



# Interpersonal and Organisational Development Research Group

**IOD Occasional Papers: Number 6/97**

## **Researching Inclusion of Disabled People in Environmental Activities**

*Sarah Beazley, Michele Moore, David Benzie,  
Martin Patient & June Maelzer*

**Researching Inclusion of Disabled People in Environmental Activities**

**Project Report and Proposals for Further Development**

**Sarah Beazley, Michele Moore, David Benzie  
Martin Patient and June Maelzer**  
Disability Studies Team

Manchester Metropolitan University

*An earlier version of this paper was published in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) Doing Disability Research Leeds . The Disability Press, 1997*

# CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>                                  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>PREFACE .....</b>   | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS.....</b>                              | <b>10</b> |
| <b>NOTES ABOUT LANGUAGE.....</b>                               | <b>12</b> |
| <b>PART ONE - INTRODUCTION.....</b>                            | <b>13</b> |
| <b>BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH.....</b>                         | <b>13</b> |
| <i>How the report is organised .....</i>                       | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Note on ethical considerations.....</i>                     | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Research context .....</i>                                  | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Starting positions of key stake-holders.....</i>            | <i>15</i> |
| <i>Plan of action .....</i>                                    | <i>16</i> |
| <i>Pressures on original research plans.....</i>               | <i>17</i> |
| <i>Changing the research approach .....</i>                    | <i>20</i> |
| <b>PART TWO - METHODOLOGY .....</b>                            | <b>23</b> |
| <b>SETTING UP A MEANINGFUL RESEARCH PROCESS.....</b>           | <b>23</b> |
| <i>Planning research discussions .....</i>                     | <i>23</i> |
| <i>Securing participation .....</i>                            | <i>23</i> |
| <i>Presentations through a third party.....</i>                | <i>27</i> |
| <i>Collaborating in research situations .....</i>              | <i>30</i> |
| <i>Involvement of non-disabled people.....</i>                 | <i>32</i> |
| <i>Eventual collection of data.....</i>                        | <i>32</i> |
| <b>PART THREE - RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>                     | <b>34</b> |
| <b>WHAT PARTICIPANTS HAD TO SAY .....</b>                      | <b>34</b> |
| <i>How do people learn about the course? .....</i>             | <i>34</i> |
| Current experiences of recruitment.....                        | 34        |
| Suggestions for wider promotion of the course.....             | 37        |
| <i>Practical issues - transport.....</i>                       | <i>39</i> |
| Current experiences of transport.....                          | 39        |
| Suggestions for tackling the transport problems .....          | 42        |
| <i>Practical issues - external funding and monitoring.....</i> | <i>44</i> |

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original ideas for this report arose through the shared experiences of Martin Patient of Sale and Altrincham MENCAP, Kevin Griffin of the Salford and Trafford Groundwork Trust and disabled people connected with various environmental activities. We are most grateful to all of these people for their inspiration and continued interest and support. We are also very grateful to the Salford and Trafford Groundwork Trust for funding the subsequent research programme and to Kevin Griffin for entrusting us with the work.

We want to acknowledge the part played by a number of other people, not named here for reasons of confidentiality, who have also contributed to the project which is the focus of this report. They will know who they are and we thank them for welcoming us, giving us their time and sharing their thoughts with us. Particular thanks must go to the students and tutors who have taken part in the research and any merits of this report are due to them.

have clearly been in people's minds for some time already. We have decided not to avoid challenging and difficult issues but to discuss these as openly as we can, whilst endeavouring at the same time, to recognise the personal commitments and responsibilities which shape the reasons why each individual views things differently. As a group of disability researchers we repeatedly find ourselves needing to take a hard look at our own assumptions and practices in order to clarify and refine our hoped for role as disabled people's allies. When we discuss barriers to involving disabled people in this particular piece of research we do include ourselves as part of the problem.

The most pivotal part of the report concerns the findings which emerge from the interviews and which illuminate directions for further development and change. It is worth highlighting here that the commitment, enthusiasm and optimism emerging through the interviews about Groundwork initiatives to include disabled people in environmental activities was extremely impressive. It becomes clear that there is a need to build on the successes and also to extend schemes so that more disabled people can choose to take part in a wider range of environmental activities, whether for leisure, education or employment purposes. Further research will prove invaluable in the process of establishing new initiatives for widening inclusion of disabled people in environmental activities. A set of draft proposals for more studies, based on the aspirations of those who have taken part in this project, is included in the report to stimulate ideas about practical ways of evolving new directions. These comprise our own contribution to making sure that this initial piece of preparatory research could make some real difference.

