



'Nowhere fits'? How parents choose a school for their children with special needs in England: practice, policies and dilemmas

Dr Cristina Devecchi & Meanu Bajwa-Patel



VI Brazilian Congress on Special Education

UfSCAR, 1-4 November 2014



Content of the session

- Policy background to parental choice in England
- Inclusion: empowerment, choice and dilemmas
- Parents choosing a school for their children with SEN: the study
- Is there a school that fits? Key findings
- What it takes to make it fit? A conceptual proposal
- Q & A

INTRODUCTION

Parental choice and inclusion: a way forward?

The confused language of parental choice

A 'Yes' to choice

The current system is outdated and not fit for purpose. Thousands of families have had to battle for months, even years, with different agencies to get the specialist care their children need. It is unacceptable they are forced to go from pillar to post, facing agonising delays and bureaucracy to get support, therapy and equipment.

These reforms will put parents in charge. We trust parents to do the right thing for their own child because they know what is best. The right to a personal budget will give them real choice and control of care, instead of councils and health services dictating how they get support.

Sarah Teather, former Children's Minister,
2012

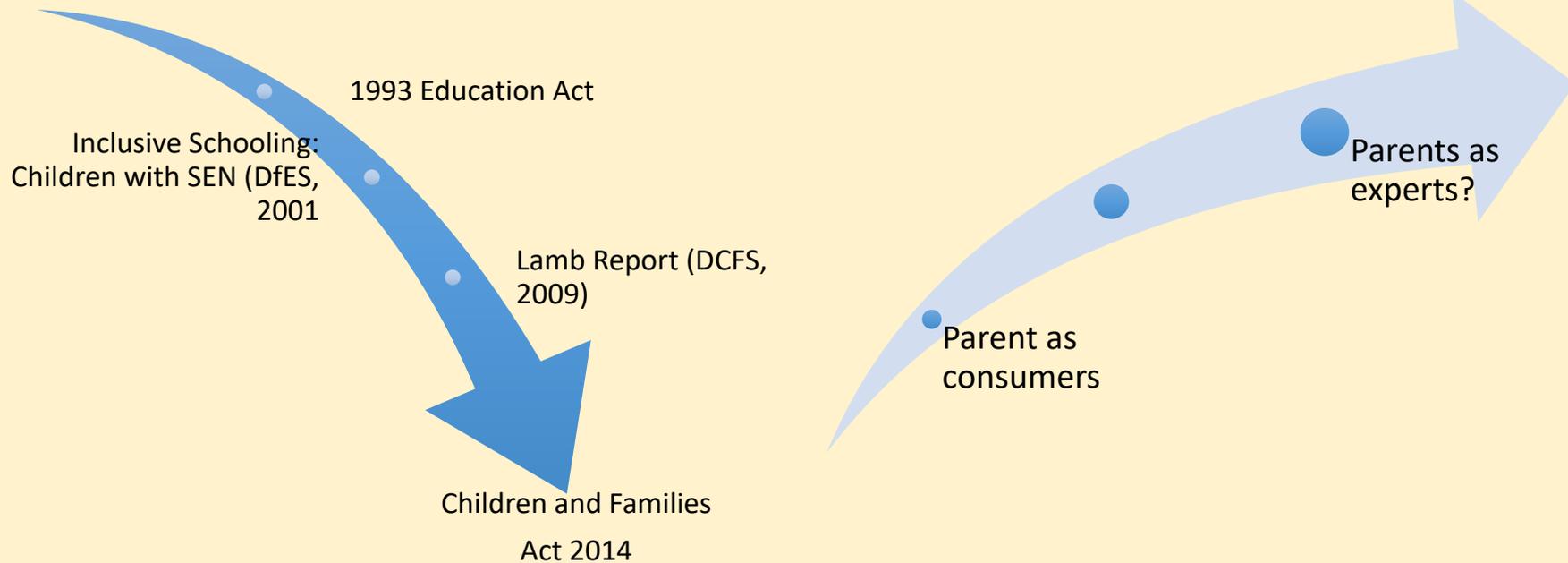
But only if ...

