# Bulletin

Special Issue:
Inclusive Education

# From the President

## Dr Robyn Wheldall

I hope that you and yours have been coping with our third winter of COVID. The continuing disruption to our lives is difficult and schools, where many of you work, are struggling with staff shortages and pressures in addition to the usual busy routine in education. It is easy to get discouraged during protracted periods of challenging circumstances.

Another area of protracted challenge is the effective education of students with disability. This has become one focus of the ongoing Disability Royal Commission. In line with this, this issue of the LDA Bulletin is dedicated to inclusion of students with disability. There is a range of opinions in this area, some very strongly held, and our Bulletin editor, Dr Ros Neilson, has gathered a number of contributions together that look at the issue of inclusion from a number of perspectives.

With the increasing number of students with disability in mainstream classes, regular classroom teachers and specialist teachers are teaching more students with more diverse learning needs than ever before. This is something to be applauded and welcomed provided there are adequate resources and expertise available to the classroom teacher. It can be very challenging for a classroom teacher to meet the needs of all the learners in her or his class. Expertise in meeting the educational needs of students with disability is held by special educators who are well-versed in evidence-based practice for students with learning challenges. Special educators and other allied professionals have an important role to play in working with classroom teachers and support staff to ensure that a student's educational, social and communication skills are developed to maximise the opportunities for each individual student.

My own experience working and collaborating with special educators and academics in this area for over 30 years has been that they are deeply committed to ensuring the effective inclusion of students with disability in the least restrictive environment possible. Many have been at the forefront of this movement in Australia and are deserving of our gratitude and admiration. There is a good way to go but we have made substantial progress in this area over recent decades.

I am, however, personally concerned that this issue is taking on a binary characteristic, that if we support inclusion and the sanctity of the rights of children with disability we have to eschew or reject a mixed offering of educational settings for these students. Surely a tailored approach that meets the needs of the individual child and their families offers the best outcome — choice is important. To have choice, we need to acknowledge the benefit of, and resource, various educational settings. Effective provision is not about location but about what meets the needs of the individual student.

It should also be noted that the students who are at the core of the LDA mission — students with learning difficulties — are *always* included in mainstream settings but their need for expert support is no less pressing. For this reason, LDA's mission is pertinent to all students who have barriers to learning, whatever their circumstances. Effective education is crucial for all students, and especially for those who will struggle to achieve what they are capable of without the support of professionals employing evidence-based approaches.

I hope you find this issue of the Bulletin thought-provoking and we look forward to hearing your responses.

On a personal note, I would like to thank my colleagues in the LDA Executive and Council who have stepped in to fulfil my responsibilities as LDA President while I have taken leave to care for my husband who is experiencing a challenging time in terms of his health.

I would also like thank Dr Roslyn Neilson, who has been our Bulletin editor over the past two and half years and who has indicated that this is her last issue as editor. We are so grateful to Ros for her dedicated and generous work in this area, ensuring that the Bulletin continues to be a huge source of important professional learning for our members and the broader educational community. Thank you, Ros!
With best wishes to all,

*Dr Robyn Wheldall*
*President, LDA*

*Dr Robyn Wheldall, BA, Ph.D., MAICD, is an Honorary Research Fellow of Macquarie University, a Founding Director of MultiLit Pty Ltd., and the Deputy Director of the MultiLit Research Unit.*

# Council news

LDA Council members have all, for the past several months, had thoughts and good wishes for Kevin Wheldall uppermost in our minds, since Kevin stepped down from Council and from the editorship of the AJLD for health reasons. We think constantly of the wisdom and leadership Kevin has provided for LDA over so many years, and we thank Robyn Wheldall for taking some extra time away from day-to-day LDA matters to care for Kevin.

Ann Ryan has recently stepped down from Council, too, and we thank her for her hard work as Treasurer and her years of dedication to LDA and its Consultant networks.

We are also very sad that we will be losing the expertise, knowledge and inspiration of Dr Kate de Bruin as she steps down from Council.

LDA is moving towards finding ways to relieve Council members of the huge demands involved in LDA's operational duties, and over the past few months we have appreciated the help of Adrian Nolan working as Interim General Manager to support us, our members, and our indefatigable Administration Officer Bec Rangas.

In June of this year, in response to the ongoing Disability Royal Commission, LDA released a *joint statement* with Autism Awareness Australia and Inclusive Education Australia, condemning a culture of low expectations surrounding children and teenagers with disabilities, learning difficulties, and additional needs.

LDA has been very busy making arrangements for the visit to Australia of the recipient of the 2022 AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, Professor Linnea Ehri. We are very excited indeed about her visit to Australia to receive the award in person at our AGM on 22 October, and we are delighted that she is providing a keynote address at two full-day professional learning events in Sydney and Melbourne in the days after the AGM.

Information about the AGM can be found adjacent to this column, and the Sydney and Melbourne events on page 9.

Information about all our LDA and AJLD award recipients can be found on page 7–8.

A call for new nominations to Council is available on the LDA website. Nominations must be received 30 days before the AGM so that we can organise voting if necessary, so they are due in by 22 September. Please consider stepping up to the plate and making your own contribution to LDA.

I myself will be stepping down from Council at the October AGM, to enjoy what I feel is some hard-earned retirement. My very best wishes go to the enthusiastic and talented youngsters, the stalwart elders, and all those in between, who will be carrying on the good work!

*Ros Neilson*
*Outgoing LDA Secretary*

## Is your school an Institutional Member of LDA?

Benefits of Institutional Membership:

- Two copies of every issue of the Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties and the LDA Bulletin - one for your staffroom table, one for the library
- LDA member discounts to professional learning events for all your school staff
- Your membership supports the continuing production of LDA publications and the provision of LDA professional learning

## LDA Annual General Meeting 22 October 2022

The LDA AGM will be held on 22 October at the Treacy Centre, Parkville, Melbourne, starting at 1.30 p.m.

The regular AGM business will be followed by the presentation of 2022 LDA and AJLD Awards, with brief acceptance speeches.

After afternoon tea, the recipient of the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award, Professor Linnea Ehri, will present a personal-historical perspective on research on learning to read and spell, with a focus on developments that she has witnessed in the 21st century.

LDA members and guests are welcome to attend.

A Zoom link will be available for participants who are unable to attend in person.

To register your attendance (for catering purposes) or to request a Zoom link, please contact Bec Rangas, LDA Administration Officer, at *enquiries@ldaustralia.org*

# Consultant notes

**Elaine McLeish**, Convenor, Consultants Committee

In my last "Consultant Notes" for the Bulletin, I was delighted to focus on the achievements of three of our retiring Consultants and to recognise their decades long commitment to LDA and to supporting students with learning difficulties. Now I am equally delighted to introduce you to two of our newer Consultants, who share the same commitment to LDA, are equally passionate about assisting LD students using evidence-based best practice, and who represent the future for LDA Consultants.

Their journeys to becoming LDA Consultants have a lot in common with many of our other Consultants, who experienced frustrations as classroom teachers, unable to provide the level of individual assistance necessary for their LD students. As LDA Consultants, they can provide one-on-one teaching for students, vital advocacy for parents, and close liaison and specialist assistance for schools when required. Consultants have the opportunity to effect real change in the lives of their students and to experience true job satisfaction, watching their students develop essential skills and grow in confidence under their guidance.

Two consultant's stories have been contributed for this section of the LDA Bulletin.

Amanda Kranz is based in Melbourne and became a Consultant member in 2017. She is a regular contributor to discussion and the sharing of ideas as a valued member of the North-East Network, one of our five Melbourne-based networks. Amanda is currently very busy with her thriving practice as well as doing her PhD at La Trobe's SOLAR Lab.

Alecia Beahan is now based in Brisbane and became a Consultant member in 2021. She is busy establishing her private practice and is already making her mark in the Consultants group with her enthusiastic search for knowledge, sharing of evidence-based best practice, and leadership of our Distance Network which comprises Consultants from all Australian mainland states.

Perhaps their stories will inspire you to reflect on how LDA Consultant Membership could benefit you now or in the future. We are always available to provide individual advice and support about how to join us. So, if you are a Specialist Teacher or a Speech/Language Pathologist, I encourage you to contact us at *consultant.convenor@ldaustralia.org*

**Elaine McLeish**
**Convenor, Consultants Committee**

*Elaine McLeish is now retired and divides her time between Northcote and Cape Paterson. She has six grandchildren and a German Shorthaired Pointer, who all keep her on her toes.*

## A Consultant's Story: Alecia Beahan

I began my teaching career in the ACT in 2008, with a combined year 3 and 4 class. It didn't take long to notice the reading and writing skills of a small number of my students were significantly behind their peers. This shocked, frustrated and unsettled me for several years. I never stopped trying to adapt and scaffold their learning, tailoring my instruction to assist them in any way I could but I felt that I needed more. In my search for answers, I stumbled across videos by Associate Professor, Deslea Konza from the PALL (Principals as Literacy Leaders) Program and research project. These videos ignited something in me and made so much sense. I wanted to know more. My own primary and secondary schooling was during the era of the then popular 'whole language' education era. I struggled to understand why I could never read, spell or write as well as my peers. After commencing the first subject in my Post Graduate studies, I began to understand why. I chose to complete a Graduate Certificate Education (Learning Difficulties) with Edith Cowan University. Inspired by Dr. Lorraine Hammond, I set a goal to register as a Learning Difficulties Australia Consultant after completion. Always striving to know more and be even 'better', I put this off for years until finally, in September last year, my husband encouraged me to apply for LDA Consultant Membership.

Over the years, it has become abundantly clear that I enjoy Tier 3, Direct Instruction in Literacy and Numeracy more than every other teaching area and I realised I wanted to be a Specialist Teacher. Earlier this year, when we relocated our family back to Brisbane, I boldly resigned from my permanent teaching position and began a new journey. Utilising my LDA Consultant Member status, I created ABLES – 'Alecia Beahan Literacy (& Numeracy) Education Specialist'.

I attended my first, LDA Distance Network meeting early this year and jumped right in as the chairperson of our meetings. These meetings provide valuable networking opportunities and a forum for discussion and information sharing between like-minded professionals who have much to offer individuals with learning disabilities, difficulties and differences. I was soon approached to represent the Distance Consultants in the Consultants Support Group meeting and found this to be very informative and interesting. With support from the LDA Online Referral Service (ORS), I am slowly building my business and enjoying every moment and individual I have had the privilege of working with. The only regret I have, is that I didn't become a LDA Consultant Member sooner.

## A Consultant's Story: Amanda Krantz

It was only five years ago that I made the big decision to leave the school system after 15 years working as a classroom teacher. With no regrets (despite the uncertainty that lay ahead), I sent in my LDA Consultant application and set myself up in a spare bedroom at home. I couldn't wait to finally be in a position where I could focus all my energy and efforts on providing targeted support to students. Having completed my Masters of Learning Intervention in 2015, I knew the difference that individualised, evidence-based intervention could make – not only to students' relationship with learning, but also to their sense of self.

In 2018 – motivated by a desire to create a community of like-minded professionals – I established The Dyslexia Hub, a multi-disciplinary clinic in Melbourne's north-east. My role at The Dyslexia Hub is a wonderful mix of 1:1 literacy and maths intervention, educational assessments, and parent support & advocacy. I love that, as a consultant, I have the opportunity to work with families long-term – it's both a joy and a privilege to see my students grow in confidence and ability over the years. I am also grateful that, through my work with parents, teachers, and schools, I am able to raise awareness of neurodiversity, encourage a more nuanced understanding of learning differences and promote the adoption of Science of Reading-aligned practices within schools.

Becoming an LDA Consultant was integral to me establishing myself in this field. Consultant membership enabled me to connect with like-minded educators, gave me access to world-class professional learning opportunities and provided me with the support that I needed to smoothly transition from classroom teaching to private practice. Now, five years later, I have a career that is both rewarding and challenging, a thriving clinic that exists solely to empower neuro-divergent learners, and a team of wonderful people around me who share my commitment to compassion, inclusion and equity. What more could anyone want?

Invitation to participate in research on phonological awareness and phonics assessment practices in Australian Schools

Are you a teacher or school leader in an Australian primary school?

Can you answer a 10 minute questionnaire on your phonological awareness and phonics assessment practices?

Your ideas are valuable and will contribute to research on assessment practices in early literacy skills, together with their advantages and challenges, in Australian schools.

This study has received Deakin University ethics approval (reference number: HAE-19-241).

Please visit *https://researchsurveys. deakin.edu.au/jfe/form/ SV_7QBG8hJeO8AS3Jk* to read the Plain Language Statement about this study and to access the questionnaire.

Dr Joanne Quick
Deakin University

## Congratulations to Alison Clarke, OAM.

In June 2022 Alison Clarke, the founder of Spelfabet, the innovative and immensely popular source of evidence-based literacy resources, was awarded an Order of Australia.

Alison has been a long-time supporter of LDA, serving as the 2015-16 Vice President, and lending her enthusiasm, organisational skills, and social media reach to LDA's professional learning events. She received LDA's 2018 Mona Tobias Award. Thank you, Alison, for your ongoing generous contributions to the field of speech pathology and literacy education. Congratulations from LDA!

## Are you interested in becoming a Consultant Member of LDA?

Consultant Membership is a special category of LDA membership, currently open to Specialist Teachers and Speech Pathologists with training in the learning difficulties area and experience in teaching and consulting with students with learning difficulties.

In addition to standard membership benefits, Consultant Membership provides:

- Recognition of your expertise in the LD field
- Inclusion in a Consultant Network Group
- Eligibility for inclusion in the LDA Online Referral Service

For more information about becoming a Consultant Member, please contact our Consultant Convenor at *consultant.convenor@ ldaustralia.org* or phone Elaine McLeish on 0406 388 325.

We would love to hear from you!

# 2022 LDA and AJLD Awards

Every year LDA takes the opportunity to recognise and applaud the efforts of those who have made excellent contributions to the support of best-practice education for students with learning difficulties.

Taylor & Francis, publishers of our *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties* (AJLD), generously fund two annual awards to the value of $500, both designed to encourage submissions of high quality to the AJLD, to ensure that the AJLD continues to provide high quality research content to our members.

- The *AJLD Eminent Researcher Award* is designed to recognise significant contributions by eminent researchers in the field of learning difficulties. It is awarded by invitation, with the Editors of the Journal approaching worthy eminent researchers and inviting them to submit an article to the Journal to receive the AJLD Eminent Researcher Award.

- The AJLD Early Career Researcher Award is based on the submission of a paper in a form appropriate for publication in the *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*. Those eligible to receive this Award are researchers who have completed their PhD within the last six years, and who are currently engaged in research which has the potential to make a significant contribution to theory or practice in the learning difficulty area.

There are also four LDA awards available each year.

- The LDA Mona Tobias Award recognises a person who has made an outstanding contribution in Australia to the education of people with learning difficulties, in leadership, research, practice, teacher and/or community education.

- The LDA Bruce Wicking Award recognises an individual or organisation for innovative programs or practices related to the teaching of children with learning difficulties.

- The LDA Tertiary Student Award is presented in recognition of academic excellence and significant research which advances the understanding of theoretical and practical issues in the field of learning difficulties, carried out by a student in the course of their tertiary level studies.

- The Rosemary Carter Award recognises an outstanding LDA Consultant Member who has contributed to the field of learning difficulties through work with students, their advocacy for students and their families, and through education of the wider community.

## And the 2022 winners are ...

AJLD Eminent Researcher Award: Professor Linnea Ehri

AJLD Early Career Researcher Award: Dr Signy Wegener

Mona Tobias Award (Joint recipients): Emina McLean and Dr Nathaniel Swain

Bruce Wicking Award: Jocelyn Seamer

Tertiary Student Award: Haley Tancredi
    Highly commended: Dr Tessa
    Weadman, Dr Katrina Kelso
Rosemary Carter Award: Mim Davidson

## AJLD Eminent Researcher Award: Professor Linnea Ehri

Dr Linnea Ehri is Distinguished Professor Emerita of Educational Psychology at the Graduate Centre of the City University of New York, and the author of over 130 papers and chapters on the reading acquisition process. She was inducted into the Reading Hall of Fame in 1988. She served on the ground-breaking National Reading Panel, contributing to the 2000 report that helped us all to start moving towards an evidence-based approach to teaching reading. She has been cited countless times in current discussion groups and in-services, with her contribution most recently being associated with our understanding the process of orthographic mapping. In July 2022 she was awarded the top award of the International Literacy Association, the William S. Gray Citation of Merit, and LDA is very proud to have the opportunity to let her know how much she is honoured in Australia as well.

## AJLD Early Career Research Award: Dr Signy Wegener

Dr Signy Wegener's award was based on the submission of her paper to the AJLD entitled *'Oral vocabulary knowledge and learning to read new words: A theoretical review'*. The judges commented that her submitted article had carefully defined an area of theoretical interest, provided a conceptually insightful review of the literature, and generated interesting suggestions for further research. They saw this article as part of a larger body of research that is not only of theoretical importance but is also likely, in the long run, to support implications for teaching. Interestingly, since the award was decided, Signy's paper has generated huge interest on social media, posted under the intriguing headline of 'orthographic skeletons.'

## Mona Tobias Award Joint Recipients: Emina McLean and Dr Nathaniel Swain

Nathaniel Swain and Emina McLean are both by nature networkers, and they have collaborated very constructively together in recent years, spearheading the translation of research on the science of reading and the science of learning into accessible pedagogical practice. They are both outstanding leaders in the field, and the judges agreed that they

should be joint recipients of the 2022 Mona Tobias Award.

Emina is currently Head of English and Literacy at Docklands Primary School, a consultant, and an instructional coach, and is a much sought-after speaker at professional learning events. She has shown remarkable leadership as she has implemented and documented a whole-school Response to Intervention approach. A dual qualified speech pathologist and teacher, she is close to the completion of her PhD at LaTrobe University.

Nate, also a dual qualified Speech Pathologist and teacher, is currently a classroom teacher and instructional coach at Brandon Park Primary School, where he and his colleagues are teaming up to develop useful freely available online resources for the provision of evidence-based teaching strategies. Nate has also spear-headed the powerful Think Forward Educators network, which provides excellent quality professional development and mentoring.

## Bruce Wicking Award: Jocelyn Seamer

Jocelyn is an educational consultant now based in Tasmania, with a strong background of innovative school leadership involving enabling systematic instruction in challenging circumstances. She is well known to many of us through her online presence, and many of us have joined her on her Science of Reading Bus. Jocelyn provides original teaching resources and regular blog posts that are not only systematic and aligned with the science of reading and writing, but are also exceptionally practical, teacher-friendly, and considerate of the needs of students with learning difficulties.
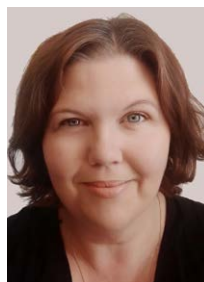
## Tertiary Student Award (and Highly Commended nominations)

It was very exciting that LDA received three excellent applications for the Tertiary Student Award in 2022. Our judging panel enjoyed becoming acquainted with their work. The judges finally managed to choose one for the award, but recommended that the other two receive 'Highly Commended' status in the process. LDA's congratulations go not only to the students themselves, but also to their supervisors. We feel that our future is in good hands.

The work of the 'Highly Commended' researchers will be mentioned first here.

### Highly Commended: Dr Katrina Kelso

Dr Katrina Kelso has just been awarded her PhD from the Curtin School of Allied Health, with her thesis entitled: *Identification, profiling, and interventions for "poor comprehenders" in the middle-upper primary years*.

Katrina developed a useful tool for screening students who may have difficulty with reading comprehension, explored the cognitive profiles of the students who were identified, and provided data on intervention strategies, along with making the strategies publicly available on the Curtin School of Allied Health *Language and Literacy in Young People* website. Katrina's research is an important contribution to an often under-recognised and under-resourced group of students.

### Highly Commended: Dr Tessa Weadman

Dr Tessa Weadman has just been awarded her PhD from La Trobe University, with her thesis entitled: *The Emergent Literacy and Language Early Childhood Checklist for Teachers (ELLECCT)*. Tessa tackled the issue of working proactively on early literacy development by developing a tool that will be extremely useful in the support

of Early Childhood Teachers as they engage in storybook reading with young children. The ELLECCT is going to make a huge contribution to the effectiveness of early childhood education. Tessa's published article and test are publicly available in the journal *First Language*.

## LDA 2022 Tertiary Student Award: Haley Tancredi

Haley Tancredi is still working on her PhD at Queensland University of Technology. Her thesis is entitled: *The impact of Accessible Pedagogies on the classroom experiences, engagement, and academic output of students with language and/or attentional difficulties*.

The judging panel commented that Haley's research design and her data collection are exemplary, and the implications of her research are ground-breaking in terms of not only supporting young people with attentional and/or language difficulties as they navigate their way into adult society, but also supporting their teachers.

## LDA Rosemary Carter Award: Mim Davidson

Mim Davidson is a Melbourne based LDA Consultant in private practice. She is a long-serving member of LDA, having first joined in 1975. Her initial teaching qualifications were obtained in Dublin, and she also has a Graduate Diploma in Special Education from Melbourne University. She has worked in a large variety of educational settings during her long career. Since 2013, she has provided expert and caring advice to parents and others on the SPELD Victoria information line. In this role she always takes the opportunity to spread the word about best practice, advise against some programs, and regularly recommends the LDA Online Referral Service to parents. She also worked as a SPELD tutor for many years. Mim is a dedicated consumer of good evidence based PD, and is always eager to expand her knowledge and skills.

