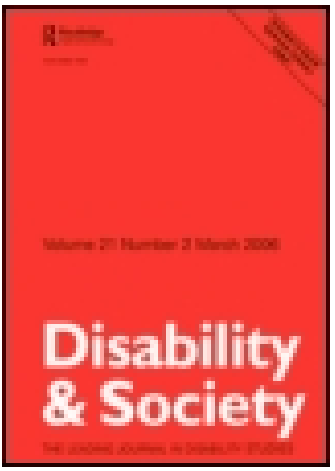

Disability & Society
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cdso20

What's So Special? Teachers' Models and Their Realisation in Practice in Segregated Schools

Joan Adams , Joan Swain & Jim Clark

Published online: 01 Jul 2010.

To cite this article: Joan Adams , Joan Swain & Jim Clark (2000) What's So Special? Teachers' Models and Their Realisation in Practice in Segregated Schools, Disability & Society, 15:2, 233-245, DOI: 10.1080/09687590025658

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09687590025658

Disability & Society, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2000, pp. 233–245

What's So Special? Teachers' Models and Their Realisation in Practice in Segregated Schools

JOAN ADAMS, JOHN SWAIN & JIM CLARK
University of Northumbria, School of Education, Coach Lane Campus, Coach Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE7 7XA, UK

ABSTRACT *The concept of 'special' has played a crucial role in the development of educational policy and practice, and the meaning of the term has been the subject of far-reaching debates and controversy. This paper is based on research which explored the meaning of 'specialness' in theory and practice from the point of view of practitioners working in segregated schools, providing education for young people designated as having moderate and severe learning difficulties. The research demonstrates the articulation of the individual model of special in teachers' thinking about pupils, themselves and their relationships with pupils, and also in the learning environment provided for different categories of young people. We argue that the dominant discursive practices of practitioners construct and maintain 'otherness' in special education, and pre-empt alternative discourses.*

The Special Scene

There is arguably no section of disability literature which is so replete with the discourse of 'special' as education. The recent DfEE Green Paper (DfEE, 1997), for instance, is peppered with the term in a variety of forms: special educational needs (often abbreviated to SEN); special educational provision; specialists; special schools; special educational needs co-ordinators (abbreviated to SENCOs—abbreviation being a particular feature of discourses of special in education); specialist teaching; specialist support; and so on. Official documentation itself provides a number of understandings of the term, such as 'additional to', 'different from', 'greater difficulty in learning than' and 'a disability'. Twenty years ago, the Warnock Report (1978) set the seal on the dominance of the concept of special, particularly with its central focus on special educational needs. The wake of that report and the subsequent 1981 Act remains and SEN is part of the daily discourse in mainstream as well as special schools. The spirit and espoused purpose of the report and Act lay in the replacement of the categorisation of young people, including categorisation as severely educationally subnormal (ESN(S)) and moderately educationally subnor-

ISSN 0968-7599 (print)/ISSN 1360-0508 (online)/00/020233-13

mal (ESN(M)). The central thrust was the reconceptualisation of special education, at that time largely equated with education provided in segregated special schools, to special provision provided for children with SEN, many of whom were and are educated in mainstream schools.

In a sense, the report and Act were successful. The whole industry of special educational needs reigns supreme as is evident, for instance, in the 1997 Green Paper. The elimination of categorisation, however, has been unsuccessful. The shift from ESN(S) and ESN(M) to SLD and MLD, respectively, seems irrelevant to the elimination of categories. Fundamentally, specialness remains institutionalised through the provision of segregated schools. Over the past 20 years, segregation has continued to flourish with negligible change in the numbers of children attending special schools (Swann, 1992). Furthermore, it continues to be promoted in recent government initiatives. Even the discourse around the changes necessary for integration (or the term increasingly used, inclusion) has largely been shaped by specialness. Thus, the Green Paper is able to refer to inclusion within mainstream schools, with no recognition of the possibility that within an inclusive education system there could be no mainstream (mainstream only having meaning in relation to special as special has meaning in relation to mainstream). Under the same umbrella of raising standards as the Green Paper, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA, 1998) consultation document lists standards for nine categories of knowledge and skills for SEN specialists. A tenth category of moderate learning difficulties is recognised, though standards are not provided as 'pupils with general learning difficulties are increasingly supported in mainstream schools'. As a framework of categorisation it closely resembles the classification system of pupils that the Warnock Report attempted to eliminate and to replace with the concept of special educational needs, and the association between special schools and classification is maintained.

