



ACADEMY OF  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
IN AUSTRALIA

# ACADEMY PAPERS

Much confusion about inclusion in Australia's  
largest education system

Linda Graham

Paul Bourke Lecture 2012

3/2013

# Much confusion about inclusion in Australia's largest education system

Linda Graham

Academy Papers 3/2013  
Paul Bourke Lecture 2012

The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia  
Canberra 2013



© The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia 2013

ISSN: 2202-3941 (Print)

ISSN: 2202-4697 (Web)

Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction rights should be addressed to:

The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia

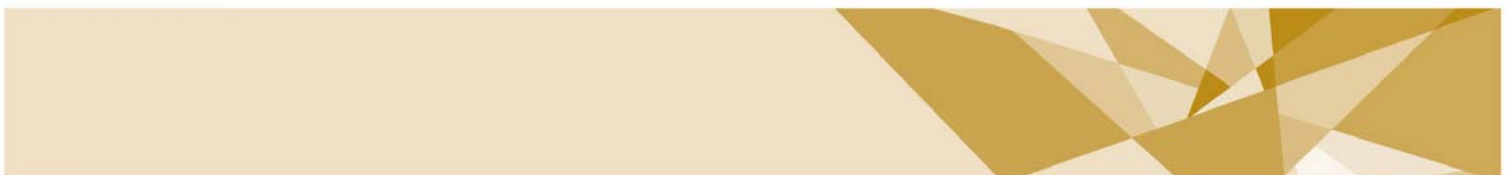
GPO Box 1956, Canberra ACT 2601

T +61 2 6249 1788 • F +61 2 6247 4335

Email: [secretariat@assa.edu.au](mailto:secretariat@assa.edu.au).

The Academy is not responsible, as a body, for the opinions expressed in any of its publications.

For further information about the Academy or any of its programs or publications, visit: [www.assa.edu.au](http://www.assa.edu.au)



## About Paul Bourke Lecture

---

**Paul Francis Bourke** (1938-1999) was a product of the History school at the University of Melbourne who went on to become one of the first Australian historians to obtain American style doctoral training.

Whilst at Flinders University, he served as Professor of American Studies and also as Pro-Vice Chancellor. From Flinders University, he went on to become the Director of the RSSS at ANU and also served as the president of the Academy (1993-1997). Amongst scholars the contribution Paul made to the field of performance measurement is considered to be invaluable.

The Paul Bourke Lecture is named in honour of the late Paul Francis Bourke. The lecture was inaugurated in 2009 and is presented each year by the recipient of the previous year's *Paul Bourke Award for Early Career Research*, at the award winner's home university and is open to the public.

### The Lecturer

Dr Graham is an ARC Discovery Research Fellow and Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Macquarie University, Australia. Her work focuses on the role that education policy plays in the increased identification of special educational needs. Her research findings have challenged claims that identification growth is due to an overall increase in the incidence of disability, and have illustrated how increased identification can work against students with a disability by reducing the funding pool and increasing stigma. She was named Macquarie University Early Career Researcher of the Year in 2011 and received the 2011 Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Early Career Award.



**Dr Linda Graham was the recipient of the 2011 Academy of Social Sciences in Australia's Paul Bourke Award for Early Career Research.**

# Much confusion about inclusion in Australia's largest education system

---

## Introduction

Over the last three decades, growing international recognition of the right of students with a disability to attend their local school has prompted change in the formation of education policies, schooling structures and pedagogical practice. Inclusion, as the movement has become known, has since been taken up and developed to different degrees in different regions and to differing degrees of success. Yet, despite sincere attempts to better include students with physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities, new and different forms of exclusion have arisen since the late 1990s; particularly for students with social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. In this lecture, I report on findings from a three year ARC Discovery project to consider the impact of inclusion on the New South Wales government schooling sector, Australia's largest education system. I will outline key barriers to meaningful access and participation relevant to education systems internationally and I will discuss areas for strategic policy intervention.

First and foremost, I will define what 'inclusion' is, which people tend not to do, but I'm going to try! I'm then going to explain the study context – what I did in this ARC fellowship project and why I did that – as well as to take you through the history of what has happened in this space in New South Wales. In other words, we're going to travel from where we have been to where we are now and I will try to explain, using these research findings, how we got here. Then I'm going to sum it all up with what I think needs to happen now.

## Defining Inclusion

Defining inclusive education or inclusion is actually very hard and I have a problem with the term inclusion myself. I've written previously about that with Roger Slee. We have a problem with the term because inclusion implies a 'bringing in' and in doing so, it privileges the centre, which then reinforces the margins (Graham & Slee, 2008). That's the problem we've had with it. But putting that aside: inclusive education or, by default, 'inclusion', which is what it tends to be called, is all about focusing on barriers to student access and participation, and not just physical barriers.

The reason I have this picture of stairs in the slide below is because often that's where the focus lands: 'Oh, we need to put in ramps and things, so that children can get into schools'. But what is often forgotten is what happens *after* that, because many things can be exclusionary, not just architecture.

