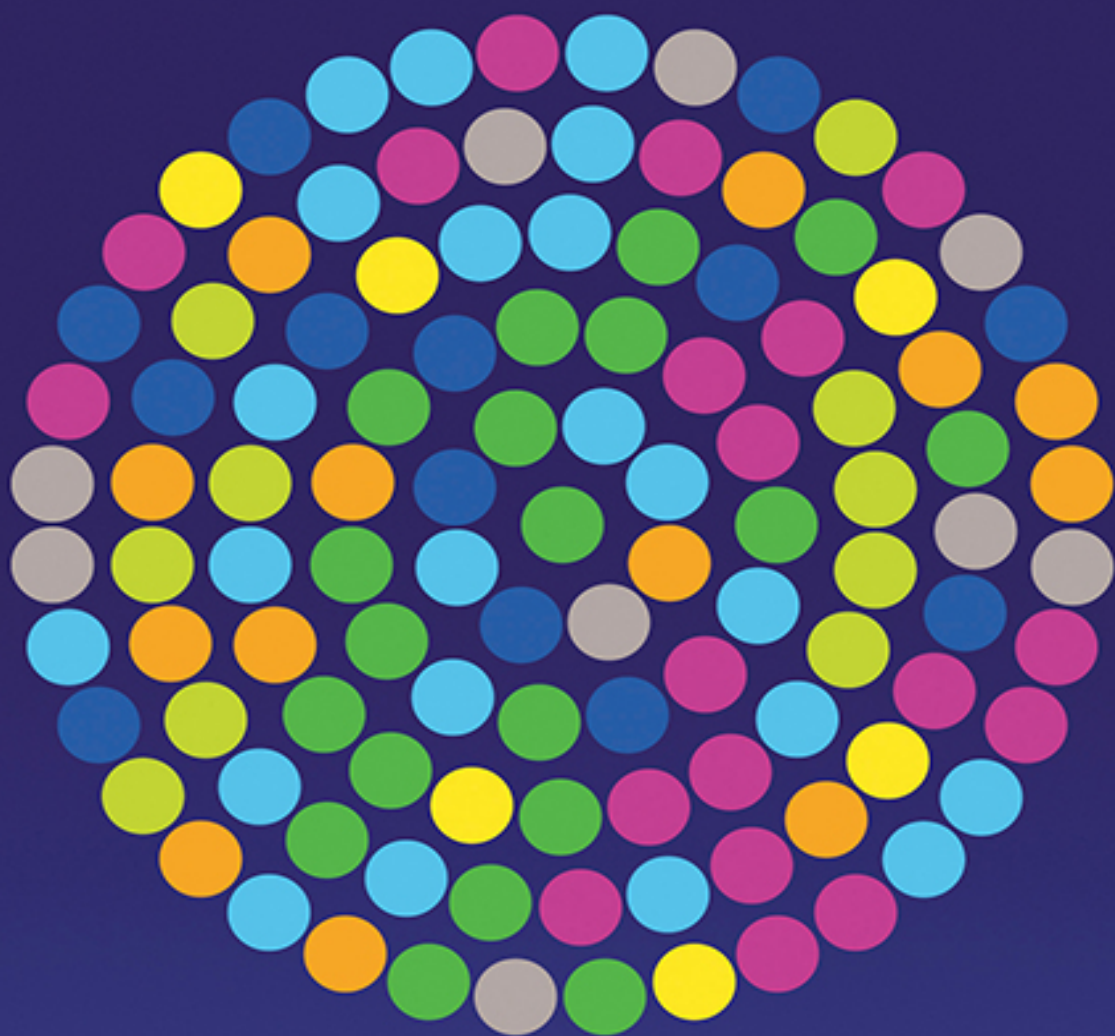


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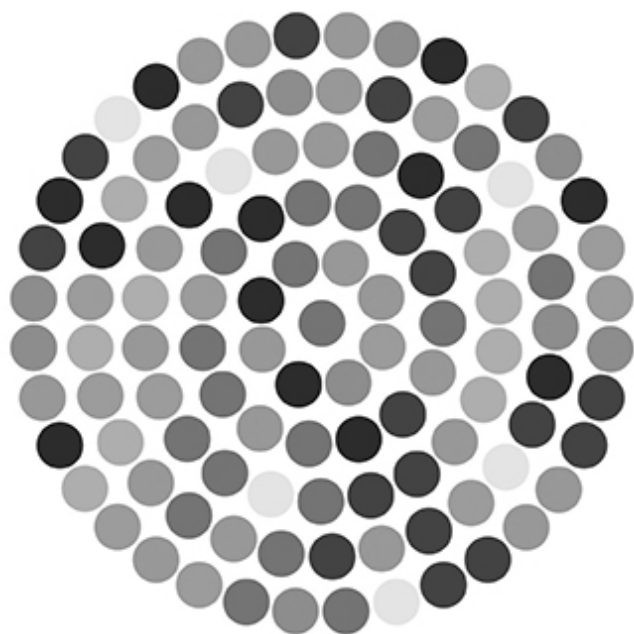
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

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EDUCATION
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This book has been written for the many millions of students with disability whose right to an inclusive education has been denied due to a lack of clarity and explicit guidance as to what inclusion is and what educators can do to achieve it. Each chapter provides the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for educators to realise their students' human right to an inclusive education. The book is a clarion call, an intellectual challenge to all those who claim to practise inclusive education, as well as those who do not. Inclusive education has been defined; its meaning is not up for debate. The objective now is to implement it.

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GLOSSARY

Ability grouping	Targeting pedagogy towards small groups of students based on their skills or achievement.
Ableist	Making judgements and decisions that affect others based on able-bodied experience and being critical without reflection.
Access	The opportunity to engage in experiences and activities, pedagogical practices, the curriculum and assessment activities unimpeded by barriers.
Accommodations	The term used in some countries to describe reasonable adjustments. In Australia, the preferred term is adjustments.
Adaptations	The term used in some countries to describe reasonable adjustments. In Australia, the preferred term is adjustments.
Adjustments	A process or action that takes place to remove or minimise barriers to accessing the curriculum, teachers' pedagogical practices or assessment, for a student with a disability.
Alteration/augmentation	Where curriculum is changed and other material is added—for example, providing orientation and mobility lessons for students with vision impairment, or teaching a

	<p>student who is nonspeaking how to use a communication device.</p>
Backward mapping	<p>The identification of desired results, or achievement standards, and using these to determine what acceptable evidence of success looks like contextually. Teachers then use this information to map out learning experiences and instruction that supports and scaffolds students towards successful achievement.</p>
Barriers	<p>A concept describing the result of the interaction between a person with an impairment and social, political and environmental impediments affecting their access and participation. Barriers can result in a student with a disability not being able to participate on the same basis as a student who does not have a disability.</p>
Categorical resource allocation method	<p>The use of disability categories to determine eligibility for individually targeted special-education funding.</p>
Complex learning profiles	<p>Students with complex learning profiles include students described as having a combination of impairments affecting behaviour, cognition, communication, emotional regulation, mobility and/or sensory processing. Students in this group can also include those who have experienced Childhood Complex Trauma arising from abuse, neglect and exclusion from education. Significant barriers may exist for students with complex learning profiles. Teachers work in collaboration with the student, the student's family and other professionals to make adjustments and regularly review their impact. Students with complex learning profiles often require substantial and/or extensive adjustments to the learning environment, the curriculum, pedagogical practices and assessment</p>

processes to enable them to participate in meaningful, age-appropriate learning experiences alongside their same-age peers in inclusive classrooms.

Differentiation	Proactively planning varied approaches to what and how students learn in order to be inclusive of student diversity. Differentiation can take place in content, process, product, affect and the environment.
Direct discrimination	Occurs when a school decides to treat a student with a disability differently to other students on the basis of their disability.
Equality	The equal and exact division of resources.
Equity	The division of resources based on a commitment to impartiality, fairness and social justice. Equality is not the same thing as equity.
Exclusion	The process of directly or indirectly denying or preventing students with disability from obtaining access to education.
Extensive adjustments	The third level of adjustments according to the NCCD, which are <i>always ongoing</i> to overcome barriers experienced by students. These could include highly individualised adjustments to all curriculum materials and assessments, alternative modes of communication, highly specialised assistive technology, intensive and individualised ongoing intervention, or personal-care assistance.
Inclusive education	A fundamental human right and process of systemic reform in education that aims to eliminate barriers, enabling all students to participate in learning experiences and the learning environment with their same-aged peers. Inclusive education differs from exclusion, segregation and integration.
Indirect	Occurs when a school unintentionally puts in place a

discrimination	policy or practice that they believe to be fair, but which has a detrimental impact on a student with a disability.
Integration	A process of placing students with disability in existing educational institutions, where the student is expected to adapt and change in order to participate in learning experiences and the learning environment. Integration is not compatible with inclusion.
Mainstream	Educational structures that are built for most (but not all) students. Mainstream is not a synonym for or compatible with inclusive education.
Medical model of disability	A perspective on disability that regards people with disability as ‘objects’ and their characteristics as ‘deficits’ to be remedied or cured.
Modifications	Where a student may access learning <i>in a different way</i> to their peers—for example, where they are assessed against different outcomes to their peers.
National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)	A federally funded scheme for people with permanent and significant disability under the age of 65 in Australia. The aim is to increase participation in activities of the person’s choosing, through support and services. The NDIS does not replicate education-funded support but can fund self-care at school, specialised transport to school and equipment (e.g. wheelchairs and communication devices).
Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)	An annual data-collection process where teachers indicate the type and level of adjustment that is provided for students with disability. Additional funding is provided to schools when students receive supplementary, substantial or extensive adjustments.
On the same	When the opportunities and choices that are

basis	available to the student with a disability are comparable to those available to a student who does not have a disability.
Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP)	The base level of teaching practice according to the NCCD, incorporating the provision of <i>occasional</i> support within the context of the types of practices that are routinely used by teachers within the resources of the classroom. It represents the baseline level of high-quality, intentional teaching that is provided to all students.
Readiness	A student's current knowledge, understanding and skills, and the knowledge and skills yet to be learned and understood. Readiness is about what students already bring to a new learning experience.
Reasonable adjustments	Adjustments to lessons, subjects, courses and extracurricular activities that enable students with disability to participate in education and that balance the interests of all parties (including the student and the school community).
Restraint	See restrictive practice.
Restrictive practice	Includes any practice used to respond to the behaviour of a student that: (1) contains or secludes the student in a room or area from which exit is prevented or impeded; (2) uses chemical, mechanical or physical restraint on the student; or (3) restricts student access.
Segregation	Education provided in a separate environment. Segregated settings mean that students with disability are not educated with their same-age peers. This is not inclusive education.
Social model of disability	Perspective on disability that sees disability as being imposed by society's failure to accommodate persons with impairments. It positions disability as a societal failure, rather than an attribute or condition located within an individual.

Special education	A categorical approach to educating students in a way that attempts to remediate their individual differences, often through withdrawal intervention or segregation. This is not inclusive education.
Special provisions	The term used in Queensland, Australia, to describe the provision of reasonable adjustments to conditions of assessment, particularly in the secondary-school years.
Substantial adjustments	The second level of adjustments according to the NCCD, which includes supports that are offered <i>more frequently at most times</i> to overcome significant barriers experienced regularly by students. These might include alternative formats for many tasks, regular support by specialists, or regular assistance with personal care, social interaction, communication or behaviour.
Supplementary adjustments	The first level of adjustments according to the NCCD, supports that are needed at <i>specific and intermittent times</i> to overcome barriers that students sometimes experience. For example, there may be a need for modifications to the built environment to be used, intermittent support provided by specialists (e.g. occasional speech pathology advice), assistive technology used for some tasks, or intermittent targeted support for students' learning (such as structured task analysis), behavioural issues or social interactions.
Universal approaches/design principles	Approaches that facilitate accessibility, participation and inclusion with fewer individual adjustments needed, through planning and designing curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environments that are accessible for all.
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	An educational approach that understands and values diversity, and applies this understanding to facilitate accessible and equitable learning. It is

characterised by multiple means of engagement,
representation and expression.

PART I

INTRODUCTION AND FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

CHAPTER 1

Inclusive education in the 21st century

LINDA J. GRAHAM

We've been talking about 'inclusion' for a long time. The concept became internationally recognised during the 1990s, even if it was largely misunderstood. It was first articulated with material force through the Salamanca Statement in 1994, and the world responded by reframing education policies and updating practice, taking on small isolated parts of the giant puzzle that is school education, one at a time. Through processes that could only be described as incremental and unsystematic, 'inclusion' then became a smokescreen for everything it was meant to replace and instead of engineering a fundamental rethink of how we do school education, twentieth-century schooling continued relatively undisturbed (Graham & Slee 2008). Although many schools are more culturally and linguistically diverse than they were in the 1980s, this change really reflects social transformation as an outcome of globalisation, mass migration and multiculturalism. By and large, schools cannot escape social transformation, for their enrolments are determined by their geography. Although there are students who travel across town to private, selective or special schools, most still attend their local school and, over time, those schools have come to reflect the diversity of their local communities.

While most students still do attend their local school, enrolment statistics present an objective counterstory to the popular belief that our local schools are ‘inclusive’. Some schools serving new migrant communities in the outer-metropolitan areas of our capital cities may excel at being culturally inclusive, but those same schools do not necessarily excel at inclusive education. The two are related, but they are not one and the same. Although acceptance of and responsiveness to *all* forms of human diversity—including cultural diversity—is a central element of inclusive education, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and no one part can ever constitute the whole. That said, this book unapologetically focuses on the inclusion of students with disability, because the practices that make schools inclusive for students with disability—such as universal design and accessible pedagogies—benefit all students (see [Chapters 3](#) and [8](#)). Research also shows that segregation is harmful (Oh-Young & Filler 2015). Therefore, while city schools with very high percentages of students from a language background other than English may claim to be inclusive, this cannot be true if they segregate students with disability in special-education units or if they advise parents of those students that they would be better served in a special school.

Despite progress in places such as New Brunswick (New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2013), the segregation of students with disability has increased in countries such as England, the United States and Australia, each of which once played a role in progressing the inclusive education movement. These increases in segregation and the way segregation takes form look different across the world, but similarities can be found. Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) in England, ‘behaviour schools’ in New South Wales and Flexible Learning Options (FLOs) in Victoria, for example, all share similar DNA in that they enrol students with learning and behavioural difficulties whose social, emotional and academic needs have not been met in the primary phase of schooling. The rationale for alternative provision is that these students have failed to thrive in mainstream schools and that *they* are deficient, not the system that failed them. The new flexi-centres being developed in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory are another version of the same tired idea, which is framed as a therapeutic response to damaged and damaging young people. This benevolent framing is reinforced by uncritical researchers and other commentators who maintain—erroneously—that these settings are a form of inclusion. This Orwellian ‘Newspeak’ has progressed so far that in-school suspension

centres have been renamed ‘Inclusion Units’ in England and put forward as an inclusion strategy (Bloom 2017). Rarely do proponents of such strategies examine their longitudinal outcomes or the cracks within the general educational system that fuel their number. Note that these ‘alternative’ settings exist in addition to traditional special schools, special-education units and classes, the ranks of which are also expanding with the development of autism-specific (but still segregated) schools, units and classes. Common across these settings, whether they are run by government, private or not-for-profit providers, is their role in sustaining an inflexible twentieth-century education system that was built with only particular students in mind. This system is what we call ‘the mainstream’.

The Mainstream

If we are ever to realise inclusive education, there are some things that we must get straight. Language is one of them. Too often, the terms ‘inclusive’ and ‘mainstream’ are used interchangeably, when they are, in fact, mutually incompatible. Let us turn to recent events in Australia for a helpful example. In 2017, right-wing senator Pauline Hanson decided to juggle a metaphorical can of petrol while holding a lighted match by suggesting to the media that students with disability, and especially those on the autism spectrum, should be removed from mainstream schools (Norman & Borrello 2017). Claiming to represent the voice of teachers, Ms Hanson argued that these students would be better served in special classes and that their presence in ‘the mainstream’ negatively affects classroom teachers and other children. People with disability, advocates, parents of children with disability and inclusive education experts lined up to condemn Ms Hanson’s comments. Many cited empirical evidence that showed the superior outcomes of inclusive education for students both with and without disability (Graham & de Bruin 2017); Kate de Bruin examines this evidence in [Chapter 3](#) of this book. What they did not do, because they knew that the nuance would be lost in the throes of ill-informed public debate, was say:

Well yeah, students with disability and especially those on the autism spectrum should *not* be included in ‘the mainstream’. That’s because it was built for most, not *all*, and its very existence depends on the coexistence of a parallel special-education system into which students who do not fit a system that was never designed for

them can be directed. The truth is that ‘the mainstream’ is *not* inclusive, and it is no surprise whatsoever that students with disability (and many others) do not thrive there.

Conflating the concept of inclusive education with the concept of the mainstream creates many problems going forward. Most frustrating is the associated claim that ‘inclusion doesn’t work’, and the inside thought of many inclusive experts is:

Well no, if inclusion is interpreted to mean placing students with disability into unreconstructed ‘mainstream’ schools—schools that we know were designed with the ‘average’ student in mind—then of course it doesn’t work. But ‘it’, in this case, isn’t inclusion—‘it’ is integration. We abandoned integration in the 1990s, because we learned all the way back then that ‘it’ doesn’t work.

It is therefore critical that everyone involved with inclusive education uses precise terminology going forward. For much of the last 25 years, inclusive education stakeholders have been grappling with the problem of how to make inclusion happen, when so few key stakeholders understand what it really is. There are several aspects to this problem that have made it difficult to solve. Aspect 1 is an artefact of what Donald Rumsfeld once referred to as ‘unknown unknowns’ (Launer 2010: 628), which is an extension of Bradley’s (1997) concept of unconscious incompetence. In other words, it is easy to believe a school is inclusive when a common definition of inclusive education is lacking and impossible to make that school inclusive if a flawed definition is applied, as this will result in the belief that inclusion has already been achieved. Aspect 2 is the gradual appropriation of both the concept and language of inclusion by special education (Walton 2015). This appropriation started in the early 2000s as a response to policies that promoted inclusive education, threatening the careers and professional status of all those wedded to the paradigm it sought to replace. This appropriation has fuelled Aspect 1 by muddying the waters and confusing educators, who applied exclusionary practices in the genuine belief that they were being inclusive. Cátia Malaquias—founder of the advocacy organisation known as Starting with Julius, and co-founder of All Means All, the Australian Alliance for Inclusive Education—calls this ‘fauxclusion’. It is an apt term for the rebranding that has so far thwarted the genuine development of inclusive education.

Fauxclusion

Calling suspension centres ‘Inclusion Units’ is just one example of this rebranding in practice. We have our own examples here in Australia. For example, when observing across seven primary schools in Queensland for a longitudinal study investigating disruptive behaviour, I asked the deputy principal of School 5 why there were so many adults in one classroom, and why there seemed to be two classes in the one small room. The deputy looked at me like I was from another planet and then informed me—with an edge to her voice—that their school was an ‘inclusive school’ and that the class I had just been observing was an ‘inclusive class’. Her tone suggested that I had asked a silly question, and she began to walk away, believing it had been answered. But, of course, I was now very interested to know more (like, if this is an inclusive class, then what do the other classes look like?) and persisted with a request for clarification. Looking slightly annoyed, the deputy explained that they had closed their Special Education Program (SEP) because of the Queensland Department of Education’s new inclusion policy. This class was considered an ‘inclusive class’ because it now included the ‘SEP kids’ who were being taught by the ‘SEP teacher’. The other half of the class comprised the ‘mainstream kids’ who were being taught by the ‘mainstream teacher’. The teachers were ‘coteaching’ this new ‘inclusive class’.

This is how inclusion is being (mis)interpreted in some Australian schools. As [Figure 1.1](#) illustrates, this ‘inclusive class’ had three adults and two classes being taught in the one room. On the left are the ‘mainstream kids’ with the ‘mainstream teacher’, who is teaching them the ‘mainstream curriculum’: Year 4 geometry using coloured shapes. On the right are the ‘SEP kids’ with the ‘SEP teacher’, who has drawn a number line on a portable whiteboard. These students are also in Year 4, although most have been placed on Prep/Year 1 Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs). The following exchange occurs:

The SEP teacher asks, ‘Is 18 closer to 10 or 20?’ Most students in the group yell out, ‘20’, but some answer ‘10’. The teacher says, ‘The right answer is 20!’ But does not explain why 10 is wrong or why 20 is closer. (Field notes, Year 4, 2018)

The purpose of the lesson is to work out the missing numbers on a timeline. The problem is that the work is pitched far below the SEP

group's capability; students are clearly bored, with some fidgeting and others deliberately calling out the wrong answer.

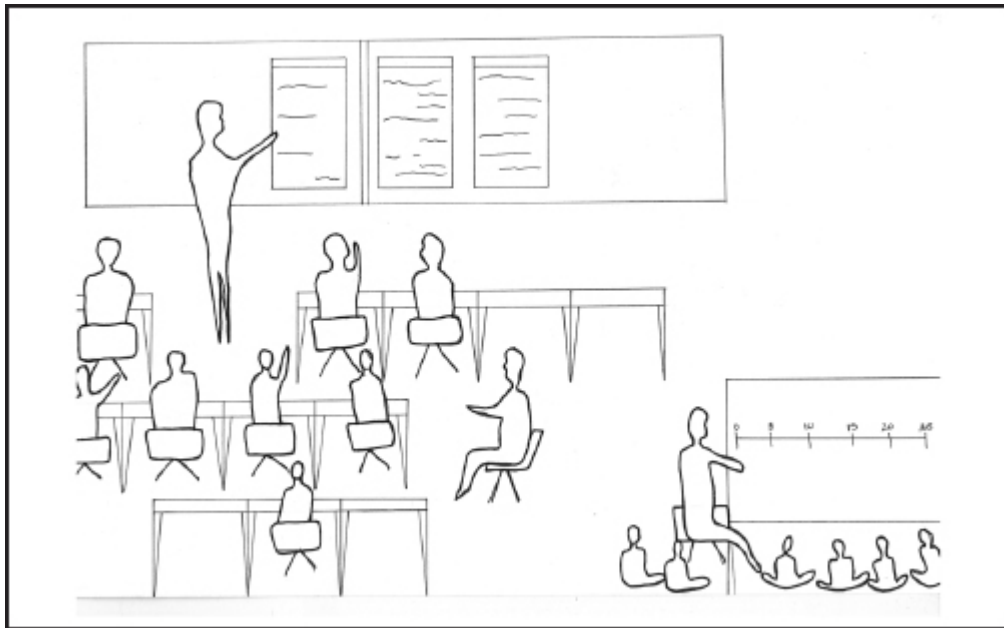


Figure 1.1. An ‘inclusive class’ in School 5 (Year 4, 2018). Artist: Olivia Tomes.

Sitting in the middle of the classroom and forming a human barrier between the two groups is the teacher aide, who remains largely motionless during the entire two-hour observational cycle, except to occasionally tell students in the mainstream group to stop fidgeting and do their work. She has her back to the SEP group. The noise is tremendous, but the students are not responsible; rather, it is a consequence of two teachers struggling to be heard over each other as they both attempt to individually instruct their own classes sandwiched next to each other in the same room.

This is not inclusion. Nor is the example of another ‘inclusive class’ that we observed in School 3. As illustrated in [Figure 1.2](#), this class featured two empty desks at the front of the room and a table with two chairs in the corridor. When we began observing, we assumed that a couple of students were absent on that day, hence the empty desks. However, about half an hour into the morning session, a teacher aide arrives with a student we will call ‘Daniel’. Daniel and the aide sit at the two desks at the front of the classroom. The teacher does not even look their way.

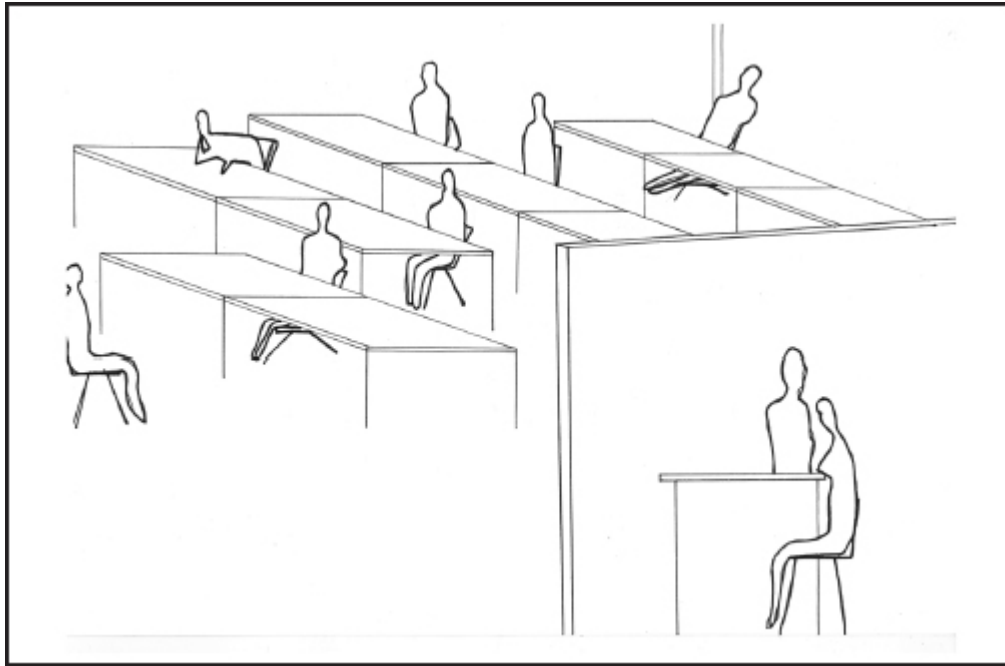


Figure 1.2. An ‘inclusive class’ in School 3 (Year 4, 2018). Artist: Olivia Tomes.

The aide hands Daniel a large scrapbook that has some single words written on the pages in coloured pencil. The words are quite large and look like the handiwork of a much younger child. Daniel begins doodling in the scrapbook while the aide stares listlessly into the distance. The classroom teacher continues with the other students, calling out instructions from his chair at the front of the room, which he rarely leaves. They are doing some form of literacy activity involving a poem that the teacher had obtained from a Russian website; it had blanked out words. The plan for the lesson was for the students to complete the poem by inserting what they thought the missing words should be. Daniel’s scrapbook doodling is unrelated, and the aide provides him with no instruction. After about twenty minutes, he and the aide move to the desk and chairs in the outside corridor. The teacher ignores their departure, just as he ignored their entrance. Daniel begins working on an iPad, and the aide sits next to him, staring into space and offering no support.

We have been following and assessing Daniel, along with the more than 240 children in the longitudinal study, since they all began school in Prep. In Year 1, Daniel received weekly speech therapy from an external agency but did not test low enough on standardised language assessment to be ‘verified’ in the Speech Language Impairment category for individual funding through Queensland’s Education Adjustment Program. Eventually, in Year 3, he was verified under the Intellectual

Impairment category and placed on a Prep ICP. For us, this is a huge concern as our data suggests that he is capable of far more. For example, while his word-level reading scores were below average in Year 1, with targeted intervention this could have been addressed and potentially lifted to average. Instead, his word-level reading scores declined so much over the next two years that they fell in the ‘very poor’ category. When we asked his Year 3 teacher what her chief concern about Daniel was, she responded:

There’s no real chief concern because I know that [Daniel] will never be with his peers academically. He’s in Grade 3, and he’s on a Prep ICP. We’ve put him on the Prep ICP so that he can experience success.

It is an indictment of our collective understanding of inclusive education that this child’s ghostly presence in the ‘mainstream’ class is being taken as evidence of inclusion.

What is Inclusion?

Academics in the field of inclusive education have been reluctant to define inclusion. It is often described as a journey, not a destination, or as a process, not a place (Runswick-Cole 2011). This language is an attempt to correct prior failed attempts at ‘mainstreaming’ and ‘integration’ (Danforth & Jones 2015), as well as capture and protect inclusion’s inherent flexibility and ongoing nature—an attempt to prevent it from being reduced to a checklist. This is because inclusive education is more than a set of practices. It is also a philosophy: a way of thinking about people, diversity, learning and teaching. Not surprisingly, this way of thinking can be hard to define. However, in the absence of a clear definition, distortions such as those described in the previous section can flourish and are difficult to correct.

In 2016, the committee responsible for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognised this problem. For a decade, inclusive education had been a human right through Article 24 of the CRPD (United Nations 2008), which provides for ‘the right of persons with disabilities to education’. Even though ratifying countries such as Australia were legally bound by the CRPD, there had been slow progress in implementing inclusive education. General Comment No. 4 (GC4) was adopted in 2016 by the CRPD Committee to make clear the

legal obligations of States parties, as well as the steps necessary to achieve realisation. GC4 is the most comprehensive and authoritative instrument explaining the human right to inclusive education (see [Chapter 4](#)). It outlines in detail what is required in order to implement inclusive education with authenticity and fidelity. Critically, GC4 not only defines inclusion. It also defines forms of provision that are antithetical to inclusion (exclusion, segregation) or that are commonly rebadged as inclusion (integration).

Inclusion is defined in GC4 as:

a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11)

The key words here are systemic reform, changes and modifications, overcome barriers, relevant age range, equitable, participatory, experience and environment, and requirements and preferences. In the absence of deep knowledge of inclusive education, however, these words may come to be misinterpreted in both policy and practice.

Systemic reform, for example, means transforming the education system—in other words, no more ‘mainstream plus special’. It demands reform of the ways in which disability-support funding is allocated (see [Chapter 6](#)). It means teaching *all* teachers to be teachers of students with disability, not just some. It means making both the learning experiences and the environments in which children are expected to learn accessible to all and not just some.

Overcome barriers is a direct reference to the social model of disability in which disability is conceptualised as an outcome of the interaction between a person with an impairment and the social, political and environmental barriers that impede their access and participation.

Equitable means fair. It does not mean the same. It refers to the principle of giving more to those who have less to equalise opportunity and redress disadvantage. Both terms are encapsulated in the concept of ‘reasonable adjustments’ (see [Chapters 4 and 5](#)).

Preferences and *participatory* refer to consultation, voice and participation in decision-making, as well as all aspects of schooling (see [Chapter 11](#)). *Requirements* is a rights-based term that replaces the word ‘needs’, which is special-education language that positions people with

disability as dependent, implying burden. It is language that is inconsistent with inclusive education (see [Chapter 4](#)).

Changes and modifications and *relevant age range* mean teaching to diversity, rather than to the middle, using proactive universal design principles to plan learning experiences, and making reasonable adjustments to ensure access to age-appropriate curriculum and assessment, working alongside same-grade peers (see [Chapters 8](#) and [9](#)).

The examples of ‘inclusive classes’ that were discussed earlier in this chapter (and depicted in [Figures 1.1](#) and [1.2](#)) are clearly at odds with this definition of inclusion. Neither Daniel nor the ‘SEP kids’ were provided with relevant age-appropriate curriculum, nor was their experience participatory. The environments into which those children were placed were not conducive to learning, and—judging from students’ lack of engagement with learning—these environments were not consistent with their requirements and preferences. Rather, these classroom examples are more appropriately described by the other definitions provided in GC4: integration, segregation and exclusion.

Integration is defined as:

a process of placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11)

Segregation is defined as:

when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11)

Exclusion is defined as:

when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11)

Most of what currently happens in Australian schools is integration, not inclusion. Schools are still largely organised as they have always been, except for minor changes to accommodate students who are required to ‘adjust’ in order to remain in that setting. When units of work are planned for a year level by a Head of Department and are then adjusted by Special Education or Learning Support teachers for individual students with a ‘verified’ disability, this is integration. When a student on the autism spectrum is ‘included’ in a busy and visually overwhelming mainstream classroom by issuing them with a pair of noise-cancelling headphones and a teacher aide to deal with the

inevitable meltdowns, this is integration. Integration is business as usual with add-ons.

However, when two groups are sandwiched into one classroom with a separate teacher for each group, as depicted in [Figure 1.1](#), this goes beyond the intended meaning of integration. This is new territory: a halfway house between integration and segregation. It cannot really be called integration, because the only attempt to integrate is through the physical co-location of the two groups. The curriculum and teaching are separate, and there is no peer interaction. Even when this ‘inclusive class’ goes to science and the same science lesson is delivered across groups, the ‘SEP kids’ are positioned at a separate desk and taught by the ‘SEP teacher’. Not surprisingly, the two groups do not mix in the playground. While this ‘inclusive class’ might not exactly fit the description of segregation above, it is further to that end of the segregation–inclusion continuum than it is to integration (see [Figure 1.3](#)). The other example of an ‘inclusive class’, depicted in [Figure 1.2](#), is also closer to segregation than integration. In this example, Daniel is a satellite orbiting the physical approximation of a class. He is not included in any way, and he is not being taught anything. This failure flows upstream. Daniel’s local high school recently created a ‘Prep/Year 1’ class in Year 7 to accommodate the vast increase in the number of students coming from local primary schools on Prep/Year 1 Individual Curriculum Plans. Not only is this not inclusion, but it also makes real inclusion much harder to achieve. And it leads to social and economic exclusion, the insidious form of exclusion that still occurs in rich, developed nations, such as the United States, United Kingdom and Australia.

The long-overdue definitions of exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion that have been written into GC4 are a potential game-changer for the implementation of inclusive education globally. But, to fully understand these definitions and to change educational practice accordingly, we need to know why these distinctions had to be made.

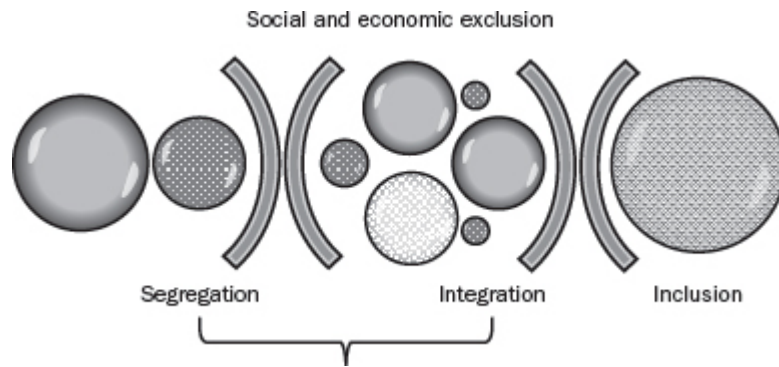


Figure 1.3. Features and outcomes of the real ‘continuum of provision’.

The History of Inclusive Education

Perhaps one of the reasons that inclusion is described as a journey is that this word also describes its history: the story of how and why inclusive education came to be. It is important for anyone involved with inclusion to understand this history, because it highlights the differences between inclusive education and everything that came before it. This, in turn, enables educators to know when educational provision is truly inclusive or whether that provision belongs more properly to a former evolutionary stage. The four definitions articulated within the CRPD GC4 effectively describe these stages. Without their place in history, there would be no need to define these stages and there would be nothing from which to distinguish inclusive education. If these stages had been consigned to history, there would not be the need to define them at all. As illustrated by [Figures 1.1](#) and [1.2](#), however, they clearly still exist.

The history of inclusive education varies across the world. Some countries are just discovering the concept for the first time. Others, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, have been engaging with its foundational concepts since the 1970s (see [Chapter 2](#)). Each country is at a different point in the evolution process and, while outstanding examples of inclusive schools can be found in many education systems around the world, few can claim to have implemented inclusive education at the system level. The various stages of implementation internationally have further muddied the waters, because some countries are still in the process of implementing mass education. Inclusive education, as defined by the CRPD, has struggled for political traction in some developing countries due to the sheer scale of the

reforms needed to modernise their education systems and because it is perceived as a white colonialist idea imposed by rich countries from the Global North (Walton 2018). For this reason, there are no clear evolutionary stages that we can confidently describe as having been completed. Rather, there are continuations of each in all systems, even in rich countries with mature education systems, such as Australia, where home schooling and part-time enrolments are increasing, especially of students on the autism spectrum (Poed et al. 2017).

That said, there are some broad historical features that are important to understand. Until the late 1800s, children with disability did not attend school. Most were institutionalised or kept at home. This is what GC4 refers to as *exclusion*, and it still occurs in many developing countries around the world. In Australia, this began to change in the 1860s with the opening of special schools by the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children. For the next 60 years, education for children with disability was considered a private concern until government special schools began opening in the early 1900s (Graham & Jahnukainen 2011). From the 1940s, governments took over from charities, establishing an increasing number of special schools and classes. At this point, increasing numbers of children who previously would have attended their local school began being directed to these new settings, especially students described as ‘maladjusted’, ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘educationally subnormal’ (McRae 1996). In other words, where special education once helped children previously excluded from schooling to receive some form of education, it began leading to a different form of exclusion. This form of exclusion is what GC4 refers to as *segregation*. And it was rampant. Questions started being asked at very high levels about who was being segregated and for what reasons. For example, in 1968 the President of the Council for Exceptional Children in the United States, Lloyd Dunn, raised concerns about the overrepresentation of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in segregated special-educational settings. Change some of the language, and he could easily be talking about the settings that I described at the beginning of this chapter:

The number of special day classes for the retarded has been increasing by leaps and bounds. The most recent 1967–68 statistics compiled by the US Office of Education now indicate that there are approximately 32,000 teachers of the retarded employed by local school systems—over one third of all special educators in the nation. In my best judgment, about 60 to 80 percent of the pupils taught by these teachers are children from low-status backgrounds—including Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans and Puerto-Rico Americans; those from non-standard English-speaking, broken, disorganized and inadequate homes and children from other non-

middle-class environments. This expensive proliferation of self-contained special schools and classes raises serious educational and civil rights issues which must be squarely faced. It is my thesis that we must stop labeling these deprived children as mentally retarded. Furthermore, we must stop segregating them by placing them into our allegedly special programs. (Dunn 1968: 5–6)

The fact that this impassioned argument was being made by the president of the premier body for special education in the United States over 50 years ago shows just how long and circuitous the journey to inclusion has been. Similar arguments were being made at the time in the United Kingdom, where research was also highlighting the overrepresentation of poor children, especially those with black or brown skin (Graham 2012). The difference between the two nations was in the ethnicity of those segregated but, while their ethnicity may have differed, their backgrounds did not. In each case, segregated students were poor white children from the working classes, the descendants of the African slave trade, and immigrants from other language and cultural backgrounds. The Australian experience has mirrored developments in the United Kingdom and United States, but always with some delay. For example, research has documented the overrepresentation of Indigenous students in segregated special-educational settings (Graham 2012; Sweller et al. 2012), but nothing has been done about it. This is despite a global movement that began some 60 years ago, a decade and a half before Lloyd Dunn made his final address as President of the Council for Exceptional Children.

What happened 60 years ago?

Several factors combined to create impetus for broad political, social and educational change, including but not limited to the birth of an international human rights legal framework that led to the CRPD (United Nations 2008) and which we discuss in [Chapter 4](#). Among this combination of factors was the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling at the height of the civil-rights movement in the United States, in which it was declared that ‘separate educational facilities are inherently unequal’ (Smith & Kozleski 2005: 272). While *Brown* was concerned with racial segregation and the inferior educational opportunities offered to African Americans, it influenced the outcome of another right to education class action, *PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* in 1971, in which it was argued that the segregation of children with intellectual disability violated the principles of *Brown* (Smith & Kozleski

2005). The successful *PARC* class action led to the passage of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* in 1975, now known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). This US federal law enshrined two important doctrines: (1) that *all* children were entitled to a free and appropriate public education, (2) in the least restrictive environment. While interpretations of the words ‘appropriate’ and ‘least restrictive’ have proved problematic over time, IDEA was a major step forward for American students with disability and their families.

The United States is a fundamentally different place to Australia or the United Kingdom, and this is one of the reasons that the history of inclusive education looks different across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The United States has different political and judicial systems, and many of the reforms that have eventually travelled across the world have come about due to legal actions by Americans with disability and/or their parents. Australia and the United Kingdom are more alike due to a shared history and their adoption of the Westminster system of government. In Australia, changes occur through political pressure and alterations to government legislation and policy, but also because Australia tends to ‘policy borrow’ from the United Kingdom and the United States (Graham & Jahnukainen 2011). A pattern of the United States leading and the United Kingdom and Australia following is evident in [Table 1.1](#) below; however, it would be a mistake to think that the United States has always led well or that it is leading now. For example, the United States is a signatory to the CRPD (United Nations 2008), but it has not ratified it and is therefore not legally bound by it. Indeed, under President Donald Trump, the United States appears to be trying to dismantle the multilateral peace-keeping arrangements that have so far prevented the occurrence of a third world war, in the belief that globalism and an unelected bureaucracy in the form of the United Nations and World Trade Organization impinge on American sovereignty (Emerson 2019). It is worrying that the United States was more progressive and inclusive in the 1970s than it is now.

