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REVIEW ESSAY

Inclusive Education for Children with Special Educational Needs: A critique

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Special educational needs: A new look, edited by L. Terzi, 2010, London, Continuum, 184 pp. + index, AUS\$42.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-44-118015-5

Special Educational Needs: A New Look by Mary Warnock was initially published as a “pamphlet” by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain in 2005. In this new edition, the original publication is reprinted as the first chapter and Brahm Norwich contributes a chapter in which he responds to the issues raised by Warnock. She then comments on his response and updates her views in the third chapter. Lorella Terzi is the editor of the book and provides an introduction and an afterword.

This book is a valuable addition to the small but growing list of books that address the controversial issue of inclusive education for children with special educational needs (SEN). There are now a plethora of books promoting the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools but a much smaller number that attempt to evaluate the theory, research and practice of inclusive education. The need for such an evaluation was highlighted by the publication of Warnock’s original pamphlet, which presented a critical review of the impact of inclusion on children with SEN. This had a substantial impact because it was Warnock, 30 years earlier, who chaired the committee that produced the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science, 1978), which was a major milestone in the development of education for children with SEN in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

In the original publication, Warnock referred to inclusion as “... possibly the most disastrous legacy of the 1978 Report ...” (2005, p. 20), since, as she goes on to say, “there is increasing evidence that the ideal of inclusion, if this means that all but those with the most severe disabilities will be in mainstream schools, is not working” (2005, p. 32). This comment is particularly important since it was the Warnock Report that led to an acceleration in the move to implement inclusive education in the United Kingdom and other parts of the world.

However, Warnock’s (2005) publication was not the first major text to question the appropriateness of the move towards inclusive education for children with SEN. The first book on this topic was that edited by Kauffman and Hallahan (1995), leading scholars in the field of special education in the United States. Their book was highly critical of the theory of full inclusion, through which it was proposed that all children

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be educated in mainstream classrooms without the need for special classes, units or special schools of any kind. The book clearly communicated the view that pursuing full inclusion would be damaging, not only to the education of children with SEN but also to the entire special education community. It provided alternative views of how special education should develop that were authored by many of the most respected academics in the field of special education in the United States.

Two years later, an Australian scholar (Jenkinson, 1997) published a book, the stated aim of which was to stimulate debate about the inclusion issue. She provided a critique of the education of children with SEN in both mainstream and special school settings that drew on research and practice in the field of special education in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. Interestingly, Jenkinson reported that, during the 1990s in some parts of Australia, plans to phase out special schools had been abandoned and there was a swing back to retaining a range of options for meeting the needs of children with SEN. The book provides a balanced and soundly argued debate on the topic of inclusive education.

A few years later some colleagues and I in the United Kingdom, concerned that there appeared to be an increasing trend toward inclusive education for children with SEN, despite minimal debate about its merits from experts in the field of special education, decided to produce an edited book with the aim of stimulating such a debate (O'Brien, 2001). However, a major publisher of books on special education in the United Kingdom refused to publish the book because it was "too controversial". In my chapter (Hornby, 2001), I identified several confusions about inclusion and proposed the adoption of "responsible inclusion", following the work of Vaughn and Schumm (1995) in the United States, which describes a more measured approach to inclusion for children with SEN. In the end, the book had little impact on the field of special education and attracted few citations by others in this field, perhaps due to using a publisher not well known in education and to what appears to be a moratorium on articles questioning the theory and practice of inclusive education for children with SEN.

The next book to be published on this topic was that edited by Cigman (2007), which was produced in response to Warnock's (2005) negative comments about inclusion. The book comprises chapters by many senior academics in the field of special education in the United Kingdom, including proponents of full inclusion, and so provides a range of views. Cigman, who like Warnock, is a philosopher rather than a special educator, highlights some of the confusions about inclusion that were identified in my chapter (Hornby, 2001). She concludes that supporters of full inclusion have distorted the arguments for inclusive education found in influential documents such as the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994). This talks of a *majority* of children with SEN being educated in mainstream schools, whereas full inclusionists refer to it as supporting the idea that this applies to *all* children with SEN. Cigman favours what she calls "moderate inclusion", which encompasses the concept of a continuum of placement options being available, from special schools, through units for children with SEN in mainstream schools, to placement in mainstream classrooms, which is currently the reality in most countries.