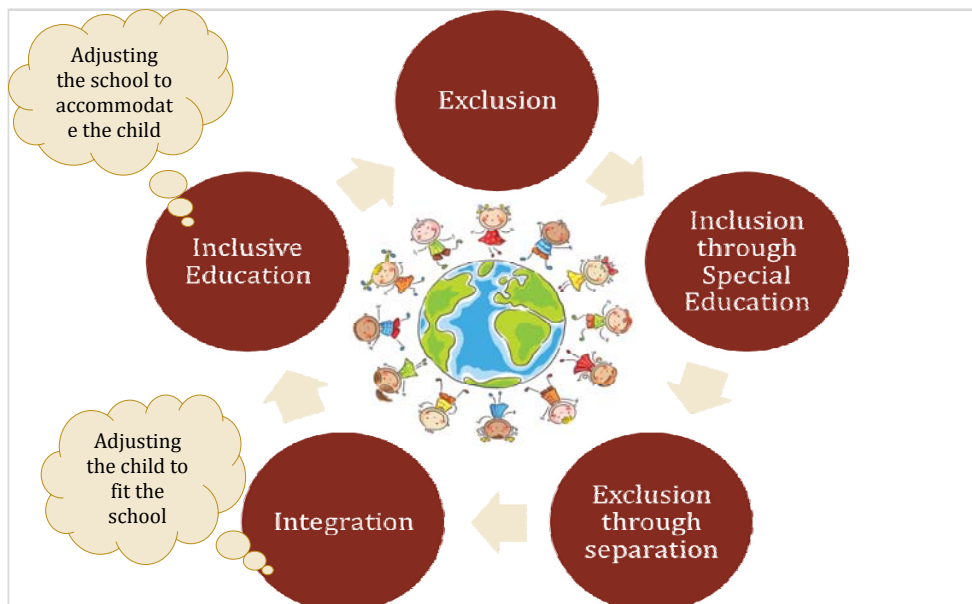


“Initially viewed as the natural antidote to segregation following deinstitutionalisation, ‘integration’ began to receive criticism for perpetuating an assimilatory logic. The realisation that exclusion can be multi-faceted and not necessarily addressed by mere changes in placement highlighted the importance of challenging existing social norms in order to forge the kind of social, economic and cultural contexts that would be more accepting and open to structural change. *In other words, inclusion was intended to bring about the political change that integration could not...*”

(Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011, p. 263)

Inclusive education research also focuses on curriculum; modifying and adjusting it. And there's a focus on pedagogy, which is differentiating the ways that we teach, and a focus on attitudes. That is probably one of the most researched areas of inclusive education research – attitudes of teachers and attitudes of principals. Unfortunately, attitudes are one of the hardest things to shift.

If we look historically, we find that 150 or so years ago we had total exclusion. Children with a disability were not included in schools, not included in education, and often were institutionalised or otherwise left at home. That began to shift in NSW generally around the late 1800s in terms of providing an education for children with a disability. So, actually the first ‘revolution’ that we had was through special education, which was about providing specialised supports for children with a disability.



But then we started having a problem, which was that we began to have exclusion *through* special education where, rather than providing pathways *into* education, special education began to be the pathway *out* through a growing number of separate placement types. Through growing recognition of that issue, we started moving into this new phase called 'integration'. This happened around the 1970s following de-institutionalisation, and it led to changing attitudes.

However, through the 1970s and towards the beginning of the 1980s, we also began to recognise that simply putting a child in a mainstream school – that a simple change in placement – doesn't necessarily mean that the child is *included*. The concept of an 'inclusive' education grew out of this history but inclusive education is about more than children with a disability. It's about *all* children and *meeting the needs* of *all* children.

There is a difference, then, between inclusive education and 'integration', which is more about adjusting the child to be able to fit the school. Inclusive education is about adjusting the school, which appears harder to do. That's why we're discussing this topic tonight.

### **Inclusion implies change.....**

It comprises two linked processes:

- It is the process of increasing the participation of students in the cultures and curricula of mainstream schools and communities;
- It is the process of reducing the exclusion of students from mainstream cultures and curricula.

(Booth, 1996, p. 89)

Now, Tony Booth is a very influential writer in the area of inclusive education and one of the authors responsible for the Index for Inclusion. Booth discusses how inclusion incorporates *two* processes. It's not just about *increasing participation* of students in the cultures and curriculum of mainstream schools and communities. It's a process about reducing the *exclusion* of students. I am arguing tonight that we're actually not doing *either* of these things very well. So, that is a brief history behind where we are with inclusion in education. Now I want to talk about the study context.

### **ARC Study Context**

I started building the case for this research in 2007-2008, when I was at the University of Sydney. At the time, I was fortunate to be under the mentorship of Professor Tony Vinson, who happened to lead the Inquiry into Public Education back in 2001. I started researching this phenomenon at the time because I was struck by competing claims. For example, parents were reporting that their children were being inadequately supported. This was evident across a raft of literature and reports. There was the aforementioned Vinson Inquiry in 2001; there was the NSW Attorney-General's report in 2006; and there was the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry in 2010. Consistently parents are saying the same things. But,



at the same time, the NSW Teachers Federation, the Australian Primary Principals Association, and the Primary Schools Principals Forum were saying that regular schools were buckling under the rise in 'integrated' students and that 'integration was underfunded'.

Now, I began to worry about all this because I had started studying Treasury papers and found that in the period 1997 to 2007 the percentage of students enrolled in NSW government schools with a confirmed disability who were receiving individually targeted support had more than doubled; rising from 2.7 per cent to 6.7 per cent of total enrolments in just 11 years. At the same time, however, the special education budget *tripled* from \$290 million to more than \$1 billion. And it's still increasing.