Within three years of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* in 1975—the forerunner to IDEA—the Warnock Report was tabled. It was the result of a parliamentary inquiry led by Baroness Warnock in the United Kingdom (see [Table 1.1](#)). Among other things, the report recommended that initial teacher-education programs include at least one mandatory unit to prepare *all* classroom teachers to teach students with disability. The Warnock Report was hugely influential both in the United Kingdom and Australia, but it was the International Year of Disabled

Persons in 1981 that had the most effect in Australia (Forlin 2006), contributing:

to a national policy consensus that every child should be able to attend their neighbourhood school where possible and in the best interests of the child. Enrolment statistics indicate the number of students enrolled in government special schools across Australia dropped by 37 per cent from 23,350 in 1982 to 14,768 in 1992. (Graham & Jahnukainen 2011: 266)

This was an important achievement but, returning to the definitions that have been at the heart of this chapter, transferring students from segregated to mainstream settings does not equal inclusion. And we have been caught in this liminal space ever since. Despite the development of national anti-discrimination legislation in the form of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE; Cth)—see [Chapter 5](#)—the necessary systemic reform required to shift from integration to inclusion that is articulated in GC4 (United Nations 2016) has not occurred. Again, while there are schools doing well with individual students, and some outstanding examples of inclusion can be found, those examples tend to be isolated and are not yet the norm. Reports from a series of parliamentary inquiries and departmental reviews conducted at state and federal level since 2000 make for depressing reading (see [Table 1.2](#)), not simply because they contain anguished reports of the experiences of real children whose right to education has been denied, but because these documented failures have not been addressed in almost two decades.

Table 1.1: Key historical events in the journey towards inclusive education

Year	Title	Origin
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights	United Nations
1954	<i>Brown v. Board of Education</i>	United States
1959	Declaration of the Rights of the Child	United Nations
1965	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	United Nations

Year	Title	Origin
1971	Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons	United Nations
1971	<i>PARC v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania</i>	United States
1973	The Karmel Report 'Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission'	Australia
1975	<i>Education for All Handicapped Children Act</i>	United States
1975	Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons	United Nations
1978	The Warnock Report 'Special Educational Needs: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People'	United Kingdom
1981	International Year of Disabled Persons	International
1989	Convention on the Rights of the Child	United Nations
1990	<i>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</i>	United States
1990	World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (Jomtien, Thailand)	UNESCO
1992	<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i>	Australia
1994	Salamanca Statement & Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (Salamanca, Spain)	UNESCO
2005	Disability Standards for Education	Australia

Year	Title	Origin
2006	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	United Nations
2012	Goal 4: Quality Education, #Envision2030: Sustainable Development Goals	United Nations
2016	General Comment No. 4 on Article 24: Right to Inclusive Education	United Nations
2018	Queensland Department of Education Inclusive Education Policy Statement	Queensland, Australia

Lobby groups on opposing sides—mainstream and special—argue that this lack of change is because inclusion is ‘too hard’. But the truth is that old practices die hard. The lack of a clear definition, together with an unwillingness to let go of the status and power inferred by ‘specialist’ knowledge, has induced a stalemate, the victims of which are students with disability, their parents and the dedicated teachers and principals who ‘go it alone’ and put the rights of their students first. Those teachers and principals need opportunities to acquire deep knowledge through quality teacher education and professional development. They need the backing of a critical mass. They need colleagues who pull their own weight, and they need unions that defend them by ensuring that *all* their members shoulder the load equally. They need employers that will support them as they make changes, because people are frightened by change and some complain loudly. They need networks from which they can source advice and quality resources that can show them how it can be done. They need educated parents who understand that every child has a right to an inclusive education and that their child’s right does not trump the rights of students with disability to be included. These are what might be called the ‘conditions of possibility’ (Foucault 1972) for inclusion, and some of these conditions are now emerging in Australia. Why now? Because the recipients of a substandard level of education that leads to social and economic exclusion have had enough, and they are beginning to contact the media when education providers breach legislation that entitles them to reasonable adjustments. Because governments can only conduct reviews and inquiries that all report the same thing for so long. Because Australia is legally bound by the CRPD, and the committee has made it very clear through GC4 what inclusive

education is and what must be done to achieve it. And because we all need to join the 21st century.

Table 1.2: Relevant government reviews and inquiries since 2000

Year	Review/Inquiry	Level of government
2002	Australian Government Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities (Commonwealth of Australia 2002)	Federal
2006	NSW Auditor-General’s Report Performance Audit: Educating Primary School Students with Disabilities (Audit Office of New South Wales 2006)	State
2010	NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into the Provision of Education to Students with a Disability or Special Needs (General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2 2010).	State
2012	Review of Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2012)	Federal
	Review of the Experiences of Students with Disabilities in Victorian Schools (Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission 2012)	State
2015	Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Urbis 2015)	Federal
	ACT Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour (Shaddock et al. 2015)	State

Year	Review/Inquiry	Level of government
2016	Access to Real Learning: Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support (Commonwealth of Australia 2016)	Federal
	Victorian Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities (Victoria Department of Education and Training 2016)	State
	NSW Audit Office Supporting Students with Disability in NSW Public Schools (Audit Office of New South Wales 2016)	State
2017	Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools (Deloitte Access Economics 2017)	State
	Report of the Select Committee on Access to the South Australian Education System for Students with a Disability (Parliament of South Australia 2017)	State
	NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Education of Students with a Disability or Special Needs in New South Wales (Portfolio Committee No. 3 2017)	State

There are green shoots emerging. Educators are beginning to support each other through collaborative networks on social media, providing advice and resources, as well as affirmation and solidarity. The School Inclusion Network for Educators (SINE) on Facebook is one such network. The Australian government has invested in the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), which allocates disability loadings based on the adjustments that teachers make to enable students with disability to access and participate in education (see [Chapter 6](#)), as per the Disability Standards

for Education 2005. And the Queensland government is leading reform efforts through its Inclusive Education Policy Statement, which draws on the CRPD to define inclusive education. Other Queensland initiatives that support its Inclusive Education Policy include annual scholarships for twelve school principals to undertake a Master of Education (Inclusive Education) at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and there is a dedicated annual Inclusive Education Showcase Award—sponsored by QUT’s Faculty of Education—that also draws on the CRPD definition of inclusion. At the time of writing this chapter, other Australian education systems are considering the Queensland approach, but the success of any policy relies on those charged with the responsibility of enacting it. Without deep knowledge of inclusive education, its guiding philosophy, fundamental concepts, frameworks and practices, the teachers and school leaders upon whom reform ultimately depends cannot make inclusion a reality. This book has been written to help *all* educators develop that deep knowledge. Welcome to the good fight, #Inclusionistas!

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CHAPTER 2

Fundamental concepts of inclusive education

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The first chapter of this book defined inclusive education with reference to General Comment No. 4 (GC4; United Nations 2016), a document that articulates the human right to inclusive education provided through Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008). Since the early 1990s, and before being defined in GC4, the meaning of inclusion was enacted through an assumed shared understanding of the philosophies, principles and concepts underpinning inclusive education. However, this assumption left meaning vulnerable to misinterpretation and misappropriation, resulting in an untenable situation that GC4 was designed to address. As noted in [Chapter 1](#), there is still some danger that the GC4 definition will be similarly misunderstood because some of the words and phrases it uses carry implicit meaning and are informed by concepts far more significant than is implied by the words themselves. The first chapter of this book therefore unpacks the GC4 definition and

briefly explains those words and phrases imbued with implicit meaning. Among those is the phrase ‘overcome barriers’ (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11). This phrase references the social model of disability; however, knowledge of the social model is necessary to comprehend the subtext of the phrase being used. Knowledge of the social model is also necessary to correctly identify and address those barriers. If the social model is not well understood, then the process of identifying and dismantling barriers—a practice that is at the foundation of inclusive education—becomes corrupted and ultimately fails. Understanding the fundamental concepts underpinning inclusive practice is therefore critical for anyone involved with education, whether they be principals, teachers or other support staff in early-childhood education through to tertiary education, for the human right to an inclusive education applies to *all* students.

What Must Educators Know and be Able to Do for Effective Inclusive Education?

For inclusive education to succeed, educators need a deep understanding of both curriculum content *and* learner diversity. This knowledge enables them to anticipate and eliminate (e.g. ‘overcome’) barriers in:

- what they teach (curriculum);
- the ways they teach it (pedagogy); and
- how learning is to be demonstrated (assessment).

Educators cannot achieve this if they believe that the barriers reside within the student and that *the student* must overcome those barriers. And educators will not do it if they believe that equity means that everyone should be taught the same way, get the same resources or do the same assessment. And, even if barriers are addressed, students are still not genuinely included if they are stigmatised by educators’ use of deficit language or if students are singled out for ‘special’ treatment. This is where the fundamental concepts of inclusive education come in and why they are so important. Deep understanding of these concepts provides teachers with the deep knowledge they need to enact inclusive practices with sensitivity, authenticity and fidelity. The five most important concepts underpinning inclusive education are:

1. ableism;
2. the social model of disability;
3. the concept of equity;
4. the dilemma of difference; and
5. inclusive language.

This chapter explains each of the five, beginning with ableism.

Ableism

Ableism is a term used to describe a way of thinking produced through able-bodied experience. If left unexamined and unchallenged, able-bodied experience leads to narrow or ableist perceptions that can result in unlawful indirect discrimination (see [Chapter 5](#)). In other words, ableism has real-world effects; yet it is subtle, which means that its existence often goes unnoticed until too late. For example, architects who design public buildings without ramps or with doorways that are too narrow to enable wheelchair access are inadvertently engaging in ableist thinking. The recent experiences of Australian Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John provide a real-life example of the effects of ableism.

In 2017, Jordon Steele-John made history by becoming Australia's youngest ever senator (Worthington 2018). He was also the parliament's first wheelchair user. The challenges he experienced during his first year at Parliament House in Canberra are striking examples of the effects of ableism. Although described in the media as 'having the loneliest seat in the Senate' (Worthington 2018: n.p.), because the floor of the Senate was only accessible by stairs, this was not the only barrier facing the new senator. Until the routes between his office and the Senate chamber were widened, Senator Steele-John was injured daily when his knuckles would scrape against the doorframes. This was not the only problem. Although his office was on the ground floor, it was the furthest from the Senate chamber and the closest toilets were not accessible.

Parliament House opened just over 30 years ago in 1988, and its architect clearly never imagined that anyone with a mobility impairment might work there. Ableism has far-reaching impacts that go well beyond the design of public buildings and spaces, for it impacts beliefs about people with disability and limits what others think is possible for them to achieve. Senator Jordon Steele-John's daily encounter with structural barriers arising from the ableist thinking underpinning twentieth-century architecture highlights the importance of different *models of disability*, as

these models approach the concept of barriers in better and worse ways. One of these models underpins inclusive education, as it provides the necessary conceptual understanding for educators to enact inclusive practices. Knowing the difference between it and other models is essential for educators to avoid ableism.

Models of disability

Over time, four models of disability have been discussed in the disability-studies literature, and these have formed the basis of political activism, legislation and policy at different points in history. These four models of disability are: the medical model, the social model, the biopsychosocial model and the human-rights model. In the following subsections, we discuss the affordances and limitations of each of these four models, as well as their implications for inclusive practice. We then explain why the social model of disability is fundamental to inclusive education, despite its limitations.

The medical model

The medical model of disability arose from the biomedical sciences and views impairments as the source of disability. These impairments are perceived as ‘deviations’ from the ‘norm’ that require remediation through intervention or medical treatment (Berghs et al. 2016). This view affects the perceived locus of change or site of intervention. The medical model privileges medical intervention and focuses on adapting the person to suit an environment modelled on able-bodied experience, while the environment itself is viewed as natural. People with disability also refer to this as the ‘individual model’ (Oliver 2013), and they have criticised it for ignoring the richness of human diversity and for pathologising difference. The medical model perpetuates ableism, because it neglects the social structures and environmental factors that can result in barriers to access and participation for people with disability (Oliver 2013; Terzi 2005).

Criticising the medical model is not the same as criticising medicine or medical intervention. For example, assistive technologies such as hearing aids, glasses, targeted language interventions and, of course, wheelchairs are all important contributions that can make the lives of people with impairments easier. The problem with the medical model—

as a way of conceptualising disability—is that it directs focus purely to the limitations of the individual and ignores the environment in which that individual is forced to live. Let us return to our earlier example detailing Senator Jordon Steele-John’s recent experiences in Parliament House. If viewed through the lens of the medical model, a mobility impairment may be the only ‘problem’ perceived. A solution to this problem might be fashioning some form of brace to enable the senator to walk from place to place, or taking the senator out of parliament for a daily physical-therapy session in the hope that this might improve his mobility and prevent the doorways from having to be widened. Such a solution would be an example of the medical model in practice, because ableist thinking only highlights one aspect of the problem: the individual and what they can and cannot do within an environment that was never designed with them in mind.

Just as Parliament House was designed by able-bodied architects who never envisaged the need for wheelchair accessibility, school learning environments are largely designed and run by able-bodied educators who generally liked school and did well at it. If the medical model predominates in learning environments, educators are only encouraged to think about how a student’s impairment is limiting their access, participation and learning, not how the education system’s own design and methods of delivery might be disabling them. We see this thinking in pedagogical practices that align with the medical model of disability, such as when ‘special’ or remedial education is provided in segregated settings. This perpetuates the assumption that ‘the problem’ is the child and not the quality or accessibility of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment or school/classroom environments. The mode of thinking perpetuated by the medical model is outdated and inconsistent with inclusive education, which instead endorses the social model of disability, even though the social model also has limitations.

The social model

The social model of disability arose from critique of the medical model and through the activism and scholarship of authors such as Professor Michael (Mike) Oliver (1945–2019). The social model distinguishes disability from impairment. According to the social model, impairment is the individual characteristic, such as paraplegia, whereas disability is the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by societal barriers to the

participation of people with impairments (Oliver 2013). In this way, disability is considered ‘socially constructed’. It arises from the interaction between a person with impairment(s) and the barriers that prevent them from going about their lives. In educational terms, barriers might arise from teachers’ attitudes to and knowledge about teaching students with disability, which may influence the ways in which lessons are designed and taught. Other barriers extend from the ways that schooling is organised and timetabled through to the location and design of classrooms.

According to the social model, it is the barriers that are responsible for disablement, not the impairment itself. Taking our earlier example of Parliament House, Senator Jordon Steele-John has an impairment that affects his mobility, for which he uses a wheelchair. He is not ‘disabled’ until he meets a set of stairs or a narrow doorway. An intangible (but no less real) barrier is created by latent assumptions about the (im)possibility of participation in political life by people with disability. These assumptions result in a tangible barrier: the design of a public building that is inaccessible to wheelchair users and which ‘disables’ people with a mobility impairment. The value of the social model is that it focuses attention on identifying and eliminating the barriers to access and participation, as opposed to focusing only on individual remediation. In the United Kingdom, where the social model of disability first gained political traction, the term ‘disabled person’ is used to illustrate that disablement is something *done to* a person, not something that is within them. Note that this language is not used in Australia, where person-first language is more common (e.g. people with disability). We explain more about inclusive language later in this chapter.

The social model has had far-reaching impact for people with disability. As noted earlier with reference to the phrase ‘overcome barriers’ in GC4 (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11), the social model constitutes the philosophical basis of the CRPD (United Nations 2008), the first legally binding instrument articulating the human right to inclusive education (see [Chapter 4](#)). Well before the CRPD, however, enactment of the social model benefited everyone, not just those with disability. For example, in 1945 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in the United States, the first ‘kerb cuts’ or what Australians might call ‘dips’ in street kerbs were installed. The existing city streets were inaccessible to hundreds of World War II veterans who used mobility aids, such as wheelchairs or crutches, so the City Commission modified the existing street kerbs to enable these veterans to safely access the city’s shops and

services (Brown 1999). The success of the newly installed kerb cuts was immediate. Access to the city for people with disability improved access for *all* members of the community, including the elderly, small children and mothers pushing prams. The existence of kerb cuts (also known as kerb ramps) is something that is easily taken for granted in modern society but represents an early example of the social model's impact. This groundbreaking initiative has since been followed by the universal application of assistive technologies (e.g. visual, auditory and sensory walk/stop alerts) at traffic lights, footpaths and public doorways, and closed captioning on YouTube videos and television. Consider how often you rely on the little green symbol and/or the buzzer at the traffic lights, or when you might 'read' the news on a television while waiting at a doctor's surgery or in an airport terminal. Think of how much easier it is to open doors that have levers, rather than knobs that must be twisted, when you are carrying groceries or a small child. These are just some of the contributions that the social model has made to all our lives.

Despite the positive impact of the social model of disability, it has not been without criticism. For example, disability-studies scholar Professor Tom Shakespeare has pointed to several limitations (Shakespeare 2006). Shakespeare's main criticism is that the social model denies the reality of impairment. He argues that people with disability often live with limited functioning, fatigue and discomfort and sometimes pain. Shakespeare and other critics maintain that the social model risks denying the impact of impairment, with the possible outcome that people with disability are not provided with the support or adjustments that they need or want. Some authors have also argued that disabilities impacting cognition and language are not well described within the social model, which is said to 'privilege' physical impairment as a result (Shakespeare 2006; Terzi 2005).

The biopsychosocial model

The biopsychosocial model of disability attempts to integrate the medical and social models of disability. First discussed in the literature by Dr George L. Engel (1977), the biopsychosocial model considers biological factors (such as genetic predisposition), psychological factors (such as personality) and social factors (such as cultural and familial background). Engel's early description of the biopsychosocial model was not clearly defined (Shakespeare et al. 2017). However, the concept of

disability as the result of interaction between health conditions (such as disorders, disease or injury) and environmental and personal factors has since been extended and internationally accepted through the World Health Organization's framework for health and disability: the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF; World Health Organization 2001). The primary function of the ICF is to standardise terminology, data collection and assessment, particularly for eligibility for disability and health-support funding. For example, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Australia is informed by the ICF. The biopsychosocial model is used more frequently in the fields of psychology, allied health and modern medicine, and has not been broadly adopted in education. It is important to note that the language used within the biopsychosocial model is heavily influenced by the medical model. The biopsychosocial model has been promoted in education (Cooper 2008); however, the model has not matured enough to be useful in inclusive education, mainly because it focuses too much on individual impairment and not enough on the structural barriers that can be adjusted.

The human-rights model

The human-rights model of disability is a relatively new development described as a tool for implementing the CRPD (Degener 2017). Central to the human-rights model are human dignity and the centrality of the person with disability in decision-making. As Quinn and Degener (2002: 14) write:

Human dignity is the anchor norm of human rights. Each individual is deemed to be of inestimable value and nobody is insignificant. People are to be valued not just because they are economically or otherwise useful but because of their inherent self-worth . . . The human rights model focuses on the inherent dignity of the human being and subsequently, but only if necessary, on the person's medical characteristics. It places the individual centre stage in all decisions affecting him/her and, most importantly, locates the main 'problem' outside the person and in society.

The human-rights model opposes the belief that impairment can hinder human-rights capacity. Within this model, impairment is valued as part of human diversity and disability-identity politics is explicitly acknowledged. For example, within the human-rights model, the unique contribution of Deaf culture is acknowledged and celebrated as part of the richness of human diversity. Of most significance is the centrality of

social justice inherent in the human-rights model (Degener 2017). The human-rights model is an important conceptual framework that can help educators and education systems to realise the human right to an inclusive education (United Nations 2016); however, it requires further development to be of practical value in education.

Which model is most useful in educational terms?

The four models that have been presented each have their merits and limitations. Viewing disability through the medical model risks stigmatisation and segregation, which are inconsistent with inclusive education. However, an extreme adoption of the social model may make it difficult to evaluate the impact of impairment and disability on individuals (Terzi 2005). While the biopsychosocial model attempts to harvest the merits of both the medical and social models, its main function is to classify health and disability, which does not contribute to the everyday work of teachers. Similarly, the human-rights model has an important function in the implementation of the CRPD, but it does not offer practical applications to teachers for the design of inclusive teaching and assessment practices.

The social model of disability offers a framework with practical applications for the development of inclusive schools. Educators can use the social model as a framework to consider the barriers:

- faced by students as a result of the environment (e.g. noisy, cluttered and visually busy classrooms; narrow corridors and doorways; stairs);
- restricting students' access to the curriculum (e.g. when assistive technologies are not used or when students cannot navigate e-books);
- existing within teachers' pedagogical practices (e.g. when teachers talk too fast, use complex sentences, and deliver multipart instructions); and
- limiting a student's ability to demonstrate learning through assessment (e.g. when students are required to demonstrate learning through restrictive modalities, such as oral presentations).

These are all barriers that can be examined and adjusted by educators and school leaders if they understand and apply the social model to reflect on practice. To achieve this, educators must move from thinking about how a student's impairment limits their access and participation

(the medical-model perspective) to instead consider the barriers that surround the student (the social-model perspective). Once identified, these barriers can be removed. Ideally, this occurs proactively in the planning and design phase through the use of inclusive practices informed by universal design principles (see [Chapter 8](#)), although some students will require further adjustments to curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, as modelled in [Chapter 9](#). The social model provides a clear conceptual model to assist teachers in the process of identifying barriers and designing/implementing reasonable adjustments for students with disability.

Equity vs equality

Within a human-rights framework, education is a right in itself that, at the same time, provides opportunities to access other rights (for example, the right to work and be employed). Access to and participation in education are essential for independence in adult life; however, not all educational settings offer the sufficient conditions to realise these entitlements and offer the full benefits of the right to education. For this reason, and as outlined in the CRPD (United Nations 2008), education must be inclusive. The following discussion of equity is based on this premise, as it is important when we discuss issues of justice and fairness to articulate clearly the purpose of education for which we strive as a society. In educational settings (such as schools), teachers, parents and students engage with what is ‘fair’ and appropriate to give everyone ‘his or her due’; these are places where conceptions of justice and fairness are negotiated and acted upon. Which principles should drive these decisions, especially when resources are scarce, and the potential losses or gains are high? The underlining principle of distribution justice that goes back more than 2000 years to Greek philosopher Aristotle is to ‘treat equals equally and unequals unequally’ (Graham 2007: 535). Burbules and colleagues (1982) argue that the first part—*to treat equals equally*—refers to an equality principle, and the second part—*to treat unequals unequally*—refers to a fairness principle. These two principles are complementary, and their relevance is always contextual. Further, it means that both equality *and* equity are needed to achieve the fair distribution of resources. However, the distinction between the two is not always clear, and there is much confusion as to how equality and equity are understood and used.

Understanding equality

Equality is based on an egalitarian understanding of the commonalities among human beings. As a human-rights principle, equality affirms that all people are born free and equal, and that they should not be discriminated against because of their personal characteristics. A narrow conception of equality, called universal sameness (Arnardottir 2009) or *formal equality*, assumes that treating everybody the same achieves equality, but this approach focuses on equality in inputs and not outcomes. Legislation and policy from the 1950s to the 1970s drew on the idea of formal equality when, for example, access to higher education expanded but without any provisions to ensure equal participation. As Professor Michael Oliver describes in a YouTube video, ‘Kicking Down the Doors: From Borstal Boy to University Professor’ (University of Kent 2018), students with disability had to navigate inaccessible buildings and exam conditions, and prove themselves on ‘merit’. The use of assistive technology of any kind during exams was considered an ‘unfair advantage’, a perception that still exists today (Osborne 2019). The justification of such an approach to equality has been reinforced by internalised ableism and the inability to perceive the commonalities of different technological tools used to record information, regardless of whether these are a pencil or pen, a typewriter, a computer, speech-to-text software or a braille writer. As noted earlier in our discussion of both ableism and the medical model, the practices of and assistive technologies used by people without disability were perceived as the norm, and anything else was seen as a deviation. Within an equality framework that merely provides the ‘opportunity’ to participate, some individuals ‘excel’—but the comparative effort to overcome barriers is an unjustifiable and additional burden that causes many more to fail.

Burbules and colleagues (1982) use the helpful metaphor of a race to illustrate this problem. Consider the following scenario. A group of runners competing in a timed race up a notoriously steep hill is split into two smaller groups. Each of these groups is running the same timed race and up the same mountain, but each group’s route is different. Due to concerns about route congestion, one group is allocated the tarred road up the mountain. The other group must navigate the natural topography, as well as ancient stiles that were built to divide crop shares. The first person to make it over the threshold is the winner. Now, most people would agree that this is not fair. Nor is it equal. So, let us torture this metaphor a little further. What if the original group was not split, and all

runners got the opportunity to run the tarred-road route? Would this be fair? Put even more simply, does *everyone* then have an equal chance of winning? Formal equality would say yes—but what about the person with a mobility impairment? As noted by Burbules and colleagues, they have been given an opportunity to compete but have no opportunity to win. In this case, a formal-equality approach perpetuates disadvantage.

We have described the formal-equality approach as being in the past in terms of policy, but it still informs educators' beliefs and behaviours. Consider, for example, the current attitudes of many educators towards the provision of adjustments in relation to senior-school assessment. In many states in Australia, students with disability in Years 11 and 12 are routinely denied adjustments in the false belief that they must compete 'on a level playing field' with students without disability. This is no different to forcing athletes with mobility impairment to run under the same conditions as athletes without disability, as outlined in our metaphorical mountain race. In some schools, the concept of a level playing field is mistaken to mean that every student must complete the same assessment task, typically under the same conditions. When an adjustment *is* made, it is usually in the form of extra time (Cumming et al. 2013); however, extra time is of no value when the assessment itself is inaccessible (Graham et al. 2018) or when time is not the barrier.

Adjustments are measures taken to level the playing field by dismantling barriers to access and participation. The fear preventing some educators from making adjustments is that this will somehow make a high-stakes competition easier for some students, disadvantaging others (Poed 2015). However, this would only be the case if the academic integrity of the assessment were affected, if navigating inaccessibility were an assessable item, or if the accessible version was only provided to some students and not others. While there is usually no argument against the provision of assessment tasks written in braille, there is less understanding when it comes to other aspects of accessibility, such as the visual, linguistic and procedural complexity of the task description (Graham et al. 2018). Key to solving this problem is determining whether the perceived barrier is integral to the task; in other words, is students' ability to decipher a task description the objective of the assessment? Usually, it is not. Proactively designing assessment for accessibility using universal principles is one way to ensure fairness, accessibility and academic integrity, because the same clearly worded, logically presented assessment task is made available to *all*.

Achieving ‘equity’ through substantive equality

The concept of equality has thus evolved and expanded to incorporate the concept of equity. *Substantive equality* recognises the need for the removal of barriers through affirmative action. This involves policies that aim to increase the participation of specific groups through the provision of reasonable adjustments, which are changes to what is usually available in order to provide equal opportunity for participation. Substantive equality requires us to treat groups differently. A number of these changes are designed and implemented at the group level and become standards of provision, such as in the proactive assessment-design example provided earlier. And, although Parliament House does not provide a good example, architecture has led the way in design thinking; the principles of universal design are now embedded in legislation and building codes. These are now core principles that apply to any public building, regardless of who the architect imagines will use the building. For example, the accessibility of school buildings is based on building standards, regardless of whether a student, parent or member of staff with mobility restrictions will be using them at any given time.

The notion of reasonable adjustments (in the Australian Disability Standards for Education 2005 [DSE]; Cth) or reasonable accommodations (CRPD; United Nations 2008)—see [Chapter 5](#)—straddles both the concepts of equality and equity. While equality focuses mainly on groups, equity focuses on individuals and responding to their specific characteristics, demands and interests in a specific context. This can be achieved through the provision of reasonable adjustments but, in this case, they are tailored to the individual. Using our assessment example above, substantive equality is reflected in the design and provision of accessible assessment using universal design principles to *all* students. Equity would entail the provision of an assessment task written in braille—as one example of educational adjustment—to an *individual* student. Through this understanding, equity is about individual differences and how unequal treatment in specific circumstances is necessary to ensure equality of opportunity. This may have implications beyond the individual who requires the unequal treatment, and this is what concerns different stakeholders in schools in terms of ensuring ‘fairness’.

Equity: to each their ‘just desserts’

Deborah Stone (2002) uses the analogy of a chocolate cake to discuss equitable distribution. She has a delicious chocolate cake to share with one of her public-policy classes. She goes through the different challenges of distributing the cake equally: some students in the class do not like chocolate, while others are allergic to chocolate or do not have the gene that enables them to digest it. These students themselves propose that they get tiny slices of the cake (to be polite and just taste it), but that other students get bigger ones, resulting in unequal slices that are of equal value to recipients. In all of Stone’s scenarios, the essence of the cake remains the same, even in a scenario where there is only enough cake mix to bake one cupcake to share. Stone discusses the different dimensions that challenge equity: *who* is going to get the cake (recipients), *what* the actual cake is (item), and *how* the cake is going to be shared (process). In the context of education, a key issue is to identify the actual experience that matters: using the cake analogy, *why* are we having cake? Is it about tasting chocolate, familiarisation with the texture of the cake, sharing celebratory food, or to engage in the social experience of relaxed, informal conversation? Depending on which elements of this experience are essential to equally partake in it, we can then redesign the experience, provide supports to access the cake, provide additional alternatives to the cake, and—if it does not really matter—even replace the chocolate cake with other options. One question to answer is whether these changes to the experience are ‘fair’ to the ‘other’ students, if they must miss out on this delicious cake. But, if the learning experience is, for instance, to teach fractions, replacing the cake with a vegan pizza does not detract from the learning objective.

The cake analogy has been used to describe equity ever since political philosopher and economist John Rawls published his theory of justice in 1971 (Coleman 1976). His theories, and those of other political philosophers—such as Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen—have all influenced public policy, particularly taxation policy. Yet the question of how much of what should go to whom does not necessarily take other important questions or what we might call ‘downstream issues’ into account. One very important downstream issue with relevance to education is known as the ‘dilemma of difference’.

The dilemma of difference

The obligation to make reasonable adjustments for students with disability requires educators to do something different for and/or provide something additional to some students and not others. Some educators feel anxious about doing this, because they have been brought up to believe that 'fair' means an equal share; however, as we explain above, fairness or 'equity' is achieved by each student receiving what they need. Nevertheless, providing something different or additional introduces another problem, which is that people with disability may be singled out as different. This can lead to stigmatisation, and the threat of stigmatisation prevents many educators, parents and even students from pursuing adjustments. Without adjustments, however, barriers remain in place. Legal scholar Martha Minow describes this predicament as the 'dilemma of difference'. To illustrate the 'damned if you do and damned if you don't' nature of the dilemma, Minow (1990: 20; emphasis in original) asks two questions:

1. When does treating people differently emphasize their differences and stigmatize or hinder them on that basis?
2. When does treating people the same become insensitive to their difference and likely to stigmatize or hinder them on *that* basis?

To explain this dilemma in practice, Minow (1985) discusses the legal cases brought by two different groups of parents in the United States during the 1970s. One group of parents was arguing *for* separate (bilingual) education, and the other group of parents was arguing *against* separate (special) education. The first legal case was brought because the language of instruction in the United States during the 1970s was English, and this was a major barrier for immigrant students who could not understand what was being taught, negatively affecting their educational achievement and employment outcomes. Minow describes this case to present one outcome of what she calls 'the dilemma of difference', which is that treating people the same can result in discrimination and the denial of difference (readers will recognise this as a result of formal equality). To illuminate the other side of the dilemma, Minow then describes the case brought by parents of children with disability who were being provided with 'special' education in segregated settings. These parents argued that their children were being discriminated against because they *were* being treated differently, and that this different treatment resulted in stigmatisation and substandard outcomes. Translating this dilemma to educational settings today, the

conundrum remains the same: ‘doing something different for some children and not others, *still* risks stigmatising those perceived as “different”’ (Graham & Tancredi 2019: 2; emphasis added). The challenge then, for educators, is how to identify and address barriers to enable access and participation for individual students without stigmatising them in the process.

Stigmatisation is a result of society’s use of categorisation. Minow (1990) argues that when individuals are categorised as belonging to a certain group, participation in society (including education) is enabled, or restricted, by their allocated category. In the current education climate, the identification of students who require additional support—a form of diagnostic categorisation—is necessary to decide on the adjustments that should be made to ensure equitable access and participation in education (Graham & Tancredi 2019). The dilemma of difference appears in this process as well: are we emphasising, and possibly stigmatising, students’ impairments in our efforts to provide them access to education? As Minow (1985: 169) stated, ‘making difference matter re-creates difference and its associated hierarchy of status’. However, the opposite is true as well, for if we do not take students’ differences into consideration, those differences are denied and adjustments are not made, leaving barriers to access and participation in place. This represents what Norwich (2008) called the ‘identification dilemma’, where both the identification and non-identification of students with disability present a problem. But if labelling students leads to stigmatisation, why is it so commonplace?

We use labels to reach common understanding. To achieve this, educators need to use ‘certain words, terms and categories’ (Graham & Macartney 2012: 190) to convey specific meaning in relation to students’ learning profiles. Besides being a form of communication, labels are a starting point from which to design curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to enable students with disability to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. For example, in considering the dangers and affordances of diagnosis for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), Graham and Tancredi (2019) conclude that diagnostic labels provide teachers with valuable initial information to help them anticipate and prevent barriers in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for students in these two groups. Teachers can use the information to determine aspects of a task that students with ADHD or DLD might find difficult to do and then ensure access and participation by removing that aspect,

where possible. They note that working memory is an area of weakness for students in both groups, and that teachers can support students by making sure that they avoid using complex sentences and multipart instructions, and by providing visual supports as one element of Universal Design for Learning (e.g. multiple means of representation; see [Chapter 8](#)).

Although labels can provide teachers with useful information, they should not be an endpoint (Graham & Macartney 2012). As noted by Wenger (1998), words are useful when people recognise their meaning through previous engagement with those words in similar situations, but they are also ambiguous: they can be used differently in different situations to convey a different meaning and purpose. It is therefore important that the use of language in inclusive education serves the purpose it was intended to serve.

Inclusive language

Language matters. And language is particularly important in inclusive education, which is concerned with the expression and realisation of human rights, dignity and freedom from discrimination. Our language is inherited from our past, and it changes over time but seldom quickly enough to prevent residual damage. Nowhere is this more evident than in relation to disability. Many words that have been used to describe people with disability in the past have been abandoned because they have acquired pejorative meanings. While many people know that it is wrong to use certain words and practise restraint, these same words can remain stuck in place, even in official documents and laws. In these instances, activism and political leadership are required to bring about change. An example is Rosa's Law, which was enacted in 2010 by Barack Obama when he was President of the United States. Rosa was a young woman with Down syndrome, and the law that was named in her honour removed the term 'mentally retarded' from the health and education code in the state of Maryland. In his speech, Obama quoted Rosa's brother, Nick, who said, 'What you call people is how you treat them. If we change the words, maybe it will be the start of a new attitude towards people with disabilities.' (The White House 2010). Obama recognised the power of language to entrench or change attitudes about people with disability, and he acted to make a difference for people with intellectual disability.

Inclusive language is important. Language not only reflects beliefs, values and attitudes, but it also plays a role in constructing the world. Classification is a natural cognitive function that enables humans to process information quickly and make sense of the world. The problem comes when classification categories are not useful or valid, or are harmful. This is particularly evident in the use of labels for people who are deemed to be different. As we noted earlier, some labels represent diagnostic categories and can be useful for understanding conditions, promoting awareness and securing appropriate educational and other support (Graham & Tancredi 2019). They also might provide a social identity through belonging to a group of people with a similar diagnostic label. Often, though, labels lead to stigmatisation, bullying and low self-esteem. Labels can reinforce an individual, deficit view of children and young people in educational settings and can result in lowered expectations (Lauchlan & Boyle 2007). It is crucial that those working in educational contexts are conscious of the effects of the language they use (Walton 2016) and that they avoid terminology that is considered offensive by people with disability.

Many terms that people use in reference to disability are negative and offensive. They reveal historical and stereotypical beliefs about the abnormality and inferiority of people with disability, and they are not acceptable terms. They include words such as ‘retarded’ (which Rosa’s Law sought to eliminate), ‘moron’, ‘imbecile’ and ‘idiot’. While these words were once medical terms, they were discontinued and are now unlikely to be found in modern health and educational texts. Yet they often appear as insults in popular discourse. Spend time in any high school (and some primary schools), and you will hear students call each other ‘retards’. Read a newspaper, attend a sporting event or scroll through Twitter, and it does not take long for the word ‘idiot’ to surface. These words have become so ubiquitous that users may not be fully aware of their origins or, even if they are aware, they may not realise their effect or who they are really insulting. To criticise an idea as ‘lame’ or ‘insane’ is to use a negative perspective of disability to show disapproval. Similarly, to criticise a politician’s views using terms such as ‘blind’ or ‘moronic’ is to reinforce a negative view of disability. This is deemed ableist language: language that devalues people with disability. People might not be conscious of ableism (Broderick & Lalvani 2017) and use these terms inadvertently. But, like racist and sexist language, ableist language needs to be identified and avoided.

Language is also subtle. Sometimes the words we use stereotype people with disability as deficient, needy or pitiful, and disability is often portrayed as a tragedy. An example is when it is said that someone ‘suffers from’ a disability. This phrase comes from an outdated and medicalised ‘charity view’ of disability that is both patronising and ableist, because it presumes that impairment must result in suffering and that the lives of people with disability must be awful. In other words, it privileges able-bodied experience and frames people with disability as deficient. Other terms that signal deficit can be more difficult to identify and avoid, because they are found in official policy and couched in the language of support. The term ‘special needs’ is one such example, and it has an interesting linguistic history. It was coined by Baroness Warnock in England in 1978 to try to shift the emphasis of difficulties with learning from individual deficit to the inadequacies of the schooling system (Thomas & Vaughan 2004). But instead of the system changing, ‘special needs’ has become another label that signals deficit and legitimates segregation into ‘special’ provision. Cátia Malaquias is the mother of a young man with Down syndrome called Julius, and a co-author of [Chapter 4](#) in this book. In a blog for Starting with Julius called ‘He ain’t special, he’s my brother’, Cátia says that she would like to see ‘this damaging phrase [special needs], and the mentality that goes with it . . . put on the scrapheap’ (Malaquias n.d.). She explains further that

The label of ‘special needs’, serving by definition to segregate or exceptionalise people with disability, is inconsistent with recognition of disability as part of human diversity. In that social framework, none of us are ‘special’ as we are all equal siblings in our diverse family of humanity.

Research confirms that people tend to be seen in a more negative light when they are described as having ‘special needs’ than when they are described as having a disability (Gernsbacher et al. 2016). People with disability know this, and some are campaigning against the term. Every year, the national association of people with Down syndrome in Italy releases a video on World Down syndrome Day to inform public knowledge and understanding. Their 2017 video was titled ‘Not Special Needs’ and featured young people with Down syndrome satirising the concept of special needs. They illustrated how inappropriate the term really is by acting out needs that would be ‘special’ if they were true, such as people with Down syndrome needing to be massaged by cats or fed dinosaur eggs. Their point was that people with disability have the

same ‘needs’ as everyone else and that the term ‘special needs’ peculiarises them in inappropriate and offensive ways. Being such a ubiquitous term, especially in special education, it can be difficult for non-disabled people to understand why this term receives so much criticism. It is complex, but essentially the word ‘needs’ portrays people with disability as dependent on the largesse of others to provide them with the support and adjustments they ‘need’. This can contribute to a perception that people with disability are a burden on others, which is a perception that has had devastating consequences, including the extermination, sterilisation and institutionalisation of children with disability (see [Chapter 4](#)). The language of ‘needs’ also obfuscates the fact that inclusive education is a human right, and that education providers are obligated to provide adjustments under legislation.

Other terms carry similarly negative associations, contributing to perceptions of individual deficit and the belief that barriers are located within individuals. An example is when students’ identities become conflated with official processes of categorisation or support provision, as reflected in the use of terms such as ‘EHSCP¹ student’ or ‘wheelchair girl’. In some cases, the person becomes the category, as children are referred to as ‘IMs’, ‘IOs’ or ‘ISs’, reflecting the three levels of classification² of intellectual disability in New South Wales, Australia: mild (IM), moderate (IO) or severe (IS) (Graham & Macartney 2012). And, although the ‘ATSI’ acronym is still used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in many public documents, it is considered offensive by First Australians. The concern about these and other terms is that they deny the humanity within individuals, efface the diversity between groups, reflect individual deficit constructions of disability and difference, and are deeply disrespectful.

What language should we use?

Educators often want to know what language is acceptable when talking about disability and difference in the context of inclusive education.

While there is general agreement about offensive language, as illustrated by the numerous examples provided above, there are different opinions about preferred terminology. The key issue is that people with disability (or disabled people) get to decide on the language they as individuals or as groups prefer. Generally, the person or group of people should remain present in the terminology, so groups of people should not be referred to

by a disability category. Terms such as ‘the blind’, ‘the disabled’ and ‘the epileptic’ should not be used. Having secured the person in the terminology, there are two positions; each has proponents and opponents.

Person-first language. Person-first language is often used to foreground the individual and signal that the individual is more than their disabled identity. This language would favour terms such as ‘person with a disability’, ‘student with epilepsy’ or ‘child with vision impairment’. These terms focus on the person or student and are a reminder not to essentialise someone in terms of their disability or imagine that because the disability is known, the person is known. It also recognises the intersectionality of identity, in that people have multiple identities assigned by their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and occupational/relational roles. Person-first language serves as a useful way to resist the tendency of schools to prejudge, sort and separate students based on the low expectations associated with certain disability labels. It is also the approach used in the CRPD and, for these reasons, the approach adopted throughout this book. Despite the potential affordances of person-first language, many people in the disability community reject this construction on the grounds that disability is not incidental or an add-on to identity; it is inherent to the way identity is defined. Person-first language is seen by some as making disability separate from identity, and this is only done because disability continues to be framed negatively. Critics of person-first language note that other aspects of identity, such as race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, are never expressed in terms of a person ‘with’ something, such as a person with ‘gayness’ or a person with ‘femaleness’. On these grounds, identity-first language is preferred by some.

