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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Provision of Practicum in Australian Postgraduate Courses Preparing Special/Inclusive Educators†

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Abstract

The importance of professional experience is clearly recognised in initial teacher education and in other professions. In this study, we explore one element of professional experience for trainee special/inclusive educators, placement in an educational setting for practicum, and how it is provided in postgraduate Australian special/inclusive education courses. We extracted data from publicly available material for all Australian postgraduate courses designed to prepare special and/or inclusive educators. Available data included the length of practicum, content of the unit related to practicum, supervision and placement arrangements, and assessment. We found that only 59% of courses included a unit that required completion of a practicum placement. Given there are no mandatory standards for special/inclusive educators, there was considerable variation in the way practical skills were assessed, the content of practicum units, mentoring arrangements and personnel involved. Practicum placements ranged from 10 to 30 days, and only two courses provided more than one placement. Further research is needed to consider the broader range of professional experiences that may be embedded in courses. We suggest that longer practicum placements should be mandatory in special/inclusive educator professional preparation and should include assessment of the implementation of specific evidence-based practices including collaboration with others.

Keywords: special educators; teacher education; practicum; field experiences

If students with disability and special education needs are to reach their full potential, they need high-quality teaching. For students living with disability, regardless of the setting in which they are educated, there is a suite of evidence-based practices that have been shown to improve outcomes (McLeskey et al., 2017, 2022; Steinbrenner et al., 2020). These evidence-based practices include explicit teacher-directed systematic instruction, data-based decision-making regarding educational goals and programming, implementation of supports and interventions based on functional behaviour assessment and collaboration with families and other professionals (Dally & Dempsey, 2015; Dally et al., 2019; McLeskey et al., 2017, 2022). In addition, special educators need a sound grasp of the principles of applied behaviour analysis as these underpin much research-based practice for students with disability (Gilmour, 2020; Pennington et al., 2021; Steinbrenner et al., 2020). Teachers of students with disability need to be able to implement these practices, which should be learned and refined through special educator training and ongoing professional development (Brownell et al., 2020; McLeskey &

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Brownell, 2015). In this article, special/inclusive educators (hereafter referred to as special educators) are defined as those educators who work directly or indirectly with students with special education needs, specifically those with disability, learning difficulties or behaviour disorders, as class teachers or school executives in specialist or inclusive settings. This includes special educators who work as classroom teachers in specialist settings and special educators in inclusive settings who work directly with students or who support regular educators. It also includes those who work in early childhood settings and in postschool programs. One component of special educator preparation that is likely to contribute to the development of expertise in evidence-based practices is practice of the competencies needed in classrooms, supported by coaching, although a fully developed and coherent picture of how these experiences, along with other experiences, impact teacher quality is still unknown (Brownell et al., 2020).

There is a consensus among teacher educators that professional experience is a critical component of initial teacher education (Le Cornu, 2015). An effective undergraduate professional experience must be an integral part of teacher preparation and must connect with the theoretical content presented, with units with key content presented before or with professional experience units (Le Cornu, 2015). In Australia, initial teacher education for both primary and secondary schools, which may be at the undergraduate or postgraduate level, must produce teachers who meet the Graduate Teacher Standards of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers set by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL; 2020). AITSL has established supervised teaching practice, with supervision by both a school staff mentor and university staff as a compulsory element of initial teacher education, and requires 'no fewer than 80 days in undergraduate and double-degree teacher education programs and no fewer than 60 days in graduate-entry programs' (AITSL, 2022, p. 18).

In Australia, a special or inclusive education qualification is typically completed after a teacher has gained an initial teacher education. At present, AITSL has no standards for postgraduate courses or programs that prepare qualified teachers to become special educators to work with students with disability and additional learning needs. No Australian state requires teachers who work in specialist settings for students with disability or in support roles in mainstream schools to hold a special education qualification, unlike requirements for either specialist teachers, such as teachers of English as a second language, or career advisors (Kemp, 2024). This means universities are not obliged to provide a professional experience that enables practice and assessment of specialist teaching skills for special/inclusive educators, and indeed there may be practical barriers such as cost and the availability of suitable persons to supervise practicum. As special educators are required to have pedagogical skills such as those based on applied behaviour analysis, explicit teaching and data-based decision-making that are not in the repertoire of regular educators (Dally et al., 2019; Gidalevich & Shalev, 2022), it would be in keeping with the principles agreed for initial teacher education that professional experience, including a practicum placement, be a necessary component of special educator preparation.