#### ARC DP1093020: Study Context

- **Competing stakeholder claims**
  - Parents reporting that their children are being *inadequately* supported in all settings, particularly in regular schools
  - Teachers union and principal groups arguing that:
    - Regular schools were buckling under the rise in 'integrated students'
    - Integration was underfunded
- **Spiraling identification and cost (1997-2007)**
  - Percentage of students with a confirmed disability > doubled
    - 2.7% to 6.7% of total enrolments within a decade
  - Special education budget tripled from \$290 million to > \$1 billion
  - Special education ↑ as percentage of the education budget
    - 7.2% to 12.8% of total recurrent spending

This wasn't just an effect of inflation because the slice of the pie that was going to special education was also increasing – \$1.1 billion as a part of \$8.25 billion (the total state education budget) is quite a lot. That wouldn't have bothered me if there weren't competing claims. If, for example, the funding was going up and everyone was happy and children were being well supported in schools, great, but that wasn't the case. So, I wanted to understand what was happening and I was also concerned about what some of my participants called the 'cargo cult', around student support funding and how it can drive diagnosis.



## **DP1093020: A critical analysis of the increase in diagnosis of special educational needs in NSW government schools**

### **Aims & Methods**

1. Analyse trends in the characteristics and placement of students with disabilities in New South Wales government schools over time;
  - Historical and statistical analysis of enrolment trends
2. Map trends against changes to national and state legislation, education policy, and funding allocation methods
  - Policy analysis, interviews with key informants from DEC central and regions;
3. Examine use of support funding in 3 case-study schools
  - Interviews with principals, deputies, school counselors, Learning Support Teachers, class teachers, support class teachers, SLSOs (teacher aides);
  - Observations of classroom practice, tailing SLSOs, playground observations

So, as part of my ARC Fellowship, I wanted to statistically analyse trends in the enrolment and placement of students with a disability over time. I also wanted to analyse these trends historically so that I could map them against policy changes and shifts in what categories of disability were funded and when (see the box above). For example, I was interested in knowing if there were changes in terms of what was being funded at a particular time. I also aimed to make sense of both of these trends – enrolment statistics and policy shifts – through interviews with key informants within the NSW Department of Education at both central and regional levels.

I then aimed to judge whether there were differences between what the policy intended and how it was enacted (how it actually played out on the ground in schools). To do this I juxtaposed these central and regional accounts – of what the policy was and what it was meant to achieve – through case study research with three schools (two primary and one secondary). That involved some 30 interviews with principals, deputies, school counsellors, learning support teachers, class teachers, support class teachers and teacher's aides. I then compared those accounts with observations of classroom practice. We also tailed the teacher's aides and observed what happened in playgrounds as well.

So what did we find from all that? I say 'we' because it wasn't just me involved in this research, there was my research assistant, Melissa Jogie, and Dr Naomi Sweller as well.

### **Where have we been and where are we now?**

Historically, New South Wales has followed the international trends to some extent. In the 1860s and the 1870s the first special schools were opened by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. The first government special school opened in 1927, but education for children with a disability remained a private concern until around the 1940s when the

government started assuming greater responsibility, taking over a number of special schools that were around. Then there was growth in support classes and special schools from that period of around the 1940s.

### The first Education Revolution: NSW Style

- **Late 1800s**
  - First special schools in NSW were opened by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children in the 1860s
- **Early 1900s**
  - First government special school, Glenfield Park, opened in 1927
- **Mid 1900s**
  - Government assumed greater responsibility for the education of children with a disability
    - Growth in support classes and special schools from the 1940s

The 1970s was a fairly heady age internationally and it wasn't just because of the clothes we were wearing. Australia, however, was quite slow to warm to inclusion in comparison to other countries. In 1973, Australia had the Karmel Report but interestingly, even though it was quite early on in the piece and quite visionary at the time, not much happened as a result of it – not with inclusion anyway.

Really, the greatest influences on inclusion were the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from the US and the Warnock Report from the UK. Incidentally, I was reading through the Warnock report the other day and noticed that they mandated that teacher education should include at least one unit of study in special or inclusive education – and that was back in 1978! I thought that was quite interesting and I will have more to say about that later.

### 1980s-90s: Plateau or cul-de-sac?

- **1981: International Year of Disabled Persons**
  - By year end, every Australian state and territory had a policy on the inclusion & support of students with a disability (Forlin, 2006).
- **1982-1992: Enrolment in special schools declined**
  - 37% decrease nationally (De Lemos, 1994)
- **>1986 NSW recorded similar decline and from then...**
  - Enrolments in separate settings first plateaued (Dempsey, 2007)
  - *And then began to rise again (Graham & Sweller, 2011)*

In the 1980s and 1990s, things began to get interesting in Australia. We had the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons and that did much in this country to highlight the inequity and the hardship faced by people with a disability in all social spheres, education being one of them. By the end of that year, according to Chris Forlin, there was a policy on inclusion for students with a disability in every state and territory across Australia.

Between 1982 and 1992, enrolment in special schools declined. Michelle de Lemos from the Australian Council for Educational Research did a national study and noted that there was a 37 per cent decrease nationally. New South Wales recorded a similar decline of about 30 per cent from 1986, but after that things began to change. Ian Dempsey from the University of Newcastle has talked about how there was evidence of a plateau and he wrote a paper in 2007 questioning whether we have reached a ceiling in the inclusion of students with a disability.

Well, Naomi Sweller and I started looking at enrolment years (1997–2007) that were a bit later than those Dempsey examined (1984–1992) and we found that there was no real plateau because enrolments began to rise again in the late 90s. This is what it looked like: the dashed line shows the number of students enrolled in government special schools and initially we're looking at about 0.5 per cent of total enrolments compared with 0.7 back in the 80s. But later 0.5 per cent rises to 0.6 and we're currently heading towards 0.7 again.