Identity-first language. Identify-first language puts the disability or other aspect of difference before the person and is seen as a way of affirming disability identity and rejecting negative connotations. Identity-first language talks of ‘disabled people’ or ‘autistic students’ or ‘deaf children’. The Autistic community has been particularly active in promoting identity-first language by asserting #AutisticPride and celebrating the contribution that neurodiversity makes to the world. One criticism of the argument for identity-first language is that it is being made by people who can speak in the absence of the voices of people with complex learning profiles who might be non-speaking (otherwise described as non-verbal). For this reason, it is important that educators consult students (or their associates) to determine whether they prefer person-first or identity-first language, and the preferences of individuals

should be respected. Finally, it is ableist to refuse to acknowledge someone's disability by saying 'I don't see you as disabled'. This might be well-intentioned and meant to mean 'I don't see you in a negative light'. But it is not a compliment and negates disability as an integral part of a disabled person's identity. It also risks people's disabilities being mis- or unrecognised, which can result in a lack of necessary support or adjustments.

Language will change. Terms that are currently acceptable may fall from favour. Previous taboo words (such as 'cripple') will continue to be reclaimed by some scholars and activists, as in the derivative 'crip'. New terms will come into use. Scholars, practitioners and students in the field of inclusive education will need to embrace a 'life of alertness' (Walton 2016: 155), maintaining a critical awareness of the power and effects of language. This makes three demands on educators. The first is a willingness to engage in critical self-reflection to identify and reject ableist thinking, beliefs and language. Second, it demands the sensitivity and courage to call out ableist, offensive and otherwise derogatory language when used in private and public spaces. Finally, it requires respectful dialogue to understand and affirm others' right to name and identify.

Conclusion

To ensure that inclusive education is implemented with fidelity, educators and support staff across all levels of education must understand the fundamental concepts that underpin it. The concept of ableism and the social model of disability clarify the external nature of barriers; these are barriers that students face, *not* individual deficits that they must overcome. Educators and other stakeholders must work with students to identify and address these barriers. Only then can they be dismantled so that *all* students can access and participate in education on an equitable basis. When the social model of disability is understood in partnership with the concepts of equity and the dilemma of difference, educators can shift their thinking from achieving equality in the form of inputs to focus instead on what is needed to achieve equity in outcomes. Engaging with these fundamental concepts, reconceptualising disability and realigning practice are all necessary to implement inclusive education effectively and with authenticity. This shift in thinking must be

accompanied by a shift to inclusive language to avoid the dilemma of difference and to support inclusive practice. Together, these concepts invite educators to reflect on their beliefs, language and practices. At times, the process of reflection can be jarring. This is a natural consequence of reflection and learning from which we all grow. With knowledge of the fundamental concepts of inclusive education, educators are well-equipped to enact genuine inclusive practices.

Notes

- 1 In England, an Education, Health and Social Care Plan is drawn up to describe the ‘special’ needs that a child or young person has and outlines the support that will be given to meet these needs. It is intended to access support that would not normally be provided in ‘mainstream’ schools.
- 2 This reflects the NSW classification of intellectual impairment.

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CHAPTER 3

Does inclusion work?

KATE DE BRUIN

There has been much debate about inclusive versus special education and, despite the Australian government committing to the systemic reform required to implement inclusive education through its ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008) in 2008, debate continues to this day. The ill-informed comments made by ultra-conservative Australian politician Senator Pauline Hanson are a well-known example (Graham & de Bruin 2017). As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), Hanson claimed that she was representing the views of teachers and parents when arguing that children with disability, and especially those with autism, did not belong in regular classrooms. Her comments prompted an immediate public backlash, but a minority of stakeholder groups agreed with her views that students with certain disabilities—and especially those on the autism spectrum—do not belong in regular schools (McDougall 2017). The comments by Hanson and her supporters are representative of the various narratives that support segregating students with disability into special schools and classrooms. These views are typically grounded in some commonly held beliefs about both inclusive and special education. In this chapter, I examine their veracity by reviewing the empirical evidence on the impact of inclusive education. I conclude with a summary of the implications for providing quality teaching in regular schools and classrooms.

Popular Beliefs about Special Education

There is a common belief that special education is better for students with disability. Special education is often delivered via withdrawal from regular classrooms or via special segregated classes and schools. Segregation into special schools and classes is perceived as beneficial by some advocates, with some variations on this theme. Sometimes segregating students with disability is positioned as beneficial for the students with disability themselves, sometimes it is positioned as beneficial for non-disabled students, and sometimes it is positioned as beneficial for teachers. One example of perceived benefit is that segregated settings are more socially accepting environments and provide superior social and academic support to students with disability, resulting in better long-term outcomes. Such a position presumes that the needs of students with disability are 'special'. Segregated settings are framed as 'special' places, because students are educated alongside others with similar 'special' needs by teachers who have 'special' knowledge and training to offer 'special' support. This set of presumptions thus constructs segregation through 'special' education as a benevolent, nurturing form of intensive care that is provided by teachers with specialist training to the benefit of 'special children'. This is a seductive narrative, especially for parents of children with disability who are rightly protective of and want the very best for their children. It is, however, not supported by the evidence, which will be presented later in this chapter.

There are a host of related popular myths that play into the anxieties of both teachers and parents, and which are used to defend segregation as preferable to inclusion. One myth is the misconception that students with disability cannot receive an appropriately tailored education outside of a specialist setting. Also relevant is the mistaken belief that a special alternative curriculum is needed to support the transition of students with disability to life beyond school. Another related myth is that the presence of students with disability in regular schools and classrooms holds back the academic progress of other students, because they are believed to tie up teacher time. This belief generates anxiety about the 'fairness' of inclusion and the capacity of teachers in regular schools and classrooms to meet the needs of students with disability at the same time as teaching the whole class. Senator Hanson voiced all these beliefs when she made her comments to the media. This is problematic, because as public

figures, politicians can play a role in sharing and improving the public's knowledge or they can spread misinformation. This chapter aims to narrow the gap between what the general public knows and what the evidence shows.

Can Segregated Settings be Inclusive?

Another major misconception that needs to be addressed is the belief that segregated special-education settings are 'inclusive' by virtue of the fact that they specifically cater for and/or do not exclude students with disability. Proponents of segregated special education sometimes echo the motto 'inclusion is a process, not a place'. However, as discussed in [Chapter 1](#), this motto was originally coined by inclusive education scholars and disability activists to protest the effects of the integration movement, which began in the 1970s and progressed through the 1980s. Integration failed students with disability, because while physical access may have been provided, there was little change in the school environment; major attitudinal and pedagogical barriers remained in place. Subsequent emphasis on process and not mere placement by inclusive education scholars and disability activists in the 1990s and beyond was an attempt to focus attention on the processes necessary to address those barriers, but this focus on process did not mean that place no longer mattered. The 'process not place' phrase has since been misappropriated by special-education lobby groups to claim that segregated schools *can* be inclusive, for if 'inclusion is not a place' then any place can be an inclusive one provided 'they are inclusive in their nature' (Forbes 2007: 68).

This ambiguity has recently been addressed through the move to explicitly define inclusive education in General Comment No. 4 (GC4; United Nations 2016). As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), GC4 explains the right to an inclusive education as articulated in Article 24 of the CRPD (United Nations 2008). Not only is inclusive education now defined within international human-rights law, but GC4 has also made it very clear that segregation and inclusion are fundamentally incompatible. No longer is it possible to claim that special schools and classes are 'inclusive'. Nor does placement within regular schools constitute an inclusive education, although it *is a necessary precondition* for inclusive education to take place (de Bruin 2019). As outlined in GC4, inclusion

requires a transformation of school culture, policy and practice so that all students can access, participate in and make progress through the curriculum without relying on outdated models of segregating students with disability to access special educational services as the default organisational arrangement. In providing a high-quality and equitable education to all students, classroom teaching and learning arrangements must be designed for universal access with reasonable adjustments where necessary.

The myths and misconceptions surrounding both special and inclusive education are usually highly emotive, and they are based in charitable benevolence or protective anxiety, and/or are the product of institutional resistance to change. The following sections of this chapter address these myths and misconceptions by presenting a summary of the empirical evidence on the social, academic and long-term impact of inclusive education for both students with and without disability.

Are ‘Special Children’ Better Off in Special Settings?

For several decades, studies have examined the impact of inclusive education. Collectively this body of research refutes the claim that students with disability are better off in segregated special settings. Many large- and small-scale studies, reports and analyses of system data have found that when students with disability are educated in the regular school system, they thrive socially and academically, and experience long-term benefits post-school. The empirical case supporting the benefits of inclusion across these three domains is presented below, drawing on rigorous studies relevant to all levels of schooling. This evidence relating to positive benefits applies to students with a range of disabilities, including those with complex learning profiles, such as students on the autism spectrum and students with emotional and behavioural disorders.

Social impact of inclusion for students with disability

Large-scale academic studies over almost five decades have found that inclusive education produces superior social and developmental outcomes (Baker et al. 1995; Carlberg & Kavale 1980; Oh-Young &

Filler 2015; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999). From these and other studies, researchers have concluded that when educated in inclusive schools, students with disability interact more frequently with their wider peer group (Alper & Ryndak 1992; Foreman et al. 2004; Hunt, Farron-Davis et al. 1994; Kennedy et al. 1997; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998). This interaction can lead to the development of richer and more diverse social networks that include peers both with and without disability (Hehir et al. 2016; Kennedy et al. 1997; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999), as well as positive and enduring friendships with non-disabled peers (Avramidis 2010; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999).

Research also indicates that an inclusive education is associated with improved quality of life for students with disability. For example, a study comparing the quality of school life of students with disability in segregated and inclusive settings found that students in the inclusive settings were less lonely (Wiener & Tardif 2004). Similar studies comparing the quality of everyday life of students educated in segregated and inclusive schools concluded that the increased interaction and stronger social networks in inclusive schools produced meaningful improvements in students' social lives beyond school. Specifically, they found that students with disability who were educated in inclusive schools and classrooms spent more of their leisure time socialising with their wider peer group, in comparison to their peers in special-education settings who largely spent their leisure time with their families (Finnvold 2018; Zurbriggen et al. 2018). This is not to say that students with disability do not experience loneliness or isolation in either setting. Rather, research indicates that loneliness and isolation can be equally common for both students with and without disability (Avramidis 2010), and that the myth of the socially protective special-education setting is not supported by empirical evidence.

Research is clear that the social benefits of inclusion also extend to specific skill development. For example, students with disability who are educated in regular schools demonstrate improved outcomes in specific skill areas, such as their social competencies (Fisher & Meyer 2002; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998), communication skills and even motor skills (Katz & Mirenda 2002). It is important to note, however, that these do not arise solely from increased contact (Nepi et al. 2013). Rather, research suggests that these improved outcomes are a result of the provision of high-quality inclusive teaching and support practices that facilitate high-quality interaction between students and the provision of

additional supports to enhance the quality of these interactions where needed. This facilitation involves several key elements. They include the use of clear instructions in interaction strategies—which are provided to *all* students—as well as structured opportunities to refine and rehearse these, and access to supplementary and targeted supports for social learning as necessary. Multiple studies on students’ social learning noted the value of incorporating these key elements using pedagogies, such as heterogeneous grouping and effectively structured cooperative and peer-learning activities (Garrote et al. 2017; Katz & Miranda 2002; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998).

An important caveat noted in some of the research discussed above is that positive outcomes from inclusion are likely to depend on it being offered in contexts that are genuinely inclusive. This means that the numbers of students with disability accord with the naturally occurring proportions within the population, rather than settings in which higher numbers of students with disability are grouped together (McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998). It also means that schools implement inclusive practices beyond their enrolment policies. It is therefore important to distinguish between ‘mainstream’ schools and ‘inclusive’ schools, which was discussed in [Chapter 1](#). The term ‘mainstream’ school is frequently used as a synonym for ‘inclusive’ school; however, the terms are far from synonymous. Mainstream schools are those that have existed since the development of compulsory schooling, and they were not designed with students with disability in mind, but rather for homogeneous cohorts (de Bruin in press). Inclusive schools are those that go beyond accepting the enrolment of students with disability, and are places in which all students are welcomed, valued as full members of the school community, and provided with the supports that they need to participate and achieve. The positive outcomes of inclusion reported in the studies discussed above are also dependent on teachers implementing appropriate inclusive pedagogies.

Academic impact of inclusion for students with disability

An extensive body of research examining the impact of inclusive education has been produced over four decades. This research has consistently found a range of academic benefits for students with disability (Baker et al. 1995; Carlberg & Kavale 1980; Hehir et al. 2016;

Katz & Mirenda 2002; Oh-Young & Filler 2015; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999). As with the research on social benefits, this literature refutes several myths about educating students with disability. These myths include the necessity of special-education teachers and segregated settings for providing high-quality learning experiences, achieving superior academic outcomes, providing appropriately tailored instruction or ensuring access to appropriate curricula.

The research on the impact of inclusive education on academic outcomes for students with disability constitutes a substantial body of research that draws on huge numbers of students and schools, making the findings compelling. As a whole, they indicate that students with disability who were educated in inclusive settings achieved better academic outcomes when compared with their counterparts in segregated settings (Cosier et al. 2013; Hehir et al. 2012; Jackson et al. 2008; Ruijs & Peetsma 2009). Some of the improved outcomes from inclusive education were reported as the general academic achievement of students with disability, such as the results of standardised testing or grade-point averages (Alper & Ryndak 1992; Carlberg & Kavale 1980; Cole et al. 2004; Hehir et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2018; Oh-Young & Filler 2015; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999). Other studies report more specific benefits in terms of academic skills. For example, particularly consistent and strong findings have been reported in research for the benefits of inclusion on students' literacy and language skills (Cole et al. 2004; Cosier et al. 2013; Dessemontet et al. 2012; Hehir et al. 2012; Kim et al. 2018; Rea et al. 2002; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999). The findings are also positive for skills in other subjects, including mathematics (Cole et al. 2004; Cosier et al. 2013; Hehir et al. 2012; Rea et al. 2002), and extends to broader cognitive skill development (Kim et al. 2018).

An additional and highly important set of findings relates to the quality of targeted support provided to students with disability in inclusive settings, with flow-on effects for their academic progress. Despite the persistence of the myth that students with disability require access to special schools and special-education teachers to receive an appropriately tailored education, research has identified that high-quality individualised learning can be implemented in inclusive school settings. For example, earlier studies that compared individualised learning plans developed in separate special education settings to those developed in inclusive school settings found that these differed in key markers of quality. These studies found that the quality of individualised education programs (IEPs) was superior in inclusive education programs (Hunt,

Farron-Davis et al. 1994) and that students demonstrate superior IEP goal mastery in inclusive classrooms (Katz & Mirenda 2002; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999). They indicated that special education settings tend to develop IEPs focused on deficit and remediation for behavioural learning, and contained a focus on 'life skills' rather than curriculum-based objectives (Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992; Rea et al. 2002). By contrast, inclusive settings typically developed higher-quality IEPs with clearer goals and performance objectives that are consistent with the academic curriculum expectations for all students (Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992; Rea et al. 2002), both of which remain hallmarks of high-quality individualised learning plans (Rowland et al. 2015).

Even though some more recent studies suggest that the quality has become more consistent between segregated and inclusive settings (La Salle et al. 2013), it is clear that students do not require placement in special-education schools or classrooms to receive appropriately tailored support for their learning to make progress at school.

This is a particularly important finding for students with complex learning profiles, because it is often presumed that segregated special education is the only place where their needs can be met. Rather, studies indicate that these students' communication and motor skills are more effectively developed when the opportunities to learn them are connected and embedded within regular classroom teaching that features natural learning opportunities and opportunities for skills to generalise (Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992; Katz & Mirenda 2002). The evidence suggests that this learning is particularly beneficial when embedded within structured interaction through small-group activities where students are learning together, such as in cooperative learning activities (Hunt, Staub et al. 1994). This is in stark contrast to the findings relating to special-education settings, where students with complex learning profiles are often provided with a life-skills curriculum focusing on 'basic skills' (e.g. functional, domestic) in place of academic (or pre-academic) skills, and where students have been found to have lower achievements measured against IEPs (Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992). In addition to making poor connections with the general curriculum (Kurth & Mastergeorge 2012), poor connections have also been found between instructional objectives and functional daily activities (Helmstetter et al. 1998).

The empirical literature suggests that it is the quality of classroom teaching and the inclusive pedagogies implemented that are likely to lead to the superior outcomes for students with disability noted above.

Several studies indicate that a key element of such quality inclusive teaching is to ensure that students with disability have access to age- and grade-appropriate content from the general academic curriculum (Helmstetter et al. 1998; Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992; Kurth & Mastergeorge 2012), as well as to core content-area instruction (Hollowood et al. 1994; Joshi & Bouck 2017). Studies also suggest that improved academic outcomes in inclusive settings result from teachers providing increased opportunities for students with disability to actively engage and participate in learning activities and with their peers (Kurth et al. 2014; Morningstar et al. 2017). This is particularly clear in relation to active engagement and participation in collaborative learning with non-disabled peers, which is associated with improved outcomes on individualised learning plans (Hunt & Farron-Davis 1992; Katz & Mirenda 2002; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999), and the acquisition of basic skills for students with complex learning profiles (Hunt, Staub et al. 1994). Studies demonstrate that collaborative-learning arrangements are more common in inclusive settings, with special-education settings typically offering more individual instruction (Helmstetter et al. 1998; Kurth & Mastergeorge 2012). These findings build on and extend the findings of the social benefits arising from collaborative interactions between all students in inclusive classrooms outlined earlier. Together they present a compelling case for using high-quality collaborative pedagogies to support all students working in heterogeneous groups in inclusive classrooms.

Long-term impact of inclusion for students with disability

Inclusive education does not only offer academic and social benefits for students with disability. In addition to these important advantages, research has also found improved long-term outcomes, such as engaging in postsecondary employment, pursuing further education or living independently (Haber et al. 2016; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999; Test et al. 2009). Students with disability who receive an inclusive education are more likely to enrol in and graduate from higher education (Rojewski et al. 2015). They are also much more likely to gain employment and earn higher wages, to be actively contributing members of their community and to be involved in long-term and stable relationships (Mazzotti et al. 2016; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999; Test et al. 2009;

Wagner et al. 1993; White & Weiner 2004). These findings clearly refute the presumption that special segregated education is required in order to prepare students with disability for adult life, although the employment and earnings of adults with disability remain stubbornly below that of the wider population.

Do Students with Disability ‘Hold Back’ other Students?

A final myth is that the presence of students with disability in regular schools and classrooms negatively affects students without disability. This myth is clearly refuted by several large-scale studies that found positive effects of inclusive education for students without disability in both social and academic domains.

Social benefits for students without disability

Studies on the impact of inclusive education for students who do *not* have a disability have found a range of social and personal benefits. These benefits are largely attitudinal in nature (Alper & Ryndak 1992; Schwab 2017). For example, students without disability tend to hold fewer prejudices about people with disability and are more open to socially interacting with them (Ruijs & Peetsma 2009). They also develop their social competencies and improve their own self-concept (McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998). Research suggests that the benefits do not arise from merely being in the same school or classroom, but rather it is the *nature* of that contact that makes an impact. Studies suggest that the social benefits of inclusion for students without disability may be a consequence of positive interpersonal experiences through genuine involvement in the classroom and routine activities of the school (McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998), such as working jointly on learning activities (Schwab 2017) or in peer tutoring (Ruijs & Peetsma 2009). Such contact develops school and classroom climates in which the membership of all students is valued. It is vital to note that these benefits do not hold when the proportion of students with disability rises unduly—from streaming, for example—with research noting that the benefits appear to drop as the number of students rises (Gottfried 2014).

This brings us back to a point made earlier, which is that inclusion is not just a place but also a process. Inclusive environments are necessarily heterogeneous places, whereby students with and without disability are educated together in proportions that roughly mirror those of the wider population, but they are also more than that. Importantly, inclusive educational environments are places in which teachers actively facilitate positive interpersonal contact between students with and without disability. This finding echoes the points made repeatedly above regarding inclusive school and classroom practices creating richer and more cohesive social environments and networks.

Academic impact of inclusion for students without disability

The academic impact of educating students with disability in regular classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers has been extensively reviewed. The overwhelming consensus is that this impact ranges from neutral to slightly positive (Kalambouka et al. 2005; Kalambouka et al. 2007; Krammer et al. 2019; McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998; Ruijs & Peetsma 2009; Ruijs et al. 2010; Salend & Garrick Duhaney 1999; Szumski et al. 2017). This refutes the myth that students without disability are held back or have their education compromised by the presence of students with disability, with the most recent and compelling evidence produced by Szumski et al. (2017). This group conducted a meta-analysis that directly investigated the impact of including students with disability on students without. It covered a total sample of almost 4.8 million students worldwide and found a positive and statistically significant academic benefit of inclusive education for students without disability, even when students with complex learning profiles were included.

This research base also addresses several variants on the misconceptions about the impact of inclusive education on students without disability. One variant is that students with particular types of disabilities, such as those with emotional or behavioural disorders, or those with complex learning profiles, are more likely to have a detrimental effect on their non-disabled peers due to their potential disproportionate claim on teachers' time and attention (Gilmour 2017). This is not supported by research exploring inclusive-classroom interactions between teachers, students and support staff, which found

that students with disability tend to have less access to their teachers (Webster & Blatchford 2019; see also [Chapter 16](#)). Further, both the Szumski et al. (2017) meta-analysis and a large-scale study from across an entire national school sector in the Netherlands (Ruijs 2017) found no differential impact due to disability type, and this extended to emotional and behavioural difficulties, and multiple and profound disabilities. Another misconception addressed is the claim that the presence of students with disability in the classroom is likely to have a particularly negative impact on high-attaining students. However, the research finds no significant difference on academic progress, regardless of the attainment status of the non-disabled students (Dessemontet & Bless 2013; Ruijs et al. 2010).

An important caveat exists in the research on academic achievement similar to that found in the studies exploring the social benefits of inclusion. This caveat is that the benefits of inclusion can be lost, and a host of other issues created, when the proportion of students with disability in a class rises beyond their natural distribution in the student population. This occurs in schools when classrooms have higher proportions of students with disability due to academic streaming or due to administrative attempts to concentrate resources (such as aides). Homogeneous groupings have several detrimental outcomes for students with disability. For example, when students are placed in lower attainment groups, teachers tend to have lowered expectations of their capacity to learn (Shifrer 2016), which leads to a range of practices that then lower the quality of teaching, such as reducing exposure to the academic curriculum, providing less feedback or working at lower-order conceptual levels (Ireson & Hallam 1999; Mazonod et al. 2019; Oakes et al. 1990; Rubie-Davies 2007). These are harmful practices for students in these classes, and they also fail to provide any significant improvements for students placed in higher attainment groups, with large-scale studies showing that the results on academic attainment are negligible or even negative (Hanushek & Wößmann 2006; Huang 2009; Steenbergen-Hu et al. 2016).

Implications for Professional Practice

The empirical research on the impact of inclusive education on students with and without disability has clearly refuted the myths that ‘special’

students need to be taught ‘special things’ by ‘special’ teachers, or that inclusion harms the learning of others. Access to an inclusive education has been found to be socially and academically beneficial for both students with and students without disability. Interestingly, in addition to these findings, two very clear themes ran through this research literature and are worth emphasising here with regard to their implications for teacher professional practice. These go to the heart of one of the myths that we explored at the start of the chapter and provide evidence to support the proposition that inclusion is *both* a place and a process.

Inclusion is a ‘place’

There was a consistent finding that ran through the research regarding *where* inclusive education takes place, emphasising that students must be co-located within the same schools and classrooms. In other words, they must be together in the same *place* for the benefits to be obtained. Heterogeneous classrooms are a necessary precondition for inclusion education. Another common thread that ran through the research acts as a qualifier to this first finding above. That is, inclusive classrooms are most beneficial when the proportion of students with disability does not rise above a certain threshold. While that threshold was hypothesised by some researchers to plausibly sit at around five students (Szumski et al. 2017), other studies indicated that there was substantial empirical evidence to support a ‘natural proportions’ hypothesis: in other words, inclusive classrooms should have proportions of students with disability that roughly reflect their prevalence in the wider population (McGregor & Vogelsberg 1998).

Inclusion is a ‘process’

The research reviewed for this chapter indicated that the benefits of inclusion flow as a consequence of processes that take place when students get a quality inclusive education within heterogeneous classrooms and schools. Specifically, the studies showed that both academic and social benefits resulted for students with and without disabilities when teachers facilitated quality interactions between them in the classroom that went beyond mere co-location and contact. A clear recurring theme was the importance of providing students with opportunities to learn and rehearse the requisite interpersonal skills for

collaboration within the context of academic learning tasks that involve highly interactive small-group activities such as cooperative learning, as well as pair work such as peer tutoring. Importantly, these collaborative learning arrangements are not ‘special’ education pedagogies, they are simply good teaching practices (Hattie 2008; Johnson et al. 2000; Miller et al. 2017; Slavin 1991; Van Ryzin & Roseth 2018; Wentzel & Watkins 2002). The key roles played by these teaching practices in supporting all students’ academic and social learning counter the popular belief that students with disability require ‘special’ teachers who hold ‘special’ knowledge about ‘special’ pedagogies or teach a ‘special’ curriculum. The findings collectively provide clear implications for pre- and in-service teacher professional learning, pointing to the importance of developing teachers’ instructional planning skills for incorporating the academic curriculum, as well as the personal and social capabilities curriculum, within well-constructed collaborative learning arrangements.

Conclusion

Students educated in segregated settings graduate to inhabit the same society as students without disability; there is no ‘special’ universe into which they graduate. It is therefore vital to cultivate an inclusive culture within schools if we wish to create an inclusive society. The transformation of the school system required to turn ‘mainstream’ schools into genuinely inclusive schools begins, then, with teachers ensuring that their classroom practice actively facilitates students with and without disability spending time in the classroom learning together and interacting meaningfully. While this may achieve benefits such as improved academic and social outcomes, it also enacts the grand moral purpose of education itself: to create well-developed citizens who are freely accepted and are valued members of society. In addition to the clear social and academic benefits for all students, the research presented in this chapter supports the position of the CRPD (United Nations 2008): that an inclusive education is a vital tool for reducing discrimination and creating a more harmonious and inclusive society (United Nations 2008, 2016).

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PART II

EDUCATORS' OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY

CHAPTER 4

Inclusive education as a human right

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Education is both a right and a means to the realisation of other rights. It is generative in that education enables the development of the capabilities necessary for full and meaningful participation in modern society (Galliot & Graham 2014). The United Nations therefore requires that education be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable, with the ‘best interests of the child a primary consideration’ (United Nations 1989: Article 3). Education must also be afforded to *all*, without discrimination of any kind, ‘on the basis of equality of opportunity’ (United Nations 2016: paragraph 13). This means that all humans, regardless of their presumed ability, have a right to education. This has not always been the case historically, and many individuals around the world are still denied the basic right to education. This happens often and not just in developing countries where, for example, there is still a struggle to ensure equality of educational opportunity for girls (Hodal 2017). In any country—whether it is developing or already developed—

students with disability are the group at greatest risk of discrimination and exclusion (Srivastava et al. 2015).

Exclusion of and discrimination against students with disability also occurs in wealthy, developed countries. Here, the problem is more insidious and often disguised through the ‘benevolent humanitarianism’ (Tomlinson 1982: 6) of special education, which is translated through a discourse that displaces education with ‘care’ and rights with ‘needs’. As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), such words position people with disability as dependent on the abled, implying burden and a hierarchy of humanity. They fuel the misperception, rooted within our shared history, that some people are educable and others are not, that ‘education’ is only for those who can profit from it and that this type of education is the business of regular ‘mainstream’ schools. That same misperception underpins the all-too-common belief that there are ‘special’ places and ‘special’ people who are more suited to the care of ‘special’ children because they use ‘special’ practices (see [Chapter 3](#)). But this is segregation, not education, and what passes for education in these settings is often not very ‘special’ at all. Rather, in the words of the late, great Stella Young: ‘The word “special”, as it is applied to disability, too often means “a bit shit”’ (Young 2013). Sensory rooms, life skills and Individual Curriculum Plans that do not extend children’s knowledge and experience by exposing them to rich age-appropriate content are not special and do not qualify as quality education.

In countries that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; United Nations 1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008), *all* children have a right to a quality education, and children with disability—specifically—have the right to an *inclusive* education. Educators’ knowledge and understanding of children’s rights, however, are critical for these rights to be realised. To understand why education is a human right, it is necessary to understand the origins of human rights generally and why respecting, enacting and understanding rights is so important. It is not just because society has an obligation to do so. Knowing why we have rights enables us to recognise rights breaches when they occur and provides us with the knowledge and ability to rectify them. Rights breaches in education still frequently occur, even in more privileged contexts. Media coverage of abuse and restrictive practices (such as having isolation boxes or ‘sanctuary’ cages in the classroom) has provided a stark reminder of the more sinister side of some current educational practices occurring in localised contexts. For children with

disability, it appears that many of these practices are becoming normalised and justified as suitable responses to assure the safety and protection of both the child and other children in the class. As more examples of restrictive practices perpetrated against children with disability emerge, the line between the atrocities perpetrated against people with disability in the past and current practices starts to fade.

Human Rights and the Treatment of People with Disability

Historically, people with disability have not been treated well. In the early part of the twentieth century, people with physical, intellectual and psychological disability were the first minority targeted by the German Nazi regime, which exploited the public attitudes, pseudoscientific beliefs and economic tensions of the era. This beginning of what eventually became known as the Holocaust was insidious and quiet. A reallocation of resources from German asylums during World War I led to higher mortality rates among asylum inmates due to hunger and disease (Mostert 2002). Widespread acceptance of this shift in resources highlighted an implicit public view that people with disability contributed less to society and were therefore less valuable than their able fellow citizens (Mostert 2002). In 1920, Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche published their influential work, *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*, in which they asserted that the right to life was not intrinsic; rather, it was earned by an individual's economic contribution to their community (Hudson 2011). According to Binding and Hoche, people with disability were 'useless eaters' whose lives should be sacrificed in order to safeguard the state's resources (Mostert 2002).

This brutal form of economic rationalism was supplemented by the pseudoscientific ideas of Social Darwinism and eugenics. Social Darwinism expanded upon Charles Darwin's biological theory of evolution to assert that biological and social characteristics were heritable. It was believed that these characteristics had the power to influence the population's overall 'quality', if allowed to be passed down through the generations. Eugenics promoted a program of human breeding in which desirable attributes could be enhanced through a higher birthrate, and unwanted social and biological traits could be eradicated through selective 'breeding' and/or reproductive sterilisation

(Barta 2001; Gallagher 2008). In Australia, these ideas manifested in the murder, abduction and forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples (Barta 2001), with the intention of 'breeding out the colour' to achieve 'racial purity' and a White Australia (McGregor 2002: 286). Although the idea of 'an Australia without Aborigines was both imagined and canvassed' (Barta 2001: 37) in the early 1800s, Germany was the first to issue a compulsory sterilisation law in furtherance of 'social hygiene'. The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, enacted by the Nazi regime in 1933 as one of its first official acts, ordered the compulsory sterilisation of specific categories of the 'hereditarily ill' (Mostert 2002). These specific categories included people with 'mental retardation', 'grave bodily malformation', schizophrenia, Huntington's chorea, blindness, epilepsy, hereditary deafness and hereditary alcoholism (Mostert 2002: 159). The regime established 220 Health Courts in which a jurist and two doctors determined who would be sterilised (Mostert 2002). The Nazi eugenics program was further promoted by the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, including the Marriage Health Law, which prevented the marriage of any person with an intellectual disability or a contagious or hereditary disease (Mostert 2002). Propaganda films and literature promoted the 'mercy killing' of those 'lives unworthy of life' (Benedict et al. 2009: 514).

On 18 August 1939, a directive was issued by the State Ministry of the Interior compelling all doctors and midwives to register any infant with a 'congenital deformity' or 'mental retardation' up to the age of three (Mostert 2002: 161). Soon after, this age limit was raised to sixteen years (Benedict et al. 2009). Medical practitioners were paid a small fee for each referral and were fined heavily for any failure to report. Later, teachers were also required to report any of their students who fell within the directive (Mostert 2002). The records of these children were sent to the Reich Health Ministry, where their fate was decided by a panel of three health professionals. Those children selected for extermination were sent to special killing wards in 28 health facilities across Germany, where they were poisoned, starved, intentionally exposed to the cold or given a lethal injection by medical staff. The children's bodies were then cremated, although some were first autopsied in the interest of Nazi 'science'. Ashes were then sent to their families with a death certificate bearing a false cause of death (Benedict et al. 2009).

The children's killing program established the bureaucratic processes and willing workforce necessary for the next stage in the Nazi regime's extermination campaign: the involuntary 'euthanasia' of adults with

disability. This program, named Aktion T4 as per the address of its headquarters at Tiergartenstrasse 4 in Berlin, required the registration of asylum patients with epilepsy, senile dementia, schizophrenia and 'feeble-mindedness', those who were criminally insane or had been institutionalised for more than five years, foreigners and 'racial aliens' (Mostert 2002: 163). The large number of potential victims identified through this process prompted the Nazis to find a more 'efficient' killing method: carbon-monoxide poisoning in specially constructed gas chambers, with the flow of gas administered by physicians (Gallagher 2008). Operations commenced in 1940, and asylum inmates were transported by bus to six killing centres spread across Germany (Mostert 2002). After the victims were killed, their gold teeth and dental bridges were extracted prior to a mass cremation (Mostert 2002).

While the authorities tried to keep their activities secret, providing the families of those killed with urns of anonymous ashes and fictitious causes of death, public suspicion was soon aroused. Concerned families caused a general outcry, which was taken up by German Roman Catholic Bishop Clemens von Galen in a powerful sermon on 3 August 1941 (Benedict et al. 2009). Faced with open accusations of homicide and fearing public backlash, the regime shut down the killing centres. Although the official Aktion T4 program ceased, the killings did not, and the involuntary 'euthanasia' of disabled people once more became the responsibility of physicians and nurses in medical institutions. The closure of the killing centres and removal of centralised operational processes caused medical staff in asylums and hospitals to revert to 'low-tech' methods of killing people in their care, including starvation, lethal injection and exposure (Mostert 2002). These killings continued unabated for both adults and children until several months *after* the fall of the Nazi regime in April 1945 (Benedict et al. 2009). Post-war prosecutors estimated that over 80,000 adults with disability were murdered as part of the official Aktion T4 program (Mostert 2002), and the later 'decentralised' killings are estimated to account for a further 150,000 to 200,000 victims (Foth 2014: 220). These death tolls demonstrate the scale of violence perpetrated against people with disability as a victim group throughout the Holocaust.

Emergence of International Human-Rights Laws and Institutions

In the waning days of World War II, representatives of the chief Allied powers met to discuss preparations for a new international organisation, later known as the United Nations (Mazower 2004). The horrors of the two world wars and the scale of the Nazi atrocities provided political momentum for the development of an international bill of rights (Duranti 2012; Waltz 2002). Proclaimed just three years after the 1945 signing of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) set out the human-rights agenda of the new world order (United Nations 1948). Article 3 of the UDHR confirms the intrinsic right of every person to ‘life, liberty, and security’. In drafting this article, the Human Rights Commission drew upon the tragic experience of children and adults who were labelled ‘useless eaters’ and murdered by the Nazi regime, due to their disability (Morsink 1999).

But the dehumanisation of people with disability did not begin or end with World War II and its immediate aftermath. Mass institutionalisation was still the norm well into the second half of the twentieth century. The medical model of disability—which treats people with disability as ‘objects’ and their characteristics as ‘defects’ to be remedied or cured—resulted in many people with disability being perceived as subhuman and ineducable. In the 1960s, the eyes of the American public were finally opened to the horror of the institutionalisation of people with disability by the mass media and broadcast television. Burton Blatt’s 1966 photographic essay entitled *Christmas in Purgatory* was a visual exposé of several state institutions in the eastern United States and contains the following account of the grim conditions that he encountered:

The infant dormitories depressed us the most . . . Very young children, one and two years of age, were lying in cribs, without interaction with any adult, without playthings, without any apparent stimulation . . . The ‘Special Education’ we observed in the dormitories for young children was certainly not education. But it was special. It was among the most especially frightening and depressing encounters with human beings we have ever experienced. (Blatt 1966, p. 34)

In 1968, television reporter Bill Baldini investigated the conditions at Pennhurst State School, an institution for children with intellectual disability in Pennsylvania. Reporting the details of what he had seen there affected him so much that he could not present the final five-minute segment. The deinstitutionalisation movement followed due to public outrage, with the closure of mass institutions and the reintegration of children and adults with disability back into the community. The 1970s and 1980s brought increasing recognition of human and civil

rights for people with disability and acknowledgement of their demand for access, equality and full participation within the community, although initial progress was slow and hampered by poor planning and preparation. The birth of the inclusive education movement in the 1990s was supported by the gradual recognition of children as rights-holders and the increasing advocacy and protection surrounding the need for adults to recognise children as humans in their own right.

The Importance of Education for Rights Realisation

Following the formation of the United Nations in 1945, and the development and ratification¹ of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, there was need for further development and formalisation of a rights treaty specifically for children. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to children, the United Nations recognised the unique status of childhood as requiring ‘the need to extend particular care to the child’ (United Nations 1989: preamble). The United Nations’ development of an international treaty specifically for children built upon the earlier Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924) adopted by the United Nations in 1959. Consisting of ten principles, it then formed the basis of what is currently known as the CRC. The current Convention’s development began in 1979 following a first draft proposed by Poland (Lee 2010), which coincided with the International Year of the Child. Adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and consisting of 54 Articles, the CRC mandates clear obligations for States parties to assure the rights in the Convention for all children, including the right to non-discrimination and the right to education (United Nations 1989). With the exception of the United States, all UN member states have ratified the Convention (United Nations 2019), emphasising the international importance of the rights of the child.

Each child’s ‘education rights’ can be understood in three interconnected ways: (1) rights *to* education; (2) rights *in* education; and (3) rights *through* education. The child’s right *to* education is provided through Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC (United Nations 1989) and incorporates provision and organisational aspects, such as the guarantees associated with free and compulsory education, and equality of opportunity, as well as the aims of education (Article 29). The aims of

education (Article 29) also stipulate that education should foster the development of individuals to their fullest potential. A child's rights *in* education are provided through the right to protection from discrimination (Article 2) and the right to protection from violence (Article 19), as well as the right to freedoms associated with participation, communication and association (Articles 12–15). Finally, a child's rights *through* education involve rights education as a means to foster and further 'the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms' (Article 29[b]). Being educated about rights is considered the most effective means of combating possible rights breaches because a person cannot defend their rights or the rights of others if they know nothing (or little) about them.

Recognition of the Rights of People with Disability

The decade from 1983 to 1992 was proclaimed 'the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons' by the UN General Assembly. With the adoption of the CRC in 1989—which ensured the right of all children to receive education without discrimination on any grounds—the notion of 'equal access' to education for students with disability also developed traction. The 1990 World Declaration on Education for All was the first instrument to make express reference to people with disability. Four years later, the World Conference on Special Needs Education specifically called for the education of students with disability in regular schools. It produced the Salamanca Statement (1994), which was supported by 90 countries, including Australia. Article 2 of the Statement concluded:

Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combatting discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all. (UNESCO 1994: ix)

This was the first time that an international instrument had unequivocally championed *inclusive* education for students with disability and emphasised the relationship between inclusive education and an inclusive society. The movement towards the education of students with disability in regular schools, rather than segregated special

schools, was gathering momentum. With increased international attention to children's rights came greater focus on the relative rights of people with disability and recognition by the international community that, despite some progress, existing human-rights mandates had been insufficient to protect and promote the rights of people with disability. In 2001, the UN General Assembly accepted a proposal for the development of an International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Eventually known as the CRPD, it was developed with very significant participation of people with disability and disabled people's organisations from all over the world (Kayess 2019).

This landmark human-rights treaty was formally adopted in 2006, came into force in 2008, and has since been ratified by 180 nations (United Nations 2019). While the CRPD is a major achievement for the approximately 1 billion people with disability around the globe (World Health Organization 2019), the darker period preceding it is still in living memory for many today. This history still influences social attitudes, leading to unconscious bias and low expectations of people with disability who are perceived to fail purely through some fault of their own, and not due to barriers to their access and participation that society has failed to anticipate and address through universal design and reasonable adjustments. A recent example of such failure in practice is the Queensland government's purchase of trains that breach the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* by not providing access for people with disability (Roe 2018). The issue of access is just as important and even more complicated in education, as access extends beyond the 'where' of physical access to encompass the 'what' and the 'how' of curriculum and pedagogy. Access across these domains remains a live issue in education, despite the CRPD expressly requiring States parties to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disability (Article 2: Definitions; Article 24.2[c]).

The 'right of persons with disability to education' is outlined in Article 24 of the CRPD, which explicitly proclaims their right to *inclusive* education, prohibits their exclusion from the general education system on the basis of disability, and requires reasonable accommodation of individual requirements to be provided. While this recognition and protection of *inclusive* education is groundbreaking, in reality the concept of inclusive education has generally been poorly implemented; it is often misunderstood, sometimes deliberately misused and even actively resisted. This is despite its recognition as a fundamental

obligation of each State party that has ratified the CRPD, and a correlative human right of people with disability. It was in recognition of these and other issues—following a decade of jurisprudence by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee) affirming the obligations of States parties to take necessary measures to ensure the realisation of this right and further identifying its contours—that the decision was made to develop and adopt a General Comment on Article 24. A General Comment (sometimes called a General Recommendation) is a guidance instrument that explains the meaning and scope of a particular provision of a UN human-rights treaty and may include recommendations to States parties on how best to comply with their obligations under that provision.

