

**Social justice principles, the law, and research,
as bases for inclusion: an update**

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CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Drivers of Inclusive Practice	4
1. Social justice principles and rights movements	4
<i>National and international declarations</i>	4
<i>Normalisation and social justice movements</i> ...	8
2. Legislation	9
3. Research and evidence-based practice	14
<i>Attitudinal studies</i>	15
<i>Social interaction outcomes</i>	19
<i>Academic outcomes</i>	22
<i>Summary of research and evidence base</i>	25
Evidence-Based Practices in Inclusion: Towards a Research Agenda	28
Conclusion	30
References	32

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Abstract

Educational policies for students with a disability in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and in most western countries stipulate that inclusive placement should be an option available to parents. It is often promoted as the first option. This paper examines three principal drivers of inclusion: social justice principles, legislation, and research findings, and considers the extent to which each of these has impacted on inclusive policy and practice. The paper considers the research base for inclusive practice, and examines the extent to which the policy and practice of inclusion is supported by evidence. We conclude with some suggestions for a research agenda that focuses on the particular contextual challenges and complexities faced in Australian school settings, whilst recognising international directions in the identification of evidence-based practices.

Introduction

Inclusion as a conceptual and heuristic phenomenon currently forms the basis of educational policy informing educational practices for students with a disability in Australia, the USA, the UK, and in most western countries, although there is no simple definition of inclusion.

The UNESCO 2000-2015 *Education For All* monitoring report states:

There is no universal agreement on what constitutes inclusive education. Broadly, its provision requires governments to take responsibility for and educate all children regardless of their needs. More ambitious approaches to inclusion are commonly grounded in a rights-based approach that aims to empower learners, celebrate diversity and combat discrimination. It suggests that, with adequate support, all children, irrespective of their different needs, should be able to learn together in mainstream classrooms in their local communities. (UNESCO, 2015, p.101)

Some authors distinguish between inclusion and inclusivity, with inclusion referring to the process of *incorporating* the non-dominant group, whereas inclusivity refers to *participation* by the non-dominant group (Berlach & Chambers, 2011a). Berlach and Chambers point out that “inclusive practice is a mindset and a worldview that permits inclusivity to be realized” (p.531). Armstrong, Armstrong and Spandagou (2011) emphasise the need to consider inclusive education as an approach to issues of social diversity in societies that are internally diversified but globally connected. They argue that “while social policy is dominated by the rhetoric of inclusion, the reality for many remains one of exclusion and the panacea on ‘inclusion’ masks many sins” (p.30).

It can be argued that there are at least three principle drivers of inclusive practice: social justice principles, legislative requirements, and research findings or evidence. It is appropriate to examine each of these drivers and to consider the extent to which they have impacted on inclusive policy and practice. In particular, it is important to consider the evidence base for inclusive practice and to ask whether the policy of inclusion, which is so widely accepted, is supported by a strong empirical base or a convincing philosophical imperative.

Drivers of Inclusive Practice

1. Social justice principles and rights movements

National and international declarations

The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* included strong statements about rights and freedoms which have subsequently been used to support inclusive practices. For example:

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

This declaration did not lead to immediate changes in the way students with a disability were treated or educated. For example, until the 1970s in Australia, many children with very severe or multiple disabilities were excluded from the public education system. However, the declaration later allowed parent groups and educators to argue for equal accessibility to schooling, and for parental choice. Changes were slow in coming, and even 40 or 50 years after Article 26 (3) was declared, there were many parents in Australian schools who had little or no “prior right to choose the kind of education” that their child would be given. Indeed, some parents would argue that, in their particular circumstances, this remains the case today.

More recent statements have been much more specific about equal access to education as a right for persons with a disability. For example, the World Declaration on *Education For All* at Jomtein, Thailand (UNESCO, 1990) stated in Article III (5):

Steps need to be taken to provide equal access to education to every category of disabled persons as an integral part of the education system.

Despite this, Miles and Singal (2010) have pointed out that some less developed countries do not regard “all” as including students with a disability or additional needs, and that there is a long way to go for education in those countries to become genuinely inclusive.

In 1994, the World Conference on Special Needs Education, held at Salamanca, Spain, agreed on a statement that specifically supported inclusion as the standard form of education for students with a disability. With support from 90 countries including Australia, Article 2 of the Salamanca Statement came to the following conclusion:

Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix)

On December 13th, 2006, the United Nations passed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This Convention provides unambiguous support for inclusive schooling:

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 ...

Australia is among 159 countries which have ratified the Convention, having done so in July 2008. In August 2009, Australia became one of the 92 countries that also signed the optional Protocol which allows the Committee on the Rights of Persons with a Disability to receive communications from persons who believe that they have been a victim of a violation of the Convention. This, of course, strengthens the impact of Article 24 for students with a disability in Australia.

The University of Melbourne's Hallmark Disability Research Institute (2015) recently made the following recommendations, *inter alia*, to a day of discussion on Article 24:

Recommendation 3

Australian education systems need to increase efforts to provide appropriately resourced inclusive education to all students with disability. Students with learning needs may constitute around 30% of the school age population.

Recommendation 4

Teacher development for inclusive education needs to position teaching as a clinical-practice profession, in line with many allied health professions and should prepare teacher candidates for interventionist and inclusive teaching.

Recommendation 5

The concept of universal design, rather than reasonable accommodations, should be promoted in future UN instruments and other documents. (Hallmark Disability Research Institute, 2015)

In 2009, the *Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education* (UNESCO, 2009) acknowledged the importance of access to education for all children and young people. The Guidelines also highlighted the importance for all children and young people of taking full part in school life and achieving desired outcomes from their schooling experiences. In addition, the Guidelines specified the ultimate goal of inclusion in education as reaching each individual's full potential and effective participation in the society.

In Australia there have been several policy statements on educational inclusion at a national level. The *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (2006) reached the following conclusion:

Goal 3.1:

Schooling should be socially just, so that students' outcomes from schooling are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location. (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006)

Similarly, the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* agreed that Australian governments and all school sectors should commit to making

significant improvements to achieve both equity and excellence, and to assist all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. The declaration was signed by all state and territory Ministers for Education, as well as by the Commonwealth Minister. To achieve these goals, it was agreed that the Australian governments, in collaboration with all school sectors, must provide all students with access to excellent education opportunities to fulfil the various capabilities of each young Australian, without any discrimination based on gender, language, sexual orientation, pregnancy, culture, ethnicity, religion, health or disability, socioeconomic background or geographic location. However, the declaration did not specifically refer to inclusion or mainstreaming, or specify where education should take place (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008).