The dotted line refers to the number of students in support classes. You can see that it has started increasing – in other words, enrolments in support classes did not decline.

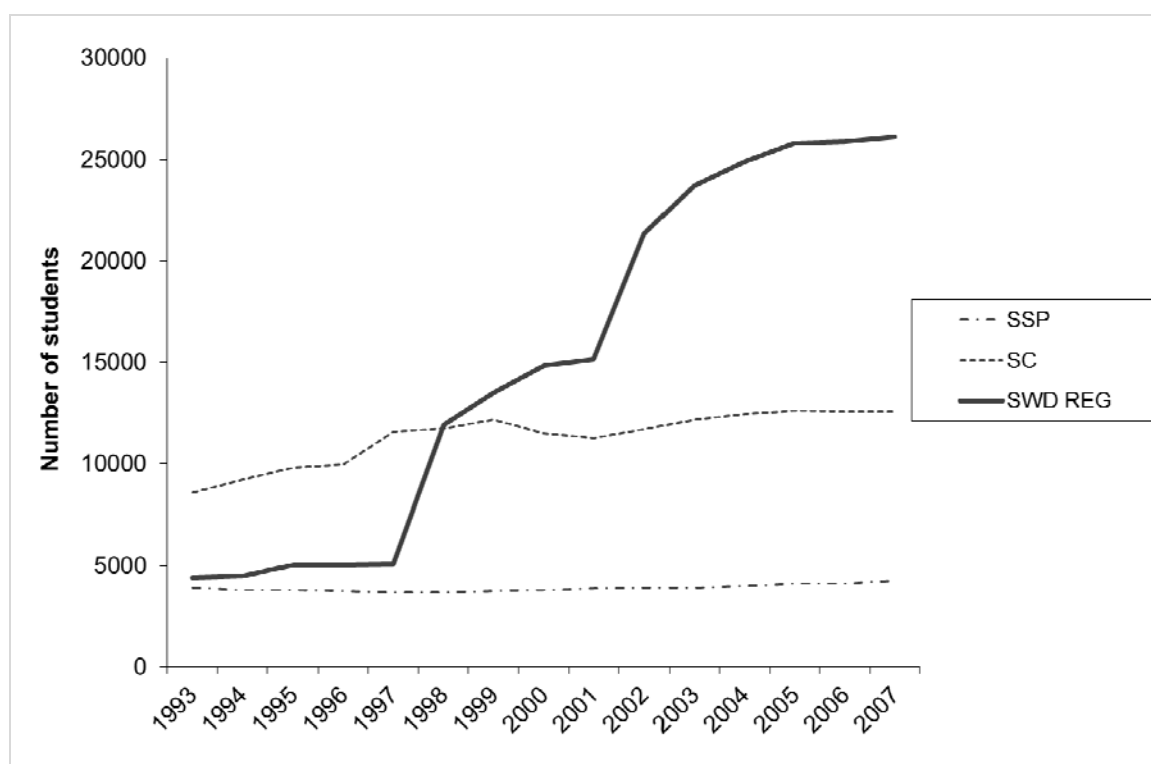


Fig. 1: Number of students enrolled in government special schools (SSP), support classes (SC) and students with a disability in regular classes (SWD REG) from 1993-2007

The solid line is the really interesting one. This refers to the number of students with a

disability or a confirmed disability enrolled in regular schools or regular classes. As a result, the central research question guiding this project was this: *if the number of students in segregated settings (e.g. special schools and support classes) has not been decreasing, then where are the students representing such rapid growth in disability diagnosis eligible for support funding coming from and why?*

So what happened? Well, we didn't just look at whether there had been an increase or a decrease in total enrolments within these settings – we also wanted to know who was going *in* and who was coming *out*.

### **Schools for Specific Purposes (SSPs)**

- ↓ 60% *decrease* in enrolment of students with physical, hearing, vision and mild intellectual impairment
- ↑ 34% *increase* in enrolment of students with moderate intellectual impairment
- ↑ 254% *increase* in the enrolment of students under the category of behavior disorder

Considering our dashed line (special schools or SSPs), we now know that there was a 60 per cent decrease in the enrolment of students with physical, hearing, vision and mild intellectual impairments between 1997 and 2007 (Graham and Sweller, 2011).

These students were coming *out* of special schools and this is consistent with the international research literature: students with these types of disabilities tend to be more accepted in 'regular' schools.

In that same period, there was a 34 per cent increase in the enrolment of students with a moderate intellectual impairment or intellectual disability in special schools and a 254 per cent increase in the enrolment of students under the category of behaviour disorder.

By constructing a policy timeline from archival material that I was able to contrast with these enrolment trends, it was clear that this increase coincided with the construction of a series of special schools called "behaviour schools" in the late 1990s through to the mid-2000s.

In fact, we've radically changed the face of special schools in New South Wales, or at least government ones. About two thirds of government special schools now are what you would call 'traditional' special schools serving students with moderate to severe intellectual disability, severe physical disability, autism and sensory disabilities (Graham, 2012).

Then we have what are called 'mental health' special schools for students diagnosed or categorised under the categories of behaviour disorder and emotional disturbance. Further, we have eight juvenile justice special schools. These are special schools that are

inside juvenile detention.

One of the indications in the international literature about whether systems have got the balance right with respect to inclusion is whether there is disproportionate representation, which we most certainly have in New South Wales.