In the development of more critical theories of the meaning of special in relation to education, a key text was Tomlinson (1982) in which she questioned the dominant humanistic explanations of special, and traced the origins and growth of segregated education to particular vested interests, including those of medical, psychological and educational personnel, and political ruling groups. She also argued that the development of special education could be understood only in relation to development of the schooling system as a whole:

> … the 1944 Act allowed for a tripartite system of secondary schooling by 'age, aptitude and ability'. Selection by 'ability' sanctioned selection by 'disability'. (Tomlinson, 1982, p. 50.)

The wholly positive connotations of the term special were and continue to be brought into question. A later paper, for instance, states that:

> The special are likely to find more difficulty in collecting meaningful skills and competencies, having usually already acquired labels associated with 'non-competence' … (Tomlinson & Colquhoun, 1995, p. 199.)

More recently, analyses of the meaning of the term special have more directly

addressed the meaning of the term 'disability'. In particular, the social model of disability, generated from and through the experiences of disabled people themselves, began to provide a foundation for a critique of existing essentialist theory and a basis for proposing radical change (Oliver, 1984; Barton, 1997). Riddell (1996) and Allan *et al.* (1998), among others, have used such theories of disability to argue that the official discourse of market-led educational policies has reinforced individualistic, rather than social, theoretical models. Corbett develops similar arguments and makes the connection with identity:

> When the term 'special' is applied to disabled people, it emphasises their relative powerlessness rather than conferring them with honour and dignity. (Corbett, 1996, p. 49.)

To address the question 'What's so special?', then, is to broach a wide arena of controversy and debate around not only the meaning of 'special', but its relation to categorisation, policy and practice in education and, broadening the issues even further, the meaning of 'disability'. In her analysis of the concept of 'special', Corbett writes:

> If the voice of the British establishment, in the form of the Warnock Report and its subsequent influence, represents enlightened modernity then the dominant discourses of special needs represent different tracks and distinct boundaries. Unless we recognize the distinction of these discourses and their often conflicting perspectives, we are unable to realize why the language of special needs has developed into an obtuse and confusing maze. (Corbett, 1996, p. 17.)

The meaning of 'special' is relative and is constructed by the participants in special education from their different standpoints. In this paper we explore this 'obtuse and confusing maze' from the viewpoint of teachers working in segregated settings. Despite the developments in theorising, there is little available evidence of teachers' theorising of special educational needs or how practitioner models of disability are realised and reflected within actual practice within the classroom. The need for research into the working models of practitioners, we would argue, is threefold. First, there is the question of whether there is any discernible change in the informal educational discourses of teachers which reflects the developments in theorising mentioned above. Secondly, official policies of special needs are translated into practice by teachers who, as Bowe & Ball point out, are involved in 'processes of active interpretation and meaning-making which relate policy texts to practice' (Bowe & Ball, 1992, p. 13). The theorising in formal educational discourse informs practice through the filter of teachers' informal discourse. Thirdly, the interaction between teachers' informal theories and teaching practice directly constructs the learning environments for young disabled people.

The findings presented within this paper are from a larger qualitative study of the learning environments of pupils with special educational needs in segregated settings (Adams, 1998). Teachers' notions of 'specialness' emerged as recurring themes during the research, rather than being an explicit focus at the outset. We

shall draw on the research to tease out and illuminate different discourses in special education, and utilise these themes as a basis for discussion. The research was undertaken in two segregated special schools, with a more detailed case study of one class in each setting. One was a school for pupils with both moderate and severe learning difficulties and the case study was a class for pupils categorised as having moderate learning disability (MLD). The other was a school, and class, for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning disability (SLD). All the children were in the secondary phase of education. The study involved observation of lessons and interviews with teachers, pupils and classroom assistants, and was intended to yield information about the psychosocial aspects of the learning environment.

