

Inclusion in education

towards equality for students
with disability



Issues paper

Written by Dr Kathy Cologon

Children and Families Research Centre
Institute of Early Childhood
Macquarie University

**Policy recommendations written with
Children with Disability Australia**

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This work has been produced with the assistance of funding from the Australian Government Department of Education to expand the education policy capacity of Children with Disability Australia. The views in this publication are the authors' own and are not necessarily held or endorsed by the Australian Government.

On 18 September 2013, Machinery of Government changes established the Department of Education and the Department of Employment out of the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). All references to DEEWR in the document should now be read as the Australian Government Department of Education.



 **Children
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Summary

All children in Australia have the right to an inclusive education. However, there are many barriers to the realisation of this right in the lived experience of children and families. Current efforts towards upholding the rights of all children are impeded by a lack of understanding of inclusive education and misappropriation of the term. Additional barriers include negative and discriminatory attitudes and practices, lack of support to facilitate inclusive education, and inadequate education and professional development for teachers and other professionals. Critical to addressing all of these barriers is recognising and disestablishing ableism in Australia.

This paper draws from recent research in addressing gaps in current understanding to provide a firm basis from which to inform research based policy development. Taking a rights-based approach, the paper focuses on developing a clear understanding of inclusive education and identifying strategies to enhance the education of all children in Australia.





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lead to our community

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Definitions

Children

People 0–18 years of age.

Education

The provision of education to people from early childhood through to adulthood (although it is recognised that education is an ongoing lifelong process).

People who experience disability

The reality in current Australian society is that the use of ‘disabled person’ generally involves a negation of personhood, rather than recognition of the social imposition of disability. Consequently, in this paper the term people who experience disability is used to recognise the social imposition of disability, whilst still identifying the person first.

Ableism

Ableism is to disability what racism or sexism is to ethnicity and gender. Ableism involves discriminatory attitudes and practices arising from the perception that a person who experiences disability is in some sense inferior to a person who does not experience disability.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) ensures that environments and experiences are inclusive of children and adults in all their diversity. This includes providing multiple ways of accessing information, approaching learning tasks and engaging and participating in learning. UDL ensures that all environments and experiences are ready for all children, rather than targeting learning experiences to a homogenised ‘middle ground’, which excludes most learners, including many children who experience disability.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education involves embracing human diversity and welcoming all children and adults as equal members of an educational community. This involves valuing and supporting the full participation of all people together within mainstream educational settings. Inclusive education requires recognising and upholding the rights of all children and adults and understanding human diversity as a rich resource and an everyday part of all human environments and interactions. Inclusive education is an approach to education free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices, including free from ableism. Inclusive education requires putting inclusive values into action to ensure all children and adults belong, participate and flourish.

Introduction

The right to an inclusive education is articulated in both the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC)¹ and the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability* (CRPD)². Consistent with ratifying these conventions, the Australian Government expresses its commitment to inclusive education in an array of documents and policies, including the *National Disability Strategy*³, the *Australian Curriculum*, the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, the *National Quality Framework* and the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*⁴. Each of these documents recognises the importance of responding to student diversity and ensuring the participation of all students as learners. However, while children who experience disability continue to be denied equal access to inclusive education from early childhood through to adulthood, the requirements of these conventions are not being upheld.⁵

Following Australia's ratification of the CRPD in 2008, the Council of Australian Governments agreed on the *National Disability Strategy* (NDS) in 2011. The NDS provided the local context for action following the ratification of the CRPD. It contains six areas of policy action, including one covering education (Learning and Skills). This was preceded by Australia's national *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*⁶ (DDA).

The *Disability Standards for Education 2005*⁷ outline legal obligations for education under Australia's national *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA). These legal obligations include ensuring the right of every child who experiences disability to education on the same basis as any child not labelled disabled.

Following Australia's ratification of the CRPD in 2008, and the development of the NDS in 2011, a review of the *Disability Standards for Education* was undertaken in 2012. In the opinion of the author the review identified many issues currently resulting in violations of the right to an inclusive education. Serious concerns were raised regarding inadequate education and professional development for teachers and specialist support staff, lack of funding and limited support from education authorities.⁸ Consistent with UNICEF's recent report on the *State of the World's Children*⁹, attitudes were identified as a major barrier to inclusion.¹⁰ The review found that for many people, stigmatisation was such that they did not feel they could disclose the difficulties they may be having or identify their support needs.¹¹ In sum, in the opinion of the author the review clearly identified that Australia is far from meeting its obligations under the CRPD and revealed many legislative breaches of the DDA.

People who experience disability form the largest minority group in our world today.¹² However, the rights of people who experience disability are repeatedly denied.¹³ Exclusion or discrimination

1 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989, <http://www.unicef.org/crc/>

2 *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability*, 2006, <https://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=150>

3 COAG, 2011

4 ACARA, 2012; ACECQA, 2011; AITSL, 2011; DEEWR, 2009

5 *The State of the World's Children 2013*, http://www.unicef.org/sowc2013/files/SWCR2013_ENG_Lo_res_24_Apr_2013.pdf

6 *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2013C00022>

7 *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767>

8 DEEWR, 2012

9 UNICEF, 2013

10 DEEWR, 2012

11 *Ibid*

12 World Health Organisation (WHO), 2011

13 UNICEF, 2013

on the basis of disability remains a common occurrence and children who experience disability are amongst the most excluded in Australia¹⁴ and throughout the world¹⁵.

Article 24 of the CRPD states 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” (CRPD, Article 24). 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” (CRPD, Article 24). The right to education for all has been recognised for many decades. Given this, 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’”¹⁶.

“[T]o be excluded is to be disempowered, to be constituted as ‘other’ and outside of a ‘normal’ frame of reference.”¹⁷ Inclusion naturally implies exclusion, thus in order to understand inclusive education it is important to consider who is included and into what, and likewise who is excluded and from what. While inclusion is about everyone, as noted above, children who experience disability are amongst the most excluded groups, thus particular attention to the rights of people who experience disability is required. The CRPD articulates the rights of people who experience disability and clearly states that these rights are not privileges.

As a signatory to the CRPD Australia is obliged, under international human rights law, to respect, protect and fulfil the rights articulated within, 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.¹⁸ This requires acting upon the recognition that “[i]nclusion is a right, not a special privilege for a select few”¹⁹.

Ill-informed attitudes and low expectations form a vicious cycle limiting opportunities for children who experience disability.²⁰ Additionally, research has found that by age six children demonstrate internalised cultural preferences and prejudices reflective of the communities in which they live, including making unsolicited prejudiced statements about community members.²¹ The development of these entrenched prejudices in the childhood years creates a cycle of prejudice that inhibits social cohesion. Fostering inclusion in the childhood years has the potential to break this cycle²², thus making childhood an important focus area for developing inclusion. However, changes in the views and behaviours of children are unlikely without changes in adult views and behaviours.²³

14 Hobson, 2010

15 UNICEF, 2013

16 D’Alessio, 2011, p.141

17 Barton, 1997, p.232

18 Jonsson, 2007, p.118

19 Kliever, 1998, p.320

20 Cologon, 2012

21 Connolly, Smith & Kelly, 2002

22 Cologon, 2012

23 Ainscow, 2007; Beckett, 2009; UNICEF, 2013

One issue that contributes to the difficulties in upholding the right to inclusive education, in Australia and internationally, is confusion regarding what comprises inclusive education and the frequent misappropriation of the term. Despite the right to inclusive education specified in the CRPD, what constitutes inclusive education varies across contexts and interpretations.²⁴ Inclusion is often viewed as an ‘added extra’ or a ‘special effort’ born out of kindness or charity. By contrast, inclusion is a right and is fundamental to a functioning society.²⁵

Since the 1970s the move towards inclusive education has been gradually building. Subsequently considerable research has focussed on the outcomes of inclusive education. However, our current understanding of the implications of this research for policy and practice in Australia is hampered by a number of factors including a current lack of shared or common meaning for ‘inclusive education’, and a lack of knowledge about developing inclusive practices and attitudes towards inclusion. These issues are addressed in this paper.

In addressing the current gaps in understanding, this paper seeks to draw together research findings to develop a clear picture of the implications for improving policy and practice—in order to facilitate greater inclusion for children who experience disability in Australia. The intention of this paper is to provide a firm basis from which to inform research based policy development.

This paper seeks to address the following questions:

- What understanding of the term ‘inclusive education’ can be drawn from current research literature?
- What does the literature tell us about attitudes towards inclusive education and the impact this has on practices?
- What can we learn from research on ‘inclusion’ and ‘inclusive education’ to inform capacity building in childhood education, work against low expectations and increase inclusion in education?
- What are the implications of the reviewed research for developing policy and practice to facilitate inclusion of children who experience disability in Australia?