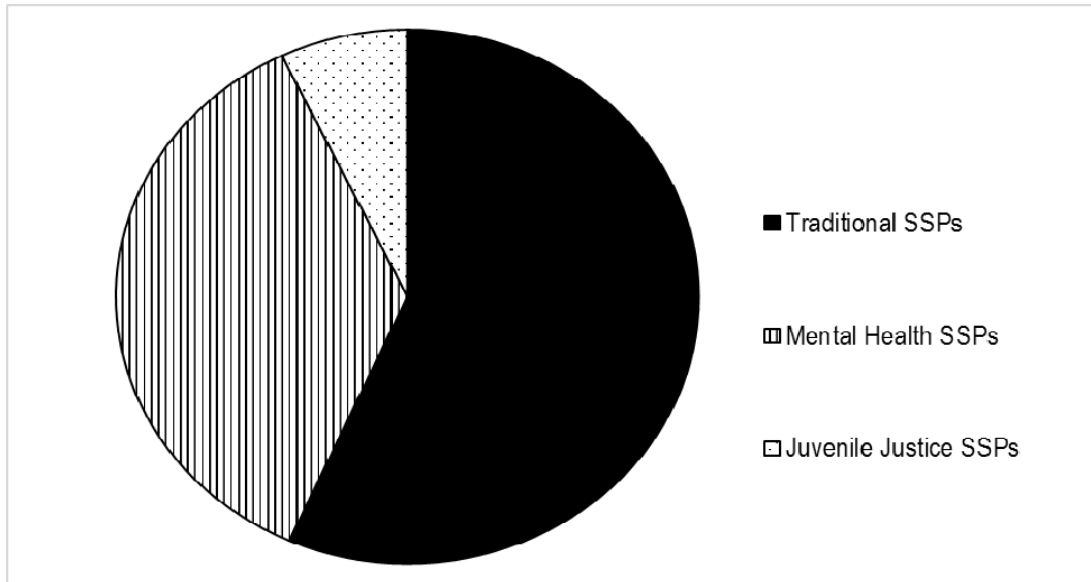


Fig. 2: Distribution of NSW government special schools by purpose

Boys are significantly overrepresented in separate settings and that increases according to the degree of subjectiveness in identification, diagnosis and placement processes. In special schools and support classes for autism, emotional disturbance, behaviour disorder, language disorder and juvenile detention more than 80 per cent of students are boys (see Graham, Sweller and Van Bergen, 2010).

I also found that Indigenous students are significantly overrepresented in mental health special schools and juvenile justice special schools but not traditional special schools. Indigenous students have an *equal* chance of being in traditional special schools but they are more than *five times* as likely to be in a mental health special school, particularly a behaviour school, which does not require confirmation of disability, and more than *fourteen times* as likely to be in juvenile justice special schools (Graham, 2012). So, if disproportionality is any kind of barometer, we have a problem.

## Support Classes (SCs)

- Small but significant decrease in **primary** support class placements (physical, hearing, vision ↓ 43%) but significant increases in:
  - emotional disturbance (+139%)
  - autism (+61%)
- Significant *increase* in the use of support classes in **secondary** schools, main drivers:
  - autism (+280%),
  - emotional disturbance (+348%)
  - behaviour disorder (+585%)

Now with respect to support classes: there was a decrease in the use of support classes in primary schools. That again is consistent with the international literature where the argument goes that inclusion appears to be a bit more successful in primary schools. But again, we can see the same decrease occurring in physical, hearing and visual impairment and an increase in emotional disturbance and autism (but not in behaviour disorder, which is interesting).

There was a significant increase in the use of support classes in secondary schools, such that there are now more than 2000 support classes in the New South Wales government system. Again the main drivers here were enrolments under the categories of autism, emotional disturbance and behaviour disorder. This doesn't necessarily mean that there has been an increase in the incidence of mental health or developmental disorders; rather that children are being classified under these categories and this can occur simply because of greater placement availability in one category than another. That is an important distinction but one that is not well understood in the wider community.

One problem that was noted back in 1996 during the McRae Integration/Inclusion Feasibility Study was that support classes were, in effect, operating as surrogate special schools. Not a lot of 'integration' really happened, so students are not necessarily included in the life of the mainstream school campus in which they have supposedly enrolled. I have to say that in the case-study high school, which had several support classes, this was absolutely the case.

Going back to figure 1, the question was what was happening with students with a disability in regular classes? If you remember the context of this study, which was the claim that schools are buckling under the increase in 'integrated' students, then how can that be if they weren't coming out of special schools and support classes? Certain ones were but our research found that there was also an *exchange* taking place (Graham & Sweller, 2011).

There has been movement out of special schools and support classes but that's been mainly students with physical, sensory or mild intellectual disability. However, that enrolment decrease has been *offset* by a flow from the other direction, particularly in the



areas or categories of emotional disturbance and behaviour disorder.

### Exchange & Transfer

- Movement from special schools and support classes = mainly students with physical, sensory or mild intellectual disability
- Enrolment decrease offset by increased enrolment of students in the categories of emotional disturbance and behaviour disorder
- Majority of students with a confirmation of disability in regular classes have not been 'integrated' at all...
- Students typically receiving *Integration Funding Support* are those who tend to be "enrolled in regular classes regardless of the supports available" (Dempsey & Foreman, 1997, p. 214).