The right to inclusive education

The adoption of the CRPD in 2006 provided unambiguous support for inclusive education through Article 24: Right to Education, which states as its first principle in Article 24.1:

States parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States parties shall ensure an *inclusive education* system at all levels. (United Nations 2008; emphasis added)

Article 24.2 further requires States parties to ensure that:

- a. Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free and compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- b. Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, quality and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live;
- c. Reasonable accommodation of the individual's requirements is provided;
- d. Persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education;
- e. Effective individualised support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion. (United Nations 2008)

Although the CRPD was the first legally binding international humanrights instrument to contain a reference to the concept of inclusive education and to commit States parties to the progressive realisation of

its achievement, it did not define inclusive education or identify the scope of the concept. This lack of interpretive guidance has undoubtedly hampered compliance with its requirements.

Following almost a decade's worth of country reports and Concluding Observations urging States parties to implement Article 24 of the CRPD, the CRPD Committee held a Day of General Discussion on Article 24 (15 April 2015, Palais des Nations, Geneva), commencing the process of developing a General Comment on Article 24. Just over a year later—following a comprehensive international consultation process with States parties, Disabled Person's Organisations and civil society—General Comment No. 4 to Article 24: Right to Education was adopted by the CRPD Committee on 26 August 2016. At 24 pages, General Comment No. 4 (GC4) is the most comprehensive and authoritative international instrument explaining the human right to inclusive education and its substantive elements, and identifying its core features. Importantly, GC4 reflects the applicable jurisprudence on the right to education for people with disability under the CRPD and is instructive of the principles that the CRPD Committee will apply in reviewing compliance by individual countries with their legal obligations under Article 24.

Article 24 and GC4 together make clear that quality inclusive education is the means by which students with disability realise their universal human right to education, with *inclusion* and *quality* being the two main pillars of this right (Reyes 2019). Further, the terms that GC4 defines, and the concepts and processes it outlines to implement inclusive education, should now be used as guidance to all engaged in education, including researchers, educators, parents, advocates and policymakers. It is not for anyone to contest the right of students with disability to be educated with their same-age peers in inclusive classrooms and to be provided with reasonable adjustments. This is their fundamental human right, formally recognised and explained by the United Nations and agreed to by all States parties ratifying the CRPD. Australia was one of the first signatories to the CRPD and ratified it in July 2008 (Australian Law Reform Commission n.d.). The CRPD entered into force for Australia one month later.

Content of CRPD General Comment No. 4

One of the most significant aspects of GC4 is in the definitions that it provides. For a long time, scholars in inclusive education have resisted defining inclusion, with some referring to it somewhat ambiguously as a

‘process’ and not a ‘place’ (Booth 1996). The origin for the focus on process is the failed attempt at ‘mainstreaming’—otherwise known as integration—during the 1970s. In the years following deinstitutionalisation, the main objective was to transfer students with disability from institutions to segregated special schools and then to mainstream schools. Within a decade, however, it became clear that more radical change was needed lest the move result purely in a change of scenery, leaving physical, attitudinal, curricular and pedagogical barriers in place. This is the history that precipitated the inclusive education movement’s later emphasis on process, in addition to placement. The historical background is understood by academics within inclusive education but not by many other stakeholders, which has made it easy for special education to appropriate the language of inclusion to claim that the segregation of students with disability into special schools and classes is, in fact, ‘inclusive’. Some go as far as to reject the notion of place entirely:

This misconception that inclusion refers to a place and not a process is very pervasive. The current Australian view is restricted to the concept of an inclusive school as a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, and where special education needs students are supported and cared for by their peers and other members of the school community. This is a Utopian view, where there are no references to the processes and learning environments needed to achieve authentic educational outcomes for *all* students. (Forbes 2007: 67)

Assisting this appropriation has been a confluence of factors, first of which has been the reluctance of some inclusive education scholars to define inclusion (Loreman et al. 2014). In the early 2000s, this lack of definition was accompanied by a deliberate broadening of the concept of inclusion to distance inclusive education from special education (Loreman et al. 2014). During the same period, inclusive education also became closely associated with the ‘Education for All’ movement led by UNESCO, which is principally focused on access to education for children in developing countries (Miles & Singal 2010). Although access, participation and equality of opportunity for all children are undeniably relevant to the goal of inclusion, together these factors inadvertently led to an elasticity in the concept that Naraian (2013) argues has diluted inclusive education’s original ‘insurrectionary edge’ (p. 361). The fact remains that the entire movement began with the desegregation of students with disability and has evolved due to the need to reconceptualise schooling so that it is accessible to all, beginning with

those who experience the greatest barriers to equality of access: students with disability. Importantly, the original concept of inclusive education is also informed by other fundamental disability-rights concepts, including the social model of disability and inclusive language, which were forged through the lived experience and work of disability activists. At its core, therefore, inclusive education is and has always been about disability. This is a strength and not a weakness, for the empirical research evidence shows that the practices that benefit students with disability benefit *all* students (see [Chapter 3](#)).

The CRPD Committee appears to understand both this background and the confusion that exists in both understanding and practice. In defining inclusive education, GC4 has broken a stalemate that until now has led some educators to believe that the enrolment of a student with disability and/or the provision of an individualised program regardless of setting is ‘inclusive’. In providing four key definitions ([Table 4.1](#)), GC4 distinguishes these forms of provision as ‘segregation’ and ‘integration’, removing any doubt as to what is meant by the term ‘inclusion’.

GC4 further clarifies these definitions, noting that the obligation of States parties to ensure progressive realisation of Article 24 ‘is not compatible with sustaining two systems of education: mainstream and special/segregated education systems’ (paragraph 39), thus making it clear that fulfilment of the goal of inclusive education entails the existence of a single education system with no parallelism (Reyes 2019). GC4 also recognises that ‘the right to non-discrimination includes the right not to be segregated and to be provided with reasonable accommodation’ (paragraph 13). This is affirmed in General Comment No. 6 on equality and non-discrimination, which states that segregated settings are discriminatory (United Nations 2018).

Table 4.1: Key definitions in General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016: paragraph 11, emphasis added)

Exclusion	when students are directly or indirectly prevented from or denied access to education in any form.
Segregation	when the education of students with disabilities is provided in separate environments designed or used to respond to a particular or various impairments, in isolation from students without disabilities.
Integration	a process of placing persons with disabilities in

existing mainstream educational institutions, as long as the former can adjust to the standardized requirements of such institutions.

Inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to *overcome* barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disability in regular classes without appropriate structural changes to, for example, organization, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies does **not** constitute inclusion.

Another important principle recognised in GC4 relates to inclusive education as a right of the child, as distinct from a choice of the parent. This is consistent with international human-rights jurisprudence in relation to children as rights-holders more broadly. Further, the notion of ‘parental choice’ must also be seen in the context of education systems that have long avoided the systemic reform necessary to achieve genuine inclusion by providing what is commonly called ‘a continuum of placement options’. Arguably, real choice must be free and informed. In a system where ‘gatekeeping’ practices are recognised as being widespread, and parents are compelled and even coerced into ‘choosing’ segregated placement (Jenkin et al. 2018; Poed et al. 2017), segregation is at best a false choice. In recognition of these issues, GC4 frames inclusive education as ‘the right of the individual learner, and not, in the case of children, the right of a parent or caregiver. Parental responsibilities in this regard are subordinate to the rights of the child’ (paragraph 10). It is worth noting that while there is limited recognition in international law of parents’ rights to choose alternative schools based on religious or moral convictions, there is no equivalent parental right in relation to disability, and such a right would violate applicable international human-rights law standards of equality and non-discrimination (Kayess 2019).

GC4 also calls on education systems to apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which involves developing flexible ways for students

to learn (see [Chapter 8](#)). In addition, the General Comment clarifies that any support measures provided must be compliant with the goal of inclusion. Accordingly, they must be designed to strengthen opportunities for students with disability to participate alongside their peers, rather than marginalise them (paragraph 33). Finally, as [Table 4.2](#) shows, GC4 identifies nine core features of inclusive education necessary to ensure progressive realisation of inclusive education (paragraph 12).

Through its jurisprudence reflected in GC4, the CRPD Committee has taken a strong stance on the importance of the right to inclusive education and provided specific recommendations to States parties bound by international law to implement their obligations under the CRPD. As the relevant UN treaty body, the CRPD Committee can use a range of mechanisms to ensure compliance with these obligations by education systems around Australia and internationally, including a formal periodic reporting process with specific recommendations to the relevant State party, in the form of ‘concluding observations’. In addition, the CRPD’s Optional Protocol (GA resolution A/RES/61/106), which was adopted and entered into force for Australia in 2009, further empowers the CRPD Committee to receive and examine individual complaints and petitions, and undertake inquiries where there is evidence of grave and systematic violations of the CRPD. It is ultimately through such processes that international human-rights law principles are recognised, developed and internalised by individual States parties into domestic legal and policy frameworks.

These international law processes, together with the guidance provided by GC4 in 2016, are having a material effect. In Australia’s case, the four key definitions (inclusion, integration, segregation and exclusion) and nine core features of inclusive education outlined in GC4 were recently adopted by the Queensland government in its 2018 Inclusive Education Policy Statement (Queensland Department of Education 2018), following the 2017 Disability Review (Deloitte Access Economics 2017). In so doing, Queensland became the first Australian state to use the definitions from international human-rights law to guide state education reforms. While it is too early to judge that policy’s implementation, it is hoped that it proves to be a catalyst for other Australian education systems to follow.

Table 4.2: Core features of inclusive education outlined in General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016: paragraph 12)

1	<i>Whole systems approach</i>	All resources are invested toward advancing inclusive education, and toward introducing and embedding the necessary changes in institutional culture, policies and practices.
2	<i>Whole education environment</i>	Committed leadership of educational institutions is essential to introduce and embed the culture, policies and practices to achieve inclusive education at all levels.
3	<i>Whole person approach</i>	Recognition is given to the capacity of every person to learn, and high expectations are established for all learners . . . inclusive education offers flexible curricula, teaching and learning methods adapted to different strengths, requirements and learning styles . . . it commits to ending segregation within educational settings by ensuring inclusive classroom teaching in accessible learning environments with appropriate supports. The education system must provide a personalised educational response, rather than expecting the student to fit the system.
4	<i>Supported teachers</i>	All teachers and other staff [in learning environments] receive education and training giving them the core values and competencies to accommodate inclusive learning environments.
5	<i>Respect for and value of diversity</i>	All students must feel valued, respected, included and listened to. Effective measures to prevent abuse and bullying are in place.
6	<i>Learning-friendly environment</i>	A positive school community and accessible environment where everyone feels safe, supported, stimulated and able to express themselves.
7	<i>Effective transitions</i>	Learners with disabilities receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to work.
8	<i>Recognition of</i>	Involvement of parents/caregivers and the community must be viewed as assets with resources

partnerships and strengths to contribute.

- 9 *Monitoring* Inclusive education must be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that segregation or integration is not happening either formally or informally.
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Conclusion

As a society, it is crucial to find ways to address the historical and social wrongs committed against people with disability. Returning to the inclusionary premise and right that all people with disability are equally entitled to participate in all aspects of society, including education, is the gateway to accessing full social participation and equality. The CRPD is a legally binding instrument that has been ratified by the Australian government, committing all Australian education sectors to the realisation of the right to inclusive education. This cannot be achieved by ‘tinkering’ with existing systems—built on an educational binary between abled students and students with disability—which perpetuate and promote the segregation of the latter. It calls for the *transformation* of education so that educational provision is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with a disability. The challenge for parents, educators and academics is how best to support this transformation to deliver on the educational rights of every child, now and into the future.

Notes

- 1 The ratification of an international convention generally refers to a commitment beyond its signature—it means that a signatory country undertakes to change its own domestic laws to realise the purposes of the convention.

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CHAPTER 5

Legislation, litigation and implications for inclusion

SHIRALEE POED

The concept of inclusive education, discussed here in relation to students with disability, has emerged from a global trend aimed at ensuring the most marginalised and vulnerable students can access and participate in education (Carrington et al. 2012). International instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008; see [Chapter 4](#)) require signatories, including Australia, to provide reasonable adjustments and individualised supports so that students with disability can access an inclusive education, without discrimination, in schools in the ‘communities in which they live’ (Article 24). The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) and its subordinate legislation, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE; Cth), provide the regulatory framework that governs the education of students with disability in Australian schools. This chapter will define discrimination, explain the legislative right to an inclusive education for students with disability, outline the application and limitations of Australia’s Commonwealth anti-discrimination legislation, clarify the obligations and lessons learned from past litigation, and offer practical implications for the inclusion of students with disability in Australian schools.

What is Discrimination?

When it comes to disability, discrimination is defined as:

any distinction, exclusion, or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. (United Nations 2008: Article 2)

In education, students with disability experience discrimination when they are denied, or are given limited access to, education in the school of their choice; have conditions imposed on their enrolment, attendance and/or participation that differ from those imposed on their peers; are required to participate without adjustments or supports; or are treated negatively on the basis of their disability. Discrimination can be conceptualised as ‘any practice that makes distinctions between individuals and groups so as to advantage some and disadvantage others’ (Waldeck & Guthrie 2004: 7).

Inclusive Education as a Right

Education is viewed as a critical factor in redressing the disadvantage that might arise from an individual’s personal or social circumstances. At the same time, it has the power to change discriminatory attitudes held by teachers, students and the broader school community (Masters & Adams 2018). For Australian students with disability, educational practices have evolved from the disadvantage of initially being provided no formal education, to separate provision in parent-run, charity-owned or government-funded segregated programs or schools, to attendance at mainstream schools with varying levels of integration or inclusion (Ashman 2018). Views on educational practices to best support the inclusion of students with disability have evolved alongside broader shifts in attitudes towards the inclusion of people with disability in society.

Emerging in the mid-1970s (UPIAS 1976), the social model of disability (see [Chapter 2](#)) challenged deficit views of people with disability, instead arguing that disability was imposed by society’s failure

to accommodate a person's impairments. It positioned disability as a societal failure, rather than an attribute or condition located within an individual. When the social-model lens was directed towards education, exclusionary practices were viewed as adding to the discrimination experienced by people with disability. More recently, other models have emerged, including the capability approach (Mitra 2006), the cultural model (Waldschmidt 2006) and the human-rights model (Degener 2017). The latter model emphasises the inherent worth of people with disability (Degener 2017). The impact of each of these models is evidenced by a shift from practices that simply redressed barriers that limited the education of students with disability to a commitment towards inclusive education.

One challenge associated with the right to an inclusive education is the ongoing attempts to define and redefine its meaning (Spandagou 2018). First, across Australia, when education jurisdictions have mentioned inclusive education in policy, they are typically referring to the education of students with disability, despite the term having application to all students marginalised within an education system (Anderson & Boyle 2015). Second, because inclusive education is not just an educational goal but also a methodology (Slee 2018a), policies have been written to suit the epistemological views held by each jurisdiction in relation to the education of students with disability (D'Alessio et al. 2018). In some states across Australia, this has included inclusive education being viewed as a term that reflects access to education, participation and achievement, rather than a student's right to all of those things alongside their same-aged peers. This misinterpretation has resulted in special schools winning awards for inclusive education, and inclusive education being equated with a continuum of provision that permits degrees of inclusion that are more properly described as integration. This fluid reconceptualisation of 'inclusive education' has meant that Australian teachers and students, including those with disability, have not reaped all of the benefits of true inclusion.

Benefits of an Inclusive Education

Quality education of students with disability is a key goal for the United Nations, as education offers significant financial benefit, not only through increased employment and productivity of people with disability

upon completion of their education, but also through the increased productivity of family members with school-aged children with disability (United Nations 2016; World Health Organization & World Bank 2011). Further, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#), there are significant short- and long-term educational and social benefits associated with the inclusion of students with disability (Hehir et al. 2016). These benefits are classified in [Table 5.1](#).

Slee (2018b) notes that the phrase ‘inclusive education’ is now deeply embedded in the lexicon of education, but that its initial aim of improving access, participation and outcomes for marginalised students may have been diminished by caveats within legislation. The Australian federal legislation that has been enacted to protect the rights of students with disability will be discussed in the next section.

Table 5.1: Benefits of an inclusive education (summarised from Hehir et al. 2016)

Benefits for the student	Benefits for peers	Benefits for teachers
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Benefits for the student	Benefits for peers	Benefits for teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved educational outcomes, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and enhanced memory skills • Improved social and emotional development, leading to higher levels of engagement/friendships with peers • Increased school attendance • Reduced behaviours of concern • Increased likelihood of completion of secondary schooling • More likely to be 'earning or learning' post-school, and living independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More accepting of diversity and reduced fear of difference, leading to a higher level of moral and ethical awareness • Enhanced skills in engaging with students who are different to them through more effective communication and greater levels of empathy and understanding • Increased self-concept • Benefit from access to educational materials that have been adapted for students with disability • No negative effect on learning outcomes, with positive effect noted in some studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher-quality instructional strategies honed by teaching diverse learners • Access to professional learning as well as additional resourcing (typically used for staffing) that can provide further in-class support • Opportunities for collaboration with allied health and other professionals to enhance practice

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992

The Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) received royal assent on 5 November 1992, and passed into law. It articulated a major shift in the view of people with disability in Australia. For the first time, the focus moved beyond the viewing of disability as a deficit (the historic medical model of disability), shifting to view disability as a condition caused by barriers that can be addressed through changes in attitudes and environments (aligned with the social model of disability). The DDA was initially proposed to counter discrimination in employment, but community consultation highlighted the need for the scope of the legislation to be extended to redress discrimination in other aspects of society, including education (Poed 2016).

The DDA obligates schools, ‘as far as practicable’, to ensure that current and prospective students with disability are not treated less favourably than their peers (DDA; Cth: section 3). Schools, either directly or indirectly, may treat students with disability differently. Sometimes this is done as a form of positive discrimination: differential treatment that balances an inequity (see [Chapter 2](#)). An example is providing material in a different format to accommodate the needs of a student with a print disability. Not all students would benefit from differently formatted materials but providing these to a student with a vision impairment, for example, is a form of positive discrimination. If a school failed to provide a student with a print disability alternatively formatted materials, this would be an example of a student being treated less favourably and could be considered discriminatory. There are two types of discriminatory treatment: direct discrimination and indirect discrimination.

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when a school decides to treat a student with a disability differently to other students on the basis of their disability. This may include a school choosing not to enrol a student because they have a disability, not permitting a student to attend a camp because of their disability, not permitting a student to study a particular subject because of their disability, and so on. If a student is not permitted to do something in a school because they have a disability, then it is likely that the school has engaged in direct discrimination.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination occurs when a school unintentionally puts in place a policy or practice that they believe to be fair, but this policy or practice has a detrimental impact on a student with a disability. An example is enforcing a 'no hat, no play' policy, which punishes students who fail to bring their hat to school by keeping them indoors at lunch. On the surface, the policy exists to limit later historical claims of skin cancer caused by sun exposure during lunchbreaks at school. However, for those students who dislike wearing hats because they have sensory issues, this policy may result in these students being kept indoors repeatedly during lunchbreaks, detrimentally impacting their ability to engage socially with their peers, decreasing their free time to self-regulate, and causing distress to the student. In implementing a 'no hat, no play' policy, the school does not set out to intentionally treat students with sensory issues differently, but it is an unintended discriminatory consequence of the policy.

Unjustifiable hardship

One exception exists in the DDA: the argument of unjustifiable hardship. This exception permits schools to make an argument that the provision of an adjustment for a student with disability would place an undue burden on the school community, and that the burden should be deemed as unreasonable thereby exempting the school from being required to make the proposed adjustment. Unjustifiable hardship will be explored in more detail later in this chapter. Due to the lack of practical guidance within legislation, the DDA included a provision that allowed for subordinate legislation to clarify the obligations embedded within the DDA. After a lengthy formulation process, the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Cth) received royal assent on 1 March 2005.

The Disability Standards for Education 2005

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Cth) is a subordinate piece of legislation recognising 'that to overcome the disadvantage arising from their disability, students with disability need to be treated differently to remove or reduce barriers to their participation in

education’ (Disability Discrimination Amendment [Education Standards] Bill 2004, Cth). The phrase ‘on the same basis’ (DSE; Cth: Standard 4.2) means that the provision of education for students with disability must be of the *same standard* as that offered to their peers. While the DSE does not explicitly mention inclusive education, it does mandate that students must be able to enrol in, participate in and have access to services, supports and facilities provided by schools in the same way as their peers. As described in the introductory chapters to this book, these are fundamental tenets of an inclusive education.

Reasonable adjustments

The DSE obligates schools to provide reasonable adjustments to lessons, subjects, courses and extracurricular activities that enable students with disability to participate in these activities and to demonstrate their learning. Examples of adjustments considered reasonable include environmental modifications (such as tactile signs or auditory loops), pedagogical or instructional adjustments (such as visual prompts to support teacher directions), adjustments to curriculum and assessment (such as special examination provisions), as well as access to specialist support services (such as an interpreter or a visiting teacher). Where participation—even with adjustments—is not possible, schools are permitted to offer substitute activities.

The concept of reasonable adjustments was intended to promote differential treatment and positive discrimination, but it has been criticised as having a detrimental impact by directing the gaze of teachers to what students cannot do, as opposed to what they can do (Slee 2018b). When teachers are seeking additional resourcing to support a student with a disability, they are required to make a case based on the adjustments required and, to be eligible, their ‘deficit [must meet] a minimum threshold’ (de Bruin, cited in El Sayed 2018: 10). Teachers must document those areas where a student experiences difficulty, with higher needs for adjustments resulting in higher levels of additional resourcing. However, likening adjustments to deficits or resourcing misses the true meaning of the phrase as defined within legislation. Reasonable adjustments are meant to be the actions taken by a school to ensure the meaningful participation of students in the life of the school and to redress barriers to participation (Poed 2016).

Academic integrity

Like the DDA, the DSE does not obligate schools to make unreasonable adjustments. There is no requirement for teachers, or for curriculum authorities, to permit adjustments that would diminish the integrity of what is being taught, or to provide adjustments that would place an unjustifiable hardship on providers. This poses a challenge for schools, as they need to determine the exact measures that would be considered reasonable. The DSE notes that schools should ensure that:

- a. course or program activities are sufficiently flexible for the student to be able to participate in them;
- b. course or program requirements are reviewed, in the light of information provided by the student, or an associate of the student, to include activities in which the student is able to participate;
- c. appropriate programs necessary to enable participation by the student are negotiated, agreed and implemented;
- d. additional support is provided to the student where necessary, to assist him or her to achieve intended learning outcomes;
- e. where a course or program necessarily includes an activity in which the student cannot participate, the student is offered an activity that constitutes a reasonable substitute within the context of the overall aims of the course or program; and
- f. any activities that are not conducted in classrooms, and associated extracurricular activities or activities that are part of the broader educational program, are designed to include the student.

(DSE; Cth: Standard 5.3)

Additionally, compliance measures for the development, accreditation and delivery of curriculum require schools to ensure that:

- a. the curriculum, teaching materials, and the assessment and certification requirements for the course or program are appropriate to the needs of the student and accessible to him or her;
- b. the course or program delivery modes and learning activities take account of intended educational outcomes and the learning capacities and needs of the student;
- c. the course or program study materials are made available in a format that is appropriate for the student and, where conversion of materials into alternative accessible formats is required, the student is not disadvantaged by the time taken for conversion;
- d. the teaching and delivery strategies for the course or program are adjusted to meet the learning needs of the student and address any disadvantage in the student's learning resulting from his or her disability, including through the provision of additional support, such as bridging or enabling courses, or the development of disability-specific skills;

- e. any activities that are not conducted in a classroom, such as field trips, industry site visits and work placements, or activities that are part of the broader course or educational program of which the course or program is a part, are designed to include the student; and
- f. the assessment procedures and methodologies for the course or program are adapted to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed.

(DSE; Cth: Standard 6.3)

Prevention of harassment and victimisation

A final requirement of the DSE is that schools must ensure students with disability and their associates—typically the student’s parent(s) or carer(s)—do not experience harassment or victimisation. This obligates schools to implement programs and practices that ensure their staff and students are trained so as to prevent actions intended to distress, humiliate, intimidate, offend or victimise the student or their relatives (The Disability Standards for Education 2005 Guidance Notes [Cth]).

Application and Limitations of Australia’s Anti-discrimination Legislation

The Commonwealth regulatory framework described above was created to ensure that Australian students with disability had the ‘right to comparable access, services and facilities, and the right to participate in education and training unimpeded by discrimination, including on the basis of stereotyped beliefs about the abilities and choices of students with disabilities’ (The Disability Standards for Education 2005 Guidance Notes [Cth]).

Application

Schools are obligated to make reasonable adjustments. To assess the reasonableness of a school’s actions, Standard 3.4 of the DSE states that the following should be considered:

- a. the student’s disability;
- b. the views of the student or the student’s associate, given under section 3.5;

- c. the effect of the adjustment on the student, including the effect on the student's:
 - i. ability to achieve learning outcomes; and
 - ii. ability to participate in courses or programs; and
 - iii. independence.
- d. the effect of the proposed adjustment on anyone else affected, including the education provider, staff and other students;
- e. the costs and benefits of making the adjustment.

(DSE; Cth: Standard 3.4)

When making adjustments, the obligations for teachers are cyclical (see [Figure 5.1](#)).

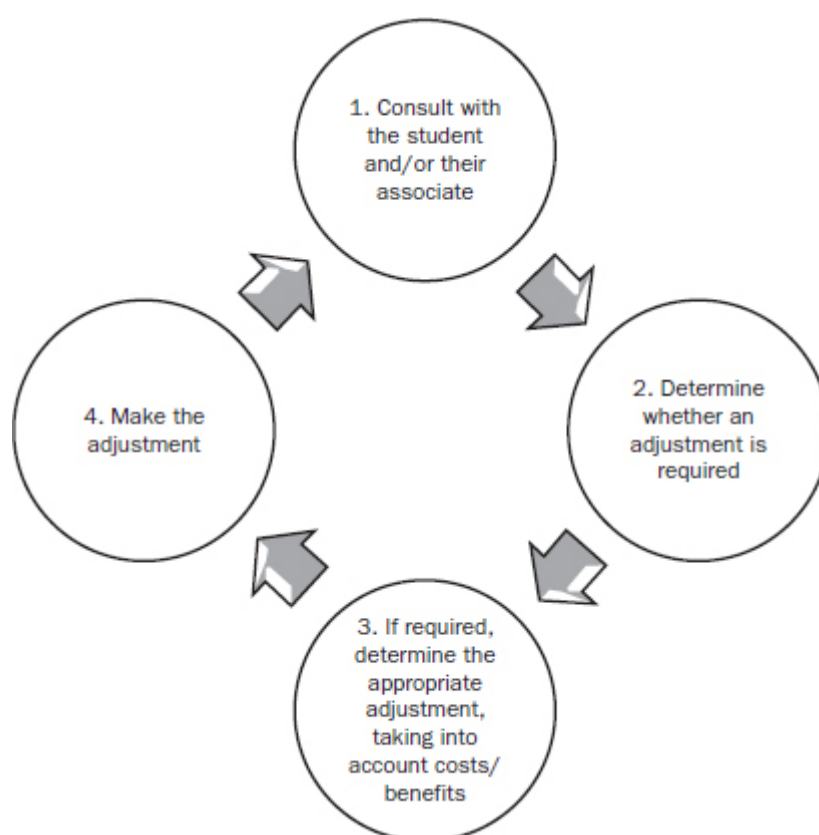


Figure 5.1. Adjustment cycle.

Limitations

Despite the enactment of federal legislation to regulate access and participation, Australian students with disability are still experiencing active and/or passive systematic discrimination resulting in reduced educational participation and opportunities (Cologon 2013; Dixon 2018; Mitchell 2017; Moss 2016; Slee 2018b). This discrimination may stem

from historical benevolent or charitable views that a separate education system will keep students with disability safe and occupied. There are also more hostile views that position students with disability as violent or dangerous, a burden on teachers and peers, damaging to the academic reputation of schools, and only able to be taught by those with specialist qualifications (Mitchell 2017; Slee 2018b). An analysis of litigation serves to identify the key themes that inhibit the inclusion of Australian students with disability.

Learning from Litigation

Litigation, while stressful on all parties, does provide an opportunity to clarify obligations and refine the regulatory framework that supports inclusion of students with disability (Alvarado & Draper Rodriguez 2018). Using the framework for reasonableness presented in the first half of this chapter—and learning from litigation—the following section outlines the obligations for educators in relation to five aspects of the framework: the student’s disability, the views of the student or their parent(s) or carer(s), the effect of the adjustment on the student, the effect of the adjustment on others, and the maintenance of academic integrity.

The student’s disability

While the legislation purports to promote the social model of disability, an inherent requirement for eligibility to make a claim of discrimination still requires a diagnosis of disability by a qualified medical or allied health practitioner. The DDA (Cth) defines disability as follows:

- a. total or partial loss of the person’s bodily or mental functions; or
- b. total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- c. the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- d. the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- e. the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person’s body; or
- f. a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- g. a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;

and includes a disability that:

- h. presently exists; or
- i. previously existed but no longer exists; or

j. may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or

k. is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

(DDA; Cth)

This broad definition does not match the criteria used by education jurisdictions to determine additional resourcing allocations for students with disability (see [Chapter 6](#)), raising questions as to whether the legislation affords the protections it set out to deliver for all, or only some, students with disability (O’Connell 2017). There is a widely held assumption by Australian educators that adjustments need to be provided only for those students who are eligible for individually targeted funding (Graham et al. 2018). This creates a chasm into which students with disability who are ineligible for funding fall (Foreman 2017). In Australia, this typically impacts students whose disability diagnosis sits on the cusp of funding eligibility; those whose diagnosis fluctuates, causing them to fall into and out of funding eligibility; and those who have a diagnosis but fail to meet eligibility criteria (Poed 2016). There is also a lack of consistency between sectors and states. As discussed in [Chapter 6](#), the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD) was designed to address these issues by focusing on the adjustments needed to enable students with disability to access curriculum and instruction, irrespective of disability category or diagnosis, across all school sectors in Australia. The key take-home message for educators is that, regardless of the criteria used to determine which students are eligible for targeted resourcing, the definition provided above outlines all students who have a legislated right to reasonable adjustments.

Educators’ Obligations under the Legislation

Obligation to consult

The DSE obligates schools to consult students, or their associates (typically parent[s] or carer[s]), in relation to the adjustments required to their educational program (Poed 2018). The reality in Australian schools

is that students are rarely consulted in relation to adjustments, particularly if they have a severe disability (Poed 2016; Wilson et al. 2015). There needs to be greater opportunities for students to make a meaningful contribution to decisions about their educational program. While some students, or more likely their associates, have an opportunity to do this during Individual Education Planning meetings (known by various names across Australia), not all students with disability are required, under jurisdictional policies, to have a plan that documents their needs. Individual plans have typically been reserved for students who receive additional resourcing through the relevant sector-eligibility criteria. As described earlier, however, these criteria do not include all students with disability entitled to reasonable adjustments under the broader DDA definition. Those students who do not receive additional resourcing are rarely consulted in relation to adjustments made to their program, which is a breach of the DSE. Processes and practices that educators can adopt to support the consultation process with students are described in [Chapter 11](#). Consulting with parents is discussed in [Chapter 14](#) and professional consultation is described in [Chapter 15](#).

Another interesting learning from litigation is that the obligation to consult does not extend to acting on the information provided through consultation. Where a school can demonstrate that it is not in the best interests of the student to provide the adjustments sought by the student or their associate, or where acting on these requests would cause a school to breach a policy, courts will permit the school to ignore the advice received in the process of consultation. One example of this, from litigation, is in relation to restraint. In one Australian case, a family sought to have their child restrained as a strategy to minimise self-injurious behaviour, providing supporting documentation from medical practitioners (see *Phu v. State of NSW*, 2008; *CP obo HP v. NSW Department of Education and Training*, 2008; *Phu v. State of NSW*, 2009; *Phu v. NSW Department of Education and Training*, 2010; *Phu v. NSW Department of Education and Training*, 2011). The school was able to successfully argue that the self-injurious behaviour could be addressed by improving the student's communication system, and that the policy on restraint did not permit schools to use the approach as a preventive strategy, but rather only in the event of an unforeseen circumstance that posed a serious risk to the child, or others.

Obligation to consider the effect of adjustments on the student

The benefits of providing adjustments to students with disability are clear. Adjustments provide access to learning, increase participation, allow the student's learning to be measured, and improve engagement. The courts will balance these benefits against costs when determining whether adjustments are reasonable. For example, parents sometimes seek assistance for their child's learning by way of the appointment of a full-time teacher aide. When making a determination as to whether this constitutes a reasonable adjustment, courts consider not just the cost of providing this service, but also the impact on the learner. For example, as discussed in [Chapter 16](#), a full-time aide may diminish opportunities for the student to engage with peers during group work or play; a teacher may delegate responsibility for the learning program for that student to the aide, thereby denying the student the benefit of access to the teacher as expert; or the teacher may delegate responsibility for home-school communication to the aide. In these cases, courts have ruled that the provision of an aide is not a reasonable adjustment.

Part-time attendance has also come to the attention of the courts. While some schools have successfully used part-time attendance to support the reintegration of students experiencing medical or mental-health conditions, others have used part-time attendance as a punitive approach to address student behaviour. These cases have not been viewed favourably by courts, as the student is being denied a benefit—full-time access to learning—on the basis of disability.

Obligation to consider the effect of the adjustment on others

Courts have also paid attention to the impact of adjustments on peers, the teacher and the broader school community. While attention usually turns to the costs of students with disability in schools, as Hehir and colleagues (2016) showed, there are many benefits for peers learning alongside students with disability. Courts will consider any impact of disability or behaviour on the learning of peers, on teacher stress and on student and staff safety, but only where a school can show that it has provided appropriate adjustments to support behavioural change.

Obligation to maintain academic integrity

There has been limited attention in school discrimination cases in relation to academic integrity. Where attention has been paid, it has been in relation to matters such as what constitutes a reasonable substitute for a planned learning experience if the provision of adjustments were insufficient to allow a student to access and participate in the experience. A growing area for mediation has been the attendance of students with disability at school camps, excursions and extracurricular activities. On these matters, the legislation is clear. Schools are expected to provide reasonable adjustments enabling students with disability the opportunity to engage on the same basis as their peers.

Implications for Inclusion

Implications for system change

Policy has the power to change professional practice. Schools must comply with policy for their actions to be defensible. As such, the following recommendations are offered for systemic change:

- The obligation to adjust causes teachers to turn their focus on the individual and their needs rather than to reflect on their curriculum and pedagogy; some have argued this as a deficit of the legislation. There are calls, instead, for legislation to obligate systemic changes to curriculum, particularly in relation to special provisions within assessment policies, with a stronger emphasis on supporting diverse learners using universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (see [Chapter 8](#)).
- Consideration should be given, at the system level, as to how the views of students who are ineligible for additional resourcing in relation to adjustments to their educational program can be documented (Poed 2016, see also [Chapter 11](#)).
- Schools would be able to better support all learners with disability if the criteria for additional resourcing mirrored the definition of disability provided in the DDA. Further, this would limit litigation claims from those students who are presently unfunded. This is the intent of the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School

Students with Disability, although work to align the NCCD with legislative obligations is ongoing.

- A clearer policy position in relation to part-time attendance would assist schools.
- Further consideration is needed at the system level regarding the provision of specialist support services, such as the quantity and quality of Auslan support, the timeliness of accessible print material delivery, and the variable nature of allied health support dependent on postcode (Parliament of Australia [The Senate Education and Employment References Committee] 2016).

Implications for principals

Legal literacy, while critical for principals and teachers, appears to be lacking (Butlin & Trimmer 2018; Trimble & Cranston 2018). There are some critical considerations for principals in relation to inclusion:

- Principals must ensure that the process to enrol at their school is accessible for all families, and that when considering applications, students with disability are considered according to the same criteria as all other students.
- At the point of enrolment, if a family discloses that their child has a disability, this information should be used to plan adjustments rather than as a reason to reject the student's enrolment. Urbis (2015) found that a fear of discrimination, particularly in non-government education settings, led to parents not disclosing their child's disability at the point of enrolment.
- Once enrolled, students with disability should have opportunities to engage in all subjects or courses offered by the school. Having a disability that impacts on communication or literacy does not automatically entitle schools to withdraw students from second-language learning; having a disability that impacts on learning does not permit the school to force the student to study a less academic pathway in secondary settings. The same process for subject and course selection should be applied to all learners.
- Where funding has been allocated to schools for the provision of support services, schools need to ensure that the student receives these services, and that they are not reallocated to other students who may present with higher needs but were ineligible for resourcing.

- Principals are obligated to ensure that policies and programs are in place to prevent the harassment and victimisation of students with disability. If these do occur, principals are further obligated to ensure that they are addressed.
- In remote locations where access to staffing can be limited, principals are asked to consider the negative implications of appointing parents as a teacher aide to support the learning of their child (Urbis 2015).

Implications for teachers

The review of the DSE (Australian Government [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations] 2012) showed that teachers were aware of the existence of the DSE, but needed ongoing training to understand its impact. Findings from litigation suggest that teachers would enhance the inclusion of students with disability through the adoption of the following practices:

- All students with disability that meet the DDA criteria provided earlier are entitled to reasonable adjustments. Teachers should plan these adjustments with the student and/or their family, and ensure that they provide these to the student as planned so that the student can participate in learning experiences on the same basis as their peers.
- Teachers should monitor classes to ensure that students with disability are not subjected to harassment or victimisation, and address these behaviours if they occur in accordance with school policy.
- Where specialist or medical assessments have been completed, teachers need to consider recommendations within these reports and plan to adopt these recommendations where appropriate. Where not appropriate, teachers should discuss their concerns with the principal so that further consultation can occur with the student and their family.
- When a teacher makes an adjustment to a student's educational program, learning experiences or assessment tasks, records of this adjustment should be kept to support longitudinal educational planning and decision-making, and as evidence for the NCCD (see [Chapter 6](#)).
- Teachers are responsible for the design and delivery of educational programs. Where additional funding has been provided to engage a teacher aide, the teacher cannot delegate this responsibility to the aide.

Conclusion

Australia's regulatory framework was designed to promote the inclusion of people with disability within all facets of society. For students with disability, the legislation is meant to promote engagement in schools and protect students from discrimination. Since its assent in 1992, the DDA has not achieved its objectives, as students with disability are still excluded from—or provided limited access to—high-quality inclusive education. To achieve the vision of an equitable society, schools need to address the systemic and structural barriers that inhibit students with disability. This includes deeper consideration of the content, pedagogy, assessment and engagement strategies that promote the full inclusion of students with disability. To achieve this, educators need to both know and fulfil their obligations under international humanrights law and national anti-discrimination legislation.

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CHAPTER 6

What is the NCCD and what does it mean for my practice?

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Over the last few decades, education systems both in Australia and overseas have made changes to the ways school funding and resources are distributed. These changes are occurring because it is now recognised that there are problems with traditional support allocation methods and that an intelligent mix of methods is necessary to prevent negative outcomes (Graham & Jahnukainen 2011). Historically, education systems have used disability categories to determine eligibility for individually targeted special-education funding. This approach, known as the categorical resource-allocation method, has several known weaknesses (Fletcher-Campbell et al. 2003). One weakness lies in its invocation of the medical model of disability. As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), there are four models of disability, including the medical, social, biopsychosocial and human-rights models. Inclusive education explicitly rejects the medical model, on which the categorical resource-allocation approach is based, as it conceptualises impairment as a deficit within the individual, directs attention to the remediation of a perceived lack, leads to the labelling and stigmatisation of people with disability, and neglects the social, economic,

political, cultural and structural barriers that disable people with impairments. In using disability categories and medical diagnoses to determine funding eligibility, categorical resource allocation draws attention to abstract medical descriptions of human differences that disguise individuality with generic group characteristics, distracting attention from the attitudinal and environmental barriers that impede individual functioning. Through the application of the medical model, the focus of the process becomes diagnosis of impairment for funding purposes, rather than identifying and implementing the adjustments necessary for students to access and participate in education.

Another weakness of the categorical approach is its tendency to create funding gaps. These funding gaps occur because governments use the categorical approach to control expenditure, and this control is enacted through tight eligibility criteria, based on medical diagnoses. Examples of such funding include Integration Funding Support (IFS) in New South Wales, the Education Adjustment Program (EAP) in Queensland, the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) in Victoria, the School Resource Entitlement Statement (SRES) in South Australia, the Individual Disability Allocation (IDA) in Western Australia, the Inclusion Support Program (ISP) in the Australian Capital Territory, and the Special Education Support Program (SESP) in the Northern Territory (Tasmania is not listed as it is the first sector to release a new funding model aligned with the NCCD). In many jurisdictions internationally, individually targeted funding is now typically only available for a limited range of so-called 'low-incidence' disability categories, such as moderate to severe levels of physical, intellectual or sensory disability, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Those students who experience significant difficulties at school and with learning, but have diagnoses that do not fit within these limited categories, are ineligible for individually targeted funding. As we discuss later, there is a misperception in schools that this is the only source of disability-support funding and, without it, the child is not entitled to support/adjustments (Graham & Tancredi 2019). This misperception and gaps in funding for students with disability have consistently been raised by parents in government reviews and inquiries at both state and federal level (see [Chapter 1](#)).