# Two unique professional learning opportunities: Days with Linnea Ehri and Friends

**P**rofessor Linnea Ehri has kindly agreed to provide a keynote address at the start of a full-day professional learning event in Melbourne on Sunday 23 October, and again in Sydney on Tuesday 25 October 2022.

The same keynote address from Linnea will be repeated in each venue. Her topic is: **Orthographic Mapping and Phases of Development in the Acquisition of Sight Word Reading, Spelling Memory, and Vocabulary Learning: Guides to Instruction**.

Four other presentations will follow at each event, and both days will end with Linnea joining the other speakers for an hour-long Q&A panel, so that they can all interact with participants. The two professional learning days in Melbourne and Sydney have been curated so that they will diverge in emphasis.

The Melbourne Day with Linnea Ehri and Friends will extend Linnea's theoretical and research insights into practical classroom questions. The three recipients of LDA's 2022 Mona Tobias and Bruce Wicking awards (see page 7-8), Emina McLean, Dr Nathaniel Swain and Jocelyn Seamer, will be reflecting on what they have achieved in the support of best practice literacy instruction. Their presentations will be rounded off with a second keynote presentation by Dr Jennifer Buckingham, who will bring ideas together in a presentation entitled *'Effective, evidence-based reading instruction for every student, every day: How far have we come and what remains to be done?'* This will set the scene for the Q&A Panel, which will be the final session of the day.

The LDA Award recipients' topics will be:

- Nathaniel Swain: *Learning words on every level: Effective instruction for building students' orthographic, grammatical, and disciplinary knowledge*
- Emina McLean: *Defining excellence and equity in early reading instruction.*
- Jocelyn Seamer: *Connecting hearts and minds: helping teachers to make the shift to structured literacy.*

The Sydney Day with Linnea Ehri and Friends has been planned with the generous support of the Macquarie University Centre for Reading (MQCR). This professional learning event will extend Linnea's theoretical and research insights by presenting fascinating cutting-edge research into how children learn to read, and discussing the practical implications of the research. Dr Signy Wegener, the recipient of LDA's 2022 AJLD Early Career Researcher award, will be joined by Dr Danielle Colenbrander and Lyndall Murray in summarising their recently published research findings. Professor Anne Castles will then present the final keynote address, *'Joining the dots and looking ahead'*, to set the scene for the Q&A panel at the end of the day.

The MQCR researchers' topics will be:

- Signy Wegener: *The oral vocabulary-reading link.*
- Lyndall Murray: *The process of learning to read new regular and irregular words.*
- Danielle Colenbrander: *What research tells us about teaching irregular words.*



### Where and when

Sunday 23 October, The Capitol, Melbourne, 9.00 for 9.30 am – 4.00 pm. Tuesday 25 October: Masonic Centre, 66 Goulburn Street Sydney, 9.00 for 9.30 am – 4.30 pm. Booking: *bit.ly/LDALinnea2022*

# In this issue of the Bulletin…

**Ros Neilson**, Editor, LDA Bulletin

**T**his issue of the Bulletin, with a focus on inclusive education, is an unusual one, and it requires a longer-than-usual editorial introduction. This issue was prepared during the period when the focus in the *Disability Royal Commission* being conducted in Australia was on a series of Public Hearings relating to disability and education. A number of the concerns aired in the Education Hearings have fallen directly within the remit of LDA, particularly those relating to literacy instruction and communication support for students with disability.

Exchanges within the Commission and on social media at the time have, however, made it clear that the inclusion of students with disability in general education is currently a very divisive issue. While there is unanimous support for aiming for best outcomes for students with disabilities, and there is general agreement that more needs to be done at the level of teacher education, there is nevertheless quite passionate disagreement about how the best outcomes might be achieved. At the core of the controversy are arguments for and against retaining the present system of 'special schools' and 'special classes' for students with disability, outside of the general education system.

LDA has a long tradition of presenting Bulletin readers with articles relating to teaching practices that are supported by research evidence, but which remain, in the eyes of some, controversial. Particularly salient examples have included championing explicit systemic phonics instruction, commenting on the preparation of teachers for reading instruction, and critiquing programs such as Reading Recovery and Levelled Literacy. This issue on inclusion delivers no less. It includes several articles that may strike some readers as relatively controversial – but what is unusual about this Bulletin is that it is anticipated that different readers will have different reactions to different articles, along with different degrees of confidence in the research evidence presented along the way. This is a particularly complex area.

This Bulletin has, therefore, been compiled in the spirit of enabling a good range of the stakeholders in this important topic to have their voices heard. This allows a space for those wish to express concerns about what might be lost if the system moves away from the retention of special schools and special classes. It also allows a space for those who carry out research and advocate to achieve a move towards full inclusion of students with disability in the general education system, to outline the rationale and the means for achieving it. All contributors were asked to try to present their own case in positive terms rather than arguing against those who disagree.

For readers who are already well involved in the field, it is hoped that this issue of the Bulletin will give them the chance to think more carefully about approaches with which they may not finally agree. It also is hoped that this Bulletin will provide a wide-ranging introduction to those of us who have not specialised in the area of support for students with disability, and will allow us to think more carefully than we may have been encouraged to do in our initial training, about the ways in which learning is best supported for *all* students.

This topic of inclusion is introduced with the voice of Dr Graeme Innes AM, the Australian Disability Commissioner from 2005 to 2014, who has generously given permission for LDA to reprint a speech he gave to the Victorian Academy for Teaching and Leadership's Principal Conference on 31 May 2022.

The next group of voices to be heard come from what many LDA members feel is their traditional base. Three articles have been contributed by highly experienced Special Educators who support educating students with disability in mainstream settings as much as possible, but still feel that a range of educational settings for students with disability is needed. Coral Kemp discusses the complexity of interpreting research reported in the area of inclusion. Sally Howell presents a 'lived experience' article that provides a voice for teachers who are concerned about the challenges of full inclusion. Ann Ryan, a long-standing LDA Consultant, discusses the role of specialist teachers in supporting students with disabilities in a range of settings.

Kate de Bruin then introduces the voices of those who argue for full inclusion for students with disability. Kate provides an account of her own experience of teaching students with disabilities, and provides some of the historical background of the inclusion movement, and how it currently looks in other countries. Sue Tate and Mary Sayers define full inclusion and cover the roadmap that inclusion might take. Their article is followed by some comments from young people, referring to their own experiences. Another voice from a young person follows, with Jacinta Conway interviewing a student about the lived experience of having dyscalculia. Jade Hand discusses inclusion and the NCCD (Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability), pointing out the strengths and challenges inherent in the system. Suzanne Carrington discusses inclusion from the point of view of leadership in schools. Haley Tancredi and Gaenor Dixon address issues relating to collaboration with allied health professionals to enhance student

inclusion. A speech pathologist's perspective on meeting inclusion challenges and opportunities within the Queensland Education Department is provided by Bronwyn Reguson, and this is followed by an article provided by Maree Neilson and Jennifer Peach, of the Queensland Department of Education's Reading and Writing Centre, describing an award-winning initiative that supports the inclusive education of students with literacy difficulties.

An essential reference follows: Kim Knight and Jacinta Conway have contributed two independent reviews of the seminal book edited by Linda Graham (2020), *Inclusive Education in the 21st Century*.

And finally, in this last edition of the LDA Bulletin that I will be editing, I have taken the liberty of publishing a book review that I have written of a children's picture book, that I feel takes ideas about inclusion to the level of poetry: Jackie French's *Josephine Wants to Dance*.

The issue on inclusion is rounded off by what was a culmination of the highly successful and inspiring conference that LDA hosted in March 2022, on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. At the end of that conference, Jackie French, as chair of the Discussion Panel, inspired participants to contribute to a 'Manifesto', or public statement, highlighting the critical advocacy issues involved in ensuring that every child becomes a successful reader. A large number of participants and LDA members submitted contributions, and these have been edited by Jackie French and Julie Scali for the purpose of being published in this LDA Bulletin. We hope that this manifesto, *'Every Child a Reader'*, lives on and can be used by others in their advocacy for equity in education. Many thanks are due to Jackie French and all those who made submissions.

I would like at this stage to extend my sincere thanks to all contributors to this issue of the Bulletin; it has been a privilege to learn from you. I have appreciated the tolerance of those LDA members who may feel this issue has strayed beyond their traditional base. My special thanks and warm good wishes go to Kate de Bruin for her patience in teaching me so much about the area of inclusion, and for introducing me, and many LDA members, to the vibrant network of people who work and advocate in the area.

I will be retiring from LDA Council after several busy years of work, and

I would like to thank LDA for trusting me to edit the LDA Bulletin over this period. I have learned an invaluable amount from the contributors with whom I have corresponded in my role as Bulletin Editor, and I hope that readers of the Bulletin have done so as well. I send my best wishes to the next editor; I encourage LDA members to keep contributing ideas and suggestions; and I encourage readers of the Bulletin who are not yet LDA members to join the association in order to support the continued production of resources like this.

**Dr Roslyn Neilson**
**Retiring Editor, LDA Bulletin**

# Transformative Possibilities of Inclusion



The following speech was delivered by **Dr Graeme Innes AM**, to the Victorian Academy for Teaching and Leadership's 2022 Principal's Conference on 31 May 2022. Dr Innes has generously given his permission to re-publish the speech here.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today.

Tyler was doing well at school. It was term 1 year 2, and he was up and into his uniform every morning. He'd finish breakfast at a rate of knots, kiss the family goodbye, and be out at the bus stop just outside his front door. It was the first pickup of the run, so he jumped in and sat behind the driver. His mum wished his three siblings had been this keen.

Then the calls from the principal started. She said Tyler was well behaved throughout school, and during recess and lunch-time. But at the end of the day, when the kids were lining up for their buses, he was regularly involved in scuffles and fights.

The school had a no tolerance to violence policy, and the principal was concerned. She didn't want to suspend Tyler for misbehaviour, but she was running out of alternatives. Mum chatted with other parents of kids with autism with no positive results. Finally, in a last attempt to avoid suspension, she asked the principal if Tyler's support worker could observe Tyler's day at school, to see if she could spot the problem. It would be a day from his NDIS plan funds, but she thought it was worth a try.

Jess, his support worker, watched him travel to school, and have a really good day in class. At the end of the day, when classes finished, the kids streamed out into the playground and bus lines. Tyler was not first in line and did not get the front seat. That's when the fights started.

The fix was simple. Tyler was let out two minutes early each day, and his seat on the bus became his regular seat in an inclusive school community.

Thanks for the chance to speak with you all today. I know the key role you each play in the success of the inclusion of kids with disabilities, and I also know the key inclusion plays in the success of the lives of kids who are included. I say this having experienced inclusive and segregated settings as a student, and having observed and participated in the disability sector most of my adult life. I want to share some of that experience and knowledge with you today.

I didn't tell Tyler's story at the beginning of this presentation to suggest that inclusion is always such an easy fix. Inclusion can sometimes be complex, inclusion can sometimes require extra support, extra staff training and extra resources, and inclusion can sometimes be contested — with advocates proposing changes that schools think are difficult or not achievable. But there are two fundamental reasons for including kids with disabilities.

First, it leads to better learning outcomes for all students and safer learning environments for kids with disabilities. I'll come back to the research on that.

And second, if we are going to build a Victorian and Australian society that includes people with disabilities, we have to start in school environments. That's where members of Australian society, with and without disabilities, learn how society works. It is completely counterintuitive to segregate children in schools, and then think that we can successfully transition them into an inclusive society. Segregation in schools puts kids with disabilities on what has been very well described as the polished pathway toward segregation in life — where we live, where we work, and how we interact with society.

I went to a segregated school up to year 10. It was a good learning environment for me, I was safe, and I learned successfully. Most of the teachers were excellent and passionate about their jobs. On the downside though, from the time I was four to the time I was sixteen, I had to travel an hour a day to school and an hour back. That was pretty wearing. But most importantly, I had no friends in my local community. My weekends were often lonely, and I did not have that cohort of friends around me for the rest of my life. I don't suggest that the peer support from other people who are blind or vision-impaired was not valuable. I do suggest that I missed all of those links which we develop throughout childhood, and which often remain with us for many years. That's my penalty for segregation. Others with disabilities are more harshly penalised.

So let's look at what the law says about inclusion. There is clear international support through the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, a UN treaty to which Australia committed more than a decade ago. This treaty requires countries to include students with disabilities.

This treaty is supported by discrimination legislation at both State and Commonwealth levels.

This legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against students with disabilities by, among other things, excluding them from schools and educational environments. This legislation was passed by State and Commonwealth governments at different times, but has been in place for thirty years or more in most cases. The Commonwealth legislation is supported by Standards under the Disability Discrimination Act, which reflect and expand on the content of the law. They were passed more than a decade ago. They, and the State and Federal law, provide that it is unlawful to discriminate against students with disabilities in a range of ways, including exclusion from education settings. They go further and require education providers to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities. The only exception to this is where such adjustments would cause unjustifiable hardship to the education provider. So it is expected that education providers will, as part of this process, experience some hardship. It is only when that hardship becomes unjustifiable that the education provider has the opportunity not to provide the adjustment. Finally, these standards require that such adjustments must be made in consultation with the student, or the parents of the student. And this requirement makes absolute sense. Because we, as people with disabilities, and the families of people with disabilities, are the experts on our own lives and our own lived experience. So it would be foolish to make such adjustments without considering that advice.

Let me come back, as I promised, to the research supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities. For more than forty years, research into the education of students with disabilities has overwhelmingly established inclusive education as producing superior social and academic outcomes for all students, with or without disabilities. Further, the research has consistently found that academic and social outcomes for children in fully inclusive settings are without exception better than in the segregated, or partially segregated environments, e.g., education support units or resource classrooms. Sadly, despite this, segregation continues to be suggested to families and educators as an appropriate option, despite having virtually no evidence basis. The most recent comprehensive review of this

research was undertaken by the Alana Institute in 2017 at Harvard graduate school of education. Findings set out clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities. Included students with disabilities develop stronger skills in reading and mathematics, have high rates of attendance, are less likely to have behavioural problems and are more likely to complete secondary school. They are more likely to be enrolled in post-secondary education and to be employed and living independently. Finally, the benefits received by non-disabled students are equal to, or more positive than, non-inclusion.

None of this is surprising when you think about it. We learn skills, social and academic, as children which we take through the rest of our lives. Why wouldn't this apply to students with disabilities or non-disabled students who have been educated with students with disabilities?

What I've done this morning is focussed on the *why* for inclusion because I know, if done successfully, the transformative possibilities it can have. I have not focussed on the *how*. That is for others with more day-to-day education experience than me. But I do know it requires resources, training, and collaborative partnerships to achieve. And I do know that you, as leaders of school communities, can — with the right mindset — achieve those transformative possibilities.

I've supported this focus through my own experience, the law, and current research.

But we all know that whilst there are many examples of successful inclusion, inclusion is not happening universally. Why is that, and how can we change that?

I assess that reflecting the whole community approach across Australia, people in the education community have a limiting and negative view of disability. People with disabilities are limited by the soft bigotry of low expectations. Most people in the community make assumptions about us that are negative and wrong. And if the bar is set low for us, most people with disabilities will tend not to push through that bar. We want to be included, we will benefit from being included — and the rest of society will as well. But we cannot be included unless society removes these assumptions, and works with us to make inclusion happen. Education is a microcosm of this situation.

So what can you, as educational leaders, do to change this situation. Well, it's what many of you are already doing. Rather than saying *why* it's saying *why not*. Rather than making those negative assumptions, it's setting the assumptions aside. Rather than presuming you know, it's asking the student or their parents how inclusion might work, and embarking on the journey to make that happen. And taking your school community with you on that journey. Some will come with you happily, some will be reluctant, and others will be unsure. You can use your leadership and skills to set the tone and the direction of the journey.

And what are the results if you take that approach? There are all of the benefits that the research I have referred to lays out for students with disabilities. Plus all of the benefits which the research lays out for the student body as a whole. People with disabilities, such as me, will grow up with their peers, rather than being introduced to them at the end of school when much of our learning and socialising has already occurred. The result will be better social and educational outcomes for everyone and a stronger and more cohesive Victorian and Australian society. And all it takes is making adjustments so that Tyler, and many others like him, get the front seat on the bus.

Thanks for the chance to speak with you today.

*Dr Innes is a lawyer, mediator, company director, and human rights advocate and served as Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner from December 2005 to July 2014. Among his many important contributions to the rights of people with disability in Australia, Dr Innes was also involved in the drafting of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Australia in 2008 and recognises the right of people with disability to an inclusive education. Dr Innes is the founder of the Attitude Foundation and sits on a number of boards in the disability sector. He is a frequent commentator about disability issues in the media, with regular appearances on television radio and print media, including on ABC's The Drum and Q&A.*

# Inclusion: A research and practice conundrum

In this article, **Coral Kemp** provides a practitioner's and a researcher's perspective on the complexity of making evidence-based decisions about inclusive education.

Inclusion in regular education settings! What a difficult topic for discussion in today's world, when inclusion is positioned as a human right – in this case the right for all children to be educated in the same settings as their age peers, regardless of type and level of disability. Do I support this human right? Of course I do, and any examination of my career as a practitioner and a researcher would clearly evidence this support.

Although I definitely agree that in an ideal world all children should be able to be educated in mainstream classrooms, we definitely do not live in an ideal world, nor is this likely to change in the near future. Important, but sometimes not mentioned, in this whole debate is another right – **the right to a quality education**, that is one that prepares individuals to live their best life following the completion of formal school education.

An important consideration is the evidence base for including children with the full range of disability type and severity in inclusive educational settings. In other words, what evidence is there that students receive a better education in inclusive or segregated settings? The answer is that while there is research that supports the inclusion of students with a disability, there is also research that does not support this position. When I hear people state that 'research supports inclusion' I want to ask: which research? which populations? how was

inclusion defined? which outcomes were measured? and which assessments were used?

Moving beyond the argument of human rights is the argument positioning full inclusion as evidence-based practice. It is important in this context to consider the meaning of evidence-based practice. In the first instance, it must be acknowledged that evidence-based practice is not just about published scientific research. Although this is an essential component, just as important are consumer values and available resources (Snow, 2019). I am in the privileged position of being able to view inclusion from both a practitioner and a researcher perspective and it is the combination of these perspectives that informs my view on inclusion.

## A Practitioner Perspective

Yes, I support the human right for inclusion, but I also recognise the need for access to evidence-based interventions in inclusive classrooms. In order for students with disabilities to receive a quality education in an inclusive setting, mainstream teachers must have the skills to support the full range of students in their classes. This includes knowledge of the evidence-based content and instructional strategies required to address the educational needs of all students. Unfortunately, recent Australian research has identified problems with the implementation of evidence-based interventions, specifically in early literacy and behaviour support, in initial primary teacher education programs (Meeks & Kemp, 2017; O'Neil & Stephenson, 2011). Having access to the support of special educators with additional qualifications in instructional science might mitigate this lack of expertise. However, relatively recent reviews have identified that there is a shortage of qualified special education teachers in this country (NSW government, 2016, 2017, Victorian government, 2016), which means that general education teachers may not

have access to support in the selection of evidence-based interventions for the students with disabilities in their classrooms. As a result of the shortage of special educators, many of those working in special education roles do not have qualifications in special education or skills in evidence-based intervention. Needless to say, if the alternative to inclusion is a special education class with a teacher who does not have a qualification in special education and/or who doesn't implement evidence-based practice in his or her classroom, then inclusion with age peers must be the better placement.

Unfortunately, a misunderstanding of the nature of truly inclusive education (i.e., a program that meets the educational needs of every student in the class) is evident in the special education policy of some schools. I recently received a communication from a consultant who was concerned because of a school's refusal to put in place appropriate adjustments for a client of hers who was about to enter Year 7. I had a similar problem when a boy, with whom I had worked, transitioned from a mainstream primary school, which was supporting his remedial program in class, to a mainstream secondary school. The boy, who had a very significant learning difficulty as evidenced by the fact that he did not have letter-sound correspondence or basic phonemic awareness skills (i.e., phoneme blending and segmentation) in Year 3 when first assessed, still had a reading age of only 7 years 5 months at the end of Year 6. Although the special education staff at the secondary school agreed to provide the technology needed to allow this student to access the regular curriculum, they refused to include a remedial program to allow him to

continue to develop his skills in reading and writing. Their response was that the focus for the school was inclusion, and they did not provide remediation. While I absolutely supported the use of technology to allow this student to access the curriculum, I could not understand why he was denied access to a remedial literacy program. Is this a case of inclusion being more important than education?

## A Researcher Perspective

Although scientific research is an important component of the evidence, it has to be acknowledged that published research is of varying quality and to acknowledge, also, that what works in carefully controlled research may not work in practice. More than twenty years ago researchers in the field of early childhood intervention acknowledged that the question "Does early intervention work?" was no longer relevant. It was unethical to allocate young children to a treatment or control group in which no intervention was provided. Early intervention was valued by both families and professionals and the question then changed from a question about the efficacy of early intervention to the question of which intervention worked for which children delivered in which way? The same must apply to inclusion.

The early reviews and meta-analyses did not include children with severe intellectual disabilities. The Carberg and Kavale meta-analysis (1980), which is widely quoted by those supporting inclusion, included 50 studies of 27,000 students in special and regular settings. The mean age of the students was 11 years and the mean IQ was 74. While the mean difference in academic and social skills in favour of regular class placement was statistically significant for students with mild intellectual disabilities, the effect size was small and did not reach clinical significance. Of interest, for students with emotional/behavioural challenges or those with learning disabilities, statistically superior results were found for segregated settings. Again, the difference was not clinically significant.

