



STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
A College of Queen's University Belfast

## Examining the legacy of the Warnock Report in Northern Ireland: a Foucauldian genealogical approach.

Purdy, N. and Totton, L. (2020)

### Citation

Purdy, N., Hunter, J. & Totton, L. (2020) Examining the legacy of the Warnock Report in Northern Ireland: a Foucauldian genealogical approach. *British Educational Research Journal*, Volume 46, Issue 3 Pages 706-723. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3604>

### Published in:

*British Educational Research Journal*

### Document Version:

Submitted Version (NB. Prior to peer-review)

This is a Submitted Version of an article published by Wiley in *British Educational Research Journal*. The final, peer-reviewed version was published on 2 March 2020, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3604>

### General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Stranmillis University College website is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

Every effort has been to ensure that research content hosted by the Stranmillis University College website does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [research@stran.ac.uk](mailto:research@stran.ac.uk).

# Examining the legacy of the Warnock Report in Northern Ireland: a Foucauldian genealogical approach

Noel Purdy, Stranmillis University College, Belfast<sup>1</sup>  
John Hunter, Education and Training Inspectorate Northern Ireland  
Lois Totton, Stranmillis University College, Belfast

## Abstract

Over forty years after the publication of the *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*, commonly referred to as the *Warnock Report*, this paper uniquely considers its legacy in the context of Northern Ireland. The paper adopts a Foucauldian genealogical approach to consider first the specific context of the “emergence” or “origins” of the Warnock Report in the 1970s, highlighting competing political forces and the positioning of the report at the very end of the age of post-war welfarism. The approach details the key elements of the *Warnock Report* itself, and then charts the resulting development of SEN policy in Northern Ireland, culminating in the faltering process of reform which began in 2006 and has been partially completed but which has recently been halted by the collapse of the power-sharing Executive and the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in January 2017. The legacy of the Warnock Report is critically examined, identifying the main positive contributions of the report but also acknowledging the enduring challenges set against a complex current financial and political context. Finally, rather than leaving Warnock completely behind, a case is made for a fresh, detailed, context-specific reading of this seminal report.

## Key Words

Special Educational Needs; Warnock; Inclusion; Foucault

## Introduction

Forty years after the publication of the *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (HMSO, 1978), commonly and hereafter referred to as the *Warnock Report*, Ainscow (2018, p.1) referred to it as “a ground-breaking step forward in our country’s journey to create an education system that can reach out to all of our children and young people” and as “a catalyst for major international developments.” Much has been written over the past 40 years about the impact of the *Warnock Report* on the education of children with special educational needs but it is evident that its

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: n.purdy@stran.ac.uk

legacy is contested (see Wedell, 1990; Warnock, 2005, 2018; Lunt, 2007; Ainscow, 2018; Norwich, 2018).

For instance, Norwich (2018, p.1) has opined that “many of the persistent problems in the SEN and inclusion and policy field derive from the Warnock legacy; with its focus on individual needs assessment and legal protections for provision...”, while Ainscow (2018, p.2) has concluded that “Forty years on, it is now time to leave Warnock behind”. In her own memoirs, Warnock herself wrote of the report that “with hindsight, I think we made some radical mistakes” (Warnock, 2000, p.32). However, all of this critique relates to the English context. By contrast very little has been written on its impact further afield and nothing to date on its impact in Northern Ireland. Using the provocation of Ainscow’s contention that Warnock should now be left behind, this paper uniquely examines the legacy of the Report, set within the complexities of the policy context of Northern Ireland, and adopting a theoretical framework grounded in the genealogical approach of Michel Foucault.

### **The SEN context in Northern Ireland**

Few could dispute that educational provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) in Northern Ireland is in urgent need of reform. The most recent figures available from the Department of Education of Northern Ireland (DE, 2018a) show that there were 79,167 pupils with SEN in 2017/18, up 2862 on the previous year, and representing 23% of the school population. A total of 17,837 pupils have a statement of special educational needs (up 800 on the previous year), representing 5.2% of the total school population. To put this in perspective, the total number of children with SEN in Northern Ireland has risen by 57% since 2003/04, while the number of children with statements has risen by 62% over the same period. In the past ten years (2008-2018) the number of pupils enrolled in special schools in Northern Ireland has also risen by 30% (DE, 2018b).

A recent report on Special Educational Needs for the Northern Ireland Assembly by the Comptroller and Auditor General (NI Audit Office, 2017) highlighted the concomitant annual rise in expenditure on SEN. In 2015-16 this expenditure was over £250m of which £217m was Education Authority (EA) expenditure and the remainder DE spend, primarily in relation to transport costs and SEN funding to Voluntary Grammar and Grant Maintained Integrated Schools. Classroom assistant costs amounted to £55m in 2015-16. Reflecting current public sector management emphases, the Audit Office report concluded that “neither the Department nor the EA can currently demonstrate value for money in terms of economy, efficiency or effectiveness in the provision of support to children with SEN in mainstream schools” (NIAO, 2017, §13).