Even within the limited categories eligible for individually targeted funding, there are issues due to the use of very tight diagnostic thresholds that also differ by jurisdiction (Graham et al. 2018). For example, a language disorder is considered clinically significant—as in, considered to have a functional impact on learning—when a child achieves two

composite scores that are at least 1.25 standard deviations below the mean on a standardised language assessment (Tomblin et al. 1997). Yet, in the few jurisdictions that *do* include speech/language impairment in their list of eligible categories, the threshold for individually targeted funding is well below the cut-off for clinical significance, meaning that many children who experience functional impact from a language disorder do not meet funding criteria. In Queensland, for instance, the verification cut-off is two standard deviations below the mean on a standardised language assessment, whereas in Victoria, it is three standard deviations below (Graham et al. 2018).

Other Sources of Disability Support Funding

Despite the way that disability funding is described by various commentators, lobby groups, education unions and the media, individually targeted funding is not the only form of funding or support provided for school students with disability (Graham 2017). For those with a disability that falls outside the limited categories eligible for individually targeted funding, schools are provided with another form of funding based on school/system census data, and it is up to each individual school to determine how that funding is used and who it supports. This is called census-based funding, and it is typically used to complement a categorical funding stream but is applied differently across jurisdictions. In some Australian states, such as New South Wales, schools are allocated specialist teacher time, in addition to a flexible funding allocation, based on enrolments and students' 'demonstrated learning needs' (NSW Department of Education 2017, 2018). These needs are determined by each school's results in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The NSW approach to census-based funding, which is called the Resource Allocation Model (RAM), is not without its problems. First, NAPLAN is not a holistic measure and provides no indication of the social, emotional or behavioural profiles of students, or the level of adjustment or support that has been or should be provided to ensure equity of access and participation. Second, schools that improve their NAPLAN performance risk being penalised by losing the resources and funding that may have helped them support their students' learning in the first place.

While a strength of census-based funding is that it is not disability specific—helping to reduce labelling and the 'wait to fail' aspect of its

categorical counterpart—its non-specific nature is also a weakness, making governments politically vulnerable to claims that students with disability are underfunded. The devolution of census-based funding through programs such as RAM to schools in the form of a ‘catchall bucket’ that could also include funding for Indigenous students, students from refugee and other cultural and language backgrounds, not to mention socio-economic disadvantage, exacerbates the invisibility of this form of funding for students with disability. Across Australia, for example, parents of children who do not qualify for individually targeted funding are often told by their child’s school that there is ‘no funding’ to support their child and that their child cannot therefore receive support or adjustments (Commonwealth of Australia 2016). This, of course, is not the full story but, due to the complicated nature of funding for students with disability, very few front-line educators or parents know the full story, and many believe that there is indeed no funding beyond that which is individually targeted to students considered to have ‘high-support needs’.

Perverse effects of the categorical approach

Although census-based approaches like RAM are imperfect, governments have adopted them—as part of the overall funding mix—to combat the known problems with categorical allocation methods. One such problem is known as ‘gaming’. Gaming occurs when students’ needs are inflated to meet eligibility thresholds or to reach higher funding brackets. While verification processes do include a series of checks and balances, an increasingly common approach to gaming is the use of multiple diagnoses in more subjective categories of disability, particularly those that cannot be objectively measured and are therefore reliant on medical judgement (Graham & Sweller 2011). Most often this inflation occurs when the primary diagnosis does not reach the threshold or is ineligible for individually targeted funding (Graham 2015). Research indicates that gaming is more likely when total education budgets are insufficient for the demands placed on schools and where school effectiveness is measured by student performance in standardised assessments (Figlio & Getzler 2006). The categorical approach to funding allocation is especially vulnerable to gaming because students with disability enable schools’ access to a funding source that can be used to ‘fill the gaps’ in the context of inadequate global budgets. The problem of gaming is exacerbated when census-based approaches are *also* inadequate or when

the number of students requiring support is perceived to exceed the skills and capacity of existing staff. A common issue reported by parents of students with disability, for example, is when a school 'shares' their child's individual allocation to provide support for 'unfunded' students in ways that leave their child with less support than they need or were entitled to receive (Commonwealth of Australia 2016). This becomes a vicious circle, with each newly identified student depleting the resources available. Unfortunately, it is a common practice that undermines inclusion, leaving some parents of children with disability feeling that they have no option but to 'choose' segregation (Commonwealth of Australia 2016). Of course, forced choice is not free choice.

Another example of gaming is diagnostic substitution, which occurs when pressure is placed on parents and doctors to exchange an existing diagnosis of disability in a category that is ineligible for individually targeted funding (e.g. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, dyslexia) with a new or additional diagnosis of disability in a category that is eligible (e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder) (Skellern et al. 2005). Although some stakeholders argue that this is the result of inadequate funding and that more is needed, it is also the case that disability-support funds are often poorly used in schools. Despite flexibility enabling schools to use their funding to release teachers for collaborative planning or to provide them with professional learning, most disability funding is spent employing teacher aides (Butt 2016). Teacher aides, however, are not always used well and are often deployed in place of necessary reforms to school structures, practice, culture and environments (see [Chapter 16](#)). Another problem associated with categorical resource-allocation models is the expense of verification procedures, which delays access to support (Graham & Jahnukainen 2011). This creates achievement gaps (Chard 2013) and has a tendency to push students out of the classroom and into specialist and segregated support (Deppeler et al. 2005; Ferguson et al. 2003; Sailor 2017). The differences between each state and sector's specified disability categories and eligibility criteria have also led to funding inconsistency and lack of portability, meaning students can gain or lose funding simply by moving to a new state or sector (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). There has also been a lack of accountability regarding students with disability who did not meet eligibility criteria or funding thresholds, as well as those who have been denied adjustments in the past.

Obligations, Responsibilities and Entitlements

Students with disability are entitled to reasonable adjustments under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE; Cth), regardless of their eligibility for individually targeted funding (see [Chapter 5](#)). A key issue that prevents many students from receiving adjustments is a set of beliefs common among educators that adjustments occur outside regular classroom teaching, that they are someone else's responsibility (e.g. teacher aides, special-education teachers or learning-support teachers), and that only 'verified' students or those in receipt of individually targeted funding are entitled to them (Graham et al. 2018). The result is that many students with disability do not receive the support or adjustments necessary to provide them with equal access to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This failure negatively affects their ability to participate and learn, contributing to disengagement, disruptive behaviour and poor schooling outcomes (Australian Federation of Disability Organisations 2018; Commonwealth of Australia 2016). It also constitutes a fundamental breach of educators' obligations under the DDA and DSE, and Australia's agreed responsibilities under international human-rights law (see [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#)).

Multiple government inquiries and reviews of education for students with disability across all Australian states and sectors have highlighted the funding of disability support as a barrier to the effective implementation of inclusive education (see [Chapter 1](#)). While the states are responsible for education under Australia's model of cooperative federalism, the Australian government is responsible for ensuring education providers' compliance with national anti-discrimination legislation. Further, as explained in [Chapter 4](#), since ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008), the Australian government is also responsible for ensuring the progressive realisation of the right of children with disability to an inclusive education under Article 24: Right to Education. In addition to specifically referring to the requirement for States parties to 'achieve a transfer of resources from segregated to inclusive environments' (United Nations 2016: paragraph 68), General Comment No. 4 (GC4) stipulates that States parties must 'develop a funding model that allocates resources and incentives for inclusive educational environments to provide the necessary support to persons with disabilities' (United Nations 2016: paragraph 68).

Background to the NCCD

It is against this backdrop that the Australian Labor government, under the leadership of the then Education Minister, The Hon Julia Gillard, worked in cooperation with all education sectors and a range of academic experts in 2010/2011 to devise a new, nationally consistent approach to defining and identifying students with disability. This approach, called the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), was designed to assess the type and level of adjustments needed for students with disability to access the curriculum and participate in learning. The NCCD was designed this way to provide information that is useful for resource allocation and workforce planning. It is based on the understanding that children with the same diagnosis can be just as different from each other as children without that diagnosis, and therefore the adjustments needed for individual children to access and participate in learning may be different as well. From a system point of view, knowing the number and types of adjustments needed is more useful than a specific diagnosis of disability, because this can assist schools and departments to mobilise resources, invest in professional learning and appropriately manage workforce capacity.

Importantly, the NCCD was not originally designed to be a resource-allocation method, although that was undoubtedly a secondary objective of the Australian government, given its legal responsibilities under international human-rights law following ratification of the CRPD (United Nations 2008). In the beginning, the NCCD was simply about defining disability in accordance with the DDA, ensuring this definition was applied nationally and across sectors, establishing the number of students with disability requiring reasonable adjustments to access their education across the country, and documenting the types and levels of adjustments provided by schools. The NCCD *became* a resource-allocation method following the 2011 Review of Funding for Schooling (Gonski et al. 2011), better known as the ‘Gonski Review’. The review report made a series of recommendations in relation to the funding of students with disability, and it stated: ‘The additional costs of supporting students with disability should be included as a loading in the schooling resource standard once nationally consistent data on student numbers and adjustment levels becomes available’ (Gonski et al. 2011: p. xvii). Professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) was originally charged with the responsibility of trialling the model and verifying the data. Six long years later, the Australian Coalition government—led by

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull—legislated the *Australian Education Amendment Act 2017* (Cth), which based the additional ‘Gonski 2.0’ loadings for students with disability on the NCCD, effectively turning the model into a national resource-allocation method. The NCCD now has significant potential to address the perverse effects and failures of other resource-allocation methods, but to realise its potential it must be well explained, well understood, adopted by *all* education sectors—Catholic, Independent and government—and enacted with fidelity.

What is the NCCD?

The NCCD operates as an annual census through which schools provide data to document their compliance with the obligation to provide reasonable adjustments to students with disability; this data is then used to inform Commonwealth disability loadings to be distributed to schools. The NCCD draws on and reinforces the ‘Planning for Personalised Learning and Support’ policy for students with disability (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2015). This resource outlines how schools can comply with their obligations under the DSE to develop adjustments in consultation with students and their parents/carers. It also outlines how schools should ensure that the learning is personalised by drawing on student information (strengths, interests, goals) and learning needs (assessments, learning supports) to maximise academic and social participation and progress. It additionally outlines how the impact of the support provided to students is to be evaluated.

It is important to note that the NCCD is designed to build on and ‘capture’ what schools already do in terms of complying with the DDA and the DSE, and when providing personalised learning and support. The NCCD facilitates recording whether and how students’ rights are being fulfilled in line with legislation and policy. However, given that decades of evaluation and research have found that many students’ rights to adjustments under the DDA and the DSE are not actually met, and that adjustments are seldom developed in consultation with students and their parents/carers, this accountability measure has the potential to generate improvement in inclusive practice across the system. The NCCD also has the potential to capture good practices already in place in many schools, and to improve the level of practice and compliance in others.

As an annual census, the NCCD operates across a yearly cycle. The reporting cycle is a twelve-month period in which data is lodged on the

first Friday in August, and the new reporting cycle begins the following day. However, the data-collection process is conceptualised by the government as running across the school year, as outlined in [Figure 6.1](#).

The planning phase

The planning phase of the NCCD involves a number of recommended processes for ensuring that all parties understand the rights and responsibilities articulated in the DSE and involved in enacting the NCCD: to communicate and consult with parents and students, to collect evidence of the need for adjustments, and to document the decisions made in selecting the adjustments. This phase includes recommended processes such as assembling a school NCCD team and team leader, and providing professional learning.

The implementation phase

This phase of the data collection contains mandatory processes that schools are required to follow. These processes require schools to make decisions about whether students should be included within the census, and what information is to be recorded about their adjustments. Decision-making tools are provided on the NCCD website to support schools during this part of the NCCD data-collection process. The three steps of the implementation phase are outlined below.

Step 1. Student eligibility for inclusion in the NCCD. In step 1, schools identify which of their students should be included in the census by identifying all those who have an impairment that meets the DDA's broad definition of disability *and* for whom there is a functional impact of this impairment requiring a reasonable adjustment to support them in accessing, participating in or making progress at school. Students who meet the definition of disability under the DDA but who do not receive adjustments—for example, those with asthma plans who manage their medication without monitoring from the school—are not included in the census. In this step of the NCCD's implementation phase, schools identify each student who received a reasonable adjustment for ten weeks or more within the reporting cycle. These do not need to be consecutive weeks, and they include adjustments provided in an episodic manner. Under the legal requirements of the DSE, schools are required to consult with students and their parents/carers in making decisions about the

adjustments provided to students. Evidence of this consultation must also be recorded and kept.

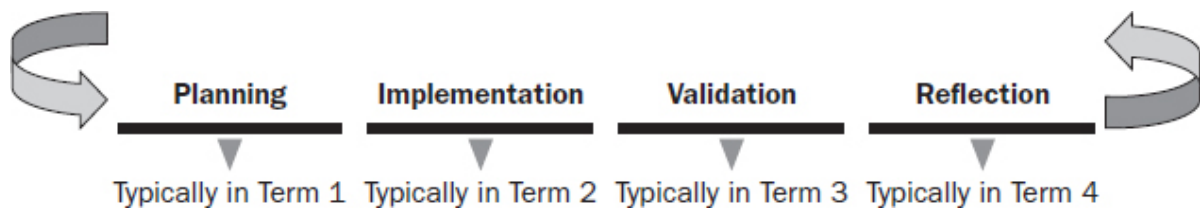


Figure 6.1. The NCCD process (Education Services Australia 2019a).

Step 2. Levels of adjustment provided to students. In step 2, schools identify the *level* of adjustment provided. The level of the adjustment provided is to be recorded within one of four levels: Level 0 (Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice; QDTP), Level 1 (supplementary), Level 2 (substantial) and Level 3 (extensive) (Education Services Australia 2019b). The differences between these levels are essentially in the frequency and the degree of intensity of the support (see [Chapter 9](#)).

Level 0. QDTP is understood as the provision of *occasional* support within the context of the types of practices that are routinely used by teachers within the resources of the classroom. These routine practices support students who take in information in a range of ways, have varied strengths in how they can showcase their learning, and are motivated and engaged in diverse ways. These practices therefore constitute adjustments implemented as, for example, peer-learning activities, formative assessment procedures, the creation of a positive learning environment, and using universal design for learning principles to ensure that barriers are removed at the planning stage and that flexibility is provided in how teachers present information, and assess and engage all students. While teachers may use them frequently, for NCCD purposes these provisions can constitute intermittent adjustments for students with disability without the need to draw on additional resources.

Level 1. Supplementary adjustments are supports that are needed at *specific and intermittent times* to overcome barriers that students sometimes experience. For example, there may be a need for the built environment to be modified, intermittent support provided by specialists (e.g. occasional speech-pathology advice), assistive technology used for some tasks, or intermittent targeted support for students' learning (such as structured task analysis) or students' behavioural or social interactions.

Level 2. Substantial adjustments are supports that are offered more frequently *at most times* to overcome significant barriers experienced regularly by students. These might include alternative formats for many tasks, regular support by specialists, or regular assistance with personal care, social interaction, communication or behaviour.

Level 3. Extensive adjustments are *always ongoing* to overcome barriers experienced by students. These could include highly individualised adjustments to all curriculum materials and assessments, alternative modes of communication, highly specialised assistive technology, intensive and individualised ongoing intervention, or personal-care assistance.

QDTP is further explained in [Chapter 8](#), which focuses on universal design principles. Examples of supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are provided in [Chapter 9](#) in the form of case studies of inclusive practice. The emphasis in each case is the process of making adjustments to the Australian Curriculum within inclusive classrooms. The responsibility for making adjustments lies with the classroom teacher in consultation with students (or their associate; see [Chapter 11](#)), with guidance and/or support from colleagues and other professionals, as well as teacher aides. The value of multidisciplinary professional collaboration and effective use of teacher aides are discussed in [Chapters 15](#) and [16](#), respectively.

Step 3. Category of disability relating to the adjustments provided to students. In step 3, schools identify the *type* of adjustments provided for each of the students included in the census. These adjustment types are reported in relation to one of four categories of disability. The category reported is not (necessarily) the category of the student's diagnosed or attributed disability, but specifically relates to the adjustment itself. Many of the support materials provided to assist schools in carrying out the NCCD data collection use the shorthand term 'the category of disability' in describing how schools should report data under step 3; however, this is misleading and has led to some confusion about what teachers are required to do. It is important to remember that the NCCD is not collecting data about *students*, but about the *adjustments* provided. This is made clear in the NCCD guidelines, which emphasise that 'the category of disability selected will be the area of disability that is the main driver or focus of the adjustments being provided for the student to support their learning' (Commonwealth of Australia 2019: 20). The guidelines note that the category of disability that is reported for the adjustments relating to a student may change over time and, for students

with multiple disabilities, schools should report on the category that is relevant to most of the adjustments provided. The four categories of adjustment under the NCCD are simplified versions of the defined types of disability articulated under the DDA. [Table 6.1](#) shows how the DDA categories have been reorganised for the NCCD.

Schools are to report the disability category that is most relevant to the adjustments provided to students. In the case of students who receive adjustments that fall under multiple categories of disability and/or relate to multiple impairments, schools report the category that constitutes the greatest focus in terms of frequency, intensity or range.

The validation phase

The validation phase of the NCCD model incorporates step 4 and is typically undertaken in Term 3, when the data is verified as correct at the school level and is then submitted. Some of the processes in this phase are mandatory, while others are recommended only.

Step 4. Record and submit data. In step 4, the first mandatory process is to review steps 1–3 to confirm that the decisions are accurate, and that sufficient evidence has been collected to support each step. The NCCD portal contains a number of helpful resources to guide schools in ensuring that they have appropriate evidence for steps 1–3. A recommended process is to engage in moderation, whereby two or more members of the NCCD team independently examine student cases and related evidence, and then compare their decisions for steps 1–3 and seek to form a consensus on the student’s inclusion, and the levels and category of adjustments provided. The second mandatory process is to submit the data. The process that schools use for submitting their data varies across school systems and sectors. Government schools typically submit their data to the Education Department in their state or territory, which then provides this to the Australian government. Similarly, Catholic and most independent schools submit theirs to their respective state authorities, which then provide this to the Australian government. A smaller number of independent schools submit theirs directly to the Australian government.

Table 6.1: Definitions and categories of disability adapted for the NCCD (Education Services Australia 2019c)

Definitions from the DDA and the Standards	NCCD categories
b) total or partial loss of a part of the body	
e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body	Physical
c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness	
d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness	
a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions	
f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction	Cognitive
a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions	
e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body	Sensory
g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects the person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement, or that results in disturbed behaviour	Social/emotional

The reflection phase

The fourth phase of the NCCD, the reflection phase, is also recommended rather than mandated, and involves school-level reflection on the practices and processes followed at the school and identification of any potential for improvement. This reflection typically takes place in Term 4.

NCCD Data: Dissemination and Quality

The information collected by schools is more detailed than the final data reported to the government. The information gathered from all systems and sectors in each annual census is aggregated and reported annually through the Australian Government Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services (n.d.), as well as the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's national report entitled School Students with Disability (ACARA 2016).

The NCCD model was trialled in 2011 and 2012, and then was progressively implemented between 2013 and 2015. It was first implemented nationwide from 2016. PwC conducted evaluations of the NCCD twice during its trial phases in 2011 and 2012, and then evaluated the quality and consistency of the data reported in 2016, the first year of full implementation. Selected schools provided the cases of students for whom data had been reported. PwC conducted steps 1–3 for these students at the selected schools and compared the consistency of the decisions made at the school level with their own decisions. Their evaluations indicated that schools were reliably selecting students for inclusion in the census (step 1) but that the decisions made at the school level regarding the category and level of adjustments (steps 2 and 3) were not always consistent with those made by PwC. They noted that the decisions and data were more consistent in schools where there was a better understanding of the collection model as well as the DDA and the DSE, and that this was better in some states and sectors than others (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017). The NCCD data reports from ACARA (2016) and the Education Council (2016, 2017) indicate that data quality remains an issue, with variation still occurring across sectors and states. Improving data reliability is critical considering its role in resource allocation under the 'Gonski 2.0' disability loadings, as discussed earlier, and will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

School Responsibilities Under the NCCD

The responsibility for establishing processes and practices for the NCCD lies with the school principal. Also, while principals may delegate some responsibilities for the enactment of specific processes and practices to other school leaders and classroom teachers, the principal is ultimately responsible for the veracity of the data submitted in the annual census. The following section therefore outlines key responsibilities for 'school

leaders’; however, this may encompass a variety of staff under the leadership and authority of the school principal.

Responsibilities of school leaders

A key responsibility of school leaders is to ensure that staff members are familiar with the processes and requirements of the NCCD and their obligations to make reasonable adjustments for students with disability under the DDA/DSE. It is the responsibility of school leaders to provide access to professional learning to ensure that staff members have the capability to enact these obligations. An additional responsibility is to identify the members of the team who are tasked with completing or contributing to the NCCD, and to ensure that they are familiar with the requirements and processes. This includes ensuring that they have documented evidence to support decisions made about each student for all elements of the reporting. There are four types of evidence, showing that:

1. students and parents were consulted in determining the adjustments to adhere to the requirements under the DSE;
2. adjustments were provided for a minimum of ten weeks to justify student inclusion in the census;
3. the types of adjustments reported were actually implemented; and
4. the adjustments were implemented with a level of frequency and intensity to justify the level of adjustment reported.

Schools are responsible for implementing processes to ensure that the data reported is accurate and that evidence has been used and documented for each decision and for each student. This evidence may be required by system or sector authorities in quality-assurance checks of the data, or it may be required by the Australian government to vary a school’s funding entitlement under the disability loadings.

Practices that support successful implementation

This next section discusses a range of practices to facilitate efficient and effective processes to support the implementation of the NCCD. There are three key areas for consideration: first, that the NCCD is a team activity that requires leadership; second, that it requires ongoing professional learning; and third, that it requires annual planning.

1. NCCD is a team activity that requires leadership. Appointing a school leader to guide and facilitate NCCD implementation at the school has been found to have positive outcomes in terms of accuracy and consistency of student data, but most significantly in the depth of staff understanding of NCCD requirements (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017). Ideally, the appointed school leader has the authority to make decisions in meetings, and the capacity to ensure alignment of the NCCD with other school requirements, such as school-improvement plans and education sector/authority compliance requirements (Fullan & Quinn 2015; Sun & Leithwood 2015). The school's appointed 'NCCD leader' needs to look for opportunities to raise and maintain the profile of the NCCD as a whole-of-school matter—such as ensuring that the NCCD is on the agenda at staff meetings—and to promote relevant professional-learning opportunities or perhaps even work with individual teachers who identify understanding the NCCD as a professional goal to build their capacity. Even more crucially, while the NCCD remains an evolving strategy, the NCCD leader needs to ensure their own currency with new information and that this is shared with all staff. An NCCD implementation team can support this work.

Membership of the NCCD implementation team may include staff from the student support-services team (e.g. learning-support teacher, guidance counsellor/school psychologist, speech language pathologist), as well as deputy principals, curriculum leaders, heads of department and classroom teachers. As we discuss at the end of this chapter, a strength of the NCCD is that it directs focus towards classroom practice and the provision of the reasonable adjustments necessary to enable students' access to and participation in education. The contribution of classroom teachers and curriculum and subject experts is essential to enact the spirit of the NCCD with fidelity. Current research based on a doctoral study investigating teachers' enactment of the NCCD suggests that this can help move the focus from data collection to planning for and implementing educational adjustments (Gallagher & Spina 2019). For example, Wendy, the curriculum leader at Happyville Primary School, is a member of the NCCD implementation team, so her firsthand experience with the requirements of the NCCD led her to consider how she could incorporate these expectations into her work with classroom teachers as they were undertaking curriculum planning. Wendy considered ways to embed the recording of adjustments into the teachers' curriculum-planning documentation. This was achieved by including a column on the curriculum plan to record adjustments, which resulted in deep

professional discussions about each student's educational profile, as well as strategies to track and monitor the impact of these adjustments.

This is equally possible in the secondary-school context. In a school participating in the aforementioned doctoral study (Gallagher & Spina 2019), a faculty/subject leader commenced working with subject teachers to ensure that educational adjustments were recorded in the semester curriculum-planning/work program. This process extended to ensuring that accessible assessment tasks were designed with reasonable adjustments. In both examples, the NCCD leader was able to negotiate with the school leadership team to provide the additional curriculum-planning time for these teachers and their respective curriculum leaders to discuss, in detail, embedding the educational adjustments into the teaching and learning cycle, including how the adjustments would be tracked and monitored. Proactive school leadership with regard to the NCCD led to a coordinated whole-school team approach that supported teachers and students.

2. Staff professional learning is necessarily ongoing. Annual school review and planning necessarily consider a range of system and local initiatives, as well as ongoing arrangements that require regular professional learning for all staff. Student-protection training is such an example, whereby professional learning is scheduled annually for all staff to provide an understanding of mandatory requirements and, specifically, how these are managed locally (Falkiner et al. 2017). Using student-protection training as a model, the NCCD could also be included in the professional-learning schedule for all staff who have professional responsibilities for students (e.g. classroom teachers, guidance counsellors, speech language pathologists) as an ongoing action that both provides regular attention and signposts the importance of the process.

During the professional-learning days that are set aside at the beginning of the school year, many schools already schedule training about the legislative context of the NCCD as well as teachers' obligations as outlined in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2018), the DSE (Cth) and the United Nations' GC4 on Article 24 of the CRPD (United Nations 2016). When schools have scheduled follow-up sessions during a staff meeting or year-level meeting, this additional time has deepened knowledge and provided an opportunity to resolve specific issues as they arise. Allocating at least one meeting per term to the NCCD also ensures that all staff members have current knowledge about the NCCD, to which subtle changes have been made each year since its inception—not all of them well explained or clearly communicated.

Moreover, scheduling training throughout the year also means that those who did not attend the training at the beginning of the school year also understand how the NCCD is managed in the context of specific schools. NCCD training may also be included in the induction process for new staff, as well as casual or relief staff, thereby providing clear direction as to the expectations and professional practices for how this work is undertaken in specific schools.

Members of the NCCD implementation team will themselves require ongoing professional learning to ensure their own currency with this national reform initiative. Where schools have used the NCCD implementation team to provide whole-of-staff professional learning, or small-group opportunities (e.g. in year-level groups or subject groups), teachers adopt shared practices and there is a common language; this is an outcome that supports the implementation of inclusive education (Walton 2016). The final benefit of ongoing professional learning about the NCCD is the opportunity for teachers to set annual professional goals to develop deeper knowledge.

3. NCCD requires annual planning. An annual NCCD implementation plan specifying the professional practices of staff working with students with disability is the first step to managing local data. This plan will provide clarity to teachers about what is expected, at their school, in terms of local processes for collecting the four types of evidence required for the NCCD, as well as guidelines for managing the data. Some schools have developed NCCD implementation plans to mirror the cycle of the actual annual August data collection, and then work backwards from this date. The NCCD school schedule confirms the timelines for school processes, such as curriculum-planning schedules and consultation meetings with parents/carers and/or students, as well as due dates for uploading NCCD data onto a centrally managed secure storage site that is accessible to school staff only. This information is then de-identified for the annual Australian government school census data collection.

Another key component of the annual NCCD implementation plan is allocating enough time for ‘within school’ moderation of the student data. The NCCD moderation resource, available on the national website, provides practical steps to guide this process (Sharma et al. 2017). All teachers need to have a thorough understanding of the requirements of the NCCD and how these are implemented in the local context. When schools have undertaken moderation as a whole-staff activity, this has built every

teacher's knowledge of the NCCD, as well as helped to share practices between teachers.

Moderating student information enables the principal to have confidence that the data they are submitting in the annual census is reliable and accurate. For principals to have confidence in their submission, there must be sufficient evidence from the four areas to include the student in the NCCD count, and the evidence must support the proposed level of adjustment and the category of disability (Education Services Australia 2019d). Schools that are part of a schooling system (i.e. government schools, Catholic schools) tend to have additional scheduling requirements, as the education authority will potentially review system data before the Australian government school census date in August, which is when schools formally lodge their NCCD data. For example, system schools may be required to finalise school data by the end of Term 2 of the school year, allowing time for the system authorities to review the data and discuss any issues with the principal before the school lodges their data with the Australian government. Once the annual data is submitted, it is used to calculate the Australian government disability loadings nationally, and the new NCCD cycle commences.

Schools that have used the NCCD Reflection Tool (Education Services Australia 2019e) report that this resource helped them to identify aspects of the NCCD process that they were managing well, and areas for improvement. Reflection on the NCCD was best undertaken just after the August census data collection, because the experience was fresh in memories, but more importantly because it occurred before the planning of school priorities for the next school year had commenced. Information gathered through this process can then be fed into annual school planning, and specific goals for NCCD implementation can be generated. For example, some school goals have included developing a consistent schoolwide approach to data storage or developing a schoolwide process for annotating student work samples. Other outcomes of using the Reflection Tool include identifying specific topics for whole-staff professional learning and working with teachers to develop consultation skills when meeting with parents and students. In some instances, schools have undertaken substantial renewal activities, such as reviewing their model of student support.

When principals have incorporated the NCCD implementation plan into the school annual plan, this has improved the alignment of strategic initiatives. For example, one primary school participating in the aforementioned doctoral study (Gallagher & Spina 2019) introduced a

whole-school literacy initiative, in which teachers collected data about each student's literacy progress. This literacy data was the basis for a specific literacy-intervention plan, as well as educational adjustments across a range of learning areas that contributed to the evidence for the NCCD. Furthermore, the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT)—especially Domain 4—Targeted Use of School Resources, and Domain 7—Differentiated Teaching and Learning—is linked with and should inform the practices reported through the NCCD (Australian Council for Educational Research 2016).

Strengths and Weaknesses of the NCCD

1. Potential of the NCCD to support teaching and learning

The NCCD has several strengths with flow-on benefits for teaching and learning. One clear benefit is that the NCCD marks a shift from a categorical to an adjustments-based system of resource allocation that is driven by what schools and teachers do to support students with disability. This has reversed the previous model of practice where, for much of the time, what teachers did was driven by the funding that was (or was not) provided. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, this led to gaps in services wherever there were real or perceived gaps in funding. The NCCD allocates resources based on what teachers *do*, and places adjustments at the heart of teaching.

This is very different from the old categorical model, which encouraged the perception that individually targeted funding was required to provide adjustments, and that only funded students were entitled to them. The reality is that *all* students with disability are legally entitled to adjustments, whether they receive individually targeted funding or not. The NCCD is also primarily based on teacher judgement. While some categorical systems apply functional assessments to determine the frequency and level of adjustment needed by students, these assessments are typically administered by guidance officers (known as school counsellors in some states) and verified at regional and/or central level, depending on the sector. These staff members become sandwiched between the school and the system, one of which wants the levels to stay as per the funding application, while the other wants to 'knock the support level down' (Graham 2015: 128).

The result is an expensive and drawn-out process; it can take many months or even years for students to receive the support to which they are entitled (Commonwealth of Australia 2016). However, even when they finally *do* receive funding, these students still may not receive adjustments. This is because disability-support funding is typically used to hire teacher aides, and they and other support staff—such as learning-support teachers—are often left with the responsibility for making adjustments. As these staff are not frontline teachers, they cannot make pedagogical adjustments and this severely limits the range and type of adjustments that are or can be made. By placing the emphasis on the levels of adjustment provided, the NCCD redirects the focus to classroom teachers and their teaching methods. The fine-grained decision-making process of identifying students at the QDTP level also reinforces the professional requirement placed on all teachers to differentiate their teaching for all students, as per Standard 1.5 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2018). This ‘normalises’ the provision of adjustments and flexibility in teaching, and encourages reflection on how everyday classroom practices can support students with disability to learn. It has the potential to create better ‘coverage’, whereby quality differentiated teaching is understood as what *all* teachers should be engaging in to support students who absorb information in a range of ways, have varied strengths and preferences in how they demonstrate their learning, and are motivated and engaged in a variety of ways.

Another benefit is in the ongoing annual professional learning about schools and teachers’ professional obligations to provide reasonable adjustments. Given the number of reports from federal government reviews and parliamentary inquiries that outline the persistent occurrence of students being denied reasonable adjustments (see [Chapter 1](#)), the importance of this ongoing professional learning cannot be overstated. Teachers’ professional learning in the DSE has become embedded in the annual cycle of the school year, and opportunities to access professional learning have been expanded. This has included the removal of paywalls from the online learning modules formerly available through the University of Canberra; these modules have now been updated and are freely available through the NCCD portal. The strength of this contribution is evidenced not only in the improvement in data quality noted by the 2016 PwC evaluation, but also in the increase in the knowledge and capacity of the workforce to uphold students’ right to adjustments under the DSE.

2. Role of moderation: not just data quality

A further strength of the NCCD resides in the moderation activities embedded within the data-collection process. Teachers hold valuable knowledge about their students' learning profiles and appropriate support, and it is a real strength of the NCCD process that professional conversations take place in which this knowledge is shared. Research on moderation shows a range of benefits when teachers engage in professional conversations and activities to moderate their judgements. Not only can their judgements become more consistent, making the moderated data more robust, but the moderation also serves as a form of professional learning that is beneficial to teaching and learning. However, these benefits are dependent on the provision of protected time being allocated for moderation to take place (Harlen 2005; Meiers et al. 2007). Embedding within-school moderation into the NCCD process has effectively ensured annual professional learning in which staff can share and evaluate the adjustments they provide to students with disability, and engage in conversations with colleagues about the nature and extent of that support. It has also strengthened the processes to ensure that the data is of higher quality. These benefits can only be further strengthened by moderation between schools and sectors, although this step is yet to be embedded within the NCCD process.

3. Weaknesses and issues that urgently need addressing

A significant weakness of the NCCD lies in difference between the purpose of its development and the way in which it is now being used. When originally conceived back in the days of Kevin Rudd's Labor government, the NCCD had one aim: to develop a national approach to defining and identifying students with disability. It was initially limited to this aim because the NCCD was an Australian government initiative, yet the Australian government does not have constitutional responsibility for school education. Rather, school education is the responsibility of state governments and, therefore, it was state governments and the Catholic and independent schooling sectors that faced the fiscal risk resulting from any changes to their resource-allocation processes. This potential has made education systems reluctant to move away from traditional funding-allocation methods that governments have typically employed to control expenditure. Controlling expenditure does not mean that governments are bad or that students with disability are of low priority. Employing some

form of control is critical, because state governments' share of tax revenue is finite, but the pressures of service delivery and the demands of stakeholders are not.

These were just some of the reasons that the NCCD began life simply as an identification and data-collection exercise; however, it could never simply remain that way due to the problems with categorical and census-based funding allocation that we described earlier, together with the Australian government's obligation to develop a funding model to promote inclusive education upon ratifying the CRPD in 2008. Now that the 'Gonski 2.0' disability loadings are tied to the NCCD levels of adjustment, the NCCD model has become a resource-allocation method. Consequently, the NCCD is vulnerable to gaming. While various checks and balances—such as the NCCD Moderation Resource (Sharma et al. 2017)—have been developed over time, there is still insufficient accountability to ensure that students are in fact being consulted in the design and implementation of adjustments, or even that the adjustments claimed were ever delivered.

The current checks and balances are also inadequate to determine whether the adjustments being claimed through the NCCD were appropriate and whether students' learning needs were actually met. As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), designing and implementing adjustments are complex processes that begin with classroom teachers' interpretation of students' presenting characteristics. Misinterpretation at this stage in the process is common and can result in students not receiving support or not receiving the correct support. For example, if teachers misidentify characteristics of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) as students 'not listening' or 'not following instructions', they may opt for a behaviour plan, rather than engage in inclusive practices that would require them to make changes to the way they give instructions in class (Graham & Tancredi 2019). Providing clear, accessible instructions is a hallmark of inclusive practice and, when enacted with consistency and fidelity, can mitigate the need for retrospective adjustments.

Embedded in the design of the NCCD is an incentive to inflate the adjustment level, because higher levels of adjustment attract more funding. This also works as a disincentive for teachers to genuinely engage in Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP); if students' learning needs are being met by this practice, then there is no need for adjustments and, indeed, no basis to claim the disability loadings that come with them. Such behaviour is unconscionable, as it takes the NCCD

from a needs-based model back to the ‘wait-to-fail’ models that the Australian government is obligated to replace in accordance with the CRPD. While this weakness is an outcome of the NCCD graduating from a simple data-collection exercise to a resource-allocation method, it is now critical for governments to ensure that this potential is urgently addressed and that regular classroom teaching utilises proactive, universal principles at the QDTP level. Currently, there is inadequate definition of QDTP and no independent assessment of teaching quality at this level. There is, therefore, no way of determining whether baseline classroom teaching is of the quality and type required to meet the needs of students with disability who would not need retrospective adjustments if provided with point-in-time accessible inclusive practices.

Finally, it is now almost a decade since work began on the NCCD, a tool designed to achieve national consistency in the definition and identification of students with a disability. Despite leading this groundbreaking work, the Australian government has thus far failed to implement the NCCD nationally. One purpose of the original exercise was to ensure that students moving from one state or sector to another would not lose funding due to the differences in the eligibility criteria in each. NCCD has so far failed to address this situation because the Australia government still ‘[allows] all school systems to redistribute all Australian government recurrent funding between their schools, based on their own needs-based funding arrangement’ (Fitzsimmons 2019, n.p.) As the Australian government is constitutionally responsible for independent schools, federal funding flows directly to independent schools. The systemic Catholic education sector redistributes the funding in accordance with their NCCD data (Fitzsimmons 2019). However, with the exception of Tasmania, which recently released a new adjustments-based funding model aligned with NCCD called Educational Adjustments Disability Funding, all state government sectors still use their own particular mix of categorical and census-based approaches in the form of the funding programs we identified in the introduction to this chapter. Taking New South Wales as an example, RAM includes funding for low-level adjustments for disability; however, students requiring higher level adjustments are still supported through Integration Funding Support (IFS). As RAM is not transparent and IFS uses restrictive disability categories, New South Wales (and every state still using their own outdated models) is effectively neutering the NCCD. Unless the states urgently and comprehensively reform and realign their resource allocation systems, as Tasmania has done, the NCCD will become nothing more

than an expensive administrative burden on schools and teachers, and it will fail to realise its potential.

Conclusion

The development of the NCCD has been heralded as a world-first model for a census that positions teachers as the best judges of appropriate adjustments to provide for students with disability. Indeed, this is a unique model that has supported a shift away from diagnosis and categorical resource allocation. It has the potential to address many of the original aims for its existence and could drive changes that improve inclusion. Such changes include the improved awareness among educational professionals of students' rights and schools' responsibilities under the DSE, and the 'normalisation' of providing adjustments based on student need and not verification of diagnosis of disability in limited eligibility categories. The potential for the NCCD and related moderation activities to broaden and deepen the professional skills of the teaching workforce for inclusive practice through formal professional learning is significant. This is especially true for those teachers who qualified prior to the articulation of the DSE, and who did not receive initial teacher education in inclusive-teaching practices. For students without an entitlement under state-based funding, many of whom have been denied their right to adjustments, the NCCD is a potential game-changer, with schools now more aware of their responsibility to meet these students' entitlement to adjustments under the DSE.

Despite these assets of the model, a number of issues remain embedded in its processes, including the potential for gaming through inflating adjustment levels, and the gaps in schools' accountability regarding the use of effective practices. The next frontier for improving the NCCD therefore lies in how these might be best addressed, and it is clear that some of this work is under way via an examination of the changes in the annual NCCD guidelines. Each year since 2017, the Guidelines have outlined increasingly stringent processes for quality assurance of the data through school and sector accountability. In the 2017 Guidelines, education authorities engaged in data checking only prior to its submission to the Commonwealth. In 2018, the Guidelines announced 'census post-enumeration processes' through which state and sector education authorities investigated anomalies in both pre- and post-census data, meaning that schools are now more accountable for submitting

robust data and being able to justify their decisions. The 2019 Guidelines now include updated and expanded post-enumeration accountability processes that include the legislated requirement to retain data records for seven years as part of financial-management responsibilities. These increased checks and balances are highly likely to produce data with more stable patterns across states and sectors over time, and to address the data-quality issues highlighted as an ongoing concern (Education Council 2016, 2017).

There remain some clear areas for further strengthening of the NCCD model if it is to improve the provision of inclusive education in accordance with the Australian government's obligations as per the CRPD. One such area is to address the effectiveness and appropriateness of the adjustments put in place for students, as these are currently unknown. As indicated earlier, schools frequently spend targeted and census-based funding on employing teacher aides who are not always used well and can operate counter to student inclusion (see [Chapter 16](#)). A range of other research has found that schools and teachers can often use practices that demonstrate little evidence of their value to support students with disability (Carter & Stephenson 2012; Carter et al. 2011; Hyatt et al. 2009), and the potential for schools to inflate the levels of adjustments has been built into the model now that it includes the allocation of resources. These issues all point to the importance of ensuring that schools are using NCCD funding to implement effective practices to support students with disability to participate and achieve at school, and this begins with high-quality inclusive practice at the QDTP level, which may avoid the need for any additional layers of intervention or support.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the NCCD needs to provide transparency about the implementation of inclusive education in Australia. As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the NCCD exists within the suite of responses that the Commonwealth government has implemented in line with its obligations under the CRPD. These obligations include ensuring the progressive realisation of the right of children with disability to an inclusive education under Article 24 (United Nations 2008), overseeing the transfer of resources from segregated to inclusive environments, and developing a funding model that allocates resources and incentives for inclusive educational environments (United Nations 2016). In light of recent reports of rising segregation in Australia (de Bruin 2019), the data collection should be expanded to provide ongoing accountability for progress in achieving these outcomes by

indicating whether adjustments are being provided in segregated or inclusive settings. This would enable Australia to meet its obligations under the CRPD's Article 31: Statistics and Data Collection (United Nations 2008) and ensure that it meets its obligation to provide transparency regarding the progressive realisation of inclusive education. The NCCD holds huge potential to support this progressive realisation, as well as to document its progress. With additional improvements to strengthen the model, such as mandating that all states and sectors reform their own resource allocation models to align with and not thwart the NCCD, it can support the transformation of the Australian education system to one in which all students have access to the equitable and high-quality education to which they are entitled.