In the following two sections of the paper we explore the teachers' reflections on the specialness of their work, and how categorisation is built into teachers' conceptions of children, themselves and their relationships. The research suggests that, despite the development of social theories of special educational needs, teachers' models remain firmly individual or essentialist and categorisation is reinforced in teachers' informal theories. We then examine how these different models were reflected in substantial differences in teaching practices. From analysis of the data there emerged pictures of two very different learning environments; the SLD classroom being much less formal with learning more experiential and co-operative. With one classroom apparently 'open' and 'child centred' (in the SLD school) and the other 'traditional' and more evidently formal (the MLD context) it was important to consider how those differences arose. Although classroom psychosocial environment has been found to vary from school to school, there were differences between these classrooms which seemed to override factors relating to separate sites. To conclude, we argue that such differences themselves reinforce and are reinforced by both essentialist explanations of 'special' and the status quo of 'special' segregated schools, and we return to social models of disability as offering ground for optimism in terms of radical change.

Teachers Conceptions of 'Specialness'

In this research there was evidence of qualitative variance in the ways teachers perceived pupils deemed to have MLD and those categorised as SLD. The teachers imposed the notion of difference and identity on the young people, but drew on quite different frameworks in doing so. There were clear differences in teachers' references to pupils' cognitive ability. In this SLD setting, there was little reference to pupils' cognitive level, just one pupil being described as,

> Extremely slow.

However, cognitive level was a clear criterion of difference and identity in the MLD setting. This was expressed through teachers emphasising pupils' abilities, rather than learning difficulties:

> And when I say 'need to be watched in the sense', I mean they are two of the brightest ones in the group;

> He went on to the G1 maths book so his rate of working is faster than the others, again because he can work independently and his reading skills access him to the maths problems;
> She's quite a deep sort of person, Margaret, and she says some very deep things … Margaret's on ordinary books;
> He's quite a bright boy, Luke.

However, the main contrast between teachers' models did not lie in conceptions of cognitive levels, but in defining 'the problem'. In the SLD context, physical impairment was repeatedly referred to, by teachers, as central to the nature of SLD and the identity of their pupils:

> Has problems with manipulation and is deteriorating;
> He's got hemiplaegia.

Within the MLD context, however, pupils' behaviour was the defining feature in teachers' models of pupils:

> If they're disturbed or distressed, the person who's nearest gets it;
> They will very easily get up and wander round and be touching things and be in parts of the room before you've actually spotted them, you know;
> Edward had a lot of problems in Year 7 with his behaviour.

Within the MLD classroom pupils' 'problems' were almost always described in terms of behaviours. Within the school, where there were pupils with SLD in the school but in different classes, it seemed that this criterion of behaviour was key to the informal categorisation of pupils:

> The lower ability groups, they accept people working on different things more easily.

The difference in teachers' models of pupils was apparent, too, in teachers' conceptions of themselves in relation to pupils and their conceptions of their relationships with pupils. The MLD teachers, in seeking to understand and interpret their relationships with pupils, articulated a perception of distance or a social gulf, between themselves and the young people they taught. Teachers felt they might be seen as 'the enemy' and 'nasty people who make you do as you're told'. At the same time there was a sense of discomfort with instances of over-familiarity exemplified by pupils commenting on teachers' dress or their families, or by suggestions that a teacher might join in the rough and tumble of school life. LeCompte *et al.* (1993) suggest that 'lower class' children adopt adult social roles and behaviour at an earlier age, so an inappropriate invitation to join in physical play emphasised social difference between teacher and pupil. In contrast, the SLD teacher believed that she empathised with pupils, recalling that there were times during her own adolescence when she had acted as they acted, felt as they felt. Their behaviour did not threaten her professional status. Instead, when she identified problematic behaviour, she also presented a solution. Pupils might be 'challenging with new people', but by implication, not with her. The teacher attributed this positive and close relationship to the requirement to meet the particular needs of the pupils which included

elements of physical care. It appeared, then, that the SLD teacher, too, conceptualised her pupils in a particular way, that their 'special needs' were different from others and that they involved the teacher in the provision of physical care to meet physiological need. Thus, the teachers' perceptions of their relationships with pupils were closely articulated with their perceptions of the young people themselves.

