Towards inclusive education: A necessary process of transformation

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Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

Inclusive education involves valuing and facilitating the full participation and belonging of everyone in all aspects of our education communities and systems.
CHAPTER ONE

Towards inclusive education: An introduction
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Background and method

In 2013 Children and Young People with Disability Australia (then Children with Disability Australia) published an extensive systematic literature review examining the evidence base for inclusive education. That review was intended to provide a firm basis from which to inform research-based advocacy and policy development. In sum, the findings were that while it was clearly established that all people have the right to an inclusive education, and that when inclusive education occurs the outcomes are positive for everyone involved, there remained many ongoing barriers to the realisation of this right in the lived experience of students and families.

Current efforts towards inclusion are impeded by a lack of understanding of inclusive education and frequent misappropriation and co-opting of the term. Additional barriers include negative and discriminatory attitudes and practices, the lack of a clear and genuine national commitment to inclusive education, insufficient support to facilitate inclusive education, and inadequate education and professional development in inclusive education for teachers and other professionals.

Critical to addressing these barriers is recognising and disputing ableism at all levels of education systems and settings. Ableism, which is examined in detail in chapter five, is a term increasingly used to describe the process by which people are excluded and treated as ‘not one of us’. The term ‘ableism’ is used in the same way as ‘racism’ and ‘sexism’ to describe the process of negatively stereotyping individuals or groups on the basis of a perceived ‘difference’ and, often, discriminating based on such stereotypes at individual and systemic levels. Using the term ‘ableism’ creates a
space to enable the often-subconscious process of devaluing those of us who experience “disability” to be called out and held up to conscious scrutiny as a starting point for disestablishing ableism.

This review of the research, in keeping with all other existing reviews and meta-analyses dating back over many decades\textsuperscript{10}, reveals a consistent lack of evidence to suggest any benefit of segregated education. By contrast, a considerable body of research was identified demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education. Despite these well-known findings, which have been persistent for more than half a century, current research nationally and internationally shows that segregated education not only continues but is increasing.\textsuperscript{11}

Building on the research base for inclusive education outlined in the first edition, this second edition consists of an extensive systematic literature review. It examines evidence across six decades and incorporates more than 400 research papers, relevant treaties and reports, to further explore the existing barriers and the possibilities for addressing these to bring about the realisation of inclusive education.

It should be noted that there are many further pressing issues that are important to inclusive education that fall outside the scope of this present edition. However, this is not to suggest that these matters are unimportant. There are a number of gaps in the literature identified within, and further research is urgently needed to address these gaps.

The research that is examined within this report addresses the outcomes of inclusive education for all students. This includes students with a wide range of disability labels, including students labelled with ‘severe’, ‘profound’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’. Given the frequent misperception that the research evidence does not concern ‘some’ students, it is important to make it clear at the outset that this report addresses the evidence regarding students across the full range of labels. Inclusive education is about \textit{all} students, not only some.

It is also important from the outset to recognise the many students, families, teachers, educators, paraprofessional educators, principals, directors, education department staff and others who work tirelessly every day to support inclusive education. There are many challenges and raising the issues identified within the research should not be read as a criticism of individuals; rather, it is an attempt to draw to light important issues that require careful consideration if inclusive education is to become a reality in Australia.

\textbf{What has changed since we first did this work?}

In the time since the publication of the first edition in 2013, there have been a range of relevant inquiries and reports within Australia, along with a host of recommendations and a number of relevant policy changes. Additionally, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has produced \textit{General Comment 4 (GC4)}, which explains Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on Inclusive Education.\textsuperscript{12} The CRPD articulates the rights of people who experience disability and clearly states that these rights are not optional nor privileges. As outlined in chapter three, despite the frequent and ongoing confusion around the term, and loose interpretation and application\textsuperscript{13}, ‘inclusive education’ has been unambiguously defined in GC4. The advent of GC4 is one of many efforts towards bringing inclusive education to a reality in the time since the first edition. Nonetheless, it unfortunately remains the case that the right to a full and inclusive education is not afforded to many children and young people who experience disability, and serious and ongoing violations of the rights of children and young people continue.\textsuperscript{14} Given the positive impact of genuine inclusive education, this highlights the need for continued advocacy and policy change in this area.\textsuperscript{15}

The once radical notion of inclusive education has been so “tamed” and “domesticated” that “special” education is now often misrepresented as “inclusive education”.\textsuperscript{16} And yet, in a simultaneous contradiction, it seems that the lines between proponents of segregated and inclusive education have been, perhaps even more boldly, drawn in the sand. However, there is no equality in segregation. The myth of “separate but equal” was debunked through the civil rights movement in North America in the 1950s –
famously through successful litigation intended to end ‘racially’-based segregated education in Brown v Board of Education of Topeka (347 US 483, 1954). It is more than time to extend that recognition to all children and young people who experience disability, including all those constructed as disabled through disproportionate representation of people belonging to other minority groups within ‘special’ education. For example, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in special education.

Nearly six years on from the publication of the first edition, the research evidence brings us to the same overall conclusion: inclusive education has positive benefits for everyone. And yet, barriers continue to prevent its realisation for many children and young people throughout Australia and across the world. To bring about the promise of inclusive education requires substantial change. Inclusive education is not a process of relabelling past practices and systems. As Slee argues, “...inclusive education is a call for a reformulation of schooling wherein ‘special’ and ‘regular’ are jettisoned and the segregation of students with disabilities is seen as a relic of a bygone age”. The time for this change is upon us.

An overview of this report

There are many key considerations in understanding inclusive education and the evidence base supporting it. In this report some of the most pressing issues are explored in light of the existing research literature. While it is not possible in one volume to address all the critical issues involved in the realisation of inclusive education, the focus areas in this report are intended to provide a clear understanding of what inclusive education is and why it is important, and to explore key factors in realising the right to education for all.

In this chapter, I have provided a brief rationale and overview to set the context for this report. In chapter two I present the research evidence regarding the outcomes of inclusive education. In the subsequent chapters, I engage with some of the key barriers that are currently preventing the realisation of inclusive education. To do so, in chapter three I begin with an in-depth consideration of common myths and confusions, and address what inclusive education actually means. I then explore this further in chapter four, in light of the current illusions of inclusion and the impact of presenting segregation as inclusion. To address the key barriers to inclusion that are clearly identified within the research, conscious disestablishment of ableism is required. Consequently, in chapter five, I examine ableism in education and consider the implications in progressing towards genuine inclusion within and beyond education settings and systems. In chapter six I unpack the concepts of macro and micro-exclusion to support a deeper understanding of inclusion and exclusion in practice. Finally, in chapter seven, I draw together the research evidence to identify a series of policy recommendations and steps for moving forward towards the transformation required to bring about inclusive education in reality.

The report is developed sequentially, thus it works well to read from start to finish. However, each chapter is also presented in such a way as to enable it to be read independently. In this way it is my hope that you, the reader, can dip in and out as is most helpful to you at any given point in time. Inclusion is a journey; we never fully arrive as we can always become more inclusive. Bringing about genuine inclusive education is often challenging and takes commitment and ongoing efforts. At the same time, inclusion is lived out in everyday moments and, in that sense, is often easy and is also natural. Much like the ‘project’ of making a life out of our existence, engaging in the ‘project’ of inclusion requires starting from where we are now and moving forward, one step at a time. We can always be more inclusive, but we can also always find the ways in which we are, or are ready to be, inclusive right now. That is our starting point. From wherever you are starting, I hope you will find this report helpful in your journey towards inclusion.
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1. UN General Assembly, 2016
2. Ibid
3. Agbenyega & Klithong, 2014; Cologon, 2014a
4. Cologon, 2014b
5. Slee, 2001
6. Bevan-Brown, 2013; Cologon, 2014b; Lalvani, & Bacon, 2019
7. Cologon, 2013a
8. Ableism, which is examined in detail in chapter five, involves an ‘othering’ process through which a stigmatised ‘them’ is created in contrast to a superior ‘us’ through the construction of a ‘normal’ and valued person and an ‘inferior other’.
9. Cologon, & Thomas, 2014
10. For example, see: Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY), 2013; Calberg, & Kavale, 1980; Dunn, 1968; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Jackson, 2008; SWIFT Center, 2017; Wang, & Baker, 1985
11. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2017; Anderson, & Boyle, 2015; Graham, & Sweller, 2011; Guldberg, Parsons, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty, & Balfe, 2011; Shaw, 2017; Valle, Connor, Broderick, A. Bejoian, & Baglieri, 2011
12. UN General Assembly, 2016
13. D’Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018
16. D’Alessio, Grima-Farrell, & Cologon, 2018
17. Annamma, 2018; Coc & Kiru, 2018; Coutinho & Oswald, 2000; Graham, 2012; Hosp & Reschly, 2004
18. Graham, 2012
20. Slee, 2018a, p. 82
CHAPTER TWO

The outcomes of inclusive education
“Inclusive education can now be justified as an approach supported philosophically, in international declarations, and empirically through research on its efficacy.”\footnote{21}

In this chapter, I outline the evidence base on the outcomes of inclusive education. When considering these outcomes there are a number of challenges. Discriminatory attitudes and practices pose serious barriers to research into inclusive education. Many research studies, purporting to examine inclusive education, in reality explore practices of segregation and exclusion\footnote{22} (micro or macro\footnote{23}). For that reason, in reviewing the research in this chapter, terms like ‘mainstream education’ are used. In progressing inclusive education there is a strong need to move to genuine and full inclusive education, and for this to be reflected in all research. Additionally, as a consequence of a myriad of factors, education settings frequently engage in reactive responses to the enrolment of students who experience disability, rather than proactively in processes of transformation for inclusion of all students.\footnote{24} Despite these issues, a considerable and growing body of research evidence supports inclusive education.\footnote{25}

In addition to positive outcomes for social justice and sense of community and belonging, research provides evidence of positive outcomes of inclusive education for social, academic, communication and physical development in students who do and do not experience disability. Inclusive education has also been found to have additional benefits for not only learning but also maintaining and generalising learning between and across settings compared with segregated education settings.\footnote{26}

The 2016 systematic review of the evidence for inclusive education by Harvard academic Thomas Hehir and his colleagues concluded “there is clear and consistent evidence that inclusive educational settings can confer substantial short- and long-term benefits for students with and without disabilities”.\footnote{27} Similarly, consistent with findings over more than half a century, in a recent study Cole and colleagues find clear academic benefits of inclusive education.\footnote{29}

Additionally, in a 2017 meta-analysis, Szumski and colleagues found positive academic benefits of inclusive education for students who do not experience disability, at all levels of schooling.\footnote{29} For students who do not experience disability, research finds that inclusive education results in: enhanced learning opportunities and experiences; education that is more sensitive to differing student needs; growth in interpersonal skills and greater acceptance and understanding of human diversity; and increased flexibility and adaptability.\footnote{30} Furthermore, inclusive education has benefits for teachers in the form of improved teaching practices, with all the benefits that entails.\footnote{31} Nonetheless, segregated schooling is not only continuing, but also increasing.\footnote{32}

Troublingly, there is a common belief that education is really only for ‘some people’, and thus that there are ‘some people’ who are ‘too disabled’ to be included. Unsurprisingly, this common misperception goes hand in hand with (and is often used as a justification for) widespread segregation of students labelled as having ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’.\footnote{33} However, despite the misunderstandings and the associated discrimination, research evidence tells a different story. In fact, aside from the ethical and philosophical concerns regarding excluding students who have been categorised as ‘too disabled’ for inclusion, decades of research demonstrates that inclusive education has benefits for the academic, communication, positive behavioural and social development of students labelled with ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’.\footnote{34}
Another common issue raised about inclusive education is the concern about the impact of including all students on the education of students who do not experience disability. However, contrary to common fears, research provides clear evidence of positive benefits of including everyone together, with no detrimental effects.\footnote{35}

As noted in chapter one, the research discussed in this report explores the outcomes of inclusive education for all students, including children and young people labelled with a wide range of disability labels or categorised with ‘severe’ and ‘multiple’ ‘disabilities’. Given the frequent misperception that the research evidence does not concern ‘some’ students, it is important to make it clear at the outset that this report addresses the evidence regarding students across the full range of labels. Inclusive education is about all students, not only some.

