2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005

Education and inclusive societies

Education has been characterised as a 'bridging' or 'multiplier' right, enabling individuals to benefit from and claim other rights, such as those related to work, housing, political participation and access to justice.

The Royal Commission has considered the link between inclusive education and an inclusive society, supporting the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

The Disability Standards of Education 2020 is a timely and pertinent review of current inclusive education practice, the importance of social inclusion and a time to explore the close connection between social and academic inclusion for students with disability. Importantly, social and academic inclusion are co-dependent; without social inclusion, academic inclusion becomes impossible, and vice versa. If we wish to become a society embracing diversity with practice of inclusion, the beginning of the journey is at school. Pertinent issues of social justice can be introduced, inclusion practiced and true acceptance of neuro-diversity becomes the norm (Austin, 2017; Baron-Cohen, 2017).

The journey needs to be facilitated by knowledgeable educators, well versed in Proficient AITSL standards. Federal government mandates graduating teachers to be proficient in inclusive education and differentiation (Australian Institute for Teachers and Learning, 2020), to be well versed in inclusive language and modelling, to be able to adjust teaching materials to accommodate diverse learners and to facilitate learning in inclusive classrooms alongside neuro-typical peers. Importantly, established teachers require upskilling in current inclusive teaching practices. Only in recent years, have pre-service teaching degrees introduced core teaching units to educate pre-service teachers in skills of differentiation, accommodation of neurodiversity and expectations that they, as teachers, will be expected to create their own learning adjustments for students requiring support. The need for pre-service and ongoing education of teachers is essential to upskill future and present educators in how to provide adequate adjustments to enable participation and access for all students with disabilities (Black-Hawkins, 2017).

It is unclear whether all metropolitan schools identify students with disabilities correctly due to a lack of auditing across school sectors. Those students who do have a disability such as dyslexia, mental health conditions or those less tangible and sometimes not considered to have a disability by secondary schools in particular. The inability to identify all students with disabilities, with some disabilities difficult to visually identify, could also be accredited to lack of time, no staff member allocated to coordinate this process, lack of availability of classroom teachers to produce notes

and personalised learning plans, and insufficient records of specific resources used previously with students.

N.B. My personal research is focused on secondary students with autism. However, responses in terms of inclusive education offered are applicable to all students with a disability; many individuals with autism have co-existing diagnoses inclusive, but not exhaustive, of ADHD, anxiety, intellectual disability/difficulty, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, with autism diagnosis becoming commonly further complicated by debilitating motor dysphagia and low sensory thresholds (Matson, 2016).

*I use the term **autism** in this discussion response, as opposed to Autism Spectrum Disorder as stipulated by DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association (2013). I personally choose not to use the term "Disorder" as I have a 16 year old daughter with autism who I consider a perfect example of a neuro-diverse adolescent teenager, well able to navigate the journey of adulthood if situated in an inclusive and accepting society.*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Individuals with autism

Individuals diagnosed with autism mostly present with struggles with social skills and communication, stereotyped and repetitive behaviour, and precise interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Although autism presents differently in each diagnosed individual, universal difficulties are noted with communication, social relating, recurring behaviours, and targeted interests, often described as fixated (Chou, 2013). These fixated interests, commonly noted with individuals with autism , have in recent times been reharnessed as considerable assets, with strength-based approaches recommending using these assets as tremendous potential, as if targeted appropriately these assets can lead to successful behavioural, social and educational opportunities for students with autism in conjunction with increased self-worth and self-determination (Hatfield, Falkmer, Falkmer, & Ciccarelli, 2018; Pellicano, Dinsmore, & Charman, 2013; Wehmeyer, 2015).

Individuals with autism commonly report struggles with social skills of verbal language, social engagement, a low sensory threshold, and initiating and maintenance of social interactions with reciprocal conversation (Carter, Harvey, Taylor, & Gotham, 2013), regardless of positioning on the autism spectrum (Peters & Brooks, 2016). These difficulties become increasingly complex with a co-morbid diagnosis, inclusive of intellectual disability or difficulties, anxiety and depression, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD), Sensory Processing Disorder, and language and speech issues (Matson, 2016; Zablotsky et al., 2012). Primary autism symptoms are often exacerbated by common high occurrences of common co-morbid conditions, resulting in potential additive and interactive effects characterising further cognitive, social, emotional and adaptive skill difficulties (Matson, 2016). One core symptom of autism is increased prevalence of restricted and repetitive behaviours (RRBs), defined as expression of repetitive body

