family ADVOCACY

Institute for Family Advocacy & Leadership Development Assoc. Inc.

A New South Wales association concerned with the rights and interests of people who have a developmental disability

The Secretary,
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations
and Education References Committee,
suite S1.61, Parliament House,
Canberra, 2600.

12 April, 2002.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into the education of students with disabilities

The existence of you Inquiry has only just come to our attention. I am about to commence 2 weeks leave and there is no other member of staff who would be able to develop the submission.

The purpose of this letter is to establish the credentials of Family Advocacy in the area of education and to seek an extension of time for the development of a submission in response the Committee's terms of reference.

Family Advocacy is a state wide advocacy agency which promotes and protects the rights, needs and interests of children and adults with developmental disability in New South Wales. Its mission is:

> *"to attain positive social roles for people with developmental disability through the development of advocacy by families and through strengthening the role, knowledge and influence of the family."*

The organisation has a priority to undertake advocacy on behalf of people with developmental disability who have very high support needs. It does this through a strong systems advocacy function combined with advocacy development work with families in all parts of the State.

Family Advocacy has made a significant contribution to education for children and young people with developmental disability, being the leading voice in calling for the implementation of inclusive education.

Our work in this area includes:

- Supporting parents across NSW to gain inclusion for their sons and daughters through information, workshops and individual support;

- Auspicing the *Kids Belong Together* campaign at the 1995 State election calling for a change of education policy;

- Co-ordinating the *Action for McRae Report* coalition to provide a unified voice for people with disability in negotiating educational reform. Members of *Action for McRae Report* coalition include Action for Citizens with Disabilities, Learning Links (previously known as the Association for children with learning difficulties), Australian Early Intervention Association (NSW Chapter), Australian Association of Special Education (NSW Chapter),Down Syndrome Association, Jewish Community Services, Kids Belong Together, Intellectual Disability Rights Service, Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, NSW Council on Intellectual Disability, NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Service, People with Disabilities NSW, Inc, Physical Disability Council of NSW, Public Interest Advocacy Association, Royal Blind Society, Statewide Disability Coalition, The Northcott Society and the Spastic Centre.

- Active involvement in the State Integration Reference Group including chair of the Training and Development Working Party and active membership of the Policy, Physical Access and Curriculum working parties.

In addition, in a private capacity, I was a member of the DDA Standards Working Party of the MCEETYA Taskforce for three years.

In November, 2001, Family Advocacy developed a submission for the Vinson Inquiry into Public Education in NSW. I attach an electronic version of the submission as a first part of our submission to your Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Belinda Epstein-Frisch

BELINDA EPSTEIN-FRISCH

So Near and Yet So Far

Students with Disability and the NSW public education system

Submission to the
Vinson Inquiry into Public Education

November 2001

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Introduction

Introduction to Family Advocacy

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Contribution of Family Advocacy to education for children and young people with developmental disability

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The situation of people with disability and the importance of inclusion

The impact of impairment

People who have a disability, by definition, experience some degree of limitation to their physical and/or functional capacity, which can become life-shaping, and even life defining, in its impact.

Although people who have a disability grow and develop across the course of their lives, this limitation is real, life long, and often has a major impact on the person's capacity to meet their own needs. Depending upon the degree to which the person's disability limits their competency, they will require additional supports from other people across the course of their lives in order for their needs and interests to be addressed, and sometimes even to ensure that they will live.

The impact of impairment means people with disability become more vulnerable to marginalisation, exclusion, neglect, exploitation and abuse.

The social situation facing people with disability

If we understand the social situation faced by people with disability, it helps us to understand the need for proactive steps, including inclusion in education, to protect their rights and safeguard them from the negative experience of people with disability in the past.

Because the person's difference has often been perceived negatively by many people within our society, people with a disability particularly have been subjected to social devaluation and discrimination, including:

- Rejection, sometimes by families, neighbours, schools, community in general, and sometimes even by the educators whose very income derives from the person;
- Isolation and segregation from people who do not have a disability and therefore from opportunities that come from being in contact with other people and the positive role expectations set by others;
- Lack of opportunities for a person's development, growth and enriching life experiences, resulting in wasted lives;
- Congregation with other people with disability and/or other devalued people, in circumstances where people may have nothing more in common than their shared rejection by other people, thereby setting very negative role expectations;

- Loss of control and autonomy whereby every aspect of life may be externally controlled by other people and/or the service system upon which they rely;

- Material poverty which exposes people to such things as poor or no health care, inferior housing, and/or homelessness, thereby leading to illness and shortened life expectancy;

- Loss of recognition of, and few opportunities to develop, a sense of individuality and uniqueness;

- Loss of relationships with the wide variety of people from whom identity and security is typically derived, like family and friends and other freely given relationships, thereby resulting in a lack of committed allies when things go wrong;

- Physical and / or emotional neglect, damage or abuse from other people and the surrounding environment.

Effects of segregated and congregated education

Segregated and congregated education has contributed to the negative perception of people with disability in society. In the past, all children who were perceived to be different, were excluded from the local school, being either excluded from education altogether, or bused to a special school geographically and emotionally distant from their community. The school and the community declared that the child was too different to belong and marginalisation and segregation was almost universally guaranteed.

Issues relating to segregated and congregated education include:

- Segregated education lacks coherence and comprehensiveness. It can never provide the richness of experience that comes from the diversity of a school made up of all children in the community;

- Segregated education often reinforces, rather than challenges, negative social stereotypes of people with disability;

- Segregated education serves interests other than those of the individuals in whose name it has been established. These include the person's family, teachers, union or professional associations, funding and regulating bodies, the neighbourhood, and society. In these competing interests, the individual child or young person is the least influential and their interests are often sacrificed to the interests of the others;

- The day-to-day struggle to provide segregated education may lead to a 'hardness' of attitude towards those students with disability they were originally set up to serve;

- In segregated settings, students with disability lack the safeguard of relationships with other students who do not have a disability. When things go wrong, as they inevitably do, students with disability may have no one to tell or no one to indicate that what has happened is not right or appropriate.

Effect of current social values especially in times of economic and social stress

Current social values suggest that a person's worth is measured according to intelligence, competency, productivity and economic wealth. These values are leading to a greater indifference to, and rejection of, marginalised populations. As a result, social and economic stress is posing a greater danger nowadays to vulnerable and powerless people. On this basis, educational inclusion for vulnerable people will be more, rather than less needed in the future.

Importance of inclusion in education

For students with disability, inclusive education provides:

- The most stimulating developmental opportunities;
- The most effective safeguard against their marginalisation and exclusion.

For students without disability, inclusive education provides:

- the most effective way to learn values of tolerance and the celebration of diversity;
- the most effective way to learn the skills of leadership, communication and being team players.

For society:

> *"Regular schools with inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all".* [1]

[1] UNESCO, Salamanca Statement Article 2.

Segregation and congregation in education

The history of education for students with disability in NSW parallels that of the USA and Canada. Prior to the 1950s, students with intellectual disability were considered to be uneducable and the state made no provision. Parents banded together to create special schools to prove to government and the community what they already knew; that of course all children and young people can learn.

In 1957, the Wyndham Report recommended the establishment of *special schools for special children.* Wyndham was not referring to the uneducable students for whom the state made no provision but rather students who *"should not be left in the ordinary class to impede the progress of more able children and to embarrass the class teacher".*[2] Wyndham recommended the establishment of "*institutions for their care"*.

By 1974 there were 85 voluntary association schools for children with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities and it was not until the early 1980s that the State Government assumed responsibility for these schools.

Sobsey[3] puts the history of segregated special education programs into its social and political context. He argues that segregated classrooms and schools (providing the first opportunity for students with disability to receive any formalised education) developed for 3 reasons. Firstly, people perceived the needs of students with disability as being beyond what was currently available. Parent advocates feared questioning the segregated nature of provision fearing they would lose what they had gained. Secondly, the 'special' nature of special education suggested that unique training and resources would be required and administrative expedience suggested concentrating these at a few sites. Thirdly, the development of operant psychology had a significant influence on special education. It became associated with carefully controlled experimental design and the precise measurement of behaviour and thereby encouraged the creation of learning environments that were very different from existing classrooms. In order to apply the laboratory science of behaviourism to special education, it was necessary to model the special education classroom after the laboratory rather than the regular classroom. The highly controlled conditions that were considered to be necessary for teaching students with special needs were alien to and incompatible with regular classrooms.

"The results have been catastrophic for students of special education programs"[4] including conditioned lack of initiative, docility and very poor generalisation of skills in real environments where the skills would have the potential to be functional. These deficits of strong instructional control and compliance led special educators to try to create artificial conditions within

[2] McRae,D., *The integration/inclusion feasibility study,* June, 1996, p38
[3] Sobsey, D., *Integration outcomes: Theoretical models and empirical investigations,* Developmental Disability Bulletin, v21,n1, 1993
[4] Sobsey, *op cit*, p5

these segregated classrooms to make them resemble regular classrooms. *"The essential contradiction between imposed structure and natural learning opportunities seemed to elude all of us".*[5]

The difficulties of generalisation also led to a secondary problem. If students removed from the mainstream of society because of deficits in their learning were ever to return to the mainstream, they would be required to learn more than the students without learning problems and they would be required to learn faster. Each transition to a new environment adds a new set of demands for the individual.

For example, a child moving from a segregated to an integrated classroom after 3 years of school must demonstrate the ability to work in groups that the other students in the regular class require. The students have learnt these skills gradually over 3 years of experience, but the student coming from the special class who has not had those experiences is expected to learn the same skills in a matter of days or weeks. Thus we are expecting the student with a disability to learn faster than non disabled schoolmates, and considering them to be failures if they cannot do so. It can be seen that the longer a child is in a special environment, the less likely it is that the child will be able to successfully return to the natural environment.

Thus the special school was premised on the assumption that the differences between students were much greater than the commonalities and that efficiencies required the provision of 'special' education in a special place. So children were separated from the same aged peers of their community and congregated together with children of a wide age range, from a wide geographical area, the only commonality being a label of deficits.

