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**ATTITUDES TO MAKATON
IN THE AGES OF INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION**

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The Makaton Vocabulary was developed in the 1970's and became, and has remained, one of most pervasive and influential pedagogical approaches for children with severe learning difficulties. This article looks at attitudes towards Makaton and compares findings from two studies, carried out in a sample of special schools in the south west of England during 1986 and 1995. Overall, the results suggest that attitudes towards the use of Makaton signs have become more positive. Makaton signs are now regarded, overall, as supporting and facilitating language development, and earlier concerns about stigmatisation have declined. There is some evidence to suggest that this latter change is influenced by changes in attitudes to British Sign Language. The 1986 study predicted that new technology would have a significant impact on attitudes to language and communication systems such as Makaton, but this prediction was not supported in the 2005 study. The article highlights also how different attitudes towards Makaton can exist within the same school, and how this situation can have a significant impact on the educational experiences and opportunities of children with severe learning difficulties. The article concludes that the apparent educational movements of integration or inclusion produce different attitudes towards Makaton and how it is used. However, although Makaton signing has become seen as a tool to create educational inclusion, the extent to which the system itself has actually changed is a contentious issue.

This research was inspired by a wish to investigate aspects of special and inclusive education at different points in time. Whilst it is tempting to think of the development of the education system as a steady and inevitable progression, the thinking and beliefs of older practices do not necessarily disappear as a new era dawns. Vestiges of older beliefs can remain within later attitudes and practices (Armstrong, 2002). Indeed it has been argued, concerning research into inclusive education, that often old practices continue as before having taken on the clothing of new terms and labels (Slee, 1998) and this can also be argued for the practice of inclusive education (Sheehy, 2003). However, discussions of such changes typically consider theoretical or policy developments and teachers attitudes towards inclusion in general, rather than the beliefs about specific pedagogical practices within classrooms (Nind et al, 2004). This research examines attitudes and practices attitudes regarding one of the most significant pedagogical innovations for children with severe learning difficulties in recent history, The Makaton Vocabulary (Walker & Armfield, 1987). It considers how attitudes and practices might have changed in England, regarding Makaton, from the *age of integration* in the mid 1980s to those in the current *age of inclusion*, in 2005.

Educational practices are culturally situated and it is probable that changes in educational ethos, regarding children with severe learning difficulties, would be reflected in changed attitudes towards Makaton and how it is used. Comparing attitudes from two points in time might reveal if Slee's (1998) and Armstrong's (2002) concerns are supported, and older practices and beliefs continue, albeit cloaked in the new language of inclusion.

The Makaton Vocabulary
The Makaton Vocabulary is the *most popular language and communication system for people with learning difficulties in the   United Kingdom* (Autism Care, 2006) and is used in over 40 countries worldwide (Makaton Development Project, 2006). It is a pedagogical approach which began in an era of segregated institutional provision for children with severe learning difficulties.   It became established as an integral part of special school teaching practice and consequently important in the lives of many children with severe learning difficulties. Its current ubiquity can make one underestimate the impact it had when first developed and introduced.