This rising expenditure must also be set in the context of financial austerity, which has reduced public funding of the education system in Northern Ireland in real terms. Recently the Chief Executive of Northern Ireland's single Education Authority warned that the local education system is facing a £350m funding gap by 2019-20 (BBC, 2017). Shortly after this warning was issued, the Education Authority refused to approve budget plans submitted by 632 schools since they were unable to show they could stay within their budgets (BBC, 2018a). By way of illustration of the severe budgetary pressures experienced by schools, at a recent presentation to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster as part of their inquiry into education funding in Northern Ireland, one primary principal admitted that parents were now donating toilet paper, tissues and soap to his school (BBC 2018b). In its final Report (House of Commons, 2019, §127) the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee concluded "It is clear that the system does not currently have the resources it needs to meet demand for SEND support" and recommended that future budget allocations to DE reflect the growing numbers of children with SEND in the school system.

The funding crisis is further exacerbated by the current political situation in Northern Ireland. Education is an area of policy which is devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly, formed after the historic Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement of 1998. However, the power-sharing Executive collapsed in January 2017 following a dispute between the two major parties over a botched renewable heat incentive, and at the time of writing Northern Ireland is fast approaching three years without a functioning elected executive or legislative Assembly. This has meant that since no new legislation or policy can be brought forward by Permanent Secretaries in the absence of government Ministers, all major public sector reform in Northern Ireland has been halted (The Independent, 2018). Political commentators agree that there is no end in sight to the current political impasse, and no willingness to impose direct rule government from London. Consequently, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (House of Commons, 2019, §131) had little alternative but to recommend that, in an extraordinary move to unblock the system, the Secretary of State should lay before parliament (in Westminster) the necessary regulations to give full effect to the SEND Act.

In terms of special educational needs, the political stalemate could not have come at a worse juncture, given the already faltering pace of SEN reform and the growing financial challenges facing schools in Northern Ireland. From a careful examination of the past using a genealogical approach, this paper aims

to provide elucidation of the current crisis in the Northern Ireland special education system and to provide some recommendations for the future.

### **Foucault's genealogical approach**

The publication of the Warnock Report and subsequent policy developments in Northern Ireland can usefully be examined using a Foucauldian genealogical theoretical framework and methodological analysis. In Foucault's essay on *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* he notes at the outset that genealogy (an approach he borrowed from Nietzsche) is "grey, meticulous and patiently documentary" and that it operates "on a field of entangled and confused documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (p.76). Consistently Foucault rejects the search for a clear, unambiguous inviolable origin. Instead genealogy requires "relentless erudition" (p.77) and finds instead "disparity" and "the dissension of other things" (p.79). In dispelling the myth or chimera of the origin, Foucault argues that the genealogist "must be able to recognise the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats – the basis of all beginnings, atavisms and heredities" (p.80).

In discussing the Nietzschean notion of *Entstehung* (tr. emergence) Foucault asserts that emergence is not a gradual, passive occurrence but rather is produced by the violent coming together of competing forces: "it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to centre stage, each in its useful strength...emergence designates a place of confrontation..." (p.84).

In terms of analysing the past, Foucault argues that a new approach is necessary, one which rejects conventional methodologies and which does not seek unambiguous causal realities, but instead reveals the complexity of *wirkliche Historie* (tr. real history):

The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. (p.88)

Or as Veyne (2010, p.55) summarises in his critique of Foucault's archaeological explorations, "there is no prime mover behind historical causality". Indeed, in the genealogical search for essential truth, Veyne concludes that "in the immense void, our petty thinking seems very patchy, very misshapen and full of surprising gaps" (p.58). Despite the potential frustrations which might emerge from a Foucauldian genealogy, the result is a more honest awareness of the "singular strangeness" (p.12) of historical phenomena which

do not have single identifiable origins. Consequently, Foucault's work argues against the possibility of uniform trans-historical ideas.

Reality is instead narrower, quirrier and any exploration of a historical situation is necessarily detailed, nuanced and self-consciously incomplete, revealing tensions, interweaving influences, complementary and contradictory themes. Foucault's genealogical enterprise reveals "a complicated tissue of antecedent historical phenomena" (Wicks, 2003, p.231); it undermines traditional history's search for objective truth; and it fundamentally destabilises the present self through the introduction of irreducible discontinuity and dissociation of identity (Barker, 1998).

In applying the Foucauldian genealogical approach to the Warnock Report, careful consideration was given to the genesis and content of the Report itself (extending to over 400 pages), and to Warnock's own subsequent engagement with and critique of the Report as recently as several months before her death in March 2019.

### **Towards a Foucauldian genealogy of the Warnock Report**

A Foucauldian genealogical reading of the "emergence" of the Warnock Report and subsequent legislation and policy yields important insights, not least in moving the needs of "handicapped" children from a peripheral to a centrally important educational issue.