²⁴ D’Alessio & Watkins, 2009

²⁵ UNICEF, 2013



Method

An extensive literature search was conducted to develop this issues paper. Drawing on more than 170 research papers, in light of the questions outlined above, the current paper addresses: the meaning of the term 'inclusive education'; outcomes of inclusive education; and barriers to or facilitators of inclusive education. Where relevant, links are also made to recent national and international reports. There has been a consistent lack of evidence to suggest any benefit of segregated education over time.²⁶ By contrast, there is a considerable body of research demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education. This literature is considered in this paper. Taken together this paper provides a clear evidence base to inform policy and practice in inclusive education in Australia. It should be noted that while there are many considerations relevant to inclusive education that fall outside of the scope of this paper, this is not to suggest that they are not important. A number of gaps in the literature are identified and further research is urgently needed to address these gaps.



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Section 1: Understanding ‘inclusive education’

Inclusive education can be a difficult concept to define.²⁷ Indeed it is arguably one of the most contested educational terms.²⁸ A lack of understanding about what ‘inclusive education’ means, is a barrier to inclusion in and of itself.²⁹

Definitions of inclusive education are rapidly changing.³⁰ However, a troubling ambiguity is that the term inclusive education is often used to describe only placement in a mainstream classroom, rather than a child’s full participation in all aspects of the educational setting.³¹ Being physically present in a mainstream setting does not automatically result in inclusion.³²

“Being there is not enough; it is no guarantee of respect for difference or access to the material, social, cultural and educational capital that people [who do not experience disability] expect.”³³

It is now widely recognised that placement within a mainstream setting, while a necessary starting point, is really only a starting point for bringing about inclusive education.³⁴ “[C]o-existence without involvement and sharing” does not equate to inclusive education.³⁵

A common misperception is that inclusive education requires a child (who is being ‘included’) to change or adjust to fit within a setting—as in a notion of assimilation rather than inclusion.³⁶ Often this misunderstanding results in a ‘question mark’ perpetually placed over whether a child has a right to be ‘included’³⁷. This devaluing and dehumanising approach would be better understood as a demeaning understanding of inclusion compared to a facilitative understanding of inclusion³⁸ whereby all people are recognised as valued human beings and rights holders. In contrast to demeaning understandings of inclusion as conditional assimilation, inclusive education requires recognising the right of every child (without exception) to be included and adapting the environment and teaching approaches in order to ensure the valued participation of all children.³⁹

It has been argued that definitions of inclusion are too broad, thus paving the way for the problematic ambiguity discussed above.⁴⁰ However, others argue that definitions are frequently too narrow.⁴¹ Narrow definitions of inclusion typically focus on inclusion of one group, while

27 Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011

28 Graham & Slee, 2008

29 Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor & Valle, 2011; Kluth, Villa & Thousand, 2001

30 Petriwskyj, 2010a

31 Beckett, 2009; Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Curcic, 2009; Fisher, 2012; Lalvani, 2013; Vakil, Welton, O’Connor, & Kline, 2009

32 de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; McLesky & Waldron, 2007

33 Komesaroff & McLean, 2006, p.97

34 Armstrong & Barton, 2008; Beckett, 2009; Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Cologon, 2010, in press; Curcic, 2009; D’Alessio, 2011; de Boer et al., 2011; Ferguson, 2008; Komesaroff & McLean, 2006; McLesky & Waldron, 2007; Rietveld, 2010

35 Curcic, 2009, p. 532

36 Armstrong et al., 2011; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Curcic, 2009; Lalvani, 2013; Rietveld, 2010

37 Cologon, 2013a; Bridle, 2005

38 Rietveld, 2010

39 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Biklen, 2000; Cologon, 2010, 2013a

40 Berlach & Chambers, 2011

41 Armstrong et al., 2011; Curcic, 2009

broader definitions focus on diversity and inclusion of all children.⁴² Understandings of inclusion are often tied up with funding, which can have adverse effects on how inclusion is implemented.⁴³

In recent Australian research, Graham and Spandagou found that “[t]he contextual characteristics of a school and its community inform discussions of diversity and define what inclusive education means in specific schools”.⁴⁴ Furthermore, this research revealed that the greater the cultural diversity in a school, the broader the understanding of inclusive education.⁴⁵ This is consistent with arguments that definitions of inclusion reflect society’s beliefs about diversity in any given context.⁴⁶ From this perspective, inclusive education is “a way of looking at the world that enacts the fundamental meaning of education for all children: full participation, full membership, valued citizenship... Inclusion is what we make it, and what we make it is what we wish our culture to be”.⁴⁷

Critical engagement is required in order to move from an understanding of bringing children who are excluded into current educational settings towards an understanding of inclusive education as “providing the best possible learning environment for all children”.⁴⁸ This requires transforming educational systems rather than changing children to fit within current, exclusionary, systems.⁴⁹

Macro and micro exclusion

Segregation or exclusion is experienced as a stigmatising mark of being a ‘lesser’ or inferior person.⁵⁰ It is a process of dehumanisation. Macro-exclusion occurs when a child is excluded from mainstream education and segregated into a ‘special’ school or a ‘special’ class/unit for all or part of the day, week or year (or denied education at all). This form of segregation and exclusion is easy to recognise. However, the lack of clear understanding of inclusive education results in a situation where exclusion also often occurs in the name of inclusion. It has been argued that in many instances the term ‘special needs education’ has been replaced with ‘inclusive education’, but without any actual change in policy and practice.⁵¹ Confusion about, or misappropriation of the term, inclusive education is also a concern within research. Some research claims to investigate inclusive education whilst actually perpetuating exclusion (as discussed in the next section of this paper).

When exclusion occurs within mainstream settings that claim to be inclusive, this results in what D’Alessio terms ‘micro-exclusion’.⁵² McLesky and Waldron illustrate an example of micro-exclusion, whereby students co-exist within a mainstream setting, but are not included:

“The general education teacher had just completed taking roll and handling the daily chores that are necessary to start the day. As reading was beginning, the special education teacher entered the classroom. She went to a table in the back of the room, and four students with disabilities joined her. The

42 Armstrong et al., 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010a

43 Graham & Spandagou, 2011

44 *Ibid*, p.225

45 *Ibid*

46 Petriwskyj, 2010a

47 Kliever, 1998, p.320

48 Berlach & Chambers, 2011, p. 530

49 Armstrong & Barton, 2008; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Jordan, Glenn & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Thomazet, 2009

50 Biklen & Burke, 2006; Rietveld, 2010; Slee, 2004

51 Florian, 2010

52 D’Alessio, 2011

general education teacher gathered the remaining 20 students in the front of the room. The special education teacher began working on a phonics lesson with “her” students, while the general education teacher was discussing a book she had been reading to the rest of the class for the past week.”⁵³

In addition to macro-exclusion in the form of refusal to enrol children who experience disability, the 2012 review of the *Disability Standards For Education* revealed multiple forms of micro-exclusion.⁵⁴ Examples included:

- Refusal to make accommodations within the environment, thus restricting participation;
- Refusal to make accommodations to the curriculum/activities, thus restricting participation;
- Exclusion from sports activities;
- Only permitting children to attend school for the part of the day where funding for an additional staff member was provided;
- Exclusion from excursions and school camps;
- Exclusion from work experience placements within the school years.

These are consistent with research in a range of contexts, including Australia and New Zealand⁵⁵ where micro-exclusion has been identified in the form of:

- Not being welcome in the educational setting (either refusal to enrol or active attempts to make the child and family feel unwelcome);
- Refusal to make accommodations or adaptations that are required for participation (for example refusal to install handrails in toilets);
- Ignorant and ableist attitudes on the part of school staff and other families;
- Conditional attendance whereby:
 - A child can only attend if a parent/caregiver is present;
 - A child can only attend if an aide is present;
 - A child can only attend for part of the day;
 - A child is sent home as soon as any difficulties arise.

⁵³ McLesky & Waldron, 2007, p.162

⁵⁴ DEEWR, 2012

⁵⁵ Purdue, Ballard & MacArthur, 2001; QPPD, 2003

It is clear that exclusion can occur in classrooms claiming to be inclusive.⁵⁶ Experiences of exclusion, whether micro or macro, have considerable negative impacts on peer interactions and understandings. In such situations children are “likely to internalise the messages that they are inferior, incompetent and undesirable peer group members, which in turn is likely to negatively impact on their motivation to seek inclusion, thus interfering with their learning of culturally-valued skills”.⁵⁷

The misappropriation of the term ‘inclusion’ or ‘inclusive education’ by those actually committed to perpetuating systems of ‘special’ education poses a serious barrier to the realisation of inclusive education.⁵⁸ The term ‘special education’ suggests exclusion rather than equal participation.⁵⁹ From this (mis)understanding of ‘inclusion’ situations of micro-exclusion occur, whereby a child is present but separated in a variety of ways including participating in a different curriculum and with different staff members⁶⁰, or when a child attends only part of the time in a mainstream setting or is removed for some of the time in order to receive ‘support’⁶¹. Consequently, “[t]he purpose of inclusion must not be simply to replicate special education services in the general education classroom”.⁶²

More blatant segregation occurs in macro-exclusion whereby children are educated in segregated ‘special’ schools or ‘special’ classes or units, rather than alongside all peers in mainstream settings. If a setting is actually inclusive then “[c]hildren with disabilities are not segregated in the classroom, at lunchtime or on the playground”.⁶³

“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.”⁶⁴

Inclusion in 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”.⁶⁵ This involves abandoning the idea of ‘making normal’ children who experience disability.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷ This fundamentally ableist view must be addressed in order to understand and bring about inclusive education.