**Relationships, interaction and belonging**

The importance of relationships between students and teachers, as well as amongst students, is well established, and known to affect social, emotional and academic outcomes.\footnote{36} Whether the result of micro or macro-exclusion, as Connor and Goldmansour write, “[w]ith segregation comes devaluation, a loss in cultural capital for individuals. This form of disempowerment actively disadvantages students who have been labelled as disabled”.\footnote{37}

Exclusion negatively affects children and young people who experience disability, their peers, and the adults who engage with them, resulting in marginalisation, stigmatisation and often bullying and abuse.\footnote{38} Students who experience disability have been found more likely to be socially isolated by their peers and at higher risk of being bullied than students who do not experience disability.\footnote{39} However, while a common assumption is that abuse and bullying occurs only in ‘mainstream’ settings, this is factually incorrect.\footnote{40} Research provides evidence that despite higher teacher-student ratios and greater supervision, the full range of bullying occurs in ‘special’ settings.\footnote{41} While there is some variation in individual studies,\footnote{42} particularly based on teacher or parent ratings, growing evidence suggests that children and young people who attend ‘special’ settings are more likely to experience bullying than their peers in ‘mainstream’ settings, and that inclusive education is a key factor in reducing or eliminating bullying.\footnote{43}

Inclusive education facilitates social development in children and young people who do and do not experience disability.\footnote{44} Research evidence suggests that genuinely inclusive education allows students to build and develop friendships that they might not have considered or encountered otherwise.\footnote{45} It also facilitates improved attitudes between students who do and do not experience disability.\footnote{46} Inclusive settings encourage higher levels of interaction than segregated settings,\footnote{47} which results in more opportunities for children and young people to establish and maintain friendships.\footnote{48} The more time a student spends within an inclusive setting, the greater the social interaction.\footnote{49} In turn, this leads to better outcomes for social and communication development.\footnote{50}

The growing body of research into the outcomes of inclusive education for social development has also found that inclusion results in a more positive sense of self and self-worth for students who do and do not experience disability.\footnote{51} Perhaps as a consequence of this, students educated in inclusive settings have also been found to be more likely to enrol in post-secondary education.\footnote{52} Inclusive education leads to a sense of belonging,\footnote{53} increased likelihood to be part of a school group,\footnote{54} and to a self-concept not only as a receiver of help, but also as a giver of help.\footnote{55} For students who do and do not experience disability, inclusive education has been shown to result in more advanced social skills.\footnote{56}

Teachers frequently cite ‘challenging behaviour’ as their biggest concern regarding fulfilling their role.\footnote{57} Given the importance of the role of teachers in relation to supporting positive behaviour, and the challenges that
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The outcomes of inclusive education

Children and young people who participate in inclusive education have been found to be more independent during and following schooling, including more likely to live independently post-school. Additionally, students who participate in inclusive education have been found to develop qualities such as patience and trust, and to become more aware of and responsive to the needs of others than students in non-inclusive settings. Inclusive education supports students in developing increased awareness and acceptance of diversity and understanding of individuality.

Academic outcomes

As Hehir and colleagues note:

“There is strong evidence that students with disabilities benefit academically from inclusive education. The academic impacts of inclusion have been studied in many ways with many different populations of students around the world. Multiple systematic reviews of the scholarly research literature indicate that students with disabilities who were educated in general education classes academically outperformed their peers who had been educated in segregated settings.”

In regards to academic outcomes, again, research findings contrast with the common assumption that the higher teacher-student ratios, as well as some teachers being trained in ‘special’ education, would result in better academic outcomes in segregated ‘special’ schools or classes. In fact, research shows that students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared with students educated in segregated settings. Research also demonstrates benefits for educational attainment, with students who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings nearly five times more likely to graduate at the expected time than students in segregated settings.

Students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings have been found to score higher on achievement tests and perform closer to grade average than students in segregated settings. In a meta-analysis of the research on inclusive education, Szumski and colleagues found no negative outcomes of the presence of students labelled with ‘emotional and behavioural disorders’, despite the frequent hypotheses to the contrary.
academic levels and to achieve outcomes that may not otherwise be possible.75 As noted above, students who attend ‘mainstream’ settings have enhanced educational attainment, increased post-secondary education, and are also more likely to be engaged in competitive employment.76

Students who do not experience disability have also been found to have equal or better academic outcomes in inclusive settings compared with students participating in non-inclusive settings.77 Furthermore, inclusive teachers engage all students in more higher-order thinking, questioning and dialogical interactions than non-inclusive teachers.78 In inclusive settings, students who do and do not experience disability have been found to receive higher-quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs, particularly through small group work.79

**Outcomes for communication and language**

Successful shared communication is at the core of participation in education.80 However, people who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) are frequently excluded and subjected to demeaning assumptions.81 These factors highlight the importance of transformation for inclusion in the area of communication.

Communication and language development in students who do and do not experience disability has been found to be enhanced through inclusive education.82 Support for inclusive peer communication has been found to be particularly important.83 Students in inclusive settings have been shown to increase independent communication, mastery of AAC strategies, and increased speech and language development when provided with appropriate support for inclusive education.84

Enhanced communication and language leads to greater independence and initiation of interactions, and increased active participation.85 Consequently, it appears that inclusive education supports communication and language development, which in turn supports greater inclusion. Appropriate support to develop and implement AAC strategies is essential to inclusive education for many people.86

Ensuring that ‘communication partners’ are supported to develop communication skills is essential for enabling shared communication.87 As den Houting, writing about understandings of and attitudes towards neurodiversity, notes, “[p]roviding a non-speaking autistic person with an alternative method of communication may give them a voice, but they will only truly stop being disabled when others listen”.88

**Physical development**

Inclusion within physical education is an important consideration for the implementation of inclusive education. The ableist foundations of physical education have been identified and strongly critiqued.89 However, limited research has considered the outcomes of inclusive education for physical development. Nonetheless, existing research provides evidence to suggest that inclusive education contributes positively towards the physical development of students who experience disability. For example, students who experience disability who are educated in ‘mainstream’ settings show gains in motor development and have a higher degree of independence.90 Inclusive education provides access to a broader range of learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance students’ experiences.91

In research considering students’ perspectives on inclusion in physical activities, students report that when they are actually included this provides an entry point for play, leisure activities, and friendship and creates a sense of legitimate participation.92 Research has explored the negative outcomes for students when they are excluded from physical education.93 However, multiple international
reviews have found that when students who experience disability are included in physical education and provided with appropriate support the outcomes are positive for all students involved.95

The outcomes of inclusive education for teachers

It is not only the practices, but also the beliefs and attitudes of teachers and others, that have been found to be critical to preventing or facilitating inclusive education.96 Indeed, the education of teachers to be equipped and prepared to teach all students – in a fully inclusive manner – is essential to inclusive education.97

Overall, research provides evidence that inclusive education results in higher quality education for students who do and do not experience disability.98 However, the benefits of inclusive education are not only for children and young people. Research has found that through participation in inclusive education, teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction.99 Additionally, developing skills to enable the inclusion of students who experience disability results in higher-quality teaching for all students and more confident teachers.100

Despite the positive outcomes of inclusive education for teachers, research also finds that teachers may hold a number of concerns about it, particularly in relation to inadequate support and resources, fear or lack of confidence in teacher knowledge and competency, and concerns about positively supporting the behaviour of diverse groups of students.101 Consequently, teachers are sometimes initially reluctant to participate in inclusive education and may feel that they are not equipped for the challenges involved. However, research has also found that teachers develop confidence in their ability to be inclusive, and increase their positive attitudes towards inclusion, through experience and support.102

Teachers often feel that inclusion will be a bigger challenge or struggle than it actually is in practice. As Kliwer writes:

“Two concerns are commonly voiced among professionals who express resistance to inclusion. This first is that the needs of children will not be met amid the complex dynamics of a general education setting. The second is that the needs of children with disabilities will require an excessive amount of directed resources that take away from the educational experiences of children without disabilities … neither concern is valid in a thoughtfully structured, well-resourced classroom.”103

Families and inclusive education

There is a considerable body of research exploring the negative impact of exclusion on families. Research provides evidence demonstrating that families frequently experience stigmatisation and a host of barriers when they seek to have their children included – so much so that parents frequently experience the notion of ‘choice’ as a furphy.104 Similarly, the experience of stigmatisation and exclusion is common for parents who experience disability.105 Research involving families in Australia who have one or more children labelled ‘disabled’ finds that inclusive education is important to families and that while there are many barriers, when the families experience inclusive education this leads to:

“…happiness, a positive outlook on life, progress and development for the family, feelings of pride and of being valued and simply that inclusion was a wonderful experience. The desire for respect for every child, for inclusion to be ‘ordinary’ and for their children to be viewed simply as children was important to the families.”106
Families identify positive attitudes towards inclusive education, inclusive relationships and strengths-based approaches as essential to facilitating inclusive education. Genuine collaboration and respectful partnerships have been found to facilitate inclusion, and yet families frequently face a lack of responsiveness to their needs and wishes. Some research suggests that when children are included this may support parents in feeling more confident to return to work. Additionally, the experience of genuine inclusive education contributes to parents’ psychological and economic well-being. Inclusive education, when it does occur, is often the result of considerable parent advocacy and many families strongly desire inclusive education for their children. For families, the path to achieving this is often an unnecessarily difficult one. It is frustrating for families to have to continually advocate for the inclusion of their child in the school and community, despite inclusive education being a fundamental right for everyone, and particularly in light of the weight of evidence demonstrating the positive outcomes.

A note on some research limitations

Many of the studies discussed in this chapter explore situations where a student has been ‘included into’ or ‘integrated into’ an existing setting, rather than reflecting a genuinely inclusive setting transformed to provide the best possible education for all of its students (chapter four will discuss this distinction further). Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate the positive outcomes that are possible when steps towards inclusive education are taken. Given that so much existing research compares integration and segregation, the lack of any research showing the superiority of segregation over ‘mainstreaming’ indicates that even poorly-done inclusion in the form of integration is still better. If the barriers currently inhibiting the realisation of genuine inclusion were to be addressed it seems likely that the outcomes would be even more positive. As transformation of education settings and systems occurs, ongoing research is required to further develop a clear understanding of the outcomes as education systems become more genuinely inclusive.

At the same time, in the face of the widespread positive outcomes of inclusive education, as outlined throughout this chapter, the exclusionary realities of current education systems and settings should be seriously questioned by policymakers and practitioners. There are a range of barriers that currently stymie the realisation of inclusion. One key and persistent issue is the plethora of misunderstandings of inclusion. In chapter three we move to unpacking these misunderstandings and clearly identifying the meaning of inclusive education as both a concept and pedagogy.

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21 Loreman, 2014, p. 460
22 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
23 Micro and macro-exclusion are described in detail in chapter five. Micro-exclusion refers to exclusionary practices within so-called inclusive settings or experiences. Macro-exclusion refers to segregation outside of ‘mainstream’ education settings or exclusion from any formal schooling.
24 Giangreco, & Suter, 2015
25 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017; Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Guang-Xue, 2014
26 Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, & Cosier, 2011
27 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 2
28 Cole, Murphy, Frisy, Grossi, & Bolte, 2019
29 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
30 Ainscow, & Cesar, 2006; Dessemontet, & Bless, 2013; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutchinson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom, & Diamond, 1998; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Rouse, & Florian, 2006; Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
31 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
32 Shaw, 2017
33 Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Harris, & Wakeman, 2008; Graham & Sweller, 2011; Kleinert, Towles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman, & Kerbel, 2015; Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014; Morningstar, Allcock, White, Taub, Kurth, Gonsier-Gerdin, Flynn, Sauer, & Jorgensen, 2016
34 For example, see: Boutot & Bryant, 2005; Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Harris, & Wakeman, 2008; Carter, Moss, Hoffman, Chung, & Sisco, 2011; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Feldman, Carter, Asmus, & Brock, 2015; Fisher, & Meyer, 2002; Foreman, Arthur-Kelly, Pascoe, & King, 2004; Hunt, McDonnell, & Crockett, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012; Ruppar, Allcock, & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2017
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35 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
36 Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010; Gregoriadis, & Grammatikopoulos, 2014; Hamre, & Planta, 2001; O’Connor, & McCartney, 2007; Ostrosky, Laumann, & Heleh, 2006; Thjs, Koemen, Roorda, & Hagen, 2011; Spilt, Koemen, & Mantzicopoulos, 2010
37 Connor, & Goldmansour, 2012, p. 31
39 Rossetti, 2014
40 Davis & Watson, 2000; Queensland Parents for People with a Disability (QPPD), 2003; Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000
41 Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000
42 For example, see: Humphrey & Hebron, 2015; Woods & Wolke, 2004
43 Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011
45 Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
46 Consiglio, Guarnera, & Magnano, 2015; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
47 Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011; Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Flewitt, Nind, & Payler, 2009; Fox, Farrell, & Davis, 2004; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Theodorou & Nind, 2010
49 Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011
51 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Fitch, 2003; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
52 Baer, Daviso, Flexer, Queen, & Meindl, 2011
53 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016; Miller, 2009; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010
54 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
56 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg, & Shea, 2009; Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016
57 Cologon, 2012; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; McMahon, & Harwood, 2016; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014
58 Ibid
59 Ibid
60 Fletcher, 2010; Gottfried, 2014
61 Ibid
62 Ibid
64 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 16
65 Szumski, Smogorzewska, & Karwowski, 2017
67 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003; Nikolaraizi, Kumar, Favaaza, Sideridis, Koulosiou, & Raill, 2005
69 Hehir, Grindal, Freeman, Lamoreau, Borquaye, & Burke, 2016, p. 13
70 de Graaf, Van Hove, & Havemann, 2013; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Giangreco, 2009; Kliever, 1998, Kliever, 2008; Myklebust, 2006; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Tanti Burlo, 2010; Vakil, Welton, O’Connor, & Kline, 2009; Vianello, & Lanfranchi, 2009
71 Schifter, 2015
72 Cole, Murphy, Frisby, Grossi, & Bolte, 2019; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten, & Roeleveld, 2001; Vakil, Welton, O’Connor, & Kline, 2009

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CHAPTER THREE

Defining inclusive education
Acknowledging that inclusive education is about all of us underlines the importance of ensuring that none of us are excluded.

