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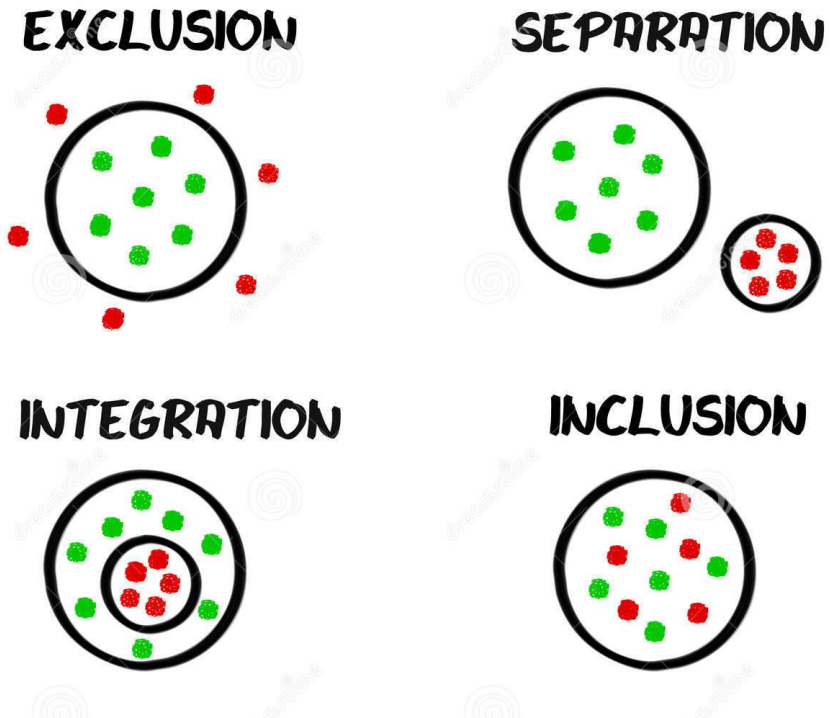
Supporting inclusive practice for children with special educational needs

Dr. Damian E M Milton



A bit about me

- I’m autistic (diagnosed 2009) – as is my son (diagnosed 2005).
- A background in Social Science (initially Sociology).
- Lecturer in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Tizard Centre, University of Kent.
- Visiting Lecturer, UCL and LSBU.
- Chair of PARC and Director at NAT.

- “Some of us aren’t meant to belong. Some of us have to turn the world upside down and shake the hell out of it until we make our own place in it.” (Lowell, 1999).

- My own school experiences and those of children today.

School experiences: beneficial aspects

- Something tangible (not always vocational).
- Intrinsic worth and logic of activity (without which little was possible).
- The teacher / passion for subject / willingness to engage.
- Positive encouragement.
- These were rarely fulfilled though.
- P.E. – physical self-awareness and confidence.
- Facilities for self-learning / study.
- Quiet spaces / ‘social’ clubs within school. Sharing of interests.
- Learning about social inequalities.

School experiences: barriers to belonging and progression

- Bullying.
- Attitude of teachers – control and discipline – push rather than engage.
- Lack of respect – lack of engagement – lack of understanding.
- Imposition of value system of teacher. One-way rather than mutual process.
- Physical environment – sensory overload – school and class sizes / lunch halls.
- Constrained curriculum – focus / content of curriculum (e.g. English Literature).

What do people mean by inclusion?

- “Being included in a group or structure.”
- Placement? Often neither inclusive or even ‘integration’.
- What helps a child with special educational needs feel ‘included’ in something?

Normalisation?

- “Another way to decide what to teach a child with autism is to understand typical child development. We should ask what key developmental skills the child has already developed, and what they need to learn next. The statutory curriculum in the countries of the UK also tells us what children should learn. Then there are pivotal behaviours that would help further development: teaching communication, social skills, daily living or academic skills that can support longer-term independence and choices.” (Prof. Richard Hastings, 2013: http://theconversation.com/behavioural-method-is-not-an-attempt-to-cure-autism-19782).

Autism and support strategies

- “I had virtually no socially-shared nor consciously, intentionally expressed, personhood beyond this performance of a non-autistic ‘normality’ with which I had neither comprehension, connection, nor identification. This disconnected constructed facade was accepted by the world around me when my true and connected self was not. Each spoonful of its acceptance was a shovel full of dirt on the coffin in which my real self was being buried alive...” (Williams, *Autism: an inside-out approach,* 1996: 243).