56 D’Alessio, 2011; Curcic, 2009; Purdue et al., 2001; Rietveld, 2010

57 Rietveld, 2010, p.27

58 Allan, 2010; Baglieri et al., 2011; D’Alessio, 2011; Lalvani, 2013

59 Armstrong et al., 2011

60 D’Alessio, 2011; Giangreco, 2009; Rietveld, 2010

61 Finke, McNaughton & Drager, 2009; Macartney & Morton, 2011

62 McLesky & Waldron, 2007, pp.162-163

63 UNICEF, 2013, p.29

64 Barton, 1997, p.234

65 D’Alessio, 2011, p.141

66 Baglieri et al., 2011; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2011

67 Ainscow, 2007; Baglieri et al., 2011; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Rietveld, 2010

Ableism: Enculturated exclusion

“...the dominant culture’s inhospitable ways create the problems society shuns.”⁶⁸

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”.⁶⁹ However, in a culture where disability is commonly viewed as a tragic within-person characteristic, this is challenging to achieve.

“Ableism describes discriminatory and exclusionary practices that result from the perception that being able-bodied is superior to being disabled, the latter being associated with ill health, incapacity, and dependence. Like racism, ableism directs structural power relations in society, generating inequalities located in institutional relations and social processes.”⁷⁰

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”.⁷¹ Ableist thinking 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’.⁷² This notion of a ‘normal’ child is central to exclusionary approaches to education, in which all children are compared to a mythical ‘normal’ child and frequently found (or pathologised as) ‘lacking’.⁷³ Therefore the focus becomes about ‘fixing’ or ‘curing’ a person (or preventing existence), rather than recognising that as humans we are all unique and impairment is simply one aspect of human diversity.⁷⁴ By 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.⁷⁵



68 Biklen, 2000, p.341

69 Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009, p.807

70 McLean, 2008, p.607

71 Campbell, 2008, p.154

72 Leiter, 2007; Loja, Costa, Hughes & Menezes, 2013; McLean, 2008

73 Baglieri et al., 2011

74 Cologon, 2013a, 2013b

75 Oliver & Barnes, 2010; Tregaskis, 2002



“Ableism is deeply and subliminally embedded within the culture.”⁷⁶ Like racism or sexism, ableism leads to devaluing of people who experience disability.⁷⁷ In turn this belief in the superiority of people who are not labelled disabled results in discrimination, abusive behaviour and exclusion of people who experience disability.⁷⁸ Ableism is easily absorbed uncritically as we demonstrate to children, through micro and macro exclusion that some people are ‘others’ and thus create a sub-class of ‘disabled’.⁷⁹ This social oppression impacts negatively on the “psycho-emotional well-being of people categorised as ‘impaired’ by those deemed ‘normal’”.⁸⁰

It is not possible to bring about inclusive education in reality whilst engaging in ableist views and practices. However, due to the lack of awareness of ableism and its impacts, for most people ableist beliefs are a consequence of enculturation and operate at a subconscious level. From a more positive perspective, “if all parties learn to view disability as a positive identity category, medicalising, dehumanising, and deficit-oriented discourse and practices are unlikely to prevail”.⁸¹ 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.⁸²

Acceptance of the notion that children can be excluded from mainstream education because they are labelled disabled “amounts to institutional discrimination”⁸³ 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 children, “interpretations of ‘all’ rendered certain students inappropriate candidates”⁸⁴. This preparedness to exclude children based on categories or labels of disability demonstrates ableist discrimination at the individual level. This, along with the examples of micro-exclusion explored in the previous section of this paper, would not be acceptable from a non-ableist viewpoint. “Central to the demands of an inclusive society are issues of social justice, equity and democratic participation. Barriers to their realization within an existing society need to be identified, challenged and removed.”⁸⁵ Lack of awareness of ableism, and of the role people and institutions play in constructing disability, creates the conditions to perpetuate discrimination⁸⁶ and therefore ableism⁸⁷.

Inclusive education is only possible when ableist views and practices are critically examined.

“...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.”⁸⁸

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

76 Campbell, 2008, p.153

77 *Ibid*

78 Beckett, 2009

79 Slee, 2004

80 Thomas, 2012, p. 211

81 Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2012, p.15

82 McLean, 2008

83 Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p.43

84 Lalvani, 2013, p.24

85 Barton, 1997, p.233

86 Booth & Ainscow, 2011

87 Broderick et al., 2012; Harpur, 2012

88 Connor & Goldmansour, 2012, p.31

A contemporary definition of inclusion

“Inclusion may be seen as a continuing process of increasing participation, and segregation as a recurring tendency to exclude difference.”⁸⁹ Children’s knowledge and skills are developed through their interactions with each other.⁹⁰ Therefore, inclusive education requires ongoing engagement with removing barriers to active involvement and participation in shared learning.⁹¹ “Inclusion values the active participation of every child as a full member of his or her family, community, and society.”⁹²

As discussed above, inclusive education is about every child’s right to be a valued member of society and to be provided with equal opportunities to actively participate in and contribute to all areas of learning.⁹³ This requires all participants within an educational setting to be open to listening and learning together—and this includes listening and learning together with children.⁹⁴

Inclusive education requires recognising impairment as one of many forms of human diversity, and welcoming and viewing diversity as a resource rather than a problem.⁹⁵ Inclusive education, therefore, creates a situation where all children can be valued and experience a sense of belonging and where all children are encouraged to reach their full potential in all areas of development.⁹⁶

“[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?”⁹⁷

The notion of “inclusion goes to the heart of how we as a community of human beings wish to live with one another”.⁹⁸ Respect for difference, collaboration, valuing families and community, and viewing all children as active and valued participants who have the right to be heard and provided with equitable access to education, are all factors that have been identified by Australian educators as essential to inclusive and quality education for all children.⁹⁹

Inclusive education is also about engaging inclusively with families.¹⁰⁰ An inclusive community is “one that provides leadership in valuing families and the roles they play; and one that recognizes that the responsibility for being included in the community does not rest with the family, the individual or disability and service organizations”.¹⁰¹ Inclusion has been defined by families 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.¹⁰²

89 Miller, 2009, p.31

90 Diamond & Hong, 2010

91 Curcic, 2009; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Vakili et al., 2009

92 Frankel, Gold & Ajodhia-Andrews, 2010, p.3

93 Armstrong & Barton, 2008; Armstrong et al., 2011; McCullough, 2009; Naraian, 2011; Purdue et al., 2009; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Wong & Cumming, 2010

94 Macartney & Morton, 2011

95 Armstrong et al., 2011; Beckett, 2009; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Cologon, 2013a; Gable, 2013; McCullough, 2009; Purdue et al., 2009

96 Chapman, 2006; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Miller, 2009; Petriwskyj, 2010b

97 Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p. 26

98 Cologon, 2010, p.47

99 Carlson et al., 2012; Cologon, 2010

100 Berlach & Chambers, 2011; Breitenbach, Armstrong & Bryson, 2013, Edmiaston & Fitzgerald, 2000; Frankel et al., 2010; Jordan Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Vakili et al., 2009

101 Mayer, 2009, p.161

102 Neeley-Barnes, Graff, Roberts, Hall & Hankins, 2010, p.251

In recent research in Italy, where all children have been educated together in mainstream settings since segregated education was ended in 1977, with the closure of all special schools, 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”.¹⁰³ This is consistent with a contemporary understanding of inclusive education as one aspect of broader inclusion in society.¹⁰⁴ It also draws our thinking towards an understanding that, rather than a setting or placement, inclusive education is an ongoing process. “Inclusive education is about responding to diversity; it is about listening to unfamiliar voices, being open, empowering all members and about celebrating ‘difference’ in dignified ways.”¹⁰⁵ When a child enrolls in a setting, this is the beginning (not the endpoint) of the process of inclusion.¹⁰⁶

Inclusive education involves an ongoing process of “putting inclusive values into action”.¹⁰⁷ 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”.¹⁰⁸ This 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”.¹⁰⁹ As such, inclusive education can be understood as ongoing critical engagement with flexible and child-centred pedagogy that caters for and values diversity, and holds high expectations for all children.¹¹⁰ Inclusive education requires recognising that we are all equally human and putting this recognition into action in everyday practical ways.