It is necessary at the outset to examine closely the particular historical context in which the Committee of Enquiry itself was established by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP, in September 1974 with the following terms of reference (which, importantly, exclude Northern Ireland):

"To review educational provision in England, Scotland and Wales for children and young people handicapped by disabilities of body or mind, taking account of the medical aspects of their needs, together with arrangements to prepare them for entry into employment; to consider the most effective use of resources for these purposes; and to make recommendations." (p.1)

The Committee was the first ever appointed by a UK government to review educational provision for all "handicapped children, whatever their handicap" (p.4). The main Committee of eight members (supplemented by assessors from government departments) was chaired by Professor Mary Warnock, and was subsequently supported by four sub-committees to which a further 15 members were co-opted. The sub-committees completed their respective tasks by May

1977 and, along with the submission of almost 400 pieces of written evidence, informed the final *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People* (HMSO, 1978). The experience of chairing the committee was not entirely a positive one. In her memoirs, Warnock was later to write that, while it was “gratifying” to see the conclusions of the report enshrined in the 1981 Education Act, and while she met some people on the committee who would become friends, there were undoubtedly differences of opinion on the best way forward, and indeed she had found “the world of special education rather dispiriting, with too many people fighting their own corners” (Warnock, 2000, p.32).

Notwithstanding the realities of the process of the inquiry, the Report duly led to the 1981 Education Act and spearheaded the re-conceptualisation of special education right across the UK and further afield, changing the discourse and terminology around disability, by advocating a focus by teachers on children’s ‘special educational needs’ (as a means to giving them access to learning) rather than on their ‘handicap’ (the umbrella term routinely used at that time) or disability. Prior to the changes in legislation throughout the UK resulting from the Warnock Report, there existed a rigid system of 11 categories of ‘handicap’ established by the 1944 *Education Act* and the subsequent *Handicapped Pupils and School Health Service Regulations* (1945). The regulations labelled children who were blind, deaf, epileptic, had physical disabilities or were aphasic as ‘seriously disabled’ and insisted that they *had* to be educated in special schools. The regulations also stated that children with other disabilities might attend ‘ordinary schools’ but only if adequate provision for them was available.

An awareness of the complexity of the changing political context of the 1970s in the UK is crucial. The decade marked significant legislative change, beginning with the 1972 Education (Handicapped Children) Act transferring responsibility for “mentally handicapped”, previously “ineducable”, children from the health authorities (who provided care and basic “training”) to local education authorities who would be required to provide special education for these “severely educationally subnormal” children; and, secondly, the 1976 Education Act (Section 10) which expressed a preference for “handicapped” children to be educated in “ordinary” schools rather than special schools, unless this would be impracticable, incompatible with the “efficient instruction” of the school or would involve unreasonable public expenditure – this legislation subsequently came to Northern Ireland in 1978. The Warnock Report was therefore first and foremost a *response* to legislation and to *already shifting* perceptions of children from being seen as ineducable to having equal rights, even though it in turn led to *future* seismic legislative and policy changes across the UK.

The Warnock Report attempted to move beyond the prevailing medical model of disability (a deficit model) and towards a social model of disability. Towards this end it set out two long-term goals of education which could be applied to *all* children, not just those with a certain level of cognitive ability: first, to develop a child's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding, leading to greater awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and, second, to prepare the child to become an active participant in and contributor to society, living as independently as possible. With these common aims in mind, and within a social model of disability, the new approach aimed to remove any remaining systemic "obstacles" facing children with SEN, and to identify and resolve these barriers which would otherwise create educational difficulties:

The purpose of education for all children is the same; the goals are the same. But the help that individual children need in progressing towards them will be different. Whereas for some the road they have to travel towards the goals is smooth and easy, for others it is fraught with obstacles. (§1.4)

The Report thus marked a shift from a medical or charity model of disability towards a rights-based social model where all children have a right to an education "for no other reason than that they are human" (§1.7) and where those who work with children with special educational needs should see themselves as having a "crucial and developing role in a society which is now committed, not merely to tending and caring for its handicapped members, as a matter of charity, but to educating them, as a matter of right and to developing their potential to the full." (§1.11)

Writing forty years later and only months before her death, Warnock notes the centrality of this often-overlooked focus on educational aims within the Committee's report and describes in some detail the metaphor which she adopted to convey the significance of a "continuum of ability" and the common enterprise of education in which all teachers and all pupils were equally engaged:

"I can't exaggerate the importance to the committee of this metaphor of education. I personally conceived it visually: I had a picture in my mind like the old-fashioned advertisement for Start-Rite shoes, that some of you may remember, which depicted the back-view of two children walking hand in hand towards a distant horizon, on a rough track that disappeared over rising ground. (I mentally placed it somewhere in Hampshire or Wiltshire, on the Downs where I had mostly spent my life). The educator, the teacher, had as her task to help the children over the obstacles and through the hazards that the road presented; and of course these obstacles would be greater for some children than for others,



just as on a real walk some stiles will be too high for one child to climb over without help, while another child will scramble over easily.”  
(Warnock, 2018, p.3)

The Warnock Report was thus influential in many respects: in asserting the principle that “education, as we conceive it, is a good, and a specifically human good, to which all human beings are entitled” (§1.7); but also in advocating an enhanced role for parents as “equal partners” in the education of their children; in developing the “statement” which helped safeguard appropriate educational provision by local authorities for those children with more severe or complex learning difficulties; and in changing the discourse around disability from a focus on medical deficit to needs and rights.