The local authority must agree to a requested placement unless the placement would be

'unsuitable for the age, ability, aptitude or SEN of the child or young person; or the attendance of the child or young person there would be incompatible with the efficient education of others; or the efficient use of resources'

School 'choice' and SEN in England: policy context

1988 Education Act



What is inclusion?

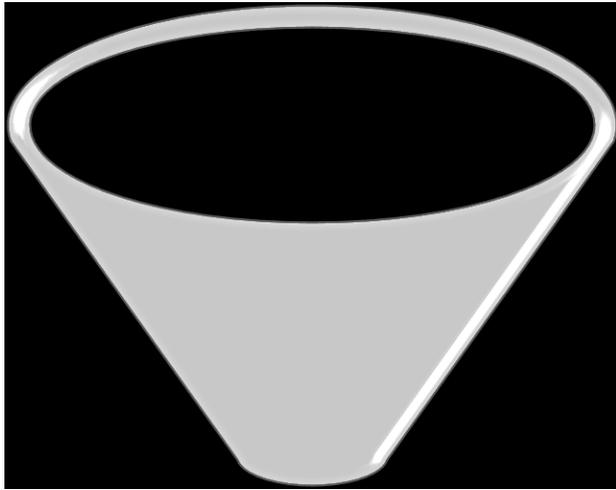
The aim of inclusive education is to eliminate social exclusion that is a consequence of attitudes and responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998). As such, it starts from the belief that education is a basic human right and the foundation for a more just society.

Education in an ordinary class, in a neighbourhood school which a child would normally attend, with support as needed by the individual. (Mittler, 1995: 105).

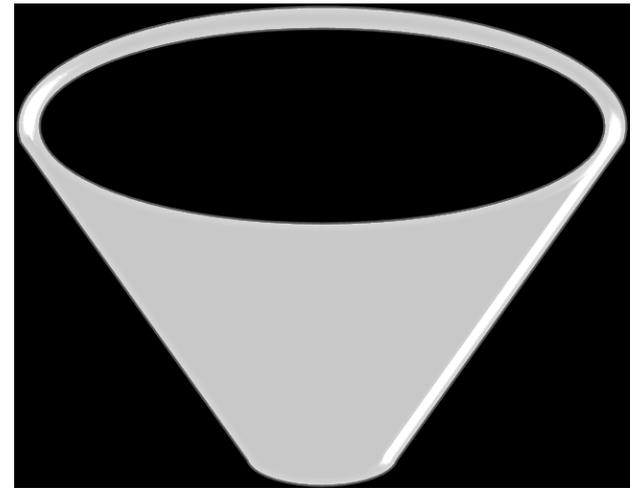
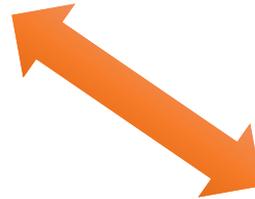
By inclusion, we mean that pupils with SEN should, wherever possible receive their education in a mainstream school, but also that they should join fully with their peers in the curriculum and life of the school But separate provision may be necessary on occasions for specific purposes. (DfEE 1997: 44)

Inclusion as an approach to education embodying particular values.....concerned with all learners and with overcoming barriers to all forms of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement (Ainscow et al, 2006: 5)