As special schools began to recognise the need to make segregated settings resemble the regular class rather than a laboratory, the concept of support units took hold. A group of classes of students with disability were placed within the grounds of a regular school, usually in a specially constructed building at the edge of the playground and often fenced off from the rest of the school. This was supposed to overcome the problems of segregation. The students could share canteen and sporting facilities and if they behaved appropriately, could 'be integrated' for assembly, special days and sometimes art and library. As integration became popular, the Support Unit was perceived to have the additional advantage of proximity to regular classes for integration for appropriate subjects.

The Support Unit has remained a serious form of segregation and congregation of students with disability. Encapsulated as 'So near and yet so far', the devalued students are visible to the rest of the school community without any viable way to form real relationships. Integration into the regular class from Support Units remains at the invitation of the regular class teacher so many students spend years without 'being invited'. As full membership of their peer group at school is denied to them, their devalued status is confirmed.

[5] Sobsey *op cit*, p5

This report is premised on the assumption that ALL children should, indeed must, grow up together if we are ever to hope for a more inclusive society. The benefits of an inclusive education for students with disability are well documented. The impacts of economic rationalist assumptions have made us slow to recognize the benefits that typical children gain from inclusion.

While ever we continue to segregate children in their education, while ever we bus children to schools distant from their communities, we send the message to that community that this child is too different to belong. This child's 'special' needs outweigh their childhood status and we remove them from what they need most … the friendship and support of intimate relationships.

Wolfensberger comments that

> *"… strategically, there simply does not exist a better long term safeguard for the welfare of individuals with disability than a large number of intimate relationships between them and other citizens. Very few people seem to realize that valued people are virtually never segregated. The only times that valued people are segregated is when they segregate themselves in order to increase their own status and value"*.[6]

[6] McRae, D., *op cit*, p42

Integration

Trends in the US and UK

Slee and Cook[7] document the way in which the call to mainstream young people with disability gathered momentum. This was largely due to the struggle of parent groups challenging segregated schooling through the courts in the United States in the early 1970s. This was supported by a growing body of research[8] which highlighted the paradox that special schools and special programs actually restricted the academic and social development of the students for whom they were designed. This did not surprise many commentators who argued that special education was in fact developed to maintain uniformity in regular schools and hide their failures.[9]

Legislation was framed in the United States in 1975[10] to enable students with disability to be educated in the least restrictive environments. Whilst this represented a significant legislative development for parents and children, it by no means guaranteed integration. Decisions about what was considered the least restrictive environment and who was to be integrated were left in the hands of 'expert' professionals, drawn largely from those whose careers had been built in segregated provision and who still retained assumptions about disability as a characteristic of the defective individual.

In the United Kingdom, Mary Warnock's 1978 report, *Special Educational Needs,* determined that 20% of the British school population would have special educational needs. The Warnock Report deplored the stigma attached to special schooling. It recognised "special education needs" and suggested the abolition of statutory categories of handicap.

The broad idea of integration passed into British law in 1981. Importantly, Warnock recognized that the problem of integrating different students was not simply a question of supplying extra programs, personnel and resources to meet their needs. It was a question of creating a culture in schools that was more inclusive and enabling so that schools could respond to the needs of all comers. Addressing the culture of the school was to have to wait until discussion of inclusion in NSW.

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[7] Slee, R & Cook, S., *Disabling or Enabling?* Youth Studies Australia, Autumn, 1993

[8] Salend, S., "Factors contributing to successful mainstreaming programs", *Exceptional Children,* N50, p409-415; 1984; Dessent, T., "The paradox of the special school" in Baker, D., & Bovair, K. (ed) *Making the special schools ordinary* v1, The Falmer Press, London, 1989; Gartner, A & Lipsky, D., "Beyond special education: Toward a quality system for all students, *Harvard Educational Review,* v57,n43, p367-395; Ainscow, M.,(ed) *Effective schools for al* , David Fulton Publishers, London, 1991.

[9] Barton, L., *The politics of special education need,* The Falmer Press, Lewes, 1987; Lewis, J., "Integration in Victorian schools: radical social policy or old wine?" in Slee, R., (ed) *Is there a desk with my name on it;The politics of integration..* The Flamer Press, London, 1993; Skrtic,T., "The special education paradox: Equity as the way to excellence", *Harvard Educational Review*, v61, n2, p148-206

[10] Public Law 94-142

Integration in practice

Under the process of integration, students with disability who are able to 'fit in' to the regular class are permitted to do so. As Slee comments,

> *"The problem for the school is one of working out how to fit different kids in with the minimum of disruption… The research imperative is the normalisation of difference by stabilizing the newcomer in an environment that provides a buffer to enable schools to remain the same"*[11]

Whilst integration represents a positive step from segregation, its basic assumptions are built on a philosophy of moral worthiness including:

- That the regular environment is not the natural environment for children who are different;
- That some children who are different will be allowed to participate with their peers but they must earn that privilege;
- That many children are not worthy to learn with their peers;
- That any question of adjustment must fall to the child who is different – their worthiness to participate is judged by the extent to which they can fit in with the system as is;
- The professional is the best person to make a judgement as to the child's worthiness to learn with their peers.

In attempting to clarify the differences between integration and inclusion, Loreman draws the distinction as

> *"… integration involves coming from the outside. Integration programs aim to … help a child to fit into a pre existing model of schooling. Inclusion differs in that it assumes that children are a part of the regular school system from the start."* [12]

One of the most obvious implications of the concept of integration compared to inclusion relates to the question of 'who belongs'. When a student is required to fit the system as is, it is only students with mild disability who are considered. In addition, the economic rationalist assumptions of our society push an increasing number of students outside the realm of belonging.[13] It is only with an inclusive orientation that ALL students 'belong'.

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[11] Slee, R. S*ocial justice and the changing directions in educational research: the case of inclusive education,* International Journal of Inclusive Education, v5, n2-3, April-September, 2001, p173.

[12] Loreman, T., *Integration: Coming from the Outside,* Interaction, v13, n1, 1999, p21

[13] Enrolment statistics indicate a doubling of the number of students with special education needs in the past decade. See p 37 of this submission.

Inclusion

Wills and Jackson[14] reflect that across the centuries of their existence, our educational systems have mirrored the culture's struggle as it works through its biases. Inclusion has been central to addressing these.

The civil rights movement in the United States confirmed that 'separate but equal' was inherently discriminatory and that the forced segregation of students by colour reinforced devalued attitudes and second rate practices for a significant proportion of the population.

As western culture began to acknowledge and respect the diverse roles of women, education responded by abandoning some of its practices, for example, of streaming young girls away from math and sciences.

More recently as a society, Australia has begun to embrace people from different cultural backgrounds and indigenous people as an essential fabric of the nation. Education systems have responded by beginning to include aboriginal studies and multiculturalism in the educational milieu. Whilst we have a distance yet to go, the historical pattern is clear, we are a nation of diversity and therefore our education system must reflect this in its practices as well as in its teachings.

Children with disability are continuing to be disadvantaged by the vision of 'separate but equal' in educational provision. The recognition of the inherent inequality of separate provision leads us to seek to pull down the barriers that have prevented children with identified disability from learning together with their peers.

In 1994, UNESCO described inclusion as:

> *"…a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children."*[15]

Inclusive education is concerned with providing appropriate responses to the broader spectrum of learning needs in formal and non formal educational settings. Here the difference between integration and inclusion is highlighted. Integration is a marginal theme addressing the way in which some learners can be integrated in the mainstream education. Inclusive education, on the other hand is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems

[14] Wills, D & Jackson, B., *Inclusion, much more than 'being there'* Interaction, v10, n2, 1996
[15] UNESCO, *Overcoming exclusion through inclusive approaches in education: A Challenge and a Vision,* 2001

in order to respond to the diversity of learners. It aims to enable both teachers and learners to feel comfortable with diversity and to see it as a challenge and enrichment in the learning environment, rather than a problem.

Wills and Jackson describe inclusion as having 3 components:

1. Physical inclusion

Physical inclusion means attending the local neighbourhood school, playing in the same playground, being in the same classrooms as well as having access to opportunities offered by the school at the same time as same aged peers without disability.

If a child is not present, then clearly he/she cannot be included. Unfortunately the landscape of our typical schools is such that even minor mobility or self care issues can play havoc with just being there. For example, even though the *Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992 (DDA) came into effect in 1993, the Building Code of Australia, the main document of reference as to how buildings and its services are to be constructed, "*does not meet the requirements of the DDA"*[16]. Thus issues of mobility and personal care can lead to exclusion from the local neighbourhood school.

2. Social Inclusion

Whilst physical presence of children in regular classrooms is a prerequisite to social inclusion, the personal and social welcoming of children within the social milieu of the school is a vital part of school life.

One can be rejected and lonely even in a crowded classroom as many children will know. Recommending segregation to prevent this sort of rejection, however, is clearly illogical. Such a position fails to recognize that the social history of people with disability is profoundly one of being rejected and fails to recognize that the only long term adaptive response to this rejection is the nurturing of acceptance and welcoming by the next generation. Both the 'place and pray' and the 'wrap in cotton wool' strategies loose touch with the complexity of human interaction.

Social inclusion involves policies and practices to promote a welcoming social environment for ALL students including promoting personal friendships, caring for one another, discouraging and addressing teasing and all other forms of social isolation of students[17].

3. Curricular inclusion

Curricular inclusion is the involvement of the student in the regular curriculum of the school. Of all the aspects of inclusion, this is probably the hardest and most controversial. It is increasingly being recognized that every child is

[16] Australian Building Code Board, Minutes of Board Meeting July 1996, p4.
[17] National Council on Intellectual Disability, *Education for all, UNESCO Report Card on inclusive education in Australia,* January, 2001. p15

special, with individual skills and needs and that this has to be addressed by the teacher. The child with the disability highlights this issue for all children.

