

**Inclusion**  
**Much More Than "Being There"**  
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**At the Cross-roads**

There is little question that inclusion will dominate issues in how to best serve students with disabilities into the foreseeable future. Like other nations around the world, we took a new pathway; ours defined in 1986 with the passage of the Disability Services Act (DSA).

For a decade, service systems across the nation have been trying to come to grips with this New Direction. Before then we had an unarticulated vision of "separate but equal" in the development of services for people with disabilities. However as others have found before us, *separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.*<sup>1</sup>

**Historical Impact**

Across the few centuries of their existence, our educational systems have mirrored the culture's struggle as it works through its biases. Inclusion has been central to addressing these. For instance, as our culture began to acknowledge and respect the diverse roles of women, education responded by abandoning some of its practices of streaming young girls from mathematics and science, to the point where recent studies show that we are only one of a number of nations where young men & women score equally well in these former stereotypically male dominated roles.

More recently, as a society, we have begun to embrace ethnic and indigenous people as an essential fabric of the nation and education systems have responded by beginning to include aboriginal study and multiculturalism in the educational milieu. While we have a way to go in these areas, we are bending over backwards in attempts to include, thereby broadening the bandwidth of acceptance in our society. Although even more recently some would move to undo these developments, the historical pattern is clear - we are a

nation of diversity and therefore our educational system must reflect this in its practice as well as in its teachings.

To advance the technical competencies required of the social movement in education we need to address the injustice by more than allowing physical access. To include those who were formerly separated requires more of us than physical or legal presence. It is more than positive, social inclusion - alone a worthy goal. To be fully inclusive we must also immerse the child in the typical developmental milieu, commonly known in education as curricula.

Being a part of the developing culture, gaining its wisdom, knowledge and skills and sharing theirs is what has been sought by all of those who have been denied it - women, migrants, indigenous Australians. So it is with people with disabilities. As a society we have found this particular issue profoundly challenging, both morally and technically.

### **Philosophical Impact: Inclusion As An Overarching Vision**

Charting the course for inclusion in human service-land is not all that different to Cook charting his course for Australia, David Dicks for a round-the-world voyage or NASA for the moon. Once the sights are clearly set nobody has to be reminded of where they are going; we need only to craft the tools to make the journey possible. Whilst some still debate the reason why we want to go there, the nation declared through the DSA, 'that is where we're headed'. This turning point in our history was a reflection of most thinking of what is good. Inclusion in the family, neighbourhood, in the "everydayness" of the culture is the vision of most everyone. Thus, it is little wonder that many parents of children with disabilities are now seeking to make this sweetly mundane dream a reality for their children too.

### **Teaching well and together**

There is a lot of justified fear in moving to a vision of teaching our children together; not the least of which is that we are facing a crisis where one in five and possibly up to a

third of our typical students aren't doing so well in school these days (Georcelli, 1996; Kemp, 1996).

Special education has laid claim to knowing how to teach well but have historically done so in segregated centres. Including children in regular classrooms has been, at best, a secondary skill of specialists. On the other hand typical class teachers have at least partially mastered the teaching of many disparate groups together.

The two teaching cultures, like the children they are to teach together, have been "brought up" apart; developing their own sub-cultures, professions, languages, to a point where even separate staff rooms on co-located campuses is common. Their skills and cultures need to be melded so that they are able to teach well and together. They are inseparable aspects of the vision of inclusion (at least in our definition).

### Technical Issues

Inclusion is a set of complex, interacting moral and technical issues.