As clearly identified in chapter two, there are important benefits of inclusive education for everyone. However, in working towards inclusion for all, it is essential to clarify common misunderstandings of inclusive education that form barriers to its realisation. In this chapter I draw on the current literature to outline such misunderstandings, contrasted with a clear and internationally-accepted definition of inclusive education.

As noted in chapter one, inclusive education involves valuing and facilitating the full participation and belonging of everyone in all aspects of our education communities and systems. No one is excluded; supports for inclusion are embedded within everyday educational practices. Inclusive education is about everyone learning together, in all our diversity. This means that everyone has genuine opportunities to learn together, with support as needed, and all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of the curriculum – thus making inclusion a shared experience. There is no ‘type’ of student ‘eligible’ (nor ‘ineligible’) for inclusion – inclusion is about and for all of us. Inclusive education involves upholding the dignity of each student in belonging, participating and accessing ongoing opportunities, recognising and valuing the contribution that each student makes, and supporting every student to flourish.

When inclusion is misconstrued as assimilation (as is the case with integration), it becomes about changing or ‘fixing’ students to ‘fit’ within existing structures, systems and practices. Assimilation ends up focussing on who is, or who can be changed to be, a close enough ‘fit’. Inclusion, instead, can be understood as ‘fitting’ educational opportunities, settings, experiences and systems to the full diversity of students and embracing and celebrating diversity as a positive and rich learning resource.

Assimilation is not inclusion, instead it is exclusion and needs to be recognised as such. When the term ‘inclusion’ is co-opted and misused to represent exclusion and segregation it becomes about entrenching the idea that there is a ‘them’ and an ‘us’ – an ‘us’ to which only some people are eligible to belong. There is nothing inclusive about segregation.

Acknowledging that inclusive education is about all of us underlines the importance of ensuring that none of us are excluded. Exclusion is a disempowering process through which we are constructed as an ‘Other’, and by inference as a ‘lesser’ or ‘inferior’ Other. Paradoxically, the very need to focus on inclusion naturally implies exclusion, thus to understand inclusive education it is important to consider who is included and into what, and likewise who is excluded, from what, and why. Or as Best, Corcoran and Slee put it: “Who’s in? Who’s out? Who decides? What are we going to do about it?”

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.”

Inclusion and ‘dis-belonging’

Efforts towards inclusion need to be undertaken with a clear awareness of the risks, and potential paradox, of identifying any one group of people as “the excluded” or “the included”. The notion of ‘dis-belonging’ highlights the problematic and entrenched assumption that has come to underpin the word ‘inclusion’, whereby the association between inclusion and the experience of disability results in “taken-for-granted assumptions that the ‘natural’ position of [people who experience disability] is one of dis-belonging”. Additionally, the use of the term ‘inclusion’ can slip easily and rapidly into a marker of the “‘boundaries’ of who is and is not normal (i.e. eligible to be ‘included’) and who is ‘different’”. This can result in exclusionary approaches whereby ‘special’ practices and programs are developed for ‘special’ students, rather than a focus on transforming existing education practices, programs and systems to be inclusive of all students and all forms of diversity. As explored in chapter five, ableism involves this devaluing and dehumanising process from which consciously or subconsciously a ‘them’ and ‘us’ is created whereby some people are constructed as
an ‘Inferior Other’, as lesser, as undesirable or undesirably ‘different’, as diminished, as needing to be ‘fixed’ or changed, as sub-human.

These assumptions of dis-belonging and ‘difference’ live in the ableist ‘underlife’. As in, the seemingly invisible but heavily present ableist beliefs, attitudes and accepted ‘truths’ that – often subconsciously – guide our thoughts, actions and social systems, with considerable implications for the legislation, policy and practice that is consequently accepted. The assumption that children and young people who experience disability may be better placed in a ‘special’ education setting and the acceptance of the parallel systems of segregated ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education is a key example of the playing out of these unquestioned ableist beliefs. Indeed, as Hodge and Runswick-Cole write, “[b]y definition the term mainstream places some children outside these services with the presumption that their requirements can only be met within some minority specialist provision”. In direct contrast to such presumptions, inclusive education involves transforming “…ordinary settings so that they can respond to the totality of the student requirements, rather than viewing education as ameliorating individual ‘needs’”. It is a shift that would result in an assumption of inclusion, rather than perpetuating the ongoing ‘question mark’ that hangs over the heads of many students whereby their eligibility to participate in their education setting and experiences is conditional and always, though often subtly, under review.

In this report, the discussion of inclusive education is focused on the inclusion of children and young people who experience disability. This is not intended to suggest that inclusive education is only about people who experience disability, nor to unthinkingly reproduce dis-belonging, but it is an essential discussion because those of us who experience disability are frequently excluded from many aspects of society – including within education. Additionally, as Erevelles contends, segregated schooling engenders this dis-belonging. Given that segregation on the basis of ‘disability’ is, arguably, the last remaining ‘respectable’ form of segregation in schooling, it needs to be directly and urgently addressed as a matter of civil rights.

It follows then that since by its very definition inclusive education is about everyone, it should not be necessary to specifically recognise the right of people who experience disability to an inclusive education – after all, all people are people. However, “for some people these rights are conceived as natural, while for others these same rights are conceived as ‘privileges’”. People who experience disability are the largest minority group in the world. People who experience disability are also amongst the most excluded. Even within anti-oppression and anti-bias movements and pedagogy, disability is frequently left unaddressed. Consequently, particular attention to ending violations of the rights of people who experience disability is required.

As Slee writes, “[e]xclusion resides deep in the bones of education”. This has wide-reaching implications for people who experience disability who are frequently excluded as a consequence of the ease with which ‘disability labels’ form a path to creating a ‘them’. While labels in and of themselves are not always or necessarily problematic – and can instead be used as powerful positive identity markers and advocacy tools – unfortunately in practice labels are frequently used to pathologise individuals and to justify exclusion. The fundamental role that education plays in creating paths for genuine participation in all other aspects of life underscores the significance of inclusion or exclusion in education.
The national and international imperative for inclusion

There has been sustained and growing interest in inclusive education nationally and internationally for some time now. The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, made at the conclusion of the conference, played an important role in highlighting the exclusion of many students worldwide and progressed international discussions around inclusion and inclusive education. This, along with the Salamanca Declaration 1994, the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, the Biwako Millennium Framework 2002, and international conventions, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), along with national initiatives such as the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (currently under review), amongst others, provide the backdrop to current research, policies and practices regarding inclusive education.

Despite this sustained and widespread interest, inclusive education has continued to be a vexed issue and it sometimes seems there are as many definitions of inclusive education put forward as there are people using the term. However, as outlined in chapter one, the CRPD provides an overarching international, and legally binding, definition. Additionally, GC4 on Article 24 of the CRPD outlines in detail the meaning of inclusive education, thus while the individual experience of inclusion and exclusion may differ, the CRPD no longer leaves room for individual opinion to determine the definition. The application of the CRPD in legislation, policy and practice also creates an important opportunity to identify and address current situations where exclusion and segregation are being masqueraded as ‘inclusion’.

Article 24 of the CRPD clearly identifies the right of every person who experiences disability to participate fully in an inclusive, quality education on an equal basis with people who are not labelled disabled. Specifically, this involves the right to inclusive education at all levels of education, intended to support “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity”. Additionally, the realisation of the right to education requires ensuring accommodations will be made and support will be provided to “facilitate effective education … consistent with the goal of full inclusion”.

GC4 on Article 24 of the CRPD further explicates the meaning of inclusive education as “a process of systemic reform” and structural change in which change takes place with the intention of creating genuinely participatory and equitable learning experiences. Inclusive education involves enabling all people to access general education settings and providing quality education on an equal basis with all people in the community in which they live. Additionally, inclusive education does not merely involve the presence of people who do and do not experience disability within the same location but rather requires support to be provided within the ‘general’ education system to ensure that each person has access to opportunities to maximise academic and social development. Inclusive education “values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, and acknowledges individuals’ requirements and their ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society”.

Importantly, the CRPD definition of inclusion also goes on to outline that no form of segregation or integration constitutes inclusive education. This distinction is key to defining what inclusive education is, and to clarifying ongoing, problematic and pervasive confusions that serve to perpetuate segregation. It is made explicitly clear in GC4 that inclusive education cannot mean education within a segregated education class or setting... all forms of segregation and integration constitute exclusion.
As explained in GC4:

- “Segregation occurs when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular impairment or to various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.

- Integration is the process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions with the understanding that they can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.”

And, in contrast to both segregation and integration, inclusion is defined as follows:

- “Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.”

The national legislative implications

Having ratified the CRPD, Australia is committed and legally obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the rights articulated within this treaty, including the right to inclusive education. Thus “to adopt appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial, promotional, and other measures toward the full realization of the right”, including provision of assistance and services as required to bring about inclusive education. This requires acting upon the long-held recognition that inclusive education is a right for every person – it is neither conditional, nor a privilege reserved for only some of us.

In its 2018 combined second and third periodic report under the CRPD, the Australian Government noted its commitment to inclusive education from early childhood through to adulthood, consistent with the CRPD. However, in relation to the fundamental core of Article 24 of the CRPD, for which phasing out all forms of segregated education is necessary, the Australian Government goes on to state:

“In respect of the Committee’s comments urging States Parties to ‘achieve a transfer of resources from segregated to inclusive environments’, Australia’s view is that a State Party will meet its obligations under article 24 through an education system that allows for funding of different education modalities so students with disability are able to participate in a range of education options including enrolment in mainstream classes in mainstream schools with additional support, specialist classes or units in mainstream schools and specialist schools.”

As Bacchi outlines, while policy is generally perceived as the means for guiding positive action, it not only represents intended action but also inaction. In this instance, for example, what the Australian governments intend to do, as well as intended inaction in key areas.

Policy is politically driven and both reflects and informs the dominant culture within any given context. Policy and culture play a critical role in facilitating inclusive education. As Johnstone and Chapman argue, “[p]olicy serves to legitimise, sanction, encourage, and disseminate desired practice”. Problematically then, alongside common misunderstandings of inclusive education, the fact that the conflation of ‘special’ education and inclusive education continues on official levels, with examples of all forms of segregation being misrepresented as inclusion, is therefore unsurprising. The presenting of state ‘inclusion’ awards to segregated schools in Queensland and Victoria, as has been the case in past years, is but one example.

Additionally, it is not uncommon when asking about inclusive education to be pointed to segregated education settings, and particularly to special units, as examples of the efforts of a government on this front, despite the reality that these examples in no way represent inclusion. The current emphasis on increasing segregated placements by the NSW State Government and in 2019 budget announcements by the Queensland State Government
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How should we live – together

Strong philosophical and moral arguments have been made for many decades regarding the importance of and right to inclusive education for all people under all circumstances. While this argument of inclusive education as a moral right is sometimes questioned, the fact remains that inclusive education is a universal human right. Additionally, when identifying and recognising the full humanity of every person, arguments against inclusive education as a moral right fail to be convincing.