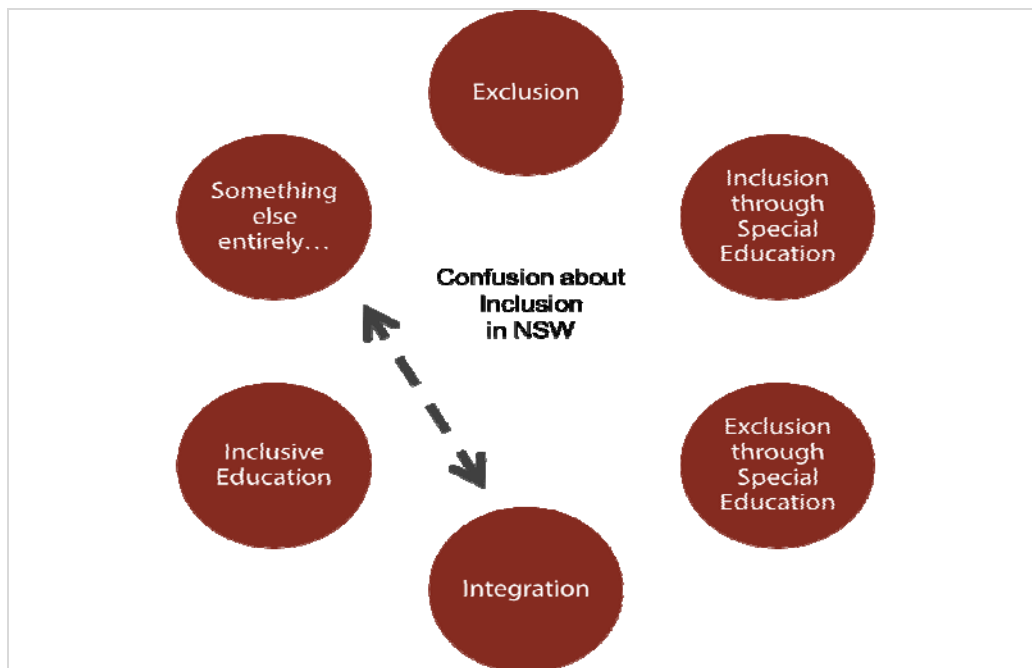
That's actually very concerning because in my prior research with Dr Ilektra Spandagou of the University of Sydney, I interviewed principals and teachers in different areas of the state. One of our specific questions was: what is behaviour disorder and what constitutes it? We found that perceptions of what constitutes behaviour disorder change dramatically depending on where you are and upon the experience and beliefs of practitioners (see Graham and Spandagou, 2011).

The other problem is that the criteria that are used to determine "mental health problems" such as 'emotional disturbance' are very broad and a body of research literature is emerging in the US saying: what is it that we're actually diagnosing here?

Fundamentally, the majority of students with confirmation of disability in regular classes have not been integrated at all. This was first queried by Ian Dempsey and Phil Foreman back in 1997 and it's still the case now. As a result, schools are not buckling under the weight of 'integrated' students who have arrived en masse from support classes and special schools. What is really happening is that we're diagnosing the mainstream. We are also excluding more and more students, particularly students who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties, Indigenous students and typically boys (Sweller, Graham & Van Bergen, 2012).

I think it is reasonable to argue, going back to this concept design (below), that we haven't actually had inclusive education in New South Wales.





What have we had? I don't really have a term for it, to be honest. It is something more like integration. And actually that is one of the criticisms that I have, which is that in the policy discourse in New South Wales – and this is absolutely definite when you go out in schools – ‘integration’ is the term that is used. But there were deep conceptual and operational problems with integration and, as I explained earlier, we had reasons for moving away from it. Unfortunately we have not yet done that in practice here in NSW.

What do we actually have in NSW? We have a highly segregated system. We have 113 special schools. We have more than 2000 support classes, many of which operate just like special schools. And what's even worse is that we have an increasingly narrow notion of who and what the mainstream is.



Then we also have children who are being identified in mainstream and who are then being referred to as 'integrated'. In other words, we have children who have and who would always have been enrolled in an ordinary local school, but because they have been assigned a label, they are now being called 'integrated students'. And it doesn't help that the Funding Support system is now called Integration Funding Support...

But the other issue we have, and I don't know how we unscramble the egg here, is another form of segregation in our system, namely academically selective schools and opportunity classes. We all know, and there's a huge amount of research, about what happens when comprehensive schools are residualised: all the 'behaviour problems' and all the 'learning problems' end up all in together, and it becomes ... Well, even back in the 1950s and 1960s, we knew this was a problem. Research by James Coleman and others told us that 'ability streaming' contributed to poor outcomes and that when we group by socioeconomic status or ability, we compound disadvantage because the students that may have some learning difficulties or are less advantaged than others don't get the benefit of working with the leading lights in the class. There is a huge body of work that attests to homogenous grouping being a problem. Barry McGaw has talked about this himself many times

### How and why did we get here?

Now moving from the statistical work to the research that I've done in schools (and I can only show partial pictures here, so I'm not talking about *all* teachers and *all* principals): we *did* see examples of exceptional practice. There was one teacher in particular that I was thinking about who was supremely organised and she knew her stuff and her classroom hummed, but I have to say that was not the general picture that we saw.

The other thing I should point out, the worrying thing, is that the schools I went to were nominated to me by their regional directors as having really good learning support teams and being good examples of inclusive practice.

#### Language and attitudes matter...

##### School Executive: Case Study #S11

"Once children have been referred by their class teachers, the next thing we do would be to look at what's the best provision of service, what level of service could we provide for these students... One of those would be that they maintain their enrolment here but it gets supported by an SLSO [teachers aide] who would support the education of that child, *integrated into that classroom*".

Now this statement from a primary school principal (see above) is an attitudinal example of the picture that in the last slide I showed you, where there's a little person who's come out of the mainstream and who was once part of the mainstream and is now no longer. I

chose this quote because it is a real-time example of how children already enrolled in mainstream schools become identified as needing support and are then referred to as 'integrated children'.

