

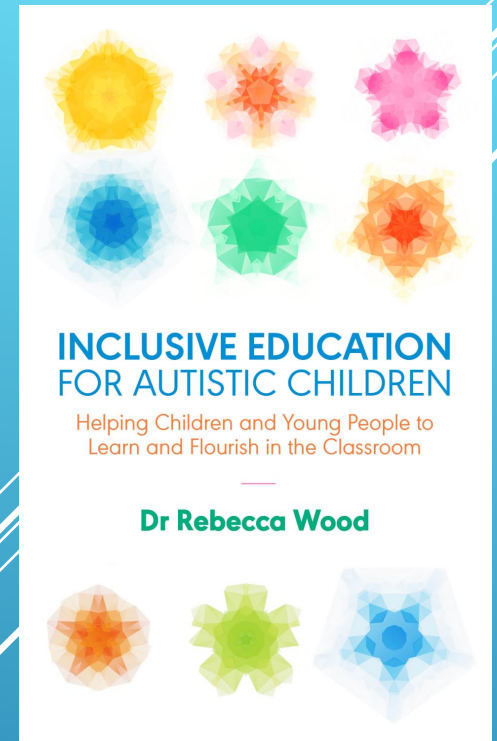
TIME TO THINK DIFFERENTLY - AND BETTER - ABOUT AUTISM, EDUCATION AND INCLUSION

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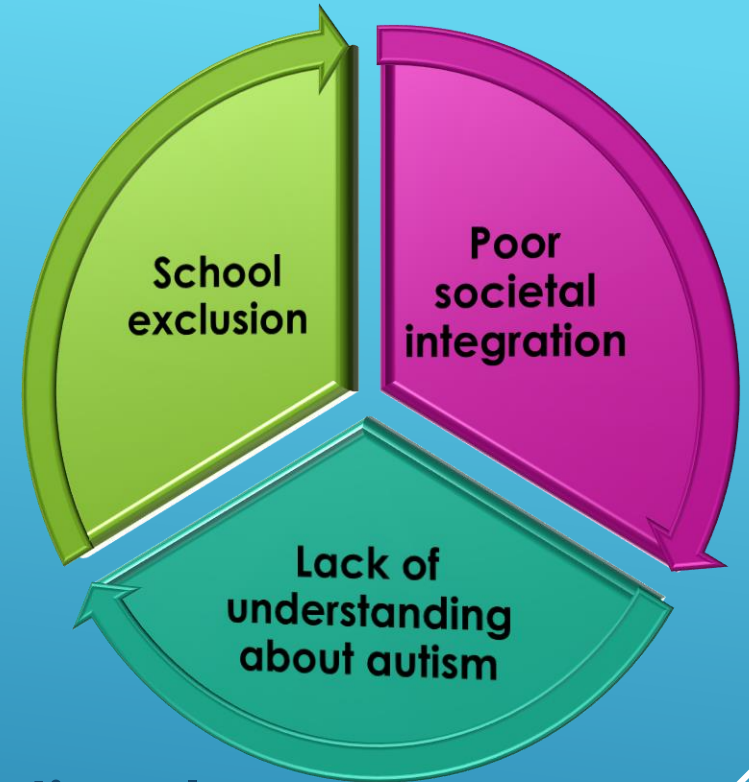


- ▶ **High levels of exclusion from school**
 - ▶ Mainstream, special, academies, PRUs
 - ▶ Exclusions are increasing
 - ▶ More special schools
- ▶ **Within-school exclusion**
 - ▶ Part-time timetable
 - ▶ Segregation: within-class/within-school
 - ▶ Limited access to extra-curricular activities
 - ▶ Patchy access arrangements for tests/exams
 - ▶ Self-withdrawal: stress/anxiety
- ▶ **Illegal exclusions/off-rolling**
- ▶ **Scottish Autism (2018) *Not included, not engaged, not involved***