In 1972-1973 the Royal Association for the Deaf and Dumb introduced signing to Botley's Park Hospital, Surrey. The project was aimed at deaf, mentally handicapped (*sic*) residents and their staff. Margaret Walker chose a vocabulary of 145 signs and carried out the research evaluation of the first use of British Sign Language (BSL) in this context. The results showed that BSL signs were easily learned by this population and suggested that it could be an effective tool for teaching language. The term Makaton is a derivation from: *Ma*rgaret Walker-Senior Speech Therapist at the Hospital; *Ka*thy Johnston and *Ton*y Cornforth , both Psychiatric Hospital Visitors from the Association for the Deaf and Dumb (Cornforth, Johnston & Walker, 1974).   In 1976 The Revised Makaton Vocabulary was completed. It was considered to be useful for various groups including: mentally handicapped (*sic*) deaf and non-deaf children and adults with little or no expressive speech and poor comprehension; children and adults who have mental and physical handicaps (*sic*) and children with autism. Walker and Armfield (1987) described Makaton as the application of a developmental vocabulary. It was a controlled method of teaching approximately 350 signs and it aimed to provide a basic means of communication, encourage speech wherever possible and develop an understanding of language via visual signs.
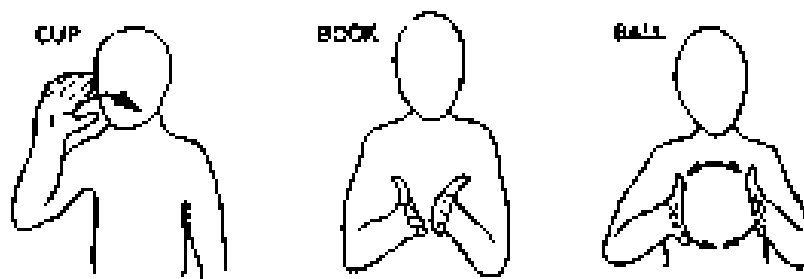
Figure 1.
Makaton signs from the 1976 Revised Makaton Vocabulary

The use of Makaton spread rapidly throughout the United Kingdom. By 1982, 95 per cent of English schools for children with severe learning difficulties, then described as *Educationally Subnormal (severe)* reported using the Makaton Vocabulary (Jones et al 1982). It also became commonly used in hospitals, adult training centres, pre-school units and children's homes. The growth of Makaton was supported by the Makaton Vocabulary Development Project (MVDP). In 1983 the MVDP registered as a charity and a network of regional representatives existed to run local activities. Between 1976 and 1985 over 30,000 people attended MVDP workshops and training courses (Sheehy, 1988). These included parents, care workers, teachers and other professionals. Makaton had evolved from a small innovative research project to become a national and internationally influential phenomenon.

The rapid rise of Makaton was accompanied by several criticisms of its design and function, for example concerning the methodology of sign selection and usage (Bailey 1978). Others argued that the Makaton teaching method and vocabulary structure were highly restrictive and, if not revised, might impede communication skill development with some children (Byler, 1984; Sharron, 1986). Further concern was raised that such a widespread system not been thoroughly evaluated and had failed to accommodate important research findings into its teaching strategies and vocabulary structure (Kiernan, 1982; Byler;1985) [For a discussion of the *Makaton controversy* see Sheehy and Rolph, 2004].   However, the academic debate regarding the merits of Makaton did not affect its growing popularity as pedagogy for children with severe learning difficulties and the approach continued to be developed. For example, as early as 1986 a research project explored Makaton peer tutoring (Hooper

and Bowler, 1991) and Makaton symbols were created and introduced as part of Makaton's approach to language development, in conjunction with signing (Walker et al, 1985).
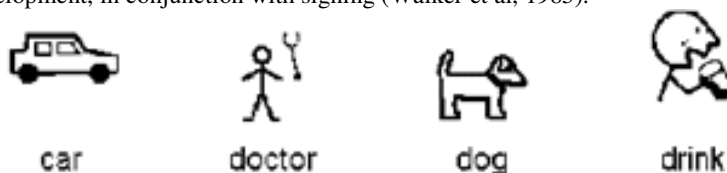

Figure 2. Makaton symbols

The 1987 Study
The Warnock Report (DES, 1978) was highly influential within the United Kingdom. It advocated for the increased integration of children from special schools into mainstream schools and introduced the concept of *special educational needs* (SEN) and children with *learning difficulties*. Its recommendations informed subsequent government Education Acts. However, the special school system in England remained intact and although there were significant variations between local authorities, accompanied by an increase of *in-class support in mainstream schools*, by 1987 children with severe learning difficulties were typically educated within special schools. The 1987 study therefore examined teachers' attitudes and practices regarding Makaton within segregated special schools for children with severe learning difficulties

Method and Findings
Several special schools for children with severe learning difficulties were contacted and permission was gained to visit and interview teachers about their use of Makaton. Subsequently, thirty teachers from eight schools were interviewed individually in the Spring and Summer of 1987. Each interview began by asking the teacher *tell me some of your feelings about Makaton and how you use it*. Issues raised were explored in keeping with a non-directive interview technique (Burman, 2001). Notes were kept during the interview and these were subsequently analysed thematically (Burman, 2001).