Dimensions of inclusion

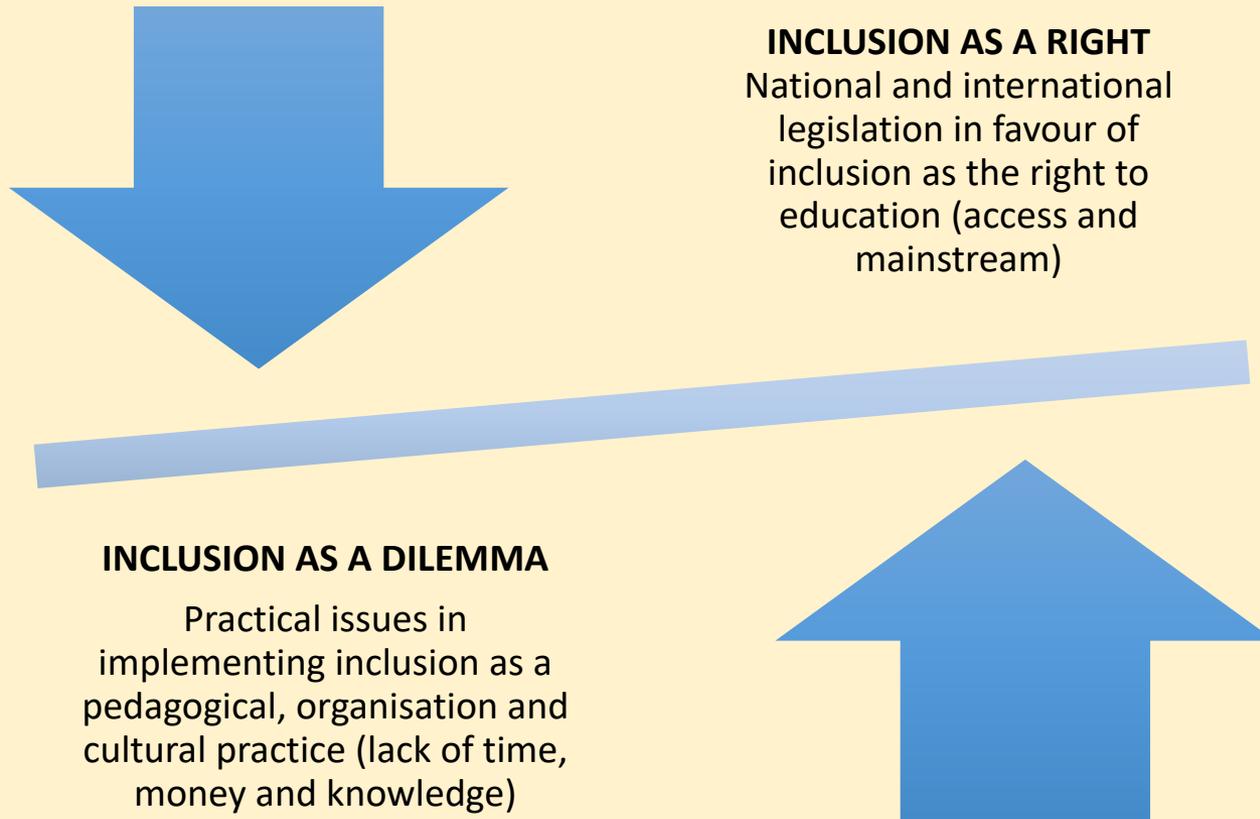


Dimensions



Underlining rights

Inclusion: empowering and/or disempowering parents?



Children and Families Act (2014) – a summary



Children and Families
Act 2014

- Giving parents and young people control over the decisions about the support they are given.
- The introduction of Education, Health and Care plans in replacement of Statements.
- Personal budgets for parents and young people to carry out their EHC plans
- A requirement on local authorities to provide a Local Offer which will include the education, health and care service

PARENTAL CHOICE: THE STUDY

Research Questions & Design

How do parents of children who have a SEN Statement make decisions to send their children either to mainstream or special schools?

What are the aspirations of these parents for their children?

In choosing either mainstream or a special school what in-school factors do these parents of children perceive as being important for the support of their children in those schools.



PHASE 1- surveys-
used to elicit broad
range of , largely
quantitative, data
across one LA



PHASE 2- Semi-
structured interviews
– used to add depth
to the survey data
and explore emerging
issues



Experiences of early schooling

Schools

Not understanding, & doing nothing

- She was continuously in trouble, and she really couldn't speak. She was terrified of playtimes, but they would force her to go out.