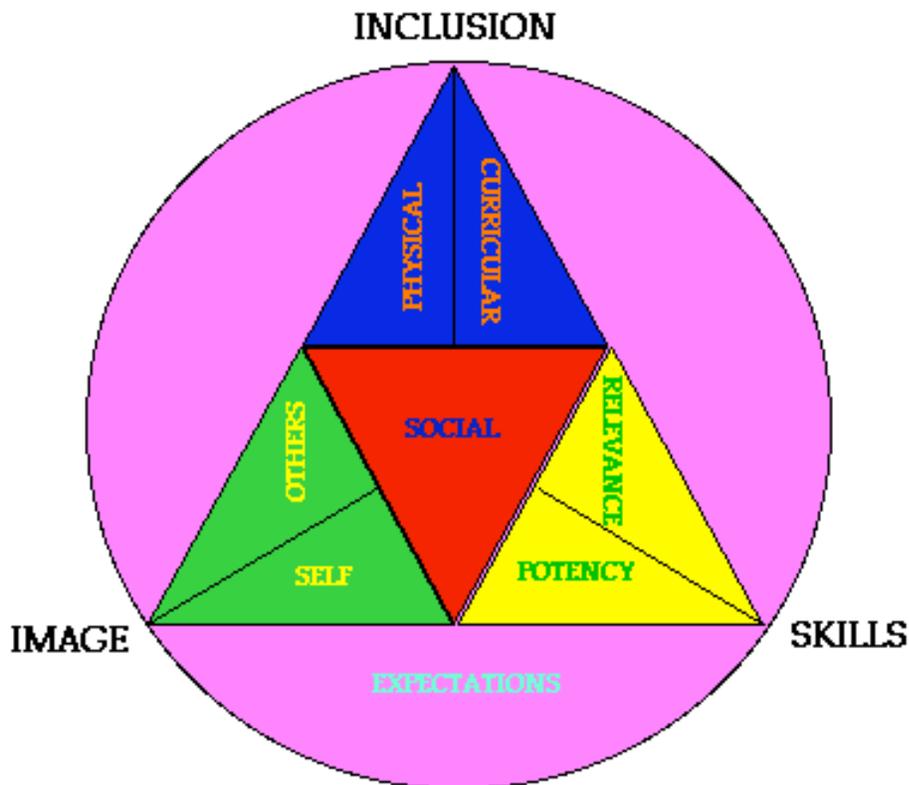


Figure 1 (above) represents the critical, interacting variables that determine the impacts (positive, negative and power thereof) of attempts to include. This model serves as an heuristic for conceptualising positively adaptive, social and developmental inclusion. It contains the following eight essential elements:

### **1. Physical inclusion....**

which is simply being physically present. It goes without saying that if the child is not present, then clearly they cannot be included; yet the landscape of our typical schools is such that even minor mobility or self-care issues can play havoc with being there. For example, even though the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) came into effect in March 1993, the Building Code of Australia - the main document of reference to how buildings and its services are to be constructed - "does not meet requirements of the DDA" (Australian Building Code Board, July 1996, page 4).

Physical inclusion means attending the local, neighbourhood school, playing in the same playground, being in the same classrooms as well as having access to specialist groupings such as art, computer, religion, etc for the same time as other children. This tends to be taken for granted with children without disabilities and indeed parents tend to be disturbed if they learn that their child is not physically included in any one of these experiences throughout the school day, week or year.

While there might need to be strategic retreats from full time physical presence in one or other of these common experiences for any child (e.g. temporary sickness), physical presence is so central to the event we know as schooling that any retreats need to be short term and usually monitored to ensure that physical presence in all aspects of school life becomes quickly re-established. So it should be for children with disabilities. Every retreat for the child with a disability (as for the typical child) will impact on other areas of the child's development. We will explore these impacts under the headings of image and skills.

## 2. Social inclusion...

Not every experience of being present is welcoming or nurturing. One can be rejected and lonely even in a crowded classroom, as many children will know. However, recommending segregation and congregation to prevent this sort of rejection is clearly illogical. Most important, such a position fails to recognise that the social history of people with disabilities is profoundly one of being rejected and fails to recognise that the only long term adaptive response to this rejection is the nurturing of acceptance and welcoming by the next generations.

Both the "place and pray" and the "wrap in cotton wool" strategies reduce the issues to one variable and thereby lose touch with the reality of human interaction being massively complex. To be positioned to nurture positive social inclusion we suggest that one must look at each major event of the day to determine:

the relevance to the student/s involved (see skills-relevance)

the impact of the experience on her/his feelings of self worth (see self-image)

the impact on how others will feel about the child (see image-others)

This more complex schemata yields a judgment as to the social inclusionary prospects of the event. If the event falls short in yielding a potential positive in one or more of these, one needn't necessarily abandon it or the child from it; rather it may call simply for some sort of adaptation or safeguard.

We cannot elaborate here as extensively as we would wish to do justice to the complexity of this issue. Two contemporary exemplars will need to suffice. First, we look at "pull-out" and other specialist groupings.

The people who belong in a group are those who share the same experiences as all the other members and any reduction in the amount of shared time tends to place social inclusion at risk. Here it is a very small step from a child who is accepted as a full time member of the class to *"He's not in our class... He comes in the morning when we have*

*set work. Then he goes back to his own room"* (Schnorr 1990, p235; our emphasis).

The pull out "special grouping" needn't gain a negative image in the eyes of others, but it can't be "talked away". One of the most powerful ways we have found to reduce the stigma associated with "special groupings" is to make "pull out" groupings commonplace (e.g. rather than a "knee jerk" response of stopping them altogether). If lots of kids are pulled out and grouped and regrouped around special interests, skills and needs, then the one "special reading or math or whatever group" doesn't run nearly as much risk of becoming stigmatised. However we need to carefully weigh up the possible benefits of any such "pull out" against these costs which might have ramifications on the whole process of inclusion. Remember, specialists groupings are but one in a plethora of teaching strategies to address variance in skill.