Several themes emerged across the interviews. These are summarised as follows:
- Makaton is of limited use as not used in a wider environment.
- Makaton can encourage speech
- Makaton is suitable for *non-speakers* only.
- Makaton is detrimental to speech
- Makaton makes children *appear more handicapped*
- Children using Makaton show a lack of spontaneous signing
- A minimum comprehension level is needed to benefit from Makaton

The teachers responses revealed issues more fundamental than the relatively technical issues found in the academic debate of the time (Sheehy, 1988). For example, teachers identifying themselves as Makaton users did not agree on the *purpose* of the Makaton vocabulary and this was often embedded in contrasting statements about the overall purpose of special education itself. This situation led to significant differences between teachers' attitudes towards Makaton and who should use it. To illustrate this an example of one school and its four teachers is shown below in Figure 2. T1-4 refers to individual teachers. The asterisks indicate their expressed beliefs.

	T1	T2	T3	T4
• All children				
• Non Speakers			*	
• Speakers only				*
• Min. Comprehension	*		*	*
• Detrimental to speech	*	*		
• Encourages speech	*	*		
• Non speakers will not gain speech	*			

Figure 3.
Teachers beliefs about for whom Makaton is suitable and its effect on speech development

Thus no teacher, in this example, saw Makaton as suitable for all children within their school. Some believed that it was only appropriate for non-speakers, some for speakers only. Similar patterns were found within each school that took part in the study, and a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices were noted. These differences would have a significant effect on the children's experiences and educational opportunities through changes in their access to Makaton and how it was used.   Fundamental differences also emerged about the curriculum and language development, and how language development was influenced by pupils, teachers use of *signs*.   Three different types of argument emerged here.

- Facilitates a natural development - *speech becomes easier when the pressure is off..*
- Encourages laziness   - *a child will become lazy and use signs only… To encourage communication all should use it…but this would make the speakers lazy*
- There is a correct method - *there is no evidence that Makaton reduces speaking, this is poor teaching*

Many   comments from teachers in the 1987 study were underpinned by beliefs about how children might fail to change sufficiently to *fit in* and ways in which their *difference* would be stigmatising for them in a mainstream school. This attitude seems to reflect concepts underpinning integration that were being espoused in education in England during this period.

> *..Integration involves preparing pupils for placements in ordinary schools. The pupil must adapt to the school and there is no necessary assumption that the school will change to accommodate a greater diversity of pupils Mittler, 2000 p.10*

The perceived status of sign language in society and the stigma of difference were often used to argue against integration occurring.

> *I'm almost totally against it…These poor children look different enough as it is without making them look any odder*
> *In a sense it draws attention to the child. Would it be better, ……., if the child was …. more normal looking?*
> *It won't help in mainstream*
> *Its similar to the BSL…they don't allow signing at all now*
> Teachers responses 1987

Integration was seen as a possibility but not for those children who couldn't change enough to *look normal*. Other studies at this time showed similar attitudes, for example in interviews with hearing impaired students and their comments on using signs (Lynas, 1986). Justification for using Makaton appeared most powerful when seen as a tool for *making normal*, i.e. that it would develop spoken language. Criticism was most powerful when arguing that Makaton was not used universally and therefore marked the child out as being different, the latter often being seen as a barrier to integration.

