

Assessment is a part of all education programs. The use of assessment in special education has an important part to play in the determination of eligibility for special education services. It is also an important aspect of quality programs, providing valuable information on the effectiveness of instruction, curriculum design, and environmental adaptations. It is also anticipated that decisions will be made on the basis of these data.

Jim Ysseldyke, in reflecting on the past 25 years of involvement with special education, spoke specifically to assessment and decision-making (Ysseldyke, 2001). While there are many points of interest in this paper, it was interesting to read about his disappointment about developments in the use of data to make valid and reliable decisions about students with special education needs. While Ysseldyke views the implementation of empirically validated practices in education as a very difficult challenge, it appears that "better pupil performance is not a reinforcer." (p. 300).

This frustration, however, has many roots in practices gone by. For example, instructional practices driven by labels we insist on placing on students and the pre-conceived notions these labels have attached to them. It would appear that we still "spend far too much time making predictions about student's lives and far too little time making a difference in their lives." (Ysseldyke, 2001, p. 303).

While change in education generally takes time, it is still amazing how change can take place if the will is there for it to happen. The use of curriculum-based measures, for example, is important in providing valid and reliable data for making timely instructional decisions. Yet, the value of curriculum-based measures are still debated well after their effectiveness has been

demonstrated (e.g., Shinn, 1998; Foegen & Deno, 2001). Forness, Kavale, Blum & Lloyd, (1996) report other attractive practices, with little or empirical no support, that continue to flourish. I recommend the work by Jim Ysseldyke and colleagues to you, and trust that in 25 years time the same message is not being delivered.

This issue of AJSE comprises three articles from around the globe. Brown et al. provide an overview of a program for special education teachers in New Zealand. This large scale project aims to skill a significant number of teachers in New Zealand to cater for students experiencing difficulties learning. Utilising materials developed locally, and by Ysseldyke and colleagues at the University of Minnesota, this program aims to provide teachers with the skills to work students experiencing difficulties learning. While the final outcomes of this program are still being evaluated, it is a bold initiative to assist students with special education needs.

The second paper reports on a study investigating how teachers respond to problem behaviours with young children. The study investigates variables surrounding the classroom, teacher background, school and community characteristics. At a time when dealing with challenging behaviour in schools is a topic issue, this paper provides a background to how teachers in one part of Australia are dealing with this issue, including the use of positive behaviour strategies.

The final paper is from researchers in the United States of America, finishing off this global issue of AJSE. David Chard and colleagues provide an excellent overview of project in skilling teachers for early-years reading classes. This program, the result of a major literacy initiative from within the state of Texas to raise reading levels, highlights the importance of going beyond one off professional development opportunities.

The need for teachers to be supported for the longer term through in-school workshops, and sharing of in-class experiences with colleagues and skilled practitioners is highlighted. Remaining within the four walls (Forlin, 1998) does not help anyone – students or the teacher.

In upcoming issues of AJSE the continuing theme will be to include more papers from further afield, while supporting the excellent work of

researchers from all educational settings. I urge you to consider submitting a manuscript, and sharing your work with the wider special education community.

David Evans PhD
Editor

References

- Foegen, A., & Deno, S. (2001). Identifying growth indicators of low achieving students in middle school mathematics. *The Journal of Special Education, 35*, 4-16.
- Shinn, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Advanced applications of curriculum-based measurement*. New York: Guilford.
- Forlin, C. (1998). Inside Four Walls. *The Australasian Journal of Special Education, 22*(2), 96-106.
- Forness, S., Kavale, K., Blum, I., & Lloyd, J. (1997). Mega-analysis of meta-analyses. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 29*(6), 4-8.
- Ysseldyke, J. (2001). Reflections of a career: 25 years of research on assessment and instructional decision making. *Exceptional Children, 67*, 295-310.