Requirements for professional experience in special/inclusive teacher preparation programs, specifically a placement in a school setting, vary across countries. In the US, special educators may be prepared in an undergraduate or a postgraduate course. As in Australia, professional experience is mandatory for undergraduate courses, but there is some variability in the length of professional experiences in special education placements (Fisher & Norris, 2023). It is also mandatory for postgraduate special education programs to include professional experience, likely to be two placements at most (Fisher & Norris, 2023). In England, newly appointed Special Educational Needs Coordinators who work in mainstream schools must be qualified teachers and must have completed a master's level award (the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordinator). Professional experience is not mandated, but it is one of the components suggested as being an element of an effective course (National College for Teaching and Leadership, n.d.). It should be noted, however, that these requirements do not apply to teachers in specialist settings in England (Department for Education, 2023). In Israel, special educators complete an undergraduate degree that includes field experiences (with weekly or biweekly visits from university staff) and an internship of 6 to 10 months

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with a mentor and input from university staff (Gidalevich & Shalev, 2022). In Finland, a 5-year course includes professional experience in special education settings with a mentor teacher and a visit from university staff (Takala et al., 2023).

Despite the varying requirements and lack of a detailed research base, there is consensus that field experiences including contact with students with disability are valuable, if not essential, components of special educator preparation (Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2024). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) in the US is a professional organisation that advocates for improvements in the education of students with disability and has developed professional standards and professional preparation standards that inform credentialing of special educators (CEC, 2024). Their professional preparation standards mandate field and clinical experiences supervised by qualified professionals (CEC, 2020). Activities where trainee special educators work with students are seen as pivotal in developing practical expertise, managing classrooms that may include students with a range of complex needs, developing problem-solving skills and linking theory to practice (Leko et al., 2024; Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2024). At the same time, reports note that there is considerable variability around the nature, length and supervision arrangements possible for practical or field experiences and that they may range from tutoring experiences with a single student within a unit of study to extended placements where the trainee takes responsibility for a whole class (Fisher & Norris, 2023; Nagro & deBettencourt, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2024; Takala et al., 2023).

There appears to be little, if any, research in Australia exploring field experiences or school practicum placements in Australian postgraduate special/inclusive education teacher preparation programs. An examination of how practical experience is addressed through school placements would shed light on the importance placed by universities on special educators demonstrating specialist skills in classroom settings and how these experiences are arranged and assessed. We have presented previous analyses of aspects of postgraduate courses preparing special/inclusive educators in Australian universities (Stephenson et al., 2022, 2023, 2024) where we have explored course content, the research base of that content and the personnel involved in teaching courses. In the study reported here, we focus on one aspect of professional experiences in courses — that is, placement in a school setting for practice teaching or practicum. The research questions guiding the analysis were as follows:

- Do courses include a unit or units that require a practicum in a school setting that includes students with disability and/or special education needs?
- If a practicum is required, what are the characteristics including length, type of placement, supervision and/or mentoring provided?
- How are university staff involved?
- What content is included in units that have a mandatory practice teaching placement?
- How are students assessed in units with a practicum component?

Method

This work builds on earlier work reported in Stephenson et al. (2022, 2023). In that work we identified, using Google searches, all Australian postgraduate university courses in special and/or inclusive education. In this paper, and in our earlier papers, the term *course* is used to refer to the whole content of a master's degree, and the term *unit* is used to refer to individual subjects within a course. Identified courses were located in both regional and urban universities. In previous work (Stephenson et al., 2022, 2023), we coded the units in each course for content areas present or absent (see Table 1 for the content areas that were coded). The content areas to be coded were developed from existing standards and Australian research including the CEC standards (2015), Dally and Dempsey (2015), Dally et al. (2019), InSpEd (2019), and McLeskey et al. (2017). We also coded whether claims regarding a research evidence base were made for that content and whether the claims could be upheld. We used publicly

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Table 1. Content Present in Units Including a Practicum