mannerisms, unusual sensory behaviours, fixations with routines and rituals and preoccupations with objects or parts of objects (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Mandy et al., 2012). Sensory differences are also a common expression of the 'restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests or activities' diagnosis criteria of DSM-5 for Autism Spectrum Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Saggers et al., 2016). Enhanced perception, hypo-reactivity, hyper-reactivity, sensory interests and repetitions are four common sensory response patterns displayed by individuals with autism (Schaaf & Lane, 2015). Interestingly, in a study conducted by Ausderau et al. (2014), only 29% of children in a sample of more than 1200 individuals with autism, aged 2-12 years, reported limited differences to neuro-typical sensory response patterns. Schaaf and Lane (2015) conducted a scoped literature review, noting pervasive effects of different sensory response patterns to core symptoms of autism, supporting importance of understanding functional and behavioural profiles of individuals with autism, as without appropriate evaluation of sensory response patterns governing characterisation, and ultimately the treatment plan, it remains difficult for support stakeholders (such as teachers, parents and therapists) to respond appropriately with intervention strategies to improve outcomes (Ausderau et al., 2014).

Adolescence and autism

Adolescence is a time of increased autonomy and independence, further highlighting difficulties in maintenance of social engagement (Chiang, Ni, & Lee, 2017), particularly with atypical reciprocal conversation patterns demonstrated by adolescents with autism (Gardner et al., 2014). Adolescence marks increased desires to develop social connectedness with peers with similar likes and dislikes (Woolfolk & Margetts, 2016), with Carter et al. (2013) reminding us that adolescents with autism too, also wish to seek social connectedness and peer acceptance within the school and community (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). With appropriate use of spoken language in social settings critical for successful inclusion, adolescents with autism have increased risks of social isolation and rejection by peers due to difficulties in this domain (Bambara et al., 2018; Bambara, Cole, Kunsch, Tsai, & Ayad, 2016).

Communication is a social, dynamic and reciprocal process requiring individuals to be motivated to interact and express thoughts appropriately (Nuske et al., 2018), with McNerney, Hill, and Pellicano (2015) recognising the lack of understanding of social cues, impaired social cognition and poor communication becoming more pronounced in adolescence, in response to the increasingly complex and demanding social milieu (Laugeson & Ellingsen, 2014). One-sided conversational patterns focusing on personal interests with difficulty in changing conversational topics, whilst paying little attention to interests of other people increase the complexity for adolescents with autism to trade information with social partners (Laugeson & Ellingsen, 2014), and identify common ground with peer networks, thus creating significant barriers to forming lasting friendships and positive relations with neuro-typical peers (Laugeson & Ellingsen, 2014; Schohl, 2016).

Executive functioning in students with autism

Executive functioning difficulties are commonly identified in students with autism (Robinson, Goddard, Dritschel, Wisley, & Howlin, 2009), corresponding with weaknesses in suppression of irrelevant input into verbal domains of working memory (Pimperton & Nation, 2010), contributing to difficulty with cognitive processing and storing of information, in addition to planning, regulating and monitoring behaviours (Heflin & Isbell, 2012). Koegel, Robinson, and Koegel (2009) report struggles with executive functioning interfere with organisation of thoughts, generating original ideas (Koegel, Park, & Koegel, 2014), and adopting perspectives of other people (Heflin & Isbell, 2012), all which increase student's difficulties in social, emotional and academic domains of secondary school. Furthermore, corresponding struggles with inferential comprehension, requiring generation of novel ideas and spontaneous behaviours, self-monitoring thoughts, actions and words including self-correction according to changing situations, compounds the already difficult educational plateau for secondary students with autism (Heflin & Isbell, 2012; Pimperton & Nation, 2010). With academic performance remaining an important expectation of students with disabilities, via mandated legislation and policies (Ministerial Council of Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008), many students with autism require individualised instruction and specific accommodations to nurture school success (Heflin & Isbell, 2012; Pimperton & Nation, 2010). Executive functioning difficulties, that seem to be present in many individuals with an autism diagnosis, regardless of their position on the spectrum, is evidenced by mental inflexibility in shifting attention to different thoughts or actions in response to environmental changes, creating struggles to generate spontaneous behaviours and novel ideas, coupled with a lower ability to self-monitor their own thoughts, actions and words, inclusive of self-correction (Heflin & Isbell, 2012).