Mutual incomprehension

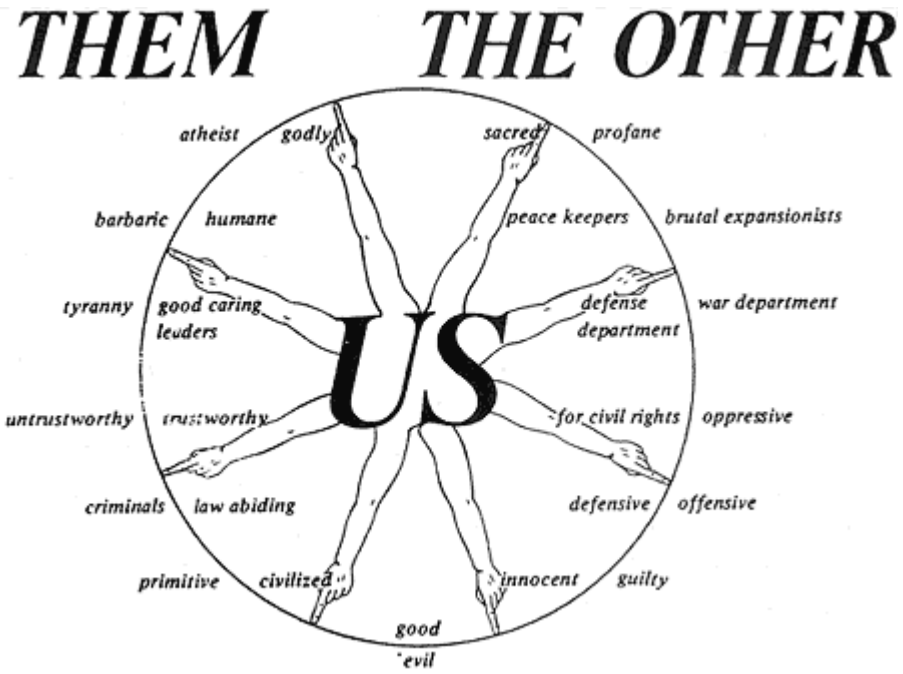
- “95% of people don’t understand me”.
- “Friends are overwhelming”.
- “Adults never leave me alone”.
- “Adults don’t stop bullying me”.
- Quotes taken from Jones et al. (2012).

The ‘double empathy problem’

- A case of mutual incomprehension?
- Breakdown in interaction between autistic and non-autistic people as not solely located in the mind of the autistic person.
- Theory of autistic mind can often leave a great deal to be desired.
- Differing dispositions and experiences.
- Humility and respect of diversity.

Social stigma

- The denigration of difference.
- ‘In’ and ‘out’ groups, stigma and discrimination.



Study of Asperger United Magazine

- Four broad main themes (encompassing various sub-themes) were identified:
- Meeting personal needs
- Living with the consequences of an ‘othered’ identity
- Connection and recognition
- Relationships and advocacy

- ‘When I am in an environment I feel comfortable in, with people who are kind and tolerant, and doing things I enjoy, then I am as happy as the next person. It is when people tell me I should think, speak or behave differently that I start to feel different, upset, isolated and worthless. So surely the problem is a lack of fit with the environment rather than something inside my brain that needs to be fixed?’ (Victoria, ‘Are You Taking Something for It?’, issue 76, 12).

Improving practice

- Valuing and recognising strengths and interests – not to patronise, control, or normalise.
- No ‘one-size-fits-all’ – differentiation and standardisation.
- Adult mentors and role models.
- Peer education and awareness – a difficult and delicate issue.

SPELL framework: Very brief summary

	Structure	Positive approaches and expectations	Empathy	Low arousal	Links
What ?	-Reducing anxiety through increased predictability	-Play to strengths -Assume 'can do' - but with help	Mutual understanding of perspective of others	-Recognise stress caused by sensory differences -Confrontation	-Promote consistency -Promote involvement
Underlying Difficulties ?	-Organising, sequencing and planning – self monitoring	-Uneven skill development -Low or imposed expectations	-Mutual understanding / misunderstanding of other minds -Judgement of social situations -Literal interpretation	-Sensory processing -Stress -High anxiety	-Uneven processing of information - Detail v bigger picture -Response to change
Some examples	-Written or pictorial timetables/ instructions/ Diaries -Clear sequencing	-Positive /direct clear language -Use strengths and interests as motivators and to build confidence	-Reflection – Discussion -Pictorial aids -'Social stories' -Keep promises	-Audit sensory environment -Reduce noise/ clutter -Reduce confrontation	-Inclusive meetings - Access to 'mainstream' facilities - Consistent

Supportive ethos

- “We need to see the world from the autistic perspective and apply approaches based on a mutuality of understanding that are rational and ethical – which respect the right of the individual to be different – yet recognises and deals with distress and offers practical help. We should encourage and motivate the person to develop strengths rather than focus on 'deficits'. This will mean offering opportunity for development while supporting emotional stability.” (Mills, 2013).

Conclusion

- Inclusion is not physical placement, but a feeling of belonging within a community of practice.
- Easier said than done, but not impossible.

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