Content	Number of units with content ($n = 15$)
Individual planning, documenting, measurable goals and objectives, including adjustments	11 (73%)
Monitoring (data collection) and evaluation of individualised plans	8 (53%)
Learning theories	3 (20%)
Principles and practice of applied behaviour analysis (ABA)	0
Teaching strategies	14 (93%)
Research based-practice — explicit teacher-directed instruction	1 (7%)
Assessment	10 (67%)
Assessment (curriculum-based assessment)	1 (7%)
Data-based decision-making	7 (47%)
Research-based literacy instruction	0
Research-based numeracy instruction	0
Differentiation	3 (20%)
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	4 (27%)
Early communication skills	0
Learners with high support needs	0
Assistive technology	1 (7%)
Positive behaviour support and functional assessment/program planning	1 (7%)
Social skills	1 (7%)
Supporting regular educators — collaboration, co-teaching, coaching	1 (7%)
Working with families	2 (13%)
Collaborative program development with families and other professionals	8 (53%)
Transition planning	0
Reporting	3 (20%)
Inclusion philosophy and practices	10 (67%)
Disability standards for education, relevant laws and policies, including National Disability Insurance Scheme	5 (33%)
Ethical practice	7 (47%)
Deliver professional learning to others	1 (7%)
Advise parents	0
Advise regarding unproven practices	0
Knowledge of other professions, agencies	0
Impact of disability on learner	0
Cultural factors	1 (7%)
Knowledge of research methods	0
Evaluating and using research	8 (53%)

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available information on university websites such as unit guides, unit outcomes, unit descriptions, timetables, staff profiles and other relevant material. In Stephenson et al. (2024), we extracted information on the staffing of the units in each course by using publicly available sources on university websites and on Google Scholar. For each identified staff member, we coded whether or not they were described as holding a special education qualification (such as a master's in special education), whether they were described as having worked in a disability-related setting (such as a special school or in a support teacher role) and whether they had recent research publications or grants relevant to the education of students with disability. Coding relevant to unit content and staff characteristics was completed independently by at least two authors, and disagreements were resolved by rereading the source materials and discussion until consensus was reached.

In the study reported here, we checked each identified course in our most recent analysis (Stephenson et al., 2024) to determine whether they contained a unit with a compulsory practicum or professional experience placement. This means that all master's courses in Australia in inclusive/special education were included in this analysis. The practicum needed to be mandatory and for a designated period of time, where the trainee special educator completed teaching tasks in a school setting. We included units where, if the trainee special educator was currently working in an appropriate setting, the requirement could be completed in the trainee's own school. We did not include units where tutoring or a case study was part of the assessment requirement for a unit as these could be individual and variable in content and time required and may not have involved supervised practice. Each course was reviewed by at least two authors during 2023 and 2024, and where there were disagreements, the source materials were reread and discussed to resolve the difference. Where courses contained a unit that included a practicum, we checked to see if unit content had been updated since the original content coding in 2021. If the unit remained the same, we used the existing coding regarding the content of that unit. If the unit had been updated, the new content was downloaded and content was independently coded by two authors, who then resolved disagreements by reviewing the source materials and reaching consensus for the final coding. For relevant staff, the coding completed for Stephenson et al. (2024) was used.

Aspects of the practicum that were coded for each identified unit included the number of placements and length of each placement. We coded how performance in the unit was assessed, including whether a report was provided from a mentor teacher, the number of assessment tasks and what was covered (assessment of school student[s], intervention planning, intervention implementation, data collection, decision-making, whether there was focus on an individual student or a group of students, other assessment). Supervision or assessment of practice by university personnel, and if so, who, was coded in addition to whether there was supervision by school personnel and, if so, their qualifications. The nature of the setting was coded as high support needs, low support needs, behaviour, trainee's own class in a mainstream school, trainee's own class in a specialist setting or other setting. The number of university staff involved and whether they held a special education qualification, had experience in a disability-related setting and had published research relevant to the education of students with special educational needs was coded using our existing data where applicable (Stephenson et al., 2024). Any additional coding required was completed independently by two authors and any disagreements were resolved by discussion.

Results

We identified 34 courses at master's level from 24 universities. The courses were in special and/or inclusive education and were described as suitable for qualified teachers to gain skills for educating students with disability. Of these courses, 20 (59%) were identified as having one or more units that included a mandatory practicum. In four courses from three universities, the same unit was part of more than one course, so, overall, there were 16 different units available for analysis.