Sarah Beazley, David Benzie, June Maelzer, Michele Moore and Martin Patient

Disability Studies Team, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, The Manchester Metropolitan University, August 1997

**Martin Patient** has long experience in the voluntary sector and is known nationally and internationally for his pioneering advocacy of disabled people's rights and opportunities. He has worked tirelessly to encourage and organise the active collaboration of disabled people and service providers in monitoring and evaluation of service delivery and planning. He is currently co-writing a book for Venture Press with other members of the team on issues arising from research with older caregivers of people with learning difficulties; Moore, M., Patient, M. and Skelton, J. (1998) *Enabling Older Caregivers*.

**David Benzie** studied Psychology and Disability Studies as part of his Combined Studies degree at the Manchester Metropolitan University. He has conducted several disability research projects and is co-author with other members of our team of a chapter; Beazley, S., Moore, M. and Benzie, D. (1997) 'Involving disabled people in research : a study of inclusion in environmental activities in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research* The Disability Press : Leeds.

## **PART ONE - INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

#### **How the report is organised**

This report is based on the experiences and views of students, both disabled and non-disabled, and staff involved in a conservation course. One aim of the course is to provide disabled people with the possibility of taking part in some environmental activities both in the present and in the future. The report provides insights into the course, alongside ideas for future research and development activity generated from suggestions of those who contributed their views to this project, and places these within a recognised framework for reflexive disability research which advances human and civil rights (Barnes and Mercer 1997; Moore et al 1998).

The contents of this report are organised as follows. An introductory section gives the background to the project and explains the shape of enquiries which were originally envisaged. The second section then concentrates on the way research activities were eventually conducted and examines the process of research, including issues of direct and indirect access to the project for disabled people. In the third section the main findings to come from participants are explored and these suggest several avenues for further research. In the fourth section ideas emerging are discussed and reviewed before moving on to presentation of a number of proposals for potential funding for further studies, based on the recommendations of people with direct experience of the context under consideration, in section 5. The final section of the report provides an appraisal of the main achievements of this preliminary piece of work and contains some suggestions for consolidating future research activities. We offer to convene a workshop to enable all those who have been involved in this first stage to exchange feedback, clarify goals and identify ways forward. All concerned will recognise that much more research needs to be done.

## **Starting positions of key stake-holders**

The first thing to say is that everyone involved with this project was delighted that ideas for research and development had come to fruition and there was considerable enthusiasm for getting started.

The directors from the Groundwork Trust and MENCAP local branches instigating the research were able to build on close knowledge of on-going activities, and detailed understanding about the practical and financial issues of establishing and maintaining inclusive initiatives, in order to identify a number of desired outcomes for the project. As with all voluntary agencies, the participating branch of the Groundwork Trust was regularly seeking funding and was interested in defining a research programme so that future bids could be consistent and well-founded. In addition, the two directors had previously put a lot of energy into a range of initiatives for disabled people that the local Groundwork Trust was implementing. It would be useful to demonstrate positive outcomes from these, which would in turn, support the case for further funding. It was hoped that research might also open up possibilities for the Trust to work more closely alongside other service providers. The commitment of the key service providers to carrying out research was unequivocal. They were strongly motivated by the wish to enhance opportunities for disabled people to participate in environmental activities. Members of the Disability Studies Research Team were equally enthusiastic, having worked alongside one of the agency directors for some time and knowing that a range of positive outcomes were likely.

The goals of the researchers were influenced more directly by theoretical principles than by practical matters such as those outlined above. For example, it is important to us that our research should have maximum relevance to the lives of those disabled people it touches on and to prompt, wherever possible, the bringing about of tangible changes which disabled people themselves prioritise. The main principle that we wished to adhere to was that emergent research activity would hold the views of disabled people centrally. Usually, to help make sure of this, we start our enquiries by encouraging disabled people to decide the research agenda. We have been moved in this direction by increasing expressions of anger by disabled people about the violation of their experiences by non-disabled researchers who presume to know better than they what issues in disabled people's lives merit research and investigation (Barnes and Mercer 1997; Moore et al, 1998). Our team has placed on record commitment to disabled people having full control over



worth spelling out because they raise questions about the importance of evolving clear strategies for facilitating disabled people's access in future research projects which may arise as an outcome of this one.

### **Pressures on original research plans**

We found that there were two ways in which the involvement of disabled people in this project was potentially threatened. These had to do with processes which we term 'gaining permissions' and 'the mediating relationship'. Our thoughts on how these factors influenced the project will prompt some disquiet but highlight several critical issues.

A phone call in the week following the initial research planning brought things to an abrupt halt. It turned out that staff from a training agency and a voluntary project, each associated with a number of the disabled students on the course, had just found out about the research. The representatives of these agencies indicated that, whilst they wished to be supportive of the project, the proposal would have to go through the vetting procedures of their respective institutions. This was entirely understandable and alerts the reader to the age-old problem of who presumes, and who has a right to presume, power and control over disabled people. The problem was exacerbated because in addition, the training agency independently set in motion a procedure for securing agreement to take part from disabled students through support workers. Staff preferred students to learn about the research and have their agreement sought through key-workers rather than involving researchers at this stage. In stark contrast, the issue of mediating consent through third parties was not mooted in relation to non-disabled students whose views were to be sought; no third party was brought forward to determine or 'protect' their decision to participate or not.