Importance of self-determination for adolescent students with autism

More recent research regarding young adults with autism recognises importance of student voice; an important resource in developing mutual understandings surrounding the neurodiversity of autism (Baric, Hellberg, Kjellberg, & Hemmingsson, 2016; Pellicano et al., 2018), and the essentialness of developing self-determination at a young age for student's with autism (Dykstra, Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Self-determination encompasses components of choice and decision making skills, goal-setting and attainment skills, problem-solving skills, self-advocacy and leadership, self-monitoring skills, perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, self-awareness and self-knowledge (Shogren, Garnier Villarreal, Lang, & Seo, 2017; Wehmeyer, 2015; Wehmeyer, Palmer, Shogren, Williams-Diehm, & Soukup, 2012). Adolescents with autism are well able to acquire self-determination, given appropriate opportunities to take initiatives, and to exercise valued and meaningful decision making, given exposure to appropriate opportunities and choices (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehman, 2013).

RESPONSES

What has prevented Australia from complying fully with is obligations in Article 24 of the CRPD? What needs to change within?

1.   Commonwealth, State and Territory governments

Inclusive education provides the opportunity for diverse cohorts of students, both neuro-typical and atypical, to have equal participation and access to education offered to same-age peers given appropriate accommodations served by classroom teachers. (DeLuca, 2013). Inclusive education assumes a human right for equal educational opportunities, as defined by Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), revised in 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006).

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), passed nearly three decades ago in Australia (1992), updated in 2005, provides the statute significantly impinging on decisions made by educational institutions relating to disability issues (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). In a review of disability discrimination law by Keeffe (2003), it was found that whilst systemic requirements of the DDA were not always transparent in providing guidance to Principals relating to complex issues relating to disability, expectations were that inclusive schools transmit cultural values responsive to such issues, with clear parameters of dignity and respect outlined in policy documents, and relevant communications occurring between all key stakeholders. Senge (2012) discusses the role of leaders [i.e. principals] creating positive inclusive culture with expectations for meaningful change resulting in more inclusive modes of schooling

There are significant tensions noted world-wide around the true model of inclusive education, echoed in Australian schools. Whilst well-intentioned, inclusive education is not facilitated uniformly across metropolitan secondary schools, as indicated by my current research, where I have conducted focus group discussions with homogeneous stakeholders of the professional learning community: school leadership, teachers, education support teachers, education assistants, parents' of secondary students with an autism diagnosis, allied health providers, and post-secondary students with autism.

The Inaugural Inclusive Education Summit held at Victoria University in Melbourne in 2015, over 120 prominent delegates discussed inclusive education with reference to a key thematic orientation; realising that educators needed to make sense of everyday practice (Whitburn & Plows, 2017), further endorsing suggestions by Mitchell (2013):

> Reasons for the policy-practice gap in inclusive education are manifold and include barriers arising from societal values and beliefs; economic factors; a lack of measures to ensure compliance with policies; the dispersion of responsibility for education;

conservative traditions among teachers, teacher educators and educational researchers; parental resistance; lack of skills among teachers; rigid curricula and examination systems; fragile democratic institutions; inadequate educational infrastructures, particularly in rural and remote areas; large class sizes; resistance from the special education sector (especially special schools); and a top-down introduction of inclusive education without adequate preparation of schools and communities (p. 301).

2. Schools and communities

Successful inclusive practice, relies on school leadership to promote governance to inclusive schooling based on collaboration, cooperation, moral reasoning, shared values and understandings, enabling schools to become disability sensitive and discrimination free (Keeffe, 2003; Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996; Slee & Allan, 2001). Twenty years ago, Slee and Allan (2001) raised significant concerns for needs for dialogue to deconstruct constraints of inclusive education policies by adhesion of 'traditional regular and special education imperatives' (p. 173), citing "special education needs" as an euphemism for failure of schools to meet diverse needs of children to de-politicise school failure (Barton, 1987), further legitimising professional interests of special education workers (Tomlinson, 1996). Dialogue, deemed necessary by Slee and Allan (2001) include understanding of politics required to engage and enact ideas for inclusion, modern blueprints for inclusive education, offering an array of curriculum choices, negating conformism for all students for which mandated inclusion may enforce failure, reflection upon knowledge of disability by working with disabled researchers. Importantly, Slee and Allan (2001) mention disdain for Australian practices of allowing special educators to train the emerging teacher workforce to be inclusive, citing:

> This is no different from the practice of bureaucracies as they bring unreconstructed psychologists and special educationalists into the inclusion policy forum. Inclusive education foreshadows a reconstruction of regular education and those that work in and with it (p.186).