Models of Specialness

Models of teachers' understanding are essentially blunt instruments, submerging individual differences in generalisations. Nevertheless, the research demonstrates that categorisation remains deeply ingrained in teachers' informal theories. The differentiation between MLD and SLD is constructed, maintained and justified through different versions of individual models of special. From the teachers' perspective, there are two individual models. An individual medical model is applied in the education of children with severe learning difficulties. This model of special is conceived in relation to non-impairment or non-disabled (disability being defined within the medical model). However, the individual medical model is less threatening to professionals. Special in this model can be humanised. The child can even be seen as 'very special' (Longhorn, 1988) and, hence, constructed in even more humanistic terms. It seems that within this model, special is legitimised when applied to teachers themselves—special skills, techniques, curriculum. Special expertise is required for special children.

The second model, applied to children with moderate learning difficulties, could be termed the individual educational model. This model of special is conceived in relation to perceived norms of capability, achievement, but primarily behaviour. The model is more threatening to teachers as, by definition, these were children for whom other teachers could not provide education. The very essence of special in this model, then, as applied to teachers' skills, techniques and expertise is teaching unteachable children.

Similar frameworks of teachers' models of specialness can be found in the literature. Tomlinson (1982), for instance, suggested a difference between 'socially constructed' disability and 'normative' disability, which is an intrinsic feature of the child. For her, the concept of 'learning difficulties' is socially constructed, arising from the values, beliefs and interests of the constructors, defined as middle class professionals, the majority of pupils in this category being of working class origin. This would relate to the individual social model outlined above. To be deaf or blind, on the other hand, is to have a normative disability. In the context of this research to have severe learning difficulties was to have a disability (defined within a medical model) which is more readily interpreted as 'normative'.

Weiner (1993) described these differing interpretations of disability, in a way which again reflects the interpretations of the adults in this study, as 'sin', which might be applied to pupils with MLD seen by teachers as badly behaved, contrasting with 'sickness', which may more readily be ascribed to pupils with SLD. When 'sickness' is demonstrated in failure to progress or in challenges of behaviour it is more readily 'excused' by the teacher as a manifestation of something organically

'wrong' with the child. Any fault lies within the child not the teacher. When pupils have MLD, causes of learning failure are less easily attributed an aetiology which is physiological or neurological. 'Misbehaviour' may then be interpreted as a direct challenge to the teacher's ability to 'manage' the class.

The different models in teachers' understanding demonstrate that informal categorisation of pupils thrives in the provision of special education. Whatever changes have been brought by the notion of special educational needs over the past 20 years, the elimination of categorisation has not been one of them. 'Specialness' for the teachers in this research was maintained through their conceptions of categories of pupils, themselves and their relationships with pupils. Analysis in terms of models of understanding, however, is limited in terms of the significance of the discourse of specialness. 'Special' is constructed by teachers through the articulation of informal theory and practice. The differentiation between MLD and SLD was not only evident in teachers' understandings, it was expressed in differing provisions and teaching practices in the two settings.

Special Practice

The importance of relationships within social contexts was acknowledged in early research on human environments (Moos, 1974) and has formed an important aspect of the learning environment research undertaken in schools (Fraser, 1986). Within classrooms, teachers' styles have been considered influential (Flanders, 1970; Good, 1979). Ramsay & Ransley (1986) suggested that there is a single underlying continuum of style, from 'traditional' to 'open'. Schultz (1982) found that teachers seek to create classroom psychosocial climates which are concordant with their teaching styles. In the classrooms of open, non-directive teachers, there is an emphasis on support. There are innovative practices and flexible rules. Directive teachers emphasise control and their classrooms are competitive and directed towards tasks. This framework proved useful in a comparison of the teaching practice and learning environment provided in the MLD and SLD contexts. Teachers' models of specialness were built into the different educational experiences provided for the two categories of young people.

