

DISABLED STUDENTS IN WELSH HIGHER EDUCATION

STUDIES IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Volume 21

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Scope

This series addresses the many different forms of exclusion that occur in schooling across a range of international contexts and considers strategies for increasing the inclusion and success of all students. In many school jurisdictions the most reliable predictors of educational failure include poverty, Aboriginality and disability. Traditionally schools have not been pressed to deal with exclusion and failure. Failing students were blamed for their lack of attainment and were either placed in segregated educational settings or encouraged to leave and enter the unskilled labour market. The crisis in the labor market and the call by parents for the inclusion of their children in their neighborhood school has made visible the failure of schools to include all children.

Drawing from a range of researchers and educators from around the world, *Studies in Inclusive Education* will demonstrate the ways in which schools contribute to the failure of different student identities on the basis of gender, race, language, sexuality, disability, socio-economic status and geographic isolation. This series differs from existing work in inclusive education by expanding the focus from a narrow consideration of what has been traditionally referred to as special educational needs to understand school failure and exclusion in all its forms. Moreover, the series will consider exclusion and inclusion across all sectors of education: early years, elementary and secondary schooling, and higher education.

Disabled Students in Welsh Higher Education

A Framework for Equality and Inclusion

By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AM	Assembly Member
AUT	Association of University Teachers
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCODP	British Council of Disabled People
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
CORAD	Committee on Restrictions Against Disabled People
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals
DA	Disability Alliance
DCS	Disability Conciliation Service
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DED	Disability Equality Duty
DELNI	Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland
DES	Disability Equality Scheme
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DH	Department of Health
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
DRC	Disability Rights Commission
DRTF	Disability Rights Task Force
DSA	Disabled Student Allowance
DSS	Department of Social Security
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EA	Equality Act
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission
ELWa	Education and Learning Wales
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEW	Higher Education Wales
LEA	Local Education Authority
LFS	Labour Force Survey
ME	Myalgic Encephalomyelitis
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales

ABBREVIATIONS

NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NCCSDO	National Co-ordinating Centre for NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Research and Development
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
NCW	New College Worcester
NDT	National Disability Team
NUS	National Union of Students
ODI	Office for Disability Issues
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
OPCS	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
QAG	Quality Assurance Group
RADAR	Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation
REWG	Race Equality Working Group
RNIB	Royal National Institute of Blind People
RNID	Royal National Institute for Deaf People
RRAA	Race Relations Amendment Act
RSI	Repetitive Strain Injury
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SENDA	Special Educational Needs and Disability Act
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SJAC	Silver Jubilee Access Committee
SLC	Student Loans Company
SWD	Students with Disabilities
UCU	University and College Union
UKDPC	United Kingdom Disabled People's Council
UPIAS	Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation
UWIC	University Wales Institute Cardiff
VOADL	Voluntary Organisation for Anti-Discrimination Legislation
WAC	Welsh Affairs Committee
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government
WG	Wales Government
WLD	Work Limiting Disability
WO	Wales Office

FOREWORD

In recent times the popular debate about access to higher education in Britain has been dominated by two main themes: the degree to which privilege maintains a stranglehold within the ancient universities and the deterrent effect of tuition fees on applications to university by students from poorer backgrounds. Though by no means superficial, these topics are essentially 'of the moment'. They hide deeper questions that are perhaps more challenging and enduring. First, beyond privilege and matters of funding, there is the problem of access to higher education for groups that have hitherto faced severe barriers to entry or have been denied such opportunities *at all*. Second there are questions concerning the dominant role of politics in education. One such issue is the impact of devolution on higher education policy and practice. *Disabled students in Welsh higher education* brings these fundamental matters to centre stage.

Much investigation has already been done in England and Scotland (*see for example*: Tinklin *et al.*, 2004; Riddell *et al.*, 2005; Fuller *et al.*, 2009). But until now there has been far less information about the situation of disabled students in higher education in Wales. Here, using her own original research, Karen Beauchamp-Pryor remedies that lack of knowledge. Only with this new contribution has it become possible to compare the situation across the United Kingdom as a whole. As a result we begin to realize the extent to which lack of access to higher education for disabled people is a common and unyielding problem. More than this, however, the devolution of political powers has produced differences in the educational landscape encountered by disabled students in various parts of Britain. In this regard, Dr. Beauchamp-Pryor offers a timely and thoroughgoing consideration of the policies of the Welsh Assembly Government (inaugurated in 1998) pertinent to the experiences of disabled people in Welsh universities.