External recognition of academic achievements of schools add significant tension to inclusion with Black-Hawkins (2010) discussing political government legislation driving improved academic results of schools to be ranked in performance tables, emphasising competition and achievement of standards, ultimately conflicting with policies mandating inclusive education valuing participation and access (Black-Hawkins, 2010; Florian & Pantić, 2017). Tomlinson (2015) recognises educational success in the twenty first century continuing to be measured by global test results, creating dissonance when individuals do not achieve desired levels, impeding national marches to global economic performances used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to rank countries across the world. Black-Hawkins (2010) confirm incompatibilities of achievement and inclusion, sitting uncomfortably together in political agendas, reinforcing continued issues with

incorporating inclusive education responding to individual needs of students, whilst complying with educational uniformity demanded by national curriculums (Hyde, Carpenter, & Dole, 2017). Furthermore, Whitburn and Plows (2017) ascertain 'increased standardisation of curriculum and assessment lead to coercive policy impositions on teachers, and surreptitious gatekeeping deters particular learners from enrolling in local schools (p. 9)'.

Each year, Western Australia newspapers publish ranking tables based on ATAR success for Year 12 graduates. Unfortunately, the audience, commonly parents and small businesses are not aware many students are actively encouraged not to undertake ATAR 12 courses, due to learning difficulties. Students with learning difficulties such as working memory, inattention issues such as ADHD, dyslexia, dysgraphia and many other learning difficulties which could be accommodated by learning adjustments administered by AITSL proficient teachers. Many students, unwittingly, are guided towards alternative entries to their degree of choice without being offered support to engage in Year 11 and 12 subject choices aligning to their post-secondary options they wish to pursue. Results of students with disabilities are excluded from ATAR ranking tables, thus higher rankings generated higher profiles for schools, increased student uptake and prestige for offering superior education offerings. Basic statistics informs us, a reduced sample size with less standard deviation around an average generates a higher average result. By Law, without discrimination, senior school students deserve choices as to subjects they wish to pursue in their final years of schooling, ensuring options to pursue post-secondary choices directly, not through alternative pathways if this is avoidable.

Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2005) endorse strategies fostering successful inclusive practice in schools; building a vision of inclusion within the school community, developing skills of teachers to teach inclusively, creation of meaningful incentives for the school community to adopt change in practice via strategic actions, reorganisation and expansion of humans and other resources in schools to teach for, and to diversity, so school communities can engage in the bigger picture. Enormous challenges are presented to school principals and teachers when moving from traditional models of schooling to all-inclusive models (Forlin et al., 2013; Forlin et al., 2008; Westwood, 2013) with Lunenburg (2010) endorsing benefits of principals and leadership sharing vision statements with staff about goals for inclusion to be shared and implemented by school communities, additionally endorsed by Senge (2012). By immersing in school community endeavours to engage students, teachers, parents and wider community members, movement can occur towards inclusive directions, collectively creating infrastructure, policies and processes promoting collegial interchange between key stakeholders to allow inclusive education to become a reality in our schools (Florian, 2017; Lunenburg, 2010; Whitburn & Plows, 2017).

Many secondary teachers in Australia report less positive attitudes to inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms, demonstrating reduced levels of adaptation to cater to diverse needs, experiencing difficulties on 'how' to adjust

curriculum appropriately, and increased resistance to inclusion in comparison to primary school teachers (Davies, 2014; Forlin et al., 2013). The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework optimising teaching and learning for all students, based on theoretical research on how people learn (Hyde et al., 2017; UDL Centre, 2018), thus providing a structures supporting educating students with autism by adopting the practice of targeted differentiation for the inclusive classrooms (Mitchell, 2013). With three overarching principles; providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression and multiple means of engagement, UDL focuses on providing physical access to the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy with emphasis on creating an inclusive environment from the outset, for participation for all students, inclusive of those with autism (Carpenter, 2017; Heflin & Isbell, 2012; Mitchell, 2013). Understanding strengths and weaknesses of students with autism with varying educational needs provides a framework for classroom educators to adjust curriculum into desirable outcomes (Carpenter, 2017; Tait, 2017).

