

Editorial

Inclusive education in one form or another has long been a topic of discussion among Special Educators, if not in education generally. From earlier questions on whether students with mild intellectual difficulty should be educated in "segregated" or "integrated" settings, the argument now concerns best practice in the education of children with severe physical, intellectual or behavioural difficulties in regular classrooms.

There is some concern however, that the motivation for the promotion of inclusive education practices may be concerned with matters other than best educational practice. For example, there is an understandable motivation in terms of equity, that students with disabilities should have access to the best facilities and full curriculum which the school system has to offer. To "specialise" education may result in locking some students in to more restricted educational experiences. Another motivation is the opportunity which Inclusion offers for modelling peer-appropriate social and learning behaviours, which often follows from regular school and regular classroom education. Encouraging evidence of improved outcomes in this way has been claimed of Inclusive education, for some children with intellectual disabilities. Other motivations might include the educative role for all students growing up and learning at school with children representing the wide range of social, intellectual, physical, cultural and emotional diversity of our culture. The opportunity to learn in a healthy, friendly and supportive environment with people sharing a range of these characteristics should be a valuable preparation for adult living and one resulting in greater acceptance of human diversity.

Concerns for the widespread implementation of Inclusion have also been expressed however, by educators worried that the "healthy, friendly and supportive environments" referred to above may not always result from Inclusive education. There is concern that not all schools, or their extended communities, are ready to work with a wider population diversity than at present. There is also strong concern that Inclusion may be used as a diversion for reducing expenditure on supporting children with special needs, by removing the special facilities and by diluting specialist staffing levels. This

would lead to further difficulty in supporting the collaborative education approaches needed in Special Education by many children and their families. To deliver education in regular classrooms for the particular needs of children with profound hearing impairment and consequent communication and learning problems, for those with impairment of vision, emotional disturbance or high physical support needs is likely to be technically very difficult, and certainly very expensive.

In view of the close interest being taken in Inclusive Education at this time by governments and by school systems, it is important that a balanced approach be taken to proposed policy initiatives. It is apparent to this writer that Inclusive Education derives from a set of egalitarian principles which should inform all practices in the delivery of human services. On the other hand, the implementation of those principles needs to take account of the particular needs of all students and to recognise, that for some students at some times, the opportunity to step outside of that regular classroom for particular more individualised attention will be needed.

The papers in this volume address many of these issues, which should be carefully evaluated in the present Inclusion debate. It is difficult to escape the conclusion from our present knowledge, that while we should strive to achieve full participation for students with disabilities in all aspects of our society, we should ensure that the opportunity is always available for those needing access to periods of intensive and individualised teaching which addresses their particular needs.

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Editor