It is not easy to ascertain how such inequalities to access could have been neutralised swiftly and as one of the providers later commented:

I think you were given quite a challenge, I can sympathise. It doesn't make things easy .. of course a lot of people with special needs trying to get any access to them.. all this is very very difficult.

The reasons why intermediaries became involved without discussion with those commissioning or commissioned to do the research were never considered. Possibly it was to show that individual members of staff had taken their responsibilities seriously, or that there was uncertainty over the researchers' communication skills, or concern that the students would be uncomfortable with unfamiliar people. Perhaps none of these factors influenced the decision to place an intermediary between the researchers and prospective disabled participants, or possibly a combination of anxieties were involved. Our concern lies simply with the inequity which these procedures imposed upon the way in which disabled, as opposed to non-disabled, students learned about the project. Maybe this all made very little difference, but in a future project we would like to encourage open discussion about the rights of disabled people within the research context.

Disabled people can find the 'gatekeepers' in their lives taking a range of differing roles. The triangle between disabled person, intermediary and another, presents complex power relations which cannot be disregarded. Problems associated with mediated relationships are complex and need to be returned to later on in this report. Here, it is important to note how right from the very beginning of this project, we found that a range of different intermediaries were positioned between disabled people and researchers without any clarification of what their role was or was wished to be. Our intention is not to deny that there is a role for intermediaries. We know they can play an essential role in enabling disabled people to interact with a sometimes hostile and prejudiced society. However, we are noting here that the mediating relationship should be clarified and mutually understood from the outset in any future research projects. These tensions were recognised by several of those we have positioned as 'the gatekeepers' themselves, who clearly knew these kinds of problems to be complicated and many-sided. What appears to provide a sensible way forward from one person's point of view may not off-set the concerns of someone looking at the situation differently. Several questions are raised in our minds which might help to tease out some of the issues arising.

objective of enabling disabled people to have as much control as possible over research which is about their lives. We continued, and continue, to believe that only disabled people themselves fully know what research is likely to make a difference to them. It seemed timely to present a progress report in order to clarify the steps taken so far and to explain the impending change of direction to those we felt would wish to be kept in the picture.

Many disability researchers have found, as was happening here, that projects come adrift because key stockholders are not sufficiently central to the research process (Moore et al 1998; Shakespeare et al 1993; Stone 1997; Zarb 1997). It is not uncommon for this to happen but researchers do not always own up to the difficulties. Here we must credit those commissioning the project for their part in permitting sufficient flexibility for a period of reflection to take place. By taking time out to write a progress update, take stock of existing problems and devise new ways forward, it became possible to find ways of meeting the original aims of the project without riding roughshod over the views and priorities of anyone involved.

#### *Revised aims and plan of activity*

The amended plans retained many elements of the original proposal and are summarised below:

- draw together ideas about access to the environment from key stockholders involved with the conservation course - by spending time with a small number of disabled people to gather their views and those of representatives from key providing agencies
- possibly provide some opportunity for various interested parties to come together to consider issues that need investigating - in order to clarify how each could be involved in future research
- collate and analyse the findings of these preparatory exercises - in order to specify the range of research issues that emerge and ideas for progressing research agendas
- prepare an end of phase report - to summarise the findings and specify potential future research projects with accompanying outline budgets.

## **PART TWO - METHODOLOGY**

### **SETTING UP A MEANINGFUL RESEARCH PROCESS**

In this part of the report we discuss how we did what we did and reflect on some of the wider implications for undertaking future projects. It may seem, as the reader continues, that the early parts of the report dwell heavily on managing headaches. Hopefully as our account of this project unfolds, it will be possible to see that the reasons for this are important and help to reveal the enormity of the eventual headway that was made. The second half of the report emphasises these achievements and focuses on how they can be optimised. But first we turn to the practicalities which preoccupied us at this stage.

#### **Planning research discussions**

We planned to use interview strategies as the main means of collecting information. We have established a reputation for carrying out interviews which enable participants to identify areas of interest which they wish to talk about and also to discuss them as much or little as they chose (Moore and Beazley, 1992; Beazley and Moore, 1995; Moore et al, 1998). Our aim is to enable people to talk about the things to which they attach priority, and so to maximise the relevance of our subsequent findings. We followed this line of thinking in the present study and organised discussions loosely to encourage people to comment on their experiences of the course as students or service providers, to uncover their ideas for future research and consider their potential involvement, and to prompt general reflection on access for disabled people to environmental activities.