Within the SLD context, teachers' styles and the learning environment tended to be open, rather than traditional. Classroom management and social control was seen, by teachers, to be mediated through personal relationships, rather than institutional rules at the classroom or school level. One teacher was particularly clear about the kind of psychosocial environment that she sought to create:

> I do not feel that I rule with an iron rod, that I'm extremely didactic. I do try to give them as many choices as possible, I do try to emanate this reasonably warm but age appropriate atmosphere whereby I want the pupils to come to me and talk to me.

Not wishing to be authoritarian and wanting to be approachable, she considered that her relationship with pupils was built on her confidence that there existed a clear understanding on the part of the pupils of appropriate behaviour:

> I know that they behave for me in a way that they don't behave for other members of staff.

Thus, the control of pupils was implicit rather than explicit, and informal rather than formal, and imposed and rationalised through humanistic concepts, such as 'support'. One teacher, for instance, said:

> If I have a child who is particularly difficult with a new person, a new adult, then I put that child with me.

This informality was apparent, too, in grouping and seating arrangements. Pupils were often grouped for learning activities, sitting together or moving to different parts of the room or even outside, depending upon the activity, but there was always an adult assigned to each group to provide 'support', unless staff levels did not allow. Seating arrangements were justified in terms of the learning environment, rather than specifically control of 'inappropriate behaviour'. An auxiliary in the SLD school stated that:

> They normally group next to the person they want to tell something to,

while the teacher explained that the seating arrangement:

> Has been more influenced by the people in the classroom and the best use, making the best use of things.

In general terms, management and control within the SLD context was open, in the sense of being non-directive and flexible. As the teachers' conception of special was humanised in informal theories of themselves, their pupils and their relationships, so too were processes of management and control.

The MLD classrooms appeared more 'traditional' and the major preoccupation of teachers was to insist that pupils behave appropriately. A highly formalised approach had been agreed by all teachers involved with class 8X and a set of rules drawn up. Some of the strategies aimed at 'settling the class' were cited by the science teacher:

> The idea was that you actually line up outside the door. When they come into the room they actually stand behind their chairs, they do not sit down.

Seats were allocated by means of place name cards.

> Most pupils confirmed that they were aware of these rules:
> You've got to line up outside the classroom;
> Always line up before the door. Come in and stand behind your chairs;

and that they applied in all lessons:

> We've got them in every lesson.

Other rules mentioned were: putting up a hand to request help, rather than shouting out; not throwing things; not swearing; and listening to what the teacher said. The consequences of not obeying rules were known, the most common being 'getting wrong', being told off. A number of pupils mentioned detention as a sanction. This might be implemented by a class teacher or, after referral, by a deputy head teacher.

Formal seating arrangements mean that pupils are isolated and teachers have greater control over what takes place. There was much evidence in the data that the intention of the imposed seating arrangements in the MLD context was justified in terms of class control. Each teacher mentioned this in interviews and the pupils too understood that this was so. Furthermore, interaction between pupils was seen to undermine discipline. For example, a teacher referred to the staff's concern about,

> Outspoken comments and cross classroom conversation during lesson time,

and one of the pupils with MLD had explained the rationale underlying the allocation of seats to pupils:

> Like we had to put, like, two naughty people–one naughty and one with a good one.

Informal seating, on the other hand invites interaction and collaboration.

Differences between the classrooms resulted from variance in the managing and directive aspects of teaching style and these were based upon perceptions of pupils at school and individual teacher level. In the MLD school strategies were adopted in response to perceived needs for direction and consistency because of perceived 'inappropriate' behaviour. In the SLD context, in contrast, control through personal relationship was dominant and only rarely was subordinated to policy agreed at school level, when behaviourist strategies were implemented because they were considered a response to identified individual needs.