Each of the schools regarded themselves as *doing Makaton* but the beliefs and practices were different and often conflicting within each school. Teachers controlled the children's access to, and use of, Makaton and did so very differently. Thus learners could be denied access to a major language development programme based on integration arguments, underpinned by the stigma given to signing in the wider society. The attitudes and practices reported by teachers relating to difference reflected, to varying degrees, the educational ideology of the time.

The 2005 Study
Eighteen years later a study, similar to the 1987 study, was carried out. During this time major changes occurred had within the United Kingdom's education system. The overall approach for children with severe learning difficulties might have been said to have moved from an age of integration into an age of inclusion (Sheehy and Kellet, 2003).

> *[Inclusion means] Young people with special educational needs being placed in mainstream provision, where there is a commitment to removing all barriers to the full participation of each child as a valued, unique individual* (Alliance for Inclusive Education, 2006)

> *Inclusive education enables all students to fully participate in any mainstream early years provision, school, college or university. Inclusive education provision has training and resources aimed at fostering every student's equality and participation in all aspects of the learning community* (Radar, 2006)

.
Throughout this time the MVDP has continued to develop and extend new initiatives. These include peer tutoring (Hooper and Walker, 2002), signing for babies (Foreman and Crews,1998) and a Parent/Carer training pack (Ferris-Taylor, 1999). Makaton has begun to appear in the media, for example in children's television programmes (BBC, 2006) and continues to be used world-wide (MDVP, 2006). A recent independent innovation, Mak-Messenger, allows Makaton users to communicate online using an instant message approach (Ohene-Djan, 2004; Ohene-Djan, et al. 2005)

Figure 4:
Mak-messenger. A recent application designed for Makaton users.

Developments such as these might suggest that Makaton has moved beyond special schools into the mainstream and, consequently, the broader lives of children in society.

The 2005 study set out to follow the original investigation and consider the extent to which attitudes to Makaton had altered in the light of the new 'inclusive times'.

One consequence of the apparent move towards inclusive education is a widespread belief that the number of special schools in England is being systematically and dramatically reduced as more children become included within mainstream provision (BBC, 2005). However, in 2005 five of the original schools could be revisited. One new special school for children with severe learning difficulties was also included in the follow up study. This served the same geographical area as its predecessor. The two 'missing schools' had been part of hospital based educational provision. These hospitals had both closed. The   number of special schools supported by the local education authority remained the same as eighteen years previously.

Since the 1987 study the number of special schools in England has declined. It is estimated that in 1987 there were 1470 special schools and this subsequently fell to 1,148 by 2004 (DfES, 2004,) and in 2005 Abbott and Lucey (2005) identified 1,269 special schools in England*. However, this fall should be considered within the context of falling school roles within all English schools during this period, a trend which is predicted to continue (Hansard, 2005, 2005b). Table 1 below illustrates the relative decline in the number of schools in England.

Table 1.
Changes in English school numbers: 1987-2004, (adapted from Department for Education and Skills, (DfES) 2005)

School type	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Special	Pupil Referral Units
Number in 1987	560	19,432	4,211	1,470	0
Number in 2004	470	17,762	3,409	1,148	426
Approximate percentage change	-16	-8.6	-19	-22 [*For 2005 = - 13.7]	Not applicable

A recent development in the English education system has been that of the Pupil Referral Unit. These provide education for pupils who cannot attend a mainstream or special school, perhaps due to illness or mainstream exclusion, and they do not have to provide the National Curriculum (DfES, 2005) In 2004 there were 426 Pupil Referral Units (DfES, 2005) If these Units are seen as offering a form of special education then the percentage change for overall special schools is estimated at 6%, i.e a slight *growth* in a time of falling school numbers elsewhere. Whilst this analysis is tentative it does suggest that the magnitude of special school closure does not reflect the popular belief that such schools have largely disappeared in the *new age of inclusion.* This may explain why at the time of the 2005 study, most of the original schools could be revisited.