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Disability Strategy for Australia 2020-2020 (2011) has among its strategic outcomes:

People with disability achieve their full potential through their participation in an inclusive high quality education system that is responsive to their needs. People with disability have opportunities to continue learning throughout their lives. (COAG, 2011, p.53)

In order to achieve these outcomes, the suggested policy directions and future actions included:

- Strengthen the capability of all education providers to deliver inclusive high quality educational programs for people with all abilities from early childhood through adulthood
- Reduce barriers and simplify access for people with disability to a high quality inclusive education system including early learning, child care, school and further education. (COAG, 2011)

A further mechanism for promoting inclusive practice in Australia has been through the National Curriculum strategy. Berlach and Chambers (2011b) point out that the Curriculum Framing Papers for English contained nine inclusivity descriptors, Mathematics included eight descriptors, History six, and Science just two. The framing papers formed the basis for the development of the curriculum. More recent statements by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) suggest a strong commitment to inclusive practice:

ACARA is committed to the development of a high-quality curriculum for all Australian students, one that promotes excellence and equity in education. All students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs drawn from a challenging curriculum that addresses their individual learning needs... The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) require education and training service providers to support the rights of students with disability to access the curriculum on the same basis as students without disability. Students with disability are

entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning opportunities drawn from age equivalent Australian Curriculum content on the same basis as students without disability. (ACARA, 2015)

Normalisation and social justice movements

The relatively recent and significant changes to the way education is provided to students with special educational needs or disabilities had their origins in the 1960s and 1970s when various influential authors took up the nature of the provision of services to people with a disability as a social justice issue. In most cases they did not argue from a research or evidence base but rather from a rights or philosophical perspective.

Perhaps the most significant and influential social justice principle has been that of “normalisation”, based largely on the writings of Bank-Mikkelsen (1969), Wolfensberger (1972, 1980) and Nirje (1970, 1985). The normalisation principle recognises that all people are entitled to live a lifestyle that other people would regard as “normal”. Normal can be defined as what most others in that culture usually do, or would prefer to do. The most “normal” educational placement in most societies is a regular school chosen by the student’s parents, either in the public or independent system. Applying the normalization philosophy to school choice leads to the view that children, regardless of their disability, should have the opportunity to attend a regular school, if that is what they or their parents see as the best thing for them (Foreman, 2014a). Principles such as normalisation have led to changes in legislation and policy, which in turn have led to changes in practice (Dempsey, 2014).

There are some obvious benefits to the normalisation principle. First, it provides a clear focus and yardstick for the evaluation of policy and practice. Policy-makers can ask whether the approach or practice is culturally normative and, as a result, the principle has provided a basis for development of policy by organisations concerned with people with disabilities. A second major advantage is that the principle can be applied in a wide range of settings. Policy makers in the area of education, housing, social welfare, and community living have all been able to use the concept of normalisation to guide and assess policy and practice.

There have also been criticisms of the concept of normalisation. Not the least of these has been problems with the concept of “normality”. Some have interpreted the concept as meaning that people with disabilities should be assisted to change to be more “normal” in order to be accepted. In the early days, this led to debate between the interpretations of Wolfensberger and Nirje about whether we should be seeking to “normalise” people or

should be celebrating their differences (Nirje, 1985). Debate continues about the extent to which disability is socially constructed (Harpur, 2012).

Other social justice principles that have influenced educational policy and practice in relation to inclusive practice include the concepts of the “least restrictive environment” and “age-appropriateness”. The concept of least restrictive environment requires that individuals should be educated in settings that place the fewest restrictions on their current and future lives, with the least restrictive setting typically a regular school and the most restrictive setting a segregated residential facility. Age appropriateness requires that students be educated in a place and manner that is culturally normative for other students of a similar age. For example, to be age-appropriate, teenage students would be encouraged to undertake activities that would typically be expected of teenagers rather than more childish activities.

Both of these concepts are capable of being debated, but have received wide acceptance among educators and parents. Few would challenge the premise that observance of these principles will generally enhance the inclusion and participation of individuals with additional needs, including those with disabilities. Social justice principles such as those referred to above have helped to determine the way in which inclusive educational programs foreshadowed in the various declarations have been implemented.

2. Legislation

In some countries, the principle of inclusion is supported by legislation requiring school systems to provide mainstream places as a first option, if that is what the parents wish. For example, in the USA there is specific legislation relating to schools: the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA) (2004). IDEA was developed from the Education of all Handicapped Children Act (1975) and, with subsequent amendments and regulations, provides a very strong legal basis for services to students with a disability in the US. An overriding principle of the act is that of “zero reject”. This means that no child may be excluded from public education on the basis of their disability, no matter how severe. Students must be educated in the least restrictive environment, which means they are expected to be educated in regular, age-appropriate classes to the maximum extent possible. The Act stipulates that there must be parental involvement with assessment and review, and student involvement where appropriate. All students with disabilities must have an Individualised Educational Program (or Individualised Family Support Plan if at pre-school level). Specialised services need to be provided in the regular class if that is where the child is placed. For example if the child needs daily physiotherapy, this should not be provided by

sending her to a special school where physiotherapy is available, but rather by providing physiotherapy at her regular school.

Despite the strength of the US legislation, there is evidence that some schools use their bureaucratic structures to limit parental input. Bacon and Causton-Theoharis (2013) reported that schools have been observed to use medical and deficit discourse, professionalised discourse, policy interpretations, and meeting practices to limit the power and input of parents. They suggest that parents need to use advocacy strategies if they are to achieve the best education possible for their children.

In the UK, the *Special Educational Needs and Disability Act* (2001) stipulates that:

A student with a disability ... must be educated in a mainstream school unless that is incompatible with the wishes of his parent or the provision of efficient education for other children. (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2001)

However, in this case, “the provision of efficient education for other children” was a potential let-out clause which could allow schools to refuse entry to a student with a disability if it was considered that the student would disrupt the class and interfere with the education of other children. In *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, the UK Department for Education and Skills (2004) stated:

All teachers should expect to teach children with special educational needs (SEN) and all schools should play their part in educating children from their local community, whatever their background or ability.

The UK legislation was greatly strengthened by the Equality Act of 2010 (The National Archives, UK, 2015). Under the Equality Act 2010, it is unlawful for any education provider, government or independent, to discriminate between pupils on grounds of disability, race, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, or sex. It is unlawful to discriminate in relation to prospective pupils (admissions arrangements), pupils already enrolled at the school, and former pupils who have a continuing relationship with the school. The Act states that a school must not discriminate against a person in its admission arrangements, in the provision of education, in exclusions, or by subjecting a pupil to any other detriment. In the UK, schools have been required to make reasonable adjustments for pupils and prospective pupils with disabilities since 1995. The new Act requires schools to also provide ancillary aids and services as needed.

In Australia, inclusive schooling is educational policy rather than law, and the policy has been adopted in some form or other by all of the State and Territory educational authorities (Jenkinson, 2001). There is also, however, strong legislative support through the Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth, DDA, 1992) and its state counterparts which

makes it illegal to discriminate against a person in education on the basis of their disability. The DDA applies to disabilities that individuals may presently experience, have had in the past, or may have in the future.

