

## Research Note

# The Development Process of the Inclusive Education Movement with Non-disabled Allies: Focusing on Disability Equality Training in England

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*This study clarifies the development process of inclusive education in England (London) with Disability Equality Training (DET) for non-disabled teachers and pupils. It focuses on the practices of graduates of special schools who are members of the Integration Alliance (IA), an organization of disabled people.*

*The shift in education policy from segregation to integration in the 1970s and 1980s influenced the development of the inclusion movement among people with disabilities and their parents, some of whom joined the IA and have been campaigning together since the 1990s to end the segregation of children with disabilities.*

*IA members provided DET to non-disabled teachers and pupils in mainstream schools to change their attitudes and practices towards inclusion. The training was delivered during Disability History Month or across the curriculum in each subject area. The training covered the history of discrimination, the concept of the ‘social model’ of disability, and the role of ‘allies’. Through DET, non-disabled teachers and pupils were encouraged to raise awareness of issues of exclusion and to work together for inclusion.*

*It is also found that inclusive education movements with non-disabled allies have been developed since the 1990s. Under the Labour government, the campaign grew and education policy shifted towards inclusive education. However, the current situation has deteriorated, and the IA’s successor is still practicing DET in mainstream schools, as inclusive education requires the cooperation of non-disabled allies and the reform of mainstream schools.*

*This paper concludes that raising non-disabled allies through DET and campaigning together was important in achieving inclusive education. It shows, in comparison to previous research, that DET has played an important role in the process of making allies for inclusive education.*

**Keywords:** inclusive education / Disability Equality Training / ally / mainstream school / disabled people’s organization

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## Introduction

Inclusive education for children with disabilities has become a global issue since the 1990s. In 1993, Rule 6 (Education) of the United Nations (UN) Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities stated the principle of equal education opportunities for children, youth, and adults with disabilities in integrated settings (UN, 1993). The UNESCO Salamanca Statement also supported the principle of inclusion<sup>1</sup> by recognizing the need to work towards 'schools for all' (UNESCO, Ministry of Education and Sciences Spain, 1994). In addition, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), adopted in 2006 and coming into force in 2008, states in Article 24 (Education) that 'States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education' and 'States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning' (UN, 2008).

When considering inclusive education, it is important to recognize the barriers that people with disabilities face in mainstream schools. In disability studies on education, Barnes points out that the mainstream education system was not constructed for disabled people with 'special educational needs (SEN)'. He reveals the environmental, attitudinal, and educational barriers which prevent disabled students from integrating into the mainstream (Barnes, 1991). One of the barriers is the negative attitude of teachers towards inclusive education. Avramidis and Norwich note that many educators have serious reservations about the widespread placement of pupils with SEN in mainstream schools. They state that without a plan for teacher training in the educational needs of children with SEN, attempts to include these children in mainstream education are difficult, so more information should be gathered about the training that teachers have had in implementing inclusion (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). These studies show that there is a need to change the attitudes of people in mainstream schools through training.

What kind of training on disability has been provided in schools? Disability Awareness Training (DAT) has often been conducted in schools. This training, which includes exercises with wheelchairs and eye masks, is sometimes carried out without people with disabilities present. French and Carr both state that DAT and simulation exercises allow students to understand the difficulties faced by people with disabilities from a medical perspective, while obscuring issues such as social exclusion and the limited participation of people with disabilities (French, 1992; Carr et al., 2012). Furthermore, DAT places non-disabled participants in a neutral position, with no direct relationship to the disability issues (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, the disability movement in England has been developing Disability Equality Training (DET) since the 1980s to promote an understanding of disability issues from the perspective of the social model of disability (Gillespie-Sells and Campbell, 1991). The features of DET are (1) the social model of disability, (2) disabled people leading the training, (3) examining the barriers faced by disabled people in society, (4) questioning stereotypes about disabled people, and (5) a commitment to change (Carr et al., 2012). This means that DET is designed to support non-disabled people in understanding disability issues from the perspective of people with disabilities and to change their own practices. Previous research found that DET has been implemented in more than 30 countries as of 2019 (Higashida et al., 2020). In the Asian region, DET has been conducted as part of professional development for physiotherapists and teachers among others, as well as serving as communi-

ty empowerment (Carr et al., 2012). Higashida finds that most participants of DET adopted the social model perspective during the sessions, and the majority attempted to change their social environment after the sessions (Higashida et al., 2020).