This work is, however, neither parochial nor narrowly drawn. The findings are universally significant. To give but one example: although the devolution of powers allows for a more local approach to questions of equality, access and inclusion, Dr. Beauchamp-Pryor shows that this facility does not guarantee speedier progress. Indeed, the evidence is clear that in building on UK-wide equality legislation, there was for a considerable time in Wales a seeming lack of urgency. Time and again the author's findings reveal a tangible distance between policy, law, operation, and outcome. Her data elucidate the ease with which staff - both academic and administrative - may act in ways which can delay, retard or even thwart policies and objectives designed to improve access and inclusion. Universities face increasing demands for high quality research, they must submit to intense scrutiny of their teaching, and they undergo detailed monitoring of administrative exactitudes ranging from admissions policies to health and safety arrangements. In these conditions, how can other pressing matters such as access for disabled students hope to command the proper attention they deserve?

FOREWORD

Another central problem has been the tokenistic role of the user in the formulation and implementation of policy (Oliver, 1990, 2009; Drake, 1999). During the late 1990s and early 2000s a phrase much used in this regard was ‘the need for empowerment’. Though the vocabulary may have changed, crucially this research demonstrates that disabled people remain absent from powerful positions through which the aims of genuine access to, and inclusion in, higher education might be advanced. Equally, beyond the meticulous and detailed academic study of policy and practice reported here, *Disabled students in Welsh higher education* also deals with thorny questions of definition. In the light of the findings, what is to be understood by concepts such as ‘change’, ‘disability’, ‘access’ and ‘inclusion’? Agreement in the meaning and force of such terms is needed if disabled people’s entry into, and experiences within, higher education are not to be vitiated.

Further, it follows that the ‘toughness’ of legislation governing questions of equality, access and inclusion is vitally important in ensuring policy realisation. While it may be true that the Equality Act, 2010 offers substantial improvements over the flimsy provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act of 2005, any measure is only as effective as the way it is implemented. From her research (completed prior to the full implementation of the 2010 Act) Dr. Beauchamp-Pryor enunciates two caveats. Any legislation is weakened where, first, practitioners are only partially aware of their duties and, second, of those who are well-informed, some have either ignored or failed to fulfil their obligations. No matter what policy may intend, outcomes depend as much on the informal realm of everyday exigencies as on the strict regimen of the law.

In sum then, this research is a most welcome contribution to the field. Grounded in personal experience and extensive empirical research, this is a diligent analysis which stands, at least in part, on the authentic voices of disabled students so that the reader may more fully apprehend the implications of continuing inequality. The book highlights different understandings of ‘inclusion’, explores the position of disabled people in higher education in Wales, considers the gap between legislation and implementation, provides an understanding of the barriers to access, realises the importance of the conceptualisation and pursuit of policy, and makes clear what is needed in future if disabled people are to enjoy those educational opportunities more readily available to other students at the HE level. As such, *Disabled students in Welsh higher education* deserves a wide national and international readership.

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The Open University
Swansea, 2012

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PREFACE

Disabled students are accessing higher education in increasing numbers, but their experiences do not necessarily reflect inclusion. This book is based on a research project which set out to identify what it means to be included and to identify those factors that result in equality and inclusion for disabled students, namely choice, control and consultation.

The impetus for the study stemmed from my educational experiences as a disabled person. It is, therefore, important to preface this volume with a short autobiographical note, which begins to explain the influence of my previous educational experiences and the way they shaped my outlook about the inclusion of disabled people in the education system and in society today.

I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s and the educational options for a child with a visual impairment were limited. Initially I went to a private school in Cardiff: I enjoyed being at school; I developed friendships; and I am unable to recall an occasion when I was treated differently to any other pupil. However, my experiences in education were about to drastically change when the school closed and I was enrolled at the local junior school. It was during this time that I started to realise what it meant to be different to other children: a difference which I believe was reinforced by the actions of teachers in the classroom. At that young age, I remember how the teachers drew attention to my inability to participate in the lessons (to read the books and to follow the blackboard): I felt excluded. I was unable to keep-up with my peers and my parents recognising the problems I experienced, arranged for me to receive additional tuition at home.

At the age of ten I went to Chorleywood College, a grammar school for blind and visually impaired girls in London, as a boarder. The school was the only one of its type in the United Kingdom where an above average level of education was offered to visually impaired girls. I disliked being away from home and whilst my parents visited as often as they were able to, I was deeply unhappy.

My elder sister, Christine, was already a pupil at Chorleywood and when I started she was in the sixth form and studying for her 'A' levels. Christine disliked being away from home too, but above all she wanted the opportunity to study and to do well. When choosing her 'A' level subjects, she was told that it was impossible for her to continue studying mathematics because she needed to be able to use a slide rule. My father, who was an engineer, designed and constructed a Braille slide rule for her and she was able to continue with her studies. She succeeded in her ambition and achieved high grades.

After 18 months, my parents decided that it would be better for me to live at home and to attend the local comprehensive school. I was placed into a remedial class and I suddenly went from receiving a high standard of education to none at all. I was later moved into a mainstream class and although I tried to do well, my abilities were hidden by dominant perceptions about disability as inability.