103 Cologon, 2013a

104 Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Cologon, 2013a; Curcic, 2009

105 Barton, 1997, p.233

106 Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Booth et al., 2006; Cologon, 2013a; Humphrey, 2008

107 Booth, Ainscow & Kingston, 2006, p.4

108 Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009, p.407

109 Ferguson 2008 p.113

110 Armstrong et al., 2011; Grenier, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010b



Section 2: Outcomes of inclusive education

When considering the outcomes of inclusive education, there are a number of challenges. As noted above, many research studies, purporting to examine inclusive education, in reality consider practices of micro (and sometimes even macro) exclusion. Discriminatory attitudes and practices pose serious barriers to inclusive education, and yet, despite these challenges, research evidence overwhelmingly supports inclusive education. In addition to the outcomes for social justice and sense of community and belonging (as discussed above) research provides evidence of positive outcomes of inclusive education for social, academic, cognitive and physical development in children who do and do not experience disability. The research studies discussed here involve a diverse range of children, including children labelled with ‘mild’ through to ‘severe’ intellectual, sensory and physical impairments or multiple impairments.

Many of the studies discussed in this section explore situations where a child has been ‘included into’ an existing setting, rather than inclusive education whereby the setting has been transformed to provide the best possible education for all of its children. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate the positive outcomes that are possible when considerable steps towards inclusive education are taken. 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 educational transformation occurs, ongoing research is required to develop a clear understanding of the outcomes of genuinely inclusive education.

The social side of inclusion

Whether the result of micro or macro exclusion, “[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”¹¹¹. Exclusion impacts negatively on children who experience disability, their peers and the adults who engage with them, resulting in marginalisation, stigmatisation and often bullying and abuse.¹¹² While a common assumption is that abuse and bullying occurs only in mainstream settings, this is actually incorrect.¹¹³ By contrast, research provides evidence that despite higher teacher-student ratios and greater supervision the full range of bullying occurs in ‘special’ settings.¹¹⁴ While there is some variation in individual studies,¹¹⁵ particularly based on teacher or parent ratings, contrary to common perception, growing research evidence suggests that children who attend ‘special’ schools are more likely to experience bullying than children who attend mainstream settings, and that inclusive education is a key factor in reducing or eliminating bullying.¹¹⁶

111 Connor & Goldmansour, 2012, p.31

112 Biklen & Burke, 2006; Curcic, 2009; DEEWR, 2012; UNICEF, 2013

113 Davis & Watson, 2000; QPPD, 2003; Rose, Monda-Amaya & Espelage, 2011; Torrance, 2000

114 Rose et al., 2011; Torrance, 2000

115 For example, Hebron & Humphrey, 2013; Woods & Wolke, 2004

116 Rose et al., 2011

Inclusive education facilitates social development in children who do and do not experience disability.¹¹⁷ Research evidence suggests that genuinely inclusive education allows children to build and develop friendships that they might not have considered or encountered otherwise.¹¹⁸ Inclusive settings encourage higher levels of interaction than segregated settings¹¹⁹, which results in more opportunities for children to establish and maintain friendships¹²⁰. The more time a child spends within an inclusive setting, the greater the social interaction.¹²¹ In turn, this leads to better outcomes for social and communication development.¹²²

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 children who do and do not experience disability.¹²³ Inclusive education leads to a sense of belonging¹²⁴ and to a self-concept not only as a receiver of help, but also as a giver of help¹²⁵. For children who do and do not experience disability, inclusive education has been shown to result in more advanced social skills.¹²⁶

Teachers frequently cite 'challenging behaviour' as their biggest concern regarding fulfilling their role as educators.¹²⁷ Research provides evidence that inclusive education leads to improved behaviour development in children who do and do not experience disability with less 'challenging' or 'disruptive' behaviour in inclusive settings.¹²⁸ Children who participate in inclusive education have been found to be more independent.¹²⁹ Additionally, children 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 children in non-inclusive settings.¹³⁰ Inclusive education supports children in developing increased awareness and acceptance of diversity and understanding of individuality.¹³¹

Inclusion and academic development

In regards to academic development, again, research findings contrast with the common assumption that the higher teacher-child ratios, as well as teachers trained in special education, would result in better academic outcomes in segregated 'special' schools or classes. By contrast, research shows that children who experience disability who are included into mainstream educational settings demonstrate better academic and vocational outcomes when compared to children who are educated in segregated settings.¹³² Children who experience disability who

117 Baker-Ericzén, Muggenborg & Shea, 2009; Finke et al., 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Jordan et al., 2009; Kliever, 1998; Odom, Buysse & Soukakou, 2011; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Stahmer, Carter, Baker, & Miwa, 2003; Stahmer, Akshoomoff & Cunningham, 2011

118 Finke et al., 2009

119 Antia, Jones, Luckner, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011; Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Flewitt, Nind & Payler, 2009; Fox, Farrell & Davis, 2004; Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman & Schattman, 1993; Odom et al., 2011; Theodoru & Nind, 2010

120 Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009; Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Stahmer et al., 2003

121 Antia et al., 2011

122 Finke et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2009; Stahmer et al., 2003

123 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Fitch, 2003

124 Chapman, 2006; Miller, 2009; Odom et al., 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010b

125 Jordan et al., 2009

126 Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009

127 Cologon, 2012

128 Finke et al., 2009; Kliever, 1998; Moghareban & Bruns, 2009; Stahmer et al., 2003; Stahmer et al., 2011

129 Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Stahmer et al., 2011

130 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke et al., 2009; Giangreco et al., 1993; Stahmer et al., 2003; Nikolarazi et al., 2005

131 Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke et al., 2009; Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Hollingsworth, Boone, & Crais, 2009; Kliever, 1998, 2008; Palmer et al., 2001; Stahmer, et al., 2003; Wong & Cumming, 2010

132 de Graaf, van Hove, & Haveman, 2013; Finke et al., 2009; Giangreco, 2009; Kliever, 1998, 2008; Myklebust, 2005; Peetsma, Vergeer, Karsten & Roeleveld, 2001; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004; Tanti Burlo, 2010; Vakil, et al., 2009; Vianello & Lanfranchi, 2009

are included into mainstream settings have been found to score higher on achievement tests and perform closer to grade average than children who are in non-inclusive settings.¹³³ Research provides evidence for better outcomes in reading, writing and mathematics.¹³⁴ Additionally, it has been argued that inclusive education stimulates learning in that more time is spent on academic learning in mainstream schools than in segregated settings.¹³⁵ Children who are included in mainstream schools are given opportunities to engage at higher academic levels and to achieve outcomes that may not otherwise be possible.¹³⁶

Children who do not experience disability have also been found to benefit academically from inclusive education with equal or better academic outcomes compared to children participating in non-inclusive settings.¹³⁷ Furthermore, inclusive teachers engage all children in more higher-order thinking, questioning and dialogical interactions than non-inclusive teachers.¹³⁸ All children in inclusive settings receive higher quality instruction that is better suited to individual needs, particularly through small group work.¹³⁹

In regards to children who do not experience disability, research finds no decrease in academic performance. Instead inclusive education results in¹⁴⁰:

- Increased learning opportunities and experiences;
- Overall education is more sensitive to differing student needs;
- Growth in interpersonal skills;
- Greater acceptance and understanding of human diversity;
- Greater flexibility and adaptability.

Communication and language development

Communication and language development in children who do and do not experience disability is enhanced through inclusive education.¹⁴¹ This is particularly evident when children who experience disability are supported to communicate with their peers.¹⁴² Children who are being included have been shown to increase independent communication, mastery of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) strategies and increased speech and language development when provided with appropriate support for inclusive education.¹⁴³ Furthermore, children assessed as

133 Peetsma et al., 2001; Vakil, et al., 2009

134 de Graaf et al., 2013; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; Peetsma et al., 2001

135 de Graaf et al., 2013; Kliewer, 1998, 2008

136 Finke et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2004; Giangreco et al., 1993; Jordan et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2010

137 Dessenmontet & Bless, 2013; Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson, & Gallannaugh, 2007; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom & Diamond, 1998; Odom et al., 2011; Purdue et al., 2001

138 Jordan et al., 2010

139 Jordan et al., 2009

140 Farrell et al., 2007; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Odom & Diamond, 1998; Purdue et al., 2001

141 Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Finke et al., 2009; Fisher & Shogren, 2012; Giangreco et al., 1993; Iacono, Chan & Waring, 1998; Hart & Whalon, 2011; Johnston, McDonnell, Nelson & Magnavito, 2003; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; Peetsma et al., 2001; Stahmer et al., 2003; Stahmer et al., 2011

142 Hart & Whalon, 2011; Kliewer, 1998; Stahmer, et al., 2003

143 Fisher & Shogren, 2012; Iacono et al., 1998; Johnston et al., 2003; Kliewer, 1998, 2008; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004

having limited vocabulary and language skills have been found to be able to engage in extended conversation and use complex vocabulary after six months of participation in an inclusive preschool setting.¹⁴⁴