Method and Findings
In the summer of 2005, 59 staff members from six different schools across the South West of England were interviewed about their views regarding Makaton. In contrast to the original study, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and Classroom Assistants were also included in these interviews. Their role has become increasingly significant in classrooms since the original study was carried out (Hancock, 2001) and, working under the direction of qualified teachers, they are frequently the person most directly involved in the child's daily language programme activities (Sheehy and Nind, 2003).

The interviews followed the original format and were informal in tone, and carried out in the school setting (e.g. in a staff room, or a quiet corner of a classroom). However, questions and prompts were included to explore each of the areas arising from the original study. Participants were also given space to voice their feelings about other issues. The interview data were analysed for emerging themes (Burman, 2001), and comparisons were made between the 1987 and 2005 responses.

Table 2:
A comparison of school staff's beliefs about the Makaton Vocabulary: 1987 and 2005.

Theme	1987	2005
Makaton is of limited use as not used in a wider environment.	40%	13%
Makaton can encourage speech	26%	47%
Makaton is suitable for "non-speakers" only.	23%	10%
Makaton is detrimental to speech	20%	8%
Makaton makes children appear "more handicapped"*	41%	13.5%
Children using Makaton show a lack of spontaneous signing	41%	5%
A minimum comprehension level is needed to benefit from Makaton	41%	8%

*Note that the term 'handicapped' was not used by any 2005 participants. This theme indicates a belief that Makaton might stigmatise or adversely mark out those who used it

The participants' responses indicate that the original themes remain relevant eighteen years on but suggests that there has been a shift in beliefs about Makaton.

The effect on speech
Makaton was seen as encouraging speech by the majority of the 2005 interviewees. A smaller number (13.6 per cent) commented that it had a neutral effect *it doesn't inhibit or discourage speech*. Relatively few saw Makaton as being detrimental to speech (8 per cent) , and this was seen as being for particular children rather than all children, for example   *it might hinder a few*. Underpinning discussions of Makaton's effect on speech was the belief, stated by a range of interviewees that Makaton was *much easier* than speaking. For some this was seen as *taking the pressure off speaking* and giving speech *multi-sensory support*. For the majority of interviewees the ease of signing, and the physical structure and prompting it offers language, was associated with the encouragement of speech, and further that *They are more likely to try*. i.e children are motivated to speak because of Makaton.
A counter argument, used by a small minority of interviewees, also began from the premise of Makaton being easy to learn but here interviewees concluded that this ease could mean that:
   the child then doesn't have to speak to communicate and this might hold them back
   Teacher , 2005.

For this group spoken language was seen as being superior to communication by signing, echoing beliefs expressed by the 1987 sample. However, even when disagreeing on the effects of Makaton on speech, most participants in 2005 commented that Makaton actively developed the child's language skills. The importance of language development, as distinct from speech production, was acknowledged.

Makaton and inclusion
In relation to the use of Makaton in wider environments i.e. outside special schools, many teachers and LSAs raised the topic of inclusion. This was now seen as a purpose of, or a significant influence on, special school practice. Several examples were given of nearby mainstream schools, playgroups and pre-school groups where the whole classes learned, or were encouraged to learn, Makaton. In these discussions Makaton was almost always looked upon as being a signed language rather than a language development programme of which signing is a part.

> *It's the equivalent of a foreign language*
> Teacher, 2005

The use of Makaton in these contexts was often linked to positive comments about the status of British Sign Language (BSL). This contrasts markedly with many comments in 1987 where BSLs status was seen undermine the use of Makaton. Changes in society towards BSL appears to influence how people think about Makaton. This was explicitly stated by some participants

> *BSL is seen as a proper language, so children aren't marginalised by signing*
> LSA, 2005