The second exemplar has to do with the common attachment of an aide to the child being "included". This practice has been unkindly labelled the "human service backpack" approach, when the aide comes between the child and peers and so becomes a burden for the child to carry through the day.

We strongly support help for teachers but the common practice of "aide attachment to the child" can be very detrimental to social inclusion if transacted poorly. If the aide is used as a support to the teacher and works with all children in the class, the likelihood of a negative impact on social inclusion is minimised.

Overall, whatever we do we must not deny the profound impact of stigma nor accept trade-offs that ultimately promote negative images of the child to him/herself or others. We must always be mindful that social rejection lies at the heart of the historical experience of people with disabilities and therefore any such further messages will likely profoundly influence their development, both in their and others' eyes. Thankfully, our experience has been that children have been very effective in teaching us how we might include.

### **3. Curricular inclusion ...**

is the involvement of the student in the regular curriculum of the school. Of all of the aspects of inclusion, this is probably the hardest, most controversial and the area where worldwide no-one is claiming mastery. Because curricular inclusion requires the involvement of all children in the same daily learning events, the groups will have a wide bandwidth of skill levels. Careful thought and preparation is essential.

Good teachers have always adapted to wide bandwidths of skill. For example in primary school, mixed grade classes are common and this also occurs in high schools where numbers do not justify separate classes. Curricular inclusion asks nothing new of the good teacher; it asks only that s/he extends the bandwidth. This extension is critical. We cannot just "teach to the mythical middle" and leave the others out.

It has been found that if children are continually faced with unachievable tasks they learn not to try (Seligman, 1975). On the other hand, achievable challenges and success breed persistence. Good teachers have been able to do this with other groups by having an extremely good knowledge of individual students and group and re-group their class accordingly, as well as design co-operative learning strategies on the basis of the children's relative skill levels on different tasks.

For instance, children who need practice in reading at one level might be grouped so as to read a story to non-readers who are required to point to pictures related to the story being read (comprehension and receptive language development); whilst a third level of group-participant needing work on writing skills might be asked to write answers to comprehension questions.

Other strategies that address bandwidth such as delegating different tasks, intensive structured sub-lessons, individual tutoring, peer tutoring and a range of other approaches are well documented in the general education literature.

It is increasingly being recognised that every child is special, with individual skills and needs, and this has to be addressed by the teacher. The child with a disability highlights this issue for all children.

## **Skill Development Issues**

### **4. Relevance...**

is one of two critical aspects of developmental inclusion. Simply, the learning experience must be relevant to the child. However, what is relevant is central to much debate in "regular" as well as "special" education circles.

Rather than attempt to prescribe relevance we approach the issue assuming: what society has determined to be at least somewhat relevant is in the regular curriculum. Therefore our task is not to rewrite the curriculum (although others may wish to tackle this!) only to make the delivery as relevant as possible to the needs of the individual.

curricular relevance is ultimately matching activities to assist the student to positively adapt and grow in proper balance with respect to their independence and their interdependence with others.

For example, we seem to agree that reading, writing, arithmetic and research (finding out how to find things you want to know about); are universally relevant to primary students. Thus, we assume they are relevant curricula for students with disabilities.

Whilst children with disabilities may seem to need to be taught "special" skills that others do not, when one looks at the issue broadly it is likely an extension of a common skill. For instance, the child in a wheelchair may need to learn to run the controls of an electric chair, which is "special" to them. However, viewed broadly they are learning to navigate their environment with increasing sophistication - something common to all students.

Our concern is that "special" has become a code word for "lesser", non-academic or even worse ... institution preparation skills that are irrelevant and maladaptive to inclusion as an adult in society. We should start from the regular curriculum and only deviate for very clear and positive rationales that are supportive of inclusion over the long run.

### **5. Potency...**

is the second key developmental inclusion issue. Here one looks at the power of the strategy in teaching the child. All children need lessons that work. However for the child whose performance falls below others in the class, there is a critical need for lessons that are potent.

Potent lessons use intense activities that challenge students at their level; make efficient use of the few precious hours of instruction time available each day; frequently group and re-group children so that the advantages of modeling, peer support and time use are maximised; individualise skill "chunks" so that they are understood by each child; correct errors clearly and positively; teach in sensible sequence; use appropriate supports and equipment, and ensure that the lesson is reinforcing in the students' scheme of things. A plethora of strategies abound in the literature that contain these essential elements.

Factors outside the classroom can also effect potency. Again, we cannot elaborate as extensively as we would wish. One example will need to suffice.

Of particular concern to us is the conflict (often between teacher and parent) over the issue of children who learn slower than others. Our concern is the false expectation that learning more slowly "necessitates" teaching more slowly, when the reverse is what is actually called for. When parents call for higher internal potency or instigate external tutelage to enhance or embellish potency, they are frequently branded as "unrealistic" or "unaccepting of their child's disability".