Factors that promote curricular inclusion include:

- Whole school policies and practices that promote high expectations for all learners;
- Detailed knowledge of each student's skill in each subject;
- Grouping practices that capture positive image, skill transfer and make extensive use of positive modeling;
- The sophisticated use of aide and specialist resources to create a seamless interface between specialist and regular class processes [18].

Why inclusion is important

It is generally agreed that the development of attitudes is an important part of education. It thus becomes critical that we declare which attitudes our society wishes to develop. This issue lies at the core of our discussion of inclusion of children with significant disability in the regular class of the local neighbourhood school:

> *"…it is impossible to teach positive attitudes about people with disability if they are not an integral part of our daily childhood experiences"[19].*

The benefits of inclusion to the child with disability are annotated in the wealth of literature documented in this submission. In brief, the research demonstrates that inclusion provides more opportunities for a child's knowledge and skills to develop. It provides learning in real environments that enable students with disability to learn real content. In the regular class, everyone's expectations of the child are higher. There are more opportunities to learn and practice age appropriate skills and to have typical age appropriate experiences. Segregated and congregated arrangements by their very nature often teach maladaptive behaviour. The child is caught into 'needing' special environments.

The inclusion of the child with disability in the regular class reduces the motivation of the parents and siblings to feel ashamed, to deny the person's existence or their relationship with the person. It helps to embed the child in the family and the family in their local community.

With proper modeling, interpretations and support, the inclusion of children with disability gentles their peers and some of the adults around them. Schooling is a strong socializing institution. Our first experiences with children with disability will powerfully shape our tolerance to difference, especially when these experiences are positively interpreted by parents and teachers.

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[18] National Council on Intellectual Disability, *op cit,* p16

[19] Wills, D., *Including children who challenge us most,* A summary of recommendations from a forum auspiced by Commonwealth Disability Services Advisory Committee of Western Australia, held 12-13 June, 1993, Freemantle, WA

There are educational benefits of inclusion way beyond benefits experienced by students with disability. Students without disability learn tolerance, respect and appreciation for people who are different. In a recent study by the Northcott Society[20], children who had a child with disability in their class had more informed and more positive attitudes to students with disability than children who had no first hand experience.

In addition, education is much more than a range of academic competencies. Employers now and in the future are looking for employees with skills in working with people, they are looking for leaders and team players and the experience of learning together with students with a range of challenges provides a learning environment that is rich with opportunities to develop these competencies.

There are many risks to children with disability when they are educated away from the regular class. Wills[21] documents these risks as:

- The risk to the development of their full potential since the teachers and others will have low expectations.[22] When the child is known to have an impairment, our dominant paradigm is often one of 'deficit fixing' or if not fixable, one of 'chronic management';

- The risk of being cast into low social status– historically children and adults with disability have been thought of as variously non human, menaces, a waste, a vegetable, objects of ridicule, to be pitied, a burden, eternal children, sick or diseased (thus to be avoided as if contagious);

- The risk of being labeled by their difference;

- The risk of rejection;

- The risk of being distanced from typical valued community, family and neighbourhood. Distancing is usually done through segregation and almost always through congregation with others who are devalued. This usually involves having one's life 'streamlined' into lifelong formal human services;

- The risk of being identified as one of a devalued group, possibly losing all individuality. The grouping of children with disability together puts them at high risk of carrying all the historical (mostly unconscious) bad judgements about the group;

[20] unpublished report. For further information contact Sue Brown at Northcott Society.
[21] Wills, *op cit,* p23
[22] Wills, *op cit* p23 draws on his experience in conducting workshops for human service personnel that few participants are ever able to list the strengths, gifts or special talents of their clients.

- The risk of losing freedoms and rights others in the group enjoy including opportunities for freely given relationships with children without disability.

Inclusion and the misuse of language

> *"The absence of a language for inclusive education that stipulates its vocabulary and grammar increases the risk for political misappropriation. Traditional special educators demonstrate a remarkable resilience through linguistic dexterity. While they use a contemporary lexicon of inclusion, the cosmetic amendments to practices and procedures reflect assumptions about pathological defect and normality based upon a disposition of calibration and exclusion."*[23]

In NSW the misappropriation of language has gone even further. Inclusion has nothing to do with being a member of the regular class of the local neighbourhood school. In NSW, special schools and support units have been dressed up as inclusive when

> *"… each of these settings provide students with relevant educational programs and access to specialized support services in an inclusive school environment which demonstrates a readiness to accept diversity among its members. An inclusive school therefore, is measured by the degree to which each and every student in it is provided for and is successfully achieving, rather than by its type or category."*[24]

Inclusion is confused with effectiveness.

The attached articles (appendices 2 & 3) by Sobseyand Epstein-Frisch, document the findings of research on the question of integrated versus segregated education. It is important to note that much of the empirical literature uses the terms integration and inclusion interchangeably.

[23] Slee,2001, *op cit,* p167
[24] NSW Department of Education and Training, *Learning Together: A discussion paper for school communities,* 1999.

Special schools and the question of choice

The argument for special schools and classes for students with disability builds on the view of separate but equal – in a smaller, more controlled environment, students with disability are believed to benefit from a greater concentration of education. Supporters of segregation (whether in education, accommodation, employment or support) construct a continuum of provision in which the highest need is translated into the greatest restriction of freedom and opportunity.

The continuum is generally conceptualised as a straight line running from "most restrictive" to "least restrictive" placement. At the most restrictive end of the continuum stand segregated facilities. At the "least restrictive" end stand normal settings. The assumption is that people with the most severe disability will be served at the most restrictive end. As people acquire more skills, they are expected to move from the most to the least restrictive placements.

The continuum is flawed

The concept of continuum is fundamentally flawed. It confuses services/facilities with needs. For students with high support needs the continuum concept creates the most serious problems:

- Students with severe disabilities always end up congregated at the most restrictive end of the continuum. As long as services are conceptualised in terms of a continuum, the most vulnerable will always end up at the most restrictive end.

- The most restrictive placements do not give students the opportunities to learn the skills necessary to learn in the least restrictive placements. The skills necessary to function in a world of people of mixed abilities cannot be taught in a segregated setting with only other students with disability. The continuum model leaves students spending their whole school lives "getting ready" for something that isn't going to happen.

- There are always bottlenecks in the continuum. The continuum concept implies that people can move easily from one placement to the next whereas in fact, movement does not depend on people's skills; it depends on the availability of services.

- Services do not need to be restrictive. The continuum confuses the issue of restrictiveness (presumably of human rights) with intensity of services (needs). Certainly, some people need intensive supports and services. This does not relate to their rights and does not need to relate to a particular setting.

- The continuum emphasises facilities not supports. Our traditional response to newly perceived needs is to build a building. As a field we have been very successful at constructing facilities, first large ones and now smaller ones. We haven't been nearly as successful in meeting

people's needs. *"Why is it that people with severe disabilities have to live in facilities and the rest of us get to live in homes?"* [25]

In fact special schools were not developed by Government as a positive action for the benefit of students with disability. They were developed by parents when the state believed that it had no role in educating children considered to be uneducable and then by Government as a method to evict students who "*should not be left in the ordinary class to impede the progress of more able children and to embarrass the class teacher."*[26]

Choice

Those who argue in favour of SSPs and support classes argue that their existence provides parents with choice of placement. Choice, however, assumes having a range of valued options from which to choose in the first place.

For the majority of Australians, making a choice is dependent on issues of cost and circumstance. But for devalued people such as people with disability, the only options are those considered by valued citizens to be the last resort.

In education, options from which most people choose include independent, religious or public school systems. Choice will depend to a significant degree on the personal values of the family and on finances. All the above options mean that the child will be at school with a wide and diverse range of students who function at different levels and in different ways.

When parents who have a child who has a disability start looking for schools, these same options are not available. Special school and classes continue to be the main option on offer for a child with high support needs. So whilst the Department of Education argues that a variety of settings provides choice, in fact it is used to channel categories of students into a single setting.

In 1996 McRae recognized that the choices facing families in NSW were singularly unequal.

> *"If they choose an SSP or some support class, enrolment is virtually automatic, staffing resources are guaranteed over time at a consistent level, and specialized equipment and materials can be found on site. Access is generally available to therapy services if they require.*
>
> *If they choose an integrated placement in a neighbourhood school, enrolment has to be negotiated and may be refused, and resources are limited by a capped funding procedures and must be sought every 6 months, carrying an implication that they may*

[25] Taylor, S., Racino,J., Knoll,J. & Lutfiyya, Z.,*The non restrictive environment,* 1987
[26] Wyndham Report as reported in McRae, *op cit,* p38

decline over time. Specialised equipment and materials must be located and paid for."[27]

Whilst the implementation of the McRae Report has gone some way to equalising the options through funding, there have been NO substantial steps to address the cultural and value perspectives presented by many Principals and District Office personnel. The inclusive option in the regular class continues to require substantial skills and tenacity on the part of parents as they battle the prejudice, ignorance and lack of responsiveness of many local schools.

The NSW Department of Education states it is moving toward parent choice of placement on a balanced and informed basis. The reality is that we are in an environment in which educational bureaucrats retain their authority, often providing to parents only the information that they believe is suitable for the family.

A significant proportion of families of children with disability have had no experience of options other than segregation. The current generation of parents went to school without peers with disability. In fact, prior to the 1990s almost all children and young people with disability were bused to schools far distant, both physically and emotionally from their communities. The message was loud and clear that children with disability did not belong.

Inclusion is presented as an uncertain option, adding to the vulnerability of families. Families are deceived that the special school is a place to get ready for the rough and tumble of the regular class. The sad fact is, however, the longer a child spends in a segregated setting, the less likely he/she is to return to the inclusive setting.

[27] McRae, D., *op cit,* p98

Status report: where are we up to?

In the last 3 years, there has been a number of key administrative changes that have facilitated the increased enrolment of students in the regular class. These include:

Improved funding

In line with the McRae recommendation, a new form of resource support for students with disability in the regular class has been introduced. This resource is:

- Targeted to individual students;
- Transferable with the student;
- Allocated according to a common procedure;
- Based on the student's support needs in an educational setting;
- Guaranteed on that basis and indexed to cost increases;
- Controlled through an eligibility requirement;
- Able to be deployed flexibly.

