

Inclusive Education in England: present reality or Utopian dream?

Inclusion has become one of the “buzzwords” of our time. However, there is little consensus as to its meaning when applied to the field of education. The lecture given to the German Behinderten-Sportverband Nordrhein-Westfalen was requested by their chairman Dieter Keuther, as one of a series of lectures attended by their instructors who came to London to support the German Paralympic team. After elucidating the many facets of inclusion and looking at its historical development the lecture aimed to assess which aspects had been positively implemented in English schools. Whilst success had been evident in the case of children with learning or physical disabilities total inclusion was often deemed to be inappropriate for children whose disabilities were so severe that the Utopian dream could become a nightmare if their needs were not adequately met in a mainstream school. Keys to the success of inclusive policy include well trained teachers and teaching assistants, small classes, adequate financial resources and an understanding of the special needs of each child along with flexibility and tolerance. The conclusion reached was that inclusion is desirable and is a present reality in a number of schools in England but it should not leave parents without the right to choose a special school setting for their child if they consider it to be the best option. Inclusion has worked well in settings where communication between school staff and parents is valued and parents’ views are taken into consideration. Inclusion, like Rome, was not built in a day. It is an ongoing process which requires excellent planning and total commitment on the part of all concerned.