A later but much smaller meta-analysis by Wang and Baker (1985-1986), which included additional measures such as attitudes, processes and interactions, found a significant effect size in favour of inclusive settings. Like Carberg and Kavale, these authors noted that certain instructional design features contributed to successful mainstream programs.

In a more recent meta-analysis by Oh-Young and Filler (2015), the authors found that more integrated settings produced better results than more segregated settings. It is important to point out that of the 24 studies included in this analysis, seven involved a preschool population, four of the remaining 17 studies included students with intellectual disabilities and only one study included students with multiple disabilities. Further, the more integrated settings did not always represent full-time placement in a mainstream classroom. It is with this information in mind that one needs to interpret the findings of research such as this.

A recent study by Ballis and Heath (2021) investigated the impact of the withdrawal of a range of special education supports for students with additional needs in Texas in the United States. They found that the greatest effects of this reduction of special education support were found for 'students on the margin', that is students with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioural challenges. The rates of high school completion and college enrolment for these populations were significantly reduced as a result of the reduction in special education support.

Much of my own research has focused on inclusion. The Early School Program was established at Macquarie University Special Education Centre in 1992 as a preschool program for children with a range of abilities including children with severe intellectual disability and children identified as being potentially intellectually gifted. The majority of the children did not have a diagnosed disability, but a large percentage did. The children were included in the same playroom and outdoor areas but programs were adopted and adapted to meet the needs of all the children enrolled in the program. A very structured transition program was in place for the children with a disability and, for 33 children transitioning to a general education class (almost 90% of the children graduating from the program at that time), their transition over five years from 1995—1999 was investigated. The subsequent inclusion in general education classrooms was followed up in 1999 for the 26 children still fully included in general education classrooms (years 1-5). Those who transitioned into mainstream classrooms had levels of intellectual disability from mild to severe with the majority having a diagnosed moderate level of disability. The social and academic achievements of those students, which have been published in peer reviewed journals, were generally positive. The objectives for this research included an investigation of the preschool program provided at Macquarie University and the transition support by the highly qualified program staff. These children had the benefit of a good preparation program, support for their transition, including teacher support, and committed parents.

Another study, led by a colleague (Kishida & Kemp, 2009), investigated the engagement and adult and peer interaction of preschool children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in inclusive and segregated preschool settings. Each of the 12 children attended one of two segregated programs for children with ASD in addition to either a regular preschool or childcare centre. The peer interaction for the children with ASD was twice as frequent in the inclusive compared to the segregated settings. However, the fact that the children interacted for an average of just 3.3% of the time in the segregated settings but still only an average of 6.8% of the time in the inclusive settings probably reflects the difficulties with social interaction experienced by many individuals with ASD. The children were marginally more engaged in the segregated settings than the inclusive settings, which might possibly reflect the skills in promoting engagement of the highly qualified staff in the segregated programs. The range in percentage engagement and interaction across children was large, reflecting individual differences in engagement and peer interaction across the young children with ASD.

Although small studies are not uncommon in the inclusion research literature, it is important to emphasise that the numbers for my studies were small and this needs to be kept in mind when considering the results. The important point to make is that the evidence supporting full inclusion is not conclusive. I have touched on just a few studies. There will be many more that can be used to support both sides of the inclusion debate. Of course it is easy to pick out those studies that support the side being argued. Waiting for randomised controlled trials is not an option as such research would not be approved by any ethics committee.

Scientific research is an important

component of evidence-based practice. However, the practice being promoted has to be valued by the consumers and this includes the children, their families and the teachers involved. Surely the children are more important than the philosophy. Let's make sure that inclusion occurs when students benefit and teachers are properly supported. This means that we, as professionals, must provide families with accurate information and must keep in mind that we do not have to live with the choices made. Students and families do.

## References

Ballis, B., & Heath, K. (2021). The long-run impacts of special education. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy 2021, 13*(4): 72–111 *https://doi. org/10.1257/pol.20190603*

Carlberg, C, & Kavale, K. (1980). The efficacy of special versus regular class placement for exceptional children: A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Special Education, 14*, 295-309.

Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2009). The engagement and interaction of children with autism spectrum disorder in segregated and inclusive early childhood center-based settings. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 29*, 105-118.

Meeks, L. J., & Kemp, C. R. (2017). How well prepared are Australian preservice teachers to teach early reading skills? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 42*(11). Retrieved from *http://ro.ecu. edu.au/ajte/vol42/iss11/1*

New South Wales Government (May, 2016). Auditor-General's report on supporting students with disability in NSW public schools. Retrieved from *https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/ reports/supporting-students-with- disability-in-nsw-public-schools*

New South Wales Government (September, 2017). Parliamentary inquiry into the education of students with disability or special needs in New South Wales. Retrieved from *https://www.parliament.nsw.gov. au/committees/inquiries/Pages/ inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2416#tab- reportsandgovernmentresponses*

Oh-Young, C., & Filler, A. (2015). A meta-analysis of the effects of placement on academic and social skill outcome measures of students with disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 47*, 80-92.

O'Neill, S. C., & Stephenson, J. (2011). Classroom behaviour management preparation on undergraduate primary teacher education in Australia: A web-based investigation. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 36* (10,) 35-52.

Snow, P. (June 2019). *What does evidence-based practice mean in education in 2019?* InSpEd Insights. Retrieved from *https://www.insped.org. au/resources-2/articles-from-insped- insights/*

Victorian Government (April, 2016). Review of the program for students with disabilities in public schools. Retrieved from *https://www.education.vic.gov.au/ Documents/about/department/PSD- Review-Report.pdf*

Wang, M. C., & Baker, E. T. (1985–1986). Mainstreaming programs: Design features and effects. *Journal of Special Education,19*, 503–521.

*Dr Coral Kemp is an experienced practitioner and researcher in the field of education. She is currently the chair of the Institute of Special Educators, a committee member of the International Society on Early Intervention, and an honorary academic at Macquarie University.*

# Inclusive education does not require the disabling of special education

In this article, **Sally Howell** provides an opinion piece arguing against an 'all means all' approach to inclusive education, reflecting her own experience and expertise in providing best practice education to students with disability.

Whate follows is an opinion piece informed by some 40 years of working in education with 35 of these as a special educator. My career has seen me work as a primary school teacher, a learning and support teacher, a NSW Department of Education Disability Programs bureaucrat/consultant, a parent advocate for children with disability in mainstream classes during the era of 'integration', a university lecturer in special education and principal of a special school.

I believe that there is much that can be done to make regular classrooms more inclusive of students with disability but I do not believe that the educational needs of every child with a disability can be met in a class of 25-30 students. In my opinion, insisting that every student attend a regular class at their local school and participate in the same learning activities at their age peers 100% of the time, contradicts the very human rights agenda such a stance claims to support. In this piece I refer to the stance '100% of students, 100% of the time, learning alongside non-disabled peers' as 'all means all'.

My journey into special education began early in my career. As a new graduate I was dismayed to find that my 4-year degree had not prepared me for the needs of the full range of students in my class. My first years as a primary school teacher had me in charge of a Year 3 class at what was then termed a 'disadvantaged school'. This was a school in a low socio-economic area with all the same issues that apply to similar areas today. Children for whom I had responsibility included a recently arrived Vietnamese refugee who had arrived by boat (in some respects we were a kinder nation back then), a profoundly deaf student who attended for half days, a selective mute, at least 3 children who had virtually no reading, writing or spelling skills, a group of students with poor reading skills, students with limited or no English, students for whom I had welfare concerns, students who were pretty much 'on track' and 3 students who may well have been gifted. Maths skills varied wildly too. I remember them all fondly and wonder how their lives have panned out.

In 1986 I enrolled in a Master of Arts (Special Education). I was motivated by the need to improve my teaching practice. What an eye opener the course was! Why wasn't the content I learned in this course part of my undergraduate degree? It would have been a great help and far more use than much of what was included in my Initial Teacher Education (ITE) course. Similar thoughts have been expressed by many special education postgraduate students and teachers I have encountered since.

On completing my special education degree, I moved into a support teacher role. This was at the time the 'whole language' approach to teaching reading was taking hold in a big way. Trying to ensure children received evidence-based reading instruction was a challenge, but luckily my Principal allowed me to assess all Year 1 students and offer a daily reading program to those who were already falling behind after a Kindergarten year of being immersed in a 'whole language' program. My Masters research project had a focus on explicitly teaching phonemic awareness and phonics to at risk Year 1 students. I ran this program within the Year 1 classroom as part of the literacy block of the timetable. No such instruction in the 2022 classroom if 'all means all' comes into effect. Targeted specialised instruction to meet the needs of students is viewed as micro exclusion and segregation. In my opinion such a stance ignores students' right to an education that meets their needs.

In 1993 I moved to a role within the Disability Directorate of the NSW Department of Education. This was an exciting time as recognition had recently been given to the need to provide educational programs to all students with disability. It was the era of 'integration,' a term now somewhat maligned. Integration was *never* about

putting students with disability in mainstream classes without adjustments or support, despite claims by 'all means all' lobbyists that it was, and as such it is/was a bad thing. Perhaps confusion has arisen because the term 'adjustment' only came into common usage in Australia after 2005 with the Disability Standards for Education requiring 'reasonable adjustments' be made to support students with disability.

Regardless, from the mid 1990s more children with disability were moving into regular schools and in the public sector at least, this was accompanied by whole school professional learning with modules for teachers and school leaders. This period also saw the Department provide courses for learning support teachers, known as Learning Assistance Teachers, that addressed the skills needed to teach students with special education needs. In some instances, teachers undertaking these courses were able to receive credit towards a post-graduate special education qualification. This professional learning was developed and delivered by teachers and consultants with post graduate qualifications in special education. For those of us committed to special education as evidence-based teaching practice, things were looking up. There was still much more to be done to improve education for students with disability, but to me it seemed efforts were being made in the right direction. I acknowledge that at the time I encountered some teachers who were openly hostile to having students with disability attend regular schools.

Recent reviews of educational provision for learners with disability identify lack of teacher training as a problem, as do many teachers themselves. A truly inclusive education system is one that provides students with disability the specialist support they need. It is my opinion that an essential component of inclusive education is teacher training that includes, but is not limited to, units of study addressing:

- Curriculum-based assessment, and monitoring of student learning

- Functional behavioural assessment

- Effective programming, including the development of appropriate individual plans and the reporting of progress against these plans

- Effective explicit teaching strategies in basic literacy and numeracy skills; cognitive skills, pro-social behaviour skills, self-help skills and communication skills

- Teaching, mentoring and modelling effective practices for teacher aides

- Co-teaching and collaboration

- Effective collaboration with families and inclusion of families as partners in the development of IEPs, and

- Skills in identifying evidence-based practice.

Regardless of their skills and knowledge, a teacher responsible for 25-30 students cannot be expected to deliver instruction responsive to every student's needs on their own. Access to highly trained special education teachers and other specialists is essential. Putting each student's needs at the centre of any decision about class placement is also a must and, in my opinion, there will always be some students whose needs will not be met in a class of 25-30 students.

In NSW, the turn of the century saw special education gains in ITE courses, with a mandatory special education unit being introduced. A worrying trend with the current shift to 'inclusive education' and 'all means all' has been the removal of special education content from some of these ITE units and some post-graduate 'inclusive education' programs. Replacement content typically has a focus on human rights, social constructs of disability and a push against any form of special education. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and differentiation are often touted as the panacea of inclusive education, but units unpacking evidence-based practices for students with special education needs, essential to implementing either approach effectively have been removed from many courses. 'All means all' argues for adjustments to accommodate disability so, for example, if a student can't read then provide a reader, don't adopt an 'exclusionary' practice of specialist reading instruction that will see a student or group of students working on content different to that of their reading classmates.

In contrast, many would argue that approaches such as Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) hold great promise in better supporting students with disability. Both approaches recognise the need for specialist support for students with complex learning needs, including those with difficulties learning to read.

During my 35 years in the field of special education I have had moments of great optimism, but sadly 2022 is no such time. As the end of my career fast approaches, rather than feeling relief at progress and confidence in the future of educational provision for learners with disability, I am fearful that the loud voice of 'all means all' and consequent demonising of special education will deny students with disability access to specialised teaching that is responsive to their learning needs. I am disappointed that there is not more attention paid to co-teaching models with classroom teachers and special educators working together. I worry about the over-reliance on a teacher's aides as the 'go to' adjustment for students with disability.

I agree that much more can be done to make classrooms more responsive to the needs of learners with disability but disabling special education is not the answer. Special education is NOT a location, it is evidence-based teaching practice that is responsive to the learning needs of individual students, irrespective of where they attend school. In many of the public debates, there are members of the teaching profession who feel that their own background - the lived experience of being teachers of students with disabilities - isn't given fair weight, and their voices are not being listened to. It is teachers who know first-hand what can be achieved with appropriate specialised instruction and support, including adequate support for teachers and appropriate instructional groupings for students.

I empathise with teachers who feel ill-equipped and unsupported to meet the challenges of their classroom just as I felt overwhelmed all those years ago. I beg policy makers and politicians to pay due respect to the voices of special educators and teachers when formulating policy on educational provision for learners with disability. To the teachers of Australia, I say: "My thoughts are with you."

*Dr Sally Howell is a Special Education Teacher and Principal, and an advocate for students with disability and their teachers.*

# Inclusion for all, across all settings: An LDA Consultant Member perspective

**Ann Ryan** provides a voice about the inclusion debate from the point of view of a long-term LDA Specialist Teacher Consultant.

As a long-term LDA Consultant member, I have been asked to report on the role we play in support of inclusion.

True to our core values, LDA has a long history of promoting inclusion. As an organisation, we are one of the earliest adopters of advocacy for inclusive practices. LDA publications and professional development events over the past decades provide a rich wealth of support for inclusive evidence-based practice and for advocacy for change of non-inclusive education practices. This is enhanced by the long-standing provision of LDA consultant member referral services to ensure learning for all.

A word on terminology is important, as much confusion over the meaning of the term 'inclusion' is prevalent. Within LDA, the common use of the term has been to describe the full participation of students in the least restrictive environment which facilitates learning, as well as social, emotional, and behavioural development. This is quite different to the 'full inclusion' meaning where the emphasis is on mainstream settings only with rejection of non-

mainstream settings, and in some cases, rejection of specialist settings within mainstream schools.

As an LDA member and parent of a child with special needs, I have a proud history of supporting inclusion across mainstream and specialist settings. Yet as a teacher, I acknowledge the difficulties it can present. In his article, *Moving Toward Inclusion, Proceed with Caution*, Peter Westwood reported on the complexities of the every-day working life of the average teacher, and the demands of increasing diversity within the student population (Westwood, 1997). He referred to inclusion as a 'contentious issue' and reported that 'If one queries the practicalities of how teachers will cater for the needs of an ever increasingly diverse group of students one is quickly labelled as 'anti-inclusionist'. Much has moved on since then, but the term 'anti-inclusionist' remains and continues to be bandied around for those who question the scope of 'full inclusion' – quite unfairly in my view.

The issues of concern to teachers in the 1990s, as reported by Westwood, still reflect those of teachers in current times. These include:

- Doubts about their ability to cope with the student's special needs
- Feeling that they do not have the specialist teaching skills required
- Anxiety concerning behaviour management
- Concern for the progress of other students in the class
- Expectation of increased workload

Many of these can be alleviated with specialist support in schools. This is where *LDA Consultant Members*

contribute, and along with other specialist referral services, such as *InSpEd*, play an important role.

Teacher concerns are understandable. Many schools do not employ qualified and experienced specialist staff with the skills to support teachers to provide for the needs of students with additional learning needs. In recognition of this, Anne Bishop, past President of AREA (since renamed LDA) in the late 70's and late 80's, was instrumental in the establishment of the LDA referral service, set up to ensure that 'children from all schools had access to a trained specialist teacher in a school or practicing privately' (Pringle & Davidson, 2019). While parents engage our services, typically our role, as LDA Consultants, is to work with the student and the school.

Teachers are very aware that students with learning difficulties do need additional support to access the curriculum. Yet too often there is a glossing over of the fact that children lacking basic skills cannot participate fully in an educational program that is based on commonly used constructivist and enquiry-based learning approaches. LDA consultants assist by the promotion of explicit, direct instruction practices and by providing support to teachers to access contemporary evidence-based pedagogy. LDA has over recent decades promoted the three-tiered Response to Intervention (RTI) model, now often referred to as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and this model

is broadly accepted as foundational to contemporary best-practice. This inclusive model provides for all students to receive the level of targeted teaching required. While supporting schools in the implementation of this model, LDA Consultant members mostly provide direct support at Tier 3 level, in one-on-one intensive intervention programs. The demands of this type of intervention are beyond the resources of many schools.

Without this support, it is sadly too common to see individual support for students relegated to the back of the classroom, if not the 'broom cupboard', delivered by untrained classroom helpers, with such practices seen as an easy solution for difficult cases. Over decades, LDA has worked to promote real inclusion and prevent such practices. The school setting is not important (mainstream, specialist or withdrawal) but rather the nature of the program and whether it is delivered by those with specialist skills.

Increasingly, schools are facilitating online sessions for students with LDA consultants for students at school. This provides valuable opportunities for staff to sit in on sessions, and to have the most efficient strategies for a particular student modelled. Further, I notice an increasing interest in my own practice for parents to sit in on sessions so that they can then provide consistent support at home. I welcome these opportunities to share best practice. This approach, which strengthens the learning opportunities for students, leads to greater opportunities for authentic inclusion in the classroom.

It needs to be acknowledged that inclusion in mainstream settings is not desirable or possible for all students. This is something I have become aware of as a parent. Despite exceptional good will, skilled staff, and excellent resourcing, my son moved from a mainstream to a special school in Year 7. My great regret is that my ideological leanings toward mainstream education at the time cost my son seven years of distress. The sensory and social environments of the mainstream school were simply overwhelming and could not be controlled. For the first time, and in a specialist setting, our son enjoyed his daily experience of school and discovered genuine friendship. His human right to an enjoyable school experience and nourishing social life was met. My wish is the same for all students, and I greatly value the work of colleagues who support inclusion across all settings.

## References

Pringle, A. & Davidson, M. (2019). Vale Anne Bishop. *Learning Difficulties Australia Bulletin, 51*(2 &3), p39.

Westwood, P. (1997). Moving toward inclusion: Proceed with caution. *Australian Journal of Learning Disabilities, 2*(3), 18-20. *https://doi. org/10.1080/19404159709546536*

*Ann Ryan is a a long-term LDA member and past Council member. Ann been committed to the support of inclusive practices in education for over 25 years.*

# Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016)

## *Article 24 – Education*

1  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 lifelong 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  In realizing this right, States Parties shall ensure that:

a  Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;

b  Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;

c  Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;

d  Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;

e  Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.

3  States Parties shall enable persons with disabilities to learn life and social development skills to facilitate their full and equal participation in education and as members of the community. To this end, States Parties shall take appropriate measures, including:

a  Facilitating the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;

b  Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community;

c  Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.

4  In order to help ensure the realization of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

5  States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

# Inclusion: An introduction

In this article, **Kate de Bruin** introduces the set of articles that argue for full inclusion of students with disability. She starts with a personal perspective, then discusses the need for systematic change in the education system.

I spent most of my time as an English teacher working in a large outer-suburban high school with around 2,000 students. The school was located in an area of high economic inequity; part of our cohort came from the area near the bay and lived in multimillion-dollar mansions, while the rest lived only a short distance inland in the low-income housing estate. Many of the latter came from families who were third-generation unemployed, and the suburb in which the school was located was a synonym in my city for drug addiction, poverty and disadvantage. Despite this, the school itself was a sought-after school which had to strictly apply the zoning rules. The principal and leadership team had undertaken a stunning "turnaround" of a formerly disadvantaged school, realised a vision of educational quality for the kids of this suburb, and built a school culture of high expectations as well as quality teaching. I loved working at that school.

It was a heady environment to work in. The principal backed teachers with energy and ideas that aligned with his vision of lifting the local kids out of poverty and disadvantage and placing them on trajectories for success. You needed only to go to him with a vision and a plan and he would support you to make it happen. The

results were extraordinary. I see my former students now in high-profile jobs: senior journalists for the national news broadcaster; high-profile lawyers, internationally-successful performing artists. The kids that are less publicly visible are the ones that I spent a good deal of my time working with: the kids with disability. But they are there, living and working in strong and connected communities and relationships. It should not be extraordinary that this is so, but nonetheless it is.

When I went into teaching, I did not have those kids uppermost in my mind. I was freshly-minted from an honours thesis in literature and had pictured myself working with senior students and teaching fine literature. And while I did get to do that, I also taught a number of students who needed me to have skills and knowledge that I had not been equipped to teach with. These were kids with disabilities and learning difficulties who couldn't access the curriculum and who never would unless something changed. I became determined to be that change.

I vividly remember a day looking helplessly at the set texts I had to teach the following term. They were good books but completely inaccessible to the students in my classes who couldn't read with enough proficiency. In that year alone, across my English teaching allotment (including a year seven class, two year nine classes and a year eleven class), there were the following students identified with disabilities who would struggle to read their texts: three students with intellectual disabilities, one with hearing impairment, one with dyslexia, two with diagnosed language difficulties and one with attentional difficulties, and one with cerebral palsy who used a wheelchair and a head pointer to type. There were also a significant number of students who were refugees from the war in Bosnia and one refugee from Iraq. Together, these students represented the greatest challenge to my professional skillset. I had not been prepared to teach them in ways that would benefit them. I had been given a very generic initial teacher

education that had not focused on anything like student diversity or evidence-based practices. I was, upon reflection, woefully underprepared for my job.