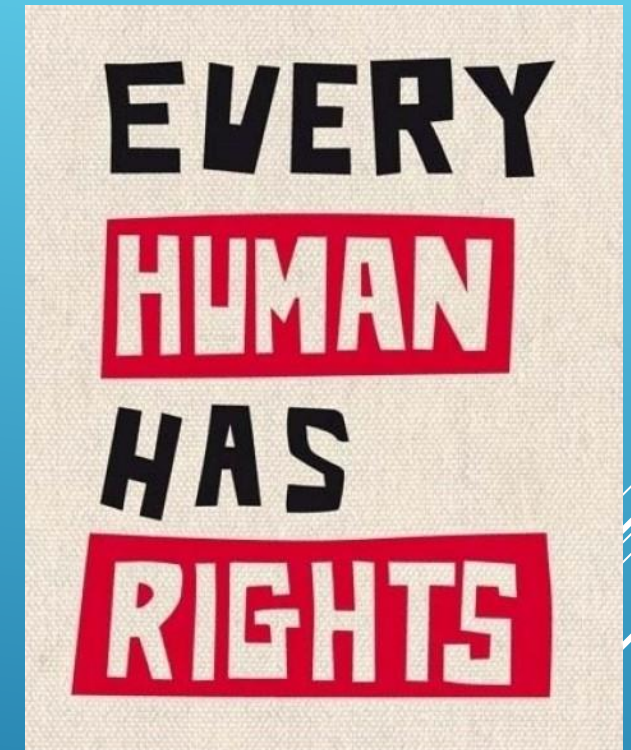
WHAT IS GOING ON?

- ▶ Leaving school with few or no qualifications
- ▶ Under-employed in adult life...
- ▶ ...or not working at all
- ▶ Poor well-being and health outcomes
- ▶ Society generally loses out
- ▶ Vicious cycle of lack of understanding, educational exclusion etc.



WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES?

- ▶ **Right to full and equal access to education well-established and longstanding**
 - ▶ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
 - ▶ Salamanca Statement (1994)
 - ▶ Education Act (1996)
 - ▶ Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act (2000)
 - ▶ Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001)
 - ▶ UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)
 - ▶ Equality Act (2010)
 - ▶ Children and Families Act (2014)



SHOULD THIS SURPRISE US?

- ▶ Autistic children and adults

- ▶ Their families

- ▶ EVERYONE

- ▶ Diverse school populations carry numerous advantages

- ▶ Narrow conceptualisation of 'normality'. Lawson (2008, 26):

- '...diversity and difference as part of everyday normal or typical life is being lost rather than cultivated.'*

- ▶ Particular skills and dispositions of autistic people not able to flourish

- ▶ Accommodations and adaptations can benefit all pupils




WHO LOSES OUT?



- ▶ Reasons are complex
- ▶ School staff don't set out to 'exclude'
- ▶ Resources and space
- ▶ Staff training
 - ▶ Underestimate their own understanding
 - ▶ Set aside natural instincts for sake of 'autism strategies'
 - ▶ Deference to the 'professional expert'
 - ▶ Perceiving the child as 'other': 'not like us'
- ▶ Unwitting adherence to school routines and norms
- ▶ Failure to consult with CYP and families

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

- ▶ Sensory issues: noise
 - ▶ Communication
 - ▶ Curriculum
 - ▶ Socialisation
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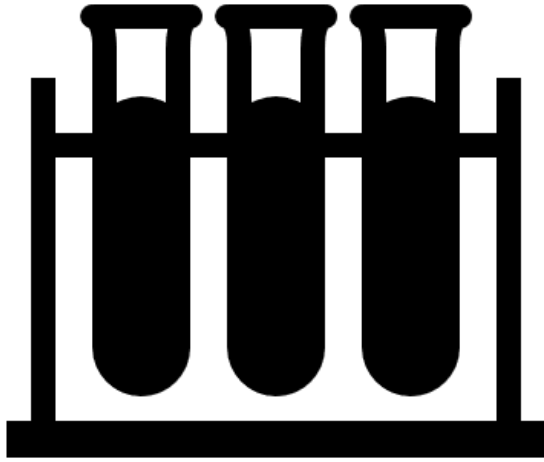
- ▶ **Noise a very significant exclusionary factor**
- ▶ **Within-school or externally**
 - ▶ Curriculum
 - ▶ Parts of the school day
 - ▶ Well-being
 - ▶ Language learning – especially ‘babble’
 - ▶ Parts or whole of school building
- ▶ **Contradictory attitudes towards noise**
 - ▶ Many noises and types of noise tolerated/encouraged
 - ▶ Autistic ‘noises’ disdained
 - ▶ The ‘wrong kind’ of noise