The links between DET and the disability inclusive education movement are particularly strong in England. Graduates of special schools developed and implemented DET in mainstream schools. Rieser notes that disability equality trainers got mainstream schools to identify the barriers which prevent inclusion through DET and developed their practice to eradicate barriers (Rieser, 2001). He argues that every school needs this training to address the real issue of ending discrimination against disabled people in education and to create more inclusive schools and communities (ibid.).

However, there is still research to be done on why DET was introduced into mainstream schools by people with disabilities in England, what was expected for non-disabled teachers and pupils in DET, and what kind of changes have taken place in the inclusive education movement. It is necessary to examine how DET has been used in the process of achieving inclusive education and to identify its potential.

This study focuses on the activities of members of the Integration Alliance (IA), a London-based disabled people's organization campaigning for inclusive education, and clarifies how inclusive education has developed through DET for non-disabled teachers and pupils<sup>2</sup>. The IA offered DET to non-disabled teachers and pupils in mainstream schools in order for them to become 'allies'. In 1996, the IA changed its name to the Alliance for Inclusive Education (ALLFIE).

## Definition of allies

The key word in this study is 'ally'. The term 'allies' refers to individuals who engage in social change efforts in coalition with social groups to which they do not belong. Allies may have more social power, status, or privilege than the group with whom they are allied; even as such, they may be able to eliminate their internal biases and stereotypes and raise awareness of different actions (Goldberg, 2016: p.76). Since the 1990s, the term 'ally' has been used within DET and the inclusive education movement in England.

## Research Questions and Methods

This study presents the following research questions.

- (1) How did the change in education policy for children with disabilities from the 1970s to the 1980s influence the inclusion movement of people with disabilities and their parents? Why did people with disabilities develop DET for non-disabled teachers and pupils? The focus is on education policy and inclusion movements in inner London.
- (2) What kind of DET have people with disabilities provided toward developing non-disabled allies at mainstream schools from the 1990s? What changes were expected for non-disabled teachers and pupils in the training? The focus is on DET content provided by the IA.
- (3) How have inclusive education movements developed with non-disabled allies in the 1990s? The focus is on changes in inclusive education movements and policies.

To answer the above questions, I analyze the following materials.

- (1) Documents on education policy for children with disabilities in England and the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA).
- (2) Publications and oral history data of IA participants.
- (3) Interview data from former leaders of IA/ALLFIE<sup>3</sup>. Table 1 gives an overview of the interviews.

Table 1. Overview of the interviews

Names	Interviewee characteristics and interview dates and places
Micheline Mason	Special school survivor (born in 1950), disabled parent, and founder of the IA. Interview was conducted in London (at her home) on 29 <sup>th</sup> May 2019 and 4 <sup>th</sup> September 2023.
Tara Flood	Special school survivor (born in 1966), former Paralympian, and director of ALLFIE after Mason. Interview was conducted in London (ALLFIE office) on 2 <sup>nd</sup> October 2017 and 16 <sup>th</sup> February 2018.

## 1. The early inclusive education movement: from the 1980s on

This section describes the changes in education policy for children with disabilities and the development of the movement in the 1970s and 1980s.

### 1-1. Changes in education policy and movements in London

In England, the 1970 Education Act made local education authorities responsible for all children, including the severely disabled. The London Authorities provided a range of special schools, classes and services and further education arrangements probably wider-ranging than anywhere else in the country (Fish and ILEA, 1985: p.12).

This situation changed at the beginning of the 1980s. The Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (Warnock Report) and the 1981 Education Act introduced the concept of ‘SEN’ and declared that children with these needs should be integrated into mainstream schools. The ILEA instituted new procedures in line with the new Act and published “Educational Opportunities for All? (The Fish Report)” in 1985. The Fish Report argued for structural change to develop more integration, an end to discrimination, changing attitudes, arrangements and approaches in schools, and the involvement of individuals and their families (ibid.: p.5).

These reforms stimulated a movement among disabled people and their parents. Paige-Smith describes the rise since the 1981 Education Act of parents’ groups lobbying to get their children into mainstream schools (Paige-Smith, 2001). In inner London, parents of children with learning difficulties formed a group called the Parents Campaign for Integrated Education (PI) in 1983. While providing support and advice for parents, the group focused on campaigning for integrated education. Additionally, there was also a growing disability movement in London. In 1985, a conference was held by a disabled people’s organization called Local Authorities and Disability Action for Equality. The conference concluded that

disabled people must talk about and demand education in order to achieve integrated education (London Boroughs Disability Resource Team, 1986: p.3, p.17). Thus, the movements of people with disabilities and their parents developed with the changes of education policy in the 1980s. However, the disability movement and the parents' movement developed separately, with no links.