The improved funding has made a most significant change in the opportunity for students with high support needs to be included. The support is provided on a maintenance basis so that students no longer compete with one another from the previously capped pool of resources.

HOWEVER

Whilst departmental guidelines encourage flexible use of targeted resources, in most schools the resource is translated in teachers' aide time. Without doubt, teachers' aide time is an important component of support. The concern, however, is that it may be seen as a substitute for the upgrading of the knowledge and skills of teachers and school leaders in planning and implementing quality practices for teaching and learning in a mixed ability classroom.

A move away from placement on the basis of categorization of disability

Resources for individual students are determined through what, in principle, is a relatively student and parent friendly planning process once eligibility is confirmed.

HOWEVER

A major area that continues to be in dispute is the use of IQ assessment as the major method of confirming intellectual disability. IQ assessment has long been questioned, having been based upon the experiences of white middle class students. Its use on students with disability is demeaning, arriving at a number to apply deficit based stereotypes which has the effect of permanently limiting the life opportunities of the person. Many parents in NSW (and worldwide) refuse to allow their child to be assessed in this way and this brings them into immediate conflict with the staff who, in principle, are supposed to facilitate their child's enrolment.

Some limited training and development

The Department developed the *Learning Together* package of discussion booklet and video to provide training and development for schools to move toward inclusive communities. The booklet and video were to be the first of a number of *Learning Together* resources.

HOWEVER

NO other resources however have been released. Because the 1993 Special Education Policy has never been revoked, the message provided in the training material is at best confusing and at worst, deceitful. *Learning Together* aims to demonstrate that all settings (regular class, support class and SSP) can be inclusive (see Section 'Inclusion and the misuse of language'). This is an example of the political misappropriation of the language of inclusion, aimed at supporting the continuation and validation of practices that are anathema to inclusion.

It is impossible to have a sensible discussion when language is so abused.

In addition, when the package was released in 1999, it was placed at the top of the Teachers' Federation list of banned activities and so was never introduced in many schools.

Priority issues to be addressed

Policy

The current Special Education Policy and Consolidated Enrolment Policy continue to provide significant barriers to the enrolment of many students in the regular class. These barriers include:

- The limiting condition placed on enrolment in the regular class of *"where this is possible and practicable and in the best interests of the child"*[28]*;*
- The belief that *"for some students, their best interests will be met by segregated provision"* [29](with best interest determined by education bureaucrats who are also responsible to ensure the viability of segregated provision);
- The inclusion of *"availability of support at alternate locations"*[30] as one of the criteria for determining enrolment in the regular class.

The Department is currently reviewing the Special Education Policy through a process originally led by a Principal of a Segregated Special School (SSP) with NO policy experience. Such as process is viewed as extremely flawed by most groups representing students with disability.

The continued existence of SSPs pose a significant threat to children with disability. It is well documented that the existence of segregated settings prompts "*the understandable belief that simply because they exist, support classes and SSPs are the appropriate placement for all students with disabilities"*[31] In addition, the fact that the funding for SSPs and support classes is by formula related to student categorization and numbers, means that the placement of individual students will be based on criteria other than the best interests of the student .

As increasing numbers of parents choose the regular class, the viability of other settings is threatened. In order to continue to offer parents 'choice' of a placement, District Office staff actively seek children for placement in SSPs and support units. Family Advocacy can put the Inquiry in direct contact with many parents who have been pressured by District Office staff to place their child in an SSP or support unit.

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[28] Department of School Education, *Special Education Policy*,p12
[29] *ibid,* p12
[30] Department of Educaiton and Training, *Enrolment of students in NSW Government schools: A summary and consideration of policy,* , p14-15
[31] McRae, D., *The integration/inclusion feasibility study, A summary of findings and recommendations,* June, 1996, p5

School culture

McRae recognised funding as 'the crux of the problem' and paid insufficient attention to issues of school culture. Whilst McRae certainly made a number of important recommendations around policy and training and development which could have had an impact on school culture, the approach he proposed still retained notions of "*the normalisation of difference by stabilising the newcomer in an environment that provides a buffer to enable schools to remain the same."*[32]

The implementation of the McRae recommendations have been substantially about integrating students with disability into the existing system rather than recommending changes to make the system more inclusive of all learners. Realistically, McRae took the approach that was pragmatic in its time – whole school reorganisation on the backs of students with disability would have been politically unsaleable and students with disability would have missed out once more.

A review as broad-based as the Vinson Inquiry, however, provides an opportunity to look at the broad questions of school effectiveness to make recommendations to reframe school organisation, teaching and curriculum in order to enable all students to learn together.

Significant training and development

Training and development provides one of the fundamental requirements to improve the inclusion of all students. The State Integration Reference Group approved a 5 year training and development plan directed at addressing the values, knowledge and skills of school leaders, teachers, teachers' aides special, and District and State Office personnel(see appendix 1).

Teacher training

One of the components of changing the system relates to the education of teachers. Teachers are ill prepared for the mixed ability classes that they will face.

In 1993, Virginia Chadwick, the then Minister for Education regulated that no teacher would be employed in NSW State schools without completion of a unit in special education in the undergraduate training. This led to the plethora of mandatory units in special education provided in all teacher training. Little thought seems to have gone into direction and content of these units as they embraced "*traditional formulations of disability as defective individual pathology separated from political, cultural and historical specificity*[33]*".*
In addition, any focus of inclusive education in teacher education is narrowed to the traditional constituency of special education and disability is disconnected from education policy in general. As Slee argues,

[32] Slee, R., *op cit,* 2001, p173
[33] Slee, R., *op cit,* 2001, p170

> "*Inclusive education is reduced to a default vocabulary for a 'Gray's Anatomy' conception of educational inclusion. Knowing these students and how we have developed techniques of dealing with them through special educational practices will make the regular teacher more inclusive. Herein lies a fundamental cultural flaw. Inclusive education is about ALL students…. This is not just an issue to be addressed in a special education community. While special educators are seldom likely to place issues of class, culture and ethnicity, sexuality, bilingualism, and so on, on the agenda for educational inclusion, there is a tendency amongst sociologists of education to pull up short before disabled students when arguing for the representation of diversity in schooling."*[34]

Thus in fact the thrust of teacher education in relation to students with additional learning needs in fact strengthens exclusion. In most pre-service teacher training, no attention is paid to the deficits of a system that leads to exclusion and failure. Continuing to deliver mandatory units in special education framed in this way is to continue to formalize exclusionary special education as the official knowledge of difference.

These issues were raised and documented by at least two organizations[35] in the Review of Teacher Education conducted by Gregor Ramsey in 1999 – 2000. Unfortunately, however, the issues were not even noted in the final report, *Quality Matters*[36].

[34] Slee, R., *op cit*, 2001, p170
[35] ACTION FOR MCRAE REPORT Coalition and the Australian Association of Special Education, NSW Chapter.
[36] Ramsey,G., *Quality Matters, Report of the Review of Teacher Education,* NSW, November, 2000.

Direction for the Vinson Inquiry

What are the barriers today to implementing the spirit of legislation and policy?

How can we overcome the barriers facing our schools in order to meet the challenges of diversity?

How can teachers best be supported to respond to the diversity of learners within any class?

The major barrier to implementing the spirit of legislation and policy is the culture that not everyone belongs. When this is the fundamental orientation, those students deemed worthy of participating in this exclusive education must fit into the pre existing system with a minimum of disruption. Successful integration becomes a technical matter of acquiring more special services, resources and personnel and placing them with special students in the regular school.

This paper has argued that the spirit of legislation and policy is served by inclusive education which

> *"…requires the interrogation and debunking of traditional attitudes, ideologies and expertise which label students with disabilities as defective. …nclusion is a political concern which addresses the issues of who belongs and who does not belong, and how we might reframe our curriculum, our ways of teaching and our school organization in order to enable all students to learn together."*[37]

Inclusive education provides far more than just the implementation of the spirit of legislation and policy. Indeed,

> *"Mainstream 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. Moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system."*[38]

The Special Education Policy and the Enrolment Policy are administrative representations of a culture built on the assumption that not every student belongs.

[37] Slee, R & Cook, S., *op cit,* p36, 1993

[38] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Recommendations: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education,* 2001, p60

Sapon Shevin describes full inclusion as a disclosing tablet.[39]

> *"Attempting to integrate students with significant educational and behavioural challenges tells us a lot about the ways in which our schools are unimaginative, under resourced, unresponsive and simply inadequate. Full inclusion did not create these problems, but it shows us where the problems are. Full inclusion reveals the manner in which our educational system must grow and improve in order to meet the needs of all students."*[40]

Family Advocacy would like to see the Vinson Inquiry provide a forum in which there can be reasoned and rational discussion on inclusion, addressing the big picture issues of changing the culture, organization and structure of schools.

We urge the Inquiry to promote an understanding that:

- inclusion is about all students. It is not just an issue to be addressed in a special education community;
- inclusion provides benefits for all students;
- interests other than those of the student maintain some students in segregated settings;
- the question that must be addressed is what needs to happen to support schools to respond to the diversity of learners within any class.

Some of the specific, visible strategies that will assist the system to change include:

- changing the education policy to an inclusive education policy;
- providing significant training and development;
- providing effective support to schools and teachers premised on the fact that all children belong.

[39] Disclosing tablets are red pills given to children learning dental hygiene. The child chews the red pill after they have brushed and the red dye sticks to any areas that have been inadequately brushed, thus making it obvious where problems remain. They disclose areas that require further attention.

[40] Sapon Shevin, M., *Full inclusion as disclosing tablet: revealing the flaws in our present system ,*Theory into practice, v35,n1, Winter, 1996

How do we guarantee that all children in every school have an equal opportunity to learn and fully develop their capacities?