The Act was strengthened in 2005, after nearly 10 years of discussion, by the enacting of Education Standards which provide more detail about the expectations on educational providers. The Act applies at all levels of education from preschool through to university (but not to child-care providers). It applies to schools in the public sector, schools registered through school registration authorities in the private sector, post-compulsory education and training providers and to higher education providers. The areas covered by the standards are:

- Enrolment and admission – a person with a disability must be able to seek admission and receive advice and support on the same basis as a person without a disability, and without discrimination.
- Participation – students with a disability must be able to participate in courses or programs without discrimination.
- Curriculum development, delivery and accreditation – all students must be able to participate appropriately in learning experiences.
- Provision of student support services – a student with a disability must be able to use services other students use or, if necessary, specialised services.
- Harassment and victimisation – processes must be developed to prevent harassment or victimisation of students with a disability.

Each area stipulates the rights of students with a disability in education and training, the legal obligations or responsibilities of education providers, and possible measures that meet the requirements of the Standards. For example, education providers are expected to make “reasonable adjustments” to meet the needs of students with a disability. In doing so, they are expected to consider the views of students and the family; the effects of the adjustment on the students and on others in the school; and to utilise a cost/benefit analysis. The provider is entitled to maintain the academic integrity of the course and its inherent components.

By contrast, “unreasonable” adjustments are not mandated. A provider can offer a defence that adjustments are unreasonable if they produce unjustifiable hardship. In judging whether the adjustments are reasonable or unreasonable, consideration can be given to the financial circumstances of the provider and the cost of the adjustment. For example a small private school is likely to be more able successfully to plead hardship than a large state system or a wealthy independent school.

Under the DDA, “unjustifiable hardship” was a defence against non-enrolment but could not be used as a reason not to provide services once the student was enrolled. However,

since the adoption of the Education Standards, unjustifiable hardship can also be considered in relation to provision of ongoing services. The Standards have provided clear guidance for providers and are undoubtedly a strengthening of the rights of people with a disability.

In 2010, five years after the Educational Standards were enacted, the Australian Government commenced the first review of their effectiveness. Following 200 submissions to the review and national round table discussions with almost 150 key stakeholders, the review concluded that the Education Standards provide a good framework for promoting the requirement for students with disability to be able to access and participate in education on the same basis as all other students, but also identified several issues that have impeded the effectiveness of the Education Standards (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012). For example, the Education Standards do not have enough emphasis on measures for promoting greater inclusion and removing subtle and indirect discrimination, and the obligations and requirements under the Education Standards lack strong accountability frameworks. The review concluded that most of the issues raised by stakeholders could be addressed through awareness raising, amendments and additions to the Education Standards, and by providing further guidance on the Standards. In addition, the review team provided 14 recommendations which cover (a) awareness raising, (b) improving clarity, (c) access, participation, discrimination and inclusion, (d) complaints, accountability, and compliance processes, and (e) contemporary education practice and relevant issues, to improve the effectiveness of the Education Standards. The Australian Government acknowledged that students with a disability encounter disadvantage in achieving education outcomes, and responded to each of the 14 review recommendations.

Australia has recently introduced Professional Standards for Teachers which have been adopted by all states and territories. These standards require all teachers to be able to provide inclusive education programs. For example, proficient teachers in Australia are now required to be able to:

- Develop teaching activities that incorporate differentiated strategies to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities
- Design and implement teaching activities that support the participation and learning of students with disability and address relevant policy and legislative requirements.
- Establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students in classroom activities. (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2015)

In 2013, The National Disability Insurance Scheme Act (NDIS) was enacted to support Australians with a significant and permanent disability and their families and carers. Two of the Act's objectives are to:

- (g) Promote the provision of high quality and innovative supports that enable people with disability to maximise independent lifestyles and full inclusion in the mainstream community;
 - (h) Raise community awareness of the issues that affect the social and economic participation of people with disability, and facilitate greater community inclusion of people with disability.
- (NDIS, 2013)

The relationship between services provided by the NDIS and school education systems is one that is developing as the system rolls out. It is intended that the NDIS will provide necessary supports that a student with a disability requires that are associated with the *functional* impact of the student's disability on their activities of daily living, but not those primarily relating to education or training. The NDIS could provide personal care and support, transport to and from school and specialist supports for transition from school education to training or employment. As many of these services have previously been provided by departments of education, it is possible that the scheme will allow some resources to be diverted back to education or training.

Despite the declarations, legislation, and policies, Slee (2013) points out that exclusion remains as a social disposition internationally and in Australia. He points to exemptions in various charters and disability discrimination acts, and to the legitimisation of exclusion on the grounds of disability in Australia's immigration policy. Slee suggests that professional knowledge and interest lead us to "divide and categorise the population for their easier administration" (p.903). He argues that so-called inclusive practices can give rise to exclusion, and gives the example of "children at the back of the classroom protected and taught by adult assistants" (p.905).

Most of the legislation and policy decisions referred to above have arisen from a social justice and equity perspective (Jenkinson, 2001; Riddell, 2009). This perspective sees segregation on the basis of human characteristics as inherently wrong. As a result, people with a disability have demanded and received the right to participate fully in society and this right has extended to educational provisions. However, the implementation of disability service policy and legislation has been inconsistent, and some segregated services for people with a disability continue in Australia (Stancliffe, 2014). A recent American study indicated that, despite strong legislation supporting inclusion in the US, many thousands of students with a disability continue to receive education in segregated settings (Kurth, Morningstar, &

Kozleski, 2014). De Graaf, Van Hove and Haveman (2014) found that 2003 legislation designed to facilitate access to regular schools in the Netherlands had only minimally increased the number of students with Down syndrome in regular classes over the following few years.

Notwithstanding these concerns, it is clear that considerable progress has been made in moving students with a disability away from a situation in which they received either no education or a segregated education towards one where they are much more likely to be educated in a regular school and receive the necessary support to maximise educational and social outcomes. The next section of this paper considers the research evidence on the outcomes of inclusive practice.

3. Research and evidence-based practice

The policy and legislative decisions related to education referred to in the previous sections have not necessarily been supported or instigated by research evidence demonstrating that students with disabilities achieve more or are happier in mainstream settings. This does not mean that such evidence does not exist. There is a long history of research on the negative impacts of segregation of children with a disability. Over 75 years ago, Skeels and Dye (1939) reported on the impact of institutionalisation on young children, suggesting that being in a non-stimulating environment could lead to lowering of IQ. In another very influential study, Dunn (1968) questioned the efficacy of segregated classes for students with a mild disability. He argued that there was limited evidence of better outcomes for students in segregated classes; that there was an over-representation in such classes of minority and disadvantaged groups; and that the growth of special classes hindered development of instructional options in regular classes. Dunn's work, while much cited, was subject to some criticism (e.g. Macmillan, 1971; Tindal, 1985). However, the passing of Public Law 94/142, The Education of All Handicapped Children's Act, in the United States in 1975 was the culmination of strong anti-discrimination activity supported by research such as that of Dunn.