#### **Securing participation**

We set out to discuss the above agenda with disabled and non-disabled students as well as tutors, other support workers and service providers all directly connected with the conservation course.

things that mean something to them, so they understand what they have done but they say it in a different way.

Undoubtedly, communication and familiarity are factors of significance in allowing disabled people to say what they want to say. The need for researchers to address this was stressed:

Obviously you've got some people who have got more profound difficulties than others and sometimes you have to know a person you know, how they phrase their responses, to understand what they are talking about. And I think to overcome and minimise that constraint, the researcher would have to be working with them closely on several occasions.

This area needs shared exploration and we agree with respondents that it is important to open up discussions about innovative and varying ways of communicating. Booth et al (1990) point out that there can be an over-reliance upon verbal methods for eliciting the views of disabled people, thus limiting the input from those for whom speech is not their preferred way of communicating. In order to dismantle such barriers to access, it is important to consider employing a range of supporting or alternative approaches such as through drawings (Moore and Beazley, 1992), photographs (Booth and Booth 1997), life stories (Goodley 1996), and informal discussions (Booth et al op cit).

Although the researcher became friendly with all of the students met on the course, this could not, given the short period of time available, equate to establishing relationships characterised by sufficient familiarity and skill for easy and effective communication to take place. For example, the research assistant did not have qualifications in British Sign Language (BSL), or training for enabling communication with people experiencing mental illness. Making light of these barriers would place a heavy constraint on the opportunity for self-expression for disabled participants (Booth et al 1990).

course, being involved in initial assessment process and then as the course progress maybe do an interim assessment to see how far they have progressed but with the researcher there again, and then again at the end, and make sure trainees know that that person is actually studying them.

Scope for paving the way in any research project is, of course, determined by practical constraints of the time for, and duration of a project. Given widespread concern about the possible pitfalls of one-off interviews which can leave participants with unanswered questions or provide insufficient opportunity to ensure views are expressed, our usual practice, given sufficiency of resources, is to build in follow-up workshops to allow for more measured and shared, reflection and discussions. A series of individual interviews, or a number of group sessions may also be a possibility for extending contact within certain time constraints and we have built different variations on these ideas into the set of proposals for future research which can be found in Section 5. At this point, it might be worth thinking through precisely what steps need to be taken in preparation for further research in the context we are discussing. How can future projects be best facilitated and what tips could be given to prospective researchers before things get underway?

- ◇ What are the strengths and pitfalls of interviews when relationships are new ? How do these differ for disabled and non-disabled people ? How can such inequalities be reduced ?
- ◇ What are the benefits or otherwise of follow-up meetings for accessing views in research ? What are the advantages and disadvantages of seeing people individually or in groups for such discussions ?
- ◇ What practical solutions are there for developing effective research relationships when available is constrained ?

### **Presentations through a third party**

By now, given some of the set-backs which had delayed this project, we had become anxious about disempowering students through the newness of our relationships created by pressures of time. When one of the service providers, a voluntary group manager, suggested that it would be more appropriate for them

communicators,, it is also possible to diminish the time barrier, which reduces the difficulty of new relationships as discussed above. On the other hand, however, both disabled research participants and researched have to trust the judgement and skill of the intermediary and vice-versa. Subtle changes of language and meaning may be nigh on impossible to avoid and there is conspicuous powerlessness on all sides in such mediated interactions (Moorehead, 1997).

A third point is really an extension of the first two in terms of self-determination in research. In using the mediated relationship, researchers unwittingly perpetuate threats to the inclusion of disabled people's own voices. Those acting as intermediaries may, for one reason or another, introduce shifts linked to their own value systems and beliefs or in a desire to represent one or other of the parties in a certain light. There is inevitably a level of dependency which will influence proceedings and the input of both those who are the researchers, and those who are the researched, will be influenced by these dynamics. Finally, there are hazards if either party wishes to discuss things which may unsettle relations either with the mediator, or within relevant social groups. A useful example is where there may be conflict for the disabled person between their acceptance of the support they receive and the supporter who provides it (Morris 1993), and we heard examples of this from the people we met:

But there are other people like Pat, doesn't like his key worker.

The role of the mediator is not an easy one, not least because the expectations of others are often not spelled out. We need to recognise dilemmas created by the choice to have a mediator present such as indicated by one of the students involved in this project who, when asked if interested in taking part in future research, responded:

if [I was to be) involved in research [it would] be through an interpreter.

These issues involving power, control and disablement at individual, group and societal levels, are important and perhaps need airing more often. They remind us that mediated communication is far from straightforward. Things were, however, to become even more complicated than this.

In the course of research discussions we asked respondents to comment on the research process and the thoughts offered add to the debate about how disability research is best carried out. One service provider pointed out the importance of recognising power issues - a matter which we agree is crucial :

Power issues must be considered. The individuals in this case have never been asked before about their opinions on such areas and due to unequal balance of power between the two parties, may not be forthcoming and so become disempowered.