But some important attributes that I had were tenacity and commitment to be a good teacher for all my students and a determination to find a way through my dilemma. One of those ways was to get trained in running reading intervention which I subsequently did and which I have written about *here* (de Bruin, 2021). And while that was really effective and we taught *all* of those kids to become competent readers, that didn't help them while they were cycling through their two years in intervention — they couldn't read the books that they had to deal with right there and then. It also offered nothing for the student who was a wheelchair user as she couldn't hold the books and there were no digital or audio copies of them. She didn't need intervention — she needed reasonable adjustments. Collectively, these students couldn't access the material being put in front of them — the textbooks, novels and worksheets provided across the curriculum.

Not willing to be defeated, I thought laterally. After scouring the internet for audio or digital copies of the novels, and conferring with the visiting teachers and speech pathologists who supported some of these students, I hit upon the idea of creating alternative formats — audio recordings of the books being read aloud and textual summaries for them to refer to. I vividly remember a day on the phone with the Copyright Agency where I was checking the legality of my plan only to learn that I was operating in a very complex area. Together we discussed the definition of disability contained within the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and the state-based counterpart legislation

and policy guidance documentation. It was explained to me that while all the students would benefit from this alternative format and supporting resources I was proposing, they could not all have them. I was legally only permitted to make them one under the following conditions:

- they would be provided solely to the student eligible for this reasonable adjustment under the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act)
- that they would have already legally purchased a physical copy of the book
- they would not be made available to others ineligible under the DDA

It was that day that I first glimpsed the scale and complexity of the web of entitlements under federal law and state-based guidelines. Of particular interest to me was the "grey area" of dyslexia which, as the patient lady from the Copyright Agency explained to me, did not clearly entitle a student to an alternative format constituting a reasonable adjustment. She advised me that there was a slippage between the *intent* of the act and the *wording* of the act that made this unclear. And thus, I first met the (somewhat arbitrary and definitely unhelpful) distinction between a disability and a learning difficulty. The very rules that had been written to ensure students who experienced barriers to accessing an education had these removed through funding and reasonable adjustments, were the same rules potentially preventing me from doing just that. In discovering that funding rules of the state were inconsistent with the DDA, and this meant that no help was available for many students who needed it, I burned with rage and the unfairness of it all. I still do. It drives me every day to change the system and make it better.

I ploughed ahead to do what I could for whom I could with what I had to hand at the time. I acquired some sound-editing software and a high-quality microphone. I put out the call to staff members to read aloud a chapter of the year 7-10 English novels and record it onto their computer and write an accompanying chapter summary including key quotes for character development and identified themes. While much of that period of time was complicated and confusing, what still stands out with brilliant clarity even twenty years later is the throng of teachers that volunteered to do this task. They were from everywhere – art

teachers, science teachers, PE teachers and principals. The willingness of these educators to put their shoulder to the wheel and help to remove learning barriers for kids with disabilities helped to keep me energised. It was a spectacular exercise in innovation and collegiality. It was also a very formative experience for me and serves to illustrate the way in which we cannot be inclusive teachers for all our students unless we all work together to achieve a shared vision of a quality education for every student.

And all those efforts made me a better teacher. In learning to teach basic reading skills, learning to navigate disability law, learning to create accessible materials, I learnt about things that were essential for me to do to ensure these *few* students could access the curriculum that benefited *everybody*. Across all my classes (including my year 12s), I taught explicitly. I read aloud to them and modelled good reading. I built background information, taught vocabulary. I created scaffolds and graphic organisers. I designed for universal access. I taught the students to work in collaborative groups and pairs and support each other. My classrooms were busy and active places and all students were supported to learn and thrive *together*.

I had no idea, back then, that what we were doing was called inclusive education. It was not until a good decade after, when I returned to do further study (and then even further study) that I learnt about this movement. When I was a school teacher, it was simply a no-brainer for me. As I saw it, mass education is for every student. It is therefore incumbent on us as teachers to educate every student. No exceptions. Find a way. Make it happen.

That was what I thought then and it is not very different now, even after a Postgraduate Diploma (Inclusive & Special Education) and a PhD and ten years in academia. But I know a lot more now and I am also equipped with the knowledge garnered from reading research findings during this time. And critical to what I have learnt are the following three things, which everybody needs to know about inclusive education.

## The need for systemic change in education

The first is the *need* for systemic change in education. It's irrefutable. The mass education system that is our

mainstream schooling is 150 years old, and it was not designed for everybody. Indeed, many students were excluded from education on the basis of poverty, race and disability from the start. We need to redesign the system, not keep trying to retrofit solutions. Just like three-cuing cannot be fixed by adding a phonics patch over it, neither can mainstream be fixed by papering over the cracks. It will require careful planning to create an inclusive system and this cannot be achieved overnight, but do it we must. The in-school and post-school outcomes for people with disability are testimony to the urgency of systemic change. These include the low rates of school completion, further study, and open employment (Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, n.d. a & b). They also include the high rates of gatekeeping, restrictive practices and inequitable access to reasonable adjustments (Poed et al. 2022). We cannot justify doing nothing and maintaining the status quo. You will read more about a proposed plan and roadmap for systemic change in this issue from the piece written by Sue Tape and Mary Sayers from Children and Young People with Disability Australia.

## The obligation for systemic change in education

The second is the *obligation* for systemic change in education. Australia, like 185 other countries, has a longstanding set of commitments to meet their human rights obligations. These obligations have their roots in the aftermath of World War 2, when the United Nations (UN) came into being. At this time the UN created a charter which outlined a goal and vision for societies in which the atrocities of the war could never occur again. Essentially, this vision described the creation of a society characterised by peacefulness and justice, in which all humans belonged and were equally valued, and was hoped to prevent violence against, or ill-treatment of, particular vulnerable or minority groups, including people with disability (Mostert, 2002). The resultant UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR; UN 1948) named the rights that should be realised for all human beings and thus formed a "roadmap" for its vision of peace. Since this declaration was made, many UN treaties and conventions have been developed as instruments for achieving the vision for peace and equality, and have placed obligations upon the nation states that signed and

ratified them. Australia is signatory to the seven core international treaties created to realise this vision (Australian Government, n.d.). These are as follows:

- the 1966 *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR)
- the 1966 *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR)
- the 1966 *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (CERD)
- the 1979 *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW)
- the 1984 *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (CAT)
- the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC)
- the 2007 *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD).

The last of these treaties places signatories under a binding obligation to realise systemic transformation for inclusive education. As can be seen above, the educational rights of students with disability to an education has taken half a century to be clearly articulated and defined within the CRPD through Article 24: Inclusive Education. It is not uncommon to hear that "inclusive education" is hard to define but this is not accurate. Indeed, a decade after the CRPD came into force, the UN released General Comment 4 (GC4; UN 2016),

a guidance document which provided further clarity for signatories. Within GC4, inclusion is defined and also distinguished against what it is not, as encapsulated in the infographic below (Hehir, 2016).

## The evidence for systemic change in education

The third is that the balance of *evidence from the past five decades* of research shows that a high-quality inclusive education, as defined in Hehir's (2016) infographic, produces better outcomes for students with and without disability. Cohort studies, meta-analyses and matched sample studies all show that when appropriate support and intervention is provided for students with disability within general education settings, the benefits for all students re superior.  To be clear, this does not mean placing kids with disability into mainstream without support. Nor does it mean that all students are required to access all supports within the general education classroom. There is a place for interventions to be run outside the general education classroom within inclusive settings. The graphic above makes clear that an "inclusive" system is not a "mainstream" system. Attempting to fit kids with disability into mainstream essentially asks them to work with that system that was never designed for them and many of those add-ons may create new barriers for students, families and teachers to navigate. Yet considerable fear and anxiety continues

to be expressed by many, including some expressed within this Bulletin, that this is what is being proposed.

It is not.

Inclusion involves systemic reform, designing a system in which effective and appropriate supports are brought to students, rather than requiring students to attend separate settings to access those supports. It is about ensuring adjustments are designed consultatively with students and their families, and requires the upskilling of the workforce.

In my job as researcher and in my university teaching of experienced teachers undertaking a Master's Degree in Inclusive Education, I often hear anxieties expressed about inclusion and I welcome the opportunity to discuss these. I tend to hear anxieties about the quality of support for student with complex learning profiles as well as about the future role of teachers and leaders from special schools. These are perfectly reasonable concerns to hold and are important to address. In my teaching I have found that once systemic redesign and transformation is understood, these anxieties are considerably reduced. There is a place for every student and for every teacher in a transformed inclusive system. The skillset of all teachers will continue to be valued. There are no supports currently offered in a segregated setting that cannot be offered in an inclusive one.

This is not to minimise the challenge that lies ahead. Change is hard and systems contain a lot of inertia that means efforts to innovate and redesign them face their own barriers — attitudinal, financial and structural. However, there are systems overseas who have gone before us and from whom we can learn. The United States closed their special schools in the 1970s, as did Italy. More recently Portugal has also closed their special schools, as has the province of New Brunswick in Canada.

None are "perfect" examples of inclusion. Yet as indicated above, we have a current system that is not providing the outcomes we would want in terms of school completion, rates of exclusion and segregation, denial of support and adjustments and so forth. We cannot wait for perfection and we do not have it now. It is therefore instructive for us to learn from what was accomplished elsewhere and apply those lessons here as part of a carefully planned systemic transformation.

One such lesson is from the United States about how system innovation



**EXCLUSION**

*Exclusion* occurs when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.

**SEGREGATION**

*Segregation* occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.

**INTEGRATION**

*Integration* is a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.

**INCLUSION**

*Inclusion* involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences.

*Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.*
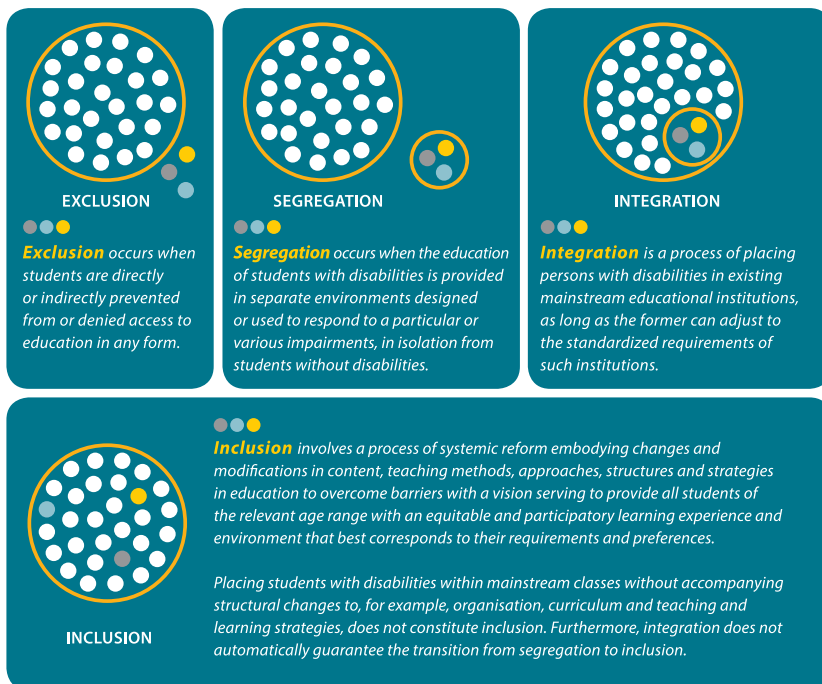
Image taken from Hehir et al., (2016)

might look. Following their school desegregation, there was considerable such innovation during the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in the development of multi-tiered systems of support models such as Response to Intervention (RTI). This equipped systems to improve the quality of teaching provided to all students in general education classrooms as well as to provide targeted or intensive supports to students without requiring them to be placed into special education settings to access these. The introduction of RTI resulted in a substantial drop in the numbers of students referred to special education while student academic and behavioural outcomes also improved significantly (Burns et al. 2002; 2005).

There are also lessons from elsewhere showing that systems continue to perform well by international standards. For example, the work of AuCoin (2020) notes that student achievement, as measured by New Brunswick students' PISA data from the 2015 cohort, were relatively high, and on par with the results from countries with much stronger economies and resourcing for education (e.g., Sweden, Norway, Australia). By this argument, one could consider that New Brunswick is "punching above its weight" in PISA and getting these results with a more inclusive system and lower resources than countries with "like" results. Like New Brunswick, Portugal also continues to refine their systemic transformation following recent legislation reform for inclusion (Alves et al., 2020). There are clear lessons to be learnt about monitoring student progress as well as investing in the upskilling of teachers.

It takes collective courage and commitment for change to occur, as well as careful planning. It is with great excitement and pride that I have been involved in the development of this LDA Bulletin in which eminent and emerging scholars, parents and teachers share their work and thoughts on the realisation of the right to an inclusive education and how this might be achieved. You will read about the role of the NCCD, school leaders, and collaboration with allied health professionals in making this a reality. You will also hear from those who note their concerns. But most importantly you will hear from those at the heart of this issue – the students themselves. I hope you find this important issue both informative and inspirational.

## References

Alves, I., Pinto, P. C., & Pinto, T. J. (2020). Developing inclusive education in Portugal: Evidence and challenges. *Prospects, 49*(3), 281-296. *https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11125-020-09504-y*

AuCoin, A., Porter, G. L., & Baker-Korotkov, K. (2020). New Brunswick's journey to inclusive education. *Prospects, 49*(3), 313-328.

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations a), n.d. *Education*. *https://www.afdo.org.au/about-australians-with-disability/education/*

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations b), n.d. *Employment*. *https://www.afdo.org.au/about-australians-with-disability/employment/*

Australian Government (n.d.). *International human rights system*. *https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/human-rights-and-anti-discrimination/international-human-rights-system*

Burns, M. K., & Symington, T. (2002). A meta-analysis of prereferral intervention teams: Student and systemic outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*(5), 437-447.

Burns, M. K., Appleton, J. J., & Stehouwer, J. D. (2005). Meta-analytic review of responsiveness-to- intervention research: Examining field-based and research-implemented models. Journal of *Psychoeducational Assessment, 23*(4), 381–394. *https://doi.org/10.1177/073428290502300406*

de Bruin, K. (2021). Response to Intervention (RTI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS): An introduction. *LDA Bulletin, 53*(3), 15-18.

Hehir, T., Grindal, T., Freeman, B., Lamoreau, R., Borquaye, Y., & Burke, S. (2016). A Summary of the Evidence on Inclusive Education. *Abt Associates*.

Poed, S., Cologon, K., & Jackson, R. (2022). Gatekeeping and restrictive practices by Australian mainstream schools: Results of a national survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26*(8), 766-779.

United Nations, (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. *https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights*

United Nations, (2016). *General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education*. *https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1313836?ln=en*

*Dr Kate de Bruin is a Senior Lecturer in inclusion and disability in the Faculty of Education at Monash University.*

# Being realistic about inclusion: What's realistic for young people with disability?

This article has been co-written by **Mary Sayers**, Chief Executive Officer of *Children and Young People with Disability Australia* (CYDA); **Sue Tape**, Co-ordinator of CYDA; and two young people with disability, **Poppy Mullins** and **Xander Wroblewski**. It provides a focus on young people with disability in the school system, and summarises a *roadmap* for changing what is taken to be 'realistic' – accompanied by a wealth of links to relevant resources.

## What has to change for students with disability, and why?

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the educational experience of students with disability. 2020 brought social isolation and constrained access to supports and services. The sudden change to remote learning made it extremely difficult for schools to provide reasonable adjustments for all students.

2021 layered on challenges in getting vaccinated, continuing social exclusion, mental health deterioration, and for some, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan cuts.

Students who have completed their education since 2019 have not had the same access to careers counselling, work experience, open days, employment fairs and other pivotal pieces of the post school education and employment puzzle.

2022 has not been the hoped-for reset. For many, as COVID persists — compounded by staff shortages and the impact of a fractured school experience — the educational challenges continue to weigh on students and their families.

## Changing perceptions: transforming the impossible to the possible

For students with disability, it was anticipated that 2022 would be a year of renewal and fresh starts.

Rather than being offered messages of hope, however, many students with disability and their families report that they have been confronted by reductive communication from schools. CYDA carried out an Education Survey in 2022, and has also been collecting comments from family consultations and social media posts. The common themes that emerged have reflected reductive perceptions of what is 'realistic'.

> *"You need to be realistic about what's possible for your child."*
> *"Realistically not every child can go to their local school."*
> *"Realistically, I will sort out all the other students first and then get to you."*

Phrases like the ones above may
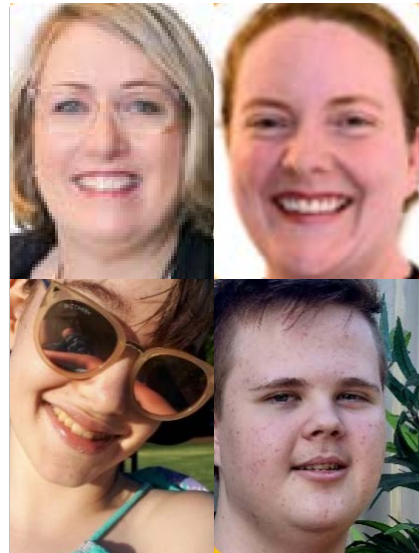


have intensified with the pandemic, but they have typically greeted students with disability and their families from birth. They are comments that reflect low expectations and societal views on



Driving change:
A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia

February 2021

the potential of children with disability that entrench ablism in all facets of our community, including education.

Adult disability advocates, Norman Kunc and Emma van der Klift (2019), similarly reflect on these types of attitudes and statements:

> "When we say something isn't realistic, what do we really mean? What are we actually trying to say? … the source of injustice to disabled people – is that when we use the phrase 'not realistic', we transform 'I don't know how' into 'It's impossible'."

## Support for students with disability: CYDA and the Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education

The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) is an initiative bringing together organisations that share a commitment to advance inclusive education in Australia and across State and Territory education systems including government and non-government schools. Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is Chair of ACIE and a national co-Convenor, together with All Means All – The Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education (All Means All).

One of the resources available from ACIE, released to help realise inclusive education in Australia, is a publication entitled Driving change: A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia.

The roadmap has two key sections:

1 The six key outcomes (or pillars) that need to occur if inclusive education is to be achieved, stepped out over the next 10 years; and

2 The key levers for change needed to realise these outcomes.

The six 'pillars' are as follows:

1 Ensure inclusive education
2 Phase out segregated education
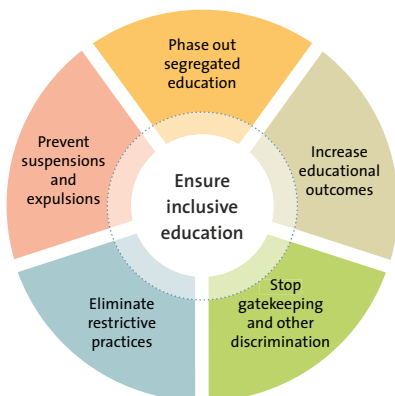


3 Increase educational outcomes
4 Stop gatekeeping and other discrimination
5 Eliminate restrictive practices
6 Prevent suspensions and expulsions



The 'key levers' to realise its vision for change range across the following areas:

- Student agency and voice
- Policy and legislative change
- Monitoring and accountability
- Parent education/support
- Teacher education
- School cultures for inclusion

These pillars are drawn from the evidence-base and embed the rights of students to education as set out in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and General Comment No. 4 (2016), which explains the normative content of Article 24 of the CRPD.

There is clear information to attest to Australia's lack of compliance with the CRPD and a mandate to make recommendations for change. The report Disability Rights Now 2019: Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reviews Australia's progress (or lack thereof) in implementing the CRPD.

Each of the pillars are interrelated to each other and in many instances, the current gaps in policy and practice lead to compounding impacts for students with disability. Community attitudes, structural barriers, and culturally entrenched practice are significant barriers that need to be called out, addressed and regularly reviewed.

The table below shows each of the key levers for change and reflective prompts for students and families to identify what change might look like at their school.

| Key lever | Example reflective prompts for students and families |
|---|---|
| Student agency and voice | How does the school gather student views on their own experiences? Are students with disability supported to talk about their experiences? |
| Policy and legislative change | Does the school discuss with families/carers and students the Disability Standards for Education (DSE), and what the child's rights to reasonable accommodations and adjustments are? Does the school refer to any specific policies on inclusive education? Is it discussed in meetings? |
| Monitoring and accountability | What data are recorded about students and how is this shared with families/carers and students – individual, class or school? |
| Parent education/ support | Does the school Parents and Friends or other family/carers bodies discuss and reflect on inclusive education and how it is tracking on inclusion? Does the school support families/carers to connect with other families at the school who also have students with disability? |
| Teacher education | Does the school talk about professional development in the newsletter or principal's report at the family/carers bodies? Do teachers show an understanding of how to include the student and family? Do teachers talk about how they modify the curriculum? |
| School cultures for inclusion | How do families/carers and students recognise and celebrate success and effort by student, educators and school? Are the student and family made to feel welcome at school – by school staff and other families and students? |

Table 1: Levers for change to achieve inclusive education: Reflective prompts

## A stepped approach to making progress to realise inclusive education

The ACIE Roadmap has a 10-year vision for change, moving from the current state where students are both segregated in special schools and classes or enrolled in mainstream setting, towards inclusive education. Inclusive education is not about mainstreaming, it's about transformation! Inclusive education is a signpost for the type of society we want in the future. Separating students from their non-disabled peers does not lead to good outcomes in the long term. Students are more likely to have poorer educational outcomes and face challenges to secure open employment. This has been termed the polished pathway from segregated education to segregated employment with people with disability still paid as little as $2 per hour.

