external expertise should be rapidly accessed? Several participants stressed the importance of retaining some *individual/micro-perspective* within a *macro/systems approach*, particularly when children have complex needs. An ecological approach would entail close liaison with health and social services counterparts - and an acknowledgement that even effective schools cannot meet all pupil needs from within their own eco-system. But by accepting this difference, we may backtrack to separate systems and the exclusion of the awkward, difficult or disruptive child!

The ultimate challenges of a truly inclusive school system lie in describing special educational needs in ways which are non-stigmatising and non-isolationist, but which at the same time, permit funding and services to be targeted at the child. We need to see the individual and social perspectives of special educational needs in a constantly dynamic tension - a potentially positive relationship in which individualised and differentiated programmes are compatible with a social construct of education which avoids isolation and heavy dependence upon 'external experts' for any problem solving. If we adopt an interactive and inclusive approach, we can encompass both the reflective and 'moving' school model offered by Mel Ainscow - with an acknowledgement of the importance of all schools accepting responsibility for a mutual development role which sees schools as dynamic and evolutionary resources for whole communities.

But the balance between the 'inclusive' school and the definition of more complex individual needs (together with the specification of services to meet them and suitable funding arrangements) will continue to need clarification within the context of an increasingly fragmented education service. The challenge of pluralist providers is creating similar dilemmas within health and social services - but with the important difference that DHAs and social services departments retain an overall strategic role and, as commissioners and purchasers of services, can directly influence the nature and quality of the provision being made.

The debate about resources can obscure the wider debate about what sort of schools we need to provide for special educational needs into the next century. Anxiety about resources may have actually created a 'victim culture' when services only follow those who have proved themselves sufficiently needy. A shift to consumer rights may actually *disenfranchise* the most disadvantaged. Articulate parents may circumnavigate the system, leaving those without advocates less well placed amidst diminishing budgets. Special education 'experts' have been accused of themselves perpetuating the status quo and retiring into professional isolationism. But the turbulence in the whole education system has made security and accessibility more problematic. Without some stabilisation, schools and LEAs will be reluctant to take risks and make changes. Additionally, with a national reduction in support and advisory services apparent through many surveys and studies, there are major concerns about how schools can move from the individualised to the interactive and inclusive approaches. An emphasis on equity as a means of achieving excellence will be insufficient without support for schools in interpreting and facilitating individually mapped learning routes for *all* children. The 'effective' school will need to develop new roles in *assessment*; *prescription* (ie the development of individualised programmes; task analysis; support strategies); *supportive and pastoral care*; *liaison* (since no school is an island, the external agencies and colleagues and parents are crucial to progress); *INSET* (staff development) and *effective management and planning*. Within these systems in-school there will be an enduring debate about *how* we identify individual needs in a non-stigmatising and positive way and about the extent to

which a *school*-based or an *individualised* 'in child' approach is more helpful in meeting the needs of all children. Above all else, we must ensure that special educational needs are not regarded as excluding and distancing children from educational opportunities but rather as the collective responsibility (and challenge) of schools, LEAs, families and of the wider range of children's services who have not *historically seen education* as a primary objective when children are presenting other needs and disadvantages which will affect their life chances without support.

The way forward

In effect, the way forward will depend upon:

a) Confident leadership within and without schools.

b) Accepting the challenge of a more community-based approach to education.

c) Balancing reflection in-school with collaboration outside.

d) Supporting the learning of teachers and children, developing partnerships with families and a range of external agencies.

e) A recognition that changing cultures of schools at a time of major destabilisation and limitations in resources may necessitate a continuing delicate balance between defining the individual characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of pupils with special educational needs and the capacity of schools to respond to such needs in an interactive and positive way.

Conclusion

by Seamus Hegarty

School reform is on the agenda in very many countries, and there is a voluminous body of research and development on 'effective schools'. Generally, this work has ignored special educational needs or, at best, regarded them in a peripheral way. If pupils with special educational needs are to participate properly in the mainstream sector, however, school effectiveness has to be re-conceptualised - and broadened.

Special educational provision has much to learn from the school improvement movement but it would be naive to expect the findings to be directly applicable. The movement grew out of particular concerns and contexts in North America and, while it has been refined with reference to European and Australian practice, it has retained an emphasis on academic achievement as the major outcome of schooling. The challenge to special educators is twofold: conceptual, to scrutinise the variables associated with school improvement in the existing literature and add new insights as necessary; and empirical, to determine how the factors held to be important work in practice so far as the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is concerned.

This second seminar on policy options in special educational needs has focussed on the conceptual task. In doing so, it builds on the general picture offered by Peter Housden and his two discussants in the first seminar which outlined current and emerging constraints on policy at national and local education authority levels. Mel Ainscow in his paper and Tony Kerr and Brahm Norwich in their responses highlight the complexity of the conceptual task. 'Inclusive' and 'effective' are distinct concepts when applied to schools, and the relationship between the two conceptual domains is dependent on values and empirical facts as well as on analytical considerations. The opposing positions taken give potent illustration of this.

Group discussion and general debate centred around three questions:

1. To what extent did participants feel that the within-child view of special education needs is still current?
2. Is the technical-rational model compatible with a creative approach to teaching and schooling?
3. Are the realities of school bureaucracy in post-era England compatible with inclusive schooling?

A central concern - possibly *the* central one - was what teachers and schools do when faced with pupils presenting problems. There was general agreement that this provided a core perspective round which other matters could be put in place. Questions regarding the notion of inclusive schooling, resource allocation mechanisms, models of teaching practice and so on are important but can be repositioned when seen in relation to pupil-teacher interactions in a learning context.

This highlights too the open-ended challenge that constitutes teaching. Teachers and pupils (all pupils, not just those who present particular problems) are in a dynamic relationship, and what is effective at one point for a given pupil is not necessarily effective at another point or for other pupils. There are principles that inform good practice but their application cannot be rule-driven. The 'effective school' is an abstraction, signifying schools that get it right for many of their pupils much of the time. In the real world of schools, the never-finished challenge is to find ways of enhancing pupil-teacher interaction in a learning context for as many pupils and in as many situations as possible.