Montaigne, an influential 16th century French philosopher, engaged in an in-depth exploration of questions about how, as people, we can live ethical lives and make choices with integrity. For Montaigne, this question of honour was integral to the ongoing and essential question of “how should we live?”. When considering inclusion, the question then becomes “how should we live together”. At its core, inclusive education is about how, as human beings, we wish to live with each other. Or as Slee suggests, inclusive education “invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer and our role in shaping both of these worlds”. This requires active and ongoing recognition and embracing of our shared humanity. It also requires a conscious rejection of the ongoing temptation to seemingly ‘make easy’ what is hard by dehumanising those of us, who by the nature of some form of stigmatisation, can easily be (mis)constructed as an ‘Inferior Other’, from which point all manners of segregation and abuse begin to be justified. Efforts to address this ableist dehumanisation are needed at every level of society.

Expectations, attitudes and beliefs

Misinformation and (ableist) low expectations combine to continually limit opportunities for people who experience disability. In contrast to common belief, children notice ‘difference’ from a very young age. Research provides evidence demonstrating that at very young ages children demonstrate internalised cultural preferences, prejudices and social hierarchies reflective of the communities in which they live, including making unsolicited prejudiced statements about community members. In research involving children aged between two and six years of age, Watson provides evidence of ableist enculturation demonstrated through children’s conversations and behaviours as they construct people who experience disability as tragic and pathologised ‘others’. The development of these entrenched prejudices from early in the childhood years creates a vicious cycle that inhibits social cohesion. Fostering inclusion throughout the childhood years has the potential to break this cycle, thus making formal schooling an important focus area for developing inclusion. However, the views and behaviours of children and young people are highly influenced by adult views and behaviours and thus adults need to take seriously the need for change in themselves.

Inclusive education requires recognising impairment as one of many forms of human diversity, and welcoming and, as noted earlier, viewing diversity as a rich resource rather than a problem. Inclusive education, therefore, creates a situation where all people can be valued and experience a sense of belonging and where all people have genuine opportunities to flourish.
Inclusion for democratic citizenship

Inclusive education requires ongoing engagement with removing barriers to active involvement and participation in shared learning and full and valued membership in all aspects of the community. This requires all participants within an education setting to be open to listening and learning together – and this includes listening and learning together with children and young people. Sapon-Shevin brings into perspective the bigger picture of inclusion, of which inclusive education is one key component:

“[I]nclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice. What kind of world do we want to create and how should we educate children for that world? What kinds of skills and commitments do people need to thrive in a diverse society?”

Inclusive education, then, is one aspect of the realisation of democratic social values. Respect for difference, collaboration, valuing families and community, and viewing all students as active and valued participants who have the right to be heard and provided with equitable access to education, are all factors identified by Australian educators as essential to inclusive education for all students.

Family perspectives

Inclusive education is also about engaging inclusively with families. In an inclusive community, families and the roles they play are valued. However, it is not the responsibility of an excluded person and their family to create change for inclusion, but rather inclusion is a shared community endeavour. Families who experience disability have identified the lived experience of inclusive education as belonging, participation, opportunity and recognised contribution. Additionally, families have identified inclusion as being accepted as “just one of the group”, as something that families have to work towards, and as something that is increasing over time. However, families also identify many challenges in working with education settings towards the goal of inclusive education. As discussed in chapters two and six, while the continuation of segregated education is often presented as important to enable family ‘choice’, this notion is not only problematic in light of the fundamental human right to inclusive education, but has been revealed as a ruse through family experiences that demonstrate time and again the pressure on families to segregate, and extensive experiences of gatekeeping.

In research in Italy, where all students have been educated together since all special schools were closed and segregated education ended in 1977, one final-year high school student shared his understanding of inclusion: “Inclusion is about the whole of life – the way we live together as people for the whole of life.” This understanding of inclusive education as one aspect of broader inclusion in society draws our thinking towards an understanding that inclusive education is an ongoing process. When a student enrols in an education setting, this is the beginning (not the endpoint) of the processes of inclusion. Placing a student who experiences disability into a ‘mainstream’ setting without undertaking transformation for inclusion does not change understandings of ‘disability’ or ‘difference’ and can simply transfer the idea of ‘special’ students from a segregated setting to being segregated within a ‘mainstream’ setting. As families who experience disability have identified, in addition to presence, genuinely belonging – with all that belonging entails – is fundamental to inclusion.
Ending segregation of students by location (within or between education settings) is a critical first step towards inclusive education. However, inclusive education requires much more than the co-location of students. As well as an end to all forms of segregation, it also involves:

- all students being welcome and valued, and the contribution of each student being recognised. This includes building inclusive relationships and engaging in critical reflection on attitudes;
- ensuring that all educational experiences are set up in ways to facilitate the equitable and genuine participation and belonging of every student;
- all necessary supports (for students and teachers) are provided and embedded inclusively within everyday practices;
- additional staff (for example, additional educators or paraprofessionals) working inclusively across the setting, without directly or indirectly ‘othering’ or segregating students;
- ensuring that there are no segregated (separate) groups, units, classes or settings for any student or group of students. This includes avoidance of all forms of streaming or ability grouping;
- facilitating the genuine participation of every student within the same learning activities, for example, all students working together within the same lessons without separate lessons or curricula based on student labels;
- making sure that all students are meaningfully involved in all aspects of learning; and
- ensuring that all students are supported to flourish.

Transformation for inclusion

Bringing about inclusive education is about transformation. It “requires developing and putting into action inclusive values, policies and practices… to engage in education for social justice and democracy, with a focus on reducing or removing oppression within and beyond education experiences and systems”. Translating values into action requires engaging with inclusive education as a very practical, everyday process. As Mogharreban and Bruns write, “[i]nclusion is not simply an intellectual ideal; it is a physical and very real experience”.

Ferguson argues that bringing about inclusive education requires considering “[h]ow teachers understand the nature of knowledge and the student’s role in learning, and how these ideas about knowledge and learning are manifested in teaching and classwork”. As such, inclusive education can be understood as ongoing critical engagement with flexible and student-centred pedagogy that caters for and values diversity, and holds high expectations for all people. Bringing about inclusive education is about identifying and addressing exclusion wherever it occurs in policy and practice. Simultaneously, inclusive education is about belonging and becoming, together. Inclusive education requires recognising that we are all equally human and putting this recognition into action.
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CHAPTER FOUR

Illusions of inclusion
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Micro-exclusion forms one of the biggest barriers to inclusive education. As I have written elsewhere:

“Micro-exclusion is where, for example, a child is enrolled in a mainstream setting but is segregated into a separate area of the classroom or school for all or part of the day; or where a child is only permitted to attend for part of the day. Other examples of micro-exclusion are where a child is present but not given the opportunity to participate in the activities along with the other children in the setting or is present but viewed as a burden and an unequally valued member of the class or setting. This is not inclusion.”

Micro-exclusion is more insidious and much less often recognised than macro-exclusion, but it is critical to address. So, for example, a student might be attending a ‘mainstream’ education setting, but if the student is not fully valued and supported to participate within the experiences of the settings along with their peers, then the student is not actually included.

“Micro-exclusion occurs when children are placed into a mainstream education context, but are segregated or excluded within the classroom/school activities or community. For example, when children are given separate activities (often with different staff) that are not connected with what the rest of the group is doing, or when they are removed from the class for particular lessons. Micro-exclusion also occurs when someone is not fully included as a valued member of the classroom community (often as a consequence of other forms of micro-exclusion)… micro-exclusion commonly occurs when integration is misunderstood as inclusion.”
Misunderstanding integration as inclusion

Micro-exclusion can occur when people misunderstand inclusion as a continuation of ‘special’ education but in a ‘mainstream’ context. As discussed in chapter three, conflating integration and inclusion is a common misunderstanding of inclusion. Integration involves a student attending a ‘mainstream’ education setting, some or all of the time, with some adaptations or accommodations intended to make this attendance possible, but without change to the setting. However, inclusion goes “beyond access and support to incorporate curricular and pedagogic differentiation supporting children’s sense of belonging and being valued.”

While the deficit focus of integration is unintentional, integration is constructed on the deficit-based assumption that there is a ‘problem’ within the student that is preventing inclusion and that it is ultimately the student who needs to change, rather than the environment or pedagogy. For integration, minor adjustments are made to enable a student who is perceived as ‘close enough’ to ‘fit’ within an existing mainstream setting. Consequently, integration remains conditional and does not involve or require critical reflection on beliefs and practices to bring about inclusive educational experiences for all students.

The assimilation muddle

The notions of assimilation inherent within concepts and approaches to integration are present more broadly within education and thus the misunderstanding of inclusion as being about assimilation is also very common. Assimilation is about making everyone ‘the same’. In contrast, inclusion is about celebrating and embracing diversity and ‘difference’. As noted in chapters one and three, when inclusion is mistakenly viewed as assimilation, it becomes about changing or ‘fixing’ students to ‘fit’ within existing structures, systems and practices. This way of thinking leads to the problematic idea whereby inclusion is misunderstood as being conditional and dependent on students being ‘the same enough’ or ‘close enough’ to the mythical ‘normal’ to meet certain requirements to be included.

This confusion of inclusion as assimilation is a significant barrier to inclusion and stems from the myth of the ‘normal’ person. This is the false idea that there is such a thing as a ‘normal person’ and that this is the ideal that all people need to aspire – or be moulded – to be. The very notion of assimilation is exclusionary and assumes that a student’s inclusion, and the value of that student, is dependent on being ‘normal’ or ‘normal enough’. In reality, inclusive education involves acknowledging that all students are unique individuals and that there is no such thing as ‘normal’. “[I]t is through valuing and enjoying difference that inclusion can be achieved.”

Unpacking micro-exclusion highlights the fact that inclusion is not a product or a program or a type of setting – it is a process. Frequent claiming of micro (and even macro) exclusion as inclusion creates significant barriers to, and confusion about, inclusion. Lack of understanding of what inclusion is, and subsequent unwarranted fear of inclusion, are also significant barriers. At the core of this is the lingering idea – perpetuated by the continuing presence of segregated settings and the insidious creep of the neo-liberal agenda and illusions of ‘choice’ – that inclusion is optional, rather than the right of every person.
Micro-exclusion through paraprofessional ‘support’ for inclusion

As noted above, micro-exclusion often occurs through well-intended but problematic use of ‘support’ for ‘inclusion’. GC4 on the CRPD specifically outlines that:

“Any support measures provided must be compliant with the goal of inclusion. Accordingly, they must be designed to strengthen opportunities for students with disabilities to participate in the classroom and in out-of-school activities alongside their peers, rather than marginalize them.”

There are many different and important forms of support for inclusion that are currently implemented in education settings. One of the most common forms of inclusion support is the employment of a paraprofessional educator. Indeed, as Rutherford notes “aides are often regarded as the ‘solution to inclusion’, the resource upon which students’ entry to the (compulsory) education system depends”.

While the employment of a paraprofessional educator is a common form of support for inclusion, there are many different terms used interchangeably in different locations and settings for this role. These include learning support assistant, additional educator, teaching assistant, teacher’s aide, paraeducator, special teacher’s assistant, instructional assistant, educational assistant and classroom assistant. A paraprofessional educator is an assistant and not a qualified teacher.

As explored further in chapter seven, in research involving parents, teachers, students and paraprofessional educators it is argued that, with careful planning, preparation and implementation, paraprofessional support may assist in facilitating inclusive education. In particular, it is contended that specific planning around the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessional educators and teachers can result in improved educational experiences and increased student involvement in the curriculum. Paraprofessional educators report the belief that their support can be beneficial in providing teachers with another adult to discuss and reflect on ideas and problem-solving within the everyday. Research provides evidence that, working in close partnership with the teacher, paraprofessional support may be implemented in such a way that it is beneficial for organising the learning environment, preparing or adapting materials in ways that can benefit all students, and providing general assistance to support the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. Unobtrusive, discreet support from a paraprofessional educator to further scaffold what is being taught by the teacher may allow for student autonomy and facilitate inclusion.