In addition, the Conservative government also decided to abolish the ILEA through the 1988 Education Reform Act for political reasons. Participants in the movements thus faced difficulties. Hence, Micheline Mason, a survivor of a special school, started trying to bring people with disabilities and their parents together.

### **1-2. The growth of the movement: focus on the birth of the Integration Alliance**

The next section examines the growth of the inclusion movement, focusing on the activities of Micheline Mason.

Mason was born with a physical disability in Surrey in 1950. As a child she underwent long-term hospitalization and was not enrolled in compulsory schooling during the primary school stage. When she was 14, she first attended a boarding school for girls in Hampshire and experienced special education. She said that she was unaware of the problem of segregated education when she attended a special school but became aware of it when she entered a mainstream art college. When she attended the college, she realized that she had been 'kept away for 17 years from ordinary life' because she had 'never been in the mainstream' (interview with Mason (29<sup>th</sup> May 2019)).

It was in 1987 that she began to participate in PI. In 1984, she gave birth to a daughter who shared her physical disability. The reason she joined PI was to 'determine that [her daughter] would not follow the same separate path as me' and to look for support to get her into mainstream school (ibid.). However, encounters with the parents of PI allowed her not only to send her daughter to a mainstream school but also to meet allies with a passion 'to change the world' concerning disabled people (ALLFIE, 2012: p.48). She began to realize through her encounters with 'allies' that some non-disabled people wanted to change education concerning disabled people. Thus, she decided to bring together disabled people harmed by segregation and their parents, and campaign for inclusive education with both groups (ibid.).

Mason and other PI parents held a conference in London in September 1989 called 'Integration Now!'. The conference was attended by disabled adults, parents of disabled children, professionals, and allies in favor of ending segregated education for all children (around 80 people in total), who shared their experiences and issues from different positions (Rieser, 2001: p.134). The conference was also the starting point of the IA, an organization of people with disabilities and their allies.

The IA was established in November 1990 as a 'disabled people's organization' with a majority of people with disabilities and a representative director. The mission of the IA was to end 'forced segregation' from school age through to adult education and to provide the necessary support and training opportunities for teachers and students to achieve its goals (Mason, 1992: p.229). It was thought that reform of mainstream schools was necessary to end segregation for people with disabilities. Therefore, the members of IA worked on DET for teachers and pupils in mainstream schools.

## 2. Disability Equality Training towards inclusive education

What kind of training has the IA provided in mainstream schools? This section focuses on the detailed content of DET.

### 2-1. Disability Equality Training to recognize the issues of exclusion

In 1990, Micheline Mason and Richard Rieser (members of IA) published a textbook entitled *Disability Equality in the Classroom*. This textbook was aimed at upper primary (grade 4) and above and was used within the curriculum of various subject areas (history, social studies, and science). Its aim was to open the minds of both teachers and pupils to promote a better understanding of disability issues and to change their attitudes and practices. The chapter titles were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Textbook chapter titles

Chapter	Title
1	Politics of Disability
2	Things You Need To Know
3	Good Practices
4	Work That Can Be Done In Class

Source: Rieser and Mason. *Disability Equality in the Classroom: A Human Rights Issue*. ILEA. 1990: pp.3-5

Chapter 1 (Politics of Disability) presented the history of discrimination against people with disabilities and the history of the disability movement. These contents were brought to the beginning to make teachers and pupils aware of the ‘exclusion’ of children with disabilities in mainstream schools and society in order to make changes towards inclusion. According to Mason, ‘to be an ally, you need to understand there’s an oppression’ (interview with Mason (29<sup>th</sup> May 2019)).

Chapter 1 also aimed to support staff and pupils in changing their framework of thinking and behavior about disability from the ‘medical model’ to the ‘social model’. The medical model of disability aimed to reduce individual impairment, and was also inseparable from the professional domination and segregation of people with disabilities. Therefore, it was necessary to reconfigure the thinking framework created by the medical model and to replace it with the social model, the view that disability issues arise in a society that excludes impaired people. Mason describes DET as ‘the process by which we all “unlearn” our thinking habits learnt from the medical model, replacing them with fresh thinking derived from the social model’ (Rieser and Mason, 1990: p.14).