Often, we hear that many children are supposedly too complex or "too disabled" to attend their local school. This is a cycle of misinformation, based on outdated views of what is best for students with disability and ignores what some exemplar schools are currently doing.

We hear and recognise the fears of families currently in or just out of the system. People are fearful of what "mainstreaming" would mean. This is not what we are asking for. Just closing down special schools without transforming local primary and secondary schools to be more inclusive would also do students a massive disservice.

Teachers need smaller classes, more time to plan, in-house access to supports and expertise and more support from the system.

We also need to address the misnomer of "parent choice". If your local school is not prepared or equipped to provide and support your child to learn with their same age peers successfully and safely, then going to a special school is not a choice. It's a compromise or coercion.

We need to have a National Inclusive Education Plan and actions to get us there in a sensible timeframe. Let's imagine the future in 10 years' time for children and young people with disability:

- From birth or when disability or developmental delay is first identified, families are encouraged and supported to strive for inclusion in their local community, and to make early childhood education and care the first step of an inclusive education alongside their non-disabled peers.

- Students learning alongside children and young people with disability understand that disability is something to be celebrated as part of our society.

- Families with non-disabled children understand that all students do better when there is full inclusion

- Students with disability are not seen as a problem, and all schools have the right funding, support, training and cultures for inclusion

- We have high expectations and believe all students can flourish with the right adjustments for their education

- That students leave their school education with options for education and employment knowing that society understands their value and there are pathways to an independent life.

However, what we have now is an educational divide, and we need a plan to bridge that divide, where all stakeholders work together to agree on the transformation to an inclusive schooling system for everyone.

## Young people's voices about inclusive education

Image description: A series of graphics with green and orange colours from left to right: person sitting at a desk, set of files, laptop, backpack and lamp. CYDA logos appear on the files and laptop.

## Levers for change: Empowering students

One of the key levers for the change needed across education and community attitudes is enabling and empowering students. The concept of student agency is rooted in the principle that students have the ability and the will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. *Article 21 of the UNCRPD* — Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information supports the need to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion.

We hope that the aspirations and goals of young people with disability play a key role in the shape of the new

Federal Government, the *outcomes framework* of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and the future recommendations from the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* including:

- recognition of the key role of student agency and voice in preventing violence, abuse, harm and neglect of students with disability,

- greater effort to involve students with disability in democratic processes at the national, regional and state/territory and school levels incorporating student voice in educational policy and practice,

- leadership on systems and schools to provide accessible information that allows students to safely learn about their rights and the process to complain,

- investment in schools and systems to seek feedback from students and ex-students with disability about what works, especially from those with complex communication needs and intellectual disability,

- development of a *national inclusive education plan* that recognises the impact that clear systems and processes for harnessing student voice and encouraging agency can have on ensuring an inclusive education.

## Poppy's voice

### Inclusivity and Reality - Deconstructing the "One Size Fits All" Approach

There has been an emphasis on practical implementations of inclusivity directed at education providers, and while this is a starting point, we need to think about how we approach these implementations.

The focus should not just be on the practical solution but the way that the solution is communicated. Too often in the disability sector, a lack of clear communication impacts heavily on the educational outcomes of a young person as was my own experience in high school.

The support I required from the special education unit at my mainstream school was the provision of a teacher's aide to assist me with the technology I required. The head of the unit imparted that I should increase my independence. Now I am not suggesting that young people with disability should be cloistered. What I am saying,

is that the method used for gaining "independence" robbed me of mine.

I was assigned a well-meaning aide but one who was uncomfortable with technology. This culminated in my goal of high achievement being jeopardised, creating a cycle of frustration. It was only through a third-party intervention that I was able to express my difficulties and adjustments were made.

Had I had a chance to clearly state my educational goals earlier with all responsible for my support present, then my independence as a student would have been fulfilled. As it was, my education was blocked by the veiled ignorance of a one size fits all approach; refusing to consider the nuances of my independence as a student.

It is not enough to focus on structural inclusions, or the provision of alternative curriculums for those that need. All stakeholders in a student's life need to fully discuss and develop a plan of action for educational achievement regardless of disability.

A barrier faced in the implementation of this practice is lack of time for preplanning. All involved should conduct meetings with students to discuss the supports required for achievable, equitable educational outcomes. This process should be reviewed often. Inclusive education providers must lobby the State Government to ensure appropriate funding is provided.

This may appear excessive but with 10% of Australian school-aged students living with disability, inclusivity cannot be side-lined (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2020). It is time for inclusivity in education to be more than a political buzzword.

## Xander's voice

As a year 10 student and a participant of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the term 'inclusion' has been a word I have grown up hearing a lot. Schools state they provide an inclusive education in line with the *Disability Standards for Education*. I see lots of examples of this, however I think there could be stronger action to improve on their efforts.

My experience with inclusion in high school has been successful and a big improvement from my primary years. I think it is because they welcome consultation and always follow through with action. I also believe it is because at my enrolment interview, I spoke about why (despite claiming to be) I did not feel, I was valued or included at primary school, as a student with a disability.

I acknowledge the education system works very hard at inclusion, but I want more action on problem solving the areas in which it falls short. Firstly, I'd like to address the inability of the education system to provide the individual level of support required by ALL students with disability. I think it is short sighted of the Federal Government to provide funding for disabled children through the NDIS and not provide adequate support for them at school. This is just crazy when kids spend most of their time at school and the Federal Government's contribution toward those who are verified, does not cover the needs of these children. This lack of sufficient funding to support children with disability at school, directly impacts on their inclusion.

Yes, I know talking about this just gets both levels of government blaming one another, but gee, just think; for the benefit of all, wouldn't it be great if our new newly formed Federal Government could step up and learn to **consult and negotiate with integrity** with the state and territory governments? Is it not time for a cohesive redesign of policies, at both the state and federal level?

Without changes to funding models that provide adequate support for **ALL** students, there will always be issues with inclusion.

Now let's think about when and how decisions are made in the wider education system and daily in our schools. I would like to see what I call 'inclusive decisions'. All decisions, whether they are around the school's implementation of the curriculum, class planning or excursions, needs to consider 'inclusion' **prior** to them being made. In many cases decisions are acted upon or announced without any, or little consultation with support staff or other relevant stakeholders. What some schools call 'consultation' is more of a discussion, **as the decision itself, has already been made**.

When decisions are made without adequate, timely consultation or thought of inclusion, it sends students with disability one very loud message. Although unintentionally, it tells us that we are not valued members of our school community and are in fact, a burden.

**Without demonstrating a process of making 'inclusive decisions' and providing funding for adequate and individual support for students with disability; there can be no claim of providing an 'inclusive education'.**

## About the contributors

*Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) is the national representative organisation for children and young people with disability aged 0 - 25 years. CYDA's vision is that children and young people with disability are valued and living empowered lives with equality of opportunity; and our purpose is to ensure governments, communities, and families, are empowering children and young people with disability to fully exercise their rights and aspirations.*

*Mary Sayers (she/her) joined Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) as Chief Executive Officer in July 2019. Over her career she has worked across policy and research, advocacy and service delivery to progress positive outcomes for children and young people, and the broader determinants of social wellbeing. She has family experience of disability as a parent and is a passionate advocate for the rights of children and young people.*

*Sue Tape (she/her) joined CYDA in April 2020 and her work is all about education – early childhood and school. Sue is building an inclusive local community around her family and is excited about the opportunities to share CYDA's work, connect with other families and be a force for change.*

*Poppy Mullins (she/her) is an aspiring writer and advocate with quadriplegic cerebral palsy. Poppy currently works for both CYDA and as a member of the ACIE's Youth Working Group project. Poppy was also a member of the co-design committee for CYDA's inaugural National Youth Disability Summit in 2020 and appears here in CYDA's LivedX series.*

*Xander Wroblewski (he/him) is a 15-year-old high school student with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome and a proud member of the LGBTQIAP+ Community. Xander is passionate about advocating for all people with a disability, especially his peers, within the education system. Xander has recently co-hosted CYDA webinars 'Inclusion in early childhood: when and where do we start?' and 'Early intervention and inclusion – can we do both?'. Xander also shared his tips for early intervention for families of young children, based on his lived experience.*

*If you have any queries about this article, please contact Sue Tape (CYDA's Project Coordinator for Inclusive Education) at suetape@cyda.org.au.*

## References

Mann, Glenys, Cuskelly, Monica, & Moni, Karen (2015) Choosing a school: parental decision-making when special schools are an option. *Disability and Society, 30*(9), pp. 1413-1427. From *https://eprints.qut.edu.au/129222/*

Inclusion Australia (2022) Equal Pay, Equal Respect, Federal Election 2022 Platform, p. 9. From *https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Equal-Pay-Equal-Respct-Federal-Election-2022-Platform-Inclusion-Australia.pdf*

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). *People with disability in Australia*. From *https://bit.ly/3bhP7Yw*

Kunc, N. & van der Klift, E. (2019). *Being Realistic Isn't Realistic: Collected essays on disability, identity, inclusion and innovation*. Telwell Talent.

Sayers, M. (2022) Evidence, page 199, transcript of proceedings, Public Hearing 24, Wednesday, 8 June 2022, The Royal Commission Into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation Of People With Disability. From *https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/transcript-day-3-public-hearing-24-canberra*

DPO Australia. (2020). *Segregation of People With Disability Is Discrimination and Must End*, Position Paper, September 2020, Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) and 38 disability rights and advocacy organisations including CYDA. From *https://dpoa.org.au/endsegregation/*

## Links

1   The Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE) 'Driving change: A roadmap for achieving inclusive education in Australia' *https://acie.org.au/2020/09/30/driving-change-a-roadmap-for-achieving-inclusive-education-in-australia/*

2   Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education *http://www.acie.org.au/*

3   Disability Rights Now 2019: Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) *https://dpoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CRPD-Shadow-Report-2019-English-PDF.pdf*

4   Article 21 of the UNCRPD *https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities#21*

5   Australia's Disability Strategy outcomes framework *https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/node/3121*

6   Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability *https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/*

7   National inclusive education plan as shown in CYDA's 2022 Federal Election Platform *https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/310/cyda-federal-election-platform-2022*

8   Disability Standards for Education *https://www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005*

9   CYDA website *http://www.cyda.org.au/*

10  LivedX Series *https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/249/livedx-4-poppy-mullins-veiled-inequality-deconstructing-the-one-size-fits-all-approach-in-inclusive-education-auslan*

11  'Inclusion in early childhood: when and where do we start?' *https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/313/recording-webinar-1-may-2022-inclusion-in-early-childhood-when-and-where-do-we-start*

12  'Early intervention and inclusion — can we do both?' *https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/315/webinar-2-june-2022-early-intervention-and-inclusion-can-we-do-both*

13  Xander's tips for early intervention *https://www.cyda.org.au/resources/details/319/tips-for-early-intervention-from-cyda-webinar-on-early-childhood*

# A Student Perspective – Living and Learning with Dyscalculia

**Maggie Vose**, a student with dyscalculia, was interviewed by **Jacinta Conway** to gain her insight and perspective into what it is like to have this Specific Learning Difficulty. Maggie spoke about what makes a great teacher, and offered her thoughts on how the school system can make a difference for students living with dyscalculia.

**M**aggie, at 15 years of age and in Year 10, is a teenager with a spontaneous sense of humour and a deeply felt sense of justice. She also has dyscalculia, which makes learning maths a significant barrier. Maggie is learning to manage this difficulty on a daily basis in school, where she has to implement strategies to manage this, cognitively, socially and emotionally. Maggie generously gave permission for these interview comments to be published.

"I first learned that I had a difficulty with maths when I was in Year 3. Before this, I didn't really notice that I struggled, but once I was diagnosed, I guess it made more sense to me. Any type of maths can really stress me out. Numbers don't work in my brain properly like

they do for other students, so I work at a lower level in maths than my peers. When I don't understand something, I can feel quite embarrassed and anxious. Sometimes I just feel quite stupid. I can't do the same work as everyone else, so I prefer to do my work away from the others. When I am working on maths in class, and doing different work to everyone else, it just makes me feel even more different, even more embarrassed, and even more anxious. So, I am allowed to work outside the classroom. This makes me feel calmer, so I don't hate maths as much. When I was a kid, I got a psychologist to help me work out how I think and feel about learning. People said that having dyscalculia also has its pro's, but I can't remember what they are. Anyway, talking through this helped me to focus on my strengths and work out ways to manage maths. I also got a tutor, who has helped me a lot.

## What works for me? Connections

When I was in Y7, I had this really amazing teacher. She would help me stay on task, and individualise my work for me and she never made me feel like I was stupid or behind. She made me feel like I could actually do maths at the same level as everyone, and I would kind of get excited when I was doing things because I would actually understand it for once. At the time, I don't think I knew specifically what she did, but I now realise that she just had a good connection with me. I thrive in classes when I have a good connection with the teacher.

## When disconnections affect communication

Sometimes teachers ask me what I want, and they say to me, 'What do



you want to do?' or 'What would make maths more enjoyable for you?' To be honest, this doesn't really help me, because whenever you ask me this, the answer is always going to be the same … "Nothing." I know I still have to do maths, so I guess the main thing for me is being able to actually do the work. Give me work to do that I can actually do, then just let me do it. I've learned that I am not comfortable with constant check-ins because I don't like the attention.

## Awareness

I think there needs to be more support for kids, specifically for kids with dyscalculia. We need more awareness of what dyscalculia is. When people think about difficulties, they just think of dyslexia. No one really knows what dyscalculia is. People know what to do to help kids with dyslexia, but people do not know what to do for Dyscalculia. If teachers had known what Dyscalculia is, maybe I would have got the help I needed earlier."

*Jacinta Conway is a specialist teacher who works with students with additional needs She has a particular interest in Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia). She has taught in schools for more than 20 years until recently, and is now the Director of Impact Tuition, where she tutors students and coaches teachers to implement evidence-based learning strategies.*

# The NCCD and Inclusive Education

In this discussion, **Jade Hand** analyses the opportunities and challenges afforded by the NCCD for supporting students with disability in the education system.

**T**he *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability* is Australia's current national framework for the collection of data and distribution of school funding for the delivery of inclusive education to students with disabilities (*NCCD*; Australian Government, 2022). The NCCD is designed to function as a data collection tool that ensures that adjustments are being provided for students with a disability, supports inclusive practice and informs the federal funding distribution (de Bruin, Graham & Gallagher, 2020). However, the extent to which is it achieving its purpose remains to be seen, and continued consideration and review of the NCCD's contribution to Australia's achievement of inclusive education is important (de Bruin, in press). The NCCD has value in the way it complements existing legislation and addresses several gaps in how Australia protects and promotes human rights for all students, by providing much-needed transparency and accountability. Yet, schools are still experiencing challenges in the delivery of inclusive education, and the role of NCCD in this is an important consideration. This paper explores the reality of NCCD in our schools and its current contribution to our collective progress towards inclusive education in Australia.

The NCCD framework was released by the Australian Government across 2011 and 2012 for trial in 377 schools (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2011, 2013). The purpose of the NCCD was to "provide a consistent national count that was not based on the differing state and territory definitions used for funding purposes" (Miller, 2017, p.30). At the outset, the NCCD required schools to provide data on students with a disability by categorising their disability and indicating the level of functional impact on the individual. It was the *Review of Funding for Schooling Report* in 2011, otherwise known as the 'Gonski Report', that suggested funding was a continuing issue for government and non-government schools and, for national clarity and equity, funding must be focussed on student need not diagnosis (Australian Government, 2011). In 2016, this resulted in the introduction of incremental loading of funds allocated to students who were placed at the Supplementary, Substantial or Extensive levels of any category on the NCCD (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). This federal funding loading is additional to the *Schooling Resource Standard* (SRS) base funding amount which applies to all students (Australian Government, DEEWR, 2022b).

Once the NCCD was implemented in all Australian schools, it provided a framework through which the Federal and State governments and educational bodies could monitor the data on students with disabilities and school placements, in addition to informing a funding model designed to be more equitable and responsive to student need. Importantly, the NCCD framework is designed to respond to the functional impact of each students' disability, rather than relying on diagnosis criteria and other methods based on categorisation and medicalisation of students. This involves teachers reporting on the adjustments they make for each student with a disability, to determine the level of frequency and intensity of adjustments provided. There are four levels of adjustment in the

NCCD model: QDTP (Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice), Supplementary, Substantial or Extensive. In theory, this is designed to develop inclusive educational practices. Schools have, however, experienced both advantages and continuing challenges with the NCCD.

## The NCCD's contribution to inclusive education

One major benefit of the NCCD framework is its focus on the provision and evidence of adjustments as a response to the functional impact of a student's disability. This has encouraged Australian schools to give careful consideration to how we meet our obligations under the *Disability Standards for Education* (Australian Government, 2005) and *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, DESA, 2006) for providing equitable and accessible learning for all students. Many schools have provided professional development for their staff to develop greater understanding of what adjustments are, when they are required and how they can be implemented. This normalisation of adjustment provision, as part of the core business of classrooms, has initiated a philosophical shift for teachers and school leaders. It highlights the possibility for all students to conduct their learning in classrooms alongside their peers, rather than participating in segregated or withdrawal programs. Increasing teachers' capacity to proactively plan for and deliver adjusted learning experiences for students with disabilities develops understanding that inclusive classrooms are realistic and achievable. With greater numbers of teachers being aware of adjustments and how to apply them, a collective

responsibility for the education of all students can begin to develop. This brings education of all students into the roles and responsibilities of all teachers, which may in turn assist in reducing the 'siloing' (or isolation) of students, staff and workspaces that are involved with disability education. Whilst segregation still features in the Australian education system, the NCCD can be credited for the emergent conversation in schools that all students' learning can be delivered within a general classroom, with appropriate adjustments in place. The NCCD framework requires evidence of adjustment provision and consultation between classroom teachers and families, and thus has the potential to reduce siloing considerably.

A further benefit of the NCCD framework is that it redirects focus onto the inclusive practices of classroom teachers. The NCCD places the teacher at the centre of a student's learning by primarily relying on their judgement of the level of functional impact of a student's disability and the frequency and intensity of required adjustments. Historically, education of students with a disability has too often become a circumstance in which only 'special' education teachers delivered 'special' instruction because they had completed 'special' training (Danforth & Ressa, 2013). Further compounding this issue is the belief that heterogeneous classrooms are considered a burden to teach and an extension of teachers' workloads (Easthope & Easthope, 2000). These beliefs and approaches may still be present within our system; however, there is a tangible shift in the understanding of classroom teachers and school leaders that the education of all students is the responsibility of all teachers. The NCCD framework has prompted schools to evaluate and review how they are delivering adjustments for students. Importantly, their census data is informed by the accuracy and effectiveness with which schools are delivering these adjustments. This has generated impetus for schools to engage in professional development in universally designed and differentiated teaching practices for teachers (de Bruin, Graham & Gallagher, 2020). This is a significant and positive step towards inclusive education in Australia.

## Does the NCCD result in more work for teachers?

The NCCD is designed to place the teachers' focus on the functional impact of a student's disability and the resulting adjustments required to facilitate learning, but early research indicates that the NCCD framework may have focussed teachers' attention on the documentation and evidencing of adjustments, rather than development of more inclusive teaching practices (Gallagher & Spina, 2019). This finding was reported similarly by the National Schools Resourcing Board (NSRB) after consultation with schools regarding the review of the funding loading for students with a disability; they note the 'significant effort to comply' with the NCCD reporting requirements (NSRB, 2019, p.50). Hickey (2019) also makes significant mention of the workload for teachers resulting from the evidential requirements of the NCCD arising from the reflections of a teacher from a non-government school in Victoria. Given the efforts to comply with the evidentiary requirements of NCCD, administrative tasks to meet the documentation requirements have subsumed much time and effort, particularly with the potential of a post enumeration exercise being delivered to randomly selected schools. This could unfortunately support views that inclusive education is additional work for teachers (Saloviita, 2019). While anecdotal evidence indicates that universally designed inclusive lessons are a generally more efficient way for teachers to plan and deliver their teaching, there is certainly some concern surrounding the collection of evidence for NCCD requirements.

## The relationship between NCCD, inclusion, and 'special education'

I suggest that working within the NCCD model should not be seen as a separate practice to typical planning and delivery of quality teaching. It is important to avoid a commitment to inclusion becoming blurred with the white noise of NCCD evidence collection. One way in which this might be achieved is for the NCCD model to be adjusted to align more closely with a tiered framework of service delivery, such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), or Response to Intervention (RTI). A hallmark of these models of service delivery is the use of 'prevention science', whereby quality instruction is provided to all students, and then additional adjustments and interventions are provided with the intent to ensure that learning gaps do not widen. Under the NCCD, students are currently recorded as receiving adjustments at higher tiers, but no accountability is provided for the quality of the underpinning instruction at the base tier. Such an adjustment to the NCCD to align with multi-tiered service delivery frameworks might, for example, ensure that any plans and documentation for students recorded as receiving adjustments at "higher" tiers (Supplementary, Substantial or Extensive) would also account for the quality of teaching being provided at the "base" tier, Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice.

In theory, the provision of adjustments involved in working with the NCCD framework should allow all students to participate in classroom experiences with their peers, and should reduce the siloing of students with a disability to particular programs and classrooms, managed by 'special education' staff. Yet such siloing practices still reside in schools. One way this tends to happen is through structures such as students on the 'NCCD list' being withdrawn from the general classroom to be provided streamed or targeted support classes. These placements are typically based on diagnosis rather than a fluid placement with planned exit points based on data-based decisions based on RTI and MTSS. Siloing can also appear through allocation of teacher assistant support only being delivered for classes with students who are at a high enough level on the NCCD, or blanket adjustments or modifications being provided to all 'students on the NCCD list', rather than adjustments being tailored as a result of functional impact of a student's disability. These approaches are often justified by resourcing or budgeting limitations, and explained to parents as such; however, it is important to recognise these practices are counter-inclusive and form barriers that must be dismantled for authentic inclusion to prevail.