Individual Education Plans (IEPs) provide the means where outcomes can be scaffolded to measure achievements. All stakeholders, inclusive of external input must be involved in IEPs to ensure there is investment in the plan created. IEPs need to reflect interactions between the individual students' abilities, and opportunities to improve capacity within the varied learning environments (Foreman, 2014). According to Foreman (2014), role delineations often position parents as passive participants in IEP planning, frequently presented with finished intervention plans by educators with limited opportunities for input, irrespective that all key stakeholders require input and ownership of agreed-upon outcomes resulting from collaboration and communication to create an informed IEP, often not representing the complete range of outcomes desired by invested parties, inclusive of the adolescent student with autism (Chiang et al., 2012; Friend & Cook, 2013).

The relationship fostered between stakeholders when teachers assume control for the planning of an IEP can inhibit the establishment of collaborative relationships between teachers, parents, educational assistants and other stakeholders, such as allied health professionals (Azad, Kim, Marcus, Sheridan, & Mandell, 2016). Communication and trust between staff, teachers, parents and students remain cited as essential elements for successful school experiences (Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten, & Falkmer, 2015); the importance of clarifying input and involvement of stakeholders fosters a collaborative team approach (Deppeler, 2012), with the end goal to achieve identified achievable outcomes for individual students with autism (Carpenter, 2017). Student voice remains imperative, particularly for students in secondary schooling, as without their commitments and feeling valued in the discussion, perceived outcomes remain critically difficult to achieve.

Falkmer et al. (2015) noted parental confidence in effective inclusive schooling diminishes upon entry of students with autism into secondary school, with parents of children with autism facing unique challenges beyond those experienced by parents of neuro-typical children. Nuske et al. (2018) acknowledges that parents of

adolescents with autism have to negotiate challenging behaviours at home and school, judgement from others, often a lack of support from extended family members, and the wider community in general. Family relationships are difficult to navigate, with many families struggling with interpersonal relationships between caregivers, in addition to negotiating secondary schooling issues that commonly arise (Ekas, Timmons, Pruitt, Ghilain, & Alessandri, 2015). Many parents have previously been actively involved in school-based interventions in primary schools, via collaboration with allied health professionals and educators, thus have capacity to provide valuable and unique insights informing effective implementation of appropriate school practices to benefit and support students with autism upon entry to secondary school (Deppeler, 2012; Falkmer et al., 2015). However, reports from parents indicate parents often feel their input is not considered valuable upon entry to secondary schooling, leading to frustrations and disillusionment with secondary education provisions (Dillon & Underwood, 2012).

3.   Individual classrooms, to ensure an inclusive education system at all levels?

Inclusive education, in theory, requires all school-age students, including those with disability, to experience valuable, positive and age-appropriate roles in school communities (Florian & Pantić, 2017; Foreman, 2014; O'Rourke, 2015). Yet, ambiguity continues to remain on how inclusivity is practiced, with educators receiving contradictory signals about inclusion, and a lack of instruction about how to teach inclusively, arising from different attitudes of individual teachers (Čagran & Schmidt, 2011; Forlin et al., 2014), school leadership (Senge et al., 2012), and government policies concerning practices of inclusion in relation to diversity (DeLuca, 2013; Gerin-Lajoie, 2008; Slee, 2011). Perceived confusion about inclusion continues to dominate research literature, despite considerable expenditure invested (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

The difficulties for teachers and educational institutions remain at the forefront of inclusive education (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Forlin, 2004; Forlin et al., 2014; Mintz & Wyse, 2015; Syriopoulou-Delli, Cassimos, & Stavroula, 2016), reinforcing importance of teacher training and ongoing professional learning, to upskill educators to respond to, and accommodate, diverse learners. Westwood (2013) discuss practicalities of inclusive classrooms supporting accommodation and appreciation of additional needs and differences, creating learning environments where all students can learn, and develop to their full potential, supported by collective effort, with reflection integrated into everyday practice to measure effect and effectiveness (Black-Hawkins, 2017). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) caution practices of ability grouping, with teacher determined differentiation possibly acting to exclude and marginalise learners, further endorsed by (Fitzgerald, 2012) in that incorporating 'parallel' activities cannot assume inclusion. Coupled with ambiguous early ability-grouping of students upon entry to Year 7, students can be typecast into lower ability learning groups without the chance to develop skills which will develop as students mature. Individualised academic

support relating to difficulties with executive functioning, inclusive of planning, time management and organisation are considered to be helpful for students with autism (Robinson et al., 2009; Saggers et al., 2016), inclusive of recommendations for effective teaching practices all invested stakeholders believe can optimise outcomes for individual students (Florian, 2008).