Schools

Schools not understanding but trying to help

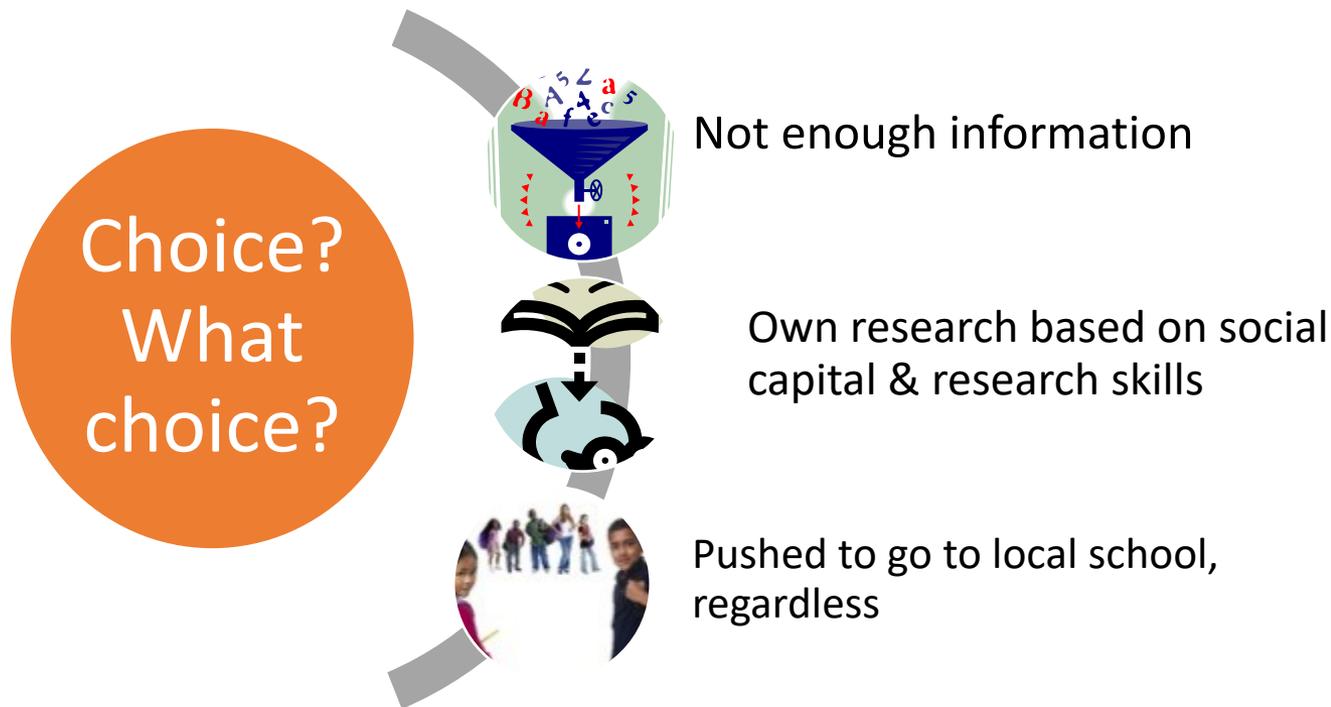
- *they did lots to make him more comfortable, e.g. creating safe havens, but he wasn't getting anything out of it.*

Schools

Understanding & managing needs effectively

- Nothing was a problem; it was all understood, because you know they'd got training, they'd got experience and they take your child on – they're not a problem

