

# CHAPTER 1

## RESEARCHING THE PRACTICES AND PROCESSES OF POLICY MAKING

### INTRODUCTION

This book explores the relationship between space, place and identity and multiple processes of policy making in education. It's main purpose is to try and understand these processes in terms of the values and principles which work through policy making in relation to 'provision'. By 'provision' I am referring to the structures, places, assessment procedures, allocation of resources, curricula and ways of naming made in relation to disabled children and young people, and other learners at risk of exclusion in education systems. Possible alternative ways of understanding how policy processes create, or contribute to, exclusions in education are explored through a number of different lenses as a means of teasing out some of the contradictory or obscured mechanisms at work which produce particular constructions of difference and 'needs'. Legislation has been both slow and weak in counteracting exclusions and reducing discrimination; in fact, policies which are presented as being concerned with widening participation in some areas may strengthen forms of marginalisation in others. This book seeks to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which policies are made and interpreted and to explore some possible implications for social justice.

Although there is a focus on spatialization and policy making in relation to disability and learning difficulty in education, the ideas and arguments put forward are connected to other forms of exclusion and inclusion. The kinds of approaches used to examine policy making in education – theories of space and place borrowed from social and cultural geography, critical historical enquiry and discourse analysis – could also be applied in relation to other groups such as girls and women, or boys and men, in particular education or work settings and career structures. They could be applied to an exploration of policy making in relation to the experience of young asylum seekers in education systems. They can be connected to values and practices informing decisions about planning in towns or rural communities and local economies, as well as in terms of the role and location of different schools, public transport systems, the design of buildings and opportunities for communities to develop and flourish. These are inseparable from issues relating to inclusion and exclusion in education which are about local, national and global policy developments relating to social and economic change, as well as about the making of education policies. As Bill Morris (General Secretary of the Transport

and General Workers Union, UK) pointed out in commenting on the proposal to set up detention camps contained in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill in October 2002:

Let's get one thing clear: these centres are not for accommodation; they are for detention. Founded on the socially repugnant objective of separating refugees and their children from society ... they will be a constant reminder that, in 2002, this country legislated in order to discriminate ...

In perhaps the most graphic example of discrimination inherent in this policy, the children of asylum seekers will be barred from local schools and educated apart from the children of this country. In doing this, the Government is not only in clear breach of UN guidance on the rights of the child, it is also sending out a dreadful message about the value our society places on these children. (Morris, B., 2002)

The social, political and economic changes taking place internationally, therefore, and their ramifications at the macro and micro levels of social life in different parts of the world, have an impact on the kinds of issues we face in terms of overcoming barriers to inclusive education. These issues extend to the whole of society and cannot be confined to a narrow interpretation of inclusion as being concerned with disabled children and those described as having 'special educational needs'. This is not to argue that the processes of stereotyping and discrimination take the same form or are experienced in uniform ways across all marginalised groups.

At this point, I am already stumbling over the language of 'marginalization' and 'marginalized groups'. Marginalization only has meaning in particular social, temporal and spatial locations. There is a real danger in identifying groups as excluded based on the familiar paradigms of ethnicity, gender, class or disability, and of actually contributing to the processes of exclusion by positioning some groups as *naturally* the subject of marginalization. In later chapters we shall examine some of these issues in relation to language and the creation of identities.

## INCLUSION: PRINCIPLES, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

When I set out to write this book, my original purpose was to examine policy making relating to inclusion and exclusion in education. I was interested in how policies are interpreted and work their way through to changes in the educational and social lives of children and communities, especially in a historical period in which 'inclusion' has become an everyday discourse of governance. At the same time the notion of inclusion can be interpreted in ways which challenge exclusionary and unjust values and practices.

In the context of this book, my interpretation of inclusion refers to a set of principles, values and practices which involve the social transformation of education systems and communities. It does not refer to a fixed state or set of criteria to be used as a blue-print, but seeks to challenge deficit thinking and practice which are 'still deeply ingrained' and too often lead 'many to believe that some pupils have to be dealt with in a separate way' (Ainscow, 1999, p. 8). In the following chapters,

I will try to explore ways in which spatialized and disabling discursive practices take place through the technical and bureaucratic procedures of categorization, labelling and placing and how these processes and procedures may be absorbed and absolved within official versions of inclusion itself. Roger Slee raises disturbing questions which challenge dominant interpretations of the notion and practice of inclusion in which:

... discursive practices form an alliance that pursues an assimilationist agenda described in a language of 'inclusion'. In other words, residual professional interests of those working in the field of special education have necessitated resilience over changing political imperatives. Predominantly unchanged practices are described in new terms. Inclusion is practised, in traditional ways, by those who presided over exclusion. The aim is to have 'othered' children fit the schools we provide with a minimum of fuss and without disrupting the institutional equilibrium. This is assimilation. Inclusive education ought to suggest a process of cultural reconstruction. (Slee, 1999, p. 127)

This cultural reconstruction has to be situated within a critical appraisal of the discourses and values articulated through the physical environment and the use of space as well as of the discourses used in relation to students, curricula, schools and communities.

What is needed is a close examination of the multiple levels and conduits through which exclusions take place. Inclusion, then, is concerned with cultural change in all areas of social, personal and political life (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000a; Booth, 2000; Corbett, 2001; Potts, 2003a). In this study inclusion is seen as a process or set of processes involving a re-evaluation of the premises on which education systems are based. As Barton explains:

Inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles, will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of *all* children and young people and the removal of *all* forms of exclusionary practice. (Barton, 1998, pp. 84–5)

A friend recently complained to me that 'the disability movement has high-jacked the inclusion agenda, and other groups and issues relating to race, gender, sexuality and class are being pushed aside in the debate'. I would argue that, on the contrary, the rights of disabled children to attend their local school have been consistently denied and ignored in debates about education and inclusion until very recently, but this comment does emphasise the dangers of compartmentalizing groups and their perceived interests. It is a contradiction to see the struggle for inclusion as taking place – and being lost or won – in relation to the discrimination, or levels of participation, experienced by particular groups. (This is illustrated by the hypothetical example of a disabled person gaining physical access to a local school or college, only to find themselves discriminated against because of practices

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