Enhanced communication and language leads to greater independence and initiation of interactions and increased active participation.¹⁴⁵ 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 children.¹⁴⁶

Physical development

Limited research has considered outcomes of inclusive education for physical development. However, research to date provides evidence to suggest that inclusive education contributes positively towards the physical development of children who experience disability. Children who experience disability who are included into mainstream educational settings show gains in motor development and have a higher degree of independence.¹⁴⁷ Inclusion in mainstream educational settings encourages participation and provides more opportunities to observe and learn through the 'power of the peer', as well as to learn through trial-and-error¹⁴⁸, this may enhance opportunities for physical development. Inclusive education provides access to a broader range of play and learning activities, which can stimulate physical development and enhance children's experiences.¹⁴⁹

In research considering children's perspectives on inclusion in physical activities, children reported that when they were actually included in physical activities this provided an entry point for play and friendship and created a sense of legitimate participation.¹⁵⁰ Research has explored the negative outcomes for children when they are excluded from physical education.¹⁵¹ However, three international reviews have found that when children who experience disability are included in physical education and provided with appropriate support the outcomes are positive for all children involved.¹⁵²

Outcomes for teachers

Overall, research provides evidence that inclusive education results in higher quality education and care for children who do and do not experience disability.¹⁵³ However, the benefits of inclusive education are not only for children. While it has been found that teachers are sometimes initially reluctant to participate in inclusive education and may feel that they are not equipped for the

144 Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2004

145 Johnston et al., 2003; Stahmer & Ingersoll, 2003

146 Hanline & Correa-Torres, 2012; Iacono & Cologon, in press

147 Fox et al., 2004; Stahmer, et al., 2003

148 Biklen, 2000; Theodorou & Nind, 2010

149 Theodorou & Nind, 2010

150 Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010

151 Qi & Ha, 2012

152 *Ibid*

153 Baker-Ericzén et al., 2009; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Jordan et al., 2010

challenges involved, research has also found that teachers develop confidence in their ability to be inclusive educators, and increase their positive attitudes towards inclusion, through experience and support.¹⁵⁴

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

“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.”¹⁵⁵

Research has found that through participation in inclusive education, teachers experience professional growth and increased personal satisfaction.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, developing skills to enable the inclusion of children who experience disability results in higher quality teaching for all children and more confident teachers.¹⁵⁷

Outcomes for families

There is considerable research exploring the negative impact of exclusion on families. While it is outside of the scope of this issues paper, research provides evidence demonstrating that families frequently experience stigmatisation and a host of barriers when they seek to have their children included.¹⁵⁸ Similarly the experience of stigmatisation and exclusion is common for parents who experience disability.¹⁵⁹ While genuine collaboration and partnership has been found to facilitate inclusion¹⁶⁰, families frequently face a lack of responsiveness to their needs and wishes.¹⁶¹ However, there is very little research investigating the outcomes of inclusive education for families when it does occur. Some research suggests that when children are included this may support parents in feeling more confident to return to work.¹⁶² Additionally, the experience of genuine inclusive education contributes to parents' psychological and economic well-being.¹⁶³ Inclusive education, when it does occur, is often the result of considerable parent advocacy and many families strongly desire inclusive education for their children. Sadly for families, the path to achieving this is often not an easy one.¹⁶⁴ It is frustrating for parents to have to continually advocate for the inclusion of their child in the school and community¹⁶⁵, particularly in light of the weight of evidence demonstrating the positive outcomes of inclusive education.

154 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cologon, 2012; Giangreco, 1993; Jordan & Stanovich, 2001; Jordan et al., 2010; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Purdue et al., 2001

155 Kliever, 2008, p.135

156 Finke et al., 2009; Giangreco, 1993

157 Cologon, 2012; Jordan and Stanovich, 2001; Jordan et al., 2010; Wong & Cumming, 2010

158 Baker-Ericzén, Mueggenborg & Shea, 2009; Lilley, 2012; Palmer et al., 2001; Runswick-Cole, 2008

159 Kilkey & Clarke, 2010; Robinson, Hickson & Strike, 2001

160 Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, van de Putte & van Hove, 2010

161 Hollingsorth & Buysse, 2009; Komesaroff, 2007

162 Jordan et al., 2010

163 Mayer, 2009

164 Runswick-Cole, 2008

165 Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009



Section 3: Capacity Building— Bringing about inclusion in practice

This paper has considered research evidence regarding the outcomes of inclusive education. But how does this come about in practice? The following section considers what can be learnt from research to inform capacity building, work against low expectations and increase inclusion in education.

To preface this section, it is important to recognise the many children, families, teachers, paraprofessionals, principals, education department staff and others who work tirelessly everyday 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 for children in Australia.

“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.”¹⁶⁶

There are many barriers to inclusive education identified in the research literature. Major barriers identified include negative attitudes and stigma around ‘difference’ and ‘disability’, inadequate education and professional development for teachers and specialist support staff, and systemic barriers including lack of funding and support from education authorities.

Attitudes

There continues to be considerable discussion of the *potential* of education, particularly education with young children, to bring about social change.¹⁶⁷ “Children are not born with prejudices against people who experience disability, but acquire them from adults, the media, and the general way in which society is organized.”¹⁶⁸ However, as noted earlier in this paper, even at very young ages, children demonstrate internalised cultural preferences or prejudices.¹⁶⁹ In fact, research demonstrates that as early as three years of age children can identify people or groups of people they ‘like’ or ‘dislike’ on the basis of symbols of conflict or stigma.¹⁷⁰ By age six children will make unsolicited prejudiced statements consistent with internalised cultural preferences.¹⁷¹ Awareness

166 Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p.40

167 Rieser & Mason, 1990, cited in Beckett, 2009, p.320

168 Rieser & Mason, 1990 cited in Beckett, 2009, p.320

169 Connolly et al., 2002

170 *Ibid*

171 *Ibid*

of the processes of enculturation emphasises the importance of working with young children to foster a culture of inclusion and actively seeking to break the cycle of entrenched ableism. However, it is important to recognise that “[l]ittle will change in the lives of children with disabilities until attitudes among communities, professionals, media and governments begin to change”.¹⁷²

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. The importance of listening and learning together with children is therefore particularly pertinent.¹⁷³

Children’s attitudes and choices are significantly shaped by the attitudes of their family and community.¹⁷⁴ Research provides evidence to suggest the presence of negative (child and adult) community views about inclusion and a lack of awareness of disabling processes.¹⁷⁵ Ableist attitudes are frequently uncritically presented in books, television and other media.¹⁷⁶ A lack of support for children who are learning about inclusion has also been identified.¹⁷⁷

In addition to wider community influences, “[t]he attitudes of teachers and pre-service teachers towards inclusivity are critical to the success of inclusive practices”¹⁷⁸. Level of parental education has been found to influence attitudes towards inclusion.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, teacher education has been found to significantly influence attitudes towards inclusive education.¹⁸⁰

In a recent Australian study involving six primary and high school classrooms, Carlson et al¹⁸¹ found that teacher attitudes were the key to inclusive practice. They suggest a reciprocal relationship between positive attitudes and inclusive practice, meaning that inclusive attitudes create the conditions for engaging in inclusive practice, which in turn results in more inclusive attitudes. Openness to learning through mistakes and ongoing development as a teacher was also found to be critical, along with working collaboratively with parents and other educators.¹⁸² These findings are consistent with a growing body of research demonstrating the importance of teacher attitudes for bringing about inclusive education.¹⁸³ 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 children who experience disability.¹⁸⁴

School environment and the culture of a school influences the way teachers interact with children who experience disability, as well as teachers’ attitudes towards inclusive education.¹⁸⁵ While much of the research focuses on the attitudes of classroom teachers, school principals and other

172 UNICEF, 2013

173 Macartney & Morton, 2011

174 Diamond & Huang, 2005; Hollingsworth & Buysse, 2009

175 Beckett, 2009; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Finke et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2004; Frankel et al., 2010; Mayer, 2009; Wong & Cumming, 2010

176 Beckett, 2009; Cologon, 2013; Diamond & Huang, 2005

177 Rietveld, 2010

178 Berlach & Chambers, 2011 p. 533

179 Stahmer et al., 2003

180 Cologon, 2012

181 Carlson et al., 2012

182 *Ibid*

183 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Brownlee & Carrington, 2000; Curcic, 2009; Diamond & Huang, 2005; Forlin, Douglas & Hattie, 1996; Frankel et al., 2010; Graham & Spandagou, 2011; Hurley & Horn, 2010; Jordan et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2010; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005; Komesaroff, 2007; Koutrouba, Vamvakari & Steliou, 2006; McMahon, 2012; Purdue, 2009; Qi & Ha, 2012; Rietveld, 2010; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Sharma, Moore & Sonawane, 2009; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998; Sze, 2009