## Recommendations

For the NCCD to support inclusive practices in schools actively and effectively, they must be part of a whole-school approach. School leadership teams and teaching staff must collaborate to design a whole-school approach to inclusion in which NCCD evidence collection is simply a part, not the whole. First and foremost, the school must commit to inclusion as it is described in the CRPD (UN, 2006) and

actively work to identify and eliminate all barriers to inclusion that may exist. As decisions are made regarding inclusive teaching practices and NCCD management, a most effective approach is to embed evidence of adjustment delivery, monitoring, consultation, and review into school structures that teachers already use. Providing separate and onerous additional documentation that is purely for the purposes of NCCD post-enumeration exercises will not deliver effective inclusion nor support teaching staff in sustainable adjustment evidencing. Ongoing professional development and coaching focussed on inclusive teaching practices and whole-school tiered systems will assist teachers and school leaders to plan, implement and deliver inclusive educational experiences for all students. This will ensure that schools achieve our collective goal of inclusion, whilst maintaining their requirements to the NCCD.

## References

Australian Government. (2022). *NCCD: Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability*. Education Services Australia Ltd. Retrieved 7 August 2022 from *https://www.nccd.edu.au/*

Australian Government, DEEWR (2022b). *What is the Schooling Resource Standard and how does it work?* Retrieved 7 August 2022 from *https://www.dese.gov.au/quality-schools-package/resources/what-schooling-resource-standard-and-how-does-it-work*

Australian Government, DEEWR. (2011). *Review of Funding for Schooling – Final Report* Retrieved 7 August 2022 from *https://www.dese.gov.au/school-funding/resources/review-funding-schooling-final-report-december-2011*

Australian Government, DEEWR. (2005). *Disability Standards for Education*. Retrieved 7 August 2022 from *https://www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005*

Danforth, S., & Ressa, T. (2013). Treating the Incomplete Child: How the Science of Learning Disabilities was Built for Exclusion. In A. S. Kanter & B. A. Ferri (Eds.), *Righting Educational Wrongs: Disability Studies in Law and Education* (First edition). Syracuse University Press.

de Bruin, K. (in press). Inclusive Education: A Critique of Progressive Reform for Students with Disabilities in Australia.

de Bruin, K., Graham, L., & Gallagher, J. (2020). What is the NCCD and what does it mean for my practice? In L. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive education for the 21st century: Theory, policy and practice*. Allen & Unwin.

Easthope, C., & Easthope, G. (2000). Intensification, Extension and Complexity of Teachers' Workload. *British journal of sociology of education, 21*(1), 43-58. *https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690095153*

Gallagher, J. & Spina, N. (2019). Caught in the frontline: examining the introduction of a new national data collection system for students with disability in Australia. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. *https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1614231*

Hickey, C. (2019). Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for Students with Disability; *Managing Workloads. Independent Education, 49*(3). *https://data.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.669097069727290*

Australian government, DEEWR, National School Resourcing Board. (2020). *Review of the loading for students with disability: Final report*. Commonwealth of Australia. *https://www.dese.gov.au/national-school-resourcing-board/resources/final-report*

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011). *Trial of a model for collecting nationally consistent data on school students with disability*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (2013). *2012 Trial of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability: Final report*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Saloviita, T. (2019). Explaining classroom teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. *Support for learning, 34*(4), 433-442. *https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12277*

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved 7 August 2022 from *https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html*.

*Jade Hand, BMus, BArts (PsychHons), GradDipEd, MEd (SEN), is an educator with over 20 years of experience in classroom, pastoral and leadership school roles. For the last 10 years she has focused on the delivery of inclusive practice in schools, including implementation of the NCCD framework. Jade is co-founder of The Inclusive School, an organisation dedicated to supporting schools in inclusive practice through professional learning, coaching and strategic planning. Jade now continues this work in schools all over Australia.*

# Transformative Leadership for Equity and Inclusion

In this article, **Professor Suzanne Carrington**, from the Centre of Inclusive Education, QUT, addresses the challenges and opportunities faced by school principals who are responsible for implementing inclusive education practices in their schools.

## Introduction

*School leaders struggle to build and sustain inclusive culture and practice in their schools. They are usually leading under system pressure to make quick changes and improve performance data that may perpetuate marginalisation for some students. (Harris et al., 2018)*

International education trends in standardisation, testing, increased accountability, and marketisation of schools have led to increased rather than decreased disparities in education quality and opportunity between advantaged and marginalised groups of students (Carrington, 2022). Despite these trends, there has also been a steady movement towards a more inclusive approach to schooling that promotes equity, influenced by a human

rights perspective. Recent evidence indicates that all states and territories across Australia are developing inclusive education policies but are failing to meet their legal and human rights obligations in practice to ensure that all children have the right to access inclusive education (Poed et al., 2020), with community concern resulting in the establishment of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability in April 2019 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020).

There are many challenges in translating inclusive education policy to systemic school reform and practice. Education leaders need support to drive change, particularly when an inclusive education approach requires a new mindset that challenges the dominant norms in beliefs and values that impact how people are viewed and included or excluded in schools. Education leaders may not have the knowledge and skills to help people in schools critically reflect and consider alternative and more inclusive approaches to schooling.

## School Leadership Matters

Progressing a systemic approach to inclusive education requires leaders at all levels to influence others, but it is the school leaders who play critical roles in promoting and creating values and conditions that facilitate and support inclusion (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Each national, regional, and local context is different, but every principal can help create and support an inclusive school. The importance of school leaders for school effectiveness is widely acknowledged (Hitt & Tucker, 2016) but there is little mention of school leaders for inclusive schools.

## Four 'ethics' of leadership

My earlier work with colleagues established that Starratt's (2012, 2014) four ethics of leadership — care, justice, critique, and community — can assist leaders to develop inclusive schools (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018; Harris et al., 2020).

- School leaders can pursue an ethic of care by valuing diversity, confronting "stereotypes" (Starratt, 2012, p. 38), and having "high expectations" for every child (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018, p. 130).
- The ethic of justice relates to authority and management within a school that considers equity and fairness (Starratt, 2012, p. 39).
- The ethic of critique is where school leaders look at their school in terms of structural justice and injustice to promote common good (Starratt, 2012) such as ensuring high expectations of every member of the school community (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018). Using the ethic of critique is essential to ensure an education system or school supports an ethical and inclusive culture.
- An inclusive school culture is also informed by an ethic of community (Ehrich & Carrington, 2018; Starratt, 1996). This ethic implies collective commitment of leaders, teachers, and the school community. It requires conversations, sharing

of beliefs and values, and considerations of practice.

Both listening to students' and parents' voices and supporting collaborative inquiries will create spaces for school communities to work together for long-term commitment and change. Such long-term commitment requires ethical leadership to support collaboration, critical inquiry, and transformation in schools. An inclusive school culture is one in which school members believe in the "dignity and worth" of all members (United Nations, 2006, Preamble); the goal of creating inclusive schools should not just focus on supporting students with disabilities but also should be embedded in a broader context of respect for and celebration of difference (Carrington, 1999).

A school principal committed to inclusion and equity supports staff to accept the "responsibilities" of membership of the school community and respect the "rights" of their fellow members (Starratt, 2014, p. 45). Celebrating diversity, social justice, equity, fairness, and integrity are some of the beliefs and values promoted within the school. These beliefs and values are expressed in the school's practices, policies, and processes (Cranston et al., 2014). School leaders' values and dispositions or attributes have not received very much attention over the years, but interest in them has increased (Brown & Trevino, 2006). Yukl (2012) suggests that leaders whose behaviours reflect values such as those listed above will be more effective in establishing inclusive communities in schools. Let us now consider a new way forward to support leadership for inclusion and equity.

## Transformative Leadership

Transformative Leadership Theory (TLT) (Shields, 2020) is a new and rigorous approach to inform a better understanding of school leaders' knowledge, beliefs, dispositions, and actions to support equity and inclusion. Shields suggests that becoming a transformative leader requires one to know oneself, one's organisation, and one's wider context. It focuses on beliefs that require a transformative leader to deconstruct frameworks that perpetuate inequity and then to reconstruct them in more equitable ways. These frameworks pertain to ableism, Indigeneity, race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, religion, and any other social markers that may result

in oppression or marginalisation, and include both deficit thinking and implicit bias. TLT recognises that while the starting point for leaders may be shaped by contextual factors, leaders must still address the inequities of power distribution; act to redress marginalisation through democratisation, equity, inclusion, and justice; emphasise interconnectedness and global awareness; and balance critique with promise. All of this requires considerable moral courage. TLT draws from existing approaches toward ethical leadership (Starratt, 1996, 2012, 2014), as well as critical pedagogical theoretical underpinnings (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988).

## Who can be a Transformative Leader?

I work in a range of school contexts to support inclusive culture, policy, and practice. School leaders who are committed to a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic concept of education will certainly benefit from learning about transformative leadership theory. However, one of the tenets of transformative leadership is Interconnectedness, Interdependence, and Global Awareness, which emphasises that school leaders cannot lead the transformation to inclusive education by themselves. My work in schools, therefore, involves school leaders, teachers, teacher aides, and any member of the school community who cares about equity and the quality of education for all students. These transformative leaders in school communities work together as Inclusion Champions and have shared values to support inclusion, challenge the status quo, and collectively drive change. Transformative leaders must be supported to develop themselves

from the inside out and this requires time to learn new ideas, reflect, write, and dialogue with colleagues. These conversations can be uncomfortable because individual beliefs, values, and practices may be challenged.

Transformative leaders need time to:

- consider the purity of their heart (beliefs)
- practice reasonableness of emotions (when their beliefs, values, and behaviours are challenged)
- reflect on personal dispositions and attributes (intrinsic to themselves and their practices)
- consider the impact of their words (the language they use)
- consider the appropriateness of their actions (model inclusion)
- consider the enormity of their habits (impact on school culture)

Each school and education system will be different, and while there is no magic recipe, Shields has developed eight tenets that should inform transformative leadership. Shields explains each tenet in this video on her YouTube Channel Channel: *https://www. youtube.com/watch?v=7YEsZNbfg-c&ab_channel=CarolynShields*

Figure 1 outlines Shields' (2020) eight tenets of transformative leadership.

## Getting Started

I have been working with a range of school communities to support transformative leaders to create and sustain more inclusive and equitable schools. Here are five steps to get you started on being a transformative leader in your education context:

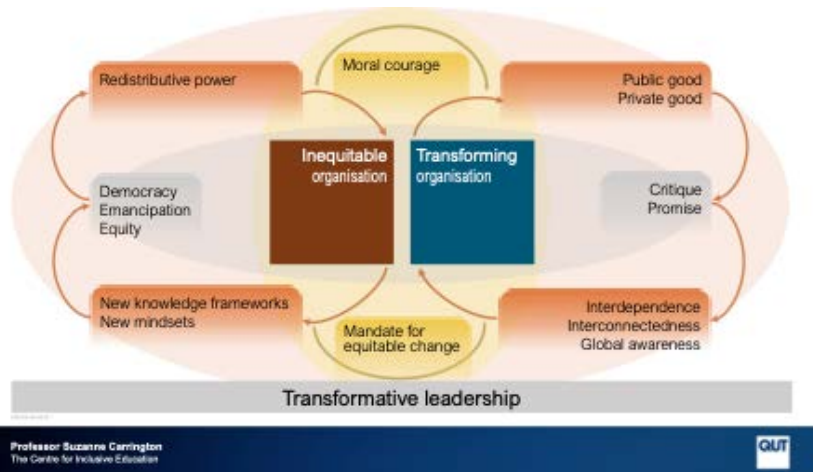1  Learn about transformative leadership. I suggest you read Carolyn Shield's book – Becoming



Figure 1: Transformative Leadership Eight Tenets (Shields, 2020)

a Transformative Leader: A Guide to Creating Equitable Schools (2020).

2  Reflect on, talk and write about your personal beliefs, values, dispositions, and attributes that influence the way you understand education for all students and guide your leadership approach for more inclusive education.

3  Write your vision and personal goals to address change for equity and inclusion.

4  Establish Inclusion Champions in your school community who:

    a  persistently work to increase their and other's awareness of inclusion and equity

    b  continually look for and challenge exclusion

5  Make time for dialogue and planning with your Inclusion Champions to redress inequities and enact change.

## Conclusion

Education leaders who are committed to developing inclusive practices must think differently about their roles, the way they communicate with others, the topics of communication, and how to work to redress inequities (Shields, 2020). They play crucial roles in promoting and creating values and conditions that facilitate and support inclusion (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Transformative leadership begins with questions of justice and democracy. This approach prompts you to ask questions such as: Who is included and who is excluded?; Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged?; Who is marginalised and who is privileged?; Whose voices have been heard and whose have been silenced? Answering these types of questions will help education leaders to critique and redress inequities and support a more inclusive and democratic conception of education. Remember that it is the people in the school and community who have the potential to produce ongoing and lasting change. It is not the programs or the curriculum.

If you and your colleagues are keen to advance equity in ways that engage others in powerful collective action, here is some inspiration!

- Model equity and social justice in your language and practice.

- Treat others with compassion and dignity, even when you disagree.

- Have the courage and conviction to ask tough questions and point out uncomfortable truths.

- Interrupt and disrupt inequitable and exclusionary practices, with compassion and grace.

- Be brave, intentional, and strategic. Take risks.

- Persist over time!

## References

Brown, M. E., & Trevino, L. K. (2006). Ethical leadership: A review and future directions. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*, 595–616.

Carrington, S. (1999). Inclusion needs a different school culture. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 3*(3), 257–268.

Carrington, S. (2022; in press). Leadership for equity. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, K. Ercikan & G. Smith (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education: Administration, governance and leadership (4th ed.)*. Elsevier.

Commonwealth of Australia. (2020). Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Interim report. Australian Government.

Cranston, N., Ehrich, L. C., & Kimber, M. (2014). Managing ethical dilemmas. In C. M. Branson & S. J. Gross (Eds.), *Handbook of ethical educational leadership* (pp. 229–245). Routledge.

DeMatthews, D., Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Sharma, U. (2020). Principal leadership for students with disabilities in effective inclusive schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 58*(5), 539–554.

Ehrich, L. C., & Carrington, S. (2018). Making sense of ethical leadership. In J. Harris, S. Carrington, M. Ainscow, B. Comber, L. C. Ehrich, V. Klenowski, J. Smeed & N. Spina, Promoting equity in schools: *Collaboration, inquiry and ethical leadership* (pp. 121–141). Routledge.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin.

Giroux, H. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Towards a critical pedagogy of learning*. Bergin and Garvey.

Harris, J., Ainscow, M., Carrington, S., & Kimber, M. (2020). Developing inclusive school cultures through ethical practices. In L. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive education for the 21st century* (pp. 247–265). Allen & Unwin.

Harris, J., Carrington, S., & Ainscow, M. (2018). *Promoting equity in schools: Collaboration, inquiry and ethical leadership*. Routledge.

Hitt, D., & Tucker, P. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research, 86*, 531–569.

Poed, S., Cologon, K., & Jackson, R. (2020). Gatekeeping and restrictive practices by Australian mainstream schools: Results of a national survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 26*(8), 766–779. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1726512

Shields, C. M. (2020). *Becoming a transformative leader: A guide to creating equitable schools*. Routledge.

Starratt, R. (1996). *Transforming educational administration: Meaning, community and excellence*. McGraw Hill.

Starratt, R. (2012). *Cultivating an ethical school*. Routledge.

Starratt, R. (2014). The purpose of education. In C. M. Branson & S. J. Gross (Eds.), *Handbook of ethical educational leadership* (pp. 43–69). Routledge.

United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. United Nations.

Yukl, G. (2012). Effective leadership behavior: What we know and what questions need more attention. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 26*, 66–85.

*Suzanne Carrington is a Professor in the Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. She has over 27 years of experience working in universities including teaching, research, international development, and various leadership roles as Head of School (10 years) and Associate Dean, Research (3 years). Suzanne's areas of expertise are in inclusive education, ethical leadership for inclusive schools, disability and teacher preparation for inclusive schools. She has engaged in research with industry collaboration to inform policy and practice in Australian and international education contexts. With her research colleagues, she has received over 4 million dollars in research funding. She has published over 100 journal publications, books, book chapters and research reports. She is currently the Program Director of the School Years Program for The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC). http://www.autismcrc.com.au/.*

Suzanne can be contacted at sx.carrington@qut.edu.au

# Student consultation and professional collaboration: Two not-so-secret ingredients that can support the provision of genuine inclusive education

How can consulting with students help professionals to learn more about their learning needs and support their self-advocacy, and how can professionals best collaborate to support the students' needs? **Haley Tancredi** and **Gaenor Dixon** discuss the issues involved, providing a case study as an example.

**T**he terms "consultation" and "collaboration" are often thrown about in conversations and written materials about how to make inclusive education happen. These terms are also included in international human rights instruments such as General Comment No. 4 on Article 24 on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2016) and Australian Federal legislation such as the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth). But what do these terms mean, and how do collaboration and consultation contribute to successful inclusive education in schools and classrooms across Australia? In this article, we explore how accessible consultation both upholds students' rights in education and supports students to develop life-long self-advocacy skills. We also discuss what professional collaboration is and how it can be facilitated and enacted in schools. Finally, we showcase the benefits of consultation and collaboration to the professionals involved, and the benefits to students and their families.

## The right to expression and the obligation to consult

Children and young people have the right to freedom of expression of views and opinions about any action affecting them. This right is enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; United Nations, 1989). Expression can take place through oral language, written text, art, or any other means chosen by the child. Children and young people have the right to express their views about all areas of their life, including education.

For Australian students with disability, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth) requires education providers to provide reasonable adjustments and consult the student (and/or their associate, which may be a parent or carer) about the adjustments that are made. Importantly, consultation must take place during the design, implementation, and review of adjustments.

## What is consultation and why is it important?

The term "consultation" can be interpreted in different ways. When framed within a rights-based approach, consultation is defined as a *process*, where someone is invited to communicate their thoughts and feelings about a situation, or event of importance to someone who can help positively impact that situation or event (Gillett-Swan et al, 2020; Tancredi, 2020a). Importantly, consultation is not reactive, it is not an afterthought, nor does it happen in an ad-hoc way.

Consultation is central to inclusive education, where students are active participants in their learning and can contribute to pedagogical refinements (Ainscow, 2004). Consultative conversations give students the opportunity to reflect on the barriers that they experience at school (e.g., the attitudinal barriers exerted by others, physical and/or sensory barriers in the environment, or barriers within curriculum and/or pedagogy) and to contribute to the adjustments that they receive. Importantly, for consultation to be effective, it must also be accessible.

## Accessible consultation

Students with sensory impairments, students with disabilities that impact communication, and students with working memory or information processing difficulties may experience barriers in the consultation process (see Table 1). However, there are ways to minimise these barriers and undertake accessible consultation, so that students can understand the content of a consultative conversation,

| Possible barrier | Strategies and Adjustments to increase accessibility |
|---|---|
| Complex or difficult to interpret questions | Questions and prompts are simple, direct and easy to comprehend<br>Vocabulary used in questions and prompts must be familiar to and understood by the student |
| Possibility of imposing cognitive overload | Environment is free from distractions<br>Visual supports used to complement the questions and prompts used<br>Several short consultative conversations take place, so that students can have multiple opportunities to share their insights |
| Restrictions on how "voice" is enacted | Student can "voice" their insights, opinions, and reflections through a mode of their choosing: oral language, written language, visual aids, arts-based approaches, photos, or a combination of approaches |

Table 1: Possible barriers and adjustments to ensure accessible consultation

can comprehend the questions that are posed to them, and can communicate their intended perspective (Gillett-Swan et al., 2020; Tancredi, 2020b). Some of these strategies and adjustments are outlined in Table 1.

Partnering with parents and carers is a critical component in enacting inclusive education (Mann & Gilmore, 2021). Parents and carers are also important stakeholders in the consultation process. Consulting directly with parents and carers can complement the insights of students. Or, for younger children or students with complex communication profiles, parents may be present during consultative conversations and may support their child to express their insights.

The student and their support team may decide that consultation processes would be supported by engaging a "broker of information". Here, the student and a support team member (e.g., a learning support teacher, allied health professional, or guidance counsellor) undertake the consultative conversations and the "broker" then works with the team to communicate the students' insights and input regarding adjustments with their teacher/s (Tancredi, 2020a). In this situation, the team may also be engaging in professional collaboration, which is another essential ingredient for inclusive education (Tancredi et al., 2020).

## What is genuine professional collaboration and why is it important?

Modern schools often employ a range of professionals in addition to teachers, including psychologists and counsellors, allied health professionals and support staff. These team members are partners in the everyday work that takes place in schools. Collaboration is a process where two or more professionals work together towards a common goal through a shared responsibility. In genuine professional collaboration, each professional contributes unique but important knowledge, skills and expertise (D'Amour et al., 2005). This contribution is reciprocal. That is, each team member gains knowledge and skills by working together.

In a school context, collaboration commonly occurs (i) between teachers, (ii) between teachers and specialist or support teachers, or (iii) as interprofessional collaboration between teachers and individuals from other professional backgrounds such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists or guidance officers. School-based professional collaboration has two major goals: to enhance the school experience of the students directly affected by the collaboration, and to contribute to the professional development of the professionals involved, leading to sustainable inclusive practices beyond the initial collaboration.