The report led to further changes in provision through its proposal of a tripartite framework of integration (rather than segregation) which radically changed educational provision. The first form of integration, *locational integration*, refers to the existence of special units or classes in mainstream schools, or where a special and mainstream school share the same site. As the report suggests, this “may be the most tenuous form of integration” but can represent “a first stage towards full integration” (§7.7). The second form of integration, *social integration*, marks a progression in that children from the special unit or class “eat, play and consort with other children, and possibly share out-of-classroom activities with them” (§7.8). The third and most advanced form of integration is referred to as *functional integration* where locational and social integration lead on to “joint participation in educational programmes”, the particular demands of which are highlighted:

It is the closest form of association, where children with special needs join, part-time or full-time, the regular classes of the school, and make a full contribution to the activity of the school. Functional integration makes the greatest demands upon an ordinary school, since it requires the most careful planning of class and individual teaching programmes to ensure that all the children benefit, whether or not they have special educational needs. (§7.9).

The report itself notes that this triad of forms of integration provides a framework for the planning and organisation of the education of children with SEN, but also for assessing “how effectively it has been achieved” (§7.10). It also acknowledges that mainstream schools will require “ready access to other supporting services, particularly the school psychological, health and social services”, but acknowledges the provision of therapies within all mainstream schools must be a long-term aim until sufficient resources are available.

Crucially, in terms of cost, the report makes it clear in a rarely cited section that integration “is not a cheap alternative to provision in separate special schools, and there is no short cut” and indeed the report suggests that the dispersal of services currently concentrated in just a few schools “will be considerably more expensive” (§7.56). In short, the principle of integration, as set out by the Warnock Report, takes the form of a triadic continuum, the success of which depends on careful planning, training and (importantly) resourcing from the very start. As such the Report once again confirms how it is the educational system which presents the barriers to learning rather than any medical deficit inherent to the child.

So, a close reading reveals that there was always a recognition in the Warnock Report of the cost implications of providing effective support for the learning of children with SEN, whether in mainstream or special education. This fundamental tension between the twin drivers of economic efficiency and educational effectiveness was thus present from the very outset and was acknowledged by Warnock herself in 2018 when she carefully framed the 1978 Report within its post-war social context. Warnock referred to the ensuing Education Act of 1981 as “the last gasp of welfarism” (p.3) following on from the Beveridge Report and the great social legislation of the 1940s which created the Social Services and the National Health Service. This is echoed by Lunt (2007, p.104) who refers to the mid-1970s context of the Warnock Report as the “expansionist and optimistic mode of ‘post-war welfarism.’”

Lunt (2007) and Warnock (2018) both note however that in the three years between the publication of the report and the passing of the 1981 Education Act, much changed politically in the UK: Margaret Thatcher, who ironically had commissioned the Committee of Inquiry in 1973, became Prime Minister in 1979 and a new era began of economic realism accompanied by emerging public management discourses around accountability, effectiveness and standards so that the remaining optimism of the 1981 Act was tempered by a warning that there would be no additional money allocated to meet these needs, despite the insistence on extra funding contained in the report itself. Warnock (2018) notes further that the very spirit of the 1981 Act was subsequently further negated by the 1988 Education Act and its resulting testing regime and league tables. For Lunt (2007) this represents a “bleak contradiction” between the noble aspirations of the report and the subsequent legislation and *Realpolitik*, so that schools were expected to integrate pupils with SEN with little preparation or support. What was proposed as a supporting relationship between government funding and educational provision had quickly developed into a toxic tension between a push for economic efficiencies and a desire for educational effectiveness. Writing in her memoirs, Warnock (2000) excoriates the Thatcherite thrust of the 1988 Education Act, as a result of which children

were seen as “tools for the improvement of the economy” (p.181) and where parents would henceforth judge schools by examination results published in national league tables. Warnock laments however that this market-driven utilitarian approach was “incompatible” (p.182) with the focus on children inherent in the earlier 1981 Education Act which followed her 1978 Report:

“The Thatcherite attempt to apply the language of the free market to education (and one may think, to health) not only could not work, but was intensely damaging. The true purpose of education was lost in the commercial jargon of cost-effectiveness, value for money and quality assurance. The fact that children need education, and that their needs are different, was simply overlooked.” (Warnock, 2000, p.182)

This close Foucauldian reading of the jagged singularity of the complex, conflicting historical circumstances which precipitated and followed the emergence of Warnock’s proposals is highly significant. As such the Warnock Report appears to have been birthed at the end of an era of public spending optimism but subsequently fell victim to the ultimately irreversible neoliberal power dynamics of the Thatcherite economic *Zeitgeist* of the 1980s. Without such a reading or awareness, one might be forgiven for assigning responsibility to Warnock herself or to the Committee of Inquiry for the failure to implement fully the report’s proposals. Instead, a genealogical approach unearths conflicting viewpoints in the “place of confrontation” (Foucault, 1984, p.84), recognises the power of government policy, and accepts that the historical version of events has myriad tensions and competing ideologies which effectively thwarted the full implementation of the ambitious proposals which were reliant on an already fading and soon to be extinguished post-war spirit of welfarism. As Warnock (2000, p.183) concludes, “The idea of a common good, which genuinely lay behind the welfarism of the 1940s and 1950s has simply got lost.” An application to the peculiarities of the Northern Ireland context below reveals further tensions and dissonances.

### **The Warnock Report and Northern Ireland**

It has already been noted that the terms of reference of the Committee of Inquiry did not extend to Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, the effects of the Report were felt there too and resulted in parallel legislation being passed. The 1996 Education Act in Northern Ireland established a framework which provided an identical legal definition of special educational needs, and led to a parallel five-stage *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs* (operational from September 1998) which resembled very closely the English Code.