TOO MUCH NOISE

- ▶ Communication input is often the 'go-to' intervention
- ▶ Autistic CYP can experience communication difficulties
- ▶ Input generalised: therapist/impaired subject model
- ▶ Schools preoccupied with their own routines and educational goals
- ▶ Communication support aimed at enforcing conformity
- ▶ Communication support becomes communication control
 - ▶ What the child expresses
 - ▶ The method used
 - ▶ 'Off-message' communication not validated
- ▶ Frustration, stress, disempowerment, lack of agency



COMMUNICATION



- ▶ Dominated by confusion and inconsistencies
- ▶ ‘Life skills’ or the academic curriculum?
- ▶ Who makes these decisions, and on what basis?
- ▶ Longer-term outcomes not considered
 - ▶ Or predicated on association of autism with impairment
- ▶ Part sessions, part days and even whole days dedicated to interventions
 - ▶ Don’t take into account the views of the child
 - ▶ Child not helped to catch up on work missed
 - ▶ Child expected to do the same amount of work in less time, with less explanation of task
- ▶ Access arrangements for tests and exams not offered
- ▶ Alternative approaches and interpretations not valued
- ▶ Unsurprising educational outcomes are poor

CURRICULUM

SOCIALISATION



- ▶ Problems with social interaction considered key area of difficulty in autism

- ▶ Difficulties with social complexities of school life

- ▶ Play:

At school, I would be on the edge of the playground, watching the other kids. I wanted to join in, but didn't know how to. I would be jumping up and down and flapping my hands, but I didn't know what to do. If someone approached me, I would freak out.


- ▶ Autistic children denied natural social opportunities schools usually provide:

- ▶ After-school clubs
- ▶ School trips...
- ▶ ...unless parents can attend
- ▶ Segregation for interventions/with teaching assistant

- ▶ Social conformity is expected while treating the child differently socially

- ▶ Social training groups can reduce authentic interactions and increase stigma

- ▶ Wishes of the child not always considered

- ▶ Sensory issues: noise
 - ▶ Communication
 - ▶ Curriculum
 - ▶ Socialisation
 - ▶ Advantages of a multi-perspective approach
 - ▶ Intense interests
- 
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NOISE

- ▶ Create quiet spaces within schools
- ▶ Recognise the contradictions and double standards in attitudes towards noise
- ▶ Involve whole school community in decisions about noise
- ▶ Not about volume levels alone
- ▶ Issue needs to be tackled at the design stage



- ▶ Essential to understand communication as a two-way, interactive process
- ▶ Recognise the multi-modal nature of autistic communication
 - ▶ Not impose a sole method of communication
 - ▶ Acknowledge communicative value of silence
- ▶ Support the child and young person to express their own wishes and choices
 - ▶ Even if not what the adult wants to hear
- ▶ Employ more technology

COMMUNICATION

- ▶ Facilitate as much as possible child's interests
- ▶ Reconsider the need for a 'broad and balanced' curriculum
 - ▶ But not as a way of limiting opportunities
- ▶ Consult broadly on curriculum priorities: parents, child/young person
- ▶ Recognise – and value – alternative approaches and interpretations
- ▶ Offer full range of access arrangements for exams
- ▶ Ensure child is the responsibility of the class teacher
- ▶ Support should focus on child's needs, not the aims of the school