Also contrasting in these two classes, comprising pupils of similar age in the secondary phase of schooling, was the way in which the MLD pupils moved around the school to be taught by specialist subject teachers, a familiar mainstream secondary model, while the SLD class followed more a primary school model wherein pupils spent most of their time in one classroom with a single teacher responsible for the delivery of almost all of the curriculum. Beattie (1997) in considering an historical and comparative perspective contends that traditionally, and for multiple reasons, the English primary classroom is of its nature 'open' and 'progressive'. In adopting a primary model, the classroom in the SLD school would de facto be less formal and traditional, would inevitably be more pupil-centred.

There were significant differences, too, in the way the two schools in the study applied the National Curriculum. The MLD pupils, for instance, took the Standard Attainment Tests (SATs) at the end of Key Stage 3, while in the SLD school only teacher assessment took place. This had led to differences in the ways in which classes were organised. The SLD pupils spent almost all of the week with one teacher who was responsible for the delivery of most of the curriculum. In this the class modelled a primary school with its attendant social structures. In the MLD school subject specialist teaching had been introduced to mirror the usual pattern of secondary schools and to prepare pupils for national, subject specific assessment. Pupils moved from teacher to teacher and for some lessons to specialist rooms. In both cases school level organisational strategies had implications for the social aspect of the classroom environment and impacted also upon learning.

As the MLD pupils took SATs in maths, English and science at the end of KS3 the school considered that they needed to address directly the attainment levels and targets and programmes of study of the National Curriculum. To approach this, the specialist subject teaching was considered necessary. In the SLD school, only teacher assessment took place because pupils would be unable to undertake the written tests. In the context of schooling, this distancing may be a liberating force in that it removed from the teachers and pupils with SLD pressures to demonstrate achievement of competence purely in National Curriculum terms. The National Curriculum could then be interpreted with the child, not national norms, as the starting point. In doing so, the execution, the implementation of the National Curriculum, was less firmly separated from its conception or rather reconceptionalization at the school level. In contrast to the MLD school, where delivery of curriculum content was seen as of importance, in the SLD school accessing an appropriate curriculum was the concern.

Teachers who feel threatened, by pupil behaviour or curriculum demands commonly fall back upon content (Lemke, 1995) and more formal structures enable teachers to control the content of learning experiences. Concerned to demonstrate coverage of National Curriculum programmes of study with pupils perceived as having challenging behaviours, the MLD school had imposed its own set of formal structures. Less preoccupied by content of the National Curriculum, and with an understanding that challenges of behaviour from pupils with SLD were not directed against her as a skilled manager of the classroom environment, the teacher was able to focus upon the needs of individual pupils and classroom structures were flexible in order to respond to these.

In general terms, then, teachers' informal constructions of specialness were reflected in the educational provision for these two categories of pupils at both the classroom and school levels. The individual medical model, applied within the SLD context, is realised through individualised provision and practice and 'special' is given meaning through the teacher's 'special' skills in relating to individual pupils, and the school's 'special' curriculum (albeit adapted from the National Curriculum) and authority in assessing pupils. On the other hand, the individual educational model is realised through explicitly didactic and controlling provision and practice, and the enforcement of supposed norms of non-special education. Within this analysis, 'open' and 'traditional' teaching styles are associated with teachers' conception of 'special', rather than differing philosophies of education.

Reflections on Specialness

As this research illustrates, the dominant discourses of special needs do indeed represent different tracks and distinct boundaries (Corbett, 1996). Indeed, what is so special is the very dominance of these discourses which, as Corker & French (1999) argue, bring the potential for acting in one way rather than another and for marginalising alternative ways of acting.

The knowledge produced within the discourses of specialness connect, firstly, not only with power over others, but with power to define others (Foucault, 1979).