Recently, Farrell (2010) published a book that is focused on evaluating criticisms of special education as well as considering the rationale for inclusive education. The criticisms of special education that he addresses include: limitations of the special education knowledge base; the unhelpfulness of classifications such as autism; problematic use of types of assessment such as intelligence testing; negative effects of labelling on children with SEN; and a lack of distinctive pedagogy and curriculum in special education. He marshals considerable evidence and concludes that these criticisms are based on

misunderstandings or a lack of knowledge of current theory, evidence and practice in the field of special education. Issues regarding the rationale for inclusive education that are addressed include the social construction of disability and SEN, rights-based justification for inclusion, and reliance on post-modern perspectives of education. He concludes that the rationale for inclusive education is seriously flawed, and that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support its effectiveness. Finally, he cites comments from several government sources in the United Kingdom in support of his perception that the influence of inclusive education is declining.

In *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*, which is the latest book to address this topic, Terzi sets the scene by highlighting the issues to be addressed by Mary Warnock and Brahm Norwich. In the first chapter, which is a reproduction of her 2005 pamphlet, Warnock discusses the history of the development of provision for children with SEN in the UK and critically evaluates the practice of statementing that was introduced following the 1978 report. She then goes on to consider the issue of inclusion and concludes that inclusive education should be rethought and redefined in order to allow children with SEN to be included in the "... common educational enterprise of learning, wherever they can learn best" (p. 14).

In the second chapter, Norwich presents a detailed analysis of the issues raised by Warnock. In some places he is critical but in others he provides further evidence to support Warnock's views. On the issue of inclusive education Norwich appears to favour a continuum of provision for children with SEN but with special schools being based on the same site as mainstream schools.

In the third chapter, Warnock responds to some of the points raised by Norwich, thereby clarifying and presenting even more forcefully her previously stated views. She points out that her current views do not represent a u-turn on her part as she had published her "... misgivings about the more hard-line inclusionists as long ago as 1993" (p. 117). She goes on to address the continued need for special schools for some children with SEN and states, "... the dogmatic special school closure lobby must recognize that for some children special schools are the best or indeed the only option" (p. 129).

In her afterword, Terzi highlights some differences between Warnock's and Norwich's views and concludes that they have addressed some of the most controversial aspects of current educational theory, and that both authors clearly share a deep concern for the well-being of vulnerable children.

This new book and the others noted above have highlighted several confusions about inclusive education, many of which were identified in my earlier chapter on this topic (Hornby, 2001), as well as others that have emerged from the issues discussed in the new book. These confusions are outlined below with reference to comments from Warnock and Norwich in the new book and to the other books that have been referred to above, as well as other key sources. These confusions are about definitions, rights, labelling, peers, aetiology, intervention models, goals, curricula, reality, finance, means and ends, and research evidence.

Definitions

First and foremost there is confusion about what is meant by inclusion, as noted by Norwich when he states, "... its definition and use are seriously problematic" (p. 100). The term is used in various ways, for example, to refer to inclusive schools or an inclusive society. Many sources (e.g., Department for Education and Employment, 1997) refer to advancing "inclusive education" as meaning increasing the numbers of

children with SEN in mainstream schools while maintaining special schools for those who need them. In contrast, other sources (e.g., Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education, 1989) use the term inclusion to describe a state of affairs in which all children are educated in mainstream classes within mainstream schools with only temporary withdrawal from this situation envisaged.

Perhaps the most serious confusion is that caused by the conflation of social inclusion with inclusive education for children with SEN. The term social inclusion is typically used to refer to the goal of bringing about an inclusive society, one in which all individuals are valued and have important roles to play. Social inclusion in education refers to the inclusion in mainstream schools of children with a wide diversity of differences, difficulties and needs. This has a much broader focus than inclusive education for children with SEN, but is often used by proponents of inclusion as if it meant the same.

In addition, many inclusionists speak of inclusion as a process. This process involves whole school re-organisation in order to develop inclusive schools. Implicit in this process, however, is the eventual goal of full inclusion. Therefore, since the word inclusion is used in so many different ways, it is important, in order to avoid confusion, to be clear about what is meant by each specific use of the term. For example, while the majority of people involved in education are in favour of inclusive schools that include most children with SEN, many have reservations about full inclusion that envisages all children with SEN being educated in mainstream classes.

Rights

A critical confusion concerns the rights of children with SEN. A typical argument put forward in favour of full inclusion is that it is a basic human right of all children to be educated along with their mainstream peers. To segregate children for any reason is considered by many inclusionists to be a denial of their human rights. However, there are two main confusions here. First of all, there is confusion between human rights and moral rights. Just because someone has a human right to a certain option does not necessarily mean that it is morally the right thing for them to do (Thomson, 1990). Thus, although their human rights allow children with SEN to be educated alongside their mainstream peers, for some of them this may not, morally, be the right or best option. As Warnock puts it in *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*: "What is a manifest good in society, and what it is my right to have . . . may not be what is best for me as a schoolchild" (p. 36).