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Content description and/or learning outcomes or other relevant information regarding unit content was available for 15 of the 16 units (see Table 1). General teaching strategies and individual planning formed the content most frequently included in units with a practicum component (only one unit included explicit instruction, and none specifically mentioned literacy or numeracy). Generic assessment was included in 10 units, but only one unit included specific mention of curriculum-based assessment. Collaborative program development was included in eight units, but only one included supporting regular educators and none included transition planning.

Claims Regarding Research/Evidence-Based Content Research

Documentation from nine units (60%) contained a claim that the content was research- or evidence-based and these claims were sustained for only three units (20%).

Length of Practicum and Placement Options

The length of the practicum was not provided for two units. There was one unit with a practicum of 10 days, six units with a practicum of 15 days, three with a practicum of 20 days, two with a practicum of 25 days, one with a practicum of 20–25 days and one with two practicum periods of 15 days each. Two units provided for longer times if this was required by employers.

Assessment in Units Including Practicum

Eight units had three assessment tasks, four had two tasks, one was unclear and there was no information for two units. There was considerable variation in content assessed in these units (see Table 2). Assessment did reflect course content in that the most commonly assessed component was intervention planning, but intervention implementation was assessed in only two units. Self-reflection exercises were included in half the units.

Assessment of actual pedagogy was also varied. For one university, no information was located on assessment of practicum. For six units, the mentor teacher provided a report as part of the assessment requirements. For two units, satisfactory performance was determined collaboratively between the mentor teacher and university staff, and for one unit, the mentor signed off on aspects of professional behaviour. For two units, it was unclear if the mentor was involved in assessment, and for four units, it appeared the mentor played no role in assessment. There appeared to be no unit where specific teacher practices in assessment, instruction, monitoring progress and evaluation (such as use of curriculum-based assessment, prompting, specific data collection methods, interpreting data and making decisions) were assessed.

Involvement of University Personnel

University personnel were involved in assessment of instruction or provided some form of supervision of practicum in five units. In one case, this was the unit lecturer; in another case, it was the lecturer or their delegate. No information was available for the other units.

Mentor Teachers

As already noted, mentor teachers played a part in assessment of teaching practice in nine units, and there were two other units where involvement of a mentor was described. No information was available about the qualifications of the mentor, although one unit guide noted they had appropriate qualifications. In one unit, peers provided observation and feedback for each other.

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Table 2. Assessment in Units that Included a Practicum

Assessment content	Number (%) of units (n = 12)
Assessment of school students	5 (42%)
Intervention planning	7 (58%)
Intervention implementation	2 (17%)
Data collection (specific data) and decision-making	2 (17%)
Focus on an individual student	7 (58%)
Focus on both individual and group	1 (8%)
Focus on either individual or group	1 (8%)
Reflection on own performance	6 (50%)
Experiences with collaboration or teamwork	2 (17%)
Observations in practicum setting	2 (17%)
Portfolio or collection of resources	3 (25%)
Other	6 (50%)

Practicum Settings

Very little specific information was available about settings for practicum. For two units, practicum could occur in the trainee's own school; for one unit, the setting had to be outside the trainee's school. Two units specified an inclusive setting, one a specialist setting, one gave the option of specialist or inclusive settings, one specified any setting that included students with additional needs and one specified a setting that included a Tier 3 student. Only one course, with three practicum units, provided for experience in both an inclusive and specialist setting.

Unit Personnel

For four units, the staff responsible for the unit could not be identified. For the remaining units, a total of 13 staff were identified, four of whom were described as holding a special education qualification, three were described as having had experience in a special education or disability-related setting, and 12 had published relevant research in the last 5 years. Only one of the university staff identified was described as qualified, experienced and with recent research. Eight of the university staff involved were described as having neither a qualification nor experience.

Discussion

If practical experience in classrooms that allows trainee special educators to master implementation of research-based practices is a crucial element of special education teacher preparation (Nagro & deBetttencourt, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2024; Takala et al., 2023), it is of some concern that almost half (14 of the 34) identified courses did not provide a formal practicum placement in a setting with students with disability. It is also of concern that most courses offer only one location for practicum and that none offer extended experiences. We need to acknowledge that information on unit content and assessment within practicum units was limited to that publicly available on university websites. There was generally little detailed information on expectation for experiences during practicum, and this does limit the conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis.