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PART III

**UNIVERSAL EVIDENCE-
BASED STRATEGIES TO
EFFECTIVELY TEACH
DIVERSE LEARNERS IN
SUPPORTIVE AND SAFE
INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

CHAPTER 7

Using assessment data to support student learning

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Research on the use of assessment data in schools and in education systems has grown enormously over the past decade. This activity has produced a variety of literature. One body of literature extols the benefits of using assessment data to inform practice, and provides guidance on how to make evidence-based decisions that drive equity and student improvement (Boudett & Steele 2007; Schnellert et al. 2008). Evidence-informed practice typically refers to the use of quantitative assessment results—either formative or summative—to inform teaching and learning decisions (Boudett & Steele 2007; Hattie 2012). Thus, when teachers or principals refer to ‘data-informed practice’, they are frequently referring to the use of numeric, standardised, assessment data. These practices are increasingly appearing in education policies that use data and evidence to monitor and drive systemic improvement by building new forms of accountability (O’Brien 2018). Education departments and systems frequently use large-scale mandated assessments, such as Australia’s National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests, to hold schools and educators accountable for student achievement. For example, NAPLAN data has been used by Australian governments to monitor and manage the performance of school principals (Bloxham et al. 2015; Heffernan 2016). As Earl and Katz (2006: 2) point out,

‘accountability and data are at the heart of contemporary reform efforts worldwide. Accountability has become the watchword of education, with data holding a central place in the current wave of large-scale reform.’

Another body of literature examines the adverse effects that can occur when data is used to orchestrate teachers’ everyday work in this new era of accountability (Roberts-Holmes 2015). Harris and colleagues (2018) examine some of these adverse effects and consider how data use can create ethical dilemmas for school leaders as they work to create and sustain inclusive schools and classrooms (see also [Chapter 10](#)). Ethical concerns include allocating greater resourcing to those students more likely to succeed in order to improve overall school data (Nichols & Berliner 2007). Researchers have raised concerns about how data systems can harm student identity, causing some students to worry about ‘being a nothing’ (Stobart 2008: 2) or that their performance might mean they may ‘never ever get a job and get money and maybe couldn’t even get a house!’ (Howell 2017: 580). Research has documented how these practices marginalise students from their home cultures (Elwood & Lundy 2010; Klenowski 2014), limit students’ subject choices and preclude certain career choices (Smyth 2011).

If inclusive education is about accepting and responding to difference to ensure that ‘all people are valued and treated with respect’ (Carrington & Elkins 2002: 51), then we must ask how assessment data can be used to promote learning and fairer outcomes for all. However, as indicated by the research literature, using assessment data to support inclusive practice and student learning is a double-edged sword. Data can be used to provide an opportunity to promote fairness and inclusion, and ensure a focus on student learning. Yet, at the same time, educators are vulnerable to the performative pressures and inevitable conflicts of interest that arise when data is the fulcrum of teacher accountability and performance management. This chapter puts forward a series of considerations for teachers and school leaders who aim to use data to support inclusive practice and student learning in the current era of accountability.

What is Assessment Data and What Can It Tell Us?

In recent decades, the explosion of large-scale standardised tests and assessment programs has increased the accessibility and visibility of

assessment data that is linked to student learning. From global data sets, such as that generated through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), to national assessment systems such as NAPLAN, and classroom data collected using standardised tests, such as the Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) published by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and run by individual schools, it is now common for student learning to be represented by and interpreted through quantitative assessment data. Yet there is increasing recognition that data should include more than numeric assessment data (Schildkamp et al. 2012).

For the purposes of this chapter, assessment data includes the wide range of evidence that teachers generate and collect to document student learning. Combining and analysing multiple assessment sources—from the diagnostic data collected before teaching commences, through to formative data that helps monitor student learning during teaching, and finally a range of summative data—can help teachers to establish a picture of what students know and can do. As will be discussed below, summative data must be collected in ways that provide all students—including students with disability—with the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do. However, focusing only on high-stakes summative data can increase the likelihood of practices that increase inequity—an issue that will be discussed later in the chapter. Similarly, discounting summative data can mean ignoring a valuable source of information that could be used to interrupt teachers' assumptions and practices in useful ways (Harris et al. 2018).

Timperley and Phillips' (2003) research suggests that teachers are more likely to have low expectations of student achievement when they do not engage with high-stakes assessment data, meaning teaching is unlikely to be sufficiently challenging. The past decade has seen ongoing discussion in Australia and internationally about the participation of students with disability in high-stakes assessment. Some countries, such as the United States, have developed alternative assessments and have required reasonable adjustments to be made to assessments and test conditions so that all students can participate in large-scale testing. The United States also requires the achievement of students with disability to be monitored through state-based assessment and reporting (Danforth 2016). Australia, however, has a complex system in which students with disability may be exempt from participation in NAPLAN. Under this system, exempt students are included in school data (being counted as

not having achieved the National Minimum Standard), despite not having taken the test. Students who are absent or whose parents choose to withdraw their child (rather than seeking an exemption) are counted as not having participated in the test. This means that there is a perceived advantage for schools when students are withdrawn or absent from NAPLAN, rather than being exempt from it. Dempsey and Davies (2013) estimate that only up to one-third of students with disability participate in NAPLAN. Worryingly, while Australian policy and legislation expect inclusive education practices, national programs such as NAPLAN are yet to develop and promote equitable access for all students. As Graham (2016) has argued, participation in NAPLAN may be one way of bringing about inclusion. This chapter, therefore, includes the broad range of assessment data—both mandated and teacher-instigated—that can help teachers establish a picture of student learning and respond in inclusive ways.

Slowing down and making conscious decisions

It is broadly accepted that in the current era of accountability, schools are ‘awash with data’ (Hattie 2005: 11). In this landscape, educators spend significant time collecting and producing assessment data. This focus on data production means that many teachers move from one assessment item to the next without having time to analyse or respond to the valuable evidence they have collected (Spina 2017; Stroud 2018). There is also research (Earl & Katz 2006; Schildkamp & Kuiper 2010) suggesting that many teachers make decisions quickly using intuition, rather than data. In the busyness of classroom life, teachers are required to make a raft of day-to-day decisions that draw on their professional judgement and experience. Balancing this rapid thinking with more careful consideration of assessment data can support teachers to focus on evidence of learning, and to reveal any assumptions they might have about student learning.

Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman (2011) proposed that there are two ways that people make decisions, which he described as ‘System 1’ and ‘System 2’ thinking. System 1 is fast thinking that relies on intuition and responding to established patterns in established ways. System 2 is slower, more effortful thinking that requires controlled and deliberate mental activity. System 1 thinking forms an important part of teachers’ assessment work. This system requires teachers to actively monitor data on an ongoing basis, and to look for established patterns of student

responses. For example, in marking student spelling, teachers might look for known spelling error patterns and process the information quickly, reducing the cognitive load required for marking and decision-making. However, fast judgements are known to increase cognitive bias (Kahneman 2011). Boudett and Steele (2007) have argued that when we analyse education data we often jump to conclusions, rather than taking the time to carefully examine evidence and consider our own biases before drawing any conclusions. Rather than rushing to draw conclusions based on known patterns in assessment data, System 2 thinking requires teachers to slow down, consider possible biases and examine multiple analytic options. If a student continues to perform poorly on written tasks, a teacher might consider whether there are less obvious explanations for what might at first seem to be a self-evident conclusion. For example, data may reveal that cognitive load is interfering with the student's ability to demonstrate their knowledge under the conditions in which the assessment was designed and delivered (Gillmor et al. 2015; Graham et al. 2018). In the busyness of school life, it is vital that teachers are provided with time to engage with assessment data in meaningful ways so they can both observe and analyse student learning, before using their professional knowledge to develop teaching that allows all students to engage in meaningful learning. It is only when we move 'from data to knowledge' (Earl & Seashore-Louis 2013: 199) that assessment data can contribute to positive change.

Developing an inquiry approach to data

Looking for patterns in assessment data can provide teachers with useful insights about the overall trends in student learning. One of the criticisms of large-scale data is that while it reveals trends—at the school, system and national level—it can be less useful as a means of providing sufficient (or timely) evidence of individual student learning. For example, while national assessment data in Australia indicates that there are significant gaps between remote Indigenous student achievement and their metropolitan and regional counterparts, this evidence has not been able to deliver sustained, positive outcomes (Guenther et al. 2013). Patterns of achievement at the whole-class or small-group level are also unlikely to provide information that is specific enough to understand individual student learning, unless it is part of an ongoing inquiry approach.

Using a student-centred question as the basis for an inquiry can help to narrow the analytic focus, and to minimise the likelihood of being overwhelmed by the amount of data available (Boudett & Steele 2007). While teachers can and should engage with a range of data, it is also useful to make time for detailed analysis of assessment evidence. For example, examining a student's written work can highlight several areas where the student could benefit from targeted teaching—from the development of adequate topic-specific vocabulary to knowledge of spelling conventions. When teachers develop their own research questions as part of critical inquiry, they can focus their attention on one area of learning and student engagement at a time (Comber et al. 2018), thus ensuring that both the analysis and the use of evidence are manageable. In taking such an approach, teachers must also be mindful of the breadth of knowledge and understanding that students need to be successful.

Investigating multiple data sources such as students' performance on a range of summative assessment items, along with formative data such as students' work samples and teacher observations, makes it possible to triangulate data and form a better picture of student learning. As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), Australian educators are legally obliged (under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 [DSE; Cth]) to consult with parents/guardians and students in the design and implementation of reasonable adjustments. Aside from this important legal imperative, inviting students into conversations about their learning is a useful way to broaden understandings of student knowledge and misconceptions. For example, Comber and colleagues (2018) worked with teachers from an Australian secondary school and used large-scale assessment data to spark teacher inquiry into student writing. The teachers in their study subsequently collected a range of further data—including student classroom assessment—to inform practice. Students participated in focus groups to talk about their perceptions of teaching and classroom practice, and shared their views about their learning. Students were also given a further opportunity to reflect on their learning using a survey entitled 'Me as a Writer' that was developed by the teachers as part of their inquiry. This range of evidence was assembled to help teachers develop a deep understanding of individual student learning, needs and preferences. As Harris and colleagues (2018) point out, equitable practices can be enhanced by gathering diverse data sources—including assessment data—and listening to a range of stakeholders. Doing so can interrupt existing patterns of thinking and encourage educators to explore

new ways of working with individual students. As one of the teachers in the research noted, this process helped her to think about the challenges that one of her students faced as ‘a puzzle to be solved [rather than thinking] in deficit terms’ (Harris et al. 2018: 56). This process also typically includes discussing data with colleagues, who may see something different and be able to offer novel suggestions about student learning and pedagogical responses.

Using Data to Inform Teaching

Assessment data can inform teaching because it can provide important insights into a child’s ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) (Vygotsky 1978, 1986). For Vygotsky (1978: 87), ‘what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow—that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow’. When a student is functioning within the ZPD, they have sufficient mastery to perform the task with assistance but cannot yet complete the task successfully on their own. If a task is too easy, no new learning will occur. Similarly, a task that is too difficult or incomprehensible will not result in new learning. The teacher’s job is to ascertain the ZPD—the point at which a task is slightly more difficult than the student can do on their own—and provide enough guidance to support learning until the student can complete the task independently. However, a key challenge for teachers is assessing students’ ZPD across the wide variety of curriculum skills and knowledge required during a school year. As Mehlinger (1995: 154) writes, being able to ‘customise schooling for individual learners, rather than mass produce students who have essentially been taught the same thing in the same way in the same amount of time . . . is not a superficial change’. Detailed, ongoing analysis of assessment data must therefore be embedded in teachers’ work.

More recent pedagogical models that have become popular in schools over the past decade have expanded on Vygotsky’s work. The Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Fisher & Frey 2008, 2013; Pearson & Gallagher 1983) provides multiple stages of instruction that aim to extend students’ progress within their ZPD. Using assessment data to plan for each of these phases of instruction is an important way of appropriately differentiating whole-class (‘I do’ and ‘we do’), small-

group ('you do together') and individual ('you do') instruction. According to Fisher and Frey (2013), this model is not a lock-step sequence of teaching, but rather a fluid approach that uses a combination of data to plan for and guide teaching. Teachers might therefore combine and analyse diagnostic data along with summative assessment data from a previous unit of work as a means of ascertaining specific gaps in student knowledge.

The work of Sharratt and Fullan (2012) similarly advocates for deep analysis of data as a means of ensuring that instruction is appropriately differentiated for individual students. They provide numerous examples, including that of Year 11 student Luis (Sharratt & Fullan 2012: 4–5), who was largely known as an aggressive and belligerent student, and who was frequently suspended or excluded from school. Careful analysis of his assessment data revealed that Luis was reading at a Year 2 level; his reading challenges had been masked by his behaviour. While many teachers (and even parents) were disbelieving, this data analysis ultimately paved the way for intensive reading support and differentiated classroom instruction. Ultimately, focused teaching based on analysis of assessment data allowed Luis to become a less frustrated learner and attain grades that were expected for his year level.

Assessment data can also be used to develop teaching using a framework developed utilising Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles (Meyer et al. 2016). For example, in targeting specific groups of students, teachers may find that teaching using virtual manipulative mathematics touch-screen apps (most commonly accessed via iPads or tablets) offers a range of affordances to all students in the class, even though the effects are variable for individual students (Moyer-Packenham et al. 2016). Digital technologies offer an ever-increasing toolkit for reducing barriers through options such as incorporating social-media use into teaching, learning and assessment (Barden 2012; Gillmor et al. 2015). In addition to adopting a universal design approach, using the principles described in [Chapter 8](#), teachers can use assessment data to tailor instruction for individual students to reduce barriers to learning.

Using assessment data to identify barriers and reflect on practice

Assessment data is often used to diagnose a 'problem' with student performance. However, employing the social model of disability

challenges teachers to consider the conditions that may prevent students from accessing learning opportunities, rather than conceptualising problems as being inherently situated within individuals. As teachers reflect on lessons that were planned using assessment data, they can begin to identify and understand the barriers to learning that may exist within their classrooms. In identifying possible barriers to student learning, it is useful to return to the earlier discussion about slowing down and making time for deep analysis of data. Rather than rushing to conclude that a student lacks understanding, a teacher can use assessment data to identify areas where they might employ universal design principles to address barriers to access.

As an example, imagine two primary-school students, Amy and Jake, who both arrive at the same incorrect answer to a problem-solving question. While this data highlights that both Amy and Jake are experiencing difficulties with problem-solving, it does not explicate the different barriers to learning that exist for each student. In this example, Amy had not yet acquired automaticity or procedural fluency in basic number facts, and experienced both the assessment task and the preceding instructions as inaccessible. Amy did not have any misconceptions about number, but instead ran out of time and cognitive capacity to answer the more complex maths problem being asked. The other student, Jake, memorised a range of mathematics procedures but applied the incorrect procedure to the question, and thus also produced an incorrect final answer. As Lewis (2010: 29) points out, students with a mathematical learning disability will tend to make ‘qualitatively different errors on math fact problems’ that require detailed analysis. Lewis demonstrates that extensive additional individual tutoring did little to improve the mathematical progress of participants in her study, yet ‘once the origin of the errors was understood’ (Lewis 2010: 29), it was possible to help students more effectively employ atypical strategies.

For many students, challenges with mathematical problem-solving may be linked to language difficulties or Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). In these cases, the visual and procedural complexity of tasks might not provide appropriate conditions of access (Gillmor et al. 2015; Graham et al. 2018). Understanding barriers to learning and developing suitable responses, therefore, require teachers to make links between student assessment data and their own practice as they work to understand which teaching practices to employ. As Lai and McNaughton (2016: 436) describe, ‘putting the evidence from classroom practices together with achievement data provides a basis for [identifying effective

practice]’. There is a growing body of evidence (Ainscow 2012; Boudett & Steele 2007; Harris et al. 2018; Lai & McNaughton 2016) that this type of analysis is most effective when carried out collaboratively.

Using Data to Inform Teacher Inquiry and Professional Development

For decades, educators have used assessment data—alongside other forms of qualitative and quantitative data—when seeking to adopt an evidence-informed approach to their practice. Critical scholars (e.g. Cochran-Smith 2015) argue that inquiry approaches must begin from a stance that focuses on equity and social justice, rather than accountability. The challenge is that the same or similar language can conceal vast differences in motivations, practices and consequences. For example, if a teacher explains that reading assessment data is being analysed and used to inform reading instruction, does this mean that data is being used to form static reading groups based on ‘ability’, or does it mean that much more inclusive practices are being implemented as a means of differentiating instruction with inclusion and fairness in mind? Researchers such as Boomer (1985), Carr and Kemmis (2003), and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) have advocated for teachers to adopt an inquiring approach not only to understand what their students know and can do, but also to critique their own work.

Analysing assessment data can lead teachers to identify areas where they can target subsequent teaching, but it may also highlight areas where teachers need to do further learning or investigation themselves. This is important, as research demonstrates that while teachers are often able to analyse assessment data to determine student learning, they are often unable to develop suitable follow-up teaching and learning activities (Callingham 2010; Watson et al. 2008). Detailed data analysis can help teachers to not only identify possible barriers to student learning, but also to develop pedagogical approaches that maximise student access to learning. Ongoing cycles of data analysis can help teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their practice, and to understand whether their teaching is indeed reducing barriers to learning and meeting student needs. If data analysis exposes an area where students need new or different pedagogies that are beyond teachers’ current expertise, teachers must consider looking towards other sources

of knowledge. As Harris and colleagues (2018) have demonstrated, schools traditionally hold significant knowledge that is not shared, because teachers' work has tended to be isolated. In arguing for a collaborative approach, they describe how teachers can see new patterns in data, as well as share ideas and knowledge about pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.

Another source of knowledge is academic research, which continues to explore and document new approaches towards working with diverse learners, and to minimise barriers to learning. The rise of social media means that a great deal of academic research is now promoted by individual academics, as well as by research associations. Teachers can increasingly access academic research via internet sites (such as The Conversation) and research-organisation blogs (such as the Australian Association for Research in Education's [AARE] EduResearch Matters blog). Following the social-media accounts of key organisations and Twitter hashtags (such as #InclusiveEducation) is another useful way of accessing up-to-date research. Teachers are also working directly with academics to undertake collaborative research, the results of which are often shared at conferences such as AARE's national conference and the Australian Council for Educational Research's (ACER) annual research conference.

A Caution: (Un)Ethical Data-Based Decision-Making

While assessment data has enormous potential to inform teacher practice in ways that are just, the rise of high-stakes data has been linked to practices that are known to increase inequity. Greater awareness of these tensions will assist teachers who use assessment data for inclusive learning. Testing and assessment have emerged as essential characteristics of quality education systems (Smith 2016). The practice of counting everything from student growth to attendance has become a ubiquitous form of management that affords legitimacy to decision-making. Instead of relying on decisions made by people such as classroom teachers—which inevitably appear subjective—decisions based on statistics provide a 'veneer of objectivity' (Hacking 1990: 4). Underpinning these decisions are inherently political decisions, such as who gets access to what. In analysing and making use of class data,

teachers and school leaders must decide whether to adopt an ethic of care (Starratt 1996) towards individual students, or whether to adopt a more utilitarian approach that seeks to allocate resources and time in ways that serve the best interests of the cohort (Harris 2016).

One worrying example is the practice known as ‘rationing’ education (Gillborn & Youdell 2000: 134). Gillborn and Youdell describe a situation in which data is used to classify students into three groups: those able to achieve with no intervention, those perceived as ‘hopeless cases’, and those whose results are most likely to improve with targeted intervention. This grouping is used as a basis for rationing resources according to those most likely to improve school data. In a similar way to medical triage, attention is focused on the students who will achieve the greatest gains with targeted intervention. Students who require extensive support but do not deliver improvements on standardised tests might be seen as detracting from the school’s overall ability to meet key performance indicators or to position itself favourably in the eyes of potential families as they make school-choice decisions. Using data in this way clearly has serious implications for equity. Similar experiences have been documented both in the United States (Booher-Jennings 2006) and Australia (O’Mara 2014).

An additional risk, according to Sherman (2009), is the growth in standardised ‘recipe’ or quick-fix approaches to inclusion, such as grouping students by ability. In the business of classroom life, the practice of targeting pedagogy towards small groups of students based on data might (at first glance) seem to be an effective and pragmatic way of targeting instruction at students’ ZPDs. Yet ability grouping is known to increase inequity (McGillicuddy & Devine 2018; Spina 2018). The Brown Center Report (Loveless 2004) reveals that the rise of ability grouping (and associated practices such as streaming, setting and tracking) is linked to the use of data as the basis of evidence-informed practice. The report dedicates an entire section to what it calls the ‘resurgence’ of ability grouping. Sweden provides another example of a system that has increasing evidence of teachers engaging in ability-grouping as a form of differentiation (Ramberg 2016). As Hart and colleagues (2004)—and others—have demonstrated, grouping by ability can inhibit teacher expectations of students in ‘low’ groups, undermine students’ self-confidence and dignity, and narrow curriculum offerings. These practices can work to reproduce and exacerbate inequity, as students in the so-called ‘higher’ ability groups receive higher-order thinking and extension pedagogies, while students in the ‘low’ groups

are more likely to receive didactic and basic-skills pedagogies (Luke et al. 2013). Grouping students by ability has been shown to have significant negative effects on both academic and nonacademic outcomes, particularly for students in the lowest streamed groups (Steenbergen-Hu et al. 2016). The use of assessment data to group students by ability for extended periods of time places too much trust in the seeming objectivity of data.

A further caution is around the entrenched belief that assessment data assembled in numeric form is a fair and objective basis for decision-making. However, there is ongoing evidence (Paugh & Dudley-Marling 2011; Spina 2018; Waterhouse 2004) that the discourses associated with contemporary data-driven practices do little to challenge harmful deficit views of students. Careful and ethical data analysis must instead be conducted with a view to challenging assumptions about students, about what is fair, and about teacher practice (Ainscow 2012). Assessment data cannot be separated from philosophical beliefs about the use of data to draw conclusions and develop practices that will increase equity and student access to learning.

Conclusion

While there is a proliferation of policies insisting that teachers use assessment data to inform their teaching practices, analysing and making use of data are fraught with problems. The strong global interest in national and high-stakes assessment has often assumed that an increase in assessment is linked to an increase in education quality (Smith 2016). However, the rise in this form of testing has not always led to significant and/or sustained improvements in student learning (Savage 2017). Data use can unintentionally create deficit discourses about students, and lead to a resurgence in practices such as ability grouping, which have been shown to have negative effects. Alternatively, data can help teachers to understand barriers that might prevent students accessing learning opportunities. To ensure assessment data is used to promote equity and inclusion, teachers must slow down and think deeply about the possible meanings of assessment data and how this knowledge can provide insights that will inform teacher practice in ways that are just. Earl and Katz's (2006) point that data-driven decision-making is often too simplistic is highly relevant when data is being used as the basis for

building inclusive classrooms. As Earl and Seashore-Louis (2013) argue, gathering assessment data should not be an end in itself. Instead, data should provide a platform for generating ‘quality knowledge’ that emerges from ‘asking good questions, having good data, and engaging in good thinking’ (Earl & Seashore-Louis 2013: 193). Data-informed practice should focus on the knowledge that assessment data generates, and the way this knowledge is used (rather than focusing on the data itself).

However, assessment data can work as a double-edged sword. While there is a great deal of potential for assessment data to be used as a basis for quality differentiation of practice, there is also significant potential for assessment data to reproduce deficit discourses and exacerbate inequitable practices and outcomes. It is crucial that teachers begin with a philosophical understanding and adopt a genuine critical-inquiry approach to interrogate their assessment data and to understand what individual students know and can do. It is also critical that teachers augment assessment data with knowledge of their students’ strengths, interests and areas of difficulty in order to build a full picture through which to make sense of students’ progress. This knowledge, collected throughout cycles of teaching, provides an invaluable means of planning for teaching that is pitched appropriately in students’ zone of proximal development (ZPD).

For teachers, questions such as ‘what do I do with Amy, who still doesn’t answer problem-solving questions correctly?’ or ‘how can I change the overall achievement of my class?’ require a combination of thinking strategies. The generation of meaningful knowledge about not only student learning but also barriers to achievement, effectiveness of teaching, and students’ ability to access assessment tasks requires deep and considered thinking. Looking at displays of graphs and visual displays of quantitative data is unlikely to provide any important insights on its own. Rather, assessment data is only useful at the classroom level if it provides teachers with new knowledge and assists teachers to build on their own understandings so they might continue to extend students’ learning in ways that ensure equity and fairness for every student in their class.

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CHAPTER 8

Universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

KATHY COLOGON & CARLY LASSIG

For any student to genuinely engage in and benefit from educational opportunities, they must first have access to those very same opportunities. This need for accessibility seems rather self-evident. However, for many students, learning opportunities are inaccessible, preventing participation and engagement, and creating a vastly inequitable ‘playing field’. This has serious implications at many levels. This chapter introduces the concept of a universal approach to accessibility in education, and outlines three key universal approaches: Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation and Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP). We then address some common misunderstandings and critiques of these approaches. Finally, we provide guidance for a step-by-step approach to implementing universal approaches in practice.

A Universal Approach to Accessibility

Accessibility is, fundamentally, a precondition for the upholding of human rights. Although accessibility does not equate to inclusion, it is a necessary starting point from which inclusion can be made possible. [Chapter 4](#) discussed these rights as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008), and [Chapter 5](#) explained how legislation and guidance such as the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Cth) require that schools ensure accessibility for all students. Teachers' responsibilities to uphold these legal requirements are reflected in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2018). For example, Standards 1.5 and 1.6 specify that teachers should know how to 'differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities' and know 'strategies to support full participation of students with disability' (AITSL 2018). These standards highlight that inclusive education requires more than simply accessing or enrolling in the local school; inclusive education also involves students fully participating in all aspects of school life, as valued members of the school community, and having their learning needs met. These elements of the Standards are consistent with the definition of inclusion in General Comment No. 4, articulating the right to inclusive education under Article 24 of the CRPD (United Nations 2016).

Ensuring accessibility includes providing physical access to the school environment and resources, access to the curriculum, and access to the social aspects of the school in relation to peers, teachers and other school-community members. This access then provides a platform from which to ensure participation with the ultimate goal of genuine inclusion. Participation requires students being given the opportunities and support to enable active engagement in all aspects of school life as they learn and grow alongside their peers. Accordingly, taking an accessible approach to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the school environment is a requirement of all teachers and education systems. Accessibility can be achieved through a universal approach that enables full participation and engagement in education for all, not only some, students. One common conceptualisation of accessible approaches is the notion of a 'universal' approach popularised through the concept of universal design. Universal design originated in the field of architecture, where it refers to intentionally designing the physical environment to be usable by as many people as possible, rather than retrofitting the environment for specific individuals (Mace 1985). For example, ramps and kerb cuts provide accessibility for people who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids, but

also for people using bicycles, prams, shopping trolleys and so on. These processes of universal design have widespread benefits and considerably reduce the need for changes to be made for individuals, thus avoiding the issues of limiting or preventing access and participation until such changes are made, and reducing the time needed for individual changes. Within education, a universal approach is used for the whole class, but it is not one size fits all. It is an approach that removes barriers to access and participation, and is flexible enough to accommodate student diversity. A universal approach in education facilitates accessibility, participation and inclusion with fewer individual adjustments needed, through planning and designing curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environments that are accessible for the full diversity of students (Darragh 2007; Katz 2013; Tomlinson 2017; Valle & Connor 2011).

Planning for diversity

The flippant statement ‘teaching would be so easy without the students’ is merely a well-worn joke. However, the *illogic* of common perceptions is that, in a sense, teaching without students is *actually* often perceived as the way to approach planning, whereby the consideration is effectively ‘content–task–deliver’. This involves, for the most part, planning to teach the same thing in the same way to all students. At face value, this may seem easier than planning to teach a diverse group of students. However, taking this diversity into account during planning is more successful than one-size-fits-all approaches and saves both time and cost by avoiding time-consuming retrospective adjustments (Edyburn 2005, 2010; McTighe & Brown 2005) and reducing the number of individual adaptations required (Morningstar et al. 2015; Price 2015). Adopting a universal approach contributes to ensuring accessibility and equity, and therefore compliance with the DSE (Cth). Such an approach also helps to ensure that no student becomes defined by a disability label (Darragh 2007). Taking a universal approach to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the environment is, at its core, about valuing students in all their diversity (Edyburn 2010).

In making education accessible, recognising the reality and value of student diversity goes hand in hand with identification of educational barriers to learning. Educational barriers are extrinsic factors such as inaccessible and inequitable curricula, pedagogies, assessments and environments. Rather than seeing problems as intrinsic to students, or seeking to change students, teachers have a responsibility to adapt

extrinsic elements to be inclusive of all students (Cologon 2014; Edyburn 2005, 2010). Education needs to be adjusted to fit to the students, rather than students needing to adapt to fit an education system or experience (Cologon 2014; Darragh 2007; Edyburn 2005, 2010). Taking a universal approach to building in genuine possibilities for accessibility and participation provides a flexible framework to meet the needs of all students and create the conditions for each student to flourish (Basham et al. 2010). This approach has the potential to benefit all students, not only those who would otherwise be at risk of exclusion (Edyburn 2010). If a universal approach is implemented routinely, then it also has the important benefit of reducing the number of individual adjustments that a teacher needs to make to bring about inclusive education. The process of making supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments is outlined in [Chapter 9](#); however, as noted in that chapter, these adjustments are predicated on the universal provision of high-quality differentiated teaching, with ‘universal’ meaning that every child receives it, *not* that one size fits all. The following section explains how these elements fit together as parts constituting a tiered framework.

Accessibility in Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment and Environments

The universal approaches outlined in this chapter form the core of a Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford 2016). MTSS is a general education framework of support for all students (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford 2016). It involves providing proactive universal approaches for the academic, behavioural and social-emotional wellbeing of all students and increasing levels of adjustments to support individual student learning (Clark & Dockweiler 2019). The universal approaches in MTSS are proactive and preventive. Such approaches build in accessibility for diverse learners from the outset, rather than waiting for barriers and challenges to arise that then require intervention. However, the additional tiers in MTSS recognise that student needs are not always met by universal approaches, and that students are entitled to reasonable adjustments to ensure full access to, and participation in, all aspects of school life. Within the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD), which is informed by the MTSS concept and described in

Chapter 6, universal approaches are known as Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP). As discussed in Chapter 9, there are three further tiers or levels of adjustments: Level 1 (supplementary), Level 2 (substantial), and Level 3 (extensive) (Australian Government 2019). The universal approaches at the core of MTSS (and therefore the NCCD) are the focus of this chapter.

Three universal approaches: UDL, differentiation and QDTP

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiation and Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) are three key universal approaches to accessibility in education. Although there are differences in how they might be used, UDL, differentiation and QDTP are complementary and can be used together. For example, when planning for a new class, a teacher can apply UDL to actively plan for diversity through embedding multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression into all aspects of the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environment. As the teacher gets to know and builds relationships with the students, further layers of differentiation can be added to better include all students as the teacher identifies where students are currently at with their learning, alongside student preferences and other motivating factors.

Universal Design for Learning. The goal of UDL is to remove barriers and address the problems of a one-size-fits-all approach in order to provide equal access to *learning*, not just access to information (Edyburn 2005). UDL is a flexible and responsive strengths-based approach to teaching, enabling high expectations matched with genuine learning opportunities for all students (Edyburn 2010; Katz 2015). UDL is usually considered to have been developed at the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST), using the foundational work of David Rose and Anne Meyer (2002). Building on the broader notion of universal design, the concept of UDL is about engaging in educational practice from the perspective of understanding and valuing diversity, and applying this understanding to facilitate accessible and equitable learning (Edyburn 2005).

UDL philosophy and practice are embodied in a set of three principles (CAST 2018) that address the ‘why’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ of learning:

1. **Multiple means of engagement** considers the ‘why’ of learning and targets the different motivators for student learning by providing options for recruiting students’ interests, sustaining effort and persistence, and harnessing self-regulation (CAST 2018). For example, teachers can provide choice for the context that students use for practising skills and completing assessments, and offer feedback that models informative evaluation to support student self-assessment and reflection.
2. **Multiple means of representation** addresses the ‘what’ of learning; knowledge can be represented and internalised in different ways, and therefore students benefit from various options for perception of information, language and symbols, and comprehension (CAST 2018). For example, teachers can offer visual and auditory alternatives to written texts and provide scaffolding that highlights and clarifies the use of key vocabulary, big ideas, critical features, patterns, symbols and structures.
3. **Multiple means of action and expression** focuses on ‘how’ students interact with the environment and express their learning in diverse ways. This requires providing options for the physical requirements and resources for learning, a range of modes of expression and communication of ideas and learning, and supporting executive function such as goal-setting, planning, strategy development, information navigation and self-monitoring (CAST 2018). Technology can play an important role here, along with allowing students to present their assessment in multiple formats.

The UDL guidelines from CAST provide a useful resource for teachers to evaluate the accessibility and flexibility of classrooms, curricula and assessment (Glass et al. 2013). UDL is underpinned by the belief that students’ abilities are contextual: they involve an interaction between the individuals and their environments (Rose et al. 2018). Using UDL encourages teachers to identify how low performance might be the result of poor design (Rose et al. 2018). This could include, for example, a poor match between the student and the learning or assessment task, or inaccessible learning resources. Implementing UDL ensures that environments and experiences are inclusive of all students by valuing diversity as an everyday, valued and expected part of education settings and experiences (Hall et al. 2012). UDL guidelines are easily accessed on the CAST website.

Differentiation. Sometimes referred to as ‘differentiated instruction’, differentiation involves proactively planning varied approaches to what and how students learn, in order to be inclusive of student diversity. A widely regarded conceptualisation of differentiation is Carol Ann Tomlinson’s approach in which specific attention is paid to four core elements: content, process, product, and environment and affect. Content differentiation concerns *what* students learn; process differentiation considers *how* students learn; product differentiation addresses how students *show* what they have learned; and environment and affect considers the climate *in* which students learn (Tomlinson 2017). Differentiation is organised, yet simultaneously flexible and responsive (Tomlinson 2017).

Importantly, differentiation aligns with UDL: content differentiation aligns with multiple means of representation (e.g. using multiple media and materials to teach the same content); process differentiation aligns with multiple means of engagement (e.g. offering choice in groupings or activities that match student interests and backgrounds); and product differentiation aligns with multiple means of action and expression (e.g. creating multiple flexible options for students to demonstrate their understandings). Both approaches are informed by the key universal principles of accessibility, flexibility and responsiveness.

When undertaking this approach to accessible learning, content, process, product, and environment and affect are ‘differentiated’ according to where students are currently at with their learning (current knowledge, understanding and skills) and in recognition of factors that motivate students, including preferences for learning (Tomlinson 2017). Numerous resources have been developed for teachers that attempt to explain differentiation and provide examples of practice. However, many of these are not consistent with Tomlinson’s intentions, or with a universal approach, and therefore care should be taken when selecting resources to implement this approach. The section on myths versus evidence, below, addresses some of these misinterpretations.

Where a student is at with their learning is sometimes referred to as ‘readiness’. Readiness has a range of different commonly understood (and sometimes problematic) meanings. Within differentiation, readiness is understood to mean a student’s current knowledge, understanding and skills, and the knowledge and skills yet to be learned and understood (Tomlinson 2017). Readiness is about what students already bring to a new learning experience. Where a student is currently at varies from task to task and is continually changing. Therefore, differentiation requires

regular, thoughtful assessment and monitoring to identify and acknowledge students' prior knowledge and skills, and ongoing development over time. This process includes 'pre-assessment', which is engaging in assessment prior to introducing new learning opportunities in order to guide planning (Tomlinson 2017). Pre-assessment is not graded or marked, but it does inform teachers and assist with planning. Planning based on this information involves identifying an appropriate level of challenge to continually scaffold ongoing learning without compromising student engagement. Addressing readiness does not mean determining that a student cannot participate in a particular experience or opportunity. Nor is it about looking to change the student. Instead, readiness is about considering what differentiation is needed to ensure all students can meaningfully participate in a valued manner. For example, this process allows *all* students to work on the same problem varied by how concrete or abstract the ideas are, or how structured or open-ended the problem is in its presentation.

We are all generally more motivated to learn when we are interested and when our preferences for comprehending, exploring and expressing learning are taken into account. This has implications for engaging students in ongoing learning (Tomlinson 2017). Differentiated learning can include incorporating links to students' passions, strengths, cultural context, personal experiences, questions or needs. Differentiating by interest can be included, for example, by encouraging students to make personal connections to topics, allowing choice within a broader topic, and using strategies such as passion projects (where learning experiences are scaffolded to align with students' levels of curiosity and passion) or interest centres that link the curriculum with a variety of tasks that engage students' existing interests and introduce them to new ideas.

Preferences for comprehending, exploring and expressing learning are shaped by students' gender, culture, background and personal ways of being (Tomlinson 2017). Taking into account student preferences for learning (sometimes referred to as a 'learning profile') does *not* involve pigeonholing a student as a certain type of learner (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic) or a 'multiple intelligence' profile. Rather, it involves teaching and learning in multiple modes, including providing opportunities for students to learn in their preferred ways as well as encouraging students to expand their learning approaches (Tomlinson 2017). Notions of 'learning styles' and 'multiple intelligences', while once popular, have been resoundingly debunked in more recent years

(Klitmøller 2015; Pashler et al. 2009). This issue is discussed further in the section below on common misunderstandings.

UDL and differentiation are complementary approaches that can be applied together to create accessible educational experiences. Although they are distinct approaches, there are considerable similarities, and taking a combined approach may maximise the inclusiveness of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and educational environments. With its focus on removing barriers, UDL can be a useful starting point for making curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the school environment more accessible for everyone. Differentiation provides a concrete approach and practical strategies for planning a variety of teaching and learning experiences that cater for the specific range of students in a particular class. Together, UDL and differentiation can be implemented by teachers to bring about QDTP, an Australian approach to teaching diverse learners.

Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice. Drawing together the internationally recognised conceptualisations of UDL and differentiation, and the current legislative and policy context, the Australian government has stipulated that, under the NCCD (see [Chapter 6](#)), QDTP is the foundation of enabling accessibility and meeting the requirements of the DSE, along with additional levels of adjustments as appropriate (Australian Government 2019). Additional funding is not allocated to QDTP, as QDTP is considered to be an approach to teaching that is responsive to all students and ‘reasonably expected as part of quality teaching or school practice’ (Australian Government 2019). This means that *all students* receive QDTP, with the intention of facilitating a more inclusive education for everyone, avoiding any one-size-fits-all approaches.

Consequently, in order to meet the requirements under the NCCD and the DSE, a universal approach to accessibility and participation in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the provisioning of the environment is required as an everyday part of all classrooms across Australia. Although QDTP was developed as part of the NCCD to address accessibility and participation of students with disability, this universal approach benefits all students. Some students require further adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the environment to fully access and participate in school, as will be discussed in [Chapter 9](#). However, as noted earlier, if a universal approach is routine practice, teachers will need to make fewer adjustments for individual students.

QDTP is defined in Appendix 2 of the NCCD guidelines (Education Council 2019), as represented in [Table 8.1](#).

The NCCD does not provide a great deal of information as to what constitutes QDTP, and this might explain the discrepancies detected in evaluations of the trial data (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2017) noted in [Chapter 6](#). With deeper understanding of universal approaches such as UDL and differentiation, educators are in a better position to interpret the meaning of terms such as ‘differentiated approach’ in the NCCD guidelines and enact this with fidelity in their practice.

Table 8.1: Support provided within Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice

Level of adjustment descriptors	<p>Students with disability are supported through active monitoring and adjustments that are not greater than those used to meet the needs of diverse learners. These adjustments are provided through usual school processes, without drawing on additional resources, and by meeting proficient-level Teaching Standards (AITSL).</p> <p>Adjustments are made infrequently as occasional action, or frequently as low-level action such as monitoring. These adjustments may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explicit, minor adjustments, including targeted or differentiated teaching, assessments or activities; • specific and relevant teaching strategies to support targeted areas of communication; • active monitoring and supervision, meeting health, personal-care and safety requirements through usual school processes; and • enabling access to learning through usual school processes (e.g. through a differentiated approach to teaching and learning) and existing facilities (e.g. existing modifications to buildings and learning environments).
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Students with a medical condition whose learning and support needs are met through usual processes (e.g. whole-school professional learning) and active monitoring by school staff are included in this category. These students may have a plan in place to support monitoring of their condition. Their identified needs would be subject to close monitoring and review.

