
What Have Rights Got to Do With it? The Continued Erosion of Inclusive Education in UK Policy

Jill Pluquailec*¹ and Gill O’connor¹

¹Sheffield Hallam University – Royaume-Uni

Résumé

In this paper we carry out a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the UK Government’s 2022 Green Paper ‘Right Support, Right Place, Right Time’, known as ‘the SEND Review’ (Department for Education (DfE), 2022f). Our analysis is informed both by Hyatt’s (2013) Critical Higher Education Policy Discourse Analysis (CHEPDA) framework and by our cognizance of how the term ‘special educational needs’ is constructed in the context of the British state’s active and passive enactment of policies that continue to diminish the quality of disabled people’s lives. Our analysis focuses principally on deconstruction of the policy document with close attention to modes of legitimation, interdiscursivity, intertextuality, pre-supposition/implication, and lexico-grammatical construction. In our analysis, we examine how apparently subtle shifts in language construction can enable principles of neoliberalism to become naturalised and embedded. England’s position as ‘the social laboratory of neoliberal education’ (Ball, 2016, p.1047), a place where disabled people’s human rights have been breached by the state, points to the SEND Review as a key site for interrogation of neoliberal educational ideology. We present three main areas of interest: the (mis)use of and omission of ‘need’, the ubiquitous and ambiguous use of ‘we’, and the presentation of ‘newness’ in the SEND Review.

We end this paper imagining an alternative future, a radical reconceptualisation of policy and practice that is the antithesis of the SEND Review before us. We find hope in the potential that Disability Studies in Education offers to the landscape for disabled young people in the UK and other deeply marketised education systems. We recognise Connor and Gabel’s (2013) admission that policy is perhaps DSE’s biggest challenge and we affirm that this paper has drawn on the ethics and practice of DSE in its Critical Discourse Analysis to interrogate and highlight the increasing marginalisation of disabled children’s education in the SEND Review. We call on readers of education policy documents and public communications to be alert to the kinds of tactics used in discourse to help achieve this marginalisation. We call on academics, practitioners and communities alike to serve as ‘demanding social critics and creative inventors of new ways of living and learning together in diverse communities’ (Danforth & Gabel, 2008, p.1), to exceed and subvert the current educational regime whether by way of scholarly critique of policy and submissions to public consultations, to challenge the current education regime and move towards a genuinely inclusive system.

*Intervenant