Similar challenges to the implementation of the new SEN system also emerged in Northern Ireland. In 1989 the Northern Ireland curriculum was introduced along with school league tables and, just as in England, this led to increasing pressures on schools to compete against each other based on their public examination scores. This marketization of schooling represented a significant barrier to the promotion of inclusive practice in schools in Northern Ireland just as in England (Warnock, 2000, 2005, 2018).

However, over the past decade, significant differences have emerged between SEN policy in England and Northern Ireland which have further highlighted the clash of competing forces and the complexity of policy development. The emergence of inclusion policy following Warnock's Report and the more recent faltering reform process are thus more redolent of Nietzsche's *Entstehungsherd* (tr. oven/pressure cooker of emergence) referred to by Foucault in his essay on *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*.

In April 2006 a review of SEN provision was initiated by the Department of Education to address concerns around the existing framework. A wide range of issues was identified for examination by the review including: the rising number of children identified with SEN and with statements; the high level of bureaucracy; the shortcomings of the existing Code of Practice; the impact of the 2005 SENDO legislation; staff skill levels; inconsistency in provision across the (then) five Education and Library Boards; and the lack of collaboration between the education, health and social care sectors. This culminated in a public consultation process following the publication of a set of policy proposals in August 2009 (DE, 2009).

Ten years later, many of the original reform proposals have been dropped entirely or modified due to public pressure, lack of available funding, a lack of political consensus and more recently the collapse of the Northern Ireland devolved Executive. Some progress has been made: the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, seen as the first building block in the new Northern Ireland SEN Framework, was passed by the Northern Ireland Assembly and received Royal Assent in March 2016, just months before the collapse of the devolved administration. The SEND Act means that the Education Authority (which replaced the five Education and Library Boards on 1 April 2015) must publish a plan of its arrangements for special educational provision at least annually, Boards of Governors must appoint a learning support coordinator (a new role replacing the SENCO) with responsibility for coordinating provision, and each child with SEN must have a Personal Learning Plan (replacing the previous Individual Education Plan). In addition, a duty is now placed on the Education Authority to have regard to the views of the child when making decisions about their special educational needs, and a duty is

placed on health and social care bodies to provide services identified by them as likely to be of benefit in addressing the child's special educational needs. In essence, the new Act provides the legislative changes necessary to support a new SEN framework which will also include new SEN Regulations, a new SEN Code of Practice and SEN Capacity Building training for schools on the new framework.

However, what little progress that had been made in the last decade has since been halted, following the collapse of Northern Ireland's power-sharing Executive in January 2017. As costs continue to spiral, the outworking of the reform process therefore remains incomplete, and Northern Ireland still operates a five-stage Code of Practice to identify and assess children with SEN, which dates back to 1998.

This complex political context highlights the failure within regional policy structures which has led in turn to both economic inefficiency and educational ineffectiveness. The sense of frustration felt by school principals, teachers and parents is now palpable. School budgets have been reduced, teachers' jobs are being cut, class sizes have increased, resources are scarce, Education Authority support is limited, and there is evidence that in the necessary trimming of school budgets, additional classroom assistant support for children with special educational needs is often first to go (BBC, 2018b; House of Commons, 2019).

However, it would be unfair to attribute the failing of the SEN system in Northern Ireland solely to Warnock's ground-breaking 1978 Report. Instead it is clear that the high aspirations and many laudable proposals contained therein fell victim to subsequent power struggles and outside forces which made the full implementation of the report impossible. So, while contemporary critics such as Norwich (2018) and Ainscow (2018) are quick to refute the enduring legacy of the Warnock Report and to suggest that we simply move on, a close Foucauldian reading would suggest instead that much of their criticism is hasty and fails to acknowledge the full complexity and challenges of its "emergence" into practice.

A number of key points of analysis are offered below as a critical interpretation of the impact of the Warnock Report on policy and practice in Northern Ireland, in terms of its positive legacy but also the challenges it has helped to create.

First, in terms of its positive contribution in Northern Ireland, it is important not to underestimate the importance of the Warnock Report as representing a significant first step towards the increased inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools, even if its original terms of reference did not extend to this part of the UK. In Northern Ireland, as in England, Scotland and Wales, the

Report led to changes in legislation, policy and practice which transformed educational provision for children with SEN. The Report set out the main tenets of a needs-based support system, characteristic of a social model of disability rather than the preceding medical model; it articulated for the first time valuable common educational aims for all children; it set out to guarantee support through the statutory assessment process for those children with the most severe and complex needs; it proposed that children should no longer be identified simply by a label, a defect or handicap; it emphasised the importance of the role of parents as equal partners (with teachers) in the education of their children; in reconceptualising disability, it changed the language and discourse of disability replacing terms such as “handicap”, “subnormal” and “maladjusted” with new terms such as “special educational needs” and “learning difficulties”; and created a new educational landscape in which children with SEN were “no longer to be thought of as a race apart” (Warnock, 2018, p.4). And, importantly, it made a strong argument for adequate resourcing to turn the high aspirations of the report into practical classroom reality in the same spirit as other post-war welfare reforms had revolutionised health and social service provision.

