

## Editorial

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The focus of the *Australasian Journal of Special Education* is the open discussion of research regarding quality programs for students with special education needs. A key issue in discussing quality programs for students with special education needs is to identify what is meant by special education. This is particularly important as the existence of special education is being challenged within education systems across Australia, the misunderstanding of what special education is by differing levels of education and politics, and the ongoing need to support the push for pre-service teacher education degrees to include a subject that addresses the provision of quality education programs for students with special education needs.

Special education in the past has been defined by a number of variables. Place of education has been the focus of many works discussing the best practice for students with disabilities, learning difficulties and behavioural disorders. Place of education has been a central issue in the inclusion debate, and while an important consideration is part of a larger picture when the needs of a student are being considered.

Special education has over the years focused on factors that have placed the "blame" within the child. This focus in special education resulted in programs that attempted to address processes underlying the learning of students. Many of the practices have been shown to be ineffective in assisting students with special education needs, and other students in school settings, to develop and take a functional place in our society. (For example, see Snyder (1994) for an excellent discussion of learning styles and reading achievement.)

More recently there has been a shift towards examining the curriculum, instruction and environment in the school in which students with

special education needs are to receive their education program. The curriculum, instruction and the instructional environment are aspects of an education program that can be influenced directly by schools, teachers, parents and members of the wider school community. These variables are aspects of an educational program that have been shown to be influential in assisting students with special education needs achieve functional skills, knowledge and values to participate in their society.

It is important as pressure for students with special education needs to be educated in the regular education classroom that provision of programs are designed about these elements - curriculum, instruction, and environment. Programs developed about these elements are able to be addressed systematically and directly by schools and teachers. In addition, each of these elements can be influenced directly by teachers and other persons assisting in the delivery of programs.

Special education is concerned with utilising research based practices that ensures quality in the design of curricula, the use of best instructional practices to assists achieve the outcomes outlined in curricula, and utilising attributes in the environment that maximise the chances for programs to meet the needs of students. As special education programs come under increasing pressure in nearly all education systems, refining the research and promoting the use of these three elements in all school settings becomes increasingly important. (I recommend the policy of the Australian Association of Special Education on quality education programs as good starting point for examining aspects of quality education programs. This is available from state chapters of the Australian Association of Special Education.)

This issue of the *Australasian Journal of Special Education* addresses issues relating to

the provision of quality education programs for students with special education needs. Wright and Sigafoos surveyed teachers and students without disabilities about the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results of this survey highlight the ongoing need for all persons involved to work together in providing quality education programs (i.e., an element of the environment), and overcome concerns and anxiety of persons involved in provision of programs.

Benseman and Park discuss the education of students with haemophilia. The use interview and survey data from persons involved in catering for the needs of these students, highlight a range of interesting implications for students. The concluding comments highlight a range of issues that quality education programs need to comprise if they are to meet the needs of students with special education needs, including those students with haemophilia.

Galbraith and Clayton discuss the use of curriculum-based measures to monitor the health of reading levels of students in primary school settings. The use of curriculum-based measures is a methodology with strong support in the literature for assisting schools to monitor the progress of students, and as this paper shows, there is support from an Australian setting for this assessment procedure in assisting the development of programs for students experiencing difficulties learning to read. The study by Galbraith and Clayton also raises the issue of effective reading programs, with high proportions of students falling below expected reading fluency levels found in the literature. The discussion of using oral reading fluency data to allocate resources poses an interesting use of these data, and rightly requires further investigation.

Bradshaw reports the results of a longitudinal study investigating the integration of students with behaviour disorders. These results highlight the need for quality education programs no

matter what setting, and for all involved to work together to meet the needs of students.

The articles in this issues address each of the elements of quality education programs. I encourage all readers to contribute to the journal, especially papers that examine these elements. Research that examines differing aspects of curriculum, instruction and the educational environment are particularly welcome as the journal attempts to promote quality programs for students with special education needs.

This issue of the *Australasian Journal of Special Education* indicates the end of an era of the journal. The journal has from its initial development been published twice a year. As of Volume 22, the journal will be published three times per year. The third issue of each volume will be dedicated to a specific topics. The third issue of Volume 22 will be dedicated to research that highlights quality education programs for students with special education needs. Invitations are open to educators and academics to contribute to this issue. A number of invitations have been made to persons, locally and internationally, to contribute papers to this issue. I look forward to editing this issue, an issue that will have relevance to a wide range of readers.

David Evans PhD  
Editor