

Submission to Senate Enquiry into the Education of Students with Disability

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Introduction

I am writing this as a parent of a young child (5yo) with a disability. Already my child has faced discrimination by being denied access to the local state preschool.

It is my assumptions that:

- A child is required to attend school for formal education.
- Schools have an obligation to provide all children who attend with an education.
- Inherent in education is academic, physical, social and behavioral skills.
- A child's education and development is a joint responsibility between the school and the parent/s and both parties must work together to enable the child to grow and develop – academically, physically, socially and behaviorally.

It is my belief that, in relation to education, the two most crucial and urgent issues requiring immediate rectification for children with disabilities are:

1. *The need for a quality intensive early intervention program (education and therapy); and*
2. *Provision of inclusive education policies and procedures for all children, thus requiring the disassembly of segregated education units and centers.*

Terms of Reference

1(a) i)

In Queensland, the ascertainment process is used to attempt to measure the level of support (resources) a student with a disability requires. The child must be portrayed as disabled as possible in order to obtain maximum resources – a focus on deficiencies. This often results in the school and teacher/s having lower than reasonable expectations of the child. This model promotes and produces UNDER education of children with disabilities.

It is more likely a child will be educated to their full potential if the model for assessing needs was based on the child's abilities, interests and learning style and this was used to develop a child centered program. This model would suit all children, not just children with a disability, and could be applied in the class as a whole therefore reducing the element of 'difference'.

1(a) ii)

Early childhood assessments are too often inaccurate because they are conducted in unfamiliar environments with the child, and, too often 'standard tests' are applied to 'non standard' children. The test results do not give a true reflection of the child's abilities and needs. Inaccurate assessments lead to children being placed inappropriately in segregated environments.

Assessment of children, particularly young children, needs to be conducted in environments that are safe and familiar to them by persons who have taken time to establish rapport with the child.

1 (a) iii)

Children included in the 'groups' listed will most often be more vulnerable of becoming welfare dependant and rely heavily on Government support as adults.

It is necessary to investigate what options are available to enable children from multiple disadvantaged groups to access the education and support they need to participate in society (social, financial, employment, education, sport etc.) as adults.

1 (a) iv)

Early intervention programs in Queensland focus on segregation and overlook the individual needs and learning styles of the child. They rely heavily on grouping 'like' disabilities and therefore deny children the most wonderful learning experience available in early childhood – their peer group.

It is my opinion that money allocated to Early Intervention here in Queensland through both the Education Department and Family and Disability Services is poorly managed with unacceptably high levels used in the administration, planning and programming of these funds. There is also no coordination of the utilization of funds (resources) from different departments and organizations to put together a program to meet the child's needs.

There needs to be procedures developed to devise a coordinated 'case managed' approach to meet a child's needs. Recognition needs to be given to the fact that many families are the best people to manage the funds and purchase the resources their child needs (therefore reducing the waste on admin and management and providing consistent therapies and education for the child).

SEDU centers need to be abolished and the funds moved to mainstream preschools.

1 (a) v)

There is such a high use of funds in inappropriate areas eg segregation, administration, planning, programming and management etc.

I believe the need is to firstly examine how we can better use existing resources and when a better system of fund utilization is implemented then look at "Are more funds required?"

1 (a) vi)

There are lots of areas needing improvement and better coordination of resources.

Lets look at those who are doing a good job, try to find 'good practice', and use this as a basis for consultation to develop inclusive education for all children.

1 (a) vii)

It is my experience that some of the best teachers at providing inclusive education opportunities (and doing it well) are recent graduates. There are admittedly some teachers who have been in their career for many years who are able to embrace the diversity of classes and teach to accommodate this diversity.

Teachers need to go to contractual agreements to avoid the risk of them becoming complacent; after all they are influencing the generation that is the future of our country. Part of the contractual agreement will require them to be able to teach 'all' children in their classrooms - whatever diversity brings.

1 (a) viii)

Relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation needs to be non discriminatory and I believe this is not the case at present.

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