184 Curcic, 2009; Giangreco, 2003; Jordan et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2010

185 Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005

educational leaders play a key role in creating the culture of a setting. Graham and Spandagou¹⁸⁶ 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."¹⁸⁷ In this research principals expressed clearly ableist views making a strong distinction between children viewed as 'normal' and those viewed as 'sub-normal'. Unsurprisingly this impacted negatively on attitudes towards inclusive education and it was sometimes unclear whether principals' enrolled students who experience disability because they wanted to or because they are obliged to.¹⁸⁸ These findings are consistent with evidence of negative attitudes of staff in administrative positions within the education system.¹⁸⁹ A lack of motivation from education departments/providers to do all that is necessary to facilitate inclusive education has been identified as a barrier.¹⁹⁰

It is unsurprising therefore, that attitudes were identified as a major barrier to non-discrimination in education for people who experience disability in the 2012 review of the *Disability Standards for Education*.¹⁹¹

*"[O]ngoing discrimination and a lack of awareness across all areas in education continues to be an extremely significant area of concern for students with disability and their families. Many families reported that, through their education experiences, their children are subjected to: limited opportunities; low expectations; exclusion; bullying; discrimination; assault and violation of human rights."*¹⁹²

The review process revealed underlying ableist attitudes and practices prevalent in education in Australia.

Amongst others, Hehir¹⁹³ articulates the impact of ableist views on educational opportunities. Writing about an 8-year-old boy, he notes:

*"At his most recent IEP meeting, his mother asked what he was learning in science. She wanted to make sure he was being prepared to take the statewide assessment in grade four. The special education teacher responded, 'We're not doing science. We're concentrating on fine motor development.' Again, like too many children with disabilities, his educational program concentrates inordinately on the characteristics of his disability at the expense of access to the curriculum."*¹⁹⁴

186 Graham & Spandagou, 2011

187 Graham & Spandagou, 2011, p. 226

188 *Ibid*

189 Frankel et al., 2010; Hurley & Horn, 2010; Purdue, 2009

190 Komesaroff, 2007

191 DEEWR, 2012

192 *Ibid*, p.30

193 Hehir, 2002

194 *Ibid*, n.p.

Hehir¹⁹⁵ argues that disestablishing ableism in education requires:

- Acknowledging that ableism exists within our systems of education;
- Seeking to unravel the effects ableism is having (deconstructing dominant ableist practices);
- Embracing impairment as one aspect of human diversity (along with diverse cultural backgrounds and genders, for example);
- Avoiding and eliminating stereotyping and patronising approaches and representation;
- Actively seeking to incorporate and celebrate multiple modes of participation;
- Debunking the myth that special education (segregated education) is superior to education of all children together (mainstream/inclusive); and
- Developing an understanding of and willingness to engage with principles of universal design for learning.

Addressing the attitudinal change inherent within these recommendations requires action at many levels—one key aspect is teacher education.

Teacher education for inclusion

Susan Hart and her colleagues¹⁹⁶ have demonstrated that what teachers do in the present can create change ‘for the better’. However, lack of teacher education and support has been identified as a barrier to inclusive education.¹⁹⁷ Teacher attitudes influence the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom.¹⁹⁸ Carlson et al argue that “[t]eacher attitude is the means by which teachers are motivated to establish inclusive teaching practices when certain support systems are in place”¹⁹⁹. Teacher education is directly related to teacher attitudes. Teachers who receive education about inclusion have been found to be more likely to have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of children who experience disability.²⁰⁰ Given the importance of attitudes for inclusive education, educating all teachers as inclusive teachers is an important goal.²⁰¹

As noted earlier in this paper, the notion that there is a ‘special’ way to teach ‘special’ children is in itself an ableist view.²⁰² This ableist thinking results in categorising some children as unacceptable for inclusion.²⁰³ By inference this view suggests that there is one way to teach all children *except* children who experience disability. The uncritical absorption of the myth of ‘normal’ creates the conditions where teachers are able to view children who experience disability as ‘other’ and this

195 *Ibid*

196 Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004

197 Brown et al., 2013; Hehir, 2002

198 Carlson et al., 2012; Curcic, 2009; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005; Huang & Diamond, 2009

199 Carlson et al., 2012, p.18

200 Cologon, 2012

201 Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2012

202 Barton, 1997; Lalvani 2013; Purdue, 2009; Valle & Connor 2010

203 Biklen, 2000; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Kliever, 1998, 2008

process results in a lack of confidence (and sometimes unwillingness) to teach all children.²⁰⁴ The notion that there is one way to teach any group of children is both problematic and untrue, as it denies the individuality of all children and the diversity within any group, thus inclusive teachers are better teachers of any child.²⁰⁵

Moving beyond the myth of the 'normal' child creates the conditions to improve education of all children. However, many teachers express considerable anxiety about inclusive education.²⁰⁶ Confidence grows with experience of inclusion.²⁰⁷ However, teachers require support to prepare them for this experience.

Teacher education has been found to lead to more inclusive attitudes.²⁰⁸ However, some studies show only minimal change²⁰⁹ and the majority of pre-service teachers feel unprepared for inclusive education²¹⁰. 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' child²¹¹, thus perpetuating ableism and impeding the opportunity to develop inclusive attitudes. However, in more recent years research has explored effective approaches to improving attitudes towards and confidence in inclusive education, through teacher education.



204 Baglieri et al., 2011

205 Curcic, 2009; Jordan et al., 2009, 2010

206 Huang & Diamond, 2009; Mayer, 2009; Petriwskyj, 2010a; Vakil et al., 2009; Watson & McCathren, 2009; Wong & Cumming, 2010

207 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Curcic, 2009; Giangreco et al., 1993

208 Appl & Spenciner, 2008; Baglieri, 2008; Bishop & Jones, 2003; Brown et al. 2008; Brownlee & Carrington, 2000; Cagran & Schmidt, 2011; Cologon, 2012; Dart, 2006; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Forlin, Cedillo, Romero-Contreras, Fletcher & Hernandez, 2010; McLean, 2008; Niemeyer & Proctor, 2002; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Sharma, Moore, & Sonawane, 2009

209 Carroll, Forlin & Jobling, 2003; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Kirk, 1998; Shippen et al., 2005; Tait & Purdie, 2000

210 Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011

211 Baglieri et al., 2011

From the research it is clear that key elements of teacher education that result in more positive attitudes towards, and understanding of, inclusive education involve:

- 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.²¹²
- Support to move beyond deficit thinking entrenched within the special education paradigm towards an approach to education that welcomes and celebrates diversity.²¹³
- Learning about and developing understanding of inclusive education.²¹⁴
- Engaging in critical reflection about beliefs and practices.²¹⁵
- Building confidence for inclusive education through reflective practice on developing knowledge of flexible pedagogy and universal design for learning.²¹⁶
- Engaging with (critical) disability studies in order to develop understanding of the social construction of disability and the role of the teacher in reducing ableism.²¹⁷
- Developing an understanding of diversity as a resource, rather than a 'problem' and learning to presume competence and hold positive expectations of all children.²¹⁸
- Learning about available supports for facilitating inclusive education.²¹⁹
- Developing an understanding of the importance of building relationships with children in order to meet individual needs.²²⁰
- Developing an understanding of the importance of listening to people who experience disability, including children, and drawing on the disability rights movement in striving towards inclusive education.²²¹ Within this, providing opportunities for respectful engagement with people who experience disability and their families.²²²
- 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.²²³

212 Beckett, 2009; Cologon, 2012, 2013; McLean, 2008

213 Bacon & Causton-Theoharis, 2012; Baglieri, 2008; Baglieri et al., 2011; Broderick et al., 2012; Cologon, 2012; Lalvani, 2013; Macartney & Morton, 2011; Slee, 2001

214 Breitenbach, Armstrong & Bryson, 2013; Cologon, 2012; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011

215 Baglieri, 2008; Cologon, 2012; Sharma, Forlin & Loreman, 2008

216 Cologon, 2012; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005

217 Broderick et al., 2012; Cologon, 2012, 2013; Grenier, 2010; Lalvani, 2013

218 Biklen, 2000; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Cologon, 2012; Diamond and Huang, 2005; Grenier, 2010; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005

219 Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cologon, 2012; Dart, 2006; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Koutrouba et al, 2006; Sharma et al., 2008

220 Cologon, 2012; Kalyva & Avramidis, 2005

221 Biklen, 2000; Connor & Goldmansour, 2012; Macartney & Morton, 2011

222 Broomhead, 2013; Cologon, 2012; Sharma et al., 2008

223 Broderick et al., 2012

Bringing about inclusive education requires providing education in disability studies and inclusion as an essential component of teacher education and ongoing professional development for all teachers and all other professionals involved in supporting inclusive education.