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Practicum Unit Content

From the data we have collected, it seems most likely that a unit that includes a practicum experience would address teaching strategies generally, individual planning, monitoring, collaborative program development, using research, and general content on inclusive practices. There was little mention of strategies specific to special education, with only one unit specifying content on explicit instruction and one unit specifying curriculum-based assessment. Although inclusion was often addressed, specific aspects of implementing inclusive practices, such as differentiation and Universal Design for Learning, were less common. In addition, although collaborative planning was addressed in just over half the units, only one included the delivery of professional support, a key role for special educators in mainstream schools.

Assessment

The content of assessment tasks reflected the content elements, with assessment for individual planning (most likely for just one individual student) being most common. There was no specification of areas to be assessed or specific kinds of assessment. Reporting of self-reflection was the other commonly used assessment task. Although self-reflection (the ability to evaluate one's teaching and its effects on students, and then adjust one's teaching to improve student outcomes) is an accepted practice in initial and special teacher education (deBettencourt & Nagro, 2019), it is odd that little attention was given to the skills necessary for self-evaluation. Curriculum-based assessment, data collection and data-based decision-making are necessary skills to determine the effects of instruction on learners and are thus required for self-reflection. DeBettencourt and Nagro (2019) found that in their sample of special education teacher trainees, reflective abilities did not improve over two practicum experiences, and they suggested the participants did not know how to reflect and may need more guidance to do so. This suggestion was recently supported by a review that found written reflections are not always effective at improving self-reflection and that trainee special educators need support, guidance and feedback in evaluating their use of evidence-based strategies (Klefbeck, 2023). It is likely that there is a similar situation in Australia.

Length of Practicum

The number of days spent in practicum overall was far short of the 60 to 80 days required for initial teacher education (AITSL, 2022). If postgraduate special education requirements are compared to postgraduate courses in other professions, such as health-related courses, it can be seen that these professions require much more supervised practical experience. For example, a 2-year occupational therapy postgraduate course must include a minimum of 1,000 hours of fieldwork supervised by a qualified occupational therapist (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2016). This is operationalised by Australian courses, such as at the University of Canberra, to include three units with placements of 40 days each as well as other experiences (University of Canberra, 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Within the profession of psychology, general psychologists who then train to specialise in an area of practice must complete an approved postgraduate course and 3,000 hours of supervised practice with an appropriately qualified supervisor (Psychology Board of Australia, 2019). As Leko et al. (2024) pointed out, if underprepared teachers enter classrooms, the onus is then on schools and systems to provide induction support and mentoring. We believe that either there needs to be a longer supervised practicum with competencies evaluated by a qualified mentor or a formal induction period that includes mentoring and coaching by a qualified special educator with adequate training to provide effective supervision.

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Settings for Practicum

Since most courses had only a single unit with a placement, the practicum settings were limited. Both inclusive and specialist settings were used, but there was little detailed information available. Brownell et al. (2019) emphasised the importance of opportunities for trainee special educators to practise skills in a range of settings, and although some courses may have included other field experiences or activities besides practicum, Australian special educators do not experience a range of settings as part of their preparation. O'Brien et al. (2024) reported that special education preparation courses in the US occurred in a variety of settings. It appears that few universities offered opportunities for practicum in early childhood settings or in postschool settings. It seems that in Australia a teacher could become a special educator without ever experiencing a specialist setting. Since postgraduate programs are for qualified teachers, all would have had some experience in mainstream settings but could become a qualified special educator with no experience in providing support in those settings. Only one course provided for practicum in both inclusive and specialist settings. Given that special educators may be employed as teachers of specialist classes in regular or specialist schools, or as support teachers in mainstream settings as well as in early childhood and postschool programs, it seems they should have practicum experience in a range of settings; however, only one course provided that opportunity.

Mentors and University Staff

For nine of the courses where information was available, the mentor teacher was involved in assessment of practicum performance and university staff were involved in assessment for five units. No information was available about the qualifications and experience of mentor teachers; for the unit coordinators overall, only four were described as having special education experience.

