Including students with a disability in regular classrooms

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An inclusive philosophy

Inclusion is based on the philosophy that schools should, provide for the needs of all the children in the community, whatever their background, their ability or their disability. Inclusive schools welcome and celebrate diversity in ability as well as in cultural, racial, ethnic and social background. With integration or main-streaming, the school asks '*Can we* provide for the needs of this student?' With inclusion, the school asks '*How will we* provide for the needs of this student?' This question is asked about students who are diverse socially, culturally, intellectually or behaviourally.

In other words, issue is: *How do we provide for the needs of every student in our school?*

History of special education

Prior to about 1976 in NSW
- no government-provided education either integrated or segregated for many students with IQ below 30
- subsidised private education and some government special schools for students with IQ 50-80
- special classes and schools for IQ above 80

This was a grim situation for many families who had little option other than to institutionalise their child if he/she had a severe disability.

The sub-agenda was to provide a place to which the child could be removed, often with little further contact with their family. The outcome was the development of large institutions for students with an intellectual disability which followed a custodial or medical model, rather than an educational model (called hospitals; matrons; sisters; wards; supremo was the medical superintendent) and, as a result, many children suffered deprivation in these institutions and a significantly decreased quality of life.

20th century

By the latter part of the 20th century: strong movement against residential institutions, particularly in the United States. Many larger institutions and some day-schools closed and many children who would previously have lived their lives in a large institution were now living at home and either attending a local school or a special school in the community.

Nowadays most school systems have an inclusive philosophy, so what is the

Basis for inclusive practice Three main drivers:

- Social justice/human rights/philosophical
- Legal/policy
- Research/empirical

1. Social justice/human rights principles

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

- Article 26 (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children

This declaration allowed parent groups and educators to argue for equal accessibility to schooling, and for parental choice but was still far from reality for many parents in less developed countries nearly 65 years later

Normalisation movement 1970s/80s:

All people are entitled to live as normal as possible a lifestyle. 'Normal' means what most other people in that culture do, or would prefer to do. The normal or most common educational thing to do is to attend a regular neighbourhood school or a private school of parental choice

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006 provides unambiguous support for inclusive schooling:

Article 24 - Education

States: *Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels, and life-long learning directed to:*
> *(a) The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;*
> *(b) The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;*
> *(c) Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.*

2. Legal basis for inclusion

Australia has tended to make educational changes for students with a disability through state education policies rather than through legislation.

By the late 1970s all States were providing educational programs for all children, regardless of their level of disability and the most typical placement was a day school, or a special unit or class within a regular school.

Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act and its associated Educational Standards has provided legislative backup for the policy changes leading to inclusion:

Disability Discrimination Act (1992): illegal to discriminate against a person in education on the basis of their disability. Strengthened in 2005 by the enacting of Education Standards covering:

- Enrolment and admission.
- Participation.
- Curriculum development
- Provision of student support services.
- Harassment and victimisation
- States also have anti-discrimination legislation, and policy supporting inclusion

3. Research/empirical basis for inclusion

Most of the impetus for movement towards inclusion has been on a social justice/human rights basis rather than an empirical basis. Research questions include:

- Do students with a disability do better in regular classes? Perhaps, more importantly:
- Do students with a disability do better in special classes?

It is hard to research the effects of inclusion on students with a disability because of:

1. the problem of comparability of "included" and "segregated" samples.
2. possibility that there will be systematic differences between the two groups, which have led to their placement in one or other of the settings, and are not, therefore, outcomes of the placement.

Social outcomes for students with a disability
- Students with a disability can have high levels of social interaction in regular settings. However, placement alone does not guarantee positive social outcomes.
- Social competence and communication skills improve when students with a disability are educated in inclusive settings.
- Friendships develop between students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings.
- Some students feel isolated and stigmatised in mainstream settings.
- Social interaction is difficult for some students with a disability.
- Students with severe multiple disabilities have more

communicative interactions and communication partners in regular classes.

Outcomes for skill acquisition for students with a disability

- Students with a disability may or may not demonstrate gains in curriculum areas, when they are educated in inclusive settings.
- Teachers of mainstreamed students sometimes emphasise behaviour management rather than teaching and learning.
- Students in mainstream classes will achieve better academic outcomes than students in special classes if the mainstream classes have a greater focus on academic skills.
- Interactive, small group contexts encourage skill acquisition and social acceptance for students with a disability in regular classrooms.