### 2-2. The role of non-disabled allies

Chapter 2 (Things You Need To Know) included a section on ‘How to be an Ally – The Role of Non-Disabled People’ which described the involvement of non-disabled allies. This section described the perception that (1) many non-disabled people did not know how

to deal with people with disabilities because they did not have the opportunity to communicate with them. (2) As a result, they left the issue of people with disabilities to the experts, which has historically led to segregated education for these children. However, (3) people with disabilities state that they do not need non-disabled people ‘to be experts’ or ‘managers of their lives’, but ‘to be friends, enablers, and receivers of their gifts’ (ibid.: p.78). According to Mason, ‘above all, we need you (non-disabled people) to refuse to accept any “segregation” of one group of humans from another as anything else but an unacceptable loss for all concerned’ (ibid.). Non-disabled people were expected to work to change the situation as allies.

Chapters 3 and 4 presented good practice and materials in mainstream schools and showed that such behavior can start in schools and classrooms. The appendix also included examples of how disability issues could be included in the national curriculum and some examples of worksheets that could be used with different age groups in the classroom.

### **2-3. Impact of training**

This textbook was distributed to all London schools, and teachers were expected to use it to include disability issues in the curriculum. Mason recalled that ‘we also did a lot of training in school, trying to explain how you do inclusive education, how it works, what you need to learn about removing the barriers’ (interview with Mason (4<sup>th</sup> September 2023)).

However, changing attitudes and behaviors was not easy. Mason said that ‘it took a long time’ for education officials to ‘understand that special school was part of discrimination’ (interview with Mason (29<sup>th</sup> May 2019)), because ‘they thought it was special and a good thing’ (ibid.). She thinks that ‘it’s still the hardest battle, really, because it’s such a fundamental change of attitude’ (ibid.).

However, as the IA provided DET for non-disabled people to reflect on their attitudes, ‘gradually professionals, teachers and all kinds of people that wanted to see that change happening or were making it happen joined it’ (ALLFIE 2012: p.50).

## **3. Inclusive education movements and policy changes: from the 1990s on**

This section looks at changes in inclusion movements and policies since the 1990s.

### **3-1. The growth of movements with allies**

The Alliance’s journey towards inclusion has not only involved developing training and challenging the media, but also taking a role in campaigning for inclusion (Rieser, 2001: p.143). In 1992, the IA published a national policy plan, ‘The Inclusive Education System’, which stated: ‘Disabled people, people with learning difficulties and allies are demanding that the segregated and restrictive Special Education System be dismantled and replaced by ONE, FULLY SUPPORTED, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM BY THE YEAR 2000’ (IA, 1992: p.9). However, even after these proposals, there was no significant change in the overall policy on the education of children with disabilities. In 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was developed because of the disability movement, but the education sector was exempted from the Act.

In 1996, Young and Powerful, a group of disabled people and non-disabled young allies

attending mainstream schools, was formed<sup>4</sup>. The young people involved in it, who believed that adults should listen to young people, developed an inclusive education movement. They acted on behalf of disabled people seeking to attend mainstream schools, such as negotiating with local education authorities and sending press releases to local newspapers and television producers (Peasley and Rieser, 2002: p.114).

In addition, when the Labour party had come to power in 1997 with the policy objective of the inclusion of people with disabilities, Young and Powerful wrote letters to Prime Minister Tony Blair and lobbied the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). They appealed that ‘we should all have the right to go to our local mainstream school’, ‘the segregated education system denies us the chance to be together and see each other for what we really are’, ‘we ask YOU to put an end to compulsory segregation by changing the law’ (Aspis, 2001: p.127). They were asked to write up an action plan for inclusion and sent it to the DfEE, highlighting what the barriers to inclusion are and the need for them to be removed (ibid.).

Under the Labour government, a green paper titled “Excellence for All Children” was published, which stated that the government would work with LEAs and schools to establish the necessary conditions to promote inclusion more widely between 1997 and 2002 (DfEE, 1997: pp.8-10). The Labour government enacted the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) in 2001. It extended the framework of the DDA to education in schools, colleges, and universities. Legislation on the education of children with disabilities was amended, and more children with disabilities gained the right to study in mainstream schools. In 1993, 47.7% of pupils with special educational needs (children in possession of a statement)<sup>5</sup> were placed in publicly funded maintained mainstream schools, but in 1997 the proportion of children increased to 57%, and in 2001 to 61.2% (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006: p.101). Mason recalled that time: ‘There was a Labour government and the minister for education was David Blunkett, who was blind and hated special schools[...]. So, he was an ally to our movement [...] and he was very much trying to fight for our thing’ (interview with Mason (29<sup>th</sup> May 2019)). It was found that under the Labour government, changes towards inclusive education were emerging, with the development of an inclusion movement by people with disabilities and young allies, and new policies coming into place.