In both, the individual medical and individual social models this is articulated at an individual level. For teachers in both settings, understandings of special are founded on the nature of the child. They are built into the child and constructed within provision for individuals. What's so special begins with the child. In both settings, individual models dominate thinking and practice. The identity of young people with severe learning difficulties is defined by teachers in medical terms. These young people were, in a sense, not considered personally 'to blame' for their learning difficulties, as they were not normal and could not aspire to normality. They were perceived as abnormal individuals. Moderate learning difficulties, by contrast, were not as readily attributed to a pathological basis to explain failure to progress. Children's identity was defined by teachers in social terms as lacking self-control and disruptive. The different tracks also legitimate teachers' knowledge and power in that teacher' expertise in specialness is articulated in terms of specialness, i.e. teaching abnormal or unteachable young people. Our analysis suggests that teachers' expertise, particularly in terms of teacher–pupil relationships and classroom management styles, is the expression of specialness through action. What's so special, from the viewpoint of teachers, is special expertise within special practice for special children.

Following Warnock and the 1981 Act, the 1980s and 1990s saw re-organisations of special provision, mostly segregated special schools, in many LEAs. In the past year, three such re-organisations have taken or are presently taking place, for instance, in the North East of England. As in other Local Education Authorities, these have involved the closing of some special schools and the opening of others, including the closure of schools for children with moderate learning difficulties and for children with severe learning difficulties, and the opening of schools for children with both severe and moderate learning difficulties, or more simply schools for children with learning difficulties. Ostensibly, the move towards schools for children with learning difficulties is directly in line with the Warnock report, in that the categories of MLD and SLD are ostensibly eliminated, yet division is maintained in the informal models of teachers.

Perhaps the main legacy of the Warnock report is, ironically, lack of change. Potts writes:

> For it seems to me that 'special educational needs' is a phrase with no clear inherent meaning, but which functions to reinforce an enduring 'otherness'. (Potts, 1998, p. 17.)

The dominant discourses of special are divisive. The function of the individual model of special has been to maintain rather than eliminate the unitary and mutually exclusive categorisation of young people. Concluding his research in mainstream schools, Priestley states:

> … the language of 'special need', and the discursive practices used to police it, continue to construct disabled children as the other. (Priestley, 1999, p. 102.)

The research reported in this paper illuminates the divisive discourses of specialness

in segregated settings. Within a segregated system, the notion of special rationalises divisions between pupils deemed to have MLD and SLD, and also between disabled (as conceived within a medical model) and special educational needs. Categories are, and seem likely to continue to be, created, justified and maintained in a segregated system which is itself created, justified and maintained by an individual model of special whether applied to children, their needs, teachers, curriculum, provision and policy itself. The dominance of the discourse of special is not only created within a segregated system, it maintains it by fostering the categorisation which underpins segregation, and by the very dominance of discourse in which special is the problem, rather than segregation.

Looking to possibilities for change, in 1986 (original publication date), Barton wrote:

> What we desperately need is a new vision or, as Martin Luther King would say, 'a dream' … An important step in this process will be both in our theoretical work and in our practice to shift concentration on the differentiation of children and to identify what they have in common. (Boston, 1997, p. 154.)

He pointed then to the emergence of the social model of disability emerging from disabled people themselves. The social model of disability recognises the social origins of disability in a society geared by and for non-disabled people. From this perspective, disadvantages or restrictions, often referred to as barriers, permeate every aspect of the physical and social environment: attitudes, institutions, language and culture, organisation and delivery of support services, and the power relations and structures of which society is constructed (Swain *et al.*, 1993). As applied to education, then, the social model of disability challenges individual models of 'special', the differentiation between MLD and SLD, and between disability and SEN, and most significantly the provision, policy and practices of a segregated education system. From this perspective, what's so special is the discourse of 'special' itself, which has pre-empted critique of existing policy and practice and fed the informal frameworks of practitioners. The analysis in this paper suggests that, in segregated settings, the social model of disability plays little or no part in teachers' models of special needs and it has not been a feature of government education policy. It would seem that a new vision remains 'a dream' under the stranglehold of 'special' from the viewpoint of specialist teachers.

REFERENCES

ADAMS, J.E. (1998) *A special environment? Learning in the MLD and SLD classroom*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northumbria.