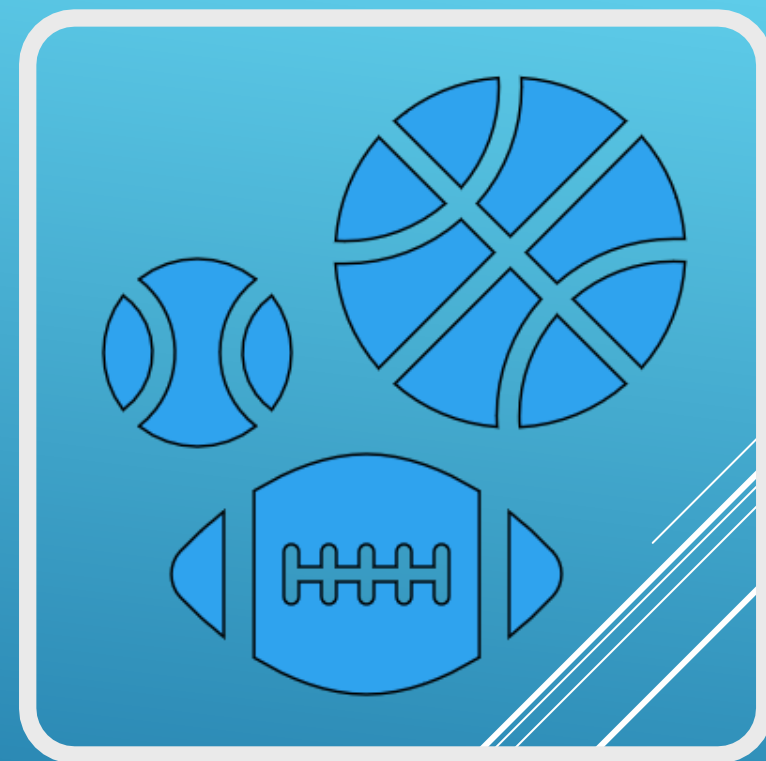
CURRICULUM

- ▶ **Essential to prioritise the social preferences of the child**
 - ▶ Not expect the child to fit into non-autistic norms
- ▶ **TAs could support the social complexities of school**
- ▶ **Find like-minded peers, create activities around interests**
 - ▶ Including internet-based
- ▶ **Not exclude autistic pupils from the more natural social opportunities of school**
 - ▶ Prioritise resources
- ▶ **Avoid exclusion and stigmatisation**
 - ▶ through interventions
 - ▶ inclusive strategies
- ▶ **Recognise social benefits of diverse school population**

SOCIALISATION



- ▶ **Study: 36 school staff; 10 autistic children; 10 parents; 10 autistic adults**
- ▶ Mother and TA of Marcus: he doesn't like P.E. (hates losing)
- ▶ Parent of Bobby: he doesn't like to get changed for P.E.
 - ▶ Bobby doesn't like P.E.
 - ▶ P.E. could be dropped for alternative targets
- ▶ Parent of Michael: he doesn't like P.E.
 - ▶ He has problems with balance
 - ▶ P.E. could be dropped for alternative targets
- ▶ TA of child Michael: he can't cope with P.E. because of noise



DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

- ▶ **Marcus:** *“What is your favourite subject in school?”*
 - ▶ *“P.E. And ICT”*
 - ▶ *“I just literally like lots of exercise, playing like loads of games”*
- ▶ **Bobby:** observed to be an active boy who enjoyed climbing and physical exercise
- ▶ **Michael:** TA *“What about lessons in school? What’s your favourite lesson?”*
 - ▶ **Michael:** *err...P.E.!*
 - ▶ **TA:** (sounding surprised) *you like P.E.?*
 - ▶ **Michael:** *Yeah*

AUTISTIC ADULTS

- ▶ 3 made positive comments about P.E. or physical exercise at school
- ▶ 1 described the sensory issues she experienced as part of group games at school
- ▶ 1 recalled disliking sports day because of being stared at