The major focus of disability researchers in the 1970s was not on the effects of inclusion or segregation but, rather, on the impact and outcomes of behaviourally-based instructional approaches for learners with various disabilities. There was limited investigation at the time of the effects of location, and most research was conducted in segregated settings. Since then, research in integrated and inclusive settings has tended to focus more on interaction and on attitudinal surveys than on the efficacy of instructional strategies and their

outcomes. Baker and Zigmond (1995) refer to the shift from discussion on *what and how* to teach to a discussion of *where* teaching should take place.

There are major difficulties in researching the effects of inclusion on students with a disability. First there is the problem of comparability of “included” and “segregated” samples. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to randomly assign students to inclusive or segregated settings for research purposes (Cole, 1999). Educational placement decisions are complex and are not readily subject to research manipulation. As a result there is always the likelihood of systematic differences between the two groups which have led to their placement in one or other of the settings. For example, students who are more alert, more interactive, better behaved, and more socially capable may be considered more suitable for placement in a regular class than students with a similar level of disability, but with poorer social functioning.

A second problem is deciding on the outcome measures. How is the success or otherwise of inclusion to be measured? How can it be determined whether inclusion has been successful? Should this be based on academic outcomes, social outcomes, parental satisfaction, student satisfaction, teacher satisfaction, or other outcome measures? As a result, there have been difficulties researching the outcomes of inclusive educational practices. Kavale (2002) concluded that “although the ideological and political support for inclusion is steadfast, the empirical evidence is less convincing” (p.210). Kavale and Mostert argued that “full inclusionists” have begun “parroting leftist political thought as a substitute for empiricism” (2003, p.193).

Despite these problems, there is a growing body of research on the effects of inclusion. The research outcomes can be summarised under the following broad headings: attitudinal studies; social interaction outcomes; and academic outcomes.

Attitudinal studies

Many of the early studies of inclusion focused on attitudes of teachers, principals, parents and students to the mainstreaming of students with a disability. This was because the feeling, at the time, was that the main impediment to successful inclusion was the negative attitude of some teachers, principals, parents, and peers. It was felt that if attitudes were positive, inclusion would be successful. The most common finding on attitudes, summarised in a meta-analysis by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), was that regular education teachers were supportive of the principle of inclusion, but were not keen to have students with disabilities in their own classes. A more recent review of teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011) concluded that most teachers in typical primary

settings hold neutral or negative attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs. The research findings indicated that variables including training, experience with inclusive education, and students' type of disability can impact on teachers' attitudes (de Boer et al., 2011).

Teachers have expressed concerns about their lack of knowledge of special education strategies and the likelihood that they would not receive the resources and support required to assist mainstreamed students. The concern about lack of support and resources is increased if those students have a severe disability (McNally, Cole & Waugh, 2001). Interestingly, an evaluation study conducted by Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that increasing pre-service teachers' knowledge of legislation and policy relevant to inclusion, and improving levels of confidence in becoming inclusive teachers, did not resolve their perceived stress or concerns about having students with special needs in their classes.

Several studies have shown that student teachers, classroom teachers and principals worry that they will not have the teaching competencies, physical resources, or time needed to include children with a disability in their classes (Bailey & du Plessis, 1998; Lambe & Bones, 2006; Morris & Sharma, 2011; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011). In an Australian study, Campbell, Gilmore & Cuskelly (2003) found that formal instruction and structured fieldwork is likely to improve attitudes to children with Down syndrome in student teachers. Another Australian study examined principals' attitudes towards including students with disruptive behaviour in mainstream classes (Wood, Evans, & Spandagou, 2014). The findings indicated that principals considered it to be beneficial for students with disruptive behaviour to be educated in inclusive settings, but not beneficial for their peers without special needs to have disruptive students in their class. Graham and Spandagou (2011) found principals' views on inclusive education to be shaped by the characteristics of their schools. Principals whose schools were more diverse regarded inclusive education more broadly than principals of schools with more limited diversity, who saw inclusive education primarily as a response to students with a disability or special needs.

Urton, Wilbert, and Hennemann (2012) found that teachers' sense of self-efficacy significantly influenced attitudes towards inclusion. They also concluded that a successful inclusive school relied heavily on the school's overall environment, particularly the attitudes of principals, teachers and staff. In a comparative study of teachers' perceptions of the development of inclusive education in Finland and South Africa, Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, and Malinen (2012) found that overall attitudes towards inclusion were positive in both countries, but teachers were concerned about the consequences of including children with

disabilities in their classrooms. Consistent with existing studies, the authors found that self-efficacy is connected to attitudes. Teachers would hold a more positive attitude towards inclusion if they believed they were able to implement inclusive practices on a practical level. The study also suggested that self-efficacy in collaboration with other stakeholders, including other teachers and parents, could be the best predictor of attitudes to inclusion.

A study of early childhood care providers in the USA by Mulvihill, Shearer and van Horn (2002) found that training and experience can lead to better attitudes and fewer perceptions of barriers to inclusion. Similar results were found by Baker-Ericzén and Mueggenborg (2009). Gilmore, Campbell and Cuskelly (2003) found that, although teachers and the general public regard inclusion as beneficial for students with Down syndrome, particularly from a social perspective, a majority of teachers and the general public believe that such children will “do better” in a setting other than a regular class with children of their own age. Another study of early childhood pre-service teachers (Appl & Spenciner, 2008) found that appropriate developmental training programs can guide student teachers to a position where they see their role as facilitators of acceptance for all children in their classes.

Professionals who are more remote from the classroom such as principals and counsellors have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes than regular class teachers or special class teachers (Center, Ward, Parmenter, & Nash, 1985; Center & Ward, 1989). Similarly, teachers with higher educational qualifications in special education have been found to have more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Hsien, Brown, & Bortoli, 2009). Florian and Linklater (2010) reported on a teacher education program which focussed on developing student teachers’ ability to recognise their capacity to teach all learners. The teachers were assisted to respond to their responsibility to enhance all children’s learning rather than their capacity to meet predetermined standards. In a cross-country investigation (Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2009), 603 pre-service teachers undertaking either a one-semester unit of work focusing on inclusive education or an infused program with similar content spread over two years were studied. The researchers found that the teacher education students’ attitudes to inclusion and views about disability generally improved and their concerns decreased following the training, although there were some group differences. In a smaller Australian study, Sharma (2012) found that completing a one-semester course on inclusion can significantly improve teacher education students’ beliefs about inclusion and lead to fewer concerns about providing for the needs of students with a disability in their classes. Cologon (2012) found similar results in a study of postgraduate early childhood students.