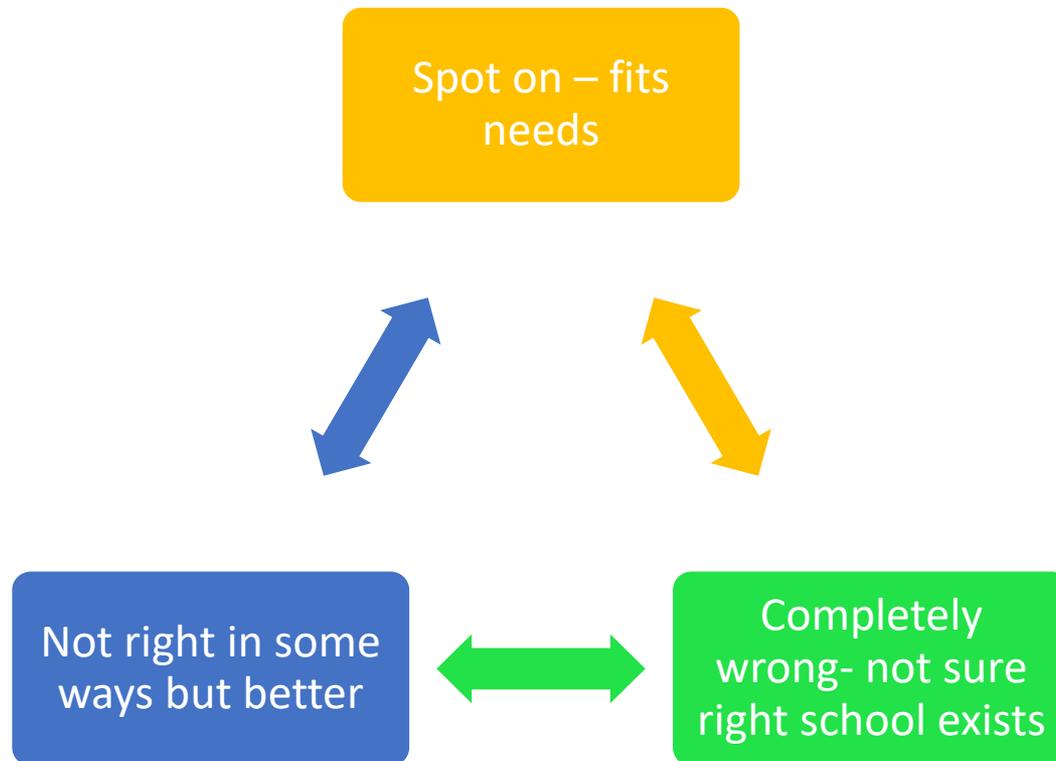
School choice information



Factors affecting school choice



Parents' views of current schooling



Parents' views of inclusion

Doesn't work in practice

- *I don't actually think that inclusion works in practice because, you know, there's all these policies and things....but actually they don't really because they don't adapt the curriculum for those children; and they do end up being mothered*

Well-intentioned

- *I don't think you should ever not make an effort to include children. But ...as a parent, there are limitations.as a parent, part of what you're doing is looking at where your child will best fit in*