Structural barriers

“Thirty-five years ago, special education was seen more as a ‘solution to’ rather than a ‘problem of’ social justice in education, but not for everyone and not for long. Sociological critiques of special education (such as Tomlinson, 1982) showed the injustices that can occur in systems with separate forms of provision for learners who deviate from what is considered to be the norm.”²²⁴

Addressing injustices requires putting inclusive values into action in practical everyday ways. In addition to attitudinal change, Hehir²²⁵ argues that disestablishing ableism in education also requires:

- Providing specialist support within mainstream settings when needed to ensure equitable access to education (e.g. teaching braille, assistance with setting up AAC systems);
- Ensuring that the education of specialist support providers (e.g. teachers of the D/deaf; braille teachers, allied health therapists) adequately facilitates the development of specialist skills (e.g. fluent signing, knowledge of how to teach braille etc.), as well as education to support recognition of and resistance to ableism, and the ability to collaborate with teachers to support inclusive education;
- Applying principles of universal design for learning.

As noted earlier in this paper, perpetuation of the ‘special’ education paradigm—rather than resulting in inclusive education – further entrenches ableist thinking and practices. Transformation of educational systems, policies and practices is required. This involves critical engagement, including examining the:

“...structural arrangements of schools, such as the physical layout of classrooms, student grouping practices, teachers’ responsibilities for groups of students, and relations among teachers in their work with students, as well as processes for assessing student learning and communicating it to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other interested parties.”²²⁶

²²⁴ Florian, 2008, p.202

²²⁵ Hehir, 2002

²²⁶ Ferguson 2008 p.113

Labelling/categorisation

One problematic aspect of the current Australian education system is the categorical approach to funding support. In addition to the challenges for families of different funding rules in different states and territories²²⁷, the categorical approach to funding support results in many children who need support being deemed ineligible. Additionally, this requirement for a label in order to access support results in many children being constructed as an 'other', bringing with it the threat of low expectations and exclusion.²²⁸ Both of these issues result in perpetuation of ableist practices and pose major barriers to inclusive education.

The recent commitment to nationally consistent collection of data on school students who experience disability (NCCD)²²⁹ places an emphasis on the adjustments required, rather than diagnostic category. This may have potential for developing a funding system focused on student need for support, rather than 'disability' or labeling. However, it remains to be seen whether this will translate into a reproduction of the current system and processes of labeling and what this funding system needs to include that will facilitate genuine positive change.

Within the present system, funding allocations for support are based on processes of labelling and categorisation. This means that children who require support, but are not labelled disabled, are excluded from the system.²³⁰ These children are frequently overlooked within such a system of education.²³¹



227 DEEWR, 2012

228 Purdue, 2009

229 DEEWR, 2013

230 Petriwskyj, 2010a

231 Jordan et al., 2010

“Constructing a society that celebrates diversity, involves a real acceptance of the concept of diversity without any need for demarcation of different types of diversity, some of which are less disruptive—hence more ‘acceptable’—than others.”²³² The process of labelling, while carrying the attractive promise of funding for support, is fraught with dangers within an ableist society.²³³ Due to frequently static understandings of disability as a within-person ‘problem’, labelling often leads to stereotyped thinking and expectations about the labelled child.²³⁴ Additionally, given the tendency to require a child who has been labelled disabled to prove themselves ‘worthy’ of inclusion²³⁵, labelling results in an automatic risk of exclusion²³⁶. Within the current system, resisting static understandings of disability, presuming competence, and recognising each child as a whole and valuable individual is essential.²³⁷ However, systemic change is required to fully address these concerns.

A system based on labelling and categorisation creates the conditions for exclusion whereby the presence or absence of labels become used as excuses for not engaging children in learning.²³⁸ Bringing about inclusive education requires addressing and amending the problems created by a system that requires diagnosis for access to supports.²³⁹ As Ho states, “it is ironic that a system that strives to provide equal educational opportunity would require children to be labelled in order to qualify for equality”.²⁴⁰

Systems of support

Even when a child is labelled and therefore funding for support may be available, limited funding and resources, lack of support from specialist staff and education authorities, and inadequate professional development opportunities were identified as barriers to implementing the *Disability Standards For Education*.²⁴¹ These findings are consistent with research evidence suggesting that many teachers feel insufficiently supported and under-resourced for inclusive education.²⁴² Teachers’ lack of knowledge, support and resources impacts on the implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms and can also impact negatively on attitudes.²⁴³

In an Australian study with 20 children with visual impairments in mainstream preschool and primary school settings, Brown et al. found that many teachers were aware of strategies to adapt the curriculum to be more inclusive.²⁴⁴ However, they lacked knowledge and support regarding preparing the environment and using visual aids. Additionally they lacked adequate resources and specialist support required for genuine inclusion. “Limited training, combined with inadequate specialist input, personnel, planning time, and resources to support staff, poses a serious challenge for teachers to implement inclusion for students with visual impairment.”²⁴⁵

232 D’Alessio, 2011, p.113

233 Ho, 2004

234 Biklen, 2000

235 *Ibid*

236 Purdue, 2009

237 Biklen, 2000

238 McMahon, 2012

239 Leiter, 2007

240 Ho, 2004, p.91

241 DEEWR, 2012

242 Curcic, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011

243 *Ibid*

244 Brown et al., 2013

245 *Ibid*, p.230

Concerns reported by teachers relating to inclusive education include: large classroom sizes, lack of specialist support, inadequate time for planning and reflective practice, limited professional development and a lack of resources.²⁴⁶ Lack of support and resources, including lack of planning time, inadequate education and professional development, insufficient personnel, and inadequate materials create considerable barriers to inclusive education.²⁴⁷ 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.²⁴⁸ Additionally, lack of resources is often used as an excuse for not allowing children who experience disability to participate or enrol.²⁴⁹ 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.

Addressing attitudes towards inclusive education at all levels and within all processes is a major component of inclusion. In addition to openness and willingness to bring about inclusion and active resistance to ableist practices (and alongside concerted efforts towards universal design for learning), teachers and school leaders require support in order to make adaptations to the environment and materials as required for the participation of individual children.²⁵⁰ This requires a combination of resources and specialist support. While specialist support needs to be implemented carefully in order to avoid creating micro-exclusion, as discussed earlier, this support is no less important than in segregated education. Teachers need to be supported to develop strategies for communication and participation as required, thus specialist teachers (such as teachers of the Deaf and braille teachers), as well as allied health professionals play an important role in working together with children, teachers and families to support inclusion.

Teachers and other professionals often lack understanding about roles and responsibilities in the care and education of children who experience disability.²⁵¹ Careful consideration of and communication about the roles of different professionals is essential in order to avoid creating situations of micro-exclusion.²⁵²

Regular collaboration with all members of the educational team, including parents, and specialist support professionals is required.²⁵³ This involves allied health professionals and specialist teachers working with teachers and families, rather than with children directly. Where appropriate, this support may be provided in a 'push-in' model of learning, where a support staff member is directly involved within classroom practice, rather than a traditional (exclusionary) 'pull-out' model.²⁵⁴ Consulting children regarding the support they need and how this is best implemented is also essential within this process.²⁵⁵

246 Cologon, 2012; Brown et al., 2013; Hemmings & Woodcock, 2011

247 Beckett, 2009; Biklen & Burke, 2006; Finke et al., 2009; Frankel et al., 2010; Horrocks, White & Roberts, 2008; Huang & Diamond, 2009; Jordan et al., 2010; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Morris & Sharma, 2011; Petriwskyj, 2010a, 2010b; Purdue, 2009; Theodorou & Nind, 2010

248 Purdue, 2009

249 *Ibid*

250 Batu, 2010; Brown et al., 2013; Curcic, 2009; Carlson et al., 2012; Cologon, 2012; Kasa-Hendrickson & Kluth, 2005; Morris & Sharma, 2011

251 Finke et al., 2009; Mayer, 2009

252 Finke et al., 2009; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009

253 Batu, 2010; Finke et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2004; Hurley & Horn, 2010; Petriwskyj, 2010a; Purdue, 2009; Recchia & Puig, 2011; Theodorou & Nind, 2010; Trepanier-Street, 2010; Watson & McCathren, 2009

254 Finke et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2009; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009; Vakil et al., 2009

255 Coates, & Vickerman, 2010; Macartney & Morton, 2011

Paraprofessional support

There are a wide array of terms used to describe paraprofessional support. Common terms include teacher aides, learning support assistants, paraeducators, special support officers, inclusion support aides, special needs assistants, paraprofessionals, or teacher assistants.