Family Advocacy believes that the most effective way to enable all children in all schools to have an equal opportunity to learn and develop their capacities is through:

- recognizing that current dysfunction comes from the pathology of schools, not the pathology of students;

- creating inclusive schools in which all children are welcomed through:

    - effective school leadership;
    - an authentic sense of community;
    - the creation of a climate that celebrates diversity;
    - genuine partnership with parents and students;
    - high expectations of all learners;
    - the use of research based strategies for teaching and learning;
    - teachers with values, knowledge and skills to teach the mixed ability classes;
    - an infrastructure that supports teachers and students and values ongoing learning.

We can only begin to ensure equal opportunities to learn and develop when we begin to question the pathology of schools that enable or disable students. Family Advocacy believes that unless we address issues of culture, organization and structure of schools, we will continue to increase the alienation of students and dysfunction of schools. A wealth of research supports the view that a fully inclusive education provides the best opportunity to enable all children in every school to have an equal opportunity to learn and fully develop their capacities.

The remainder of this section outlines some strategies that are associated with the development of inclusive schools.

1. Leadership

Educational leadership is perhaps the single most important ingredient in the development of inclusive schools. School leaders can have a most significant impact on school cultures, the extent to which education is seen as relevant to students and parents and the extent to which teachers feel themselves to be a part of a team undertaking a worthwhile job.

School leaders need to have an understanding of the values, concepts and practices that promote an inclusive school community and have skills in collaborative leadership including team building, planning and consultation.

2. An authentic school community

An authentic school community is one in which students, parents and staff feel ownership and share a joint commitment to a common mission. Effective schools research[41] indicates that a clear school mission developed through thoughtful planning by the full school community can lead to a joint commitment to philosophy, instructional goals, priorities and accountability and lay the ground work for genuine partnerships.

3. The creation of a climate that celebrates diversity

A school that recognizes and values the unique nature of each student will create an environment in which all students can learn. Valuing diversity is a pre requisite to developing learning activities that are relevant to the unique talents and needs of each child.

4. Genuine partnerships with students and parents

Parents want genuine partnerships that respect their expertise and choices. Genuine partnership requires the full sharing of information so all parties to the partnership are fully able to make decisions.

5. High expectations for all learners

In an inclusive school there is a climate of expectation in which the staff demonstrate that all students can learn and the staff also believe that they have the capability to help all students to achieve.

Research[42] indicates that students tend to learn as much (or as little) as their teachers expect. Teachers with high expectations for all students can structure and guide behaviour and can challenge students beyond that which students themselves believe they can do. Effective teachers are student centred, using the students own strengths, interests, goals and dreams as the beginning point for learning as they tap into the students' natural curiosity and desire to learn.

The research cited above indicates that the practice of placing students in low ability classes produces low expectations, poor self esteem and tends to perpetuate social inequities based on race and economic class.

[41] Lezotte, L., "School improvement base on the effective school research" in Lipsky, KD & Gartner,A., *Beyond separate education : quality education for all,* Paul Brookes, Baltimore, 1989;www.google.com/search?q+effective+schools provides a number of articles with useful overview of research.

[42] Benard, B., *Turning it around for all youth: from risk to resilience,* ERIC/CUE Digest no 126, Eric Clearinghouse on urban education, New York, 1997; Wang, M., *Fostering educational resilience in inner city schools,* Philadelphia PA, Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education, 1997; *What works: Research about teaching and learning,* 2nd edition. Washington DC, Dept of Education, 1987.

6. The use of research based instructional practices

For every student to learn we need instructional practices that are adapted to the individual learning needs of students and built on positive peer interaction.

7. Effective teachers

Effective teachers have the values, knowledge and skills to teach the mixed ability groups that exist in every classroom. One important understanding of an effective teacher is the recognition of the requirement for ongoing learning.

Teachers who can support high expectations for all learners have skills in research based teaching and learning processes, planning, developing, implementing, monitoring, modifying and evaluating curriculum, effective use of resources and support personnel, working in partnerships with parents and developing strategies to create a positive, inclusive classroom climate.[43]

Changes in pre-service training is essential to achieve these values, knowledge and skills in teachers.

8. An infrastructure that supports teachers

For teachers to be effective in teaching all children, they need specialist consultancy support, time to plan and modify curricula and the opportunity to have regular support and supervision with people skilled and experienced in inclusion.

[43] Australian Association of Special Education, NSW Branch, *Pre Service Training*, Position paper.

How do we ensure that the principles of social justice are guaranteed within the system and that public education strengthens the influence of these principles across society?

The fundamental principles of social justice in our society include:

- democracy
- equity
- equality of opportunity
- respect for difference
- inclusion

Education has a most critical role in political socialisation and facilitating active democratic citizenship. The responsibility of the state for education is most challenging: education has to take account of the diversity of cultural, linguistic and socio–economic backgrounds of students as well as the diversity of individual talents and needs. The challenge is to turn the diversity into a constructive contributory factor of mutual understanding between individuals and groups.

Any educational policy must be able to meet the challenges of pluralism. It must enable everyone to find their place in the community to which they primarily belong and at the same time be given the means to open up other communities. The International Commission of Education for the Twenty First Century focuses attention on the fact that education policies must be sufficiently diversified so as not to become another cause of social exclusion. Schools must foster the desire to live together.[44]

Specifically in the Australian context, the principles of social justice will be promoted when education is seen to provide a fair go for all in a way that respects people for who they are.

Value conflict

If education is to facilitate democratic citizenship for an inclusive society, it must seek to promote core values of inclusion, respect for diversity, equity and equality of opportunity. There is, however significant tension between these values and the values that underpin the actions of government promoting a competitive, economic rationalist system.

[44] UNESCO, *Learning: The treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty First Century,* Paris, 1996.

Conditions for effective democracy

Democracy provides one of the most important foundations in Australian society as we know it. In general terms, there would be universal support that education must direct its efforts to developing an informed citizenry who have a commitment to democratic principles.

Bernstein[45] identifies conditions and rights to build an effective democracy and these provide an underpinning for the principles of social justice. The conditions include: firstly that people must feel that they have a stake in society and secondly that people must enjoy confidence in the political arrangements, believing that these arrangements will enable them to realize their stake.

Bernstein identifies three inter-related rights that support these conditions, namely the right of individual enhancement which suggests the encouragement of critical understanding of the past and new possibilities for the future. This right ensures a condition of confidence. Secondly, the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally and finally the right of participation.

More people seem vulnerable to exclusion

The conditions for effective democracy appear far less clear today than they were 20 years ago. More and more people in our society do not feel they can realize their stake. They do not feel a confidence for the future. They do not feel socially, intellectually and culturally included and they do not feel that their participation is valued.

This can be seen, for example, in the alienation of youth who have a real sense that they will not 'realise their stake'. Their fears are of lives spent in unemployment or in unrewarding work with little control over their destiny. People with disability and their families also fear they will never 'realise their stake'. The significant increase in the number of students with special education needs may be understood as an increase in the number of people who the system has declared to be marginal and whose inclusion is conditional (e.g. dependent on a package of support).

The school system has always promoted exclusion

Vulnerability to exclusion is not new. Slee[46] argues that schools are and have always been reluctant when it comes to inclusion and that exclusion and 'othering' of young people through the forms and processes of education is endemic.[47] Certainly the context of education policy (markets, competition,

[45] Bernstein, B., *Pedagogy Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory research critique,* Taylor & Francis, London, 1996

[46] Slee, R., 2001, p172

[47] Ball, S., *Educational reform: A critical and post structural approach,* Buckingham Open University Press, 1994; Gerwitz S.,Ball, S. & Bowe, R., *Markets, choice and equity in education,* Buckingham Open University Press, 1995; Apple, M., *Cultural politics in*

unemployment) creates the conditions for exclusion that militate against an inclusive educational approach.

Slee argues that the inevitability of failure of the traditional organization of the education system was hidden by the market demand for unskilled labour and the segregation of special education. Past failure as a result of the narrow academic curriculum and restrictive pedagogy was interpreted as defects in the individual.

Today, the crisis in the unskilled labour market and the concomitant extension of schooling for increasing numbers of young people has witnessed a number of trends that reinforce the claim that schools are reluctant when it comes to inclusion. These include:

> *"the expansion and net widening of special educational provision within and outside regular schools. Exclusion has been formalized as a permanent feature of the educational landscape in co existence with discussion of inclusion. The struggle over the constitution of the curriculum continues amid panics over standards and measurable student outcomes. The panic over standards in literacy and numeracy has facilitated a re-articulation of equity policy as a generalized 'back-to-basic' movement.*
>
> *The operation of the state school sector as an educational marketplace to the mantra of competition and choice has privileged well resourced choosers who now have free reign to guarantee and reproduce their cultural, social and economic advantage (as best they can). … The assumption of an informed and or mobile community of parents is flawed"*[48].

Principles of social justice through inclusion

It has been argued that an ability to realize one's stake is a fundamental condition for democracy and in order to realize one's stake one must have the right to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally. In this context it can be argued that policies of inclusion in education provide an important step toward meeting the conditions of democracy and encouraging the promulgation of principles of social justice.

Reluctantly in the last decade, schools have extended notions of inclusion to children and young people with disability but have been keen to maintain the rigidity of the environment by normalising the difference of the child. The problem is conceived as "*how do we ensure the correct mix of resources, expertise and personnel support to facilitate the placement of the child*[49]

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education, New York Teachers' College Press, 1996; Whitty, *et al*, *Devolution and choice in education: The school, the state and the Market,* Buckingham Open University Press, 1998; Lauder, H & Hughes, D., *Trading futures: Why markets in education don't work,* Buckingham Open University Press, 1999 reported Slee, 2001, p172

[48] Slee, 2001, p173

[49] Slee, 2001, p173

This approach has not been satisfactory. Inclusion cannot mean forcing an increasingly diverse group of students to fit within existing structures. Disharmony, frustration and alienation can only result from such an approach.

Family Advocacy believes that the system must be reorganized to become more genuinely inclusive of all students. Fundamental assumptions about difference and the role of education must be placed on the table. Slee urges us to consider the pathology of schools rather than the pathology of individuals. This starts from an analysis of the current situation in terms of: Who is in? Who is out? How come? Who decides? Who benefits from this? Who loses? And inevitably, what are we going to do about it?