Myths versus Evidence: Common Misunderstandings of Universal Approaches

Applying a universal approach is not about designing a one-size-fits-all education for all students (Hall et al. 2012). Rather, it involves using a flexible approach so that all students can learn in ways that are accessible (Hall et al. 2012). There are several misconceptions that surround universal approaches such as UDL and differentiation, as explored in [Table 8.2](#). These misconceptions often form the basis of unfounded criticism of UDL and differentiation.

The following section unpacks each of the eight elaborations above to better explain the philosophy and intent of universal approaches.

Table 8.2: Universal approaches: myths and reality

Universal approaches are not . . .	Universal approaches are . . .
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Only for students with disability or who have been given other 'labels'	For all students
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Something extra for teachers	At the core of effective planning
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Lowering expectations or watering down the curriculum	'Teaching up' and providing students with the supports they need to achieve to their full potential
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More work for some and less work for others	Varied avenues to the same essential understandings
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Individualisation and individual lesson plans	A balance of whole-class, small-group and individual learning, and options for engaging with learning in multiple ways
Always student choice	A balance of teacher and student choice
Ability grouping or streaming	Flexible grouping based on readiness, interest and learning profile
‘Learning styles’	Teaching using multiple modalities and media, and allowing students to learn and express their learning in multiple formats

Universal approaches are for all students

Universal approaches for inclusive practice such as UDL and differentiation are for *all* students, not just students who have been ascribed disability or other labels. As underscored by the philosophy of universal design, when we consider barriers for students who might be disadvantaged and circumvent these in the initial design, we create something accessible for everyone. Taking a universal approach is not about having an extra UDL or differentiation column in a lesson plan to design ‘special tasks’ and ‘special resources’ for ‘special students’, as this is a practice that can stigmatise students. Instead, implementing inclusive universal approaches is at the core of all curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and classroom environment design. It is therefore not something extra for teachers to do—it is effective planning from the outset.

Universal approaches are at the core of effective planning

UDL and differentiation are at the core of effective planning and involve intentionally building in accessibility and flexibility to initial design (Hall et al. 2012; Tomlinson 2017). This is important to highlight, given

the criticism that differentiation involves retrofitting (e.g. Capp 2017; Stanford & Reeves 2009). Like any new pedagogy, implementing UDL and differentiation may initially take teachers more time to plan while they are learning this new way of teaching. However, with education and practice, universal approaches have the potential to *save* time by teaching students more efficiently and effectively from the outset. These approaches prevent the need for reteaching curriculum designed for hypothetical ‘middle’ students that fails to meet the needs of all students.

Universal approaches involve ‘teaching up’ and providing varied avenues to the same essential understandings

One misconception of inclusive practice is that it results in ‘watering down’ the curriculum or lowering expectations for some or all students. In reality, UDL and differentiation both assume competence and can be approached by ‘teaching up’. That is, rather than planning for the ‘middle’ and then lowering expectations for some students and increasing expectations for others, universal approaches involve planning for the ideal learning outcomes and providing scaffolds (e.g. small-group instruction, graphic organisers, specific success criteria) to enable all students to meet these goals (Tomlinson 2017). This method ensures that all students have opportunities to engage in meaningful work with high-level thinking (Tomlinson 2017). It also avoids the perceived inequity of inclusive practices resulting in providing ‘high-achieving’ learners with more work, and so-called ‘struggling’ learners with less (Westwood 2001). Although they may take varied paths, all students can be supported in working towards achieving the same essential understandings.

Universal approaches involve a balance of learning configurations and choices

Catering for diverse learners in an inclusive classroom through the use of individual lesson plans for each student is a related misconception about differentiation. This is not a realistic or achievable practice to sustain and is not encouraged by universal approaches such as UDL or differentiation. Both approaches advocate the use of a balance of whole-class, small-group and individual learning (Hall et al. 2012; Tomlinson

2017). When implementing universal approaches, students have opportunities to work collaboratively, cooperatively and independently; sometimes this will be teacher-chosen and sometimes chosen by students (Tomlinson 2017).

Universal approaches require flexible grouping

When planning the composition of whole classes and small groups, streaming and ability grouping are not evidence-based practices. Streaming aims to increase homogeneity in classes and is therefore not reconcilable with inclusive practices that seek to meet the needs of everyone in heterogeneous classes. Moreover, streaming and ability grouping do not produce academic gains for most students, and can perpetuate disadvantage for students in so-called ‘low’ ability groups or classes (Johnston & Wildy 2016; Macqueen 2013; Slavin 1987, 1990). It is argued that some students who have been labelled as ‘gifted’ may sometimes benefit from spending some time in ability groups, but only when also provided with differentiation or acceleration (Kulik & Kulik 1992; Vialle & Rogers 2012). However, research shows that the benefits for these students are marginal (Steenbergen-Hu et al. 2016), and considerable caution is needed as this approach may result in exclusion. Flexible grouping is a key strategy of differentiation, and this term refers to the carefully planned use of a range of homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings based on readiness, interest and learning profile so that students have opportunities to work with a range of peers (Tomlinson 2017).

Universal approaches involve multiple modalities

As noted earlier, learning-style theory—where students are categorised as visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners—has been a popular choice for grouping arrangements or task planning by teachers. However, research evidence does not support the application of learning-style theory in educational practice (Klitmøller 2015; Pashler et al. 2009). Due to confusion around this concept, Tomlinson (2017) clarified the distinction between learning-profile terminology in differentiation and the debunked learning-style theory. Learning styles have no place in UDL or differentiation. Universal approaches recognise that all students

benefit from opportunities to work with multiple modalities and media, and to express their learning in multiple formats.

UDL and differentiation: considering the research evidence

As discussed in [Chapter 3](#), there is overwhelming research supporting inclusive education as producing positive academic and social outcomes for all students (Hehir et al. 2016). However, there is not yet the same quantity of research evidence to support the effectiveness of UDL and differentiation specifically. The limited quality empirical research on these approaches is not necessarily due to the ineffectiveness of the practices; in part it is due to the poor quality of, or misconceptions underpinning, the studies. For example, although there is a plethora of research claiming to have studied these approaches, many of these studies cannot contribute to the evidence base because they are premised on inaccurate conceptions of differentiation and UDL (e.g. using ability groups and learning styles). However, there are studies that show empirical support for the use of differentiation. These studies include interventions to improve reading outcomes (Goddard et al. 2015; Little et al. 2014; Reis et al. 2007; Reis et al. 2008; Reis et al. 2011; Shaunessy-Dedrick et al. 2015), mathematics outcomes (Goddard et al. 2015), science outcomes (Mastropieri et al. 2006) and student engagement in learning (VanTassel-Baska et al. 2008). Studies of UDL also demonstrate positive outcomes in increasing students' active academic and social engagement (Katz 2013), as well as facilitating greater social inclusion through providing support for developing compassionate learning communities (Katz & Porath 2011). UDL receives empirical support for enhancing students' learning processes across a range of school levels and curriculum areas, but additional experimental studies are recommended to strengthen the evidence base (Capp 2017).

Universal Approaches in Practice

In this chapter, we have explored the rationale for universal, accessible approaches. We have unpacked key models, how they are implemented, and some of the benefits. We have also outlined and addressed common misunderstandings and related criticisms. In this final section, we will

consider the ‘how’ of putting universal approaches into practice. As outlined earlier in this chapter, this process forms the first layer—or tier—of MTSS.

Implementing universal approaches

Building on the suggestions of Burgstahler (2015), and adapting Valle and Connor (2011), we outline five steps for implementing universal approaches:

1. Identify learning goals, outcomes and content.
2. Define the group of students, and identify the diversity.
3. Design assessment tasks.
4. Design and implement universal teaching and learning within an inclusive environment.
5. Evaluate and modify practice.

While each of these steps is described in detail below, we note that they are not intended as an ordered checklist. Instead, they highlight key steps and form key considerations for an ongoing cycle of reflective practice. At times the order would be more appropriately varied. For example, when planning at the outset of the year prior to developing relationships with students and developing an awareness of students’ current knowledge, the initial step of identifying learning goals, outcomes and content would be followed by adopting universal approaches and designing appropriate assessment tasks. The implementation of universal approaches is then adapted as the teacher gets to know and builds relationships with their students.

1. Identify learning goals, outcomes and content. Before beginning any planning, teachers must be clear about the learning goals and what outcomes they want students to demonstrate. From a differentiation perspective, this is the starting point of content differentiation. Although we can vary how students get there, the goal is for all students to be working towards the same essential understandings or ‘big picture’ ideas. For example, Australian Curriculum content, such as science understandings that all living things can be grouped (Year 3 Content Descriptor) or that energy appears in different forms (Year 8 Content Descriptor), should be a universal goal for the whole class and should not be different for an individual student unless specifically outlined (for justifiable and necessary reasons) in an alternative learning plan, such as

an Individual Curriculum Plan (ICP). In this initial planning, teachers also need to consider assessment, so that the learning goals drive the instructional design (known as backward mapping, see [Chapter 9](#)). To achieve these same essential understandings, students can access a variety of content, using different processes and with appropriate scaffolds.

2. Define the group of students, and identify the diversity. Building positive relationships with students is at the core of effective education; indeed, ‘[h]ighly effective teachers teach students first, then content’ (Tomlinson 2017: 39). Therefore, it is important to understand the student diversity in the class in order to teach content that will achieve the learning outcomes. Understanding the diversity of each group of students enables teachers to consider whether there are specific barriers to access and participation in the curriculum, pedagogy or assessment approaches that need to be addressed. It also enables teachers to consider how curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the environment match students’ strengths, passions, needs, cultural contexts, personal backgrounds, experiences, questions and preferences. Teachers can involve students in this process to facilitate relationship building, engagement and teacher understandings of students’ knowledge.

3. Design assessment tasks. Planning assessment first allows teachers to focus on the planning of teaching and learning experiences that will support students to reach the intended learning outcomes. Both formative and summative assessments need to be accessible. Recognising that students’ performances are an interaction between the environment and their abilities and disabilities acknowledges that inaccessible assessment can be disabling (Rose et al. 2018). From a differentiation approach, undertaking relevant pre-assessments for the specific content area is key to determining where students are currently at with their knowledge, understanding and skills in this content area, as well as factors that motivate students. Pre-assessments are useful for revealing student mastery, gaps and misconceptions (Tomlinson 2017). Typical formative assessment formats are commonly used for pre-assessments, such as quizzes, concept maps, graphic organisers, teacher–student conferences, observations, self-evaluations, exit cards, writing prompts, cloze passages and so on.

[Figure 8.1](#) presents two examples of mathematics pre-assessments that are quick to administer and check: (i) a quiz question for assessing perimeter (Year 5 Measurement and Geometry); and (ii) a Frayer diagram for assessing rotational symmetry understandings (Year 7

Measurement and Geometry). Based on the results, a teacher can determine any misconceptions or gaps to target and whether any students have already mastered the content and are ready for the next step in a learning sequence. The process of completing pre-assessments can also be differentiated to allow students to have the best opportunity to show the teacher their current readiness. For example, students could complete the Frayer diagram using words, pictures and/or through a teacher–student conference.

It is also helpful to design ongoing formative assessment that will be used to monitor student progress and adjust instruction, and to allow students to reflect on their own progress. Both product differentiation and UDL’s principle of multiple means of action and expression focus on developing accessible and inclusive assessment.

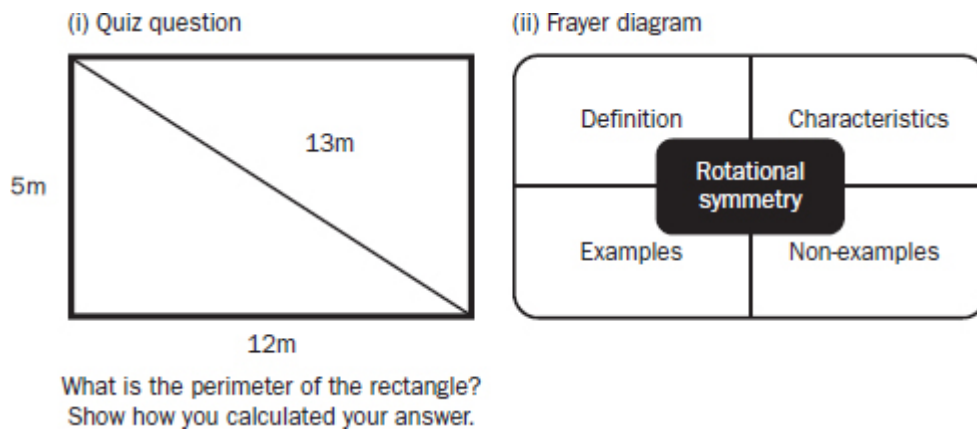


Figure 8.1. Examples of pre-assessments.

It is important to carefully examine assessment methods and content to ensure that the assessment task actually assesses what you think you are assessing (Rose et al. 2018). If you are not assessing writing, for example, is there a need for students to complete a written response? Consider a teacher who is doing a summative assessment of students’ understandings of ‘the importance of people, institutions and processes to Australian democracy’ (ACARA n.d.: n.p.). These understandings could be assessed through a variety of formats. While some students might prefer to write a traditional essay or oral presentation, these understandings might also be assessed through a web page, multimedia presentation, dramatic presentation, music and lyrics, poetry or other creative products. Allowing students multiple options for presenting their learning requires teachers and students to have clear, shared

understandings of the intended learning outcomes and criteria for assessment (Broadfoot et al. 2002).

The goal and process of assessment must be made explicit to students. This requires accessible assessment task and criteria sheets.

Recommended design guidelines for assessment task and criteria sheets include: (i) visual accessibility, through a layout that assists students to comprehend the assessment task requirements; (ii) procedural accessibility, with consistency of instructions and clarity in the task and criteria; and (iii) linguistic accessibility, with the use of age-appropriate language to give clear instructions (Graham et al. 2018). This can be achieved through the proactive use of universal approaches. For example, to reduce the barrier of linguistically complex assessment tasks and make task sheets more accessible, the UDL principle of providing multiple means of representation prompts teachers to provide options for language and symbols. Some strategies for implementing this principle include:

- pre-teaching vocabulary that will appear on assessment task and criteria sheets;
- embedding visual, non-linguistic supports;
- embedding vocabulary support with hyperlinks, footnotes, explanations and illustrations;
- providing text and/or auditory descriptions for any graphic representations;
- highlighting key terms;
- providing a glossary of key terms;
- pre-teaching and embedding support for unfamiliar references, such as academic or figurative language (or remove this complex language, if possible); and
- providing translations in students' first languages.

(CAST 2018)

Environment and affect differentiation can be seen in elements of multiple means of action and expression (e.g. expectation of growth, and support for setting personal learning goals and monitoring growth), and in multiple means of engagement (e.g. varying the level of sensory stimulation, and allowing movement and breaks to increase on-task engagement). Content differentiation builds on UDL in its focus on using pre-assessment information to target learning just beyond students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978), so that at times students will be doing tasks of different complexity while working towards the same essential understandings (Tomlinson 2017).

4. Design and implement universal teaching and learning within an inclusive environment. Within UDL and differentiation, there are

various pedagogical strategies that can be applied to curriculum, pedagogy and environmental design. It is not possible within the scope of this chapter to outline all possibilities. However, throughout this chapter we provide guidelines to consider in the process of applying a universal approach. This includes engaging in a cycle of designing, teaching, reviewing—and then designing again—the learning opportunities provided to all students. Within this, there are a few key considerations. Building in multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression is foundational to taking an accessible approach. Accessibility needs to be considered within the physical environment, as well as within the curriculum and pedagogy. This includes ensuring that multiple forms of communication are used and valued (e.g. visual communication, braille, sign language, multiple spoken languages, as appropriate) and that there is a clear match between the teacher and task expectations, and the information provided to students. Within and around the physical space, accessible pathways and clearly defined boundaries are required. It is important to engage in ongoing critical reflection on potential barriers to, and facilitators of, inclusion within the education setting. This includes recognising what is happening in the environment that is working well, as well as identifying current barriers within the environment, curriculum and pedagogy that need to be addressed in order to provide equitable learning opportunities to all students.

Teachers can draw on various pedagogies or methods that fit with their teaching philosophy and assist them to achieve the goal of accessibility and inclusion. For example, a compatible method might be making available all instructional content online for students to engage with at an appropriate time and place for them and to revisit as often as needed. UDL guidelines provide a reminder that any audiovisual materials should be made accessible using elements such as subtitles for any auditory information and hyperlinks to definitions of key terms or to further explanatory information. There are no set methods or pedagogies that must be used with UDL or differentiation. There is space for a variety of teaching methods to suit different purposes.

With the deep understanding gained of the students in Step 2, teachers can follow UDL with differentiated teaching and learning to ensure that it meets the diversity of the class. Two useful strategies for doing this include flexible grouping and tiering. As discussed earlier, flexible grouping involves using a range of purposeful individual, small-group and whole-class configurations based on readiness, interest or learning

profile (Tomlinson 2017). [Figure 8.2](#) offers an example sequence of a differentiated unit with flexible groupings, where students have opportunities to work with a range of peers. Flexible groupings change for different curriculum areas and tasks within a single curriculum area, so they differ from fixed-ability groups where students work with the same students for an extended period of time.

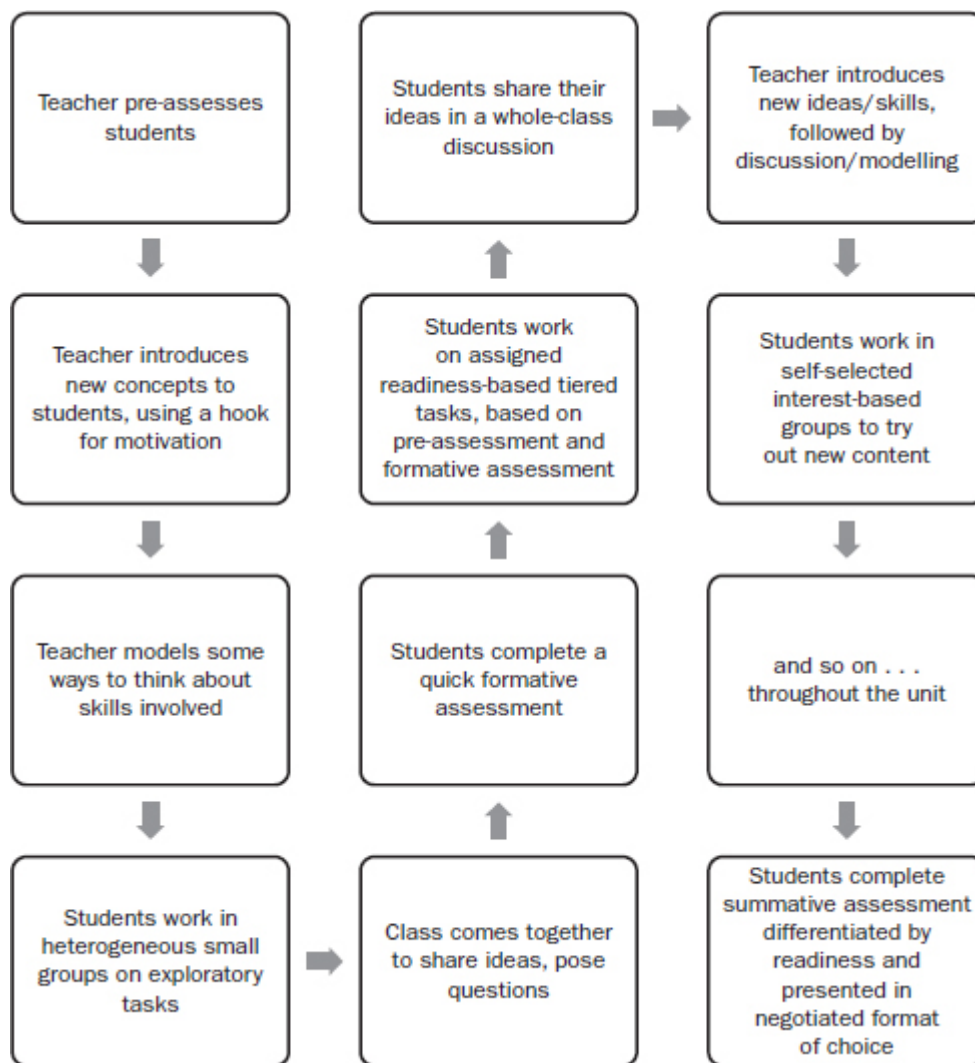


Figure 8.2. Example sequence of a differentiated unit.

In addition to showing the intentional use of multiple groupings, the example unit sequence in [Figure 8.2](#) includes tiered tasks. Tiering is a strategy for differentiating by readiness where all students are working towards the same essential understandings, but through tasks at different levels of challenge (Tomlinson 2017). A critical planning step here is to start with the most challenging task first, then vary the types or amounts of scaffolds provided (e.g. graphic organisers, small-group instruction,

modelling) within the other tiered tasks in order to ‘teach up’, so that all students have rigorous learning experiences (Tomlinson 2017). Critically, this strategy should be underpinned by choice so that tiering does not inadvertently place a ceiling on the learning of students due to preconceived perceptions about ability. At times, tiering is poorly enacted through the splitting of classes into low, middle and high ‘ability’ groups that are each given a different ‘tier’ to work on. Providing all students with a choice of *all* tiers avoids shutting down opportunities for students to freely determine and test their own limits and is consistent with high expectations and the presumption of competence.

The climate of the classroom is critical to accessibility and inclusion. This means developing an effective, safe and welcoming learning community built on mutual respect and fairness, and an expectation of growth and success (Tomlinson 2017). There are many aspects to creating this positive classroom climate. One important consideration is to facilitate social and emotional learning through processes of fostering compassionate learning communities, including a specific focus on supporting positive self-concept, fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating respect for diversity (Katz 2015; see also [Chapter 13](#)). Consider the ways in which learning and teaching in this education setting are flexible and responsive, and the classroom environment and affect in which students are expected to learn (Tomlinson 2017). It is also important to consider the systems and structures in place, including examining leadership and management, professional development and collaboration (Katz 2015; see also [Chapter 10](#)). If images of people are present within the environment, it is important that these represent the full range of human diversities within the setting and beyond. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives need to be actively and respectfully included, and gender stereotypes consciously challenged. Flexible opportunities need to be provided for all students to participate fully and exercise appropriate choice. It is essential to consider students’ interests and current knowledge, and to value the contribution of each student.

5. Evaluate and modify practice. Throughout the teaching sequence, it is important to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction in relation to the goals and intended outcomes identified in Step 1, using strategies such as personal observations and reflections, student feedback and peer feedback from colleagues. Student feedback plays a crucial role in developing a mutually respectful and responsive environment, and for

improving the inclusiveness of classrooms. It is important for students to be collaborators in classroom decision-making (Tomlinson 2017).

Implementing UDL and differentiation requires a systematic approach to planning curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and the classroom environment. This section has described how UDL and differentiation can be used together in a practical, systematic way. Ideally, incorporating universal approaches to teaching diverse learners would form part of a whole-school approach to inclusive education, supported by professional development. However, teachers need not wait for their school to lead this process. Individual teachers who model inclusive approaches in their own classrooms, and share their passion and success with colleagues, can be catalysts for change.

Conclusion

As explored above, universal approaches address the why, what and how of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environment within education settings. Such an approach does not involve retrofitting previous approaches with addendums to accommodate ‘special’ students. Rather, it involves planning from the outset for all aspects of human diversity, and identifying and planning for the specific diversity within a group of students (Valle & Connor 2011). A universal approach is founded on holding high expectations for all students and considering how multiple approaches can enable each student to meaningfully participate, effectively learn and demonstrate their learning, and have their contribution valued.

Taking a universal approach to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environment does not ‘just happen’; it takes effort and ongoing commitment (Edyburn 2005). However, the intention of universal approaches is to ensure high-quality education for all students in a way that also enhances teachers’ engagement and enjoyment (Katz 2015). Initially, universal approaches require advocacy in order to motivate change to increase accessibility and recognise barriers in place. This advocacy is followed by engagement in a period of considerable change, where the environment, curricula, pedagogy and assessment are reconsidered in light of taking a universal approach. During this process, there are likely to be times where accessibility has not yet been achieved—for example, where a student needs braille materials, and these are not

yet available (Edyburn 2005), or where a ramp or rails are needed, but are not yet installed. While working to address these barriers, flexible and creative problem-solving is needed to ensure that inclusion does not need to wait. Accessibility occurs when equitable access is ‘provided to everyone at the same time’ (Edyburn 2005: 19). This means that accessible design is design that is useful to everyone, from the perspective of recognising and valuing the full range of human diversity. Universal approaches hold considerable promise for facilitating access and participation, and bringing inclusive education to a reality. In working to meet obligations under educational policy, as well as national and international law, taking a universal approach is at the core of quality education.

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Making adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

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Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) recognises that students with disability have a right to an inclusive education (United Nations 2008). Upon ratifying the CRPD in 2008, Australia committed to implementing inclusive education, which requires changes to legislation, policy and practice (see [Chapters 4](#) and [6](#)). In 2016, the United Nations provided further guidance through General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016), which identifies failure to provide adjustments for students with disability as a key barrier to learning (see sections 4f, 12c, 12g and 13). This is concerning, given that Australian schools and systems must comply with both the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (DSE; Cth). As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), this legislation protects individuals against discrimination on the basis of disability. To comply with the DSE, educators must implement reasonable adjustments, so that all students have the opportunity to become active and engaged learners. Importantly, additional funding for students with disability is now provided by the Australian government based on the loadings determined by data submitted to the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD; Education Services Australia 2019). To maximise accessibility and to minimise workload, teachers should first adopt universal design principles, as described in [Chapter 8](#), to enable them to:

1. plan dignified teaching and learning programs that are age/grade appropriate and which deliver content that is meaningful and respectful of individual strengths,

- interests and proficiencies; and
2. engage in accessible teaching that is stimulating, challenging and rigorous for all.

The NCCD conceptualises this through a baseline level of intentional teaching, known as Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP). While many students with disability will thrive when presented with well-planned, flexible and accessible curricula, pedagogies and assessments, this will not be the case for all students. This practical reality is recognised in the NCCD through three levels of adjustments that are provided in addition to QDTP. As described in [Chapter 6](#), these levels are known as supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments. Providing adjustments as part of teaching and learning programs in inclusive classrooms is a process of ‘simplicity’ (Sharratt & Fullan 2012), a term that neatly encapsulates the simplicity of the individual components relating to a practice and the complexity of the whole when all the necessary components are combined. In this chapter, we attempt to de-complexify this process by showing *how* teachers can design and implement supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The chapter will first discuss the Australian Curriculum and describe how its alignment with pedagogical design and assessment affords opportunities for teachers to cater for a diverse student population in inclusive classrooms. The second part of the chapter will illustrate how teachers can make supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for different year levels and across different subjects.

The Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has developed the Australian Curriculum to be equitable and responsive to the differing requirements or preferences of all students spanning all areas of ‘cognitive, affective, physical, social, and aesthetic curriculum experiences’ (ACARA 2016: n.p.). This flexibility aligns the design of the Australian Curriculum with the DSE (Cth) requirement that students with disability should access the curriculum on the same basis as students without disability. The Australian Curriculum consists of three parts:

1. learning areas;
2. general capabilities; and
3. cross-curriculum priorities.

The *learning areas* entail a sequence of content descriptors and achievement standards in each of the eight learning areas, from the Foundation level of schooling through to Year 10. Teachers can use this sequence to design age/grade-equivalent learning experiences, and to identify students’ progress along this sequence.

The *general capabilities* consist of seven domains that teachers should address as part of the learning areas. When students are capable in each of these domains, they can apply their skills and knowledge with confidence across varying contexts within and outside the classroom. The learning area content descriptors show in which area these general capabilities can be developed and/or applied. The seven domains are:

1. Literacy
2. Numeracy
3. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Capability
4. Critical and Creative Thinking
5. Personal and Social Capability
6. Ethical Understanding
7. Intercultural Understanding (ACARA n.d.-d: n.p.).

The *cross-curriculum priorities* highlight three areas with which the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) required students to engage. These areas are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. This chapter will show how teachers can use the learning areas and general capabilities to make adjustments for students with disability.

Within the literature, a range of terms is used to describe changes made to curriculum, pedagogy or assessment, and it is important to note at the outset of this chapter that some of these terms are not interchangeable. In Australia, the term 'adjustment' is embedded in the DSE and is explained as an action or measure taken by a teacher that enables a student with disability to access and participate in learning *on the same basis* as their peers (DSE; Cth: section 3.3). In other countries, particularly the United States, the term 'accommodation' is used interchangeably to mean adjustment. Where a student may access learning *in a different way* to their peers—for example, where they are assessed against different outcomes to their peers—these changes are sometimes described in literature as 'modifications' (Kettler et al. 2009; Lane & Leventhal 2015). Where curriculum is changed and other material is added—for example, providing orientation and mobility lessons for students with vision impairment, or teaching a student who is non-verbal how to use a communication device—these changes are typically referred to as curriculum 'alterations' or curriculum 'augmentations' (Lee et al. 2006).

When adjustments, modifications or alterations are required to enable access to curriculum, pedagogy or assessment, these must be designed in consultation with the student and their parent(s)/carer(s) as per the DSE (Cth) obligation to consult (see [Chapters 11](#) and [16](#)). As the second part of this chapter will illustrate, teachers can match content descriptors in a learning area from different grade levels to better meet the progression of students working below (or above) their own grade level. Similarly, teachers can use the general capabilities to change how students engage with an activity or how they demonstrate their learning. For example, the Literacy sequence can be used to adjust the ways students engage with texts, such as using augmentative and alternative communication devices to respond to literary

experiences and express opinions. These adjustments do not exist in isolation from teaching; teachers' pedagogical design choices should align with the curricular content.

Pedagogical Design

Pedagogical design is the process of thinking about the relationship between educational theories, curriculum, instructional strategies, students and learning. It is the point where theory intersects with practice, taking the conceptual to the practical. This praxis has been described as 'the practice of teaching framed and informed by a shared and structured body of knowledge' (Pollard 2010: 5) that teachers enact to assist students in achieving curriculum expectations. It is the 'how' of the work. Quality pedagogical frameworks encompass a comprehensive repertoire of research-informed practices, designed to support teachers to make methodical and intentional decisions about how they teach, with a focus on maximising student learning. Teachers need to focus on pedagogical design processes that have powerful and positive effects on the learning of all students (Hattie 2003). This can be achieved by critically examining pedagogical frameworks, lesson-design processes, instructional adjustments, monitoring and feedback protocols, and the application of differentiated practice. Although there are several pedagogical frameworks available, there is no single construct that will guarantee learning for every student in every context. This is because improvement depends less on prescriptive approaches to teaching and assessment, and more on well-supported principles of effective pedagogies that can be part of more than one pedagogical approach. Teachers need to select an appropriate pedagogical framework and develop a repertoire of practices to respond to students and their learning, rather than adopting a single, rigid pedagogical approach. Pedagogical approaches are determined by teachers' professional experience, knowledge of their students, understanding of the curriculum, awareness of the research, and collaboration regarding problems of practice at the local level.

If pedagogy is 'the act and discourse of teaching' (Alexander 2004: 8), then instruction is a smaller part of that broad concept (Black & Wiliam 2018). Instructional models emphasise the importance of establishing clear aims, designing educational activities to accomplish those aims, and determining whether the aims have been accomplished (Black & Wiliam 2018). Thus, teachers need to set learning intentions and success criteria for each lesson and unit of learning, and communicate these clearly to students. Learning intentions and success criteria serve six purposes:

1. Ensure all students know what they are going to learn and where they are heading.
2. Provide guidance to teachers on what their chosen teaching and learning activities are seeking to achieve.
3. Provide the basis for feedback and reduce discrepancies between student current understanding and intended learning.
4. Assist students and teachers in tracking and assessing student progress.

5. Help teachers to understand the impact of their teaching and learning activities, and when they may need to adapt or change these.
6. Help students understand what improved performance looks like.

(AITSL n.d.: 1)

Learning intentions and success criteria are often sourced from the content descriptors and achievement standards of the Australian Curriculum, broken up into achievable sub-goals and sub-criteria. These intentions and criteria can be adjusted to reflect any required variances in complexity for students with disability, as the second part of this chapter will illustrate. However, the formulation of learning intentions and success criteria needs to be accessible to all students to enable them to share a common understanding of what they need to do to succeed in a lesson or a unit. Therefore, teachers need to purposefully plan how students access this information so that they can participate in learning (Assessment Reform Group 2002). For example, some students may be able to independently read and understand verbally expressed intentions and criteria, but other students may need visual exemplars that show them what success looks like (Sadler 1987) in order to develop the same knowledge. Access to the goals and assessable criteria of a lesson and, indeed, a lesson unit will allow students with disability to participate in teaching and learning on the same basis as their peers. However, goals and criteria change based on students' progression through the content and teachers' assessment of this progression, which is used to inform teachers' next steps in teaching. Accordingly, the next section focuses on assessment practice as the last part of the alignment between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Assessment

Teachers engage in formative and summative assessment as part of their everyday practice. Although the curriculum and pedagogy are important, Black and Wiliam (2018: 555) stated that 'any examination of pedagogy that does not take into account the various kinds of assessment processes that are used in educational settings . . . can at best provide only a partial explanation of what is going on'. When teachers and students work towards achieving learning intentions and success criteria, teachers plan various formative educational activities for students to engage with to guide them towards success. Teachers measure students' progress towards success by gathering formative evidence through various means as part of their pedagogy (e.g. worksheets, observation, interaction) and use that evidence to inform their teaching to best guide students towards achieving their learning intentions or extend them further. Monitoring this progress also provides teachers with the opportunity to give students feedback throughout their learning and transforms correcting student errors into opportunities to support deeper learning (Fisher et al. 2016).

Summative assessment tasks can serve a similar purpose to formative assessment when they are used in a formative way (Black & Wiliam 1998): they can inform teachers about the impact of their teaching and highlight gaps in student knowledge and/or skills that need to be addressed in further teaching. The Australian Curriculum achievement standards inform teachers of the expectations of what ‘satisfactory’ (C-level) quality of student work looks like. For teachers to be able to design and recognise achievement standards in their assessment, they need to have deep knowledge of the Australian Curriculum and how their assessment task aligns with the curriculum. In addition, they need to be aware that assessment items should solely measure students’ performance against the curricular content and achievement standards that were identified to be the focus of the task. Previous research has demonstrated a lack of alignment between the assessment task that students are asked to complete and the achievement standard, presenting multiple access barriers for students with disability (Graham et al. 2018). While many barriers can be designed out using universal approaches (see [Chapter 8](#)), there will always be some that cannot be anticipated, or require more significant adjustment for individual students. When teachers understand the intent of the curriculum and use appropriate pedagogical designs to teach and assess the curricular content, then they are in a position to make appropriate reasonable adjustments in accordance with the DSE (see also [Chapter 5](#)).

Designing Learning for All Students

Teachers are obligated to design learning experiences that ensure all students have access to the curriculum, can make use of teachers’ pedagogical practices, and are able to demonstrate their learning through formative and summative assessment. This includes both designing accessible learning for all students and making adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment as articulated in the DSE (Cth; see [Chapter 5](#)), the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2018) and the Australian Curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has recommended a process for planning teaching and learning that teachers should apply to all students, regardless of their circumstances, progress in learning or school placement (ACARA 2018). First, all teachers should commence planning by referring to the student’s age/grade-equivalent curriculum content, with the Australian Curriculum determining *what* should be taught. *How* it might best be taught or assessed is considered the remit of different states and territories, systems, schools and teachers. Second, teachers consider students’ learning profiles, together with anticipated and known barriers to access and participation within the task. Third, teachers design and implement adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment based on students’ learning profiles. Adjustments should be designed through a reflective process to ensure that each student’s progress is ongoing, and the student (where appropriate) and their parent(s)/carer(s) should be consulted throughout this process.

In some instances, a student may be assessed against the achievement standard from an earlier or later grade level where this reflects the best entry point in their learning. As the second part of this chapter will show, this process involves identifying topics from the age/grade-equivalent achievement standards and content descriptors, and finding similar topics in the standards and descriptors of different year levels. This similarity ensures that students are working on the same age/grade-appropriate content as their peers, but at a complexity level better suited to their learning profile.

As per the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD; see [Chapter 6](#)), schools must also report on all adjustments. This helps to show the work done by schools under the DSE and to improve future policy and resourcing for students with disability. The NCCD was informed by the concept of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), comparable to Response to Intervention or Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL). The idea shared by all of these models is the provision of high-quality universal education followed by an increase of support based on individual students' profiles and learning progression. In the NCCD, this base level of universal provision is called Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP). The term 'universal', in this instance, does not mean 'one size fits all', rather that this level of provision is provided to *all* students. This important distinction is depicted in [Figure 9.1](#).

The overlapping circles in [Figure 9.1](#) illustrate that quality differentiated teaching and learning of the Australian Curriculum should always be at the core of education for all students, irrespective of their required levels of adjustment and support. Support is offered in addition to QDTP, not instead of QDTP. Further, support is not fixed, but changes across contexts, learning areas and student profiles, and is responsive to documented need.

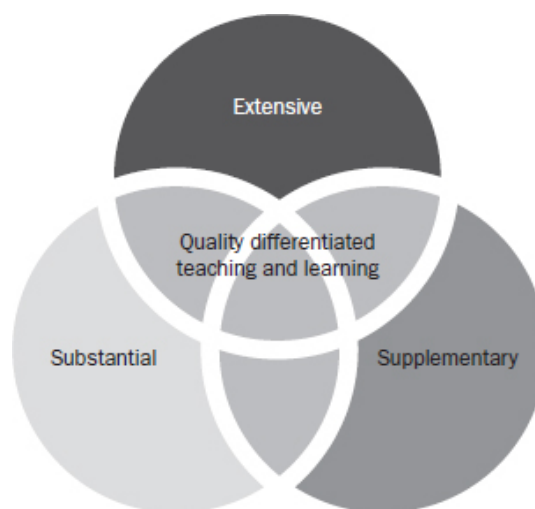


Figure 9.1. Visual conceptualisation of the NCCD framework (Swancutt 2018).

The differences between QDTP and higher levels of support (supplementary, substantial and extensive) are essentially in the frequency and intensity of the

support provided (see [Chapter 6](#)). Supplementary adjustments are defined as being required at certain times only, reflecting an occasional need in certain areas. Substantial adjustments are defined as being required more consistently, and extensive adjustments reflect a highly individualised program and ongoing need for possible curricular modification or alteration, in addition to adjustments. Since these levels of adjustments are extensions of QDTP, teachers can proactively plan adjustments as part of everyday teaching and learning. This planning allows students to tap into and out of support responsively as needed and removes the delay associated with retrospectively adjusting teaching and learning for students with disability. Students are now able to access support at a different level, but at the same time, as their peers. Examples of *how* teachers can use the Australian Curriculum to design and implement supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments as conceptualised in the NCCD model are the focus of the second part of this chapter.

Making Supplementary, Substantial and Extensive Adjustments

This section provides three examples of practice in the form of case studies to demonstrate how teachers can design supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments to support students with disability in inclusive classrooms. In each example, teachers employ ‘backward mapping’ (Wiggins & McTighe 2005), which involves the identification of desired results, or achievement standards, and use these to determine what acceptable evidence of success looks like contextually. Teachers then use this information to map out learning experiences and instruction that support and scaffold students towards successful achievement. In addition, each example demonstrates the use of two tools to plan teaching and learning for students who require supplementary, substantial or extensive adjustments, using Australian Curriculum content relevant to the student and their same-age peers. The first tool is a ‘know, do, think’ process, which informs the second tool, a lesson-design template. The tools are first explained conceptually, and then their application is demonstrated throughout the three case studies.

Tool 1: ‘Know, do, think’ process

In an inclusive classroom, it is important that teachers have a strong understanding of the intent and demands of the age/grade-equivalent curriculum. Although they need to know which Australian Curriculum content descriptor(s) and achievement standard(s) will be the focus of their pedagogy and assessment, teachers must also be able to articulate what students need to know and do to be successful in a unit of study. Furthermore, teachers need to be aware of the kinds of questions that students are required to respond to (or the ‘thinking’ in which they need to engage), to ensure that they are not asking students to engage in conceptual understanding

that is beyond what is expected for the student’s year level. By articulating these three aspects of ‘know’, ‘do’ and ‘think’, teachers engage in a curriculum-alignment process, as modelled in [Table 9.1](#). This ‘know, do, think’ process helps teachers make explicit the exact set of knowledge and skills—as well as the indicators for demonstration of knowledge and skills—that they need to embed in their chosen unit of study. The prompts provided in [Table 9.1](#) support teachers to then identify barriers for students and consider ways in which the identified set of knowledge and skills can be made universally accessible through QDTP (see [Chapter 8](#)). This proactive approach focuses on eliminating foreseeable barriers through flexible, universal planning and proactive design in anticipation of student diversity from the outset.

Teachers can use the completed ‘know, do, think’ process to design their lessons, including setting learning intentions and success criteria, and planning teaching and learning activities that scaffold students to successfully achieve the learning intentions. They can also determine where barriers to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment may exist and implement adjustments accordingly. This is made easier when teachers adopt high-quality accessible inclusive practice—as conceptualised through the NCCD’s baseline QDTP level—as this makes some retrospective adjustments redundant and leaves teachers with greater capacity to make higher-level adjustments for fewer students, if and when required. The lesson design and adjustments can be captured in the second tool: the lesson-design template.