In Foucauldian terms, the Warnock Report thus represented a ground-breaking attempt to undermine and disarm dominant power-laden assumptions about disability. The report served to tackle the “model of exclusion” which had hitherto prevailed in education with rigid medical deficit categorisations and barriers which effectively denied education to children who were deemed to be abnormal and thus ineducable. Foucault wrote that “critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged and unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest” (1988, pp.154-155). As such the Warnock Report challenged not just the structures and practices of educational exclusion but also underlying and unchallenged beliefs about difference, needs, abilities and disabilities.

While there is much to celebrate, however, the challenging aspects of the legacy of the Warnock Report in Northern Ireland also need to be acknowledged, referred to by Warnock herself as the “radical mistakes” of her report (Warnock, 2000, p.32). The fact that there were shortcomings in the original report and failures in its eventual implementation should not come as a surprise within a genealogical approach. In describing Foucault’s approach, Marshall (1990, p.19) reaffirms that genealogy provides no uninterrupted histories, plays havoc with notions of continuity, and necessarily involves shifts, faults and errors:

“There are errors and accidents to be discovered which will disturb notions of order. The search for descent is not a search for firm foundations; on the contrary, it discovers moving sands, fragmented and incoherent events with

faults, errors, omissions, faulty appraisals, and pious claims and aspirations. The move is in general to show that ‘historical truths’ rest upon complex, contingent and fragile ground.” (Marshall, 1990, p.19)

There are three key enduring challenges arising from the Warnock Report in Northern Ireland:

*First*, Warnock (2018) herself came to recognise the statement (one of the main proposals) as “most baleful element in our report” (p.5) as, in hindsight, it was to be drawn up by the same local education authority which was legally obliged to pay for its provisions. This has led to a conflict between what a child really needs to access the educational curriculum and what the former Education and Library Boards (now the Education Authority) are actually able to afford. It has also led to innumerable disputes and tribunals as parents have appealed decisions made by ELBs/EA and argued for a higher level of support. The result has been additional and unnecessary delay, bureaucracy and expense, when resources could and should have been directed towards supporting the children’s learning needs in classrooms. This has been highlighted in successive reviews of SEN provision in Northern Ireland over the past 15 years (e.g. O’Connor *et al.*, 2005; DENI, 2009; NIAO, 2017; House of Commons, 2019) and corresponds to Norwich’s contention that “many of the persistent problems in the SEN and inclusion policy field derive from the Warnock legacy” (2018) with its focus on individual needs assessment and legal protections for provision. This legacy once again highlights the collision of the often competing forces of educational effectiveness and economic efficiency, and this is a challenge which has arguably become even more acute in the current climate of financial austerity and political stagnation in Northern Ireland. That there should be shortcomings and inadequacies in any policy proposal should however come as no surprise, even if, arguably, the problem has only arisen as a result of a lack of funding available to local education authorities rather than as a result of the proposals themselves.

A *second* example is the confusion which has emerged in Northern Ireland as elsewhere around the concept of inclusion. By 2005, in what she later described as an “intemperate pamphlet” (Warnock, 2018, p.8) Warnock herself had come to criticise her own policy of inclusion which she referred to as a “disastrous legacy” (Warnock, 2005, p.20). She argued that inclusion had gone off track so that “in many cases” inclusion “is experienced as a painful form of exclusion” (p.39) by children who are placed in mainstream settings without any of the necessary careful planning, training and adequate financial resourcing required to make this work. This results in children too often being “physically included but emotionally excluded” (p.36). Warnock noted then that “school is not a microcosm of society” and that it is directed towards life in the future after

school. She concluded that all children should be included “within a common educational project, not that they should be included under one roof” (p.37) if that experience of “equality” is in fact detrimental to their learning and does not serve to advance the common aims of education.

In 2018 Warnock noted that her 1978 report had been increasingly read as though it had advocated the inclusion of all children in mainstream schools, irrespective of their support needs. Warnock (2018) acknowledged that there were individual members of her committee who did hold this view and who saw the abolition of special schools as the next logical step after the creation of comprehensive schools in England in the 1960s and 70s. Warnock argued however that this was not the view of the committee as a whole, and maintained that the committee overall were “cautious about complete integration or inclusion” (p.4), especially for children with behavioural difficulties and/or autism. This refreshing honesty by Warnock is also enlightening in its acknowledgement of the range of opinions expressed by the membership of the 1974-78 Committee of Inquiry. It also serves to illustrate how concepts can subsequently be taken and used/misused to serve others’ purposes far beyond the original intention. Warnock (2018) was quick to refute this misinterpretation of her “cautious” approach to integration, which led in some Local Authorities in England (though not in Northern Ireland) to the closure of many special schools, and instead urged policymakers to “embrace the idea of different ways of accommodating them [children with SEN], either in special institutions or in units and spaces of their own on the existing educational campus” (p.8).