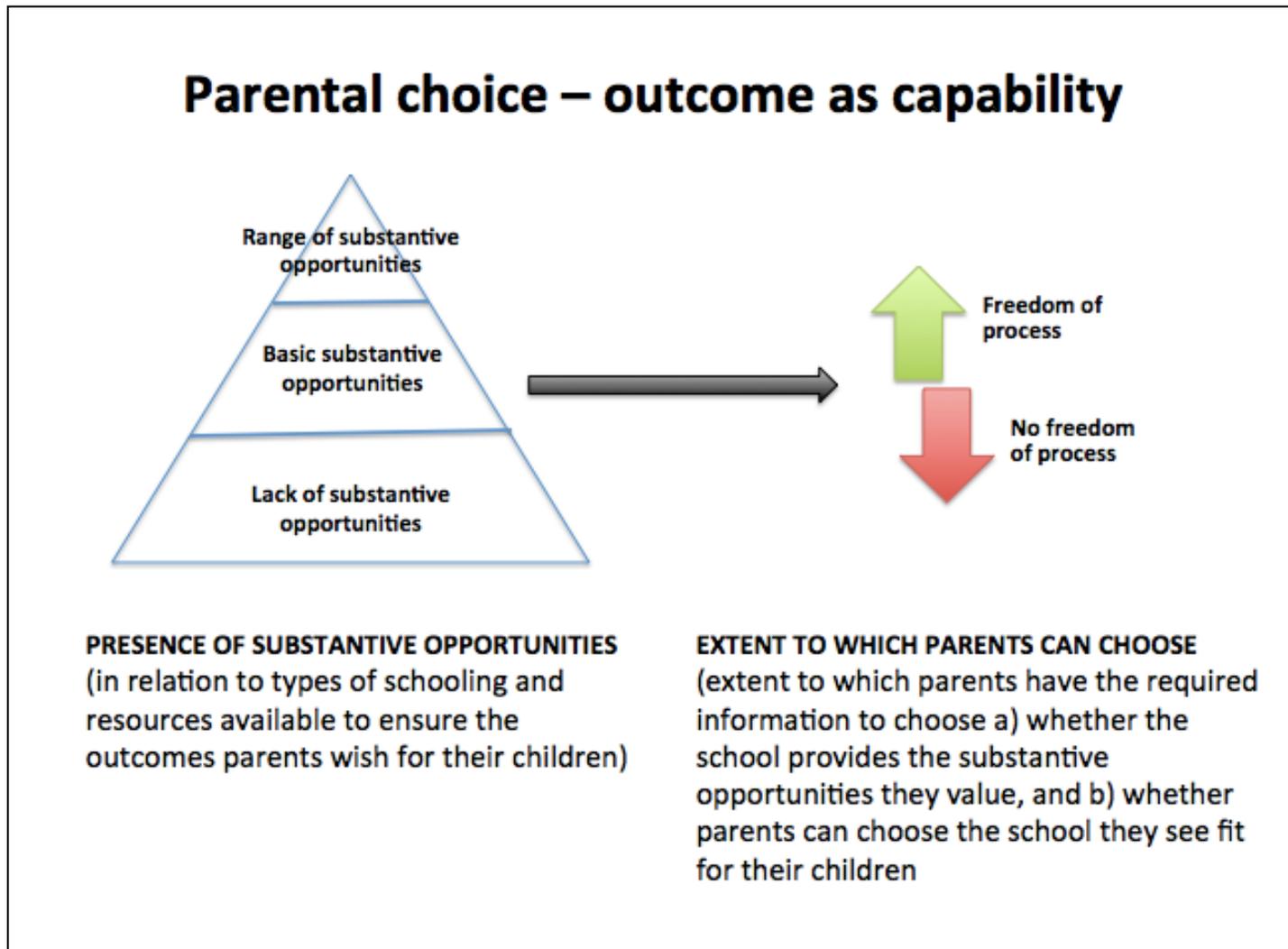
Inclusion, what inclusion?

- *this idea of inclusion doesn't include kids with Autism! I think inclusion...didn't meet his needs, he couldn't cope with it.....he was in classes that supported inclusion, he was sitting outside the class because he couldn't cope with what was going on inside the class. So it's actually **exclusion***

‘thick detail’

- *I feel that we're not included at all; I think we're excluded, because our children have this condition (Autism). We can't do mainstream things; we can't even, you know ... if we get an invitation to a wedding, I know we can't go, you know. My kids can't cope with it. You know, we're totally excluded.*

Parental choice as the ‘capability’ to choose



In conclusion....

- **Educational inclusion schools need to understand that :**
- *It's about making education fit them (children), I think, rather than make them fit education.*

Q & A

- How are England and Brazil similar?

Thank you
for listening

WE ARE [NORTHAMPTON.AC.UK](https://www.northampton.ac.uk)

cristina.devecchi@northampton.ac.uk

meanu.bajwa-patel@northampton.ac.uk