Raising Awareness Isn’t Enough: A Response To Dr Jones’ Open Dialogue

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From reading Dr Jones’ research on the inclusion of disabled children into inclusive classrooms, I would say the paper suggests that a lot of thought has been put into including disabled pupils through policies, voice of opinion, and overall attitude towards inclusion in educational settings. However, I would also say that even though there has been a lot of thought put into it, inclusion, or inclusive classrooms, are not always happening in education.

In the beginning of this paper, it has been made clear that the term ‘disability’ is not yet clear in such aspects. This is shown to me in one specific part of the article as Dr Jones has pointed out that the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has quite a broad definition and has concluded/implied from survey respondents that everyone, at some point in their life, will experience having a disability. I would disagree to some degree with this as some people can become disabled at any point in their life but there is a major difference between some who become paralysed from the waist down and those who would have a mental illness such as anxiety or depression that would be affected for longer than 12 months and be affected by it in day-to-day activities. However, I do understand that some mental illnesses such as schizophrenia would be considered a disability. I also think that the DWP’s broad definition would have contradicting perspectives as some would say it is good to have this definition in place in relation to classrooms as there would be adaptations made to support pupils who may or may not have a diagnosis of a disability. However, not everyone has a disability and I think with this, everyone would most likely still be treated the same.

I think this would link into person centred views as Dr Jones has stated at another point when discussing affirmative models of disability that the principle of said models is captured in the phrase “nothing about us without us.” From what I understand, affirmative
models take human rights into consideration when focusing on challenging the views of non-disabled people. Taking this into account when talking about education, every child has the right to education and access to information. I think if disabled pupils are treated the same way as every other child would and still find difficulty with learning and accessing information, schools are not fulfilling that right to education. From personal experience, schools seem to perceive every pupil as the same until it has been made very clear that certain individuals have a disability. Support would then be put in place to support the disability but even then, I would say disabled pupils are still treated the same as other disabled pupils, so they are not being supported as the single individual they are, being affected by their own disability. Schools are not taking into consideration person centred views and changing the support to suit the individual instead of the disability.

The quote I mentioned previously “nothing about us without us”, I think, suggests that the voice of disabled individuals in education should be that of a disabled individual, however, it has been mentioned by Dr Jones that there was no Minister of State for Disabled People at the time of writing the article and even when we had ones previously, they had not had a disability. I would say this, therefore, shows that disabled people are not fully represented in education, which would then cause further difficulties in creating the right environment and giving the correct support to disabled pupils as there is no voice from a disabled person to say what difficulties a disabled person may experience. I think most opinions from non-disabled people may be complete assumptions and would definitely not help any disabled person in getting an education.

Moving on to my next point, Dr Jones had also stated that all children have the right to an inclusive education, like mentioned above. Discrimination and exclusion from other pupils may make it extremely difficult for disabled individuals to get the same education as everyone else. Shown research given within this section of the article shows that non-disabled
pupils have very little acceptance of those with a disability. It was also theorised within psychological research that this response was due to the labelling of disabled pupils. However, negative responses towards disabled individuals do not only apply to non-disabled pupils but also applies to the teachers, shown through Hehir et al. (2016, cited in Jones, this issue). This may not be as directly insulting to disabled pupils but can still have the same exclusive impact as name-calling from peers would. Teachers would segregate pupils into two groups, disabled and non-disabled, as they did not feel they could teach disabled pupils (Hehir et al., 2016, cited in Jones, this issue). I would agree with this point as from personal experiences, I have been discriminated against for having a disability and segregated from other pupils in my class for being different and also through the assumption that I would not be able to handle the socialising aspect in the classroom. It was also mentioned that some teachers feel uncomfortable having disabled students in their classes even though there is promotion for inclusion. To me, this is wrong as teachers are choosing to treat disabled children differently by excluding them due to discomfort, even though, pupils should be included and treated as if no pupil is the same. Just some have more difficulties than others. While needing more support, they are still needing to be giving the same education and treated no different to anyone else. Although, negative attitudes have been shown within education from both students and teachers, there are many positive responses to the labelling of disabled pupils such as the accessibility to more support and an increased understanding of disabilities within education. Some teachers would even sometimes go out of their own way to procure resources to support their disabled students which can have a positive impact.