Research has shown that collaboration between allied health professionals and teachers improves students' performance (Selanikyo et al., 2016; Villeneuve, 2009). There are several ways that collaboration can occur in schools such as co-teaching, collaborative planning, coaching and collaborative consultation.

Co-teaching takes place when two professionals work together to teach a class. Different models may be adopted: one teaches, and one assists; both teach (parallel teaching and team teaching); both teaching smaller groups (station teaching); and alternative teaching where a group is taught separately, and students cycle through that group. Some models of co-teaching can work to support inclusion more than others.

Collaborative planning involves the team working together to plan for the students within the classroom. This may include planning the curriculum to be inclusive, and/or planning for personalised adjustments for students.

Coaching, in the context of collaboration for inclusive education, may involve general teaching strategies and then consider needs specific to individual students (Tancredi et al., 2020). For example, in interprofessional coaching between a teacher and an allied health professional, the focus may be building the teacher's skills in an area where the allied health professional can contribute expertise – for example, enhancing access to classroom instruction through changes to language and enhancing student comprehension through explicit vocabulary instruction.

Collaborative consultation, where team members provide information and suggestions for adjustments and strategies for working with the student in the context of the school, may be a useful tool to address the understandings and needs of students who have complex overlapping barriers to learning (Villeneuve, 2009).

When using a collaborative approach the team may consider the following questions, which will help determine the best model for the purpose of the collaboration:

- What is the goal and purpose of the collaboration?
- Is the collaborative work going to support a specific student, a group of students or a whole school project?
- What data or information will inform decision-making, and the activities undertaken?
- Are there any time, resourcing or logistical constraints to consider?
- Do the professionals involved have an existing relationship?

## How can we enact consultation and collaboration within an inclusive approach?

In an inclusive approach the focus of the collaborative work is enabling all students to belong, connect, participate and succeed as full members of the school community alongside their peers. Collaboration to achieve this goal may need to support whole school planning,

year level and teacher unit planning, pedagogical strategies, development of personalised adjustments, and enactment and monitoring of the effectiveness of those strategies and adjustments. Underpinning the collaborative work is the planned, intentional consultation with the student, so that their voice is central in the teams' discussions and work.

Garcia-Melgar et al. (2022) identify that the critical factors for collaboration to enhance the inclusion of students with disability include: mechanisms for team communication, practical ways of working together and shared understanding of inclusion. Creating clear communication strategies that work for all team members, agreeing on frequency of communication and how meetings and decisions are made will develop a smoother collaborative relationship.

Effective collaboration requires time and space for the team to develop a working relationship, establish roles and plan and implement and reflect on collaborative work. This requires a clear intentional approach to teamwork, and commitment by all team members to the time and work required to effectively collaborate.

School leaders can support collaboration through school policy, school priorities and resourcing. A school policy that highlights and protects student voice in identifying appropriate teaching strategies and adjustments will enhance the effectiveness of the teams' work. Ensuring collaborative work is a school priority and resourcing the time for this to occur affords teams time to develop an effective collaboration and to collaborate in a timely way that supports teachers and students.

We now present a research case study that provides a practical example of the enactment of consultation and collaboration in a school. This case study is drawn from a project conducted in 2018 titled *Adjusting language barriers in secondary classrooms through professional collaboration based on student consultation* (Tancredi, 2018).

## A research case study

This project sought to investigate (i) what students with language difficulties say helps them to learn, and (ii) the impact of teacher and speech pathologist collaboration to design and implement reasonable adjustments, based on student insights. A sequential mixed-method design was used with repeat data collection methods

including classroom observations, questionnaires, and analysis of student class work samples. Two Grade 8 students with language difficulties were consulted about what helps them to learn at school. Then, the information shared by students during consultation was used to develop educational adjustments to support them in inclusive classrooms.

"Michael" was one of the student participants in the study. He shared the barriers that he experienced in class and his insights on what helped him to learn in a series of individual consultative conversations with the researcher, a speech pathologist. Discussions were audio recorded and visual aids, such as the Menu of Adjustments (Tancredi, 2018), were used to support Michael to share his insights. Visual records of the ideas that Michael shared were also co-constructed. These included mind maps and lists of preferred and non-preferred teaching strategies that teachers might adopt.

The researcher then acted as a broker of information to share Michael's insights with his teachers and these insights formed the basis of a series of reasonable adjustments that were refined through a process of professional collaboration and which teachers implemented in the classroom.

Michael had identified that he was often confused and overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of information in the classroom. His English and humanities teacher, Dana, also self-identified that while her fast-paced lessons and complex teaching resources may work for some students, they were not accessible for all students, especially Michael, who was tracking well below where he needed to. Dana agreed that she needed to focus on "slowing down" the pace of instruction and that she could refine the visual aids that she used in class to help students understand how to analyse historical sources and to construct paragraphs for an essay. Dana said:

*Like I said, that's a professional goal for me, always. Really slowing it down, not jumping ahead of myself, sticking to a key idea and develop that well. Again, the things that you - it's easy to take for granted, but for a child like Michael, it's that constant playing catch-up.*

Dana and the researcher engaged in a process of teacher-speech pathologist collaboration across one school term. Dana's increased awareness of the barriers that Michael was facing meant

that she worked to reduce the pace of her instructional language and she built in intentional pauses to allow students to have time to process what she said. These practice refinements were also observed in the classroom, where Dana's speech rate was reduced. She also refined the visual supports that she used to teach source analysis, so that they were simplified, important information was prioritised, and visual supports closely aligned with the paragraph structure that students were working towards constructing.

In her final debrief interview, Dana shared that hearing Michael's insights and engaging in professional collaboration had helped her better understand Michael's language and learning profile and the barriers that he experienced. She said:

*Yeah I think, I think me actually being aware... And consciously aware that these children have specific learning needs and having a little bit more of an understanding about what I can do to help.*

When asked if he had noticed any teachers doing anything different in their teaching, Michael said:

*Um changing like the how they explain it on the PowerPoint slides and explain it more slowly... And that so I understand it.*

This small-scale project demonstrated that combining the insights of students with disability and professional collaboration can result in the design and implementation of adjustments that can have a transformative impact on students and their teachers alike.

## Conclusion

Student consultation and professional collaboration are important ingredients to ensure the provision of inclusive education for students with disability. As discussed in this article, consultation and collaboration have the potential to effect positive change for students' access and participation at school, and can transform the way teachers think about their teaching, for all students.

### References

Ainscow, M. (2004). Developing inclusive education systems: What are the levers for change? *Journal of Educational Change,* 6(2), 109-124. doi:10.1007/s10833-005-1298-4

D'Amour, D., Ferrada-Videla, M., San-Martin Rodriguez, L. & Beaulieu, M. D., (2005). The conceptual basis for interprofessional collaboration: Core

concepts and theoretical frameworks, *Journal of Interprofessional Care, 19*, 116-131.

Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) (Austl.) ). Retrieved from *https://www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005*

Garcia-Melgar, A., Hyett, N., Bagley, K., McKinstry, C., Spong, J. & Iacono, T. (2022). Collaborative team approaches to supporting inclusion of children with disability in mainstream schools: A co-design study. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 126*, 1-11.

Gillett-Swan, J., Tancredi, H. A., & Graham, L. J. (2020). Putting students at the centre. In L. J. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century* (pp. 266-295). Routledge.

Mann, G., & Gilmore, L. (2021). Barriers to positive parent-teacher partnerships: the views of parents and teachers in an inclusive education context. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-13.

Selanikyo, E., Yalon-Chamovitz, S., & Weintraub, N. (2017). Enhancing classroom participation of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Améliorer la participation en classe des élèves ayant des déficiences intellectuelles et des troubles envahissants du développement. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 84*(2), 76-86. doi:10.1177/0008417416661346

Tancredi, H. (2018). Adjusting language barriers in secondary classrooms through professional collaboration based on student consultation (Unpublished master's thesis). Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Retrieved from *https://eprints.qut.edu.au/122876/*

Tancredi, H. (2020a). Meeting obligations to consult students with disability: methodological considerations and successful elements for consultation. *Australian Educational Researcher, 47*(2), 201–217. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00341-3*

Tancredi, H. A. (2020b). Consulting students with disability: A practical guide for educators and other professionals [PDF]. The Centre for Inclusive Education QUT. *https://research.qut.edu.au/c4ie/wp-content/uploads/sites/281/2022/02/Practice_Guides_Student_Consultation.pdf*

Tancredi, H. A., Dixon, G., English, L, & Gallagher, J. (2020). Collaborating with colleagues and other professionals. In L. J. Graham (Ed.), *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century* (pp. 358-381). Routledge.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva: United Nations *https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx*

United Nations. (2016). *General comment No. 4, Article 24: Right to inclusive education* (CRPD/C/GC/4), *https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRPD/C/GC/4&Lang=en*

Villeneuve, M. (2009). A critical examination of school-based occupational therapy collaborative consultation. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 76*, 206-218. *https://doi.org/10.1177/000841740907600s05*

*Haley Tancredi is an educational speech pathologist with over 15 years' experience in schools in NSW and Queensland. She is currently a PhD candidate on the Accessible Assessment ARC Linkage project at QUT, where she is investigating the impact of teachers' use of accessible teaching practices on the classroom experiences, engagement and learning outcomes of students with language and attentional difficulties. This builds on her previous research, which investigated the impact of student-informed education adjustments for students with language difficulties.*

*Gaenor Dixon is the Director, Therapies and Nursing in the Department of Education, Queensland. As a dual qualified speech language pathologist and teacher, Gaenor has worked in education policy and schools in Queensland and Victoria for over 25 years providing supports as part of the educational team for students with disability to maximise their participation and success at school. Gaenor has a strong interest in inclusive education and has worked on several projects to support schools in their inclusive education journeys.*

# Disability and inclusive education: A speech-language pathologist's professional journey

In this article, **Bronwyn Reguson** provides an account of the legislative and professional context that has allowed her, as a speech-language pathologist (SLP), to work to support the implementation of inclusive education.

With a professional career spanning over 20 years and a myriad of roles in and outside of education, I have been asked to share what roles SLPs can and perhaps should play in working towards both a more inclusive education system and an inclusive society more generally - a life of choice, opportunity and equity for people who experience disability.

I will start this article by referring to the legislative context in which I have been working: the international, federal and state pieces of legislation that have served to define the terms *disability* and *inclusive education* as they are used in my profession today. I will then go on to give a brief account of how I have worked with those definitions in my own career as an SLP in the context of education in Queensland, and what I have tried to achieve as I work with, and on behalf of, people who experience disability. There have been both challenges and successes.

## The legislative context

The terms *disability* and *inclusive education* are, respectively defined under federal legislation and international convention, in the *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* part 4 (cth), and in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations, 2016). Detailed discussion of those legislative definitions may be found in Graham (2020).

Another piece of Australian legislation is important in my professional context: the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005) (cth). The Disability Standards for Education (2005) set the minimum standard for ensuring people who experience disability have access to and can participate in education on the same basis as people without disability, and this standard has been carried forward into the current Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability *NCCD* (2022) (cth). The phrase *"on the same basis"* is critical here: it means "that students with disability are provided with opportunities and choices that are comparable to those available to students without disability. It does not mean all students have to be educated in exactly the same way." (NCCD, 2022). The Disability Standards for Education (2005) are about creating a fair playing field, where students who experience disability get what they need through the provision of reasonable adjustments. It is indeed ironic when someone argues that the provision of reasonable adjustment for a person who experiences disability makes it unfair for other students, when in fact the opposite is likely true: the

standards apply to enrolment, participation, curriculum design and delivery, support services and elimination of harassment and victimisation. The standards are reviewed every 5 years and a key recommendation of the Disability Standards for Education *2020 review* was to ensure the standards apply not only in pre-schools and kindergarten but also in early childhood care settings.

In 2016, General Comment 4 of the UN CRPD was ratified, and Australia became a signatory. In the Australian education context, the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) basically serve to make those international standards workable, ensuring the human rights of people who experience disability are upheld and protected, and that they enjoy the same rights and fundamental freedoms as people without disability, including the right to education.

In Queensland, the ratification of the CRPD coincided with the Queensland Disability Review, conducted by Deloitte Access Economics. This review was published in early 2017, with 17 recommendations about policy, practice and resourcing. Queensland Department of Education's *Every Student with Disability Succeeding Plan* was released shortly after, and this document is now in its second iteration. The Department of Education released the Inclusive Education Policy in May 2018 in response to the

recommendation on having a clear and definitive policy statement which adopts the definition and core features from the 2016 United Nations CRPD general comment 4.

This departmental support at the state level is perhaps why those of us working in Queensland are passionate about the possibilities that the Inclusive Education Policy creates.

## Mental models and professional philosophies

But what does this have to do with a career as an SLP? I have enjoyed working across most contexts including education, health, community, university, and private practice. I would like to share my insights as I moved beyond the traditional SLP role and into system leadership in the past decade.

Firstly, I have found that self-reflection on your mental model of disability matters, and this is what I continue to try to share with others in my field. The well-known medical model works in medical contexts and when life saving measures are needed – but outside of that, it should not be the predominant mental model on which services are delivered in education fit for 21st century learners.

The intention here is to challenge, first and foremost, people's thinking about disability, as per the Disability Discrimination Act (1992), so that they can make informed, evidence-based decisions in consultation with the person who experiences disability. This change in mindset is about:

1 Ensuring that the people we serve in our professional roles have voice, choice and control over the services and supports they need to be successful in different contexts across their lifespan.

2 Finding a match between what people think about disability and the way they practice given the context of their work.

3 Focusing on self-determination and person-centred practices, where the identity of the person is valued and their inherent strengths are celebrated; accommodations are provided; and, when and if necessary, skills are taught in the context in which they are needed.

For me, this shift in thinking happened over the first five years of my career. The shift happened after seeing over 500 students in my first two years of practice in education, then working

in health, providing early intervention therapy in a clinical environment, teaching discrete skills and hoping that families did some practice outside of the 30-minute session once a week, fortnight or month. Working alongside a range of educational professionals, I had built my understanding of what curriculum and pedagogy meant, and I was able to contribute my expertise to supporting students with speech-language communication needs. I was finding, however, that mental models about the role of the SLP prevented me from being welcome at the planning table with teachers.

Despite the constraints of my early experiences, I developed key skills in team dynamics, multidisciplinary assessment and intervention practices, and in the facilitation of early intervention. Most importantly, I developed a strong understanding of communication and collaboration with professionals across contexts, and also started to realise that empowering families and teachers with knowledge and skills was key to improving life outcomes for children and students with disability.

From these early experiences as a clinician working 1:1 with children, students and families, I developed my professional philosophy as coach. This was cemented during a year in Canada where I worked in a community-run, child development centre outside of Vancouver, honing my skills as an interdisciplinary, family-centred practitioner. Working with and for families in their homes, in the contexts in which their young children lived and played, and working towards family goals, proved to be a powerful catalyst for my self-reflective practice. Training in early intervention communication approaches like *The Hanen Centre* programs, and other communication partner training approaches such as Makaton (now known in Australia as *Key Word Sign*), equipped me with both knowledge of adult learning and how to effectively teach others how to interact and promote optimal developmental outcomes with children with a range of disabilities.

I learned that professional philosophy matters, and it needs to match both the mental model of the practitioner and the practice context.

Many of the barriers I have identified over the years come back to people's attitudes and assumptions about what people who experience disability can achieve and what others think SLPs in education do. This is a remnant of medical model thinking, where people

without disability think that people who experience disability need to be 'fixed'; they see the problem as lying within the person, rather than within the environment – including the attitudes and beliefs of people in that environment. The *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (ICF, 2001) published by the World Health Organisation goes some way to aligning functioning in terms of activity and participation with environmental factors for people who experience disability. Although the medical model still dominates across practice contexts, the human rights model of disability has growing support.

Once again: Mental models matter – especially when the practice, policy and legislative contexts demand us to think differently.

## A professional journey

As I returned to education as the professional supervisor for the SLP service in North Queensland, I undertook a service evaluation and made several attempts to create more equitable access to SLP services, but with limited benefit. The Disability Standards for Education (2005) came to be in my second year as a supervisor, as did the Department's inclusive education policy statement of 2005, to which the SLP supervisory network contributed. In my work as adjunct lecturer at James Cook University I came to understand the concept of evidence-based practice more deeply. Evidence-based practice is commonly referenced as having three elements: clinical expertise, research literature and client values/circumstance. It actually has a fourth critical element: practice context (Hoffman et al., 2017). In 2007 I read about Response to Intervention in the Education Department's discussion paper on the role of Support Teachers Literacy and Numeracy (STLaN) and I initiated a service delivery project in 2008 including literature review on efficacy of SLP service delivery models in education. This formed for the basis for our region's trial and subsequent full implementation of the whole school approach to SLP services from 2010. The intent was to shift service delivery to be needs-based. The focus was on ensuring SLPs worked through whole school and whole class approaches, and ensuring that student learning outcomes drove the intensification of supports across tier 2 and 3. We now have over a decade of data on the requests

for support from over 110 primary, secondary and special school settings, and this has informed prioritisation of service delivery across the region. As a result, SLPs and teachers work more closely at the curriculum clarity and design phases of the teaching and learning cycle, so that barriers for students can be identified and removed early, and reasonable adjustments can be planned for at the outset. This is balanced with individualised services and supports for those students who require the specialised skills of SLPs, most often students with complex communication needs as well as those with phonologically based speech sound disorders and accompanying literacy learning needs.

In the context of education, the role of the SLP is often seen to involve identifying barriers to student access, participation and achievement in the curriculum for students with speech-language communication needs. Prevention of failure, however, is also critical. When we apply the definition of *disability* from the Disability Discrimination Act, and when we consider all elements of evidence-based practice within a biopsychosocial model, it is important to consider the full breadth of the SLP role in prevention of educational failure for the 20% of four-year old children who have difficulty communicating, and the 14% of 15-year-olds who have only basic literacy skills (Speech Pathology Australia, 2022). The national trends in the Australian Early Development Census (2021) indicates that 22.9% of children at school entry are at-risk or developmentally vulnerable in the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain, with 17.4% of children at-risk or developmentally vulnerable in the Language and Cognitive Skills (school-based) domain.

Can we really afford to continue working in ways that are driven by outdated mental models, intervening 1 child, student or family at a time?

My personal journey of changing my mind and subsequently my practice, as well as my agility in a changing policy and system context, has enabled me to step sideways from my role as SLP supervisor in 2012. The Department of Education invested in the Online Training Australia Coordinator role in each region under the 2012 federal government National Partnership for More Support for Students with Disabilities, a recommendation from the 2010 Disability Standards for Education

review. I spent four years as a Coordinator in Queensland, using my strengths in adult learning and coaching to facilitate professional development for teachers, curriculum leaders, special educators, teacher aides/assistants, school and regional leaders on a range of topics including the Disability Standards for Education and disability specific courses in reading disorders, motor coordination disorder, Autism as well as coordinating the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) from trial to full implementation, and Phase 2 of Quality Schools, Inclusive Leaders project.

From 2016 I moved into the Regional Inclusion Coach role in Queensland, supporting regional and school leaders to undertake system and school reform through the lens of inclusive education. In response to school needs, I designed and delivered the regional inclusion forums for school leadership teams so that they had the capability to lead school improvement through inquiry cycles to lift the engagement, attendance and achievement of students with disability across our region. Have we fully realised this outcome yet? No, but we are most certainly on the way, with many schools focussed on improving the educational outcomes of students with disability through sustained leadership focus, collaborative practice and students at the heart of curriculum, teaching and learning.

Most recently I have stepped into a Director role, overseeing support services and commencing implementation of multi-tiered systems of support at a regional level.

Changing minds is the hardest and most rewarding work I have done in my career. The stories and faces of students, teachers and leaders when they are supported to implement inclusive curriculum and pedagogy is something that can't be unseen. We can indeed do better the more we learn together about inclusive education and acknowledge that what works for some is often good for all.

## References

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) (2021). (Cth.) (Austl). *https://www.dese.gov.au/early-childhood/announcements/report-now-available-2021-australian-early-development-census*

Disability Standards in Education (2005) and (2020). (Cth) (Austl.) *https://www.dese.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005/2020-review-disability-standards-education-2005/final-report*

Hoffmann, T., Bennett, S, & Del Mar, C.B. (2017). *Evidence-based practice across the health professions* (3rd Ed.). Elsevier.

Graham, L.J. (Ed.). (2020). *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. *https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116073*

National Partnership Agreement for More Support for Students with Disabilities (2012). (Cth.) (Austl.) *https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/national-partnership-agreement-more-support-students-disabilities*

Speech Pathology Australia (2022). *Practice Guideline: Speech Pathology in Education*.

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD). *General comment No. 4, Article 24: Right to inclusive education*. *https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html*

*Bronwyn Reguson is Acting Director, State Schools Team, North Queensland Region Department of Education.*

# Congratulations on a Speech Pathology Australia Community Contribution Award: Queensland Reading and Writing Centre

**Maree Neilson** and **Jennifer Peach**

At the Speech Pathology Australia Conference in May 2022, the prestigious Community Contribution Award was presented to the Queensland Reading and Writing Centre. LDA would like to congratulate the Centre and its founders for their innovative and very useful specialised support service, provided within the Queensland Department of Education.

Maree Neilson and Jennifer Peach have provided a summary of the goals and structure of the Centre the role of speech pathologists in supporting the language and literacy outcomes



Inclusive Leadership and Capability Executive Director Maree Neilson (right) and Director, Speech Pathology – Language and Literacy Jennifer Peach accepting the Speech Pathology Australia Community Contribution Award for 2022, on behalf of the Queensland Department of Education's Reading and Writing Centre

of students with spoken and written communication disorders.

