

Submission to

REVIEW OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN NSW

INTRODUCTION

ACTION FOR MCRAE coalition is a broad based coalition of representing parents, service providers, advocacy groups, legal centres and professional and teaching organisations that came together in 1997 to seek the implementation of the McRae Report in NSW education.

Undergraduate and continuing education of teachers has been an issue about which the coalition has expressed considerable concern. ACTION FOR MCRAE welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Review.

1. CHANGE

1.1 CHANGES IN TEACHING AND THE WORK OF TEACHERS

This section will look at changes in the composition of the regular class of the local school and changes in expectations for all learners. It will conclude with observations about the struggles experienced by teachers in meeting these newer challenges.

A. The last decade there has been a dramatic change in the composition of the regular class of local primary schools.

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 govt 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

Source: 1999/2000 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 govt 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

Source: 1999/2000 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 govt 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

Source: 1999/2000 NSW State Budget Papers & D. McRae, *The Integration /Inclusion Feasibility Study*, Department of Education & Training, June, 1996. , p23)

These tables indicate three major developments.

Firstly, there is a significant increase in the number of students with special education needs who are integrated into the regular class. At primary level, over 50% of students with disabilities are currently enrolled and educated in the regular class. These changes in class membership are already in evidence in secondary schools where it is anticipated that there will be a commensurable rise in the proportion of students with disabilities in the regular class into the future.

Secondly, there is an increase in the total number of students with special education needs. This indicates an increase in the identification of special education needs in students who were already members of the regular class. These tend to be students with mild disabilities who in the past did not receive any funded support.

Finally, there has been almost a doubling of the number of students with special education needs staying in secondary schools.

B. Expectations for all learners.

There has been a change in expectation in the learning capacity of students with disabilities. Inclusion is no longer perceived to be limited to social goals for students. There is an expectation that all students can learn and that all students have a right to access and participation in the regular curriculum (with or without modification).

Teachers and school communities must possess the knowledge and skills to enable students of differing abilities to meet their educational goals within the context of the full curriculum.

C. Meeting the challenges

Inclusion National¹ has developed and implemented a Report Card on inclusive education in Australia for the international report on inclusive education being prepared by UNESCO.

The Report Card distinguished three aspects of inclusion; namely physical inclusion, social inclusion and developmental or curricular inclusion. Physical inclusion is defined as the practice by which a child with a disability is enrolled full time in the regular classroom and is accessing the regular curriculum (with or without modification). Social inclusion is defined as personal and social welcoming of children within the social milieu of the educational environment. Curricular or developmental inclusion is the involvement of the student in the regular curriculum of the class.

¹ *Inclusion National* is an emerging group of interested parents, citizens and professionals who are basically "*friends of an inclusive society*". Inclusion National formed at the 1999 conference of the National Council on Intellectual Disability in Melbourne.

The Report Card in NSW does not pretend to be a representative sample but provides important feedback on the views of consumers and professionals from disability organisations. The full Report Card is available on request.

The respondents believed that there had been an increase in the physical presence or physical inclusion of students with disabilities in NSW. This is reflected in the data presented in Tables 1-3.

The respondents however universally reported that social and developmental inclusion was poor. In other words, the students are physically present in regular classrooms but teachers are struggling to provide a welcoming environment in which all students feel valued and are struggling in modifying material so that all students are involved in a meaningful way in the regular curriculum .

If teacher education is to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to teach inclusive classrooms, teachers must be capable of working to develop:

- high expectations for all learners,
- detailed knowledge of each student's skill in each subject area,
- grouping practices that capture positive image as well as skill transfer,
- extensive use of positive modelling,
- sophisticated use of aide and specialist resources to create a seamless interface among specialist and regular class processes,
- welcoming enrolment, host classroom and whole school policies and practices that promote personal friendships,
- positive social environments that value caring for one another, discourage and address teasing and all forms of social isolation of students.

1.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

Over the last 5 years, the membership of classrooms has changed significantly. The bandwidth of skill has widened and with the newer members of the class have come a range of resources in specialist teacher and teacher aide time. Many teachers lack the knowledge, skills and experience to teach the mixed ability classes and to make most effective use of the additional resources that have come with the children.

It is the view of ACTION FOR MCRAE Coalition that the add on mandatory unit in special education is inadequate to prepare teachers for classes of today. In addition, when knowledge and skills related to teaching students with special education needs are provided in a separate "add on" unit, the notion of students with special education needs as added on optional students is confirmed.

It is the view of ACTION FOR MCRAE that teachers can only gain the requisite knowledge and skills if there is a significant re organisation of teacher education based on the premise that all classrooms have students of mixed ability. We recommend that the mandatory unit in special education be replaced / backed up by a change in ALL pedagogical courses to ensure that all pedagogy is based on the

premise of mixed ability classes and provides the knowledge and skills to teach inclusive classes of students of mixed abilities.

1.3. CAPABILITIES TEACHERS NEED TO MEET THE CHANGES AND CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

ACTION FOR MCRAE coalition supports the teacher competencies developed by the Australian Association of Special Education.

These include:

Awareness of issues in special education : teachers will be aware of historical and philosophical developments in program development, delivery of instruction and current policy and practices.