Many overt behaviours displayed by students are challenging to secondary teachers, interfering with students' learning new skills and sometimes interfering with learning for other participants in the class (Scott & Bennet, 2012). Commonly noted challenging behaviours, such as non-compliance, interrupting, and class disruptions could be attributed to the struggles in communication and social skills, or at times, a lack of understanding of classroom behavioural expectations (Heflin & Isbell, 2012). The use of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) advocates creating environmental contexts supporting adaptive and prosocial behaviour in people with autism, based on notions that problem contexts can cause problem behaviours (Carr et al., 1994). Using the normalisation approach of severe problem behaviours in students with autism, behaviour is noted as a form of communication (albeit inappropriate and often socially unacceptable), but preventable with the effective response to target these challenging behaviours (Scott & Bennet, 2012). However, if teaching staff do not have skills sets in applying ABA strategies or Positive Behaviour Strategies (PBS), often requiring intervention with allied health service professionals, they are unsure of how to respond to these overt behaviours in students.

Carr et al. (1994) emphasises the importance of isolating and understanding sources of challenging behaviour, followed by intervention using efficient functional communication that can be taught to the child, with reduction in reinforcements over time. Adaptive functioning is recognised as critical, allowing students to develop social behaviours that enable abilities to improve functional independence in the socially complex environment of secondary schooling (Heflin & Isbell, 2012). By understanding behaviours targeted for change, successful intervention becomes possible for educators, providing responses to reduce problem behaviour, whilst increasing desired behaviour (Scott & Bennet, 2012). Furthermore, effective targeted interventions can be successful with students with any disabilities if related to student's special interests, learning styles, or strengths, and can be utilised as reinforcers (Myles, Smith, Aspy, Grossman, & Henry, 2012). Teachers are well positioned to employ behavioural strategies to support the challenges presented by individuals in inclusive classrooms, however, the success of behavioural intervention balances on teachers in schools being provided with professional learning on how to specifically address complex behaviour issues (Roth, Gillis, & Digennaro Reed, 2014).

Acknowledging the individual profiles of students allows educators to define appropriate and achievable mutual short and long term academic, behavioural and social outcomes (Carpenter, 2017). Student-specific information enhances a teachers' ability to provide adjusted activities and utilise specific strategies outlined in IEP documents and to improve participation and accessibility for students in their school

experiences (Conway, 2014; Zablotsky et al., 2012), aligning with AITSL Standard One, "Know students and how they learn" (Australian Institute for Teachers and Learning Institute [AITSL, (2013). Collaborative consultation with invested stakeholders (educational support and subject teachers, parents, educational assistants and allied health professionals) mutually recognises challenges, allows negotiation for agreed upon goals, and shares responsibility and accountability between all stakeholders with commitment to agreed outcomes.

Student voice remains imperative in secondary schooling, although low incidence of student-focused planning continues to be reported (Tso & Strnadová, 2016), even in light of evidence recognising decision making as an essential aspect of developing an individual's self-determination (Dykstra Steinbrenner & Watson, 2015; Tso & Strnadová, 2016). Self-determination encompasses components of choice and decision making skills, goal-setting and attainment skills, problem-solving skills, self-advocacy and leadership; self-monitoring skills, perceptions of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy, self-awareness and self-knowledge (Shogren et al., 2017; Wehmeyer, 2015; Wehmeyer et al., 2012), with all adolescents able to acquire self-determination, given appropriate opportunities to take initiatives and exercise meaningful decision making through exposure to guided choices (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehman, 2013). Focus areas cited as important by Crockett and Hardman (2010), contributing to secondary school success, rest on promotion of self-determination, supporting the inclusion of students in school and community settings, whilst developing social competence.

Post-secondary options for students with any disability requires an awareness in conjunction with employment preparation programs and developing systematic transition planning. This also, importantly, links to the entry into the post-school world on departure from secondary school (Hyde et al., 2017), enabling further inclusion and success for students upon exit from their schooling experience.