However, I would say, although it has been suggested that there may be an increased understanding of disabilities, many teachers still do not know how to approach the subject of supporting pupils with a disability. As stated, when referencing Hansen et al. (2023, cited in Jones, this issue), teachers have difficulty discussing the subject of the pupils with disabilities
with their family due to the worry of saying something insulting. I would agree that teachers have difficulty discussing with the parents of those with disabilities as my own teachers avoided the topic with my parents. I would also say that teachers are clearly not confident enough to teach students with disabilities and discuss their support needs in full detail with the family of those pupils. I believe teachers need to learn more about how to approach the subject and be able to gain confidence in discussing it to properly ensure that pupils are able to get the correct support.

Through carrying out my own research into what others have found on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, I have found two other articles that support the view of Dr Jones on the need of inclusion and the positive impact of inclusion on disabled pupils. Arthur-Kelly et al. (2008) found that disabled students had been able to better develop their communication skills within inclusive classrooms when interacting with other students compared to being in special classrooms. I would say this supports the idea of disallowing segregation in classrooms as it helps to support disabled pupils with learning better and develop on skills they may be struggling with. Without segregation, non-disabled pupils may be more likely to interact with disabled pupils which would also allow both to receive the same education that is needed. Even if disabled pupils may need a bit more support in some areas. To support this, Koller et al. (2017) had also done an analysis of research and found that Frazee (2003, cited in Koller et al, 2017) had stated that disabled pupils do value the relationships they have with peers, however, to support a point previously made by Dr Jones, disabled students still experience low levels of social interaction due to being at risk of bullying and social exclusion. Due to this, I think more support needs to be put in place to support social inclusion between disabled pupils and non-disabled pupils.

Overall, to conclude my response to the paper written by Dr Jones, I think the definition of a disability needs to be made even more clear to ensure that the right pupils get
the right support to be able to have an education in the classroom instead of basic adaptations made under the assumption that it will automatically support all pupils with or without a diagnosis. Adaptations need to be made with the individuals with disabilities taken into consideration. This then brings me to my second point in which schools do not support person centred views to support each pupil individually. Instead they put support in place, again, under the assumption that the support will automatically be the right help for the pupil. I believe that it needs to be made clear that each disabled pupil is different and would, therefore, need different support to suit them. As mentioned previously, having a disabled representative voicing the needs of disabled pupils would be better for creating the correct environment for disabled pupils to learn and getting them the right support. It would also be good for explaining that there may need to be different supports in place even for individuals with the same condition as some pupils will have the same condition but not the same difficulties. It also may seem through all points made that I am contradicting myself by saying we should be separating non-disabled pupils and disabled pupils as well as each disabled pupil individually, but not supporting the idea of segregation, however, I believe individual support should be separated, not the individual from others. Pupils should still be able to interact socially with those in classes that do not have the same difficulties. Teachers segregating pupils are not allowing this inclusion and should be put a stop to. Disabled pupils should still be treated the same as everyone else even with the extra support. Teachers should also not feel any discomfort because even disabled pupils are human like non-disabled pupils and should not be made to feel anything other than normal. Teachers should also not be uncomfortable discussing the disability with family members, especially if they feel discussing support would be helpful as parents know their child better than teachers. Finally, from other research studies, it has been made clear that social inclusion is helpful in making disabled pupils feel normal, better develop anything they struggle with, and be able to gain
the same education as everyone else. Overall, I believe the inclusion of disabled pupils in inclusive classrooms needs to be looked at more and teachers should be getting adequate training to be able to include disabled pupils, support them better, and gain more of an understanding to be able to support them without feeling uncomfortable to do so.

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References