Another suggestion was that disabled individuals maybe more forthcoming to disabled researchers who have a similar cultural background. There is a growing awareness of the importance of disabled people carrying out research (Rioux and Bachs 1994; Oliver 1992) and of the necessity for non-disabled researchers to recognise the importance of creating alliances between disabled and non-disabled researchers with disabled people (Hurst 1995; Moore et al op cit.; Stone and Priestly 1996). More questions about the conduct of disability research need answers:

- ◇ How can the seemingly counter needs of 'direct access', 'mediated encounters', 'full communication' and 'self-determination' be met?
- ◇ What power issues prevail upon disabled research respondents, support workers in their role as intermediaries, service providers in their role as gate-keepers and researchers aiming to conduct independent and emancipatory explorations of a particular context? How do the concerns of each of these groups differ ? How can such differences identified ? How can agreement be reached?
- ◇ Is it possible to list some ways to begin to break down barriers which threaten to restrict the fullest involvement of disabled people in research ? For example, in the context under discussion, could existing student / staff forums provide an opportunity to discuss some of these issues?



widening inclusion of disabled people in environmental activities. Responses strongly suggest that a larger scale evaluation would provide not only confirmation of the value of current initiatives and experience but also generate many indications of further ways forward.

you didn't get the fees paid .. you had to pay yourself.

Here we immediately need to consider broad issue of access to adult education which are dependent on literacy, on finances, on resourcefulness and on support. The influence of such factors was clear to one of the tutors who explained :

It's easy to get access to people who haven't got any kind of special needs.

They can read about it in the college's publicity, in like a press release or leaflets but, of course, people who can't read don't stand a chance and you've just got to hope either their parents or really the key worker notices and takes an interest.

In all of this lies an important difference not just in accessing information about the course, but in exercising of choice. The non-disabled students were aware that there were 'a lot of other courses' and were able to make a decision based for these particular students, upon financial information. The disabled students may not have been aware of the alternatives and may possibly have been presented with little or no choice as is shown by Graham's comments :

Interviewer : How did you find out about the ecology course?

Graham : That was through the manager, Peter, he sorted it out. He asked us if I wanted to go on it and I said 'yeah because I don't do anything in the week', I just stayed at home doing nothing, so he said I could learn a skill you see

Interviewer : Had you said to him before you were interested in stuff or..

Graham : No, it just came up, I think he found out, think he phoned the [park] .. found out from there basically, you know what I mean?

One of the service providers highlighted the difficulties further :

[Recruiting disabled students] is an absolute nightmare. One of the major

to learn about practical conservation through a pre-NVQ course and it is felt to be very likely that many people who might be interested simply do not know such opportunities exist. Already this creates a challenge for trying to ensure equal access to information. Needless to say, those for whom this was of concern had also begun to consider some solutions.

### *Suggestions for wider promotion of the course*

Marketing of the course to ensure that it reaches a wider number of people is important as part of a wider equal opportunities policy with which the course does aim to comply. Non-disabled students had ideas about how to extend the advertising and use a variety of accessible formats :

I think it should be advertised more in the media, in local papers so that the disabled people who get the papers would know about it.  
And also they have a slot, don't they, I don't know, on Granada [TV] 'Community Action' or something. [There is] a huge waiting list apparently, it's about 2 years. But you could get on the list and get it put on.

Staff also had a range of suggestions :

I think there should be more links to established charities so that we can say to them 'these are the things we offer' because they are obviously in a better position to contact potential trainees than we are.  
We provide the service but we haven't got the links. I think there should be some research into just attracting attention of deaf groups and blind groups, learning difficulties groups whatever.

One of the service providers suggested a strategy to raise general awareness of local environment issues, thus hopefully leading to the possibility of more informed choices in decisions about courses and careers :

## **Practical issues - transport**

For those who do decide to do the course the next practical barrier seems to be that of transport. Many writers have noted the wide extent of transport disability in the UK and although individual solutions may not overcome the problem entirely (Heiser, 1995), individual action may contribute towards removing obstacles at least at local levels.

### *Current experiences of transport*

All those who spoke to us identified transport problems as a significant barrier to disabled peoples' inclusion in the course and other environmental activities. One support worker noted that transportation had limited the numbers [attending] where individuals have to make their own arrangements and may not have the necessary income'.

Of course the current students, although recognising the problems, had resolved them by the time they spoke to us, albeit having to rely upon personal resourcefulness and good will :

Ruth: Some people have mentioned that transport is a problem

Diana: Yeah, I found that

Interviewer : what about getting there and back?

Graham : I just get a lift

Interviewer : Off?

Graham : Off my key worker

Staff know access to the course is being limited by the practicalities or economics of transport :

at the moment most of them find their own way here. Some of them come along with their key workers Some of them rely on private hire taxis.

