CHAPTER 2

Principles and policies for integration and inclusion

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This chapter aims to:

- examine the philosophical principles associated with integration and inclusion
- describe the legislation and policies that have developed from these principles
- describe the educational policies for students with a disability in the states and territories in Australia and in New Zealand
- comment on the way in which these educational policies may be implemented.

Principles for inclusion

Social justice

Like other social sciences, the education of students with special needs is based on a number of beliefs and principles. These beliefs and principles are responsible for the way in which western society presently supports these students. As the last chapter demonstrated, our views of disability have changed considerably in the past century. Consequently, our present views of disability should not be seen as static. These views represent our society's current interpretation of disability, and these views may change in the future. The core of our present belief system about the education of students with special needs is reflected in the ideas of human rights, equity and social justice.

Social justice is difficult to define because the term does not have a single essential meaning. Christensen and Dorn (1997) argue that social justice philosophies may be classified into individualistic and communitarian groups. Individualistic notions of social justice focus on the position and life experience of individuals. From this perspective we would be concerned with the liberty, entitlements and reduction of inequality of individuals with special needs. The assumption is that individual liberty is an essential prerequisite for the achievement of social justice. From a communitarian viewpoint, the notion of shared community beliefs about living and justice are important.

For most people, however, social justice will mean the elimination of injustice. Such injustice in educational settings may be more common than we may wish to acknowledge. For example, Flynn (1997) found that 76 per cent of the participants in his sample of over 700 Australian parents of a child with a disability, students with a disability and others, reported that they had been subject to or knew of educational discrimination. Examples of this discrimination included:

- refusal or discouragement of enrolment at regular schools
- different conditions of enrolment (for example, student enrolled on a trial basis, able to attend for a limited number of hours, parent required to attend school to administer medication)
- denial of, or limited access to school services, facilities or programmes (for example, lack of physical access to some areas, paucity of aides, resources and equipment)
- different application of school discipline policies (for example, for some students with a disability, the standard of discipline expected of them was higher than for other students)
- failure of schools to sufficiently address issues of bullying and harassment against students with disabilities (for example, teachers not responding to instances of bullying, student with a disability being confined to a small part of the playground in response to alleged sexual harassment).

The importance of social justice is reflected in federal (for example, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1998), and state government policies in Australia (for example, Department of Human Services, Victoria, 1999; South Australian Equal Opportunity Commission, 1999). These policies represent attempts to deal with past injustices to people with a disability, and other disadvantaged groups, by ensuring access to services for these groups.

An implication of the implementation of social justice to students with special needs is the place of such students in schools. From a social justice view, the individual with a learning problem is seen as a member of the total student body, which because of its nature, will also display variations in ability and variations in the need for support. In the past, schools have often attempted to deal with students with special needs by focusing on the student and their 'problem' or 'deficiency'. This approach has not been a successful way to support the student because it ignores the fact that the student functions in the family, school and wider communities. All of these communities have an important influence on the development of the student, and they should be taken into account in planning to support the student.

Another way in which schools have dealt with students with special educational needs is to 'pigeonhole' them, by placing them into standard programmes that the school currently offers. This has made sense for schools because it has been seen to be administratively efficient. It has not always made sense for the students because the existing programmes may not have been flexible enough to meet their needs.

An unfortunate result of these narrow views of students with special needs may be that they are seen to be 'in the school', but not 'of the school'. In other words, this approach has sometimes alienated students by focusing on their differences and deficiencies in comparison to the other students in the school. An alternative perspective is described by Christensen (1992):

> Rather than a few students being seen to have 'special' needs, schools must regard all students' needs as part of the fabric of human experience and must become open, inclusive and responsive institutions which celebrate rather than eliminate human difference. (p. 8)

To achieve such an outcome means that schools will need to act in ways that do not handicap students with special needs. For example, schools will need to ensure that students with a disability have the same degree of access to school services as other students. In practical terms, this relates to the organisation of the curriculum, the nature of the curriculum content, how the school assesses and reports on the progress of students, and how decisions are made about the allocation of resources.

On an interpersonal level, to genuinely include students with special needs in the school may require a change in the mindset of some teachers, and other school staff, who support these students. Teachers will need to assess not only students' weaknesses and deficiencies, but also their interests and strengths (this approach is explained in later chapters). It may also mean that teachers will need to demonstrate their confidence in the students' potential for growth and development by planning for and implementing their teaching in a positive manner. This way of viewing the situation and its likely outcomes is shown in Figure 2.1. An additional outcome of this approach is that the student's self-esteem may be enhanced. For example, the student may be more likely to 'risk' trying a new activity, and they may view their mistakes as just a part of the learning experience, and not a reason for them to discontinue the activity.

Another example of how schools should monitor their responses to students with special educational needs is the way these students are referred to by school staff. The previous chapter demonstrated how damaging inappropriate language can be for these students. For example, consider the message that may be given to others by staff

Wolfensberger (1995), who has renamed it 'social role valorisation'. This reinterpretation is based on a recognition that all members of the community assume a social role, whether it be as a worker, a spouse, a daughter, or an artist. Each of these roles is valued in its own right.

However, Wolfensberger points out that many people with a disability perform roles in the community that are not valued, or they may have no meaningful role to play. To apply this view of normalisation means that schools should create an environment in which students with special needs are seen as valued members of the school community. In the process, these students may be seen as competent and as capable of making a positive contribution. The 'Coffee Shop' that many high schools run (see Box 2.1) is an example of how students with moderate or severe intellectual disability can demonstrate their competencies in a regular school setting.