4. **What is essential to facilitate the transition from segregated or integrated settings to inclusive education settings, and to sustain the change?**

Mintz and Wyse (2015) explore the complex interwoven relationship of knowledge and pedagogy, recognising challenges for educators in responding to diverse needs of learners that don't respond to traditional ways to teaching. Furthermore, Mintz and Wyse (2015) argue if mainstreaming of all students is mandatory, educators consequently do require specialist training relating to specific understandings of particular diagnostic categories, in order to develop essential skills for construction of individual pedagogies, or learning adjustments, for students with additional needs. Mintz and Wyse (2015) illustrates a compelling example:

> …there is some recognition that a part of special education is recognising, for example, that the human science can provide evidence as to how we can improve the life chances of certain groups of children. Thus, the child with autism should be

encouraged to engage in neuro-typical social communication if that means he or she will be able to get a job, get married and have a fulfilling relationship in society as it is. From such a perspective, specific knowledge about diagnostic categories have an important place in the work of teachers (p. 1168).

The nature of student's disability or disorder, combined with the absence or presence of behavioural problems impacts on teacher attitudes towards inclusion (Cagran & Schmidt, 2011). Understandably, doubts are expressed about viability of including students with disabilities, particularly with complex co-morbid conditions, emotional and behavioural issues.   However many difficulties are attributed to lack of understanding or limited experience of teachers with supporting and teaching atypical learners (Slee, 2011; Westwood, 2013), with the absence of invested leadership in developing their staff in inclusive culture, strategies to differentiate, collaboration with teachers who can successfully differentiate within their own school, discussed in depth by Senge (2012) in is highly acclaimed book "A fifth discipline resource: Schools that learn", first published in 2000, revised in 2012, with fruitful recommendations for change in education institutions to encourage learning of all participants.

5.   Collaborative communication in professional learning communities

Teacher and educational institution professional learning communities (PLCs) are conceptualised within the community of practice literature, with defined characteristics of collegiality and shared tasks by the school community with a student learning focus (Owen, 2014). Successful PLCS are based on the premise that varied perspectives and experiences of associated stakeholders contribute to ongoing growth and improvement of community practice (Barton & Stepanek, 2012). PLCs are relatively new forums discussed as important contexts for teacher professional learning, focusing predominantly on improving pedagogical understandings and strategies to improve the *learning of students*, not just total school achievements (Brody & Hadar, 2015; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003; Stoll et al., 2006). Utilising PLC approaches and values can act to deepen social interaction and effective discourse, self-reflection, collaboration and sharing of ideas that work to improve student learning, in turn facilitating collective construction of knowledge (Popp & Goldman, 2016).

Stoll et al. (2006) acknowledge whilst 'there is no universal definition of a professional learning [sic] community (p.222)', five key characteristics help to define PLCs; shared values and visions, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration and the promotion of individual and group learning. Furthermore, PLCs are powerful formats promoting effective professional development of teacher educators, and to improve teaching practice (Stoll et al., 2006), providing platforms for innovation of community practice, and opportunities for teachers to learn with, and from other teachers in social and collaborative cultures (Hunuk et al., 2019; Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015).

Advancement of collegial interchange, a key characteristic of PLCs, allows engagement of key stakeholders, jointly searching for solutions contributing to individual and institutional growth (Brody & Hadar, 2015), with Hunuk et al. (2019) endorsing when groups of people with shared concerns engage in collaborative and

critical reflection, communities can improve practice in a learning-orientated and growth promoting trajectory. Furthermore, Brody and Hadar (2015) note PLCs require intentional initiation, promoted by leadership staff, actively responding to needs of educational community members, with deliberate cultivation, as aspiration does come naturally in many school settings (Senge et al., 2012).

6. **What is the impact of inclusive education on the life course outcomes (including learning and employment outcomes) of students with disability?**

Tomlinson (2015) expresses concerns about worldwide current inclusive education practices, observing supposed acceptance by educational administration about inclusive practice, but on the flipside note many schools in England, Australia and United States still conduct exclusionary practice by engaging students with additional needs in courses focusing on self-presentation, time-keeping, obedience and life skills, in order to achieve norms of social behaviour, in preparation for low level work and low-paid jobs. Slee (2011) introduces the term 'collective indifference', suggesting unless the bias of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy are changed, access to inclusive education remains a process of lobbying to 'add the numbers of minority students to the enrolment register (p.40)', with diagnoses resulting in labels, followed by downward adjustment of teacher expectations, leading to restricted educational and social trajectories (Slee, 2011, 2012). Mitchell (2013) suggests inclusive education, when rolled out appropriately, allows raised self-esteem of learners with additional educational needs with social and academic gains, in conjunction with other learners appreciating diversities of society, whilst developing an appreciation of social justice and equality (Slee, 2011, 2012). Everyone in the schooling institution becomes a winner.