ALLAN, J., BROWN, S. & RIDDELL, S. (1998) Permission to speak? Theorising special education inside the classroom, in: C. CLARK, A. DYSON & A. MILLWARD (Eds) *Theorising Special Education* (London, Routledge).

BARTON, L. (1997) The politics of special educational needs, in: L. BARTON & M. OLIVER (Eds) *Disability Studies: past, present and future*, pp. 138–159 (Leeds, Disability Press).

BEATTIE, N. (1997) Contextual preconditions of 'open schooling'. the English case in historical and comparative perspectives, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 27, pp. 59–76.

BOWE, R. & BALL, S.J., WITH GOLD, A. (1992) *Reforming Education and Changing Schools: case studies in policy sociology* (London, Routledge).

DFEE (1997) *Excellence for all Children: meeting Special Educational needs* (London, HMSO).

CORBETT, J. (1996) *Bad-Mouthing: the language of Special Needs* (London, Falmer Press).

CORKER, M. & FRENCH, S. (1999) Reclaiming discourse in disability studies, in: M. CORKER & S. FRENCH (Eds) *Disability Discourse*, pp. 1–11 (Buckingham, Open University Press).

FLANDERS, N. (1970) *Analyzing Teaching Behaviour* (Reading, Addison Wesley).

FOUCAULT, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punishment* (Harmondsworth, Penguin).

FRASER, B.J. (1986) *Classroom Environment* (London, Croom Helm).

GOOD, T. (1979) Classroom expectations: teacher: pupil interaction, in: J. MCMILLAN (Ed.) *The Social Psychology of School Learning* (New York, Academic Press).

LECOMPTE, M.D., PREISSLE, J. & TESCH, R. (1993) *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2nd edn (SanDiego, Academic Press).

LEMKE, J.L. (1995) *Textual Politics: discourse and social dynamics* (London, Taylor and Francis).

LONGHORN, F. (1988) *A Sensory Curriculum for Very Special People* (London, Souvenir Press).

MOOS, R.H. (1974) *The Social Climate Scales: an overview* (Palo Alto, Consulting Psychologists' Press).

OLIVER, M. (1984) The integration and segregation debate: some sociological considerations, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 6, pp. 75–92.

POTTS, P. (1998) Knowledge is not enough: an exploration of what we can expect from enquiries which are social, in: L. BARTON & M. OLIVER (Eds) *Disability Studies: past, present and future* (Leeds, Disability Press).

PRIESTLEY, M. (1999) Discourse and identity: disabled children in mainstream high schools, in: M. CORKER & S. FRENCH (Eds) *Disability Discourse* (Buckingham, Open University Press).

RAMSAY, W. & RANSLEY, W. (1986) A method of analysis for determining dimensions of teaching style, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2(1), pp. 69–79.

RIDDELL, S. (1996) Theorising special educational needs in a changing political climate, in: L. BARTON (Ed.) *Disability and Society: emerging issues and insights* (London, Longman).

SCHULTZ, R.A. (1982) Teaching style and sociopsychological climates, *Alberta Journal of Education Research*, 28(1), pp. 9–18.

SWAIN, J. FINKELSTEIN, V., FRENCH, S. & OLIVER, M. (Eds) (1993) *Disabling Barriers–Enabling Environments* (London, Sage in association with The Open University).

SWANN, W. (1992) *Segregation Statistics* (London, Centre for Studies on Integration in Education).

TEACHER TRAINING AGENCY (1998) *National Standards for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Specialist Teachers* (London, Teacher Training Agency).

TOMLINSON, S. (1982) *A Sociology of Special Education* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul).

TOMLINSON, S. & COLQUHOUN, R.F (1995) The political economy of Special Educational Needs in Britain, *Disability and Society*, 10, pp. 191–202.

WARNOCK, H.M. (Chairman) (1978) *Special Educational Needs. Report of the Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (The Warnock Report) (London, HMSO).

WEINER, B. (1993) On sin versus sickness: a theory of responsibility and social motivation, *American Psychologist*, 48, pp. 957–965.