Box 2.1

Programmes: The coffee shop

In most high schools the special classroom for students with moderate or severe intellectual disability bears little resemblance to a conventional classroom. Typically, the room would contain cooking facilities such as a stove and a microwave, a fridge, and a sink. The reason for these facilities is to assist the students to develop a range of domestic living skills that will help them both now and when they leave school.

In some schools, the entire curriculum of these students may be centred around the use of these facilities as a coffee shop. The shop may operate for several days each week, during recess and lunch, and would be open for patronage by school staff and students. Students from the special class would take orders from the staff and students, prepare and serve the food and beverages, make out the bill and receive payments, just as a waiter might do in a coffee shop in the community.

At other times during the week, these students may be planning a menu for the shop, preparing a budget, using public transport to the supermarket, shopping and handling money, and cooking and preparing food. During the operation of the coffee shop, the students will be developing their social and communication skills. They will also be demonstrating to the school community that they are individuals with competencies and that they are capable of making a positive contribution to school life.

Teaching functional skills

In this context, functional skills means skills that are either of immediate use to the student, or skills that will be of use to the student in the near future. For the majority of school students, a traditional academic programme is functional because it provides students with the prerequisite skills that they will need at higher levels of study (for example, to be eligible for enrolment in tertiary education programmes). For other students, a traditional academic orientation in their educational programme may not be in the best interests of the student because they may struggle to meet the demands of that orientation.

Examples of non-academic functional programmes include the completion of vocational training courses by students in high schools (vocational training and students with special needs is explored in Chapter 12), the teaching of money handling and independent travel skills to students with moderate intellectual disability, or independent dressing and feeding skills to preschool children with special needs. In each case, an assessment of the relevance of a traditional educational approach has been made, and a modification to ensure that the outcomes for the student are functional has occurred.

This principle is relevant to many students with special needs. However, for students with very high support needs it can be hard to apply the principle. This is because for some students with severe intellectual and physical disabilities it becomes very difficult to teach functional skills as the student may be unable to do many daily activities either independently or semi-independently. An alternative approach may be to attempt to enhance the 'quality of life' of the student by focusing on their physiological and emotional state (Hatton, 1998).

Least restrictive environment

Students with special needs usually live and spend their leisure time in heterogeneous environments in the community. If they are to develop the skills necessary to function in those environments, they may need to spend as much time as possible in a regular school setting. For some students, a special class or special school may not give them the opportunities to learn the skills needed to function in the community (Alper, 1996).

Educational environments such as a special school or a special class can be seen as being restrictive because they may limit the student's opportunity to access the experiences available in a regular school or a regular class. Integrated school settings offer more opportunities for interaction with peers than segregated settings. Integrated settings also provide an opportunity for other teachers and students to develop appropriate attitudes about disability by learning more about the capabilities of students with special needs. An example of how this principle can be implemented is described in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2

Programmes: Inclusion at Evatt Primary School

The programme at Evatt Primary School is an example of a model that delivers integration support to students with disabilities in regular classes. Our experience is that inclusion works when there is a whole school acceptance of the process, ongoing professional development of staff, collaborative planning and teaching, consistent behaviour management practices, and realistic expectations for students and teachers.

Our programme was established in 1993 and has been developed around collaborative attitudes and practices. There was an expectation by the staff and

parents that students with disabilities should be integrated in regular classes and participate in class programmes.

The school caters for 340 students, including fourteen who receive extra support from the special education teacher and a teacher's assistant. The level and type of support provided is determined by the individual needs of students and teachers through a collaborative process involving parents, teachers and other professionals. Individual curriculum plans ensure that teaching strategies and learning outcomes for students in the special education programme are readily assessed and reported.

This year we have a student in kindergarten with high health needs, and he requires a gastric feeding tube. This boy contracted meningitis when he was two years old. He has a full time health carer at school to meet his needs, but he is able to work in the regular class with support from the teacher assistant. He has made excellent progress so far. A second student in kindergarten has cerebral palsy. Although she is still adjusting to wearing a new leg splint, and is sometimes anxious about gross motor activities, her overall progress is very encouraging.

Another student in Year 6, who joined the school this year, is achieving learning outcomes at the Year 2 level. She works on a modified programme in the regular class, and she joins smaller groups for English and Maths.

Students in the programme are recognised by their peers as class members and are included in all areas of the curriculum. The special education teacher and teacher's assistant work in a variety of ways and settings across the school, including the Learning Support Centre. This Centre is a well resourced, centrally located room where teachers can borrow resources and where students can learn together. Regular special needs meetings and daily communication between the special education team and class teachers ensures that learning support is delivered in a coordinated manner.

The role of the special education teacher includes the coordination of services by internal and external providers. An essential part of this work involves establishing and maintaining strong partnerships between professionals and working with parents to achieve the best learning outcomes for students. We have found that these partnerships not only facilitate the provision of effective support to teachers and students, but also ensure that the support is practical, relevant and consistent.

Maintaining partnerships between service providers is also considered important. We believe our successes are linked to collaborative partnerships and effective communication systems between service providers. Our experience is that successful inclusion is more likely to occur when a collaborative model of service delivery is adopted, and a shared responsibility for the learning outcomes of students with disabilities is accepted. We think this can be achieved through communicating, cooperating and supporting as well as sharing ideas, strategies and resources.

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Educational policies in Australia and New Zealand, as well as most western countries, recognise that schools are not justified in keeping students in restrictive settings unless there are very good reasons for doing so. Further, these policies recognise