However, in contrast, research provides substantial evidence that the current approaches to paraprofessional support can impede or even prevent, rather than facilitate, inclusion. Indeed, despite the frequent use of paraprofessional educators, serious concerns have been raised regarding whether this is actually beneficial for bringing about inclusive education. As Giangreco points out, there is insufficient data to support the employment of paraprofessional educators; they are often expected, but not qualified, to teach; there is a substantial amount of research showing the detrimental effects of the common practice of one-to-one paraprofessional support; current approaches to decision-making are inadequate and often place an undue burden on paraprofessional educators; and assigning a paraprofessional educator to a classroom or student does not address the substantial change required to actually bring about inclusion in practice.
Over-reliance on paraprofessional educators, who often become a replacement for, rather than assistant to, the teacher, has been identified as a major issue with the use of paraprofessional support. This prevents inclusion in grade-appropriate educational experiences with peers and results in education decisions being made by unqualified or underqualified personnel, rather than by the teacher. Consequently, paraprofessional educators end up being required to provide academic support in subjects they are unskilled in and students receive most of their education from the paraprofessional educator rather than the classroom teacher. This results in poor quality educational experiences, is an inappropriate and unfair expectation of paraprofessional educators, and leads to teachers and students becoming highly (and unnecessarily) dependent on paraprofessional educators, with negative outcomes for students and for peer relationships.

Negative impact on quality of education

Over-reliance on paraprofessional educators, who often become a replacement for, rather than assistant to, the teacher, has been identified as a major issue with the use of paraprofessional support. This prevents inclusion in grade-appropriate educational experiences with peers and results in education decisions being made by unqualified or underqualified personnel, rather than by the teacher. Consequently, paraprofessional educators end up being required to provide academic support in subjects they are unskilled in and students receive most of their education from the paraprofessional educator rather than the classroom teacher. This results in poor quality educational experiences, is an inappropriate and unfair expectation of paraprofessional educators, and leads to teachers and students becoming highly (and unnecessarily) dependent on paraprofessional educators, with negative outcomes for students and for peer relationships.

Negative impact on quality of education

Current approaches to paraprofessional support have been repeatedly found to have detrimental outcomes on educational quality. Conroy argues that:

“By increasing the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom, administrators have shifted the responsibility for teaching the most unique and complex learners to the least trained and lowest paid workers rather than making fundamental changes in general and special education to meet the needs of all students.”

Teachers are reported to be less engaged with the student when there is a paraprofessional educator assigned to that student. Consequently, students have limited access to quality, or even adequate and appropriate, teachers and learning opportunities. Where some shared teaching occurs, students have reported a mismatch of information whereby the teacher and the paraprofessional educator would provide conflicting information. Additionally, due to the common approaches to the ways in which paraprofessional educators are expected to work, students often develop ‘learned helplessness’.

Unsurprisingly then, in addition to the lack of positive outcomes and absence of empirical evidence to demonstrate that the use of paraprofessional educators in the classroom is effective, research provides evidence that paraprofessional support can have a negative impact on student performance. For example, research in primary and secondary schools has found that students receiving paraprofessional support made less progress than students considered to have similar ‘support needs’ who were receiving little or no formal support at all.

The impact of paraprofessional presence on peer relationships

It has long been recognised that the model of one-on-one paraprofessional educator support is detrimental to educational outcomes and social engagement. Additionally, research provides evidence that when paraprofessional support is in place, students with disability labels are often physically separated from the rest of the students in the classroom. Unsurprisingly then, the presence of a paraprofessional educator has been found to reduce time with peers. Additionally, having paraprofessional support can influence other students’ perceptions of the capabilities of the student who experiences disability.

Students who experience disability report feeling isolated, stigmatised and rejected by their peers when they have a paraprofessional educator working with them. For example, in research with students’ who have visual impairments who are attending Australian secondary schools, Whitburn found that students who received paraprofessional support compared themselves negatively with their peers. Broer and colleagues argue that on account of the way that paraprofessional support is often implemented, “students are denied typical opportunities to develop peer relationships and a sense of self that is so important for social-emotional maturation.” It has been found that peers often address the paraprofessional educator rather than the student and students who work with paraprofessional educators are often actively teased or rejected by their peers.

Student perspectives on paraprofessional support

Too much support from paraprofessional educators can lead to lack of autonomy for students. Students report finding the presence of a paraprofessional educator invasive. For example, some students likened paraprofessional support to having a mother around all the time and reported that it inhibited peer engagement.
Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

More blatant segregation occurs in macro-exclusion whereby students are educated in segregated ‘special’ schools or ‘special’ classes or units, rather than together with all peers who do and do not experience disability. If a setting is actually inclusive then “[c]hildren with disabilities are not segregated in the classroom, at lunchtime or on the playground”.244

It has long been argued that:

“Inclusive education is part of a human rights approach to social relations and conditions. The intentions and values involved are an integral part of a vision of the whole society of which education is a part. Therefore the role education plays in the development of an inclusive society is a very serious issue. It is thus important to be clear in our understanding that inclusive education is not about ‘special’ teachers meeting the needs of ‘special’ children …it is not about ‘dumping’ pupils into an unchanged system of provision and practice. Rather, it is about how, where and why, and with what consequences, we educate all pupils.”245

This means that bringing about inclusive education requires transformation.246 It requires a deeply thoughtful, reflective and ongoing commitment to enacting change towards inclusion and thus towards a better education for all. One key element is moving beyond conceptualising needs as ‘special’ or ‘additional’. As humans we all have needs. While the ways in which these needs can be or are met vary from one person to another, this does not make our needs ‘special’ or ‘additional’ – they are simply human needs. As I have written elsewhere, “terms like ‘children with special rights’ and ‘children with additional needs’ infer that some children want more than their basic needs and rights to be met – not for anything extra”.247

The contributions and challenges of ‘special’ education

Segregated – or ‘special’ – education began approximately a century ago as a then-revolutionary idea that students who experienced disability could and should receive some form of formal education (prior to which most students who experienced disability were denied any formal education). In the decades that followed, gradually questions were raised about whether segregation was necessary and whether it provided the best educational...
opportunities. Following the introduction of the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act, it became unlawful across Australia for any setting to discriminate against a person on the basis of disability. However, unfortunately, discrimination continues despite national and international law.

As D’Alessio argues, inclusive education “requires the abandonment of special educational stances which focus on compensatory approaches to individual ‘needs’, to embrace a pedagogy of inclusion and a commitment to the rights of all to belong”. This involves abandoning the myth of ‘normal’ and the associated ableist idea of ‘making normal’ people who experience disability. From this perspective, a contemporary understanding of inclusive education is possible. However, underpinning micro and macro-exclusion is the idea that people who experience disability are in some sense ‘lacking’ or less human than those who are not labelled disabled. This fundamentally ableist view must be addressed in order to understand and bring about inclusive education.

Slee writes that:

“… traditional special education sustains ableist assumptions about disability through longstanding practices of categorisation and separation of children according to deficits. Exclusion is attributed to individual student impairment rather than to the disabling cultures and practices of schooling”

In the face of ongoing and increasing segregation in education, the legal requirement to transition to a fully inclusive education system is challenging to implement, but absolutely necessary. While the option to exclude remains, both macro and micro-exclusion will flourish and continue to stymie the impetus for the transformation required to achieve genuine inclusive education. Australia needs to move away from parallel systems of ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education towards shared schools for everyone.
Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

219 Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Rutherford, 2012; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Whitburn, 2013

220 Conroy, 2007 p. 47

221 Conroy, 2007; Giangreco, 2010; Rutherford, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019

222 Brock & Carter, 2015; Conroy, 2007; Martin & Alborz, 2014; Rutherford, 2012; Saddler, 2014; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Werts et al., 2004; Westover & Martin, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019

223 Broer et al., 2005

224 Broer et al., 2005; Conroy, 2007; Saddler, 2014

225 Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Saddler, 2014

226 Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Burdick & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Conroy, 2007; Devlin, 2008; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Rutherford, 2012; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015


228 Broer et al., 2005

229 Broer et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012; Stockall, 2014; Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Whitburn, 2013

230 Whitburn, 2013

231 Broer et al., 2005, p. 425

232 Broer et al., 2005; Conroy 2007; Westover & Martin, 2014

233 Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Webster & Blatchford, 2013; Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Webster & Blatchford, 2019; Whitburn, 2013

234 Rutherford, 2012; Whitburn, 2013

235 Broer et al., 2005

236 Broer et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012

237 Broer et al., 2005

238 Rutherford, 2012

239 D’Alessio, 2011; Curcic, 2009; Purdue, Ballard, & MacArthur, 2001; Rietveld, 2010

240 Rietveld, 2010, p. 27

241 Allan, 2010; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; D’Alessio, 2011; Lalvani, 2013

242 Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2011


244 United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2013, p. 29

245 Barton, 1997, p.234

246 Giangreco & Suter, 2015; Slee, 2018a

247 Cologon, 2014d, p. 59

248 D’Alessio, 2011, p. 141

249 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011

250 Ainscow, 2007; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Rietveld, 2010

251 Slee, 2018b, p. 14

252 Anderson & Boyle, 2015; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2017; Graham, & Sweller, 2011; Guldberg, Parsons, MacLeod, Jones, Prunty, & Balfe, 2011; Shaw, 2017; Valle, Connor, Broderick, Bejoian, & Baglieri, 2011
CHAPTER FIVE

Uncovering ableism in education
Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

The guises and modes of justification for segregation continue to become simultaneously more insidious, more sophisticated and — perhaps ironically — more blatant. Weary and wearying phrases such as “inclusive education is a good idea, BUT...” or “I do believe in inclusion, BUT...” power on. So powerful are these ways of thinking and so insidious is the stigmatisation that leads to the perception of ‘respectable’ exclusion of so many children and young people, that somehow inclusive education becomes perceived as the territory of opinion and preference, rather than a universal and fundamental human right with the support of research evidence and ethical considerations. The question is, why? So many people for so many years have worked to bring inclusive education to a reality. Both ‘mainstream’ teachers and proponents of ‘special’ education alike are almost universally caring, well-meaning and hardworking people who are all seeking positive outcomes for students who experience disability. The failings of our education systems are not wished for or intentional. There is much good will. However, thriving in the underlife is rampant and unchecked experience disability. The failings of our education systems are not wished for or intentional. There is much good will. However, thriving in the underlife is rampant and unchecked.

The ableist perpetuation of exclusion and segregation is, at its core, based on the myth of the ‘normal person’. This notion of a ‘normal person’ necessarily results in a division of people into ‘normal’ — which is then taken to be ‘human’ — and the inferred ‘Other’, which is constructed as ‘abnormal’. From an ableist viewpoint, therefore, a student who experiences disability is negatively constructed as ‘abnormal’ and the myth of the ‘normal student’ is an example of ableist thinking. This difficult to shake belief is so deeply entrenched at the basis of so many approaches to and beliefs about education. The resulting parallel myth is that of the pathologised ‘special educational needs child’. Our education systems are built around the notion of this mythical creature and success or failure in schooling depends in very large part on how close to or far from ‘passing’ for ‘normal’ a person can be. Echoing Foucault, the power of this myth is incessantly reproduced as we continue to seek to shape, tame and discipline ourselves and each other. This endeavour leads to misery not only for people constructed by ableist inference, as ‘subnormal’ or ‘abnormal’, but also for people constructed as ‘normal’ who must perpetually seek to live up to this notion and who, as Goodley, Liddiad and Runswick-Cole argue, are inevitably plunged “into emotional turmoil”.

Extensive and elaborate processes of sorting, classifying, categorising and labelling create an illusion of legitimacy to the myth of the ‘normal person’. For example, as Slee unpacks, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, now in its fifth edition, “attempts to standardize post hoc — it forms a shaky science that becomes the basis for the classification and management of students who trouble, or are troubled by, the cultures, structures and operation of a school system”. Under globalised neoliberal reforms to education, these collective fictions are shrouded in the continuing spin-off of further myths characterised by a “punitive and paternalistic benevolence”, from which some of us, who are cast as ‘sub-normal’, ‘defective’ or in some sense ‘less than’, are conditionally ‘accepted’ into the margins of society, thus commencing on a journey of a life apart. These ‘collective fictions’ enable tolerance, acceptance, or even promotion of segregation and the continuation of exclusionary systems of schooling.