In the late 1990s, I decided to apply for a place at university. I was amazed at the level of provision I was being offered: books could be photocopied and

PREFACE

enlarged or recorded on to tape; computer software enabled scanning and reading of material; notetakers for lectures could be provided; and even transport to and from university could be arranged.

In 1998, I commenced my undergraduate studies at Swansea University and I was keen to make the most of every opportunity. Initially, however, the promised support did not materialise and in seeking help from my lecturers in the form of copies of overheads and back copies of notes, I found support proved variable. The differing response in policy, provision and practice, by individual lecturers and across departments, became evident and I began to recognise factors that impeded my inclusion. As a result of my experiences, I became intrigued to find out how other disabled students fared in higher education: How included did they feel and what were the factors that influenced their feelings?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many disabled researchers and academics have discussed the impact the social model of disability has had in transforming their lives. I too experienced this transformation when introduced to the social model and it was the realisation that it was the barriers resulting from attitudes, the design of the environment and organisational and institutional planning, that so strongly motivated my desire to carry out disability research. My sincere thanks go to those academics and researchers whose work has pioneered change and provided so much inspiration. However, it is to my undergraduate lecturer, Dr. Robert Drake, who introduced me to the social model, that I owe most gratitude. It was through his encouragement, support and inspiration that I felt such a yearning to challenge the inequality and exclusion experienced by so many disabled people.

Many people have contributed to this study, from key informants at a national level, to the staff at the case study university. I am grateful for their advice, views and opinions, which assisted in my understanding of many of the issues involved. I am, however, most obligated to the students who participated in the research project, whose openness and willingness to share their innermost thoughts and experiences with me led to such rich data. I hope, as they so deeply hoped, that the findings will bring about change and be positively responded to.

I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth Blakemore and Dr. Tracey Sagar for their advice and support in the research design, analysis and writing-up stages of my doctoral thesis. Their encouragement and enthusiasm proved motivating and was very much appreciated.

Professor Len Barton encouraged me to apply for a postdoctoral research fellowship and I was awarded an Economic and Social Research Council grant (number PTA-026-27-2172). The funding enabled further analysis of Welsh policy and statistical data, and supported the publication and presentation of my research findings. My sincere gratitude is extended to Professor Anne Borsay, for her support and guidance in her role as 'mentor'.

In preparing my manuscript, *Disabled students in Welsh higher education: A framework for equality and inclusion*, Professor Barton kindly provided valuable advice and feedback. I am grateful for his guidance and encouragement throughout the process. I would also like to thank Professor Roger Slee and his editorial board for including my monograph as part of the series *Studies in Inclusive Education*.

I must thank my family and friends who have offered support and encouragement. My gratitude is given most of all to my husband, Alan Pryor, who never doubted my ability to complete the project and to my mother, Margaret Beauchamp, who personally understood why the research was important and encouraged me to share its findings. Both have given up so much, whilst I have

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committed my time to pursuing my research. My final thoughts go to my father, John Beauchamp, and my sister, Christine Lane, who both died before I went to university and who would have been amazed that I not only managed to get into higher education, but that I coped and succeeded despite its many barriers.

PART ONE

PERCEPTIONS, PRIORITIES AND POWER

CHAPTER 1

THE CONTEXT

Equality, Rights and Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

‘I hope that things will change now, not for me, but for future students’
Paul

It was a desire to increase the experience of inclusion for disabled students in higher education that provided the impetus to write this book. The purpose of the research project, which was based on disability provision in Wales, was to identify those areas of policy and practice where change was needed, together with explanations about why change was needed: a change which was deeply wished for by Paul, a disabled student who participated in the case study research. The unfolding chapters aim to develop an understanding of why Paul, as with other students who participated in the study, believed different approaches were necessary to ensure that disabled students felt included in higher education. The study questioned what it meant to be included, what the barriers were to inclusion, and how these barriers could be overcome.

RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

Undertaking an evaluation of the priorities in disability policy and provision within Welsh higher education was important given: the lack of previous research examining what it means to be included in higher education; and the increased political power within Wales as a consequence of devolution.

Included, But Not Inclusion

Increasing numbers of disabled students are now accessing higher education, but prior to the 1990s few disabled students had the opportunity to study at a higher educational level. Disability policy and provision within higher education was almost non-existent and in a major review of discriminatory policy within the United Kingdom, Colin Barnes (1991) identified that the majority of higher education institutions were inaccessible and unwilling to support disabled students. During the 1990s the response of institutions significantly changed as a result of major legislative and policy development. The number of disabled students accessing higher education began to increase substantially from two per cent in 1994/95 reaching 8.63 per cent in 2011/12 (HESA, 2004, 2012). However, as

CHAPTER 1

evidenced by the case study data, increased numbers did not reflect a student experience of inclusion: the feeling of ‘belonging’ and of being ‘wanted’.