I mean it seems ridiculous that you give all these people with learning difficulties bus passes and they've never got access to a bus. A lot of time they are relying on friendly bus drivers to actually tell them where they are, what the number of the bus is and you know where their stop is.

This demonstrates the socially constructed nature of disability for people who are denied their right to accessible public transport. It isn't learning difficulty which threatens to prevent the above- mentioned students from using buses; it is the attitude of bus drivers.

Other services that complement mainstream transport systems in order to make it easier to move from place to another can also be inaccessible, as one member of staff pointed out:

I think 'Ring and Ride' is a valuable service but it's not very reliable and a lot of people with learning difficulties have real communication problems and I doubt whether they could actually order a bus for a specific time.

Again there are clear barriers to disabled people's inclusion. Of course the responsibility for this should be seen as shared, with the communication breakdown being in significant part due to the lack of innovative, user friendly mechanisms being explored and developed by services so to enable people with impairments to use forms of public transport if they choose.

It is clear that transport problems are reducing opportunities for disabled people to participate in the environmental course in a number of ways. For example, the number of hours lost through travel has a marked impact on the learning experience of those who are actually on the course :

With people who are currently on the course .. ideally they'd like everybody here from 9 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock in the evening. A lot of the philosophy behind the course is really that all courses are like introductions

If social services actually funded transport then that would be brilliant but nobody seems to want to take on the responsibility.

It would be good if you could do a pick-up somewhere .. that was more central.

The lack of universal accessible transport posed many questions about the practicalities of consolidating links within and beyond the course. The crucial thing here is to ensure that existing barriers are not allowed to grow into perennial problems. Staff are able to identify specific transport problems in need of initiatives to bring about change :

I can't really see how a person can actually get involved in environmental activities when they have to rely on public transport. It's absolutely farcical. However, you do get people such as the Ring and Ride .. three of the GM buses, they are pretty good. However [these services are] not reliable and they will only work within a very limited boundary.

It would be helpful to recognise that two targets for removing transport disability have already been teased out in the above reflections; reliability and boundary issues could quickly be taken up with the relevant operators as part of the process of dismantling disabling barriers. The right to travel is regarded as "a basic good and something which most people would regard as a right in our society .. fundamental to overcoming isolation" (Heiser 1995) and in line with similar views expressed by students and staff alike, we have made transport disability the focus of a major research initiative to follow on from this report.

It seemed also that there had been little chance yet to explore environmental activities as recreation in part, one member of staff felt, because 'leisure activities in general are not available which needs to be addressed'. Another person, talking about a walking club that had been in place but had folded, pointed out that 'some individuals were interested in [the club] but could not go due to a funding issue because they were not living in a residential setting', raising another area for exploration.

rendering of disabled people as 'exotic' and subsequently reproducing images of vulnerability (Barnes 1992). The course tutors explained one aspect of the role of social services which exposes a host of unwarranted assumptions about the inclusion of disabled people on the course :

[7 places] that's the number set by social services for managing the number of people. You can't have more than that on the course basically because the main difficulty if you have more than that, it is difficult to give them the extra help they need. We did enrol 12 people that was originally set for 10 and then they told us about the rule about 7.

Here, we see assumptions of dependency being made about disabled students and no recognition given to the role of personal assistants. Clearly there is some difficulty for course providers when liaison with external bodies involves positioning disabled students as separate and different from their non-disabled peers. Difficulties are compounded when constraints to be imposed by external agencies are not well communicated and so bring extra stress to staff as they emerge. A tutor with responsibility for students with learning difficulties talked further about the potential strains of external collaboration:

sometimes our relationship with social services can, as they say, be stretched. I mean it can be difficult, you have to build up an element of trust for the relevant officer. Quite often it's the centre manager or some centre's have what's known as training manager.

Interviewer : So you have to liaise with all of them. That's time consuming isn't it?

It is terribly time-consuming.

The level of involvement by social services described to us appears to create barriers for course tutors wanting to widen inclusion of disabled students. It seems there are some issues for further exploration here, especially as such contacts impact directly upon the running of the course and the ways disabled people can participate.

other words they've got to reach a minimum standard regarding their sort of ability, anything less than standard just . well it's classified as being 'not yet competent'. That's how it works .. there is no such thing as a pass or a fail.

As far as adapting material goes, I mean that is entirely at our discretion, we can do what we like.

The funding situation presents less scope for manoeuvre :

One of the really good things about the NVQ is when people actually progress to that stage, then all they need to do is just like perhaps one unit have up to date in say given time periods such as a year. And carry on and keep coming back to complete the whole course over a period of years. So in theory it's quite flexible however the funding as most things, isn't that flexible.

As one tutor explained about financing :

And to be quite honest the funding isn't there to actually give them the amount of time they need to actually complete the course.