There has also been a continued failure to fully understand what was meant by integration in the Warnock Report and this is very evident in Northern Ireland. In terms of Warnock’s tripartite model of integration (discussed above), in Northern Ireland there has been an enduring focus on “locational” integration alone: each year the school census figures collected by the Department of Education report the number of children with SEN and with statements in mainstream and special schools. However, while broad statistics can reveal overall trends towards mainstreaming, they say nothing about what the Warnock Report termed “social” or “functional” integration. The establishment, for instance, of over 100 learning support centres (units) across mainstream primary and post-primary schools in Northern Ireland in recent years has gone some way to enable locational integration but has done little to establish a necessary framework to benchmark quality and ensure meaningful inclusion practice (moving beyond the “locational” to the “social” and “functional”). The legacy has thus been an unhealthy focus on where children are taught rather than how they are taught.



A *third* example of where the legacy of Warnock presents ongoing challenges is around the very term “special educational needs”. Ainscow (2018), for instance, contends that the term ‘special educational needs’ has outlived its usefulness due to its “continuing emphasis on the deficits of individual learners” (p.2). While it is undeniable (even to Warnock herself –see Warnock 2005, 2018) that this term has been abused and misinterpreted by policy makers and others and has often become a single label suggesting homogeneity, the suggestion that it focuses on individual deficits cannot be supported. Indeed, this term more than any other revolutionised how we speak of children with learning difficulties, focusing on individual children’s needs and ensuring that systemic barriers to their learning are identified and addressed. Warnock (2018) herself repeatedly stressed the importance of Ministers, civil servants and head teachers regarding children with SEN as a diverse rather than homogenous grouping requiring knowledge of the individual child, and individual responses. In terms of the language, Warnock rightly and honestly acknowledged the difficulty of referring to a child in need of additional support without some recourse to a “vocabulary” (p.7) and her response is typically pragmatic:

“Whatever we call it, we are labelling these children. We can’t avoid doing so if we are to identify them, and if we can’t identify them, we cannot do what the law demands and meet their needs. So we call them SEN children, and we try to specify the kind of problems they have in as neutral a vocabulary as we can, though, in my view, this is labour lost...The fact is that if proper provision is to be made to meet the educational needs of diverse children with complicated conditions, psychological or physical or indeed social that stand in the way of their learning, then we have got to be able to refer to them without the constant fear that someone will accuse us of elitism, or of using patronising or insulting language. I for one would rather be described as deaf (which I am) than facing auditory challenges, as someone once kindly told me I was when I couldn’t hear what she said.” (Warnock, 2000, p.7)

So, while there has been some misuse and over-generalisation of the term “special educational needs”, Warnock is right to defend her position, for it is only by identifying the particular challenges faced by individual children that the most appropriate support can be provided, even within a broadly inclusive education system.

A genealogical reading of the Report and subsequent commentaries thus highlights that the term “special educational needs” was conceived in good faith as an attempt to counter exclusion, to disrupt the hegemonic categorisations of the deficit medical model, and to provide opportunities for children to learn together with appropriate support and resources. What could not have been predicted was the misappropriation by policy-makers of the term “special educational needs” or even “SEN children” as one homogenous category,

further reinforcing notions of power and their destructive influence. The irony could hardly be greater, given Warnock's repeated emphasis on meeting the needs of the individual child. However, the answer is to educate users about the true heterogeneity of children's needs, not to abandon the term entirely.

## **Conclusion**

In response to Ainscow's provocation that "Forty years on, it is now time to leave Warnock behind" this paper uniquely addresses the legacy of the Warnock Report on policy and practice in Northern Ireland using a Foucauldian genealogical approach.

In so doing, the analysis resists the urge to reveal clear origins or ultimate truths, but instead significantly reveals a report which "emerged" in the wake of legislation within a specific context of optimism and post-war welfarism, led by a committee which held a range of different opinions. It also highlights how the report's ambitious proposals demanded additional public spending (just as the National Health Service depended on public national insurance contributions), but that the radical proposals were smothered by the prevailing forces of marketization, competition and reduced public spending of the Thatcher government which came to power just months after the publication of the Committee's report.

In examining the legacy of the Report, it is clear that in Northern Ireland as elsewhere in the UK the Report was highly influential in shaping future legislation which revolutionised support for children with SEN across the education system (in mainstream and special schools). It successfully challenged assumptions around exclusion, articulated common educational aims for all children, and created a system whereby a statutory duty was placed on ELBs/EA to identify and address the learning difficulties of children with even the most severe and/or complex needs. As such the Warnock Report was ground-breaking, and must still be considered as the most significant disability-related report in Northern Ireland's educational history.

However, a number of enduring challenges arising from the Warnock Report are also acknowledged: the failure to propose the establishment of an *independent* body to identify children's educational needs, for which support would be paid for by the ELBs/EA; the undue focus on *where* rather than *how* children with SEN are educated and integrated; and continuing misappropriation of the term "special educational needs" by some who wrongly interpret it as denoting a homogenous group of children and/or who fail to see how the identification of individual needs is the first step towards the provision of appropriate support.

/or fail to move beyond identification of need to provision of support.

That there are challenges, difficulties, complexities and even some “radical mistakes” (Warnock, 2000, p.32) in the Warnock Report is incontrovertible. Rather than leaving Warnock behind however, this paper argues that its many positive influences should be acknowledged and celebrated. Over forty years on, there is great value in re-visiting Warnock, in reading the report in detail, in considering its historical context, but also in reappraising its recommendations in light of the current educational context.