Ableism: enculturated exclusion

Purdue and colleagues write that inclusive education involves “all children, families and adults’ rights to participate in environments where diversity is assumed, welcomed and viewed as a rich resource rather than seen as a problem”. However, in a culture where disability is commonly viewed as a tragic within-person characteristic, this is challenging to achieve. As noted above, ableism is a dehumanising process in which we create a ‘them’ and ‘us’ whereby some people are constructed as an ‘Inferior Other’, as less, as ‘different’, as undesirable, as pitiable, as needing to be ‘fixed’ or changed, as sub-human. Ableism plays out insidiously in everyday situations. The sense that an interaction or relationship between a person who does and a person who doesn’t experience disability is somehow benevolent on the part of the non-disabled person; the frequently unquestioned inaccessibility of places, events and materials; patronising interactions such as the often cited congratulatory remarks that a person who experiences disability may receive from strangers for simply being out and about — these are all examples of ableism. So too is the internalised ableism where a person views themselves as inferior or lesser due to impairment. Like racism, sexism and homophobia, for example, ableism results in stigma, including discrimination. From an ableist perspective, disability is
cast as diminished state of being. However, ableism remains little recognised, so much so that Hodge and Runswick-Cole suggest that “[t]he practices of ableism are negotiated and agreed without ever being overtly recognised and acknowledged”. Ableism involves discrimination and exclusion based on legitimising the notion of the ‘Inferior Other’ and the idea that “fixing” or changing a ‘broken person’ is a benevolent and necessary act as a response to the ‘tragedy’ and ‘deficit’ of disability. “Like racism, ableism directs structural power relations in society, generating inequalities located in institutional relations and social processes.” These discriminatory inequalities have powerful implications in terms of barriers to genuine inclusion in education.

The myth of ‘normal’ – and therefore the myth that there is a ‘perfect’ way to be – paves the way for ableism. At the core of ableist thinking is the belief “that impairment (irrespective of ‘type’) is inherently negative which should, if the opportunity presents itself, be ameliorated, cured or indeed eliminated”. Ableism results in a view of disability as a tragic within-person difference and creates an understanding of some people as ‘normal’ compared to a less ideal ‘Other’. This myth of a ‘normal’ student is central to exclusionary approaches to education, in which all children and young people are compared to a mythical ‘normal’ student and frequently found (or pathologised as) ‘lacking’. Therefore, the focus becomes about ‘fixing’ or ‘curing’ a person (or preventing or eliminating existence), rather than recognising that as humans we are all unique and impairment is simply one aspect of human diversity.

In contrast, a social model understanding of disability, as promoted within the disabled persons’ movement, recognises that a person who experiences disability is whole and unbroken, but is disabled by the unaccommodating and ableist views, practices, systems and structures of society. Ableism is easily absorbed uncritically, as we demonstrate to children and young people – through micro and macro-exclusion in education and more broadly through commonly-accepted beliefs and practices, all forms of media and resources, and the design and creation of places and spaces – that some people are ‘Inferior Others’ and thus create a sub-class of ‘disabled’. Acceptance of the myth of ‘normal’ is so powerful and widespread that the idea that children and young people who experience disability should be permanently engaged in the pursuit of ‘becoming normal’ is seldom even challenged. This social oppression impacts negatively on the “psycho-emotional well-being of people categorised as ‘impaired’ by those deemed ‘normal’”. The depth of entrenchment of ableism is such that those of us who experience disability can blame ourselves, rather than oppressive systems and structures, for ableist oppression and develop self-loathing and dislike of other people who experience disability and consequently accept or even promote segregation.

“Ableism is deeply and subliminally embedded within the culture” and rapidly internalised by people who do and do not experience disability. Children are particularly at risk of this internalisation. While the research about inclusive education with students who experience disability is still limited, extant research is reflective of the effects of internalised ableism as students resign themselves, accept or even perceive as benevolent, their own segregation. Additionally, segregation creates a situation where many students grow up without peers who they are aware experience disability, thus creating an unspoken ‘othering’. By contrast, research provides evidence of positive attitude development between peers when students are educated together.

It is not possible to bring about inclusive education in reality whilst engaging in ableist, and therefore deficit-based, views and practices. However, due to the lack of awareness of ableism and its impacts, for most people ableist beliefs operate at a subconscious level. From a more hopeful perspective, Bacon and Causton-Theoharis observe that “if all parties learn to view disability as a positive identity category, medicalising, dehumanising, and deficit-oriented discourse and practices are unlikely to prevail”. Recognising ableism, and identifying ableist views and practices, is a critical first step in a process that has been paralleled to emerging from racist to anti-racist views.
Acceptance of the notion that children and young people can be excluded from ‘mainstream’ education because they are labelled ‘disabled’ “amounts to institutional discrimination”\(^{285}\) and is an example of ableist views playing out in practice. Research provides evidence that, even for those who view inclusive education as optimal for all students, “interpretations of ‘all’ rendered certain students inappropriate candidates”.\(^{286}\) This preparedness to exclude children and young people based on categories or labels of disability demonstrates ableist discrimination at the individual level. This, along with the examples of micro-exclusion explored in chapter four, would not be acceptable from a non-ableist viewpoint. Lack of awareness of ableism, and of the role people and institutions play in constructing disability, creates the conditions to perpetuate discrimination\(^{287}\) and therefore ableism.\(^{288}\)

Inclusive education is only possible when ableist views and practices are critically examined. As Connor and Goldmansour write:

> “…students should learn with, and from, each other – coming to know true diversity in terms of physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional differences. In this way, artificial notions of ‘normalcy’ that have served to diminish and devalue ‘disabled’ children for so long can begin to change. As microcosms of society, classrooms must come to reflect, exemplify, and engage with actual diversity.”\(^{289}\)

Thus, inclusive practice within classrooms not only requires the disestablishment of ableism, but inclusive education also provides the ideal conditions from which to address the disestablishment of ableism in society as a whole. This process holds the potential for the realisation of inclusive education and the creation of the conditions in which all children and young people can flourish.

\(^{253}\) Tomlinson, 2017; Slee, 2018a

\(^{254}\) Campbell, 2012

\(^{255}\) Rutherford, 2016; Slee, 2018a; Slee, 2018b

\(^{256}\) In his 1979 work Discipline and Punish Michel Foucault discusses the 19th century culture of ‘policing’ ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, resulting in an internalised ‘disciplinary gaze’ from which we monitor our own bodies to reflect a particular way of being that we have been enculturated to believe is ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ or ‘desirable’. This lens is strongly reflected in the identification and framing of ableism.
CHAPTER SIX

Broken promises and further barriers to inclusion
“Rights promise much but often give very little in reality”

The tragic reality of the current failure to uphold the right to inclusive education for every student is the personal toll for students and families when inclusion is promised but not delivered. Indeed, false promises of inclusive education, where none is actually offered and instead micro – and even macro – exclusion is dressed up as ‘inclusion’, pose a serious threat to inclusive education and come at a high individual cost. Additionally, the perpetuation of misunderstandings of inclusion create situations where students are devalued and receive totally unacceptable educational experiences.

On the basis of student and family perspectives, Margrain and Farrugia argue that “policy and discourse are not enough to ensure inclusion. Professionals, including teachers, school leaders and wider community advocates, need to take stronger action to support inclusion, to minimise exclusion, and to foster partnership with families”. Student and family experiences of inclusive education are diverse. However, research provides evidence that many families frequently encounter considerable resistance and extensive gatekeeping practices when they seek an inclusive education for a student who experiences disability. Additionally, even when students ‘make it through the school gate’, often the student is not included in reality and therefore is not welcome and does not experience belonging, genuine participation and opportunities, and having their contribution recognised and valued. Students and families express considerable distress and negative psychosocial impacts as a consequence of these exclusionary experiences and, despite the ongoing mantra of ‘parent choice’, can be left feeling that they have no option other than segregated education.

Booth and Ainscow argue that: “Learning and participation are impeded when children encounter ‘barriers’. These can occur in an interaction with any aspect of a school: its buildings and physical arrangement; school organisation, cultures and policies; the relationship between and amongst children and adults; and approaches to teaching and learning. Barriers may be found, too, outside the boundaries of the school within families and communities, and within national and international events and policies.”

Exploring further the barriers to inclusive education, in this chapter I will address additional research regarding the impact of beliefs and attitudes.

Ableist cultures

Students’ attitudes and choices are significantly shaped by the attitudes of their family and communities. Research provides evidence to suggest the presence of negative community views about inclusion and a lack of awareness of disabling processes. Ableist attitudes are frequently uncritically presented in books, toys, television, movies, social and other media. A lack of support for students who are learning about inclusion has also been identified.

The perpetuation of misunderstandings of inclusion create situations where students are devalued and receive totally unacceptable educational experiences.
Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

Stemming from consciously or subconsciously ableist beliefs and practices, negative attitudes towards, and fears about, inclusion have been found to be major barriers to inclusive education. In a considerable body of research from across the world, the beliefs and attitudes of teachers, and others, have been found to be critical to preventing or facilitating inclusive education. As previously noted, research finds that teachers hold a number of concerns about inclusive education, particularly in relation to inadequate support and resources, fear or lack of confidence in teacher knowledge and competency, and concerns about positively supporting the behaviour of diverse groups of students.

The environment and culture of an education setting influences the ways in which teachers interact with students who experience disability, as well as teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education. While much of the research focuses on the attitudes of classroom teachers, school, preschool, and centre leaders play a key role in creating the culture of a setting. Graham and Spandagou found that principals’ perceptions of inclusion are formed by their own understandings of inclusion, as well as the context of the school they are in. “The process is reciprocal: context influences perceptions, perceptions influence attitudes and, in return, attitudes influence the context.” In Graham and Spandagou’s research, principals expressed clearly ableist views, making a strong distinction between students who were viewed as ‘normal’ and those who, by inference, were viewed as ‘sub-normal’. Unsurprisingly, this impacted negatively on attitudes towards inclusive education. These findings are consistent with evidence of negative attitudes of staff in administrative positions within every level of the education system.

**Support and resourcing for inclusive education**

Concerns regarding inadequate resources and limited support for inclusive education have been widely reported. Issues of inadequate teacher education for inclusion, a subsequent lack of confidence, skills and knowledge, and issues regarding misunderstandings of and misuse of paraprofessional support sit alongside concerns about inadequate teacher-student ratios and insufficient support staff. These concerns are intensified when difficulties are encountered with collaboration or due to limited leadership for inclusion. Insufficient time for teachers to prepare educational experiences, rigid curricula, one-size-fits-all approaches and the negative impacts of the neo-liberal agenda in education are also key issues. Additionally, limited access to materials and learning resources are identified. Concerns are also raised regarding limited information available to support teachers and families in working together towards inclusive education. In addressing these concerns, a key issue is the need for careful redistribution of the existing resources. The current inequitable distribution of resources within the Australian education system is a barrier to inclusive education. While increased resourcing for inclusive education is clearly needed, this does not necessarily require additional resourcing overall, in that the extensive resources that are currently directed towards segregated education settings can be redirected to support transformation to genuine inclusive education for all. This is an important part of the process of transitioning from the current parallel systems of education to an inclusive system, as required under international law (see chapter three for further discussion).

The representation of students who experience disability in education materials is also an area of concern. The deficit-based and stereotypical representation or absence of representation in materials including books, posters, toys, television, movies, social and other media, as noted above, perpetuates ableism and forms a barrier to inclusive education.
In addressing these barriers, care needs to be taken not to (re)produce ableist approaches. An emphasis on resources without consideration of the structure and culture within a setting may result in deficit-based thinking that undermines the very meaning of inclusive education.\footnote{Beckett, 2009; Birken & Burke, 2006; Brown, Packer, & Passmore, 2013; Cologon, 2012; Deng & Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009; Frankel, Gold, & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010; Hemmings, & Woodcock, 2011; Horrocks, White, & Roberts, 2008; Huang, & Diamond, 2009; Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Kim, 2013; Klibthong, 2013; McDonald & Tufue-Dolgoy, 2013; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009; Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009; Sarkar, 2010; Sulkunpant, Arthur-Kelly, & Dempsey, 2013; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Zhang, 2011} Additionally, lack of resources is often used as an excuse for not allowing students who experience disability to participate or enrol in an education setting.\footnote{Ibid, p. 226} Providing support for teachers is essential to facilitating inclusion. However, the provision of support needs to be approached from an understanding of inclusive education and an active desire to resist ableism.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Granite & Graham, 2012} Beckett, 2009; Bond, 2013; Cologon, 2013c; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Ellis, 2015; Hodkinson, 2012; Lalvani & Bacon, 2019; Martinez-Bello & Martinez-Bello, 2016; Salvador, 2017
\item \footnote{Ibid} Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER SEVEN

‘Un-othering’: transformation towards inclusion
In sum, it is clear that the extant research provides strong support for inclusive education. At the same time, it is equally clear that there are currently significant barriers that need to be addressed in order to make inclusive education a reality for all.

In this final chapter I will draw together research to consider some of the key issues that need to be addressed in working towards inclusive education, concluding with policy recommendations.

As noted at the start of this report, it is important to recognise the many students, families, teachers, paraprofessional educators, principals, education department staff and others who work tirelessly every day to support inclusive education. There are many challenges and raising the issues identified within the research literature should not be read as a criticism of individuals, but rather as an attempt to draw to light important issues that require careful consideration if inclusive education is to become a reality in Australia – and as a support to all efforts towards genuine inclusion.