Basically we don't charge anyone to come on the course because it's what a person can feel that it discriminates against them, a lot of people can't otherwise afford any kind of education. Well basically what they need to do is that to find funding is to actually achieve something over the period of a year. If they don't achieve anything then basically they won't be funded. I mean there's got to be some sort of progression. I think you'll find this works out for most [post-sixteen] courses.



Graham : I would like to get back into full-time employment, yeah I would do, yeah definitely

Interviewer: Any particular areas you want'?

Graham : Em gardening like Kim and Kerry [non-disabled students] because they want to do gardening. I like gardening. It's good because I mean you can get out into the fresh air, you can work with people who you like working with, you know like using different tools like loppers and lawn mowers, strimmers, spades, hoes anything to do with outdoor pursuits.

Interviewer: You wouldn't have been able to do that before [coming on the course] then, or would you?

Graham : Couldn't do it before, no. But now I have learned how to do it at college I can do it in other areas you see, round where I live.

Could do my parents garden what ever, you know, because I've got the basic knowledge of it. Because I know what to do to get paid for *it*, you know what I mean?

It is clear just from these few comments that students feel keen to pursue their interest in environmental activities through further study or employment. However, possibly due to the fact that the opportunity for disabled people to join the course is only just established, some staff felt that exit routes needed further development. Further examination of exit routes beyond the course, including prospects for further education and for work, is seen as a sufficiently important agenda to merit a large scale enquiry. We have drawn up proposals for a substantial piece of research which could pursue some of these matters and which would build local and national development on the back of the many advances that the inclusive conservation course has already provided.

The last point raises the issue of communication again, and would be important to explore further as it is likely to comprise a barrier to inclusion in the group. Despite this, the presence of sign language was evidently already having a positive impact on other students who were finding exposure to it a valuable and enriching experience :

Graham : working with Deaf people, I like doing that, I like learning the sign language and all that. That's pretty interesting

Interviewer : would you like to go on a course on sign language?

Graham : no, I just like learning it off Pam, you know, and Pauline because I like get to know the ins and outs of the sign language so I can talk to them, communicate with them.

Other barriers were also being slowly dismantled too and the non-disabled students, with varying amounts of previous contact with disabled people, commented on their broad experiences of working together in a group with disabled students. The effect this had on disabling preconceptions and stereotyping can be seen from these comments

Diana : [I have had contact with disabled people] through my scouting. I've had a few disabled scouts through with Down's Syndrome. ... When I first came [on the course], I didn't realise we'd be working with people with learning difficulties or anything. So when I first came I was, like, a bit sort of shocked and didn't know how I'd cope. But yeah, its definitely been a positive thing. Because, as you say, you begin to look at them as sort of their own person, their own individual rather than grouping them all together as disabled people and you realise they're capable of a lot more than you give them credit for.

Taking a wider perspective on the learning process was discussed :

they also carry out work which isn't really for the course so they get more of a broader vision of what goes on in conservation work. I don't stick strictly to the course syllabus. If there is a job they can help with I let them help to give them a wider outlook. If they've caught up on something, say they've done all the planting they need to do and they've got a couple of weeks in the schedule when they should still be planting, I'll have them out doing footpaths, which aren't actually part of their course. And so we get them involved in all sorts of activities, whatever suited their needs.

And the course tutor had noted the value of imaginative teaching methods :

Most special needs people tend to pick up most things through demonstrations rather than actually spending a couple of hours talking.

### *Suggestions for the course content and teaching approaches*

The people we spoke to had some suggestions of things that could be built upon to make the course more accessible to disabled people and these ideas could be pursued through further research on participation of disabled people on such courses. Strategies to maximise participation of d/Deaf students were indicated for example :

[we need] more people with knowledge of sign language and deaf awareness.

The non-disabled students had some ideas too, from their own observations and experiences, which supported some of the tutors comments and offer a useful perspective :

- ◇ What action can be taken to enable disabled students to contribute to course monitoring and evaluation ? Are there existing staff / student mechanisms which provide a forum for such participation? If not, how can an appropriate committee be convened ? How can students be supported in evolving their own means of ensuring representation of their views?
- ◇ Students have indicated the need to further break down barriers of communication. What immediate steps could be taken?
- ◇ Could disabled people and/or their representative organisations play a part in further raising awareness of disability issues for those involved with the course ? Who could you contact in relation to this ? When?

At the end of this part of the report then, it is evident that people within the context have identified a range of areas for further exploration. As already said, in Section 5 we present a comprehensive set of research proposals for further discussion, which could ultimately be used to seek funding for advancing the agendas put forward by those who participated in this initial enquiry. Before moving on to these proposals however, we would first like to offer some comments on what has been uncovered so far.

The partnership which has been established through this research, between the MMU Disability Studies Research team and the Groundwork Trust, has clearly enabled meaningful questions to be asked of disabled people, their non-disabled peers and service providers who have key responsibilities and interests in the area of inclusion in environmental activities. We would like to build on this partnership to further co-ordinate the participation of disabled people in research, subsequent policy and practical developments, and in implementing change.