Impact on students without disabilities

- The academic performance of typically-developing students is not compromised by the presence of students with a disability in their classrooms.
- The classroom behaviour of typically developing students is not generally affected negatively by the presence of students with a disability. However, some studies have suggested that there can be unwanted effects.

Impact on parents

- Parent support for inclusion is encouraged by experience with inclusion, although experience alone does not shape attitudes.
- Parents of students with a disability seek positive attitudes, good educational opportunities, and acceptance of their child by educators.
- Some parents of students with more severe disabilities are worried about the loss of the individual support of a specialised setting.
- Parents need to expend substantial efforts to support their mainstreamed children

Impact on teachers

- Although many teachers are initially reluctant about inclusion, they become confident in their abilities with support and experience.
- Teachers experience professional growth as a result of working in inclusive settings.
- Many teachers prefer to have students with mild disabilities and without behaviour problems in their classes.
- Support from other teachers is a powerful and necessary resource to empower teachers to problem-solve new instructional challenges.

Role of teachers in successful inclusion

- Teacher attitude is a major factor in successful programs of inclusion.

- Training and experience assist teachers in successful implementation of programs of inclusion.
- Facilitating the inclusion of students with a disability requires the sensitivity to make on-the-spot judgements about the type and amount of support to encourage participation, while not interfering with student interactions.

Role of principals

- Principals tend to be more supportive of inclusion than classroom teachers.
- Some principals are concerned about the logistics of planning for inclusion.
- A generally positive school culture will impact on positive attitudes to students with a disability.

Other issues arising from the research:

- Factors such as financial support and teacher education impact on the success of inclusion.
- The number of students with a disability in any one classroom should be reflective of population numbers.
- Parents of young children or children with mild disabilities, and parents who are more highly educated, are more likely to support inclusion.
- Many student teachers feel unprepared to teach students with a disability.

Effect on enrolments in regular schools

Decades of "inclusive policy" have not greatly changed the number of students with significant disabilities in segregated classes or regular classes:

- Small starting base – around 2-3% in segregated settings
- Parental choice to maintain specialised placements
- New classes for behavioural/emotional difficulties

Inclusive policies have led to greater support for students with mild disabilities (who were always enrolled in regular classes).

Currently about 4.9% of school children identified with a disability (3.2% in 2000):

Public system 5.5% (4% in 2000)
Private system 2.9% (2% in 2000)

In NSW Department of Education and Communities schools:

| 2003 | 104 SSPs | 16730 (2.27%) students in special schools & classes | 49.6% of 33710 SWD |
| 2011 | 113 SSPs | 19437 (2.6%) students in special schools & classes | 47% of 41300 SWD |

Thus, if all special services closed, would contribute less than one child per regular class.

The future

Two main issues will continue to impact on the education of students with a disability relating to where it takes place and how it takes place:

View 1: the lives of people with a disability are immeasurably improved when they leave the restrictions of institutions and segregated settings and take their place in the community.

View 2: removing students from the more sheltered environments of special schools and classes leaves them open to isolation, bullying and stigmatism without necessarily improving their learning.

Evidence can be found to support both arguments.

The conclusion:

The impact of different educational placements will vary from student to student. Some students will thrive in the challenge of an inclusive setting, while others will find such settings to be confronting and overwhelming.

The important aspect of current policy and law in most developed countries is that parents are now in a position to make a *choice* about what type of education they want for their child, based on their assessment of the effect of the placement on the child's current and future quality of life.

The question of how special education should occur is more easily resolved through empirical means. There is strong evidence that better outcomes for students with all types of learning difficulties result when there is:

- Careful planning,
- Individualized instruction
- Appropriate feedback
- On-going monitoring and evaluation

Modern technological approaches using computer-assisted instruction provide opportunities to use the above techniques efficiently in regular classes - the future will see the further development of technology as an essential component of special education.

National Professional Standard for Teachers 4.1 states that Proficient Teachers: *Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities*. The expectation for all teachers is nothing les