Parents of Bobby and Michael: they dislike P.E. and so it could be dropped

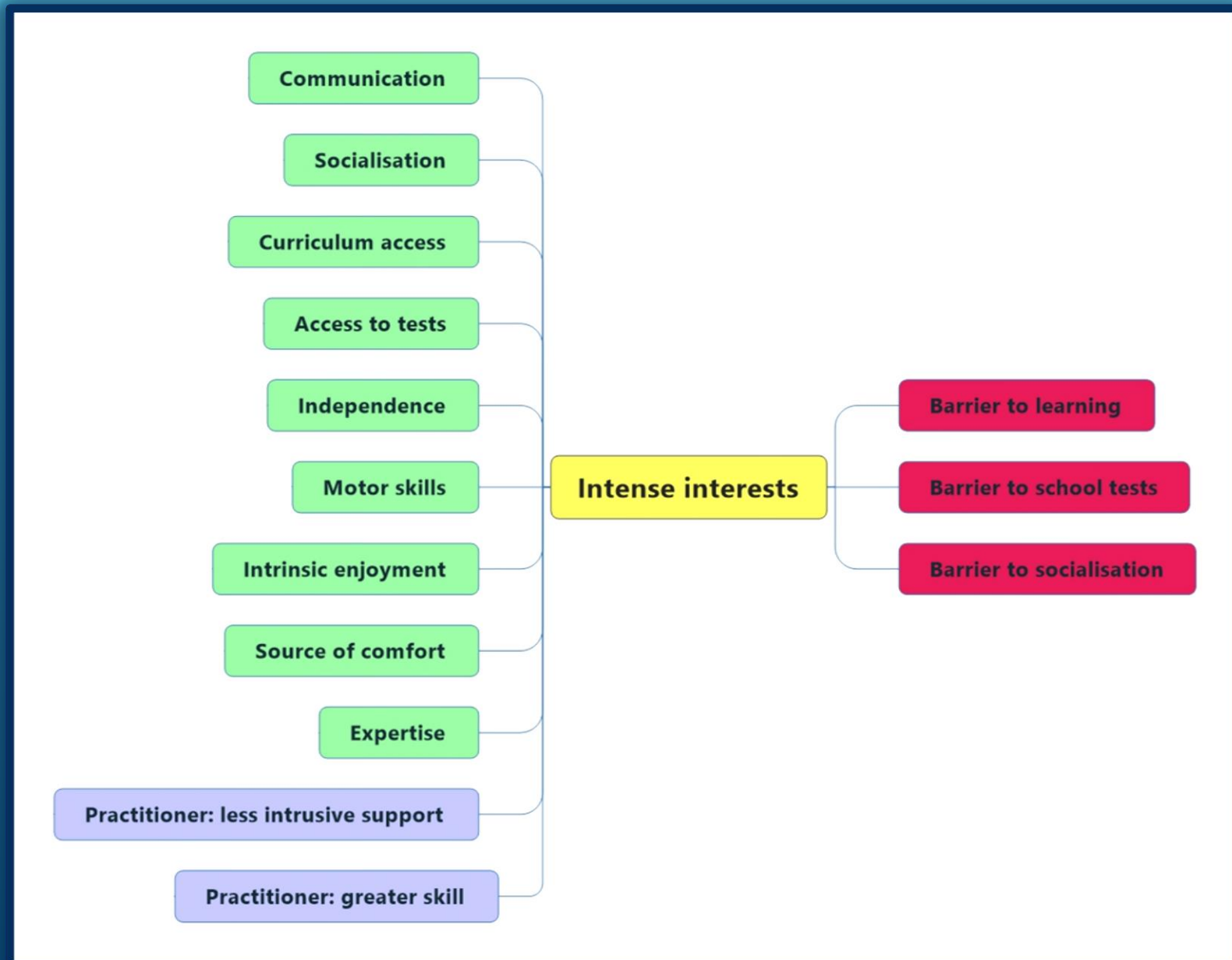
TA of Michael: surprised that he says P.E. is his favourite subject

Parent and TA of Marcus: P.E. a difficult subject for him

3 autistic adults: P.E. a valuable subject in school. 2 autistic adults: some sensory and social difficulties with P.E. activities

Marcus and Michael: P.E. a favourite subject. Bobby: enjoys physical activity

INTENSE INTERESTS



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The Engine Shed



- ▶ **Thomas (2012, 486):**
 - ▶ Need to ‘retreat from histories of identify-assess-diagnose-help’ and enable all pupils to feel part of the school community
- ▶ Presence should not be conditional on conformity with existing norms
- ▶ Provide support to aid the child, not to force conformity
- ▶ Inclusion won’t work as a bolt-on to existing structures and attitudes
- ▶ Need to recognise and value the ways autistic pupils think, learn, communicate, interpret, respond and socialise

THINKING DIFFERENTLY

- ▶ **Diverse perspectives**
 - ▶ School staff: teachers, TAs, SENCOs, deputy Head teachers
 - ▶ Parents
 - ▶ Autistic children
 - ▶ Autistic adults
- ▶ **Viewpoints of autistic children and adults especially highlighted**
- ▶ **Ten autistic contributors to book**
 - ▶ Foreword by Dr Wenn B. Lawson
 - ▶ Illustrations by Sonny Hallett
 - ▶ Adult contributors: Jon Adams; Michael Barton; Kabie Brook; George Whitney
 - ▶ Child contributors: Grace; James; Rose; Zack
- ▶ **Practical and evidence-based**
- ▶ **Accessible**
- ▶ **Available in all good bookshops...**

BOOK

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN

Helping Children and Young People to
Learn and Flourish in the Classroom

Dr Rebecca Wood