### **What would we do differently?**

It will have become clear that the direction of the project at the start was adequately in place, but that assumptions were made about the priorities and concerns of key people in the field, which led to some delays and demanded some subsequent changes of direction. For future projects it will be sensible to cost in for sufficient time and opportunity for all those who will be influenced by the research to get together to discuss principles, processes and directions. Most importantly, mechanisms must be put in place to make sure that disabled people who are to be the 'subject' of a project have as much control as possible over what goes on in their name. This links to the need to allow scope for flexibility within the field, flexibility both with time and focus, in order to allow the research process to take adequate account of the agendas and starting points of all those who might be involved. The need for this is borne out by the ultimate successes of this project which do stem from developing a way forward that allowed freedom for research agendas and processes to be defined by the group. But this fundamentally important achievement was made possible only by the perceptiveness and sensitivity of the two key service providers supporting research in this context, who refrained from imposing more tangible goals in moments of apparent stalemate.

We feel all that has happened provides testimony to the strength of the research partnership which has been built through this project. A starting point for further collaborative ventures, and specifically for progressing the research bids which have been developed out of this pilot work, could be a workshop to bring interested parties together. We are happy to convene such a workshop at the Manchester

Of course we couldn't agree more. Research is an immensely powerful tool for bringing about change (Vernon 1997). Expedient and widespread dissemination of this report may prompt individual action, particularly if readers are willing to heed the many thinking points we have tried to raise and to reconsider their own roles and responsibilities in dismantling disabling barriers. As researchers, we might feel that our own responsibilities stop here, with the completion of this report and its submission to those who commissioned the project. However this would not tally with the emphasis we have tried to place on the part each of us plays in recycling disablement and oppression if we do not constantly question the extent to which we can measure up as disabled people's allies. For this reason we have taken this research account a stage further and tried to identify strategies for maintaining the momentum gathered by these initial investigations, through instigating further projects. Draft proposals for research to take inclusion of disabled people in environmental activities forward are presented next.

## REFERENCES

- Barnes, B. (1990) *Cabbage Syndrome : The Social Construction of Dependence*, Lewis : Falmer.
- Barnes, C. (1991) *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination*, London : Hurst & Co.
- Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) (1997) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press.
- Barnes, C. (1996) Disability and the myth of the independent researcher, *Disability and Society*, 11 (1) : 107-10.
- Bashford, L., Townsley, R. and Williams, C. (1995) 'Parallel Text Making Research Accessible to People with Intellectual Difficulties' *International Journal of Disability and Education* Vol.42, No.3, pp 211-220.
- Beazley, S. Moore, M. and Benzie, D. (1997) Involving Disabled People in Research : a study of inclusion in environmental activities in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press.
- Beazley, S., and Moore, M. (1995) *Deaf children, their families and professional : dismantling barriers* David Fulton : London.
- Booth, T., Simons, K. and Booth W. (1990) *Outward Bound : Relocation and Community Care for People with Learning Difficulties*. Milton Keynes : Open University Press.
- Booth, T. and Booth, W. (1997) Making Connections : A narrative study of adult children of parents with learning difficulties, in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press.
- Campbell, J. and Oliver, M. (1996) *Disability Politics . Understanding Our Past, Changing Our Future*. London : Routledge.
- Goodley, D. (1996) Tales of Hidden Lives : a critical examination of life history research with people who have learning difficulties, *Disability and Society*, 11, (3), 333-348.

- Oliver, M. (1997) *Emancipatory research : realistic goal or impossible dream*. Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press
- Rioux, M. and Bach, M (Eds) (1994) *Disability is not measles : New Research Paradigms in Disability*, Ontario : The Roeher Institute
- Shakespeare, P., Atkinson, D. & French, S. (Eds.) (1993) *Reflecting on Research Practice : Issues in Health and Social Welfare*. Buckingham : Open University Press.
- Shakespeare, T. (1996) Rules of engagement: doing disability research, *Disability and Society*, 11 (1) :115-9.
- Skelton, J., Beazley, S., Maelzer, J., Moore, M., and Patient, M. *Learning Disabled People and Older Care-Givers*. Manchester Metropolitan University, Disability Studies Team Project Report.
- Stone, E. (1997) From the Research Notes of a Foreign Devil: Disability Research in China, in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press.
- Stone, E. and Priestly, M. (1996) Parasites, pawns and partners: disability research and the role of non-disabled researchers, *British Journal of Sociology*, 47, (4).
- Vernon, A. (1997) Reflexivity : The dilemmas of researching from the inside in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press
- Zarb, G. Researching Disabling Barriers in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (Eds) *Doing Disability Research*, Leeds : The Disability Press.