The principles of social justice through inclusion require the focus to change to the education system rather than the child.

The way forward

If we are to ensure that the principles of social justice are guaranteed within the system and that public education strengthens the influence of these principles across society, we must:

- deal with context – develop an understanding that disarray seen in schools is a product of much broader forces;
- recognize that if increasing number of students are seen as not belonging, it is a reflection of the system rather than the students;
- look to 'solutions' in changing the culture, organization and structure of schools;
- seek support from the Vinson Inquiry in addressing the pathology of schools not students. We seek strong recommendations about ways to build strong comprehensive schools that welcome ALL learners.

What has been the social and educational impact of State Government policies since 1988 regarding the structure of public education?

State Government policies since 1988 in relation to students with disability have grown out of the reluctant acknowledgement that students with disability could not be segregated permanently. The first moves away from segregated education in Australia occurred in Victoria.

Victoria

In the early 1980s, the Kirner Labor Government was significantly influenced by the Warnock Report in the UK and embraced the understanding that societies and their institutions may disable or enable. Kirner called for a public review of services for children with disabilities which was conducted in 1982. The results, published in *Integration in Victorian Education*[50] was unequivocal in affirming the right of all children to their place in the regular classroom. An organisational perspective was adopted to consider how the delivery of educational services can be changed in order to generate inclusive educational programs.

Slee describes the 1984 Victorian report as "*visionary, standing apart from all other investigations into special education around the world"* [51]*.* Implementing the vision was an altogether different question and the gap between vision and practice which emerged, had profound consequences for students.

Slee's commentary on the implementation of integration in Victoria is salutary.

> *"Despite the bold blue print embodied within the 1984 Integration Report, integration in practice rapidly degenerated into a struggle over resources, professional interest and bureaucratic procedure. This may be attributed to a number of factors, including the pervasive belief that successful integration was simply a technical matter of acquiring more special services, resources and personnel and placing them with special students in the regular school. Successful integration is far more. It requires the interrogation and debunking of traditional attitudes, ideologies and expertise which label students with disabilities as defective…*
>
> *Integration is a political concern which addresses the issues of who belongs and who does not belong, and how we might reframe our curriculum, our ways of teaching and our school organization in order to enable all students to learn together."*[52]

[50] Victorian Ministry of Education, *Integration in Victorian Education,* 1984
[51] Slee, R & Cook, S., *Disabling or Enabling?* Youth Studies Australia, Autumn, 1993
[52] Slee, R & Cook, S., *op cit,* p36, 1993

The first moves away from segregated education in Australia occurred in Victoria. State Government policies in the past 12 years have grown out of the reluctant acknowledgement that students with disabilities could not be segregated permanently.

NSW

Legislative mandate

In the 12 years between *Integration in Victorian Education* and the McRae Report in NSW, one international charter and four pieces of legislation were introduced or upgraded to underpin the right of students with disability to be educated in the regular class of the local neighbourhood school.

The UN Standard Rules for the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) recognized the principle of educational opportunities for persons with disabilities in integrated settings. The 'Salamanca Statement' and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in June, 1994, drew extensively on these Standard Rules. The Salamanca Statement concludes with

> "*Students with special educational needs must have access to mainstream schools which should accommodate them within a child centred pedagogy capable of meeting their needs."*[53]

The *Commonwealth Disability Services Act*, 1986, and the *NSW Disability Services Act*, 1993, promoted the concepts of integration and positive outcomes for people with disability. The *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992, and the *NSW Anti Discrimination Act*, 1977, made it unlawful to treat people with disability in a less favourable way when compared to people without disability.

Government reviews

Between 1980 and 1991, there were at least four NSW government reports addressing appropriate educational provision for students with disability. In fact, the current policy that *every child should be able to attend the regular neighbourhood school where this is possible and practicable and in the best interests of the child* dates to the Doherty Report[54] of 1982. The policy, whilst progressive for its time, has provided an insurmountable barrier for many students seeking enrolment in the regular class. The policy is clearly based on the premise that only students who can fit in to the pre existing system without adjustment are allowed.

[53] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *"Recommendations, National Inquiry into rural and remote education"*, May, 2000, p60

[54] Doherty Report, otherwise known as Working Party on a Plan for Special Education in NSW, May, 1982.

The integration program was evaluated in 1988 and again in 1989. Both evaluations indicated a strong level of support for the integration program and equally strong impressions of its success for students involved. The evaluations identified 2 issues for immediate attention: the adequacy and security of funding support and the need for additional professional development and consultancy support for teachers.

In 1991 Muir conducted *A Review of Key Issues in Integration* for the Department. This led to the Special Education Plan of 1989–92 which provided support for segregated classes and units (including for reading and language disability), post school pilot transition programs as well as a number of programs to increase support for students in the regular class.

The second strategy for 1993-97 had 4 outcome areas:

- "Prevention of learning failure and behaviour disorders";
- "Support mechanisms for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and behaviour disorders, with collaborative networked support across schools";
- Transition to Post School Options;
- "Teacher education" both pre-service and in-service.

> *"These two strategies express a similar trend which became more pronounced in the second. Additional resources were increasingly flexibly configured and they are focused on support rather than delivery. In other words, they were increasingly directed at help and support in regular settings for both teachers and students with disabilities."*[55]

Nevertheless, by 1996 Special Education Plan funding was less than 8% of the component of special education budget spent on staffing in support classes and SSPs.[56]

Parent action

By 1994, parents of children and young people with disability were angry. They had been buoyed by the *Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act*, 1992, and the Salamanca Statement, 1994 and were in contact with families in Victoria who had experienced inclusion for some time. Yet in NSW, the Special Education Policy was used as a brick wall to prevent most children with disability from being enrolled in the regular class.
Under the auspice of Family Advocacy, the *Kids Belong Together* campaign was launched in the lead up to the 1995 state election. Families from across NSW met with two thirds of the candidates for the State election. They were calling for a change in education policy.

[55] McRae,D., *Integration/Inclusion Feasibility Study,*1996, p40
[56] McRae, *op cit,* p40

Feasibility study

Instead of a change of policy, the newly elected Labor Government provided a feasibility study which when finalized was known as *The Integration/ Inclusion Feasibility Study* or the McRae Report for short.

McRae documented what parents had known for a long time. The process of integration had faltered despite

> *"… various pressures from changes in parents' attitudes and wishes; from levels of unmet demand; from significant rise in the number of students enrolled through this process and wide experience of fully integrated students in schools; from high levels of success within integration in the earlier years of schooling leading to even higher levels of parental expectation and demand; and from the nature of legislation and policy."*[57]

McRae believed that the key issue was to dismantle the structural barriers which remained over time to meet the intent of current legislation and policy. He saw the major structural barrier as inequity of opportunities in different settings caused by funding inequities. McRae reported

> *"The broad choices that confront parents are singularly unbalanced at present (1996). If they choose an SSP or some support class, enrolment is virtually automatic, staffing resources are guaranteed over time at a consistent level, and specialized equipment and materials can be found on site. Access is generally available to therapy services where they are required.*
>
> *If they choose an integrated placement in a neighbourhood school, enrolment has to be negotiated and may be refused, and resources are limited by a capped funding procedures and must be sought every 6 months, carrying an implication that they may decline over time. Specialised equipment and materials must be located and paid for. Access to therapy services, where they exist has to be established.*
>
> *These same factors are substantial disincentives for regular schools to accept students with disabilities. It is in fact quite remarkable that so many students are successfully integrated in regular classrooms in so many schools.*
>
> *The crux of the problem rests squarely on the current funding arrangements which are still primarily based on categorization by type and level of disability, poor proxies for educational need and decidedly blunt instruments for resource allocation. … There are*

[57] McRae, *oop cit,* p98

still fundamental splits between maintenance funded, initiative funded and integrating services leading to unresponsiveness to changes in level and location of demand.

There are other structural barriers. These include the distinctions, which are sometimes radical, between special and general education, prompting the understandable belief that simply because they exist, support classes and SSPs are the appropriate placement for students with disabilities."[58]

McRae recommended that it was time for change:

"A system was required that provides for

- *parent choice of placement on a balanced and informed basis,*
- *guaranteed resource support according to students' needs in an educational setting, and*
- *equitable distribution of resources regardless of location or setting."*[59]

What McRae recognised was the importance of funding. What he paid insufficient attention to were issues of culture. The approach still retained

"is one of working out how to fit different kids in with the minimum of disruption. (it is about) the normalisation of difference by stabilizing the newcomer in an environment that provides a buffer to enable schools to remain the same"[60]

Government action

The Government moved on the funding recommendations but has paid scant attention to addressing issues of policy and training and development which might have begun to address issues of culture.

[58] McRae, *oop cit,* p98
[59] McRae, D., *The Integration /Inclusion Feasibility Study; A summary of findings and recommendations,* p5
[60] Slee, R., *Social justice and the changing directions in educational research: the case of inclusive education,* International Journal of Inclusive Education, v5, n2-3, April – September, 2001, p173

Changes in membership of the regular class

As a result of the implementation of the McRae Report there have been significant shifts in the pattern of enrolment of students with special education needs as noted in the following 3 tables.

Table 1 – Enrolment of students with disabilities in support classes, SSPs and in integrated settings, PRIMARY.