Implications

We acknowledge that there are learning activities other than a practicum (such as workshops, case studies and tutoring) that may provide practice in some essential skills. However, we believe that real in-class experiences with coaching and feedback are essential for trainee special educators to be classroom-ready (Leko et al., 2024). Brownell et al. (2019) suggested that trainee special educators could work through a continuum of experiences from theory to tutoring, to small group teaching, to whole class teaching. They also suggest experiences in a range of settings. It would seem unlikely that a single practicum experience, typical of Australian courses, limited to 10 to 20 days, could provide this preparation.

Overall, we found that the length and variety of practicum placements appear to be generally inadequate to fully prepare special educators for their subsequent roles. The content of units does not appear to focus specifically on evidence-based special education practices, although we acknowledge these could be addressed in units that are not linked to a practicum. There is little evidence to show that mentor teachers are qualified special educators. Less than half the university personnel involved were described as having a special education qualification.

There are potential barriers to the provision of more extensive practicum experiences. Cost to universities is an issue, as mentor teachers should be paid and trainee special educator supervision would add to the workload of university staff. There are also costs for the trainee special educators, who may need to take leave from their regular position to complete an unpaid practicum placement. There are then costs to schools where trainees are employed, as they must be replaced while they are absent on practicum. There may also be costs to schools if mentor teachers need to be released from their regular duties and replaced while providing mentoring. From anecdotal information, it seems recruitment of qualified special educators as supervisors is difficult, and this is of concern, especially when university staff may not be qualified special educators either. The implication is that trainees may not see evidence-based practices in classrooms and may not be provided with constructive feedback on their

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implementation of such practices. The disconnect between school practices and evidence-based content from their courses means practicum placements may be ineffective (Solari et al., 2023).

Recommendations

This is an area that requires much more research to identify the most effective means of providing trainee special educators with the research-based pedagogical skills required in their roles (O'Brien et al., 2024). It may be that universities could partially compensate for the short and limited practicum placements by embedding a range of practice-based tasks in all units. As suggested by Leko et al. (2024), this could include practice of discrete skills in simulated settings, with peers, and in role-plays. This can progress to practising a combination of skills but in a less complex environment such as tutoring or working with small groups. This may be particularly valuable where specialised content and skills are needed for a particular curriculum area such as reading (Solari et al., 2023). Coaching and feedback from an expert, either as teaching is observed or by video, is likely to be required. Some of these practices would present difficulties for fully online courses, but supervision through video is becoming more common and may be a good solution for those already working in special education settings. The use of video may also allow for placements in geographically rural and remote areas.

In addition to pedagogical skills, special educators need practical experiences in collaborating and working with families/caregivers and with other professionals, such as allied health professionals. It is a requirement of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Australian Government, 2006) that adjustments are developed in consultation with families/caregivers and the student where possible, and trainee special educators would benefit from supervised experiences in this area. Students with disability, particularly those with more complex needs, including mental health needs, will likely be receiving supports and interventions through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (2024). Special educators need an understanding of the work of these professionals and experience in working with them to ensure practices in schools are consistent with those provided outside educational settings.

We believe this analysis has several implications for improvement of the preparation of special educators. Universities should consider provision of practical experiences as a necessity in addition to longer and more varied placements. Supervision and mentoring should be provided by school and university staff who are themselves qualified and experienced special educators. Trainees should not only be able to demonstrate specific competencies in planning, assessment, and instruction but also be able to demonstrate skills in collaborating with other teachers and professionals and in supporting regular classroom teachers.

There is also much to be researched regarding practices in Australia. The perspectives of trainee special educators themselves, their mentor teachers and university staff could be explored. More detail about what occurs during practicum is needed as is more information about how practicum is linked to course content and how specific competencies may be practised and assessed during practicum. A comparison could be made between the perceptions and performance of special educators who have graduated from courses with and without practicum placements. The perspectives of school personnel on practicum placements and mentoring and their value of practicum would also be of interest.

With no prescribed standards for the preparation of special educators, universities are free to provide courses with no required in-school placements. Current courses that do provide practicum offer placements that are likely to be short and in only one setting. The supervision provided may not involve qualified special educators. We believe this situation is unsatisfactory and requires further exploration to determine evidence-based means of ensuring special educators are classroom-ready.

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member of InSpEd. Work done by InSpEd is cited in papers by the authors cited in this paper. Dr Ganguly is coordinator of special education programs at Charles Sturt University. Coding regarding practicum and other content from this university was completed independently by two other authors.

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