What is happening in our schools is that we have children who are attending their local school and they're enrolled in that school but they may start having difficulty or some problems emerge which then leads to some form of identification to secure additional support. The point I want to make here, though, is that *the language that we use matters*. Have a look at where the principal says 'once children have been referred by their class teachers the next thing we do would be to look at what's the best provision of service' In other words, 'do we have them here or do we have them in a support class?'

This participant then said that one of those options would be that they maintain the child's enrolment at the school but it gets supported by a teacher's aide 'who would support the education of that child *integrated* into that classroom'. *This* is the mind-set that we're struggling with because that child has a right to be in that classroom but suddenly, because they have additional support needs, they become peripheral. They are no longer viewed as citizens.

One of the really interesting things is that in all of the pages and pages of transcripts that this research produced, children's rights are never mentioned. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is also not mentioned except in one case where I was told that the 'Occupational Health and Safety Act trumps the DDA'. Somebody should test that in court.

Now, in the slide below, I've quoted a classroom teacher. One of the questions that I was asking of all my participants was: 'Do you believe that special educational needs have increased? If so, how do you explain that?' This teacher had a particular view on why that was: that they had 'a lot of DAS kids' which in this school meant 'Dumb As'.

### **Class Teacher: Case Study #S1**

"The special ed needs have increased. Yeah... For some reason the children --- (pause) --- Don't seem to be as bright. Yeah. We have a term here called 'DAS'. It's not very nice but we have a lot of DAS kids here: Dumb AS! Whatever... And they're demanding! Really demanding on my time. When they're away, so much more gets done. So much more gets achieved."

The school was not in a hugely disadvantaged area but there were pockets of disadvantage. Invariably the kids described as 'DAS' were the children who were what the staff called 'from the "flower streets"' or from the public housing areas.

What struck me here, apart from that, was the statement that 'they're really demanding on my time and when they're away so much more gets done, so much more gets achieved'.

It was interesting because, when I asked this teacher ‘what is the purpose of education, what are you seeking to produce in the students?’ she in fact had a really passionate belief that ‘I want to produce knowledgeable, thoughtful, caring citizens’. She was a really dedicated teacher, in that respect.

One of the issues is about matching those sorts of beliefs with actions in practice and the right sort of attitudes towards teaching with additional support needs. Another contributing factor is *teacher knowledge and capability*. Here one of the things that I found striking was that it was actually the support class teachers that had the most inclusive attitudes. The teacher that I quote in the box below was quite passionate about being inclusive – this was in the high school where the support classes were on the other side of campus and were really not anything to do with the main school. This teacher was saying that ‘in 2011 we still have teachers who want to exclude students’. He told us ‘we had this fella coming in and he was going to do something or other about values and what-not and it would have been a really great thing for our kids to do but they [the “main” school] didn’t want our students to be there’. He talked about saying ‘Look, come on, the DDA!!!’ He said ‘I call the DDA [people] up all the time to be able to say we can’t do this, we can’t exclude on this basis’.

### **As does teacher knowledge & capability...**

#### **Support Class Teacher: Case Study #S3**

“I think that for inclusion to work it is teacher education that needs to be addressed. As I said, we still have teachers – *in 2011!!* – we still have teachers who want to exclude our kids from a lot of programs in the school. So I think that teacher education is the thing that has to be looked at and *has* to be addressed.”

I included this quote because of what he was saying at the bottom: “I think teacher education is the thing that has to be looked at and has to be addressed”. And I agree because – and I’m collapsing a lot of hours of classroom observations here but essentially – there are worthy ideals but they are not always matched by practice. I don’t think that the teachers themselves are necessarily aware of that.

But one of the most common things that we saw was teaching to a perceived middle. By that, I mean that a very prevalent theme in the transcripts was ‘I’ve got 27 kids in my class’ and ‘Oh, the class sizes are too big’. But, by teaching to the middle, teachers are reducing their class sizes by default, because they’re only teaching ten kids. They’re teaching to the ones that are interested in what they’re saying and who can understand enough to engage. And we’re not seeing enough differentiation. There was very little evidence of individualised planning or programming. Very little evidence of re-teaching. Teachers were explaining to us afterwards when we were interviewing them that ‘I don’t have the time to go back and teach and if they don’t get it in the time that I have, well I just have to move on’. So, what we had was, basically, content-driven pedagogy.

Some were really well intentioned and I think teachers are not necessarily understanding about the intellectual demand and quality in the work that they’re doing. We’d be sitting up

the back of the classroom watching how attempts to engage students were taken up with approaches like ‘well, we’re going to design a title page now, so design a title page for whatever’ you know, for the unit of work that was about to come up. Typically the girls were fairly involved in that but the boys were not interested at all and ended up mucking around.

An interesting corollary to that was that there was a lot of shift and change in lessons. In some classes it was a little worrying. In particular with subjects like maths, some teachers appeared to find other things more interesting to do. For example, on one lesson that we were observing a former student came in with a guitar and everything stopped and the next *hour* was spent playing songs. This was a Year 6 classroom. The year before students are hit by the high school academic curriculum?

Then following that type of delay, it was all about trying to make up lost time. So, in the business end of the day (generally the morning sessions) we had literacy and numeracy most typically, where the class had to go around corners in fifth gear, as it were. What was happening was content-driven pedagogy or, put another way, *teaching at a speed that is over the top of many of the kids in the class because you have to get through the prescribed content*. Certain students were being looked after in this context, but there were others being ignored.