Studies of the attitudes of peers to students with disabilities often reveal a lack of specific knowledge but generally positive attitudes (Kyle & Davies, 1991). In a relatively large study in Canada, McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller and Killip (2004) found that while the majority of high school students had positive to very positive attitudes to their mainstreamed peers with disabilities, 20% of students held negative to very negative attitudes, clearly enough students to make life very miserable for those with a disability. McDougall et al also found that attitudes were related to specific aspects of the school culture. In England, Laws and Kelly (2005) investigated whether the attitudes of primary-aged children were related to their friendship intentions. They found 10% of a sample of 202 children aged 9-12 had negative attitudes combined with negative friendship intentions, and a further 28% had “less than completely positive friendship intentions despite ... average to positive attitudes” (p.95).

Rillotta and Nettlebeck (2007) found that training programs for Australian secondary school students could lead to improved attitudes to students with an intellectual disability, and that these improvements may be sustainable over time. Longer training produced more positive attitudes. As is usual for such studies, attitude was measured by response on an attitude survey rather than by a more direct measure. Moore and Nettlebeck (2013) found that three hours of disability awareness training spread over four weeks led to improved attitude scores in adolescent school-boys, with gains sustained at one-month follow-up. Nowicki and Sandieson (2002) undertook a meta-analysis of studies of children’s attitudes to people with intellectual or physical disabilities over the period 1990-2000. They found that, while children’s attitudes to people with a disability were not as positive as they might be, there are many complexities in investigating such attitudes which make it difficult to draw conclusions from the research that has been done. They concluded that further careful research is needed if appropriate strategies to promote positive attitudes to inclusion are to be implemented.

Students with disabilities themselves have mixed views, and tend to report the location they are in as their preferred option, whether it is segregation or inclusion (Curtin & Clarke, 2005). As might be expected, parents also have varying views about the type of placement that is best for their child, with some very much in favour of and others very much opposed to inclusion (Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001). Parents often have attitudes in favour of inclusion, but are nevertheless worried about issues such as a lack of resources, the need for specialised teaching or potential social isolation for their children (Elkins, van Kraayenoord, & Jobling, 2003; Leyser & Kirk, 2004). In the Netherlands, 190 parents of children attending general primary schools were surveyed, and the results of the study

revealed that parents' attitudes were generally positive. However, most parents were negative about the inclusion of children with profound intellectual disability or multiple disabilities (de Boer & Munde, in press). In addition, the authors found that fathers and older parents held more negative attitudes about inclusion of children with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities in regular classes. Szumski and Karwowski (2012) found that parental socioeconomic status was positively related to students' placement in inclusive and mainstream settings.

A recent Australian study investigated parents' perceptions about innovations related to including students with autism spectrum disorder in regular schools. The results suggested that the provision of a safe environment, structured school and extracurricular time, flexible time, curriculum and staffing, and socially attractive activities would promote positive attitudes (Reupert, Deppeler, & Sharma, in press). The authors also encouraged schools to bring parents, teachers, and community agencies together to facilitate inclusion.

Carlson, Hemmings and Wurf (2012) conducted an observational study of six teachers who were judged by their principals to be working effectively in inclusive classrooms. From these observations and subsequent interviews with the teachers, Carlson et al produced a model of an inclusive educator which suggested that good support systems, professional development and experience produced positive attitudes. Positive attitudes then led to the use of effective instructional strategies such as feedback, direct instruction, questioning, and co-operative learning.

Social interaction outcomes

It is sometimes argued that the most effective way to get people to interact with each other is to place them together. This is of course a simplistic assertion. We are all aware that schools are places where friendships can be difficult and children can be excluded for a variety of reasons. Many different cliques form, and social interaction is often problematic, even for children without any disability and with relatively good social skills. It is naïve to think that students with a disability will achieve instant acceptance just by being placed in a regular class. Some students report isolation, stigmatisation and exclusion in mainstreamed settings (Cooney, Jahoda, Gumley & Knott, 2006; Curtin & Clarke, 2005).

Some disabilities, by their nature, make interaction difficult for the people who have them. Children with poor language, social ... or mobility skills will have their interactions necessarily restricted. For example Macintosh and Dissanayake (2006), in an Australian study, found that children with high functioning autism or Asperger syndrome observed in playground settings were significantly less likely than their typically developing peers to be

in ongoing social exchanges or in interactions with three or more peers. The modifiability of these interaction difficulties is an important continuing research question. In a useful discussion, Meyer (2001) points out that adult mediation can have a significant impact on friendship interactions, both positively and negatively.

In a large scale study of students on the autism spectrum, Hebron and Humphrey (2014a) found that such students were more likely to be bullied in mainstream settings than in specialist school settings, with older students increasingly likely to be bullied, and school bus journeys a particular problem area. The authors suggest that this finding should be seen as an argument for working to make mainstream settings more socially inclusive rather than as support for specialist placement. In another study of students with autism in secondary mainstream settings Hebron and Humphrey (2014b) found higher levels of anxiety and anger in the students with autism than in a comparison group of students with other special educational needs. The authors concluded that mainstream schools need to be sensitive to possibly concealed anxiety and to anger triggers in students with autism.

Webster and Carter (2007) reviewed 36 studies of social relationships between children with and without developmental disabilities. They concluded that, while the nature and development of friendships and interactions between typically developing peers has been extensively studied, the study of relationships between children with developmental disabilities and peers without disabilities is much less developed. They describe such research as “patchy at best, limited in scope, and non-linear in its development” (2007, p.210).

It is unarguable, however, that a student who is placed in a segregated setting will have little or no opportunity to mix with students without a disability. On an intuitive level, it seems likely that positive interactions will occur when students who are included have good social competence and are sufficiently able to interact on a normal social level with their peers. However, Cutts and Sigafos (2001) studied a group of adolescents with intellectual disability in a regular high school in Australia and found that their level of social interaction with peers was not significantly correlated with their level of social competence. It should be noted, nevertheless, that social interactions of the students with intellectual disability were largely, although not exclusively, with other students who also had an intellectual disability.