In October 2015, the Department of Education announced the launch of the Reading Centre, an initiative to champion reading as an essential life skill, and to support school leaders, teachers and parents to inspire, encourage and teach young Queenslanders to read.

In 2020, the Centre was refocused as the Reading and Writing Centre, acknowledging the reciprocity of reading and writing.

The Centre provides specialist advice and professional learning to build the capability of leaders and educators to plan for reading and writing within the Australian Curriculum and implement evidence-based teaching practices, and to build the confidence of parents to support their child's reading and writing development both before and throughout their schooling years. While established and resourced by the Department of Education, support is provided across all schooling sectors for young people from birth to 18 years.

In 2017, the Centre established a Reading and Writing Disorders Service to build capability of regional and school leaders and educators in the prevention, identification and intervention for children and adolescents at-risk of or experiencing difficulties learning to read and write. Acknowledging that access to written language is founded in oral language competency, leadership of this key priority for the Centre and for the Department was positioned with the Centre's speech pathology team.

The Reading and Writing Disorders service targets six key focus areas:

**Early years and prevention**
Collaborating with early years educators, parents and caregivers to:

- increase understanding of the integral relationship between spoken and written language
- create language and literacy-rich home and learning environments.

**Identification and support**
Building the capability of regional and school-based multidisciplinary teams to identify students at-risk of or experiencing difficulties learning to read and plan interventions and supports delivered at all levels within a whole school approach.

**Differentiation and access**
Growing teachers' understanding of the specific nature of reading and writing disorders and how to differentiate the teaching and learning environment, curriculum and assessment materials to meet the learning and access needs of students with reading and writing disorders.

**Rural and remote**
Providing support for targeted clusters of schools in rural and remote locations to progress the language, literacy and learning outcomes for students in rural and remote locations.

**Advisory service**
The Reading and writing disorders advisory service connects educators and parents with expert advice, information and support on reading and writing disorders, including dyslexia.

**Building the evidence base**
The Reading and Writing Centre partners with internal and external organisations to build the evidence base in the field of reading and writing disorders.

*Maree Neilson is the Inclusive Leadership and Capability Executive Director, Disability and Inclusion Branch of the Queensland Department of Education, and Jennifer Peach is the Director of Speech Pathology – Language and Literacy at the Reading and Writing Centre.*

# Book Review:
# Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice

Reviewed by **Kim Knight**

As a speech pathologist working in education, I know it's difficult for teachers, and some speech pathologists, to see what we do outside of a medical model. We're often asked to assess students, with the expectation we do an hour observation in the classroom, conduct a one-to-one standardised test, write a report with some recommendations, and often with little information on academic performance supplied beforehand. Some expect us to attend schools to deliver therapy, to 'treat' students with disabilities.

Inclusion reforms are rolling out across Victorian public schools, and with these reforms, the medical model will need to adjust. Other well-established models must adjust, too; given the popular long-standing tradition of 'teaching to the middle', mandated inclusion is one of the biggest education reforms this country has seen. The climb is steep, and the road is long. But the reform is achievable, particularly when reference books exist that cover so much of the landscape (and beyond) in this area. And I think that *Inclusive Education in the 21st Century* is one such book.

*Inclusive Education in the 21st Century* is written for teachers, particularly school leadership. While there are chapters on implementing Quality Differentiated Teaching Practices and other NCCD level supports, with examples, the book seems more systems orientated. With constant reference to Australian legislation and links to the UN Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities (United Nations 2008), there is a sense that implementation requires a school-wide approach.

The text has four parts; the first three parts faithfully cover theory, policy and practice in inclusion, with the last dedicated to cultural change within schools to support inclusion. The front matter contains a glossary of key terms. Each part builds on the previous chapters, with authors returning to discussions of theory and policy and linking this to the content presented.

The four parts contain several chapters by different authors, all prominent researchers, practitioners, and leaders in their fields — fields which include early childhood, education, psychology, criminology, speech pathology, occupational therapy, politics, and social work.

Part 1 of the book, 'Introduction and Fundamental Concepts', comprises three chapters and starts with the first mention of inclusive education in the 1990s and the social and educational climate that led to initial discussions. It lays the groundwork by providing a history of inclusion and its social context.

These initial chapters are largely dedicated to defining what inclusion is and is not, and defining the associated terminology, including the four models of disability, equity versus equality, segregation, exclusion, and other concepts that, as the authors point out, are often misunderstood. Common misunderstandings are therefore also presented and rebutted thoughtfully, accompanied with illustrations and diagrams that embody the concepts of inclusion when done well, and when not.
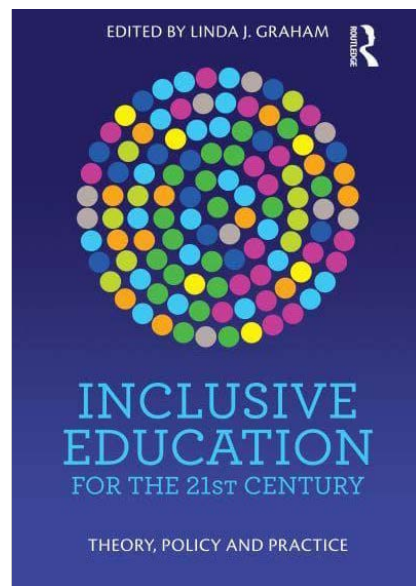
This section concludes with a chapter that examines beliefs about 'special' education, and then dispels common assumptions and practices, explaining the evidence for inclusive practices in the classroom. The evidence is also tied to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is an appropriate segue to the next section.

Three chapters make up Part 2: 'Educators' Obligations Under International and National Legislation and Policy'. The first chapter asserts the right of all children to an education according to the UN Convention, then details the historical mistreatment of people with a disability, then the international policy and legislation that came about as a result. Chapter 4 also highlights sections of Article 24 of the UN Convention on inclusive education and presents key definitions and features of General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016) which clarifies the right to inclusive education, and outlines compliance with respect to a country's legal obligations under Article 24. The tables provided in the book

helpfully distil this information for easy reference.

Chapter 5 then presents local legislative contexts; the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Australian Government) and the Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government, Department of Education 2005). It also includes examples of litigation and reiterates the importance of schools' compliance under The Act and The Standards. The following chapter discusses the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD; Education Services Australia 2019), where we are introduced to the four levels of adjustments that schools implement and report on as part of their NCCD obligations.

Part 3 is devoted to 'Universal Evidenced-Based Strategies to Effectively Teach Diverse Learners in Supportive and Safe Inclusive Environments'. Chapter 7 explains how assessment data and detailed analysis and assessment processes are crucial to decision making and strategy implementation and to get inclusion right from the start. There are a few specific examples throughout the chapter that are helpful in conveying what types of outcomes could be expected from a closer analysis of student performance. There is also a discussion on how data can backflip; how it might also be used to 'ration' students, leading to segregation or exclusion of students who aren't improving.

Chapter 8 examines universal approaches to inclusion, introducing the concept of Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) as a framework for reasonable adjustments. Harking back to previous discussions on the NCCD, this chapter explains the complementary approaches of Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice, Differentiation and Universal Design for Learning alongside each other and points out similarities and differences, then offers ways to implement these.

Chapter 9 is where readers glimpse what implementation could look like in the classroom. The remaining levels of adjustments, according to the NCCD (Supplementary, Substantial, Extensive) are revisited (Chapter 6) and discussed, then worked examples presented. There are three case studies. For each one the author provides a sample lesson plan with a column for universal approaches, then additional columns for further levels of adjustments. Readers are also reminded that professionals from other domains (like occupational therapists and speech pathologists) can be consulted in this process.

Part 4, 'Developing Inclusive School Cultures Through Inclusive and Ethical Practices,' has sections dedicated to family, carer and student voice, which are not only central to realising inclusion, and engagement, but again we are reminded that it is a legislated obligation. These last chapters are concerned with practice that is student-centred, that includes parent and carers in decision making, and that is collaborative. These chapters follow a structure that reiterates legal obligations, then offers suggestions for implementation, followed by examples.

Chapter 12 presents evidence and suggestions for fostering teacher and student relationships which introduces a research-based paradigm of teacher-student relationship types from positive to negative, ranked on closeness and conflict—the most positive being a relationship that is high in closeness and low in conflict. There is advice here on how teachers can foster optimal relationships.

The book concludes with a chapter which examines the current role of teacher's aides, also known as education support staff. I found this particularly relevant and interesting, considering current teacher shortages and the roles assigned to teacher's aides that, to me, can sometimes look more like respite roles. This chapter offers a reimagined role for the teacher's aide, suggesting how, with ongoing training, support, and collaborative guidance from teachers, they can contribute to implementing inclusion in the classroom and even take small groups of students, applying effective evidence-based, tiered intervention.

At 408 pages (including references) plus additional front matter, including its glossary, not much is skimmed over. By widening the contextual scope, the book goes beyond the usual discussions on education—pedagogy and teaching philosophy—and into human rights and how we came to inclusion from there. This is important if professionals are asking the question 'why inclusion?'

The language is accessible and relatively jargon free. I say 'relatively' because, as I have mentioned, there is an emphasis on language and vocabulary; it is crucial for all parties having conversations about inclusion to know they are talking about the same things. Contributors do an excellent job linking their content to the language and concepts already discussed, so the relevance and connection to inclusion are understood and not viewed as disparate, satellite concepts.

The chapters on putting inclusion into practice in assessment and lesson planning do not go into too much detail with specific strategies, but they are not meant to; they provide a blueprint for how to apply reasonable adjustments. To see the process in action—even on paper through examples—makes inclusion, I think, seem do-able.

The new Speech Pathology in Education Practice Guidelines (Speech Pathology Australia, 2022) also align with the principles and practices of inclusive education outlined in this book. The Guidelines promote "exploration of participation restrictions and activity limitation [as the] recommended entry point for problem-solving child support requirements in education" (p.20). They outline principles for practice informed by evidence, working in culturally responsive ways, collaborating with all parties, including with education teams, students, families and communities, and supporting implementation of MTSS. This means moving away from practices like collecting exhaustive data, providing service based on diagnosis, and making recommendations in isolation; in short, the current Speech Pathology in Education Guidelines eschew a purely medical model of practice for speech pathologists in education.

I would like to say that *Inclusive Education in the 21st Century* is timely but, and I think the authors might agree, this train has been chugging away for a while now with a handful of enthusiastic, informed passengers, who have become red in the face from yelling over the engine at those standing on the platform. I get it; the changes required to adjust our current model are quite significant and are either misunderstood or intimidating, or both. This brings to mind the uphill struggle to implement the Science of Reading, but this is not enshrined in legislation.

This text supplies readers with a broad but thorough foundation for implementing inclusive practice from the ground up. As the book states at the start, "Inclusive education has been defined; its meaning is not up for debate. The objective now is to implement it."

## References

Speech Pathology Australia (2022). *Practice guidelines: Speech Pathology in Education*.

*Kim Knight is a speech pathologist and writer based in Sydney. She has experience in supporting school-age students with language and communication difficulties.*

# Book Review:
# Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice

Reviewed by **Jacinta Conway**

*Graham, L.J. (Ed.). (2020). Inclusive Education for the 21st Century: Theory, Policy and Practice (1st Ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116073*

Inclusive Education for the 21st Century, edited by Linda J Graham, is an eye-opening informational and instructional text that addresses 'Inclusive Education' in all its facets - theory, policy and practice. The contributors to the *16 chapters of the book* have provided a range of carefully-considered arguments supporting what is an important movement in the current educational context.

From policy makers to school leaders to teachers, there is something of value for all in this book. I have picked up this book many times for many different reasons.

When working as a school leader in my role as Inclusion and Intervention Leader, I really benefited from chapter 16 – 'Rethinking the use of teacher aides'.

When consulting with families and discussing adjustments and supports, I have benefited from reading the chapters 7-9.

With the implementation of the National Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD) in 2018, more conversations have taken place in schools as to the levels of adjustments that have been provided to students with disabilities. Alongside this, specific terminology has been debated. Schools and teachers have varied in their use of terms such as differentiation, adjustments, accommodations and modifications. The definitions of these terms in the glossary are helpful when developing policies, curriculum planners and Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

More recently, I was collaborating with a team to plan a unit of work that would be able to address all the needs of the students in a multi-age, multi-grade setting where the children have a variety of abilities and needs. We used the exemplar planning templates from chapter 9 to guide our planning, and then developed a unit plan that included a co-teaching approach. Planning a unit of work that addressed the needs of all students in the class, including one child that was non-verbal, required flexibility and adaptability on the part of all the colleagues who were collaborating. Reading chapter 15 before a planning session enables all colleagues to consider the impact they can have. I particularly liked the quote on page 377, 'Professional collaboration in schools provides teams with the opportunity to engage in shared decision-making, joint action and localised professional development.'

For many years, educators have implicitly or explicitly positioned themselves on a side of the Reading Wars. Many that have advocated for the Science of Reading have argued that there is empirical evidence to support their position when campaigning for change. There is a similar discourse taking place across the education landscape when it comes to Inclusive Education. For this reason, this book is a must-read for anyone who works with a student with a disability of any kind. It will challenge your thinking, and support you on a journey to be a more inclusive educator. Importantly, it will also provide you will empirical evidence from leading researchers on both the case for inclusive education and how to implement it in practice.
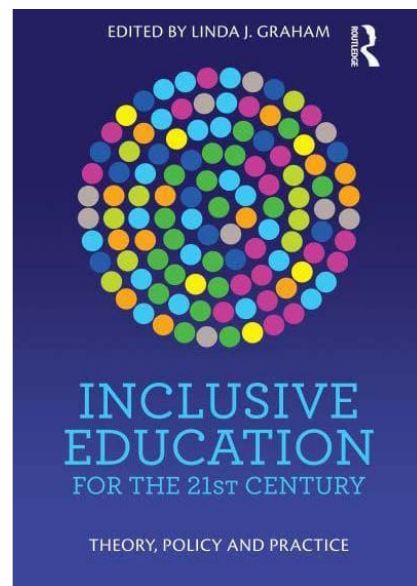
*Jacinta Conway is a specialist teacher who works with students with additional needs She has a particular interest in Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia, Dysgraphia and Dyscalculia). She has taught in schools for more than 20 years until recently, and is now the Director of Impact Tuition, where she tutors students and coaches teachers to implement evidence-based learning strategies.*

# Book Review:
# Josephine Wants to Dance

Reviewed by **Ros Neilson**

*Josephine Wants to Dance, by Jackie French, illustrated by Bruce Whatley. Published by Angus and Robertson (Harper Collins Children Books), 2006; reprinted 2016.*

During the time I was compiling the set of articles on inclusion published in this issue of the LDA bulletin, my four-year old granddaughter brought me one of her favourite books to show me: Jackie French's *Josephine Wants to Dance*, illustrated by Bruce Whatley. My granddaughter loves the book because she herself wants to dance, because she is interested in animals, and because she is amused by the brilliantly executed and very funny illustrations.

On a superficial level — indeed, as the blurb explicitly claims — this children's book is a story about "the importance of believing in yourself", with the message that you will be able to succeed if you only follow your dreams.

At a deeper level, though, I found myself responding to the book by thinking that it gives us a carefully nuanced implicit message about inclusion.

Josephine, the lead kangaroo in the story, differs from other kangaroos (as her brother Joey keeps pointing out to her) because she wants to dance. She turns to lyrebirds, emus and brolgas to learn how to leap, sway and point her toes, and she learns from eagles how to "soar to the music of the wind." She spends her time whirling like clouds and swaying with branches, but still yearns to find another way to dance. When she sees a poster advertising a ballet company coming to town, she feels inspired by the pink tutus and ballet shoes, sneaks into town, and watches the dancers rehearsing through a window. She practises the moves she sees in the rehearsals, using the garbage bin outside the window as her stage. The lead ballerina and her understudy happen to develop injuries that prevent them from dancing just before the opening night, so Josephine leaps through the window and shows off her own dancing skills - "swirling above the stage like the mist playing with the moon". It is the ballet director who sees Josephine's potential despite the protests of the other dancers, and the costume designer is persuaded to alter a tutu for Josephine and to stretch some ballet shoes to fit kangaroo feet. Josephine's concert performance is excellent. The stunned audience giggles at first, but by the end of the performance they are silent for a moment before they start cheering. In a superb twist, the motley crew of audience members realise that dancing looks like so much fun that they start dancing themselves — and this double page is the funniest and most engaging of the illustrations. Josephine is presented with a bunch of roses after the concert, which she finds delicious.

Why do I see this book as more about inclusion than about the 'believe-in-yourself' line? Josephine is never presented as handicapped because she is normally excluded from the world of human ballet. Rather, her ability to learn new abilities from special sources in her natural environment is celebrated. The ballet director and costume designer are presented as simply good-natured and practical as they recognise her potential and work hard to make adjustments, overriding the protests of others. There is the recognition that they were placed in the situation where they had no other option but to work to include Josephine, given the injuries sustained by the lead
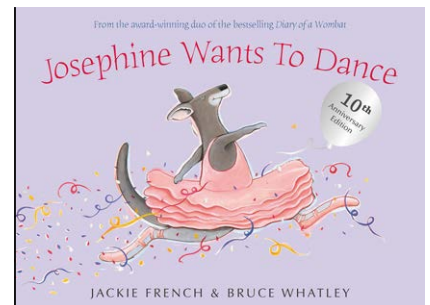
ballerina and her understudy, and that gives a slightly uncomfortable edge to the 'feel-good' nature of the book. Nevertheless, the ending celebrates the sheer pleasure that the audience derives from accepting Josephine's inclusion, and readers can simply enjoy the final joke of Josephine dancing, tango-style, with a rose between her teeth.

*Josephine Wants to Dance* is not a heavy-handed book in any way, but the delightfully whimsical prose and illustrations leave me with the thought that the world would be a better place if this kind of successful inclusion were not merely fanciful.

# LDA Manifesto: *"Every Child a Reader"*

Edited by **Jackie French** and **Julie Scali**

On Sunday 20th March, Learning Difficulties Australia "Success for All Learners: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support" conference was held. We were lucky enough to have the well-loved author Jackie French as our panel chair at the end of the day. Jackie is known for her passionate advocacy for literacy, as is made clear on the *"Rights of the Child Reader"* page of her website. At the end of the conference day Jackie pleaded for LDA as an organisation, and for all teachers and other educational professionals, to submit a 'manifesto' to those with the power to enforce change to do more to ensure that every child had the opportunity to be a successful reader.

This is, of course, something that LDA is also passionate about. The LDA Constitution states that the purposes of the organisation are:

2.3 To support and promote scientific evidence-based research that will advance understanding of the theory and evidence underlying effective teaching practice for students with learning difficulties.

2.5 To advocate for improved services to students experiencing difficulties with learning through advice to relevant organisations and submissions to government bodies.

Although the Constitution specifies the support for students with learning *difficulties*, it is of course our aim that ALL students receive instruction that is evidence-based, explicit and gives students the best possible chance of success at reading. We believe reading success is possible for all students, regardless of when they start to learn or what their needs may be.

So, in response to Jackie's plea and in line with our Constitution, we are on a quest for change. The '*Every child a reader*' manifesto is based on the voices of many of the LDA members and participants from the MTSS conference who contributed their ideas. We are sincerely grateful to all who took the time to have their voices heard.

Further to the recommended changes in the *Primary Reading Pledge (2020)* and the *Initial Teacher Education Next Steps (2022)* report, LDA and its members would like to see the following changes to literacy education — in every pre-service university training, school, and classroom. This manifesto is a summary of the key themes of desired change that emerged from the rich contributions we received.

## 'Every Child a Reader' Manifesto: Key themes

**System based change:** State English curriculums to be evidence aligned, with clearly defined, systematic and explicit instruction of the essential skills of literacy instruction.

**Initial Teacher Education:** All preservice teachers to be highly skilled in the knowledge, skills and instruction of the science of reading and evidence aligned assessment approaches.

**Support for Schools:** All schools to be supported to establish systematic approaches to reading and writing, including funding for evidence-based professional learning, coaching and resources, with additional support for rural and regional areas.

**Professional Learning:** All current PreK-6 teachers and education assistants to engage in evidence-based professional learning in the science of reading and evidence aligned assessment approaches to provide the knowledge and skill to empower educators to achieve a year's worth of academic growth in a given year, for every student.

**Whole school approaches:** Every school will embed systematic, school wide evidence-based approaches to the teaching of literacy, with clear direction on the essential components of a literacy block, within a Response to Intervention framework.

**Universal Screening:** Within every school's Response to Intervention framework, every school will administer whole school universal screening in every year level, twice yearly, with prompt and rigorous progress monitoring, to ensure early identification of literacy difficulties; and to inform decisions around instruction, intervention, and resourcing.

**Evidence-based intervention:** Schools will effectively implement evidence-based intervention in line with Tier 2 and Tier 3 best practice. All intervention approaches that do not align with reading science will be removed. Intervention is implemented early, is in addition to the literacy block, and is provided by highly qualified staff.

**Inclusivity for diverse learners:** All students with learning disabilities are provided equal access to year level classroom content and texts in literacy, with intervention scheduled outside of the literacy block. Specialised educators support the diverse needs to students and coach and upskill other staff in inclusive practices.

**Australia wide public campaign:** The launch of a public campaign to raise the profile of literacy — showcasing reading in all walks of life — is publicised nation-wide.

*Jackie French AM is an Australian author, historian, ecologist and honorary wombat (part time); 2014–15 Australian Children' Laureate; and 2015 Senior Australian of the Year.*

*Julie Scali, of Literacy Impact, is a passionate educator, consultant, and Learning Difficulties Specialist.*