The relatively limited use of Makaton in society was still acknowledged but was not seen by the majority of participants as an argument against its use. Rather, it was typically argued that this situation was therefore something that should, and was, being changed. A majority of participants expressed the opinion that other members of society should learn Makaton and see it being used, particularly teachers and children in mainstream schools. Furthermore, the movement of children with learning difficulties into mainstream schools was seen by many participants as a positive force in initiating this change of attitudes to signing and children with severe learning difficulties. Makaton was explicitly linked by participants to a broader goal of *helping inclusion*. Makaton was frequently seen as a means through which schools could be changed, in contrast to the earlier integrationist arguments that tended to focus on how far the child themselves could change. Makaton was now being given as a reason why inclusion could work, rather than why integration would fail. The *educational tool* was the same in both cases but teachers' attitudes towards its use were different. This *inclusive* attitude contrasts with the 1987 comments in which Makaton signing was often seen as stigmatising. In 2005 the participants describing difference and diversity as an expected part of classroom life, indeed something to be promoted.
Only eight participants felt that using Makaton might potentially stigmatise children.

> *…Makaton is fine for young children, but is not cool for older kids…*
> *…Might be funny looks in mainstream, not well known in mainstream….*
> *…Needs to be explained, might be confused with flapping...*
> *…It has a negative perception in mainstream…*
> *…marks some one out as different, especially older kids, goes against inclusion…*
> *…some parents feel it marks them out as special needs…*
> *…a negative perception, speech is [seen by others as] better…*
> Teachers and Classroom Assistants, 2005

Interestingly, the degree to which Makaton might stigmatise children was usually commented on in terms of specific mainstream schools, ie. stigmatisation would happen in some schools but not others. One factor mentioned in relation to this was whether the classes signed or teachers explained what Makaton was to the pupils. In these *inclusive* schools Makaton was not stigmatising because the other children understood it and may have learned some signs themselves. Again the link with BSL was mentioned and also the effect that television had on giving signing a *good press*. Several teachers mentioned a *growing acceptance* and felt it was becoming easier for children to sign in mainstream schools, although it still remained a *sub-culture*.

> *There is a long way to go. BSL is only recently accepted, Makaton is a long way down the line here*
> *It's changing. CBEEBIES is good!* [*CBEEBIES is a children's television show*]
> Teachers, 2005

When discussing how Makaton was perceived outside schools responses included:
>*…The same as BSL…*
>*…Like the deaf community, there's more understanding now…*
>*…The more people know it, the less different it gets…*
>Teacher and Classroom Assistants, 2005

There were many positive comments about how much all children in mainstream schools *enjoyed using it*, were *fascinated by Makaton* and *loved to learn it* and *want to learn signs*. Signing was only an issue, or stigmatising, for a Makaton user where the others haven't been given the opportunity to *try it out*. In the case of Makaton, barriers to inclusion could be overcome by change in mainstream school policy and practices.

Alternative Approaches
Since the 1987 interviews were conducted other language development programmes and communication systems have become available (Abbott and Lucey, 2005). Only seven of the interviewees, from two schools, said that Makaton was the sole or principle communication method being used in their school. The majority of respondents did not see other approaches as competition but rather part of a wider communication approach within the schools. A typical comment was
>*We use them all together. …..Symbols work well alongside Makaton. BSL isn't competition as it extends and supports Makaton*
>Classroom Assistant 2005

The Objects of Reference method (Jones, Pring and Grove, 2002) was mentioned by two teachers both of whom taught children with profound and multiple learning difficulties, and was used alongside Makaton.

Compared to the 1987 study there were relatively few examples of negative comments about the use of Makaton in the wider environment. For example *I think it's just for special schools*. In the 2005 study negative comments about Makaton tended to argue that other communication systems (not available in 1987) had much more communicative potential outside the special school situation. These approaches were all symbol based systems , for example the Picture Communication System (PCS) was mentioned by 45 participants (see Abbot and Langley, 2005, for an overview of current symbol use in English special schools). It was felt that these symbol based approaches could be understood without training and therefore were better in supporting communication within mainstream schools and community settings. Those who argued for this did not use Makaton symbols with their class but used a combination of Makaton signs and Picture Communication Symbols. However, the reasons for using symbols other than Makaton symbols was not known by these participants. Some children, it was felt by the symbol advocates, will only use signing in supported communication with their LSA and teachers, but not with their peers. This could hold them back in mainstream classrooms where the social support for their interactions might not exist. It was felt this was a particular issue for some children with autism and that symbols can sometimes get around this problem.