Studies of interactions between students with and without a disability do not always produce negative results. Hardiman, Guerin, and Fitzsimons (2009) compared the social competence of students with moderate intellectual disability in inclusive versus segregated school settings in Ireland, and found that there was no significant difference in social competence for children which was attributable to the setting. In a study of deaf and hard of

hearing students in mainstream settings, Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer and Reed (2011) found that mean social skill ratings by teachers and self-ratings of students with a hearing impairment were similar to ratings for students without a disability. Research in the Netherlands by Koster, Pijl, Nakken, and van Houten (2010) found that, while the majority of students with special needs in regular grade 1-3 primary classes had a satisfactory degree of social interaction, a relatively large portion of the students with special needs had difficulties in their social participation. In general, students with special needs had significantly fewer friends and were less frequently members of a cohesive subgroup, when compared to their typical peers. Students with special needs tended to have fewer interactions with classmates, and more interactions with the teacher. They were less accepted than students without special needs. In the Koster et al study, no significant differences were found among students with different categories of disability, possibly due to low numbers in sub-groups in the research study. A literature review by Bossaert, Colpin, Pijl and Petry (2013) concluded that practitioners need to pay particular attention to ensuring satisfactory social relations between peers with and without special educational needs in secondary schools.

There have been some suggestions that inclusion does not benefit students with more severe or multiple disabilities (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997). However, some Australian research has suggested that students with the most severe disabilities can benefit from regular class placements. Such students are likely to experience more communicative interactions in regular classes than in special classes (Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & Smyth King, 2004). This is largely because there is more opportunity for social and communicative interaction in regular classes when the rest of the class is verbal, and there is often a special teacher's assistant assigned to the student. Causton-Theoharis and Malmgren (2005) found that paraprofessionals working with students with severe disability in regular settings can, with training, dramatically increase the interactions between such students and their typically-developing peers. This does not necessarily mean that all students with multiple or severe disabilities should be in regular classes. However, it does suggest that if they are in special classes, particularly when the other students also have multiple and severe disabilities, communicative interactions may need to be encouraged through specific intervention.

Inclusion is frequently regarded more positively for younger children, with educators pointing out that it may become more difficult as students proceed through the grades, particularly in secondary schools. The interested reader is directed to a special issue of the *Australasian Journal of Special Education* (2005, vol 29, 2), containing papers by Forlin and others that focus on aspects of secondary inclusion. For example, in this issue, Hay and

Winn (2005) reported on their use of focus groups and interviews to explore the various perspectives of Australian students, parents and teachers on the secondary school inclusion of students with Asperger syndrome. Interestingly, they found some convergence of belief across participants in terms of the importance of school facilities, and varying levels of emphasis upon several shared key themes according to the nature of the group. They noted that whilst mainstream teachers were more concerned with the characteristics and needs of individuals with Asperger syndrome, special education teachers focused on the importance of collaboration and relationship-building. Hay and Winn (2005) underline the complex and multidimensional process that typifies inclusive practice in modern schools.

Academic outcomes

In the past, special education led the way in the search to identify teaching approaches that would maximise academic outcomes for all students, especially those who were at risk of failure (Lloyd, Forness, & Kavale, 1998). The inclusion of students with higher support needs in their age-appropriate settings has underlined the importance of progressing authentic research into the learning outcomes achieved in the inclusion model, and ways of maximising learning outcomes for all students in contemporary classrooms. Most particularly, longitudinal, large scale controlled analyses of academic and social outcomes for students, like those reported by Peetsma, Verger, Roeleveld, and Karsten, (2001) in the Netherlands, are overdue in Australasia.

It is often argued that teaching of academic skills is more likely to occur in regular schools than in special schools. In a comparison of regular versus special placement for students with Down syndrome in Dutch primary schools, de Graaf, van Hove and Haveman (2013) found that between one and a half and twice as much time was spent on academic skills in regular schools than in special schools. They found positive effects of regular school placement on academic achievement, particularly in reading skills.

Rietveld (2005) used a case study methodology to investigate the mathematical learning experiences of young children with Down syndrome enrolled in local or non-local schools in New Zealand. The overall findings were confronting, including a lack of conceptual support or feedback for the learners, and disparities amongst teachers, parents and other involved professionals regarding the goals of the educational program. Clearly, inclusion brings with it both challenges and the need for solutions that are satisfactory for all stakeholders (Pearce & Forlin, 2005).

In this context, differentiated classroom practice and inclusive curricula are two themes that must be considered when attempting to answer the question of whether, or how

well, inclusion functions to produce positive academic outcomes. Differentiation is a term that has been variously defined in relation to the changes that teachers make to their pedagogical approaches, the learning environment and the curriculum presented to learners in the modern diverse classroom to accommodate individual needs. Led at an international level by the empirical and practical work of Tomlinson (for example, Tomlinson, 2014), research and practice around differentiation is recognised as necessarily difficult but warranted if inclusion is to enhance learner outcomes (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005). In other words, teaching to the middle in the heterogeneous classroom is neither satisfactory nor acceptable, a point that has been highlighted in the various debates about reading instruction during the past decade. Of course the vexed question is whether differentiation is occurring in classrooms and how it can best be supported in the context of increasing demands on teachers and schools.

In a study of four classrooms and the teachers responsible for them in typical NSW primary schools, Smith (2006) found little evidence of differentiation in reading instruction aimed at high, low and average ability primary-aged students. Interestingly, Smith's use of mixed research methods revealed a contradiction between what was observed in classrooms and what teachers reported about differentiation. Little differentiation was observed in relation to a host of defined variables including teacher instruction and academic engagement of students. Conversely teachers reported that they believed they were differentiating quite a lot for their students and also pointed out some challenges and support needs in their situations. The findings of this study could stimulate further analysis of what really happens in the modern diverse classroom, along with a focus on how to improve outcomes for all students (Dempsey & Arthur-Kelly, 2007).

The Department of Education, Science and Training (2007) has published a report on a comprehensive project led by Tony Shaddock at the University of Canberra which investigated strategies for improving learning outcomes in students with a disability in early, middle and post-compulsory school programs. Accompanied by a teacher resource booklet, the report synthesises relevant national and international literature, and summarises a vast amount of data collected from teachers and schools across Australia, including the nature of adaptations made by teacher to address student needs, and the perceptions of teachers regarding the type and content of professional development programs that are best suited to their needs in the diverse classroom. Initiatives of this kind at a national level are central to the task of enhancing professional practices and enabling schools and systems to support educators in this endeavour.

An important question is whether the presence of a student with a disability impacts negatively on the rest of the class. Fruth and Woods (2015) recently examined the impact of inclusion on the academic performance of secondary students without a disability in social studies, science, mathematics, and reading in Ohio in the US. The authors compared the academic performance of students without disabilities in inclusive settings in the above areas to their performance in segregated environments, i.e. in classrooms which did not include students with a disability. Results indicated that no significant differences existed in the performance of students in different settings in social studies, science, or reading. However, students without disabilities scored significantly better in mathematics in segregated settings than in inclusive environments. In a comparative study of primary-aged classes with and without a student with an intellectual disability, Dessemontet and Bless (2013) found that the presence of a student with an intellectual disability in a mainstream class had no impact, either positive or negative, on the academic achievement of other students in the class, whether those students were low-, average- or high-achieving. Ruijs and Peetsma (2009) reviewed the effects of inclusion on students with and without special needs and found that, the majority of studies confirmed positive or neutral results of inclusion on academic achievement, with outcomes either similar to or better than segregated settings. Very few studies found negative effects on achievement for students with special needs in inclusive settings.