A second aspect of the rights confusion concerns priorities. As well as their right to be included, children also have a right to an appropriate education suited to their needs. "It is their right to learn that we must defend, not their right to learn in the same environment as everyone else" (p. 36). That is, the right to an appropriate education that meets children's specific needs is more important than the right to be educated alongside their mainstream peers. Therefore, it cannot be morally right to include all children in mainstream schools if this means that some of them will not be able to receive the education most appropriate for their needs.

Labelling

Inclusive education is regarded, by its proponents, as preferable because it enables avoidance of some practices that are central to special education, such as the identification of SEN and the setting up of Individualised Education Programs (IEPs). According to inclusionists, this is because such practices can result in labelling children with SEN.

Being labelled as having SEN is seen as stigmatising them and therefore, according to inclusionists, should be avoided. There is then a dilemma, since if children are identified as having SEN there is a risk of negative labelling and stigma, while if they are not identified there is a risk that they will not get the teaching they require and their special needs will not be met. This confusion is referred to as the “dilemma of difference” by Norwich (p. 91). However, this concern is the product of confused thinking as it is clear that children with SEN attract labels from other children and teachers even when they are not formally identified as having SEN. So being stigmatised is not necessarily a result of the identification but related to the fact that their SEN mark them out as different in some way. Therefore, avoiding identifying SEN will not prevent children with SEN from being stigmatised. But it may prevent them from getting the education that they need.

Peers

One of the proposed hallmarks of inclusion is that children with SEN are educated along with their peers in mainstream classrooms. However, as Warnock points out in *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*: “Inclusion is not a matter of where you are geographically, but where you feel you belong” (p. 34). Many children with SEN are more comfortable with peers who have similar disabilities and interests to themselves, rather than peers of the same chronological age. So for these children a sense of belonging, and therefore being included in a learning community, is more likely to result from placement in a special class or special school than a mainstream classroom.

Aetiology

An important confusion related to inclusion concerns theories about the aetiology of SEN. Until around four decades ago it was assumed that SEN resulted entirely from physiological or psychological difficulties inherent in children themselves. Since this time, awareness has grown concerning just how much social and environmental factors can influence children’s development and functioning. However, some inclusionists have taken this social perspective to its extreme and suggest that SEN are entirely socially constructed. Both Warnock and Norwich consider this to be going too far in denying the impact that impairments can have on children’s learning. They consider it important to acknowledge the role of physiological and psychological factors as well as social factors in the aetiology of SEN.

Intervention Models

Inclusion is also regarded, by its proponents, as being preferable to special education because the latter is said to be based on a medical or deficit model of intervention, as opposed to focusing on students’ needs and strengths. This is a confused and inaccurate view, for several reasons. Special education interventions have been influenced by medical, psychological and several other treatment models, as discussed by Farrell (2010), who concludes: “the knowledge base of special education includes a wide range of disciplines and contributions supplemented by related research and methods informing evidence-based practice” (Farrell, 2010, p. 50).

This focus on evidence-based practice is an important aspect of special education because of the regular intrusion of controversial interventions such as Facilitated

Communication and the Doman–Delecatto programme, which are not only ineffective but are also potentially harmful (Hornby, Atkinson, & Howard, 1997). These two examples of interventions highlight another reason why the movement toward full inclusion needs to be carefully evaluated before it is universally adopted. It is similar to these interventions in that its proponents have not yet established a sound theoretical base nor do they encourage research to be conducted into its effectiveness.

Goals

An important confusion that impacts on the issue of inclusion concerns the goals of education, as noted by Terzi (*Special Educational Needs: A New Look*, p. 162). This confusion applies to all children but is particularly important for children with SEN. In recent years there has been increasing emphasis on academic achievement as the primary goal of education in many countries. Governments have focused their attention on the improvement of academic standards by various means, including the establishment of national curricula and national assessment regimes. This has deflected attention away from the broader goals of education, such as those concerned with the development of life and social skills.

Including children with SEN in mainstream schools that are driven by the need to achieve high academic standards results in the goals of education for many of these children being inappropriate. The major goal of education for many children with SEN must be to produce happy, well-adjusted and productive citizens. As stated in the Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994, p. 10): “Schools should assist them to become economically active and provide them with the skills needed in everyday life, offering training in skills which respond to the social and communication demands and expectations of adult life”.