### Observations of practice

- Worthy ideals not always matched by actions in the classroom
- Teaching to a perceived “middle”
- Little evidence of individualised planning or program adjustments
- Well-intentioned but misguided efforts to “engage” = low intellectual demand and wasted time (idling in 1<sup>st</sup> gear)
- Leads to content-driven pedagogy and rushing in the business end of the day (going around corners in 5<sup>th</sup> gear)
- Kids in the “grey zone” left to fend for themselves and “integrated” students become the responsibility of the SLSO (teachers aide)
- Diagnosis, both formal and informal, becomes the justification for exclusion and educational failure
- Assumptions about responsibility

In the interviews, there were a lot of justifications for what we observed. Quite often informal diagnoses were provided about some students, such as ADHD. When we asked ‘Does he actually have a diagnosis of ADHD?’ the response was ‘I don’t know but he’s this and he’s that and if I tell him to pay attention, if I try to keep him on task, he’ll just spend the whole time focusing on doing that rather than listening – and he won’t learn.’



The thing is, when he's staring out the window he's not learning anyway.

These were the children we tend to call 'kids in the grey zone'. These ones were being left to fend for themselves and the so-called 'integrated students' (the students who were funded) were the responsibility of the teacher's aide. The ESL (English as a second language) kids were over there in a group and over there was the child with the autism diagnosis sitting with the teacher's aide. Then there would be the grey zone kids who were sitting here looking out the window and the teacher would be teaching to a reduced "middle". The students on the periphery would be missed. As I mentioned, diagnosis – both formal and informal – was given as justification for not meeting the needs of all students.

### What needs to happen now?

So, what do we need? I think, after all these years, that inclusion really does need a new school culture. I'm very fortunate: my PhD supervisor did her thesis on this and I didn't realise how influential this was at the time because she never made me read it! But the quote in the box below is from Professor Suzanne Carrington back in 2002 saying that in-class support may actually exclude students even more from the curriculum. This is because if a second adult is there – if a teacher's aide or a special education teacher is there – doing the doing for that child, then what we have is unreconstructed pedagogy and an unreconstructed curriculum. What that effectively means is that we teach in the middle and we still miss the kids outside.

#### **Inclusion *really* does need a different school culture...**

"In-class support may actually exclude students more from accessing the curriculum. For example, if a second adult is required to give a pupil additional help or maximize the amount of teacher time available to individuals, the support does nothing to change the way the curriculum is delivered.

In fact there is evidence that the presence of the special education teacher actually allows the subject teacher to deliver an 'unreconstructed curriculum' through an 'unreconstructed pedagogy'..."

Professor Gary Thomas from the University of Birmingham argues that 'inclusive education has to become more than a synonym for special systems in mainstream schools and more than a peripheral dimension of mainstream education'. I would say that that should not just apply out in schools but also in teacher education itself. One mandatory unit of inclusive education is not enough. It's a drop in the ocean compared to what we actually need. If we're going to adequately prepare teachers to teach in inclusive schools then that knowledge needs to be embedded from the beginning and it can't be an 'add-on' at the end because there's too much for them to know. They need to know about all of the

theory. They need to know about the Disability Discrimination Act. But they also need to understand how they can teach to support all students and how to reflect and to improve on that.

### **Recommendations**

Inclusive education has to become more than a synonym for special systems in mainstream schools, more than a peripheral dimension to mainstream education.

(Thomas, 2012, pp. 5-6)

So what are some of the things that we can **actually** do -- right here, right now?

I think one of the most urgent moves is to delete the term 'integration' from policy because it just sends the wrong message. *I do actually believe that the Department has to take a position on this.* That doesn't necessarily — and I've done some international comparisons (see Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011) — mean that the system is going to become inclusive just because we start using nice terminology but it does help to get everybody on the same page. Seriously, when we were talking to teachers they were saying 'What's this inclusion? I don't know anything about it, I've only heard of integration'.



- **Delete the term “integration” from policy discourse**
  - Partner with Universities in developing authentic professional learning experiences
  - Move more quickly to non-categorical funding allocation methods
- **Support improvement of initial teacher education**
  - 1 mandatory “add-on” unit cannot cover theory and practice
  - Need to embed principles of inclusive education (national legislation, as well as international conventions) in all TED units
- **Quality control practical experiences**
  - Develop better practicum to ensure quality practice models
  - Engage in service learning with vetted partner organisations

Something that is in train at the moment at a national level is the move towards a non-categorical funding allocation method and that means not tying funding to a disability diagnosis. I think that is really important and, if done properly, it could make a difference.

But we absolutely need to improve teacher education. And we can do that in part with better practicum.

The current Director General of the Department, Michele Bruniges, has been talking about the need to improve teacher education. But the general assumption is that university teacher education is too theoretical and we need to increase practicum. Well, from what I've seen, that's not going to help if the right practice isn't out there for students to learn from.

For that reason, I think we need to control the practicum in this area much more and that is being done in certain places. At the Queensland University of Technology, for example, there's an award-winning service learning program with vetted partner organisations and I think that is something that universities in NSW could do in partnership with the NSW Department of Education and Communities.



The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia  
GPO Box 1956, Canberra ACT 2601  
T +61 2 6249 1788 • F +61 2 6247 4335  
Email: [secretariat@assa.edu.au](mailto:secretariat@assa.edu.au).

For further information about the Academy or any of its  
programs or publications, visit: [WWW.ASSA.EDU.AU](http://WWW.ASSA.EDU.AU)