Another factor that has come into play as part of the inclusion process is inclusive curriculum and reporting, led most recently in Australia through the trialling and approval of national curricula. This is especially noteworthy in relation to the impacts for students who would traditionally have received instruction on functional curriculum quite different from their same-aged peers (see NSW Department of Education, 1988). In NSW, for example, most students are evaluated in terms of the Key Learning Areas that are defined by the Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards (for example, English, Maths). Outcomes are described as part of a continuum of learning statements in a particular content area and, most importantly, these learnings are the shared focus for all students, with support statements provided to assist in programming for students with special educational needs. The only exception is the Life Skills Curriculum for secondary students, which brings a functional flavour to the skills, knowledge and values on offer to students, an option that is often selected by families of students with moderate or severe intellectual disability. One consequence of this alignment in curriculum offerings has been the enhanced credentialing available to all students at both Stage 5 (Year 10 School Certificate) and Stage 6 (Higher

School Certificate). There are also National Curriculum initiatives for students with special education needs, referred to earlier.

Despite the introduction of such important systemic changes in practice, there appears to be no specific Australasian data on the success or otherwise of an inclusive approach to curriculum. In contrast, researchers such as Agran and Wehmeyer have provided several insightful papers that explore aspects of access to the general curriculum in American schools for students with disabilities, along with materials designed to enhance their participation. For example, Agran, Alper, and Wehmeyer (2002) described some of the challenges reported by teachers in ensuring access to the general curriculum for students with moderate and severe disabilities, points that resonate anecdotally, if not empirically (due to a lack of reported research), with the Australian situation. Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker, and Agran (2003) provided observational data indicating variability across setting types in the degree to which students with intellectual disability were gaining access to tasks derived from the general curriculum. In addition, Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer and Palmer (2006) have demonstrated that when a specific self-determined instructional model is employed and the appropriate supports are available, it is possible to achieve mastery levels of progress in students with moderate or severe disability in the context of the general curriculum and in the general educational setting. Notwithstanding the small sample size, this study and the other data provided by eminent American researchers in inclusive curriculum and differentiation point to the need for a sharper focus in research energies locally.

Summary of research and evidence base

By way of summary, research findings related to the inclusion of students with a disability in regular classes are provided in Table 1, below. These are not absolute conclusions, but represent the findings of peer-reviewed research studies or meta-analyses.

Table 1
Summary of outcomes of research on inclusive education*

Social outcomes for students with a disability

- Students with a disability can demonstrate high levels of social interaction in regular settings.
- Placement alone does not guarantee positive social outcomes and some students feel more isolated in regular settings.
- Social competence and communication skills improve when students with a disability are educated in inclusive settings.
- Friendships can develop between students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings.
- Some students feel isolated and stigmatised in mainstream settings.
- Students with autism are more likely to be bullied in mainstream settings than in specialist settings
- Students with developmental disabilities can establish friendships that are similar in character

to those of typically-developing peers.

- Teachers play a critical role in facilitating friendships between students with a disability and their peers without a disability.
- Parents and teachers can play a role in facilitating friendships between students with a disability and their peers without a disability.
- Teaching assistants can be trained to increase the interactions between students with severe disabilities and their peers in regular settings.
- Friendship and membership are helped by long-term involvement in the classroom and routine activities of the school. However, social interaction is difficult for some students with a disability.
- Students with severe multiple disabilities have more communicative interactions and communication partners in regular classes than in special classes.
- Teacher assistants can have a negative influence on the social interaction of students with a disability.
- Inclusive settings may raise the work-related aspirations of students with a disability.
- Some students with a disability have a preference for inclusive settings, some for segregated settings.

Outcomes for skill acquisition for students with a disability

- Students with a disability may demonstrate gains in curriculum areas when they are educated in inclusive settings. However, some studies do not show curriculum gains.
- Teachers of mainstreamed students sometimes emphasise behaviour management rather than teaching and learning.
- The majority of studies confirm positive or neutral results of inclusion on academic achievement.
- Students in mainstream classes will achieve better academic outcomes than students in special classes if the mainstream classes have a greater focus on academic skills.
- Students in mainstream classes are likely to spend up to twice as much time on academic skills.
- Students in regular classes benefit from explicit, teacher-directed approaches to classroom learning.
- Interactive, small group contexts encourage skill acquisition and social acceptance for students with a disability in general education classrooms.

Impact on students without disabilities

- The academic performance of typically developing students is not compromised by the presence of students with a disability in their classrooms.
- The classroom behaviour of typically developing students is not generally affected negatively by the presence of students with a disability in their classrooms.
- However, some studies have suggested that there can be unwanted effects.
- Typically developing students benefit from their involvement and relationships with students with a disability.
- Typically developing students may perceive that adaptations and accommodations for students with a disability benefit their own learning.
- Some typically developing students have negative attitudes to students with a disability.
- Negative attitudes are amenable to change through educational programs.
- Students without a disability in regular classes benefit from explicit, teacher-directed approaches to classroom learning.
- The presence of students with a disability in the general education classroom provides learning opportunities and experiences that might not otherwise be part of the curriculum.

Impact on parents

- Parent support for inclusion is encouraged by experience with this approach to education, although experience alone does not shape attitudes.

- Parents of students with a disability are looking for positive attitudes, good educational opportunities and acceptance of their child among educators.
- Some parents of students with more severe disabilities are worried about the loss of the individual support of a specialised setting.
- Parents who strongly favour inclusion may still be worried about whether their child will lack resources and be socially isolated in regular settings.
- Parents need to expend substantial efforts to support their mainstreamed children.
- Some parents of students without disabilities are worried about the impact of inclusion on their child's education.

Impact on teachers

- Although many teachers are initially reluctant about inclusion, they become confident in their abilities with support, experience and professional development.
- Teachers experience professional growth as a result of working in inclusive settings.
- Teachers experience increased personal satisfaction as a result of working in inclusive settings.
- Many teachers prefer to have students with mild disabilities and without behaviour problems in their classes.
- Support from other teachers is a powerful and necessary resource to empower teachers to problem-solve new instructional challenges.
- Training, experience with inclusive education, and students' type of disability can impact on teacher attitudes.
- Good support systems, professional development and experience produced positive attitudes in teachers.
- While many teachers see parents as a valuable resource, others prefer them not to volunteer to assist in the classroom.