Year	Students in support classes and SSPs	Students in government schools receiving special education support in integrated settings	TOTAL
1996/7	7,603	3,380	10,983
1997/8	7,341	4,106	11,447
1998/9	7,131	7,905	15,036
1999/00	7,096	8,313	15,409
2000/01	7,000	10,773	17,773
2001/02	6,600	11,060	17,660

Source: NSW State Budget Papers

Table 2 – Enrolment of students with disabilities in support classes, SSPs and in integrated settings, SECONDARY

Year	Students in support classes and SSPs	Students in government schools receiving special education support in integrated settings	TOTAL
1996/7	6,155	596	6,751
1997/8	6289	1,027	7,316
1998/9	8,265	3,995	12,260
1999/00	8,274	4,267	12,541
2000/01	8,804	4,077	12,881
2001/02	8,580	4,098	12,678

Source: NSW State Budget Papers

Table 3 – Enrolment of students with disabilities in support classes, SSPs and in integrated settings, TOTAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

Year	Students in support classes and SSPs	Students in government schools receiving special education support in integrated settings	TOTAL
1988	13,353	1,135	14,488
1990	14,060	1,983	16,043
1992	14,092	3,335	17,427
1994	14,500	4,478	18,978
1996	13,758	3,976	17,734
1997	13,630	5,133	18,763
1998	15,396	11,900	27,296
1999	15,370	12,580	27,950
2000/01	15,804	14,850	30,654
2001/02	15,180	15,158	30,338

Source: NSW State Budget Papers& D. McRae, *The Integration/Inclusion Feasibility Study*, Department of Education & Training, June, 1996., p23

These tables indicate two major developments.

Firstly, there is a significant increase in the number of students with special education needs who are integrated into the regular class. Secondly, there is an increase in the total number of students with special education needs.

These tables demonstrate a phenomenon similar to that which occurred in Victoria where the substantial increase in the numbers in the regular class have NOT been matched by a corresponding decrease in the proportion of students in support classes and SSPs.

Slee[61] makes sense of this data in terms of how societies create and expand categories of disability. He believes that Victoria created a new category of disabled students, 'integration' students, for whom funding is distributed by need. The increased labeling of students is not a value neutral activity.

> *"The attachment of a special or disability label has a number of impacts on those who interact with the labeled student. Calling someone 'socially- emotionally disturbed' is quite different from being called naughty or disruptive. A generalist classroom teacher*

[61] Slee, R & Cook, S., *op cit,* 1993, p36

knows that there are people who are specially trained and have consultancy positions to deal with this type of young person."[62].

This may lead the teacher to ask whether the class should 'put up' with the student in the classroom. This severely restricts the options and experiences of the labeled person. Effectively, such labeling narrows their definition of 'normality' and who has the right to a place in the regular classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, State Government policies since 1988 have recognized the concept of integration but until 1997, provided the most tepid support for the process.

The fact that the McRae Report has been administratively implemented rather than adopted at the policy level has had a most significant impact. It means that Government has addressed many of the financial issues but this has been at the cost of a 100% increase in labeling of new students with special educational needs. It is interesting that the McRae Report could not decide whether it was about integration or inclusion, using the terms synonymously throughout. In fact McRae is talking about integration, not inclusion. Whilst McRae indicated that the regular class could be available for all comers, he did not seek to 'change the system' to become inclusive of all learners. McRae packaged up support around the student to fit different kids in with minimum disruption.

[62] Slee, R & Cook, S., *op cit,* 1993, p37

How does the Australian society best respond to the needs of students with particular characteristics within the totality of provision?

> *"Mainstream 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. Moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost effectiveness of the entire education system."*[63]

Family Advocacy believes that an inclusive system is the only way to respond to the needs of students with particular characteristics within the totality of provision.

The paper has argued that the development of attitudes is a critical part of the process of education. In this context it becomes critically important for us to declare which attitudes it is we want society to develop. Family Advocacy believes that the values of the equal worth of all individuals, democracy, equity, equal opportunity and respect for diversity are the fundamental values that should be transmitted through our schools.

It is impossible to teach these values when significant minority groups are excluded from our schools because the message is so strongly contradicted by our practice. It is only possible to teach positive attitudes about people with disabilities if they are an integral part of our daily childhood experience, if they are our playmates, our school friends and our co-learners. Brown *et al* argue

> *"There is no better way to prepare those without disabilities to function responsibly in integrated environments and activities in adulthood than to have them grow up touching a natural proportion of students with disabilities in their schools and neighbourhoods".*[64]

The section on Inclusion discussed the importance of inclusion as well as outlining risks to all students when children with disability are excluded.

The section on Segregation discussed the flawed assumptions underpinning segregation. Segregated education was not set up for the benefit of students with disability but rather to maintain the uniformity of the regular education system. It is maintained to provide 'choice' for parents by the almost forced placement of some children in these settings.

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[63] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Recommendations: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education,* 2001, p60

[64] Brown, L., *The home school – why students with severe intellectual disabilities must attend the schools of their brothers, sisters, friends and neighbours,* TASH, v14, n1, p3, 1989

How do we get there?

Goninan[66] argues that it is hard to imagine a form of educational inclusion which would have the potential to maintain high quality educational outcomes for the students, without the costs. The key question becomes: Do we wait until there are adequate funds to 'properly' resource educational inclusion? The wait could be indefinite.

The high costs result from the operation of segregated settings at the same time the system provides opportunities for inclusion. It must be remembered however that the overwhelming majority of resources per head of student with disability continue to go to segregated settings[67].

Education of each individual student is a time limited opportunity to develop skills and to become a full member of our society. A delay of weeks, months or years does irreparable damage to the individual student. The only option is to move to an inclusive system supported by policy, effective support, curricula, training and development.

Family Advocacy has proposed to Government that it adopt an Inclusive Education Policy enabling all students to be welcomed and educated in the regular class of local schools.

Family Advocacy recommended to Government that this policy could be best implemented:

- by ensuring that all new enrolments were made in the regular class;

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[65] McRae, D., *A Summary of findings and recommendations,* 1996, p5

[66] Goninan, M., *Advocacy and inclusive education: an analysis of political forces affecting educational service delivery to students with disabilities,* Australian Disability Review, n2, 1995, p20

[67] This submission seeks to provide direction to further analysis in relation to the equity of resource allocation. The Special education budget for 2001/2 is $477.7 m of which $45m provides integration support to students in the regular class. Given that approximately 50% of students with special education need are now in the regular class, (note enrolment statistics p x) a blunt analysis would indicated that 9.4% of the special education budget supports 50% of the students with disabilities.

- by providing encouragement and support to enable all students currently in segregated placements to move overt time to the regular class with support.

APPENDIX 1 (Training and Development)

Integration Program Reference Group

Towards Inclusive Schools – a Training and Development Plan for NSW DET Schools

Goal

For all school personnel to have the values, knowledge and skills to effectively educate all students in their local area within a welcoming school environment.

Rationale

In NSW schools, there is a great deal of goodwill on the part of school leaders, teachers and support staff to meet the needs of students with disabilities who are enrolled in regular classes. In the past three years, there has been a significant increase in the funding available for these students. We now need to ensure that maximum educational outcomes are achieved for these students from this increase in funding.

Before the system can deliver on these outcomes the Department of Education and Training (DET), needs to be committed to developing positive inclusive school environments. DET's Disability Action Plan (DAP) acknowledges several barriers to an inclusive school culture that need to be overcome. These barriers are:

- That staff vary in their level of disability awareness (section 1)
- That students may not be participating in a full range of curriculum areas (section 3)
- That there may be fragmentation in the way support is delivered to students with disabilities because policies, procedures and advice may not be consistently interpreted.

To remove these barriers and effect change DET needs a protocol; that ensures all its policies and practices are inclusive. This should state that:

- All leadership courses have components on inclusive schooling
- Merit selection criteria include a demonstrated awareness of the needs of students with disabilities in the regular class
- All new teachers recruited by DET have an understanding of disability and the skills to teach inclusive classes
- Policy statements reflect and direct the change required in school culture.

Training and development is a strategy that means DET can meet its DAP targets and develop inclusive school culture. Systemic, high quality training and development initiatives, which support and reinforce the goodwill of school staff, have the potential to:

- change the culture of schools so that they are truly inclusive
- change leadership styles, and
- give school personnel the confidence and skills they need to ensure effective results for the full range of students in their classes.

To achieve this change, action needs to be taken in a number of areas.

1. Systematic training and development is required to improve practice and implement policy. A wide ranging program will be needed to provide support and development opportunities for teachers, teachers' aides, students, parents, school communities, district and state office personnel. This training and development should occur at individual and whole school level, through, district office support and through self-paced learning.

2. Targeted funding for this initiative is required from the Training and Development Directorate budget. Funds currently allocated to schools from the integration program reflect and meet the support needs of identified individual students and cannot be redirected to fund training and development in this area.

The following plan is a five year strategy. at the end if this document. Attachment 1 represents the first step for the 2002/2003 budget to build on current initiatives.

Key Objectives

1. School leaders will facilitate collaborative processes in order to develop inclusive school communities.

2. Classroom teachers will plan and implement effective classroom practices and programs for all students.

3. Teacher's aides special will participate as members of school teams, which provide effective support to students with disabilities in an inclusive manner.

4. District superintendents, CEOs school improvement, student services and equity coordinators, training and development coordinators, special education and guidance support staff, state office units and directorates will provide leadership and support to schools to ensure effective inclusive programs and practices are developed and implemented.

Key Objective 1

School leaders will facilitate collaborative processes in order to develop inclusive school communities.

Implications for Practice

School leaders will:

- ensure the development and effective operation of learning support teams and the development of individual learning support plans for students with disabilities
- lead effective school planning and liaison with parents and related professionals
- provide consultative, supportive leadership of the whole school community to ensure effective teaching and learning of the full range of students.

T&D Initiative

Outcomes	Actions/Strategies	Responsibility
Principals will have: ▪ an understanding of the concept of and practices that promote an inclusive school community ▪ the knowledge and skills to implement legislative and policy requirements ▪ skills in collaborative leadership, to ensure the development of an inclusive school community, including team building, planning, consultation ▪ awareness of support options and effective use of the range of available resources.	Develop district courses that are offered at least annually (that could include coursework, visiting successful schools and readings). Include a module on inclusive school cultures in all leadership training courses.	Training and Development Directorate with significant input from Special Education Operations and Disability and Learning Difficulties Units and practising school personnel.

Key Objective 2

Classroom teachers will plan and implement effective classroom practices and programs for all students.