Within the 2005 study conflicting comments were made in relation to children with autism. Six interviewees thought that Makaton was particularly suited for children with autism, whereas four felt that it was suitable for all children *except* those with autism. In this group four teachers came from the same school and two expressed each opinion. The school teaches many children with autism. This difference seems to reflect teachers use of alternative language systems. Those who felt that Makaton was *not* useful advocated PCS as being more effective

Makaton tended to be seen as signing rather than a broader language development programme and Makaton symbols were not seen as being inherently part of the Makaton programme.
>*Writing with Symbols has replaced Makaton symbols*
Teacher, 2005

Writing with Symbols (Detheridge and Whittle, 2000) is a software program which uses pictorial symbols. It can also use Makaton symbols, allowing pupils to read and write Makaton symbols.

Surprisingly only two respondents indicated technologically based *voice* approaches, such as switch systems utilising recorded vocabulary and a small minority of the sample mentioned digital photographs being used in preference to symbol systems or signing. In 1987, it was felt by several participants that using new technology, which could *speak symbols*, would become common practice in the future and reduce the need for signing. Whilst such technology is increasingly available it was mentioned by only 15 per cent of the 2005 interviewees. This suggests that new technology, which although portable and increasingly affordable, is not having the predicted impact on Makaton use. The

1987 prediction was that the technology would help to normalise the children by giving them a form a spoken language. The 2005 interviewees in general are more comfortable with children using non-speech based means of communication. This may has reduced their need to adopt *technology that speaks*.

Training.
Issues of training were mentioned in the 2005 study. In particular, the cost of training, obtaining appropriate professional development of staff and the quality and consistency of Makaton practice within schools. Some interviewees mentioned the difficulty of providing appropriate training and resources both for staff, and for the families of their pupils. Several interviewees said that their schools could not afford to pay *Makaton's fees* to train all staff members, and so training was done on a trickle-down basis, with perhaps only one or two staff members being formally trained; they then train other staff members, either, in some cases, by setting up *official* lessons, or simply by allowing other staff to pick up signs as they go along. This results of this were seen as producing a somewhat chaotic situation across a school, where some staff members are fairly proficient and others are not, and where different staff members may be using different signs for the same word (or accidental variations on a single sign), or generalising one sign to cover several different words. In some cases, some provision may be made for teaching families, but again where this is done, it is generally done somewhat erratically, and may result in confusion. While several interviewees mentioned that they and other staff members and families would like to learn more formally, the cost was mentioned as being prohibitive. Further, the cost of training was seen as having a negative impact on children's inclusion within mainstream; many mainstream schools might be keen to train some of their staff, and in turn to teach their pupils some simple signing, but were perceived as reluctant to spend money on something that may not be widely used. When arguing in this way the benefits of Makaton became seen as being largely for the child being *included*, rather than for all whole class. Hence, Makaton could lose out in a competition for funds with events having a *whole class, National Curriculum based* impact. A child's inclusion, supported by Makaton trained staff, was seen as competing with other, potentially conflicting agendas that were being imposed on schools.
In contrast, in 1987, Makaton training was seen as accessible, albeit from interviews with only teachers and at a time when Makaton was largely confined to special schools. A much wider audience now exists for Makaton and the access to training, and competition for funds, is seen as acting as a barrier in meeting the needs of this larger group.