In terms of Northern Ireland, the paper reveals that although the main elements of the report were implemented in Northern Ireland legislation and policy as in England through the 1980s and 1990s, more recently there has been a series of significant failures in SEN policy in terms of its economic effectiveness and its ability to meet the needs of children. This has been compounded in the past three years by the collapse of the devolved political administration in Northern Ireland, which has halted an already painfully slow process of reform. In Foucauldian terms it could be argued that the most recent House of Commons Inquiry into Education Funding in Northern Ireland has actually foregrounded the individual messy cases of need from multiple perspectives (a “*wirkliche Historie*” rather than a polished linear traditional history): of children waiting 2 years or longer for SEN support to be provided, of classroom assistant provision being halved, of restricted access to referrals for assessment by educational psychologists, of parents having to buy basic necessities including toilet paper, tissues and soap for their children’s schools, and of a depleted, under-funded Education Authority struggling to meet growing demands. While Foucault highlights the interrelation of knowledge and accompanying elements of subjugation in any society or system, there is an even greater sense of powerlessness in the current political climate in Northern Ireland where even those in supposed positions of power (e.g. Department of Education officials and Education Authority Officers) are unable to implement change in the absence of a devolved legislature.

This Foucauldian analysis has been challenging, complex and sobering. Foucault was undoubtedly right to note that his genealogical approach befits the “molelike perspective of the scholar” rather than the “lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher” (1984, p.77) but in so doing, this analysis has encouraged a fresh reading of Warnock’s Report with particular reference to the torturous path of SEN policy development in Northern Ireland. Rather than turning our back on Warnock, this analysis has demonstrated that despite the contradictions, dissonances, jaggedness and gaps, there is still much to be gained from a close reading of this seminal report.

## References:

Ainscow, M. (2018) 'The Warnock Report: a catalyst for global change?' *Support for Learning*, Available online at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14679604/homepage/warnockvirtualissue> (accessed 12 August 2019)

Barker, M. (1998) *Michel Foucault - an introduction*. (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press).

BBC (2017) 'NI schools in the red: Education system faces £350m funds gap'. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-42317279> (accessed 12 August 2019)

BBC (2018a) 'Budget plans refused for 632 NI schools'. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-42798691> (accessed 12 August 2019)

BBC (2018b) 'Maghaberry primary school principal says parents donating toilet roll'. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-46047134> (accessed 12 August 2019)

Department of Education Northern Ireland (1996) *Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Needs*. Available online at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/special-educational-needs-code-practice> (accessed 12 August 2019)

Department of Education Northern Ireland (2009) *The Way Forward for Special Educational Needs and Inclusion*. Available online at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/every-school-good-school-way-forward-special-educational-needs-consultation-document> (accessed 12 August 2019)

Department of Education Northern Ireland (2018a) *Statistics and Research*. Available online at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research-1> (accessed 12 August 2019)

Department of Education Northern Ireland (2018b) *Annual Enrolments at Grant-aided Schools in Northern Ireland*. Available online at: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/annual-enrolments-at-grant-aided-schools-in-northern-ireland-201819.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2019).

Foucault, M. (1984) 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in P. Rabinow (Ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. (London, Penguin).

Foucault, M. (1988) *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: interviews and other writings 1977-1984*. (New York, Routledge).

HMSO (1978) *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (The Warnock Report)*. (London, HMSO).

House of Commons (2019) *Education Funding in Northern Ireland – Report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee*. Available online at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmniaf/1497/1497.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2019).

Lunt, I. (2007) 'The challenge of meeting additional educational needs with or without statements of special educational need' in R. Cigman (Ed.) *Included or Excluded? The challenge of the mainstream for some SEN children*. (London, Routledge).

Marshall, J.D. (1990) 'Foucault and Educational Research' in S. Ball (Ed.) *Foucault and Education*. (London, Routledge).

Northern Ireland Audit Office (2017) *Special Educational Needs*. Available online at: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/sites/niao/files/mediafiles/Special%20Educational%20Needs.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2019).

Norwich, B. (2018) 'Impact of the Warnock Report on English policy and practice: a personal view' *Support for Learning*, Available online at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14679604/homepage/warnockvirtualissue> (accessed 12 August 2019).

O'Connor, U., Hartop, B., & McConkey, R. (2005) 'Parental views on the statutory assessment and educational planning for children with special educational needs'. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 20 (3), 251–269.

The Independent (2018) "Protests to mark Northern Ireland breaking record for longest period without formal government". Available online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/northern-ireland-protests-government-wedeservebetter-stormont-a8510831.html> (accessed 12 August 2019).

Veyne, P. (2010) *Foucault – his thought, his character*. (Cambridge, Polity Press).

Warnock, M. (2000) *Mary Warnock: A Memoir – People & Places*. (London, Duckbacks).

Warnock, M. (2005) *Special Educational Needs: a new look*. (London, Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain).

Warnock, M. (2018) *SEN: The past and the future. Support for Learning*, Available online at:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/page/journal/14679604/homepage/warnockvirtu> alissue (accessed 12 August 2019).

Wedell, K. (1990) 'Children with special educational needs: past, present, future' in P. Evans and V. Varma (Eds.) *Special Education: Past, Present, Future* (Basingstoke, Falmer Press).