7. **And students without disability? How does inclusive education promote a more inclusive society?**

Current research redefines movement of special education towards inclusive models of schooling, identifying opportunities for students with autism, using strength-based approaches (Pillay & Brownlow, 2017), to create meaningful engagement in educational experiences, furthermore encouraging opportunities to foster positive peer interactions with neuro-typical peers (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; O'Rourke, 2015; Pellicano, Dinsmore, & Charman, 2014). Providing social opportunities within school settings enhances valued neuro-typical connections; aiding in social competence, fostering self-determination and promoting success in secondary schooling and beyond for *all learners* in an inclusive school (Carter et al., 2014; Shogren et al., 2008; Wehmeyer et al., 2012), with Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, Solomon, and Sirota (2001) claiming that at times, 'the practice of inclusion rests primarily on unaffected schoolmates rather than teachers' (p.399).

The sensitive issue of how best to promote peer acceptance, in order to create greater understanding amongst peers, whilst avoiding accentuation of differences and exclusion experienced by students with autism remains difficult without support of the

school itself (Symes & Humphrey, 2010). Neuro-typical peers have potential to model social norms of communication and behaviour, acting as appropriate and valuable role models for students with disabilities in secondary schools (Hochman, Carter, Bottema-Beutel, Harvey, & Gustafson, 2015; Watkins et al., 2015).

Peer-mediated interventions, coordinated by educators and/or allied health therapists, include the use of proximity, socially appropriate prompting and reinforcing, direct instruction of social skills, using social scripts and using participant interest driven activities, all of which can generate positive and meaningful social interactions for students with autism (Koegel et al., 2009; Watkins et al., 2017). Skill sets gained by neuro-typical cohorts is invaluable, as evidenced by siblings of children with additional needs, as acceptance of inclusion values skills of tolerance, understanding and the ability to appreciate neurodiversity – all of these skills are exceptionally valuable for our younger generation entering a hopefully more inclusive world where those with disabilities are valued members of our society.

End solutions

What becomes apparently clear is that the key to inclusive education is for staff to undertake ongoing professional learning to become upskilled in the continual development of inclusive education. The focus seems to largely be on upskilling pre-service teachers, but for those veteran teachers who completed their teaching degree many years ago have often received superfluous education in this area.

Leaders of schools, often seek a Masters Degrees in Leaderships (a popular degree in Western Australia to gain leadership positions), however upon examination of the Masters of Leadership across five major universities in Western Australia shows no evidence of a specific unit examining diversity and inclusive education for completion by potential school leaders. On-line courses with multiple choice quizzes, as provided by AITSL Professional Learning, may not be sufficient to warrant educators about how to incorporate inclusive education practices. Effective delivery of inclusive education is subject-specific, requires on-going dialogue with those competent in providing adjustments and benefits from collaborative communication with all stakeholders supporting students with disabilities. Each individual school setting needs to set time aside to explore viable solutions and strategies to ensure all staff have strategies and support to implement practices.

Developing support for inclusive education to improve education for those with disabilities needs time, funding and support. Leaders of schools need to value connection and inclusion and the vision needs to be created, not just by school leaders, but by school communities. Each individual requires investment and the community needs to see value in inclusive education to cater to those with disabilities, not just as a task that is demanded by school leaders, or via State and Federal legislation. Teachers inherently teach in isolation and many brilliant ideas are not shared across staff due to, insufficient opportunities for staff to engage in reflection and collaboration about beliefs, attitudes, stereotypical views and values and effective teaching strategies to increase accessibility for all learners (Makopoulou et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2016). Black-Hawkins (2017) cites inclusive education continues to

remain problematic, if neuro-typical learners are considered as the homogeneous group, with learners with additional needs positioned alongside (Black-Hawkins, 2017). In closing, as evidenced by research, clear and consistent evidence can be found that inclusive education settings can confer substantial short and long-term benefits for both students with, and without disabilities.

N.B. For any further information or access to references used, please contact email below.

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