Implications for Practice

Classroom teachers will provide for the needs of all students by:

- participating in learning support teams
- planning and implementing effective teaching strategies
- planning and developing effective assessment and evaluation processes
- working with support staff, parents and other agencies
- making the most effective use of allocated resources to ensure learning
- creating an inclusive class structure
- using a range of behaviour management strategies

T&D Initiative

Outcomes	Actions/Strategies	Responsibility
Teachers will have skills in: • research based teaching and learning processes • planning, developing, • implementing, • monitoring, modifying and evaluating curriculum • effective use of resources and support personnel • working in partnership with parents • developing strategies to create a positive and inclusive classroom climate	Develop district courses that are offered at least annually (that could include coursework, visiting successful classes and readings).	Training and Development Directorate with significant input from Special Education Operations and Disability and Learning Difficulties Units and practising school personnel.

Key Objective 3

Teachers' aides special will participate as members of school teams, which provide effective support to students with disabilities in an inclusive manner.

Implications for Practice

Teachers' aides, both casual and permanent, will:

- demonstrate skills in working as part of a collaborative, sometimes multidisciplinary team
- demonstrate skills in working with groups of students
- support the implementation of inclusive programs, under the direction of a teacher
- demonstrate skills in managing student behaviour
- work with class groups to support effective inclusive practice
- assist in monitoring student performance

T&D Initiative

Outcomes	Actions/Strategies	Responsibility
Teachers aides will have: ▪ knowledge and skills in implementing inclusive practice ▪ understanding of professional expectations and ethics in the context of this position ▪ knowledge and skills in working as part of a team.	Induction program for new employees offered each semester by the District Office. Flexible courses leading to accreditation, if required but with an option for non accreditation, if that is the choice of the participant. All TAs, including casual staff, should be supported to do the course.	Training and Development Directorate in consultation with state office special education units. Run at district or school level by district officers.

Key Objective 4

District superintendents, CEOs school improvement, student services and equity coordinators, training and development coordinators, special education and guidance support staff, state office units and directorates will provide leadership and support to schools to ensure effective inclusive programs and practices are developed and implemented.

Implications for Practice

State Office and District staff will:

- support change which leads to inclusive practice
- implement plans and strategies to facilitate and support an inclusive school system
- plan for the monitoring and reporting of effective practice
- support the implementation of training and development programs for school based staff

T&D Initiative

Outcomes	Actions/Strategies	Responsibility
State and District Office staff will have: ▪ knowledge of the characteristics of effective, inclusive schools. ▪ knowledge of DET obligations under legislation, policy documents and procedural guidelines ▪ knowledge and skills in the management of collaborative change at a system level	T&D for superintendents and school improvement officers in these procedures using a 'train-the-trainer' model.	Run by State office in 2001and then annually. Training then provided to school leaders.

APPENDIX 2 (Epstein-Frisch)

The Inclusion Debate :

What the Research Says

Belinda Epstein-Frisch

July, 1995

INTRODUCTION

It is good to see that the education of students with disabilities has received some attention in recent months. Much of the comment, however has been based on assertion and may have left readers and listeners in a polarised position.

The purpose of this article is to review recent literature on the topic of inclusion of students with high educational support needs in order to promote a more informed and collaborative debate on this vital subject.

The article will examine three of the many misconceptions that have been evident in the debate and will present research findings that have documented the beneficial effects of education in regular classes even for students with severe disabilities for whom adaptations and modification of the curriculum are needed.

MYTH: Students with developmental disabilities learn more in special classes.

A substantial body of research has documented the beneficial effects of education in the regular class for students with severe disabilities.

Wang, Anderson & Bram (1985) report the results of a massive meta-analysis involving 50 studies and approximately 3,400 students comparing integrated and segregated settings. The results show a **significant advantage in educational performance for students placed in integrated settings.** In addition, these results show that students with special needs spending 100% of their time in a regular classroom significantly outperformed their peers who were integrated on a part time basis.

Integrated education has been associated with such high priority student outcomes as **the acquisition of social and communication skills,** (Cole & Meyer, 1991; Kohler and Fowler, 1985; Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Brady et al, 1984; Breen, Haring, Pitts Conway & Gaylord Ross, 1985; Cole, 1986; Cole, Meyer, Vandercook, Mcquarter, 1986; Giangreco et al, 1993; Hunt, Alwell, Goetz & Sailor, 1990; Strain & Odom, 1986;) **the display of more positive affect** (Park & Goetz, 1985;) **increased achievement of IEP objectives** (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984; Wang & Baker, 1986; Hunt & Farron_Davis 1992), **greater levels of independence,**(Anderson & Farron-Davis, 1987; Freagon et al 1985;) **improved attitudes toward peers with severe disabilities** (Donaldson,1980; Fenrick & Peterson, 1986; Haring et al, 197; Sasso, Simpson & Novak, 1977; McHale & Simeonsson, 1980; Voeltz; 1980, 1982;) and **more positive parental expectations for their child's future,** (Anderson & Farron-Davis, 1987; Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989.)

So what is it about the regular class that leads students with severe disabilities to do better in integrated settings than their peers in segregated settings?

In an extensive study using 312 teachers and families from 5 states of the USA, the California Research Institute(1992) used the survey method to address this question. The CRI sought to identify the educational practices

associated with the highest levels of student achievement, peer acceptance and family expectation. Educational practices examined included degree of physical and social integration, state of the art educational strategies such as functional, generalised skill development, systematic data based programming, community based instruction, the use of the trans-disciplinary model for provision of ancillary services, and a range of principal and special education teacher related behaviours. The key factor identified as statistically associated with the highest student outcomes was the **extent to which the child participated in integrated settings and activities.** In other words, out of a group of what are considered to be educational "best practices", only one - the extent of integration - was strongly linked to each one of the high priority student outcome variables.

Thus the research seems to confirm that students with disabilities "do better" when included in the regular class. Many of the authors cited argue that the more positive outcomes from inclusion can be attributed to the fact that inclusion provides greater environmental relevance, more instructional time, more instructional trials, normalised expectations, greater availability of suitable models and the need for fewer educational transitions. (Sobsey, 1993, Wills, 1993 and Brown,1989)

MYTH: Having students with developmental disabilities in regular classrooms detracts from the education of other students.

A growing number of recent studies throw serious doubt on the veracity of this myth. There are:

1. **Studies that demonstrate that in inclusive settings there is an acceptance of the student with disabilities by classmates** that resembled those among other students. (Giangreco et al,1993; York et al,1990) Whilst the majority of students accepted the presence of the student with disabilities and were nonchalant about it, several of the students with disabilities had classmates without disabilities as "best buddies". (Evans, 1992; Kohler & Fowler,1985;Odom & Brown, 1993.)

2. Studies that show that students without disabilities do not have any adverse effect by the inclusion of students with disabilities, experiencing **no loss in instruction time** when students with severe disabilities were included (Hollowood,1995) and **no adverse effects on the academic results** of children without disabilities (Sharpe, 1994).

3. Studies that show that inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular class brings some positive benefits to the able bodied peers.
Students who participated in social interaction programs had **more positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities** (Kishi,1988), had an **increase in social status** (Sasso & Rude, 1987),had **enhanced self esteem and sense of responsibility** (Rogers,1993) **learned how to match their language to the ability of the kids with handicaps, took part in less disruptive behaviour and spent an equal amount of time working, playing and talking with their peers** (Strain,1983). Also, teenagers who socialise with their peers who have disabilities state that there are a number of benefits for them that come out ofthis participation (Murray,1987).

Thus the recent literature seems to confirm that inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular class is not detrimental to other students. Many studies in fact show a positive impact from inclusion.

MYTH: Teachers need a special education background to include students with developmental disabilities in the regular classroom.

Extensive writers point out that teaching methods typically adopted in special education are no different in essence from models of "good" teaching in general (Gow et al,1988; La Grange Dept of Special Education,1990; Schattman, 1991).

In fact it is argued that the development of specialised terminology in special education has served to alienate and disempower regular education teachers from the use of the effective teaching methods that are practised daily with all students (Gow 1988).

Giangreco studied the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms from the perspective of the teachers who experienced it. Teachers in this study shared a common initial experience that they typically described in negative terms and had the expectation that some one else was responsible for the student's education. Over 85% of the teachers reported experiencing varying degrees of change in their own expectations and behaviour toward the student with disabilities over a period of 12 months. Subsequent to these changes, teachers identified a variety of benefits to the student, classmates without disabilities and themselves.

The teachers in the study did not have much if any training to prepare them for the experience of having a student with severe disabilities in their class. Whereas preparatory training may be beneficial, the research suggests that the direct experience of working with the child on an ongoing basis was a critical factor in the transformation of teachers and episodic training is unlikely to simulate this experience.

The results found by Giangreco are echoed elsewhere (Horner,1992) with teachers feeling themselves unprepared for the inclusion of students with severe disabilities and yet showing interest in opportunities to improve their capacity to support these challenging students rather than in strategies for removing them.

The National Survey on Inclusive Education in the USA in 1994 found that there are numerous models of successful inclusive education in terms of differing roles of teachers. **The key factors included the use of special education staff to resource the regular education teacher with flexible planning time, systematic staff development and supports for staff and students.**

Experience is showing that a special education background is not a prerequisite to having a student with a disability included in your class. The effective teaching methods practised daily by teachers will stand them in good stead when combined with appropriate support.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular class of the local neighbourhood school is neither new nor faddish. Research supports it as good educational practice.

We must examine schools as learning communities in which children (and adults) learn not just specified subject material but how to value, respond to and take responsiblity for people who are different. We must ask ourselves what lessons children learn when those who are different in some way must leave their classroom community to have their needs met.

Those who seek inclusion in education want meaningful dialogue based on information with individual teachers and teacher representatives.

A major issue for the teaching profession is obviously what constitutes appropriate support. It is clear from the above that many of the common assumptions about what type and level of support is appropriate may need to be reviewed. The research evidence shows clear benefits of inclusion. With this in mind it is time for a constructive discussion of the ways in which human and material resources can be best used for supporting teachers and students in local schools. Parents who seek inclusion for their children have made it very clear that they are committed to appropriate and adequate support for teachers.

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