Ending the option to exclude by transitioning from parallel systems of ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education to an inclusive education system for all is a necessary, long overdue and fundamental step. In Australia, this requires serious state and federal government commitments to inclusive education, and associated legislation, policy, and appropriate provision and distribution of funding. A key and straightforward starting point is to ensure no further segregated settings (schools, preschools, classes, centres, or ‘units’) are created. Transitioning from the current segregated parallel ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ settings to inclusive settings is essential but is also more complex and needs to be done with considerable care.

To avoid simply relocating students whilst maintaining ableist micro-exclusion, more than co-location is required. Without a paradigm shift away from ableist understandings of human diversity, misunderstandings of inclusive education as deficit-based ‘special’ education will persist.\(^{314}\) This means that any genuine efforts towards transformation for inclusion necessarily require actively working towards a culture of inclusion within and beyond education settings and systems, including directly working to identify and disestablish ableism in all forms and at all levels.

Within this transition, it is important to ensure that the highest possible quality of education is provided to every student at all times. Inclusive education is quality education and is a necessary precursor to this goal.

As explored in the next section of this chapter, there are considerable attitudinal barriers to the culture shift required. From within ‘special’ education, despite the lack of research evidence to support the notion (see chapter two), barriers include the contradictory concern that ending segregated education will reduce the opportunity for quality education and a fear that it will render those who have dedicated their lives to ‘special’ education redundant. Within ‘mainstream’ settings these barriers include fear of not being able to provide quality education for all children, alongside an ableist misunderstanding, perpetuated by the current option to exclude, that children who have been ascribed disability labels are ‘intruders’ in ‘mainstream’ settings and might ‘better belong elsewhere’. Reflecting on these issues not only raises the matter of the culture shift required, but also the practical considerations needed for transformation towards inclusive education.

In the remainder of the chapter, a range of aspects of the research are explored with the intention of supporting these processes of change. Before engaging with these, though, it is important to acknowledge both the magnitude of this change and the fact that it happens little by little in everyday exchanges. A necessary starting point is always to consider the existing strengths within any given system or setting. It is from what we already know we can do well that we can move forward to address what it is we need
to do better. Additionally, it is important to start with a clear vision of where we are heading, why, and what steps are needed to get there. From here, we can engage in an ongoing iterative cycle of planning and review – implementing, observing, reflecting, and then planning again. Examples from research and practice can assist in getting a clearer picture of this process in action.\textsuperscript{315} In getting started, it may be helpful to:

- document a clear vision and shared set of values for working towards inclusion
- create a ‘space’ to work together to build a shared understanding and collaborative starting point, and provide resources and support to enable this
- identify current strengths and enablers (practical and attitudinal)
- identify current barriers (practical and attitudinal)
- document what change is needed:
  - what will this change ‘look like’ when it has happened?
  - will this change be consistent with inclusive values?
- build on current strengths and acknowledge current barriers, identify the steps that might enable the process of transformation from ‘where we are’ to ‘where we are going’
- determine what support, knowledge and skills are needed to enable these steps
- identify where this support and learning can come from
- choose a starting point (small and bigger) and begin
- take action, document, observe, reflect, review and continue this cycle.

In the remainder of this chapter the research evidence is examined to identify some key factors that may facilitate this transformation towards inclusive education. While ongoing research is required, there are a number of areas for which the research provides a strong basis to progress this transformation.

**Attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education**

Discussion has long been held about the potential of education to bring about social change.\textsuperscript{316} As explored in chapter two, research provides evidence to demonstrate that as people we are not born prejudiced, however, we develop and demonstrate prejudice early in childhood as we are enculturated into the dominant ways of thinking and being.\textsuperscript{317} In fact, research provides evidence that as early as two years of age, children’s conversations and behaviours demonstrate ableist enculturation\textsuperscript{318}, and by the age of three, children will identify people or groups of people they ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ on the basis of symbols of conflict or stigma.\textsuperscript{319} By age six, children will make unsolicited prejudiced statements consistent with internalised cultural preferences.\textsuperscript{320} Awareness of the processes of enculturation emphasises the importance of working with children from young ages to foster a culture of inclusion and actively seeking to break the cycle of entrenched ableism. However, these childhood processes of enculturation are unlikely to change until attitudes begin to change amongst adults within and beyond education systems, including across the community and within media and government.\textsuperscript{321}

If the adults seeking to foster a culture of inclusion have not examined their own attitudes and practices, they are likely to perpetuate the cycle of ableism, ultimately preventing the realisation of inclusive education. While it is common to advocate for ‘disability awareness’ as part of the efforts towards a culture of inclusion, this tends to be interpreted to mean awareness of characteristics associated with disability labels. A critical aspect of working towards inclusion does in fact involve a form of ‘disability awareness’ – that is, disability equity education. This involves developing awareness of ableism and working to resist dominant negative and normative
Towards inclusive education: a necessary process of transformation

The attitudinal transformation required for inclusive education is premised on the disestablishment of ableism. To disestablish ableism in education, Hehir argues that it is necessary to:

• acknowledge that ableism exists within our systems of education
• actively seek to unravel the effects ableism is having (deconstructing dominant ableist practices)
• welcome and embrace impairment as one of the many and valuable aspects of human diversity (along with diverse cultural backgrounds and genders, for example)
• avoid negative stereotyping and eliminate patronising approaches and representations
• actively seek to incorporate and celebrate multiple modes of participation
• debunk the myth that ‘special’ education (segregated education) is superior to education of all students together
• develop an understanding of and willingness to engage with principles of universal design for learning
• provide appropriate support within ‘mainstream’ settings when needed to ensure equitable access to education (e.g. providing and/or teaching braille, assistance with setting up AAC systems)
• ensure that the education of allied support providers (e.g. teachers of the D/deaf, braille teachers and allied health therapists) enables the provision of adequate support to teachers in developing key skills (fluent signing, knowledge of how to teach braille, etc), as well as supporting recognition of and resistance to ableism, and includes the ability to collaborate with teachers to support inclusive education
• apply principles of universal design for learning.

Openness to learning through mistakes and ongoing development as a teacher has also been found to be critical, along with working collaboratively with parents and other teachers. Level of parental education has been found to influence attitudes towards inclusion. These findings are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of teacher attitudes for bringing about inclusive education.

It is important to note that research provides evidence to suggest that differences in teachers’ attitudes result in differences in teaching practices overall, not just related to students who experience disability.

In longitudinal research, Jordan and colleagues provide evidence to demonstrate that when teachers take on the attitude and belief that they are responsible for and have a valuable role to play in the education of all students (specifically including students who experience disability), these teachers engage with all students more often and at higher cognitive levels. Consequently, “inclusive teachers are more engaged and proactive educators”. This means that teachers need to be committed to the education of all students in their groups or classes. Differences in teachers’ beliefs result in differences in teaching practices overall, not just related to students who experience disability. These findings contribute to the recognition of the importance of teacher attitudes towards inclusive education, in order to bring about the best possible education for all students – whether or not students experience disability. Indeed, a reciprocal relationship forms between attitudes and practice, in which inclusive attitudes create the conditions for engaging in inclusive practice, in turn resulting in more inclusive attitudes.

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As explored throughout, perpetuation of the ‘special’ education paradigm, rather than resulting in inclusive education, further entrenches ableist thinking and practices. Transformation of education systems, policies and practices is required. This involves critical engagement with all aspects of education settings and systems, including examining the environment and addressing the physical arrangement of rooms, and ensuring that when students are arranged into groups that these do not create micro-exclusion (e.g. ability grouping or streaming) and instead are flexible and heterogeneous groups. Additionally, it is essential
Teachers who receive education about inclusive education have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards students who experience disability.

Teachers and other professionals often benefit from support to develop understanding about roles and responsibilities in the education of students who experience disability. As illustrated through the examination of the research evidence regarding the role of paraprofessional educators, careful consideration of and communication about the roles of all professionals is essential to avoid creating situations of micro-exclusion.

Regular collaboration with all members of the education team, including parents, and allied support professionals is required. This involves allied professionals working with teachers and families, rather than with students directly. At times it may be appropriate for support to be provided in a ‘push-in’ model of learning, where a support staff member is directly involved within classroom practice, rather than a traditional (and always exclusionary) ‘pull-out’ model. However, any such ‘push-in’ support needs to be implemented in a genuinely inclusive manner and as part of a universal approach to education for all. This means ensuring that intended support does not end up constituting micro-exclusion. Consulting students regarding the support they need and how they believe this is best implemented is essential within this process.

Addressing the changes required to meet these recommendations requires action at many levels – one key aspect is teacher education.

Teacher education for inclusive education

Teacher attitudes influence the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom. Teacher education is directly related to teacher attitudes. Given the importance and implications of teacher attitudes, and the relationships between ableism and negative views towards inclusive education, McLean argues that engaging professionals in processes of examining their beliefs and attitudes, and disestablishing ableist views, is an ethical obligation for teacher education. Additionally, what teachers do in the present can create change ‘for the better’.

Inadequate, or severely inadequate, teacher education for inclusion is a major barrier to inclusive education. Forlin finds that teacher education for inclusion “in most regions has been tokenistic at best and non-existent at worst”. Furthermore, it is not only the pre-service education that teachers receive, but also ongoing professional development that needs to focus on inclusive education. This is essential because education contexts (and broader contexts) change frequently, because inclusive education
is an ongoing process, and because there are many teachers currently in service who have had limited education in terms of inclusive education and require professional development to further develop their skills and understandings. For this reason, research finds that less experienced teachers (who have been more recently educated) are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards inclusive education. Recognising that teachers’ understanding of education grows as they gain experience is also relevant in terms of acknowledging the need for pre-service as well as ongoing teacher education for inclusion.

Despite the current and serious issues in teacher education for inclusion, nationally and internationally, it has been found to have positive impacts on teacher attitudes. Teachers who receive education about inclusive education have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards students who experience disability. However, as outlined in chapter six, research provides evidence of widespread concerns about inclusive education on the part of teachers. Lack of teacher education and support has been identified as a barrier to inclusive education. Despite the positive attitudes of more recently graduated teachers, research also provides evidence to suggest that many new teachers consider their teaching education to have been adequate to prepare them to teach inclusively, with more sustained and intensive education for inclusion required. Positively though, research also finds that pre-service and in-service teacher education for inclusion can alleviate these concerns and facilitate positive attitudes towards inclusive education, as well as supporting the development of teacher skills and confidence in bringing about inclusion in practice.

As noted earlier, the notion that there is a ‘special’ way to teach ‘special’ students is in itself an ableist view. This ableist thinking results in categorising some students as unacceptable for inclusion. By inference, this view suggests – incorrectly – that there is one way to teach all students except students who experience disability. The uncritical absorption of the myth of ‘normal’ creates the conditions where teachers are able to view students who experience disability as ‘Other’ and this process results in a lack of confidence (and sometimes unwillingness) to teach all students. Additionally, this unexamined perpetuation of the myth of ‘normal’ reduces the quality of education for all students since it does not take into account any aspects of human diversity and thus teaching is not optimal for any student. The notion that there is one way to teach any group of students is both problematic and untrue, as it denies the individuality of all students and the diversity within any group, thus inclusive teachers are flexible and responsive and better teachers of any student.

Moving beyond the myth of the ‘normal’ student creates the conditions to improve the education of all students. While many teachers express considerable anxiety about inclusive education, confidence grows with experience of inclusion. However, teachers require support to prepare them for this experience.

As noted above, teacher education has been found to lead to more inclusive attitudes. However, some studies show only minimal change and the majority of pre-service teachers feel unprepared for inclusive education. The traditional approach to teacher education in which teachers are taught about disability categories, often in a week-by-week fashion, serves to reinforce the myth of the ‘normal’ and ‘sub-normal’ student, thus perpetuating ableism and impeding the opportunity to develop inclusive attitudes. Instead, anti-ableist teacher education is required.