Curricula

Another problem has been confusion surrounding entitlement and the appropriateness of curricula for children with SEN. From when a national curriculum was first proposed in the United Kingdom, influential people and organisations in the SEN field supported the government’s intention to include children with SEN in this curriculum to the greatest extent possible. That all children with SEN should be entitled to have access to the same curriculum as other children was seen as being a step forward. This was in fact the case for many children with SEN; for example, those with severe visual impairment who, in the past, may have been denied opportunities such as taking science subjects. However, for the majority of children with SEN, who have learning or behavioural difficulties, it has been a backward step, as noted by Warnock (*Special Educational Needs: A New Look*, p. 20). National curricula, with their associated national assessments and their consequences, such as league tables of schools, have emphasised academic achievement much more than other aspects of the curriculum such as personal, social and vocational education. Therefore, having a national curriculum as the whole curriculum is not appropriate for children with moderate to severe learning or behavioural difficulties and leads to many of them becoming disaffected.

Inclusion in an unsuitable curriculum directly contributes to the development of emotional or behavioural difficulties for many children, which leads them to be disruptive and eventually results in the exclusion of some of them from schools. As argued by Farrell (2010), the priority for children with SEN must be that they have access to curricula which are appropriate for them, not that they are fitted into a national curriculum which was designed for the mainstream population.

Reality

A common confusion occurs among educators influenced by the rhetoric of full inclusion, despite its contrast with the reality of the situation in schools. The rhetoric of full inclusion suggests that it is possible to effectively educate all children with SEN in mainstream classrooms. However, the reality of the situation in mainstream schools is that many teachers do not feel able or willing to implement this scenario (Croll & Moses, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

The reality is also that, in many countries, there is insufficient input on teaching children with SEN in initial teacher education courses and limited in-service training on SEN available to teachers. This means that many teachers do not have the skills necessary for including children with a wide range of SEN in their classes and are also concerned that there will be insufficient material and financial resources, and in particular support staff, to effectively implement a policy of full inclusion.

Finance

A key confusion concerns the funding of children with SEN in general, and those who are included in mainstream schools in particular. As discussed by both Warnock and Norwich in their chapters, a variety of solutions to the issue of funding have been proposed but there is still no agreement on what is the most satisfactory funding model.

There is also confusion about the relative cost of provision for SEN in mainstream or special facilities. At first sight, special schools and units appear expensive so inclusive education seems to be the cheaper option, but only in the short term. If the education system does not provide young people with SEN with the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to achieve independence and success after they leave school, the cost to society will be far greater in the long run in terms of unemployment benefits, welfare payments and the costs of the criminal justice system. Thus, special provision for a small number of children with SEN is costly but it is likely to be much less so than the later consequences of not making suitable provision.

Means and Ends

A confusion with inclusion that is addressed in both of Warnock's chapters is whether inclusion is a means to an end or an end in itself. Proponents of full inclusion argue that segregated SEN placement is wrong because a key goal of education should be to fully include children in the community in which they live. Therefore, they ought to be included in their local mainstream schools. However, as suggested by Warnock, inclusion in the community after leaving school is actually the most important end that educators should be seeking. Inclusion in mainstream schools may be a means to that end but should not be an end in itself. For some children with SEN, segregated SEN placement may be the best means to the end of eventual inclusion in the community when they leave school. In contrast, inclusion in mainstream schools that does not fully meet children's SEN may be counterproductive in that it is likely to reduce the potential for full inclusion in the community as adults.

Research Evidence

There is confusion about the research base for inclusive education, with many inclusionists appearing to believe that an adequate research base for inclusion is

unnecessary or already exists. However, in Norwich's chapter, Lindsay's (2007) review is cited as concluding that reviews of the research evidence in support of inclusion to date have been inconclusive, suggesting that an adequate research base for inclusion has not been established. Farrell (2010) in his book cites a raft of relevant studies, many of which report negative findings regarding the impact of inclusive education. Norwich concludes that there needs to be more intensive research to provide evidence regarding the policy and practice of inclusive education. Such research needs to take a long-term view of outcomes for children with SEN who experience either inclusive or segregated schooling. The findings of two long-term follow-up studies of children with SEN, who were "included" in mainstream schools following periods of time attending special schools, suggest that children with SEN who experience inclusive education may well be disadvantaged in the long-term (Hornby & Kidd, 2001; Hornby & Witte, 2008).

As Warnock concluded in *Special Educational Needs: A New Look*: "what we really need is evidence of where different children with different disabilities thrive best, and how the pitiful casualties of some inclusive comprehensive schools can be best avoided" (p. 139).

Conclusion

This new book makes a seminal contribution to the literature evaluating inclusive education for children with SEN. It is essential reading for all academics and practitioners working in this field.

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