### 3-2. Current situation

However, the Labour Party was defeated by the Conservative Party in the 2010 general election and fell into opposition. Disabled people’s organizations feared a backlash against inclusion. Indeed, the percentage of children with a statement attending special schools has increased by about 10% from 33.8% in 2001 to 42.9% in 2016 (including pupils with EHC plans)<sup>6</sup> (Department for Education (DfE), 2016: p.6).

This has been a difficult situation for ALLFIE. However, ALLFIE is practicing DET for teachers and pupils in schools. Since 2011, ALLFIE has launched the ‘How Was School?’ project, which collects oral histories of the school experiences of people with disabilities over the past 100 years. This school pack is aimed at Years 5 to 8 and is designed for use in Disability History Month (an annual month-long celebration of the history of the disability rights movement and the achievements of disabled people) and the National Curriculum (for example, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), citizenship, history, etc.). Teachers and pupils can use this school pack to learn about the experiences of people with



disabilities and the importance of inclusion.

Tara Flood, who succeeded Mason as ALLFIE's representative, said: 'Allies are non-disabled people who share our vision that inclusive education is a right' (interview with Flood (2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017)). Allies include not only parents of children with disabilities, but also 'all non-disabled people who share our vision of inclusive education', including school and college students, teachers, support staff and policy-makers (ibid.). Making allies and working together is necessary to change difficult situations for children with disabilities. This is why ALLFIE continues to practice DET for non-disabled teachers and pupils in mainstream schools.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on the practices of people with disabilities who joined IA (ALLFIE) in England to identify how inclusive education developed with DET for non-disabled teachers and pupils.

The movement for inclusive education was started in the 1980s by disabled people who had left special schools and parents of children with disabilities. In addition, non-disabled young allies in mainstream schools joined the movement in the late 1990s.

During this period, graduates of special schools provided DET to teachers and pupils in mainstream schools. Since there was a need to change their attitudes and practices towards inclusive education. DET was delivered during Disability History Month or across the curriculum in each subject area. The training enabled non-disabled teachers and pupils to learn about the history of discrimination against people with disabilities, the differences between the 'medical model' and the 'social model' of disability, and the role of 'allies'. From the perspective of people with disabilities, 'non-disabled allies' have been key partners in developing inclusive education.

As people with disabilities offered DET in mainstream schools, the range of actors involved in the inclusive education movement expanded. Under the Labour government, the campaign by people with disabilities and their allies grew stronger and education policy shifted towards inclusive education. However, the current situation has deteriorated and ALLFIE is still practicing DET, as it has the potential to play an important role in the development of inclusive education.

The results of this study show that raising non-disabled allies through DET and campaigning together was important in achieving inclusive education. Therefore, compared to previous research, this study shows that DET played an important role in the process of making allies for inclusive education.

However, this study has limitations. First, more practical research is needed on how disabled people's organizations and teachers have worked together in DET. Second, this study was not able to focus on the perspectives of 'non-disabled allies' and how they changed their attitudes and practices. Despite these limitations, the findings advance the discussion on learning activities to develop allies for inclusive education.

## Notes

- 1 Rieser explains the differences between inclusion and integration as follows: What all forms of integration have in common is the assumption of some form of assimilation of the disabled child into the mainstream school. The school remains largely unchanged, and the focus is on the child fitting in. However, inclusion is an ongoing process that involves a major change in the ethos of the school and is about building a school community that accepts and values difference. It requires a commitment from the whole staff, the school governors, parents/carers, and pupils/students (Rieser, 2011).
- 2 This paper is a revised contribution to the supplementary chapter of my book (Hashida, 2024). This paper differs from the chapter in the following ways. First, this paper examines previous research on the education of children with disabilities and DET. It also shows the importance of DET in raising allies for inclusive education, compared to the supplementary chapter. Second, this paper clarifies the detailed content and use of DET and its impact, based on the findings of the additional literature review and interview survey.
- 3 The interviews were conducted after the approval of the Ethics Committee, Institute of Human Sciences, University of Tsukuba, and the Human Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Human Development and Environment, Kobe University.
- 4 They were supported by the ALLFIE but acted independently.
- 5 The LEA issued a statement to a child with special educational needs. The statement described the child's particular needs and recommended how they should be met (Barnes, 1991: p.34).
- 6 In 2014, the statement of special educational needs was replaced with the new education, health and care (EHC) plan. EHC plans identify educational, health and social needs and set out additional support to meet those needs (GOV.UK. *Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)*). Retrieved November 27, 2023, from <https://www.gov.uk/children-with-special-educational-needs/extra-SEN-help>).

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