We know from the writings of disabled academics and activists (see for example, Barnes, 1991; Crow, 1992; French, 1994; Morris, 1996) that although disabled people are increasingly included within society’s structures, society in many ways is not perceived as inclusive:

We receive so many messages from the non-disabled world that we are not wanted, that we are considered less than human. For those with restricted mobility or sensory disabilities, the very physical environment tells us we don’t belong. It tells us that we aren’t wanted in the places that non-disabled people spend their lives – their homes, their schools and colleges, their workplaces, their leisure venues. (Morris, 1996, p. 26)

At the heart of inclusion lie serious issues concerning: citizenship and the extent rights and responsibilities are extended to *all* members of society; rights and the role they play in securing inclusion; and equality in the valuing of difference.

Citizenship, rights and equality. Citizenship is about ‘belonging’ and essentially defines ‘those who are, and who are not, members of a common society’ (Barbalet, 1988, p. 1). Thomas Marshall’s well known discussion of citizenship consisted of civil, political and social rights: civil rights ‘necessary for individual freedom’, political rights ‘to participate in the exercise of political power’ and social rights reflecting ‘the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society’ (1950, pp. 10-11). The failure to secure rights leads to disadvantaged groups becoming excluded and marginalised.

Educational rights play a fundamental role in securing inclusion, as it is through education that we learn the skills necessary to be able to fully participate in society. To deny educational rights, is to deny an individual’s potential and restrict their opportunities. Moreover, where dominant ideology remains unchallenged, it is instead reinforced through values held within the education system. Children are classified into ‘able’ and ‘less able’ groups, leading to the exclusion of some children and the inclusion of others. The impact of marginalisation within education will be returned to in chapter seven and reflected upon by the students who participated in the study.

Citizenship is not only linked to rights, but is also linked to obligations, which require individuals to be ‘capable of taking on [society’s] burdens as well as enjoying [society’s] benefits’ (Plant, 1990, p. 49). Citizenship has been about being ‘fit’ and ‘able’ to contribute to these obligations, and for those unable to contribute, a lower level of citizenship was afforded. Traditionally, support for disabled people has not been viewed in terms of citizenship and rights, but in terms of care and compensation. The lack of rights by disabled people, led to their dependency on welfare support, which reinforced beliefs that they were a burden on society (Thompson, 1998). These beliefs were difficult to challenge partly because

successive governments relied on the views of traditional charities in the representation of disabled people (Oliver, 1990, 2009; Barnes, 1991; Drake, 1992, 1999; Campbell & Oliver, 1996): views which focused on welfare provision in meeting individual need. Disabled people were excluded from the political process and their views overlooked: views, which focused on the importance of rights.

Rights secure equality, and without rights, the inequality experienced by disabled people persisted. Equality, according to John Baker:

Stands for a democratic society, not a bureaucratic one. And it stands for a society in which genuine differences of sex, religion, and culture are respected, not despised. These principles of equality need and reinforce each other. Inequalities of wealth restrict democracy and mutual respect. Inequalities of power sustain economic advantage and social prestige. Inequalities of status imply that the rich and powerful deserve their privileges. (1987, p. 149)

Arguably those groups with sufficient wealth and power are able to influence governmental, educational and judicial practices and in chapters two and three, the influence of those with power (politicians, policymakers, higher education providers, business and charities) will be considered in terms of whose views dominated the development of legislation and policy, and why.

Equality is about recognising and respecting individual difference. Individuals are entitled to respect and support in achieving their full potential and maximum fulfilment in life. In higher education, the historic failure to educate disabled people (Barnes, 1991; Hurst, 1993) meant that many disabled people lacked the fulfilment of an academic life and the rewards stemming from academic achievement. More recently, whilst disabled people have experienced increased opportunities to study at a higher educational level, the policy and provision implemented predominantly failed to recognise disability as an equality issue and instead focused on caring for and compensating disabled students. As a consequence, disabled students felt they did not 'belong', and these feelings will be explored in detail in part two which focuses on the case study research.

The importance of citizenship, rights and equality will be explored throughout the research, but underpinning these serious issues are theoretical accounts which explain the influence of power and the way power operates to include some and exclude others.

Power, oppression and empowerment. It is argued that the political, economic and social response towards disabled people has been influenced by those with power (Oliver, 2009; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Theories of power provide an explanation about the process of power and how those with the most power are able to dominate and shape values and interests within society. Antonio Gramsci's doctrine of 'hegemony', rests on the 'domination' by the 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Femia, 1988, p. 24). It is through this 'leadership' that 'hegemony' is exercised: