

**Alternative spaces of education for young people with socio-emotional differences: sites of alternative social expression or extending the reach of normalisation?**



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# *Structure*

1. Introduction – socio-emotional differences as inclusion's absent presence
2. Inclusion and normalisation
3. The case-study
4. Preliminary findings – Special Units
  - ❖ Spaces of inclusion
  - ❖ Spaces of exclusion
  - ❖ Parallel spaces
  - ❖ Exceptional spaces
5. Conclusion - special units, inclusion and normalisation

## *Socio-emotional differences as inclusion's absent presence (1)*

1. Contested geographies of education inclusion (e.g. UK SEN Green Paper, 2011).
2. Young people with socio-emotional differences
  - A contested diagnosis (Molloy and Vasil, 2002)
  - Different social expression, not less (Davidson, 2008)
3. Disability as an embodied identifier
4. Young people with socio-emotional differences – disabled
  - ❖ Diagnosis contested – diagnosis of 'normal' versus 'abnormal'
  - ❖ Context specific
  - ❖ Brings to light practices to which all (disabled) bodies are subject
5. Conceptualise socio-emotional differences as disability = politicisation and emphasise socio-spatial processes of disablement

## *Socio-emotional differences as inclusion's absent presence (2)*

1. Young people with socio-emotional differences
  1. Absent presence within much literature re: inclusion
  2. Group around which anti-inclusion discourses coalesce (e.g. Warnock, 2005)
  3. One of the groups most likely to be excluded (Farrell, 2001; Achilles et al., 2007)

## *Inclusion and normalisation*

- “In modern society, the behaviour of individuals is regulated not through overt repression but through a set of standards and values associated with normality which are set into play by a network of ostensibly beneficial and scientific forms of knowledge” (McNay, 1994: 95).
- Normalisation of disabled people - into mainstream (economic) activities, to come closer to an able ‘norm’ – one impetus for inclusion processes (also about disability politics)
- (Re)produced via everyday practices (Butler, 1991, 1993)
- Intersubjective relations and recognition (Butler, 1997, 2004)

## *The case study*

- Part of a broader ESRC project
- Research in 3 LEAs in 9 schools
- Per LEA:
  - 1 Primary school, 1 Secondary school, 1 Special School
- Research with:
  - Children/young people (12 per school =108)
  - Parents (30 overall)
  - School and LEA institutional actors (40 overall)
- Findings today – School with a specialist learning support unit for young people with ASD, interviews with 8 children, 2 adults – preliminary analysis!

*Inclusive space:*

- Facilitated young people's attendance in mainstream school, and access to some elements of a mainstream curriculum:

Yeah. When I first started here - I weren't ready for the lessons, I was up here all the time.

*Oh were you? I didn't know that.*

Yeah, it's a bit busy, and coming into here and then being up here, and then starting going to lessons, so ...

*Is that good going to lessons then or would you prefer to be up here?*

Yeah, because at my old school, which was where I come from, I weren't going to any lessons and that proper because ...

## *Inclusive space*

- Site of the construction of social relationships between children
- Some of which extended beyond the school space
- Positive relationships between young people and adults in the unit
- Broadening the normative ideal of acceptable behaviour in space:

## *Inclusive space*

- “The, the positive impact of having kids with quite severe SEN is that 95%, because the teenagers are incredibly tolerant, and they don't bat an eyelid you know, despite the fact that some of the autistic kids in particular, kids with Aspergers who really don't have any pick up on social clues whatsoever, are at times outrageously provocative, without realising that they're doing it. 95% of the kids just go, might just go, Oh God not again, but they don't, do you know what I mean?” (Inclusion support manager).

## *Spaces of exclusion*

- Most social relationships and networks are with other young people with socio-emotional differences
- Other friends generally do not go into the learning support facility
- Young people can travel relatively long distances, often alone
  - > constrains social relationships between school, home and neighbourhood
- Young people become labelled and associated with the segregated space

## *Spaces of exclusion*



## *Parallel Spaces*

- Access to a (limited) parallel formal curricula, taught in an inclusive way
- Subject to norms and expectations of behaviour, teaching young people to become appropriately civilised, self-regulating citizens
- Emphasis on social and emotional norms - as a bedrock for inclusion into mainstream society and activities – parallels emphasis on correcting disabled children's bodies (Watson et al., 1999; Holt, 2003)

## *Parallel Spaces*

- Positive practices to reinforce appropriate behaviour ‘golden time’
- Increasing self-regulation of behaviour
- ‘Right, Colin was trying to teach me how to play [draughts] yesterday. And he beat me in about 30 seconds. I’m not very good! ... With me and Lee, because me and Lee don’t fight about it ... We just get on with it. Because if you fight over a game, like fight over whose won, it’s not really a good game ...
- ‘Because normally I play a game of draughts with Colin, but Colin always beats me...’

## *Spaces of exception*

- Normal school rules are bent, sometimes suspended, but generally not completely transformed
- Spaces of acceptance of different behaviour
- Calm environments that reduce the stress of school settings
- Alternative curricula – e.g. Gardening and/or social and independent living skills

## *Conclusion: special units, inclusion and normalisation*

- Special units facilitate the inclusion into mainstream schools of young people with socio-emotional differences
- Operate as mini-institutions and spatial containers of difference
- Seen as enabling spaces by young people, spaces of refuge
- BUT!
- Not outside of processes of normalisation – the normalisation of young people with socio-emotional differences requires a different interpretation of school rules > productive power – liveable lives (Butler, 2004)
- Alternative curriculum – still producing useful, conforming citizens
- Differential access to capitals of young people