It is necessary for teacher education to equip teachers with both the awareness and the skills and knowledge to implement strengths-based approaches to inclusive education and to develop flexibility and creativity in providing multiple ways to learn and engage. This strengths-based approach is important not only in relation to students, but also in collaborating with other adults. Learning processes for successful and positive collaboration with families, and other important people involved in the lives of students, is an important aspect of teacher education for inclusion. Furthermore,
collaborative learning between professionals has been found to be an effective approach to increasing and improving inclusive practices.\textsuperscript{371}

While there are a range of misunderstandings and confusions about the meaning and processes of differentiation and universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the provisioning of the environment, there is a growing body of research investigating the use and outcomes of such approaches.\textsuperscript{372} This research is of direct relevance to recent policy development in Australia. The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability (NCCD), which came into effect in 2018, now forms the basis for funding support across education settings in Australia.\textsuperscript{373} Under the NCCD, all teachers are required to engage in Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) in order to facilitate the inclusion of all students, and to meet the requirements of the Disability Standards for Education.\textsuperscript{374} QDTP is understood as an approach to teaching that is responsive to all students and that can be “reasonably expected as part of quality teaching or school practice”.\textsuperscript{375} Under the NCCD, additional funding is provided to support teachers in undertaking further levels of adjustments, which are categorised as: Supplementary Adjustments, Substantial Adjustments and Extensive Adjustments. However, additional funding is not provided for engaging in QDTP and instead it is expected as a foundation of teaching for all.\textsuperscript{376} This means that to meet current Australian Government teacher requirements, all teachers need to be equipped to take a universal approach to accessibility and participation in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and the provisioning of the environment in order to facilitate QDTP.

Teacher education for inclusion needs to be based on understanding the importance of relationships, particularly in regards to positive approaches to supporting behaviour development.\textsuperscript{377} Additionally, teachers need support to understand that inclusion is an ongoing process.\textsuperscript{378} The idea of inclusion as a ‘work in progress’ can facilitate teachers’ willingness to adapt strategies and ideas as they build relationships with students and families and learn more about the processes of teaching and about each individual student with whom they work.\textsuperscript{379} From the research it is clear that key elements of teacher education that result in more positive attitudes towards, and understanding of, inclusive education include:

- teacher education based on an anti-bias, rights-based approach to inclusive education for all students\textsuperscript{380}
- education for critical reflection and critical consciousness to facilitate inclusive attitudes\textsuperscript{381}
- support for teachers to develop skills in identifying, challenging and addressing barriers to inclusion\textsuperscript{382}
- teacher education that enables teachers to develop an understanding of ableism, recognise ableist values and practices, and seek to disestablish ableist attitudes, including consideration of representation of people who experience disability\textsuperscript{383}
- support to move beyond deficit thinking entrenched within the ‘special’ education paradigm towards a strengths-based approach to education that welcomes and celebrates diversity\textsuperscript{384}
- learning about and developing a rights-based understanding of inclusive education\textsuperscript{385}
- engaging in critical reflection about beliefs and practices\textsuperscript{386}
- building confidence for inclusive education through reflective practice on developing knowledge of flexible pedagogy\textsuperscript{387}
- engaging with critical disability studies to develop understanding of the social construction of disability and the role of the teacher in reducing ableism\textsuperscript{388}
- developing an understanding of diversity as a resource rather than a ‘problem’ and learning to presume competence and hold positive expectations of all students\textsuperscript{389}
- learning about available supports for facilitating inclusive education\textsuperscript{390}
- critical engagement with resources and inclusive approaches to provisioning the environment\textsuperscript{391}
- developing an understanding of the importance of building relationships with students to facilitate inclusion\textsuperscript{392}
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Specific planning around the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessional educators and teachers can result in improved educational experiences and increased student involvement in the curriculum. Paraprofessional educators report the belief that their support can be beneficial in providing teachers with another adult to discuss and reflect on ideas and problem-solving within the everyday. Research provides evidence that, working in close partnership with the teacher, paraprofessional support may be implemented in such a way that it is beneficial for organising the learning environment, preparing or adapting materials in ways that can benefit all students, and providing general assistance to support the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. Unobtrusive, discreet support from a paraprofessional educator to further scaffold what is being taught by the teacher may allow for student autonomy and facilitate inclusion. Indeed, in research with 16 young adults labelled with intellectual disabilities, Broer and colleagues found that students reported that at times paraprofessional educators were able to assist by providing useful explanations to clarify teacher instruction. When paraprofessional educators are from the same community or cultural backgrounds as families, or have experienced similar life situations, support has been found to bring together families and professionals when many different professionals are involved in the lives of the student and family. Paraprofessional support can be useful for assistance with small group learning and supervision of students, including assistance with emergencies and classroom management.

• developing an understanding of the importance of listening to people who experience disability, including children and young people, and drawing on the disability rights movement in striving towards inclusive education (and within this, providing opportunities for respectful engagement with people who experience disability and their families)

• establishing strategies for ongoing collaboration with other teachers, including the provision of a ‘theoretical toolbox’ to assist with engaging in ongoing critical thinking and critical reflection

• learning about effective approaches to using support for inclusive education, particularly awareness of common pitfalls and important practices for collaborating with paraprofessionals, and alternative approaches to support

• support for developing understanding of and skills for engaging in differentiation and universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, the environment and assessment.

When teachers perceive a culture of exclusion or feel that they are not supported through policy, and when they experience the effects of a lack of support, this can have a detrimental impact on their attitudes towards inclusive education. One key area of policy is teacher education for inclusive education. This requires providing education in disability studies and inclusive education as an essential component of teacher education and ongoing professional development for all teachers and all other professionals involved in supporting inclusive education. Consistent with international obligations under the CRPD, the delivery of this teacher education needs to include at least one compulsory, semester-long subject dedicated solely to inclusive education. This needs to be undertaken alongside embedded approaches to ensuring all aspects of teacher education address inclusion. Additionally, ongoing professional development for in-service teachers is required.

Paraprofessional support for inclusion

As discussed in chapter four, despite substantial concerns about common approaches to using paraprofessional support for inclusive education, in research involving parents, teachers, students and paraprofessional educators it is argued that with careful planning, preparation and implementation, paraprofessional support may help facilitate inclusion. It has also been argued that

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Policy and practice for inclusive education

“Inclusive education is an example of a policy initiative that is socially just, but requires significant commitment and knowledge to implement.”

In relation to policy, two key matters of concern are raised in the research literature. Firstly, policies are frequently inadequate (or non-existent) and misunderstandings of inclusive education are evident in many policies that purport to be about inclusion. Secondly, while many policies do outline inclusive approaches, there is a need for stronger links between policy and practice. Indeed, what is stated in policy and legislation is not necessarily reflective of implemented practice.

Regarding the first of these two key issues, it is clear that current policies are inadequate for the realisation of inclusive education. To bring inclusive education to a reality, policy transformation is required. Critically, policy makers need to engage with inclusive education as a fundamental human right for every person, and thus to shift from inclusive education as a choice – or an optional extra – to inclusive education as everyday practice for all.

Concerning the links between policy and practice, inclusive education policies are common nationally and internationally. However, the translation of these policies into practice is limited and many barriers to genuine realisation of inclusive education have been identified. Fragmentation between policy and practice is an issue that requires thoughtful consideration in undertaking policy-making to bring about inclusive education.

When adequate education and professional development is provided and careful and ongoing collaboration with the teacher is in place, paraprofessional educators report beliefs that they can provide effective support for inclusive education. However, suggestions that further education for paraprofessionals is the key strategy needed require cautious examination given the risk that this may serve to legitimise the problematic tendency for teachers to inappropriately transfer teacher responsibility for students to the paraprofessional.

Overall, it is clear that the common strategy of employing paraprofessional educators to support the education of students who experience disability may hold some promise. However, by contrast (as outlined in chapter four), research provides substantial evidence that the current approaches to paraprofessional support can impede, rather than facilitate, inclusion. Consequently, careful, comprehensive and research-based policy-making is required.
Policy recommendations

Building on the research literature, there is scope for a coordinated framework for inclusive education in all Australian education settings. Cognisant of the importance of policy transformation and a coherent approach between policy and practice, the following research-based recommendations are provided with a view to working towards the realisation of genuine inclusive education:

1. Develop and implement a National Action Plan for Inclusive Education to ensure a successful transition from parallel systems of education to one inclusive system of education

Conduct a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system and develop a national plan with measurable actions and robust monitoring and accountability to ensure the rights of students who experience disability are upheld, consistent with Australia’s obligations under the CRPD, and in keeping with the definition of inclusive education outlined in GC4. There must be no confusion or conflation of inclusion with any forms of exclusion including assimilation, integration or remediation. Careful attention needs to be paid to how the evidence-base on inclusive education is translated to policy, practice and funding systems in order to create an achievable plan for the transition from parallel ‘special’ and ‘mainstream’ education systems to one education system for all. This includes a reallocation of current funding to ensure that the distribution of education funds fully and equitably supports the transition and ongoing successful functioning of a genuinely inclusive education system.

2. Ensure that no new segregated settings (schools, pre-schools, centres, units or classrooms) are created

As part of the review, the educational practices and culture of segregated schools should be specifically examined, with a view to defining policy and funding arrangements that are consistent with Australia’s obligations and contemporary theory. This needs to include a clear plan to ensure a positive transition of current students to a fully inclusive education system. A key initial step in moving towards this is to cease the creation of new segregated settings.

3. Ensure the full recognition of human rights

From the above review, define clear expectations for inclusive education in Australian schools. As part of the review process, conduct a robust review, in consultation with organisations of persons with disability, of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and implement the recommendations in the new standards. The expectations need to ensure that there is no implicit hierarchy of students and that no students can be considered ‘too disabled’ for inclusive education. As such, it needs to be explicit that there are no exceptions to the fundamental human right to inclusive education. Expanding the current data collection practices to include recording and transparent reporting of the numbers of students who do not qualify for an adjustment, who are prevented from enrolling in their local education settings, and of all use of restrictive practices, suspension and expulsion is required. Transparent and disaggregated reporting of educational attainment and completion rates is also required.

4. Foster a culture of inclusion

Addressing ableism within and beyond education settings and systems is essential to facilitating inclusive education. This includes the need for policy to engage the broader community with anti-ableist education and disability equity education.

5. Introduce compulsory, comprehensive and ongoing teacher education for inclusion

Ongoing pre-service and in-service professional development for educators on inclusive education (not to be confused with ‘special’ education) is essential (including developing awareness regarding ableism and the provisions of the CRPD). Within pre-service teacher education, the CRPD requires at least one compulsory core (semester-long) subject in every teacher education program that is solely dedicated to inclusive education. This approach is complemented, but not replaced, by an embedded approach throughout the curriculum. At least one subject dedicated to critical disability studies, free of ableism and underpinned by a disability equity education approach, is also recommended.
5 Build the foundations for successful collaboration for inclusion

Inclusive education practice should become an integral part of education for all allied health and education leaders and other education support professionals. Additionally, teachers and allied professionals require support for collaborating for inclusion. This includes addressing the considerable policy gap regarding the use of paraprofessional support. Information and support for families to assist with the currently complex and often very frustrating process of advocating for inclusive education is also essential.

6 Ensure flexible and responsive curriculum and assessment approaches

The role of differentiation in teaching practice is clearly identified in the implementation of the NCCD. Further development of policy to ensure differentiated, universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy, environments and assessment is required, with space needed for flexible and responsive approaches. Clear consideration of the impacts of high-stakes student achievement testing is also required.

7 Listen to students

Ongoing commitment to direct, accountable and regular consultation with students who experience disability and their families is required across all aspects of policy-making and implementation for inclusive education.

8 Prioritise disability equity education

Further development of the diversity approach within the Australian Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia is needed to incorporate disability equity education, including awareness-raising regarding ableism and educational practice.
Conclusion

As evident in this review, it is now well established that inclusive education is a positive and necessary progression for education systems the world over. Inclusive education is recognised as a fundamental human right. The research demonstrates the positive outcomes of inclusive education. However, the evidence is also clear that there are many barriers to inclusive education that are still prevalent. More than 20 years ago, Barton argued that,

“it is because of the offensiveness of existing injustices and barriers that we must not on the one hand underestimate the degree of the struggle involved if our vision of an inclusive society is to be realized, or on the other hand fail to recognize the importance of establishing effective working relationships with all those involved in removing oppression and discrimination.”

This has not changed. It is clear, therefore, that bringing inclusive education to a reality for all is an urgent ethical and educational imperative. However, this does require transformation, starting with recognising and actively working to disestablish ableism at every level of our education systems, and within society more broadly. As with the social movements that have come before, this is not an easy task and many of us will necessarily feel uncomfortable as we encounter our own ableism and the ableism that abounds in our society. This discomfort is necessary and important to bring about transformation. However, we need to support each other in solidarity as we take on this challenge. Being genuinely inclusive involves ongoing commitment and continual critical reflection. This is not always easy, but it is a worthy challenge when we consider what kind of world we wish to live in together.
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