Assessment and evaluation: In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to develop, administer and evaluate curriculum based measures to plan individual programs, monitor student progress and evaluate instruction.

Curriculum and program design: In collaboration with a special educator, teachers will be able to adapt curriculum objectives and design an individualised education program that meets the identified needs of the student.

Instruction: Teachers will be able to plan and utilise effective instructional strategies to assist students achieve instructional objectives.

Classroom and behaviour management: Teachers will implement practices that result in maximum teaching time, high rates of task engagement, decrease disruptive behaviour and promote positive teacher/ student interaction.

Environmental adaptation: In collaboration with special educators and other personnel, teachers will be able to recommend and implement modifications to the classroom and school environment that assist students meet classroom and individual objectives and access the full range of school facilities.

Research based practice: Teachers will be able to critically evaluate and be able to justify their selection of instructional strategies in the light of empirical evidence provided by research.

Practicum and post graduate development: Teachers must learn to apply more general principles to specific situations. Coaching and mentoring have been shown to be most effective in assisting classroom teachers to use research based techniques. Such practical experience should be gained by working with trained and competent special educators.

In addition, ACTION FOR MCRAE believes that teachers must have competence in working as part of a team, in working in partnership with parents, in communication and negotiation skills.

Whilst AASE indicates that these are the teacher competencies resulting from the mandatory pre-service program, ACTION FOR MCRAE believes that this must be backed up with a consistent inclusive approach in all pedagogy.

3. EDUCATION PROGRAMS

3.1 EFFECTIVENESS OF CURRENT TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The Inclusion National Report Card strongly indicates that current teachers lack the knowledge and skills to effectively teach classes of students of mixed abilities.

Mandatory Unit in Special education.

Whilst the disability community applauded the decision to include a mandatory unit in special education in all undergraduate teacher education, the quality of the courses offered is extremely variable. Many courses spend significant time on non educational issues of medical aetiology underpinning a deficit model and provide little or no preparation for teaching mixed ability classes.

Many courses continue to operate from an individual pupil view which places the blame for educational failure on the student and deals with the failure by removal. The individual pupil view is based on the assumption a group of children can be identified who are special; these “special” children need special teaching in response to their problem; it is best to teach children with similar problems together and other children are “normal” and benefit from existing forms of schooling.

Effective schooling, on the other hand, seeks to understand children’s difficulties as they participate in school through a curriculum approach. This view enables schools to cater for a wider range of pupils including students who are traditionally excluded from the regular class. The approach assumes that any child may experience difficulties in schooling and that such difficulties can point to ways in which teaching can be improved. These improvements in teaching will lead to better learning conditions for all pupils. The curriculum approach recognises that support must be available as teachers attempt to develop their practice.

3.2 CHANGES NEEDED TO TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

ACTION FOR MCRAE recommends the following changes to teacher education programs to more effectively prepare teachers for schools of the future:

1. Change the assumptions that underpin teacher education in relation to:
 - class membership: that all classes have members who are of mixed ability.
 - ways in which schools respond to pupils experiencing difficulties in learning.

2. Overhaul the mandatory units in special education to ensure the development of an inclusive framework to provide competencies outlined above.

3. Overhaul all pedagogical and subject courses to develop an integrated knowledge of a continuum of effective assessment, programming and teaching skills.
4. Provide teachers with knowledge and skills to be effective communicators, working as partners with parents, as part of an education team.

3.3. STRATEGIES TO PRODUCE GRADUATES TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF TEACHING IN THE NEXT DECADE.

- Increase the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds and pre service experience.
- Provide opportunities for teachers and student teachers to meet with people with disabilities and understand the importance of inclusion in meeting their goals and aspirations.
- Provide opportunities to challenge existing values and attitudes.
- Provide more opportunities to gain experience in planning meaningful and enjoyable activities for a whole class with students of very mixed abilities.

4. BALANCE OF THEORY AND ON THE JOB PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES

It is the view of ACTION FOR MCRAE that student teachers need more practical experience BUT only if that practical experience demonstrates good teaching practice of inclusive classrooms. As good practice is only just emerging in this area, we believe that there is an important role for university supervisors and teacher mentors to supervise practice and to critique observed practice.

5. CONTINUING EDUCATION

Some of the areas that need to be addressed in post initial and continuing education programs include:

- Recognising the need to change teaching practice.
Teachers must be assisted to understand :
 - the impact of personal values and beliefs on teaching;
 - the nature of personal and professional change;
 - the nature of change in education;
 - barriers to change;
 - conditions for successful change;
 - strategies that are useful to promote purposeful change.
- Capacity to analyse existing classroom practice.
- Capacity of teachers as effective problem solvers.
- Core competencies for teaching mixed ability classes.

- Assisting school executive to develop and lead an inclusive school community.

Continuing education needs to be offered through a range of easily accessible modules that address changed practice.

6. TECHNOLOGY

Increasingly, the independence and learning of students with disabilities is facilitated by the use of technology. Whilst it is not expected that teachers will be experts on technology related to students with disabilities, teachers need to be familiar with and open and willing to learn about particular technology for particular students.