Role of teachers

- Teacher attitude is a major factor in successful programs of inclusion.
- Training and experience assist teachers in successful implementation of programs of inclusion.
- Teachers who have a positive sense of self-efficacy in relation to collaboration have more positive attitudes towards inclusion.
- Some teachers feel that they would need highly specialised skills to teach students with a disability.
- Facilitating the inclusion of students with a disability requires the sensitivity to make on-the-spot judgements about the type and amount of support to encourage participation, while not interfering with student interactions.
- The most inclusive classrooms cater for every student's individual needs rather than modifying the environment only for students with a disability.
- Teacher education programs that focus on making the best use of teachers' existing skills can enhance inclusive practice.
- Increasing pre-service teachers' knowledge of legislation and policy relevant to inclusion, and improving levels of confidence in becoming inclusive teachers, does not necessarily resolve concerns about having students with special needs in their classes.

Role of principals

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

Other factors

- Factors such as program standards, financial support and teacher education impact on the success of inclusion.
- The number of students with a disability in any one classroom should not be excessive – it should be reflective of population numbers.
- Evaluation of the impact of inclusion needs to use multiple data sources.
- Parents of young children, parents of children with mild disabilities and parents who are more highly educated are more likely to support inclusion.
- Parents often face a struggle to have their children accepted in regular classes.
- Many pre-service teachers feel unprepared to teach students with a disability.
- Pre-service training can improve attitudes and confidence.

*Headings and findings are based on McGregor & Vogelsberg (1998), pp. 57–69. Findings have been updated and expanded, using research reports published after 1997. The table is adapted from Foreman (2014b, p.29-31).

Evidence-Based Practices in Inclusion: Towards a Research Agenda

In this discussion paper, we have canvassed issues that highlight the interplay of social justice principles, legislation, and empirical investigations as they impact on both the process and the outcomes of inclusion for individuals with additional learning needs. A recent review of more than 170 research papers (Cologon, 2014) identified a set of barriers that may impede the realisation of the right to an inclusive education for students with disabilities. These barriers include lack of a clear understanding of inclusive education, negative and discriminatory attitudes and practices, lack of support and resourcing, and insufficient training and professional development for teachers and other relevant professionals. Cologon (p.42) provided a list of responses that could facilitate the implementation of inclusive education. These include:

- A paradigm shift from special education and deficit thinking towards authentic acceptance of diversity and welcoming differences.
- Community advocacy, paying close attention to disability and disability-rights movements
- Encouraging inclusion of all children as early as possible, regardless of their disability and level of additional needs, to develop a culture of inclusion.
- Promoting the quality of pre-service and in-service professional development and training, to equip professionals, paraprofessionals, and other relevant stakeholders with necessary knowledge and skills about inclusion.
- Provision of sufficient support, resourcing, funding, and opportunities to make environmental, material and curriculum modifications, to provide specialist support and professional development.
- Encouraging parent and student involvement.
- Documenting student outcomes and experiences, and using data based or evidence-based practice to inform stakeholders.

Likewise, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) (2013) prepared a report for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) which identifies research and evidence-based literature regarding outcomes of inclusive education for students with disability. Although there is a lack of data on good inclusive practice in Australia, the report found that inclusive education in Australia focuses on two key approaches: whole-school practice and in-class support. Whole-school good practices include “adjustment to cultures, policies, and practices, the development of support structures, regimes of funding support, and the provision of and access to equitable learning opportunities” (p30). Class level good practices involve adoption of inclusive pedagogy and alternative curricula, the use of universal design for learning, application of assistive and adaptive technologies, and individualised planning.

The ARACY report suggested that Australia’s educational leaders need to be aware of the context and the complexity of the various educational systems of each state and territory, and that inclusion policies should address the needs of learners, and be informed by local research that addresses specific regional needs, such as urban and rural situations, fiscal constraints, support structures and the capabilities of those who are to implement it. In addition, involvement of all stakeholders is very important if an inclusive approach is to be enacted (ARACY, 2013). The ARACY report suggested a number of issues that require close attention for Australia to make continued progress towards achieving inclusive education. First there is the tension arising from the choice and equity debates. Choice implies that separate special schools will be an option, while some view any form of separate provision as retrograde. Another issue relates to pressure on schools to demonstrate improvement in academic outcomes. This could be positive for students with additional learning needs if it leads to removal of barriers to learning, but could have negative consequences if it leads to an overemphasis on academic accountability. A further issue relates to the need for all participants, including educators, politicians and school communities, to collaborate to ensure a connection between inclusive education and broader educational reform. Finally, there is consensus that it is necessary for teacher education programs to prepare graduates who have had sufficient practice in real situations to be able to provide inclusive programs in their classrooms. Among the suggested ways for moving forward recommended by ARACY (p.40) were:

- Government departments, educational systems, schools, community, family, and paraprofessionals should collaborate to advocate for inclusive education, and to develop a support infrastructure for inclusive education.

- Appropriate policies should be introduced to ensure teachers and principals receive quality, consistent and effective training in inclusive education.
- Teachers in training require practical, context-relevant input with opportunities for collaboration with highly effective practitioners.
- Close liaison is required across all jurisdictions, and routine consultation with students with disability and their families, to make sure the funding model enables federal support to equitably address the diverse needs of each student with additional needs.
- Consistent data should be collected at both inter and intra state level to examine the effectiveness of inclusive services at all levels.
- The role of special schools in supporting inclusion should be evaluated.

Clearly the effective delivery of practices that have a sound empirical base into the complex realities of the modern classroom is a challenging task, and we have probably raised more questions than we have answered. We finish by posing several questions that might usefully inform future research agendas in relation to inclusion:

- * What academic and social outcomes are achieved over the longer term by students with various disabilities in inclusive Australian classrooms, and how do such findings compare with similar cohorts in other countries?
- * What instructional practices are effective in increasing the interaction, engagement and learning of students with additional needs in inclusive settings?
- * How well is the philosophy and use of differentiated instructional practice addressed in teacher education programs around Australasia?
- * To what extent can universal design for learning increase access to the regular curriculum?
- * How well prepared are teacher education graduates to teach students with additional needs in learning or behaviour?
- * Do we have adequate data on the professional development needs of practising classroom teachers in relation to the differentiated delivery of teaching and learning programs in primary and secondary classrooms?
- * What models of professional development for teachers and principals will best assist the achievement of evidence-based practices in the typical inclusive classroom?

Conclusion

In this review paper we have attempted to outline the various social justice principles, legislative and policy directions, and research findings that have shaped the provision of inclusive approaches to special education to this point. Perhaps most pointedly, our

discussion indicates the need for a sharpened focus on the question of how to translate what we know about the key elements of inclusive and differentiated practice into reality in classrooms around the Australasian region. The DEST (2007) report and subsequent reviews by ARACY (2013) and Cologon (2014) are useful steps in the right direction and should serve as a national stimulus to ongoing progress in charting student outcomes and teacher needs in the milieu that is the inclusive classroom.

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