A collaborative and accountable environment with respected involvement of the parent as partner embellishes potency, while conflict can severely restrict potency. Both teachers and parents need to build up this collaborative approach in an environment of trust and respect.

## **Image issues**

### **6. Self-image...**

is profoundly effected by the company we keep, the settings we are in and the messages about who we are from this company. We know that how we feel about ourselves dramatically affects motivation, general behaviour and level of contentment. This is commonly put forward as the reason that children with a disability would be better off in a segregated school. It is often recommended to parents that their child will be happier with 'similar' children, where the difficulties in coping related to their disability would be less apparent.

We reject this argument not only because we aspire to an inclusive society and adopting this advice will run counter to that end, but because of the profound impact this congregation has on the development of the person's sense of 'self' as more 'disabled child' than child, as more impaired than is actually the case. Congregating children for their school life on the basis of their disability means that this characteristic is judged more important and life defining than their personality, skills, humanness or any other characteristic.

As we discussed earlier, it does not follow that positive self-image will flow automatically from physical inclusion. Much has to be done. In the world of children, the feedback from adults as well as peers is critically important. Structuring positive roles in the classroom and playground, feedback around personal gains rather than relative class position, rewarding positive behaviour, public acknowledgment of their importance by merit awards and other strategies are well known and used by most teachers.

Again we need invent nothing new. Rather we need only extend these known strategies to children with impairments with the knowledge that a child with a disability may have experienced a higher rate of failure. As with any other child with similar experiences, the frequency of positive feedback needs to be greater.

### **7. Image: In the mind's eye of others...**

It would be unlikely any child ever escapes school life without some experiences of being teased or shunned. Children with disabilities are no different in this respect, although they are much more vulnerable to these occurrences because of historical treatment.

Positive image in the eyes of peers has a lot to do with sharing as much as possible and being seen to have roles that are valued. For adults, this means speaking honestly but respectfully to and about the child, modeling typical, positive interactions, establishing and nurturing opportunities to share time with other children in activities where typical (hopefully positive) relationships may develop.

The more friends that the child develops, the less likely it is that teasing will occur and less likely to have a devastating impact (e.g. due to the presence of allies), so allowing the child to learn to deal adaptively with one of life's realities. Although it has become a truism in our society to say that children can be cruel, we find they can also be quite refreshingly kind - sometimes in spite of what we do but even more so when nurtured in this direction.

There are probably few areas in education that are more central to the development of responsible adults than the teaching of how children should deal with others who are different or more vulnerable. Basically as adults we have three choices in how to deal with this issue:

We can do nothing, in the belief that the children will work it out for themselves.

We can model rejection by saying that children who are different do not belong here.

We can see the child with a disability as a very powerful means to teach children some very important issues about getting along with each other.

We believe we have a role as educators to nurture the latter. To do nothing is not teaching and to teach prejudice is profoundly immoral.

## **8. Expectations**

Much of what we do in life is determined by the expectations of others. We may live or die based on our own and others' expectations. In medicine this is known as placebo and accounts for much of healing's power.

In the field of disability, decades of research has shown that in general our expectations have been far too low, resulting in people living down to our low expectations. Inclusion requests that we raise the expectations of everyone ... at least a little bit. After all, it is less damaging to have a positive expectation fail than to set and meet a negative one.

In Figure 1 we have 'expectations' as the milieu in which all of the other aspects of inclusion operate. If expectations are poor, outcomes will almost certainly reflect this. Conversely, positive expectations can impact on every other aspect of inclusion in a positive way.

## **Interactions**

These eight elements are in constant interaction and impact on each other. If a child has a low opinion of her/himself, lessons are less likely to be potent and there may be some problems with social inclusion. If the child is socially included and is experiencing academic success, self esteem is likely to rise. Lessons that are not relevant - for example doing non-academic or 'social' tasks when all the other children are doing mathematics - are likely to impact on self esteem, their image in the eyes of others and lessen social inclusion.

This means that if problems occur we need to pinpoint the areas of risk and adjust our strategies accordingly. We have found this heuristic (Figure 1) particularly useful in this regard. For example, if there is little progress academically we clearly need to look at the relevance and potency of the teaching but if that appears sound we turn the lens toward issues of social inclusion, self image and image in the eyes of others, extent of physical presence or lowered expectations.

### **Responsibility**

When reading through the above list it is clear that there are many areas where we need to develop our skills and systems. There are also resource issues in support, additional teacher training, teaching materials and time to think through some very complex issues.

However, these are our problems. If we cannot carry out inclusion for some of these reasons, we must be clear why we are not including a child. It is not the child that is deficient, it is us.

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<sup>i</sup> US Supreme Court in the famous 1954 case on racial segregation in education: Brown vs the Board of Education, p. 495, our emphasis.