Then and now.
A comparison of the two sets of interviews suggests that, overall, there have been significant changes in attitudes to Makaton and how its use is described. Further, these changes do seem to reflect a movement within the education system from a period of integration towards inclusion. Although there is variation within the two studies, one can discern some general differences between the two periods in time.
In 1987 Makaton was seen as a remedial special education technique, and something that would stigmatize children in mainstream schools. These children might be integrated if their speech and language skills developed to a point where Makaton signing was not needed. Integration could be only achieved by 'making normal'. The perceived value of Makaton was strongly influenced by the degree to which it could support this process of changing the child. Signed language was awarded a very low status and this status also influenced teachers' perceptions of the Makaton Vocabulary. In 2005 signed language (BSL) was reported as having a higher status in society and consequently Makaton was also seen more positively. A greater acceptance of individual differences and alternative means of communication has helped Makaton to become perceived as tool for supporting the inclusion of children within mainstream schools. A range of symbol based communication systems now exist and appear to be often used in preference to Makaton symbols, however the Makaton Vocabulary signs are highly valued by teachers and Learning Support Assistants as communicative and pedagogical devices. Makaton signs may be less transparent than some symbol systems but the 'language status' awarded to Makaton by many participants appears to protect them from being replaced by symbols that are more immediately understood. In some respects Makaton is being constructed as the natural language for some children with severe learning difficulties, in a way that is similar to BSL's position as the natural language of the Deaf community.
The changes noted in the second study do appear to reflect many aspects of current thinking about inclusion and inclusive education, although there is considerable individual variation in the attitudes of school staff. As Tables 1 shows, Armstrong's (2002) argument that attitudes and practices from previous eras can continue to exist is supported to some extent. However, overall attitudes are changing

and the perceived purpose and value of Makaton, for the majority of school staff, is in based on its ability to support inclusive educational practices. These attitudes are based on an acceptance of diversity together with an expectation of mainstream education.

And yet, the majority of the special schools from the 1987 study are still teaching children with severe learning difficulties eighteen years later. Children in such schools are still segregated. This raises the issue of whether the system is gradually evolving towards inclusion, aided by innovations such as the Makaton Vocabulary, or whether the new *inclusive* language is being used to explain practices within a context that is essentially non-inclusive. It has been suggested that *inclusion* is being re-constructed, for children with severe learning difficulties, as continued separate special education which offers inclusion in a curriculum to prepare them for later *inclusion* in society.

> *Our job is to prepare children for life, not mainstream education. We will return children to the*
> *mainstream wherever possible, but inclusion fails some children.*
> Quarmby, 2006.

The 2005 participants suggested that *wherever possible* was significantly influenced by competition from different funding and policy priorities, imposed on mainstream schools by the government. A change in the government's prioritisation of inclusive education has been noted by others. Richard Rieser, director of the charity Disability Equality in Education states:

> *Up until 2001 the government was clear that all children with disabilities should be included.*
> *That movement towards inclusion has stopped*
> Rieser quoted in Quarmby, 2006.

In the *age of integration* Makaton was perceived as a remedial technique to support the education of children with severe learning difficulties in the, then relatively recent, move from segregated hospital provision to special schools and towards the possible but less likely option of mainstream schools. Attitudes of the time saw Makaton as a tool for integration and carried within them the limitations of the integrationist model.

In the second series of interviews Makaton was seen as a communicative tool that could support and enable inclusive education, but which is underutilised due to financial and prioritisation barriers. In describing their attitudes towards Makaton the interviewees clearly expressed a movement away from using a within-child, or deficit model, as seen in the 1987 study, towards a view in which barriers to inclusion are seen as existing outside of the child. The school staff were often speaking *the language of inclusion*, albeit from within segregated special schools. Makaton is seen by these staff as an excellent pedagogical tool for the *age of inclusion*, and examples were reported of Makaton use successfully supporting children within mainstream schools. However, whether this *age* will arrive for all children with severe learning difficulties in England remains unclear at this moment in time.

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