Paraprofessional support is the most common use of funding intended to support inclusion.²⁵⁶ This is in part due to the assumption that for many children one-to-one support is beneficial.²⁵⁷ However, this assumption is not supported by research evidence.²⁵⁸ “Unfortunately, the support of an untrained paraprofessional can have negative consequences that actually undermine the original social and academic goals of inclusion.”²⁵⁹ In particular, the presence of a paraprofessional has been found to impede peer interactions.²⁶⁰



256 Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Rutherford, 2012

257 Giangreco, 2010

258 *Ibid*

259 Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005, p.432

260 Angelides, Constantinou & Leigh 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Giangreco, 2003; Giangreco, Yuan, McKenzie, Cameron, & Fialka, 2005; Rutherford, 2012

Providing professional development opportunities to assist paraprofessionals in learning to facilitate peer interactions may be effective.²⁶¹ However, a focus on education for paraprofessionals as the solution to current exclusionary practices needs to be approached with considerable caution.²⁶² Unfortunately teachers often perceive paraprofessionals as their replacement, rather than as a support to them as the teacher of every child.²⁶³ This results in children who experience disability being educated mainly or solely by the least qualified person present (the paraprofessional) and clearly undermines any efforts toward inclusion (resulting in micro-exclusion).²⁶⁴ “When teachers fail to interact with children, they will not be able to gain the knowledge they need to plan a meaningful and relevant curriculum to support their learning and development.”²⁶⁵ Additionally, overdependence on paraprofessionals is a common problem, which adversely affects social and academic growth.²⁶⁶ Consequently the provision of paraprofessional support can prevent rather than facilitate inclusive education.²⁶⁷

Where paraprofessional support is deemed to be appropriate, Giangreco²⁶⁸ suggests a number of strategies to assist with facilitating inclusive education:

- Seat all students together (do not have the student who is labelled disabled at the side or the back with the paraprofessional);
- Ensure the teacher takes responsibility for interacting with and educating all students;
- Avoid close physical proximity with the paraprofessional;
- Use the paraprofessional for whole class support;
- Facilitate interaction between all peers;
- Consult the student with disability regarding what support they require and how they wish this to be implemented; and
- Use the paraprofessional to enable greater teacher engagement.

261 Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005

262 Butt & Lowe, 2012; Giangreco, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012

263 Giangreco, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2005; Rutherford, 2012

264 Rutherford, 2012

265 Purdue, 2009, p.138

266 Giangreco, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2005; Morris & Sharma, 2011

267 Angelides et al., 2009; Giangreco, 2003; Giangreco et al., 2005; Morris & Sharma, 2011

268 Giangreco, 2003

Developing a culture of inclusion

While it is common to advocate for ‘disability awareness’ as part of the efforts towards 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 ‘disability awareness’ – that is, resisting dominant normative narratives or understandings of disability.²⁶⁹ Supporting children and teachers to genuinely develop disability awareness opens possibilities for actively reducing the barriers that result in the experience of disability for many children.

In the 2012 review of *Disability Standards For Education*, it was identified that the development of a culture of inclusion, in which diversity is valued, is crucial, not simply the implementation of an inclusive curriculum.²⁷⁰ This requires support for children, families and educators to develop a positive understanding of inclusive education. It has been demonstrated that prejudice can be reduced and positive attitudes can be fostered through engaging in inclusive education²⁷¹ and participating in education about disability awareness focussed on disestablishing ableist views.

Drawing on the research explored in this paper, Table 1 outlines some of the barriers identified along with approaches to addressing these issues.



269 Biklen, 2000
270 DEEWR, 2012
271 UNICEF, 2013

Table 1. Addressing barriers to inclusive education

Issue	Response needed
<p>Lack of understanding of inclusive education.</p> <p>Lack of understanding of the social construction of disability.</p> <p>Lack of awareness of ableism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with disability studies and efforts to raise awareness and remove ableist underpinnings to policy and practice at all levels of the education system. This requires a paradigm shift away from special education and deficit thinking towards genuine embracing of diversity and welcoming diversity as a strength to enhance education for all children; • Community advocacy, including regarding language use and representations of media and popular culture; • Research focus on listening to voices of people who experience disability.
<p>Lack of recognition of people who experience disability as key players in bringing about inclusive education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to the national and international disability and disability-rights movements; • Consultation with, and ongoing commitment to listening to the voices of, people who experience disability.
<p>Ableist attitudes, policies, practices and cultural beliefs.</p> <p>Entrenched cycle of multi-generational ableist thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of a culture of inclusion; • Ensure inclusion of all children from a very young age in order to break the cycle of enculturated ableism; • Cultural shift is required for children and adults, thus it is important to engage in listening and learning together; • Universal design for learning.
<p>Lack of teacher confidence and preparedness.</p> <p>Negative teacher attitudes towards inclusive education.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory modules in pre-service teacher education in both inclusive education and (critical) disability studies, with an active and explicit move away from traditional deficit based 'special' education. • Ongoing professional development in inclusive education and disability studies. • Creation of spaces and processes for ongoing critical reflection and dialogue to continually improve practice and create the conditions for the perpetual process of becoming inclusive.

Continued micro and macro exclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a plan towards ending segregated education. • Learn from other contexts such as Italy, where all children have been educated together in mainstream settings since all special schools were all closed following legislation in 1977. In order to work towards a positive experience for all involved and to avoid recreating 'special' education (and therefore exclusion). • Careful review of the role of paraprofessionals. • Provision of adequate support and resources, along with opportunities for ongoing critical reflection (as noted above). • Implement universal design for learning. • Support for all teachers to teach all children, not 'special' teachers for 'special' children.
Vicious cycle of low expectations and lack of opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve teacher education. • Improve ongoing professional development. • More research documenting student outcomes and experiences. • Improved parent/student participation. • Leadership development on inclusion.
Ableist system of funding and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative funding system based on need, rather than categorisation. Appropriate education of specialist teachers, allied health professionals and paraprofessionals to ensure understanding of inclusive education, in depth specialist knowledge, and successful approaches to collaborating with families and teachers and active resistance to ableism.
Inadequate resources and support to facilitate inclusive education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient support and adequate resources to enable modifications and accommodations to the environment, materials and curriculum; • Adequate funding for ongoing (and appropriate) professional development. • The provision of sufficient planning time to facilitate an ongoing cycle of reflection and actions to enable inclusive practice. • Adequate funding for specialist support (from appropriately educated support professionals) • Commitment to universal design for learning within policies, structures, curriculum, environment, materials and professional development.



Conclusion: Implications for going forward

On the basis of mounting evidence in support of inclusive education, in 2008 Dempsey²⁷² concludes that “(t)he argument over whether inclusion works is ended. Inclusion does work when key components of the classroom and the school environment are in place”. However, the transformation to inclusion is not an easy one. Barton writes,

“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.”²⁷³

Thus leadership is required to bring about change towards inclusion.²⁷⁴ Educators need to be supported to think outside the square—“enlarging their capacity to imagine what might be achieved”²⁷⁵. At the heart of this, false assumptions and low expectations regarding the capabilities and behaviours of certain children (or groups of children) need to be challenged.²⁷⁶ Resistance to ableism and transformation at all levels of education is required in order to bring about inclusive education in Australia, and thus to uphold the rights of all children. This requires commitment to the ongoing process of becoming inclusive.



272 Dempsey, 2008, p.59

273 Barton, 1997, p.239

274 Ainscow, 2007

275 *Ibid*, p.6

276 *Ibid*

Policy recommendations

There is considerable change at present within relevant national policy agendas regarding people with disability. Within the education reform it is imperative that there is a clear commitment to genuine inclusive education at all levels of the education system in Australia.

Building on the research literature reviewed in this paper, there is scope for a coordinated framework for inclusive education in all Australian schools.

1. Undertake a comprehensive review of policy and practice at all levels of the education system to ensure the rights of students with disability are upheld, consistent with Australia's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in keeping with a contemporary understanding of inclusive education, and how evidence on inclusive education is translated to policy, practice and funding systems.
2. As part of this review, the educational practices and culture of segregated schools should be specifically examined, with a view to defining policy and funding arrangements for these settings that are consistent with Australia's obligations and contemporary theory.
3. From this review, define clear expectations for inclusive education in Australian schools. These should incorporate and complement the Disability Standards for Education (2005).
4. It is essential that the funding model must build in capacity for compulsory pre and in-service professional development for educators on inclusive education (including developing awareness regarding ableism, and the provisions of the CRPD).
5. Inclusive education practice should become an integral part of education and training for allied health, education leaders and other education support professionals.
6. Direct, accountable and regular consultation with students with disability and their families must be built into the next phase of the development of the funding model for students with disability, including the collection of nationally consistent data on students with disability.
7. Further development of the diversity approach within the *Australian Curriculum* and the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* to incorporate disability awareness, including awareness raising regarding ableism and educational practice.

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Suite 3, 173 Queens Parade, Clifton Hill, VIC 3068

Phone 03 9482 1130 or 1800 222 660 (regional or interstate)

Fax (03) 9481 7833

Email info@cda.org.au **ABN** 42 140 529 273