Table 9.1: ‘Know, do, think’ process and teacher prompts

Know	Do	Think	Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice
What are the key concepts that students need to know?	What tasks/activities do students need to do to demonstrate that they know these concepts?	What questions do students have to ask themselves while engaging in the tasks/activities?	What differentiation can occur to support universal access?

Tool 2: Lesson-design template

The lesson-design template (Swancutt 2019) can be used to indicate the learning intentions and success criteria applicable to the lesson, and to subsequently map out a lesson structure including the progression of instruction, differentiation strategies and adjustments (see [Table 9.2](#)).

There are five steps to the lesson-design process. First, teachers record the relevant learning intention that is the focus of the teaching and learning process. The learning intention frames the purpose of the lesson and is used to guide the instructional decisions throughout the lesson. Teachers then record the success

criteria to capture what success in the lesson looks like, or what students need to do in order to demonstrate the knowledge and skills expected from the learning intention. Next, teachers consider the ways in which the learning intention and success criteria can be communicated (e.g. in writing, verbally, through exemplars), so that all students can develop a common understanding. Teachers complete the lesson-structure component of the template after they have determined the key strategies and adjustments needed. The lesson structure is informed by the teachers' preferred pedagogical framework. In this template, we use the Gradual Release of Responsibility (Fisher & Frey 2008) model, which prompts the development of the lesson flow or 'stage' (e.g. I do, we do, you do; see [Table 9.2](#)). This model focuses on shifting the thinking and doing from the teacher to the students. To support this, the template uses an explicit instruction approach (Archer & Hughes 2010) to scaffold and guide students through the learning process.

As part of completing the lesson-structure component, teachers record what the teacher and students will do throughout each stage. They further consider how students will be actively engaged and participating, and how the teacher will facilitate the achievement of learning intentions. Finally, teachers capture the key strategies/adjustments that need to be implemented to respond to student diversity. These involve QDTP-level strategies and, if necessary, supplementary, substantial or extensive adjustments.

In the final section of this chapter, we demonstrate the use of the 'know, do, think' process and the lesson-design template through three case studies. The first case study focuses on supplementary adjustments, the second focuses on substantial adjustments, and the third focuses on extensive adjustments. While we have broken the NCCD levels of adjustment into three case studies for ease of demonstration, it is important to note that such clear boundaries do not always exist in reality and that some students will receive a variety of adjustment levels.

Table 9.2: Lesson-design exemplar

Date:	Class:	Subject:	
Learning intention:		Success criteria: Students will:	
Lesson structure			
Stage	Teacher	Students	Key strategies/ adjustments
Opening			
I do <i>(Modelled)</i>			
We do <i>(Guided/shared)</i>			
You do <i>(Independent)</i>			
Closing			
Wrap-up			

Case study 1: Supplementary adjustments

Jack is in Year 4 at Durungul State School. A talented soccer player, Jack loves coming to school to see his friends and to play inter-school sport. Since Prep, Jack's teachers have had concerns about his attention and language skills. Jack uses simple vocabulary and sentences in his talking and writing. He finds it very difficult to comprehend a text and continues to have difficulty with reading fluency and decoding skills.

In a Year 4 English unit of study, students are required to read and analyse a quest novel, and then write a short response explaining how the author represents the main character in an important event. They must create a structured text to explain their ideas and use language features to demonstrate coherence and add detail. Their text needs to demonstrate understanding of grammar and a range of vocabulary selections, and their spelling and punctuation must be accurate. The Year 4 English achievement standards that are covered include:

- explaining how language features, images and vocabulary are used to engage the interests of audiences;

- describing literal and implied meaning connecting ideas in different texts;
- using language features to create coherence and add detail to texts;
- creating structured texts to explain ideas for different audiences; and
- demonstrating understanding of grammar, use accurate spelling and punctuation, and re-read and edit their work to improve meaning.

(ACARA n.d.-a)

To ensure that this assessment task is accessible to Jack, his teacher uses the ‘know, do, think’ process with Year 4 achievement standards as the starting point (see [Table 9.3](#) for an impression). First, Jack’s teacher matches the achievement standards to the relevant content descriptors. For instance, the first achievement standard above relates to the content descriptor ‘Identify characteristic features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text’ (ACARA n.d.-a). Jack’s teacher ensures that the assessment task sheet and marking guide do not cover any content descriptors or achievement standards other than those being assessed. For example, the Year 4 English achievement standard also requires students to ‘select vocabulary from a range of resources’, but this was not the focus of this unit of work. Therefore, the assessment task and marking guide should not embed or assess students on items relating to this part of the achievement standard. Jack’s teacher then analyses the achievement standards, content descriptors, assessment task and marking guide to identify the underlying literacy demands. This helps the teacher to populate the ‘know, do, think’ columns of this tool. Next, Jack’s teacher identifies accessibility barriers that may affect Jack in the assessment task, which informs practice at the QDTP level and the supplementary-level adjustments. The teacher, reflecting on adjustments requested by Jack, anticipates that he may have difficulty maintaining attention if explanations are long and if they are only provided verbally. This can be addressed using accessible, inclusive language, which is a core component of QDTP. The teacher also recognises barriers to Jack accessing the content of the novel, if adjustments are not made to the mode of text access. This knowledge enables Jack’s teacher to record universal design considerations at the QDTP level and supplementary-level adjustments. An illustrative example focusing on a small excerpt of Jack’s assessment task is shown in [Table 9.3](#).

Table 9.3: Excerpt of ‘know, do, think’ process with supplementary adjustments

Know	Do	Think	Selected examples from QDTP	Supplementary adjustments
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Know	Do	Think	Selected examples from QDTP	Supplementary adjustments
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and select an important event in the novel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What event(s) are important and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide audiobook version of text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlarge the print • Read smaller section of text • Reduce language complexity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of language features, vocabulary and how they are used to engage audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how author uses language features and vocabulary to represent the main character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the language features and vocabulary make me feel? • How is the character represented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Display samples of text with identified language features and vocabulary on wall • Graphic organisers • Sentence starters • Option to respond verbally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify language features from a key list • Option to respond through multimodal representations • Intermittent targeted support from speech pathologist
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure and features of an explanatory text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a structured text using evidence from the novel to explain how the author represents the character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I creating a structured text? • How do I know? • What evidence will I use and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning scaffolds • Sentence starters • Use of speech to text supports • Differing word-limit expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete a modelled response using vocabulary lists with visual prompts, word webs and a cloze task

Jack's teacher now has a clear picture of what students need to know, do and think as part of this unit of work. The teacher can now use the lesson-design template to plan their lessons as part of this unit. An example of one such lesson is provided in [Table 9.4](#).

As we stated earlier, there are five steps to the lesson-planning process. First, Jack's teacher identifies one learning intention for this lesson. In this case, they

source this from the second row of the ‘know’ column, as previously described in [Table 9.3](#). The teacher then formulates success criteria based on the ‘do’ and ‘think’ columns, aligning with their chosen learning intention. The communication of learning intentions and success criteria is supported by explicit teaching of cognitive verbs, pairing them with visual supports, and displaying student-friendly definitions on the learning wall. An example of successfully completed work for that lesson is also displayed. Next, Jack’s teacher identifies strategies to communicate these intentions and criteria to all students, taking account of Jack’s use of simple vocabulary (e.g. by offering a glossary of cognitive verbs). Jack’s teacher then completes the lesson-structure component by gradually releasing responsibility to the student. Finally, Jack’s teacher identifies strategies and adjustments, based on advice previously given by Jack and his family, so that Jack can participate in the lesson components on the same basis as his peers.

[Table 9.4](#) shows that strategies used during the ‘Opening’ and ‘I do’ sections of the lesson can be implemented for all students (QDTP), through the provision of True/False questions and whole-class graphic organisers. In the later stages (You do, Closing, Wrap-up), supplementary adjustments such as guidance and scribing are provided. These are italicised in the Key strategies/adjustments column.

Jack’s teacher regularly monitors Jack’s progress throughout the unit of study through a variety of formative assessment tasks, as described in [Table 9.4](#). The teacher analyses the formative assessment data against the success criteria to determine whether additional adjustments or intervention are required to ensure Jack’s participation in lessons or to provide additional challenge in future lessons. This contextual and evolving differentiation is enacted throughout the delivery of the unit, with data continuing to inform the need for additional or different adjustments. Jack’s teacher further provides feedback to Jack about his performance, as well as steps for improvement.

The summative assessment task requires students to ‘create a structured text to explain their ideas and use language features to demonstrate coherence and add detail’. Their text needs to demonstrate ‘understanding of grammar and a range of vocabulary selections, and their spelling and punctuation must be accurate’. The ‘know, do, think’ process allows Jack’s teacher to identify supplementary adjustments to enable Jack to demonstrate his knowledge and skills on the same basis as his peers. Jack’s teacher separates the assessable components, so Jack can have his grammar, spelling and punctuation reviewed separately. This reduces the barrier to Jack’s creation of text that has been imposed by reliance on these skills. Jack can also access:

- a speech-to-text application to verbally dictate his explanatory text, as Jack’s verbal answers indicate a higher level of thinking than his written production;
- sentence starters to prompt and guide the structure of his text; and
- editing processes via a word-processing program that allow him to rearrange and manipulate text clearly and efficiently.

Table 9.4: Year 4 English lesson-design exemplar

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Date:	Class: Year 4	Subject: English	
Learning intention: Students will understand how the author uses language to represent the main character		Success criteria: Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify text structures • identify language features • identify literal and inferred meaning; and • describe the effects of language features 	
Lesson structure			
Stage	Teacher	Students	Key strategies/adjustments
Opening	Ask questions about the plot and character development in previous chapter	Work in pairs to answer questions	<i>True/False</i> and <i>Yes/No</i> questions included Using mini-whiteboards to indicate responses
I do <i>(Modelled)</i>	Read aloud a small section of the next chapter Think aloud to identify text structure, language features and vocabulary Use metalanguage to describe the effects Model recording on graphic organiser	Listening and viewing	Piece of text projected on the board and highlighted to link to graphic organiser Record structure, language features, vocabulary and effects on a graphic organiser
We do <i>(Guided/shared)</i>	Read aloud the next small section Provide prompts and scaffolds	Cooperatively identifying the text structure, language features, vocabulary and effects	Piece of text projected on the board and highlighted to link to graphic organiser Cooperatively recording structure, language features, vocabulary and effects on a graphic organiser

You do <i>(Independent)</i>	Present the next small section of text Instruct students to engage with the text and record features and their effects on a graphic organiser	Engaging in a chosen workstation to complete the task 1. Audio text group 2. Guided reading group 3. Independent reading from novel group	<i>Multimodal text provided Scaffold and prompt sheets Graphic organiser Modelling/guidance Smaller section of the text First/then visual instructions Support from speech pathologist</i>
Closing	Independent section of the text presented on the board Add to co-constructed graphic organiser	Some students to identify a feature and describe an effect	Scaffolded questioning
Wrap-up		Selecting one feature identified in the lesson and drawing or writing it on the 'graffiti wall'	Scribing <i>Speech to text</i>

These supplementary adjustments do not affect the rigour or the intent of the curriculum. They also do not alter the complexity or criteria of the satisfactory standard as dictated by the achievement standard. The adjustments in this example are supplementary (see [Chapter 6](#)), as they are neither highly individualised nor occurring frequently across Jack's programs. If the adjustments were significantly altering the complexity or method of assessment, then they would be more indicative of 'substantial' adjustments, which is the focus of the next case study.

Case study 2: Substantial adjustments

Ruby is in Year 7 at Yalburu High School and loves animals and her friends. Most lunchtimes, Ruby and her friends talk about how they could set up a dog-walking business to earn extra money. Ruby has learning difficulties and a complex learning profile involving moderate intellectual disability. She finds it difficult to understand new concepts in class, particularly when the content is something that is unfamiliar to her, and she requires more repetition and feedback to consolidate learning. In Year 7 mathematics, Ruby's class engages in a unit of study where the achievement standards that are covered include:

- comparing, adding and subtracting integers;

- making connections between whole numbers and index notation;
- solving problems involving percentages and all four operations with fractions and decimals;
- using fractions, decimals and percentages, and their equivalences, and express one quantity as a fraction or percentage of another; and
- describing mathematical thinking and reasoning, including discussion of choices made, strategies used, and conclusions reached.

(ACARA n.d.-b)

Ruby's teacher uses the 'know, do, think' process to determine what Year 7 content descriptors match these success criteria, and to ensure that the assessment task and marking guide do not cover any other criteria than intended. At this point, Ruby's teacher considers the barriers that she anticipates Ruby will experience in accessing the curriculum and in demonstrating her knowledge to the satisfactory standard. These considerations are evidence-informed, as Ruby's teacher has analysed Ruby's past academic performance, work samples and response to differentiated teaching over time. She has also consulted with Ruby and her parents regarding her strengths and interests, and the types of adjustments that support her to access and participate in the curriculum. In addition, Ruby's teacher has collaborated with colleagues to build her capability to enact pedagogy and assessment that is responsive to Ruby's learning profile. Through this rigorous process, Ruby's teacher determined that Ruby would benefit from content being taught and assessed using achievement standards from a different year level. This decision has been endorsed by Ruby's parents. Together, Ruby's teacher and parents have determined that a Year 1 access point is reflective of Ruby's next steps in learning progression for mathematics.

Therefore, Ruby's teacher consults the Australian Curriculum to first compare the achievement standards of Year 7 and Year 1. Second, she identifies the assessable achievement standards of the unit of study for Year 7 (as listed above) and identifies similar topics in the Year 1 achievement standard. [Table 9.5](#) shows two examples of how the Year 7 and Year 1 achievement standards align.

Third, Ruby's teacher edits the complexity of the 'know, do, think' table. She notes those components of the 'know, do, think' table that do not align to the curriculum intent of the Year 1 standard, acknowledging that Ruby will equitably participate in the teaching and learning of these components but will not be assessed on them. Using a different achievement standard means that Ruby's teacher must also modify the summative assessment task, to ensure that she is not assessing Ruby at a Year 7 level. Ruby's teacher works through each assessment task/question and makes the necessary changes, omissions and additions. This same process is reflected in the modification of the marking guide; Ruby's teacher alters the five-point scale descriptions to reflect the variance in task/question requirements, and the differences in cognitive verbs and overall complexity.

An example of the backward mapping of the 'know, do, think' process is provided in [Table 9.6](#), with the last column highlighting the substantial adjustments

that Ruby’s teacher has identified after analysing the difference in complexity between Year 7 and Year 1. These adjustments are substantial, because the achievement standards for Ruby have been significantly changed, and this level of modification is often provided.

Table 9.5: Alignment of Year 7 and Year 1 achievement standards

Year 7	Year 1
Students solve problems involving the comparison, addition and subtraction of integers	Students carry out simple additions and subtractions using counting strategies
Students make connections between whole numbers and index notation	Students count to and from 100

Table 9.6: Excerpt of ‘know, do, think’ process with substantial adjustments

Know	Do	Think	QDTP	Substantial adjustments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules for adding and subtracting integers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add and subtract integers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the rules? • What are the sequential steps? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of a written number line • Use of a concrete/physical number line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adding and subtracting positive integers • Counting on • Partitioning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to solve problems involving percentages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert fractions to decimals to determine which quantity is the most 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the formula for converting between fractions and percentages? • Have I applied the formula correctly? • Which percentage is smaller/larger? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option of using a calculator • Tiered complexity of fractions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify one-half out of a whole and representing it using pictures and concrete materials

Know	Do	Think	QDTP	Substantial adjustments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process of converting between index notation and whole numbers (expanded notation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write numbers in expanded notation using powers of ten 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which number is the base and which is the index; what do they represent? • What operation is required to expand? • How is the index notation represented as a whole number? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option of using a calculator • Number expanders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read and record numbers to 100

Although the complexity of the taught content has changed for Ruby, it is important to prioritise age/grade-appropriate and equitable participation across all learning activities when including students with complex learning profiles such as Ruby. A focus on shared learning opportunities and commonalities in what students are learning, rather than on differences, helps to ensure that students do not become stigmatised or otherwise marginalised within the classroom. Therefore, when Ruby's teacher uses the lesson-design template, she reviews components of the lesson to ensure that there is opportunity for Ruby to engage in rigorous and relevant learning that incorporates explicit instruction appropriate to her individualised curriculum. She also still incorporates QDTP to support Ruby accessing the curriculum at the Year 1 access point. In order for varying levels of curriculum to be taught within the one core lesson, Ruby's teacher needs to purposefully select a pedagogical framework that will provide the necessary flexibility and responsiveness. To assist in this process, she co-plans with the support of specialist staff. [Table 9.7](#) illustrates the lesson design for Ruby's class, with key strategies/adjustments provided to inform the teacher of Ruby's substantial adjustments. These are italicised in the Key strategies/adjustments column of the table. It shows that, although Ruby's learning intentions and success criteria are modified (also italicised), she still works on similar content to her peers within the mathematics learning area. The activities as outlined throughout the gradual release of responsibility are also similar for Ruby and her peers, with supports in place to help Ruby succeed, such as modified questions.

Like the first case study, Ruby's teacher continuously monitors Ruby's progress through formative assessment to inform the alteration and addition of teaching adjustments. When providing substantial adjustments, formative assessment tools are also modified to reflect the variances in complexity at the Year 1 access point. For example, in the lesson plan from [Table 9.7](#), Ruby engages with modified

questions during class. Ruby’s formative data is still analysed to determine the need for more support, intervention or challenge, and this informs the design of future lessons. This indicates that instructional adjustments and differentiation are still provided for students who are accessing alternative points on the F–10 Australian Curriculum. At the point of summative assessment, the modified assessment item is administered with determined adjustments. Ruby’s performance on the assessment is judged in relation to the full breadth of the modified marking guide. Ruby’s teacher uses work-sample portfolios from the Australian Curriculum website to support this decision-making process.

Table 9.7: Year 7 mathematics lesson-design exemplar

Date:	Class: Year 7	Subject: Mathematics	
Learning intention: Students will add and subtract integers <i>Replace ‘integers’ with ‘positive numbers to 10’</i>		Success criteria: Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locate an integer on a number line; • move in the correct direction to add and subtract; and • accurately add and subtract integers <i>Replace ‘integers’ with ‘positive numbers to 10’</i>	
Lesson structure			
Stage	Teacher	Students	Key strategies/adjustments
Opening	Review reading of +/- integers Call out numbers Ask questions about number properties	Record answers on mini-whiteboards Represent integers on a number line—identifying biggest/smallest	Number line <i>Include positive numbers less than 20</i>
I do (Modelled)	Use number line and thinking aloud to add and subtract—physical turn and move body in combination	Watching and following	Number line <i>Include problems involving only positive numbers</i>
		Identifying the 3 thought prompts spoken aloud to	Record the thought prompts on the board with visual supports included

	with 'jumps' on the number line	solve modelled problems	
We do <i>(Guided/shared)</i>	Writing problems on the board	Solving the problem on the board using the number line, utilising prompts and peer support	Number line Prompts with visuals Peer support <i>Targeted problems involving positive numbers to 10</i>
	Setting up a human number line	Physically turning and moving on a human number line to solve problems	Human number line/physical movement Explicit instruction to communicate steps and actions <i>Targeted problems involving positive numbers to 10</i>
You do <i>(Independent)</i>	Extended guided practice	Selecting independent practice from choice of tasks Accessing guided practice as required	<i>Modified questions</i> Number lines <i>Concrete materials</i> <i>Individualised instruction</i> Task analysis
	Checking for understanding	Using prompts and peer tutoring to solve problems	Checking answers on calculator Immediate, corrective feedback
Closing	Checking for understanding	Demonstrate problem-solving of chosen task	<i>Targeted questioning by teacher or aide</i>
	Providing a strong and weak example: one equation that has been solved correctly and	Identifying which equation has been solved correctly and which one has mistakes;	Checking answers on calculator

	another that has some mistakes	providing corrections	
Wrap-up		Self-assess against the success criteria	<i>Modified success criteria—positive numbers to 10</i>

This scenario is considered to reflect substantial adjustments because the adjustments and modifications to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were significant and frequently applied to most lessons throughout the unit of study. Highly structured supports were enacted at key times throughout, and specific planning occurred to ensure access to all instructional activities. If these supports were more extensive, sustained and ongoing, then they would likely fall under the category of an ‘extensive’ adjustment, which is the focus of the third case study.

Case study 3: Extensive adjustments

Blake also attends Yalburu High School and is in Year 10. Blake loves Pokémon and carries his Pokémon folder with him everywhere. He loves looking at his cards, especially the ones with shiny graphics. Blake is on the autism spectrum, with severe intellectual disability. Blake is also non-verbal. He communicates his needs through his behaviour and through vocalisations that indicate whether he is calm and happy or overwhelmed and stressed. Blake has been working intensively with his NDIS-funded private speech pathologist (see [Chapter 15](#)) to develop his expressive communication skills using a Pragmatic Organisation Dynamic Display (PODD) and some key word signs. Blake can understand simple directions that are supported by visual cues. In his current science unit of study, students are required to:

- analyse how the periodic table organises elements, and use it to make predictions about the properties of elements;
- use scientific knowledge of an atom’s electron arrangement to predict the formation of ions;
- develop questions and hypotheses, and independently design and improve appropriate methods of investigation;
- [engage in] analysing data, selecting evidence and developing and justifying conclusions;
- explain the concept of energy conservation and represent energy transfer and transformation within systems; and
- analyse how the models and theories they use have developed over time, and discuss the factors that prompted their review.

(ACARA n.d.-c)

The communication and cognitive demands of Year 10 science mean that Blake experiences significant barriers in accessing the curriculum, engaging with his teacher’s pedagogical processes and demonstrating his learning. As a result, Blake’s teacher regularly collaborates with both a multidisciplinary team and Blake’s parents to monitor access, participation and outcomes (see [Chapters 14 and 15](#)), and to determine the suitability and effectiveness of the range of intensive supports utilised to facilitate learning. Through this approach to evidence-informed decision-making, the team has reached consensus, agreeing that a highly individualised curriculum is the most appropriate access point for Blake. This means that Blake’s teacher embarks on the following five-step process.

First, Blake’s teacher does not use learning descriptors and achievement standards from the F–10 Australian Curriculum, but some of the extended general-capabilities sequences instead. These sequences concern the areas of Literacy, Numeracy, and Personal and Social Capability, and they provide a continuum of learning goals that commence prior to Foundation level. The goals range in complexity and demand from Level 1a to Level 1d. Although the extended general capabilities exist to better respond to individual students’ intellectual and communication profiles, it is important that the learning still takes place through the Year 10 science context. Therefore, Blake’s teacher still analyses the Year 10 science curriculum as part of her ‘know, do, think’ process. With clear knowledge of the age/grade-equivalent learning area, Blake’s teacher is then able to consider the extensive adjustments required to support Blake. This is achieved by accessing the relevant extended general-capability sequences and highlighting the levels at which the student is currently working. In this instance, Blake is accessing Literacy at Level 1c, Numeracy at Level 1a, and Personal and Social Capability at Level 1a (see [Table 9.8](#)). Next, Blake’s teacher selects sub-elements of each sequence that align with the Year 10 science unit of work. An example of alignment between the Year 10 science curriculum and Literacy Continuum Level 1c is shown in [Table 9.9](#).

Then, with Blake’s individual goals in mind, and using the accessibility expertise provided by a speech pathologist, occupational therapist and other school-based support staff, Blake’s teacher is able to modify the age/grade-equivalent ‘know, do, think’ table (based on the Year 10 achievement standards) to reflect the variance in learning expectations and highly individualised adjustments. [Table 9.10](#) shows some examples of the extensive adjustments—in the form of goals related to the general capabilities—that are provided for Blake, alongside the ‘know, do, think’ aspects relevant to Blake’s peers.

Table 9.8: Relevant extended general capability sequences

Literacy	Numeracy	Personal and Social Capability
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Literacy	Numeracy	Personal and Social Capability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to a sequence of gestures, objects, photographs and/or pictographs, for example follow a visual schedule to complete a task • Respond to texts with familiar structures, for example by responding to a question • Respond to requests • Request items, people or events present at the time • Create texts, for example to comment on a recent event, story or shared experience (ACARA n.d.-e) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort or match objects according to their features • Display information using real objects or photographs and respond to questions about the information displayed • Sequence familiar actions and events in a variety of ways (ACARA n.d.-f) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a choice to participate in a class activity • Attempt tasks with support or prompting (ACARA n.d.-g)

Table 9.9: Alignment between Year 10 science achievement standard and Literacy Continuum

Year 10	Literacy Continuum Level 1c
Develop questions and hypotheses, and independently design and improve appropriate methods of investigation	Respond to texts with familiar structures, for example by responding to a question Respond to a sequence of gestures, objects, photographs and/or pictographs, for example follow a visual schedule to complete a task

For summative assessment purposes, the performance of students with complex learning profiles, such as Blake who is receiving extensive adjustments, is not judged against a set achievement standard or five-point scale in a marking guide. Instead, Blake’s teacher collects a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate Blake’s competencies across his individual goals. The evidence collected can be multimodal, and Blake should be provided with multiple opportunities to demonstrate his learning across the unit of study, as per the Universal Design for Learning’s principle of multiple means of action and expression (CAST 2019; see also [Chapter 8](#)). Such evidence can be collected throughout the teaching and learning process; it is not necessary for the teacher to wait until the end of the unit. Blake’s teacher develops a checklist to indicate opportunities to collect evidence

against each of the identified goals from [Table 9.10](#), ensuring that presented opportunities are being utilised and monitored.

Table 9.10: Excerpt of ‘know, do, think’ process with extensive adjustments

Know	Do	Think	QDTP	Extensive adjustments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different chemical reactions and factors that affect their reaction rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain how different factors influence the rate of reaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the chemistry of the chemical process? • What are the factors that influence the reaction rate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual supports • Frayer model • Descriptive analysis • Visual periodic table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sort or match pictures of reactions according to their features
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of a hypothesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a question and hypothesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which factors can be manipulated and tested? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brainstorming • Use of a cloze structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to simple questions about an experiment using a customised PODD grid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The components of a method and their purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and improve a method—explain how reliability, safety and fairness have been considered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will an experiment test my hypothesis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelled method • Group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use pictures to sort or match scenarios that are safe/not safe

Know	Do	Think	QDTP	Extensive adjustments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to safely conduct an experiment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an experiment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I following my method? • Am I being safe? How do I know? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples and non-examples • Modelled experiment • Group work • Visual prompts • Guided group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a choice to participate in the experiment • Follow visual schedule to collect equipment • Attempt tasks with support or prompting with vigilant supervision

When using the lesson-design template, Blake’s teacher needs to be aware of the intensive supports and adjustments that Blake will require in order to equitably participate and engage in learning. She may need to develop alternative materials, especially in relation to supporting Blake’s communication. As Blake has limited verbal communication and experiences receptive language difficulties, his teacher can support the use of vocalisations, gestures and pointing to gain attention, and demonstrate intentional communication using a range of visual supports. An example of a lesson design encompassing an inquiry-based pedagogical framework in combination with the identified extensive adjustments (recorded in italics) is provided in [Table 9.11](#).

As with the previous case study, the teacher uses intensive supports, a range of physical and verbal prompts, and feedback and correction throughout every lesson. Blake’s teacher monitors Blake’s formative performance to inform changes to the type and number of adjustments, modifications and alterations, and to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching. This process often involves regular consultation with the multidisciplinary team to ensure that the educational experiences remain responsive and rigorous. Peer supports are authentically engaged where appropriate, and a teaching assistant is present in every lesson to assist Blake’s teacher in facilitating the extensive adjustments that Blake requires. Alternative modes of communication are taught and used, and constant and vigilant supervision is provided.

Table 9.11: Year 10 science unit of study lesson-design exemplar

Date:	Class: Year 10	Subject: Science
Learning intention:		Success criteria:

<p>Students will distinguish between the physical properties of metals, non-metals and metalloids</p> <p><i>Distinguish pictures of objects according to their features</i></p>	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define the terms: metal, non-metal, metalloid; • conduct an investigation to identify physical proper ties; and • classify elements <p><i>Sort or match pictures of objects according to their features</i></p>
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Lesson structure

Stage	Teacher	Students	Key strategies/adjustments
Engage	<p>Show pictures of metals, non-metals, metalloids</p> <p>Define the terms: metal, non-metal, metalloid</p> <p>Identify properties—explicit teaching, simplified language, visual supports</p>	<p>Identify uses</p> <p>Complete Frayer models</p>	<p>Visual supports</p> <p>Descriptive analysis</p> <p>Frayer model</p> <p>Explicit teaching</p> <p>Simplified language</p> <p>Visual supports</p> <p><i>Sort and match pictures of common objects (hard/soft, solid/fluid)</i></p>
Explore	<p>Review laboratory safety and equipment</p> <p>Model the experiment—thinking aloud while working through the steps</p>	<p>Read the procedure for testing the metallic properties of elements</p> <p>Predict which elements will be metals</p> <p>Conduct the experiment</p>	<p>Procedure with visual supports</p> <p>Group work</p> <p>Visual supports</p> <p>Guided group support as required</p> <p><i>Identify safe/not safe by sorting pictures</i></p> <p><i>Visual equipment list</i></p> <p><i>Responding to yes/no questions about basic properties using key word sign or gesture</i></p> <p><i>Make a choice to participate using key word sign</i></p>

Explain	Collect and organise data and analyse patterns—thinking aloud and providing reasoning	Classify elements as metals, non-metals, metalloids based on data evidence	Graphic organisers <i>Photographs Sort photographs of experiment in the order they occurred Respond to questions about the experiment using PODD</i>
Extend	Describe a relationship between the physical properties and metallic nature of the elements	Draw conclusions about the physical properties of metals, non-metals and metalloids consistent with evidence from the investigation	Concept map Cloze Sentence starters Co-construction Verbal responses <i>Respond to questions about different objects (hard/soft, solid/fluid) and their use using PODD</i>
Evaluate	Review the positions of metals, metalloids and non-metals in the periodic table	Review predictions and locate the metals, metalloids and non-metals on the periodic table	<i>Review sorting activity</i>
Wrap-up		Review performance against success criteria	Review performance against modified success criteria

This scenario has been considered to reflect extensive adjustments because the adjustments are highly individualised, comprehensive and ongoing. The adjustments occur across all of the student's educational experiences at all times and are delivered in an intensive and highly structured manner. Extensive support from specialist staff is ongoing, and specialised communication strategies and adult supervision are utilised for all lessons and activities.

Conclusion

Australian teachers are mandated by law to identify and use strategies to enable the access and participation of students with disability in their classes. While access barriers facing many students with disability can be proactively addressed through the provision of Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP), some students will require supplementary, substantial or extensive adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. This chapter has shown how, through the provision of such adjustments, modifications and alterations, all students can benefit from learning together. This includes those with complex learning profiles. This chapter has provided practical advice on how to make supplementary, substantial and extensive adjustments to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, so that educators can include *all* their students and, importantly, prepare classroom environments in which successful learning can occur.

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PART IV

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE SCHOOL CULTURES THROUGH INCLUSIVE AND ETHICAL PRACTICES

CHAPTER 10

Developing inclusive school cultures through ethical practices

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This chapter draws lessons from research carried out within school networks in England and Australia to examine the effects of ethical school leadership on improving equity and inclusion. The chapter begins by examining some of the unintended and perverse effects (O'Neill 2013) of standardised assessment and competition as measures for accountability, with a particular focus on the effects on students—such as those with disability—who have been traditionally marginalised by mainstream schooling. Drawing on our research in the United Kingdom and Australia, the chapter focuses on the relationship between in/exclusion and school culture, and how ethical leadership practices (Starratt 2012, 2014), as illustrated through the use of collaborative inquiry processes, contribute to the development of inclusive practices and cultures. Two case studies are presented to illustrate the ways that school leaders have used ethical leadership approaches to promote

inclusion through collaborative inquiry and critical reflection. These processes represent ways in which educators apply an *ethic of critique* (Starratt 2012) by challenging expectations of what is possible and drawing attention to new ways of thinking and new practices. Finally, this chapter explores some of the challenges for educators, particularly those in leadership roles, in establishing ethical and inclusive school cultures within current contexts of accountability.

Effects of Standardised Assessment and School Competition

Education systems around the world are facing increasing pressure to improve their rankings on global league tables derived from standardised testing regimes. Many approaches to standardised student testing, such as NAPLAN in Australia, were initiated with the intention of measuring student outcomes across schools. The 2008 introduction of NAPLAN was followed in 2010 by the development of a national website. The My School website reports student performance in NAPLAN by individual school and provides school demographic information, allowing for the comparison of individual schools. The My School website was developed to inject new energy into education systems and benefit those with the privilege of choice. However, growing evidence suggests that the narrowly defined student outcomes measured by standardised assessment can result in a range of perverse effects (O'Neill 2013) for students and schools, including driving competition between schools.

Over the past three decades, debates have raged internationally around the increasing competition and market-driven logic of schooling (Salokangas & Ainscow 2017). While traditional notions of public schooling focus on societal benefits of education, this type of competition focuses specifically on the benefits for individuals. This emphasis on the private benefits of schooling has sparked increasing competition in many education systems, between schools and individuals who want access to schooling that will reap the greatest possible rewards. Parents are being encouraged to 'vote with their feet' by choosing high-performing schools for their children. In this context, a school marketplace has emerged with higher levels of competition, increased parent choice and the promise of greater diversity between schools (Whitty et al. 1998). Consideration of supporting an inclusive

approach for students with disability will often be pushed to the side when schools experience the pressures of competition and parent choice. School leaders need to consider how ethical decisions and practice can support good outcomes for all students.

Current research cautions that the market logic and emphasis on between-school competition in many industrialised Western nations have not resulted in improved learning outcomes for all students. School performance is generally compared on the basis of standardised assessments from which some groups of students, including those with disability and those with limited English-language skills, can be excluded. These measures of student performance focus on specific academic skills and do not provide a comprehensive view of the school or its ability to cater for individual student needs. While the public reporting of student outcomes is purported to support parents' choice of the best schools for their child(ren), there is growing concern from a range of countries—including Australia, England, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States—that this approach can increase fragmentation and inequality in education systems (Connell 2013). This fragmentation, in turn, is likely to produce an increase in students being placed in segregated provision of various forms, something that has been seen most strikingly in recent years in England. Competition between schools further disadvantages students who have traditionally not been served well by, or have been excluded from, mainstream schooling, such as those from the poorest households, ethnic and linguistic minorities, Indigenous people, and persons with disability.

Inclusion, Equity and Building Cultures of Ethical Leadership

This competitive school context presents a major challenge to the idea of inclusive education that supports the access, success and participation of *all* students, not least those with disability. The principle of inclusion in education is one that is endorsed by the widely ratified UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008) and also Sustainable Development Goal Four, which is to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (United Nations 2016a: n.p.). In Australia, there is a recognised obligation to ensure that schools are inclusive, because

Australia is a signatory to the CRPD (see [Chapter 4](#)). This commitment is further detailed in Article 24 and General Comment No. 4, which together provide definitions of inclusion and guidelines that support a human-rights perspective for education for all children (United Nations 2016b).

It is worth noting that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2012) indicates that certain education systems—including the one in Finland—can be viewed as successful, because they rank highly on measures of ‘quality’ and ‘equity’. Further encouragement for this view is provided by the recent ‘Report Card’ prepared for UNICEF by the Innocenti Centre. Focusing on high- and middle-income countries, it concludes:

Tackling educational inequality does not mean sacrificing high standards. Countries with higher average achievement tend to have lower levels of inequality . . . Bringing the worst performing students up does not mean pulling the best-performing students down. (UNICEF 2018: 3)

The implication is that it is possible for countries to develop education systems that are both excellent and equitable. Keeping this ambitious agenda in mind, the experiences we describe in this chapter are informed by the definitions provided in the 2017 UNESCO document entitled *A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. This leads us to view inclusion as a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners; equity is about ensuring fairness, where the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance (see [Chapter 2](#)). The central message is therefore simple: every learner matters and matters equally. The complexity arises, however, when we try to put this message into practice. Drawing on case studies from schools in England and Australia, we consider how ethical leadership approaches can support school leaders to develop an inclusive approach for all students.

Ethical Leadership

Starratt’s (2012, 2014) framework of ethical leadership describes three interrelated ethics: care, justice and critique. Starratt describes the ethic of care in the context of relationships that respect the rights and individuality of others. The ethic of care promotes the development of an

open, trusting relationship between educators and students that ‘honors the dignity and integrity of each person’ (Starratt 2014: 55). In simple terms, the ethic of justice relates to both the rights of individual staff and students and also the fair distribution of resources among members of the community. For educators, the ethic of justice can challenge them to act fairly and to ensure that they meet the long-term needs of all students. The ethic of critique asks educators to adopt a critical stance that questions which groups or individuals are privileged or disadvantaged by current systems. The ethic of critique can challenge current structures that create inequality and provide a catalyst for the development of more equitable, fair and inclusive school practices. Processes of inquiry, which set out to inform and improve school practices, are closely linked to this framework of ethical leadership.

In the following section, we use examples from England and Australia based on these ideas to illustrate how ethical leadership informs practices within the school, with a particular focus on inquiry-based practices. Our approach, described as collaborative inquiry, starts from the ethical leadership framework of care, justice and critique. We worked with educators from within networks of schools to collaboratively develop an ‘inquiry stance’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009) that encouraged them to critically examine current practices in their schools with a view to developing new ways to promote an inclusive culture. We also consider the implications for school leaders as they seek to promote improvements within their communities.

Ethical leadership practices across a network in England

Since the 1990s, a team from the University of Manchester has carried out research within networks of schools in relation to the use of collaborative inquiry as a strategy for promoting equitable school development (see summary in Ainscow et al. 2016). Seen as a process of knowledge generation that occurs when researchers and teachers bring together their understandings, the aim of this approach is to develop new knowledge about how broad values—such as promoting inclusion, equity and ethical leadership—might be better realised and enacted in the future (Ainscow et al. 2012).

Staff research teams. The approach involves the creation of teams of teachers who lead processes of collaborative inquiry within their school.

These collaborative inquiry processes are guided by the ethics of care, justice and critique through their particular focus on improving conditions for students who have been or are at risk of being marginalised in a variety of ways. Teachers began the process by taking the opportunity to share existing practices and collaboratively develop ways to critique and refine these practices, leading to experimentation with new ways of working that will fulfil the ethics of care and justice for all students. University researchers provided support for these teams to identify areas of their practice where inequities persist, and to collect and analyse evidence. University researchers further encouraged teachers to make use of recommendations from relevant research in order to draw on their own learning and the learning of others to develop, implement and evaluate improvement plans that addressed these inequities.

These experiences have shown how the use of evidence to support critique of teaching and other processes within a school can help to promote inclusive practices (Ainscow et al. 2012, 2016). Specifically, these processes of critique can create space for rethinking and experimentation, with a focus on improving equity and inclusion in schools. Particularly powerful techniques in this respect involve the use of mutual lesson observation, sometimes through video recordings, and evidence collected from students about teaching and learning arrangements within a school. Under certain conditions, approaches such as these provide ‘interruptions’ that help to make the familiar unfamiliar in ways that stimulate self-questioning, creativity and action. The critique of evidence from teaching practice, for example, can illuminate issues within the classroom or in school policies that had previously been overlooked. Once school leaders start exploring their practices, it raises the questions of ‘why are we engaging in these particular practices?’ and ‘are there any students whom these practices might not serve well?’ This form of questioning can sometimes lead to a reframing of perceived problems that, in turn, draws a teacher’s attention to new possibilities for addressing barriers to participation and learning. Within such contexts, teachers can reframe their perceptions of issues within the classroom as potential areas for creative thinking. Students whose progress is a matter of concern, for example, can start to be seen more positively as a stimulus for new ways of thinking about pedagogy and supporting achievement. The example below illustrates what this can involve.

Learning from differences. Three teachers in an inner-city secondary school identified students within each of their classes whom they saw as being particularly vulnerable. The teachers felt that by thinking about a

lesson with these individuals in mind, they might create new and different ways to support the participation and learning of all of their students. One teacher talked about a student who had an understanding of language but would not speak, even when invited. Another teacher focused on a student who had severe dyslexia. Their focus on students with specific needs led the teachers to critically consider their current practice and discuss how they might plan their lessons differently; for example, they talked about getting students to write on the whiteboard, or to rehearse verbally what they wanted to say rather than writing arguments down.

These three teachers decided that they needed to consult some of their students before teaching the lesson to get an idea of how they preferred to learn. They also wanted to consider how best to plan the lesson to support the many differences among the students and to build a culture of fairness and inclusion. They selected seven students, each from a different ethnic background, six of whom were born outside the country. The teachers got these students together at lunchtime and asked them to rank their preferences regarding different classroom activities that could be used when studying poetry.

The overall aim of the lesson they designed was to develop confidence in and awareness of a variety of dramatic techniques. Each teacher taught the lesson with their two colleagues watching, as a form of lesson study. The teachers made changes to the lesson plans in light of the regular discussions that took place after each had had the opportunity to teach the lesson. Their discussions became increasingly focused on matters of detail and, as a result, led to a greater emphasis on mutual challenge and personal reflection. At the end of the process, the three teachers all commented that they had been challenged to rethink their lesson planning and facilitation. Through this, they realised that new approaches gave members of the class the opportunity to learn outside their 'comfort zone' and required the teachers to move beyond their former expectations about the capabilities of their students.

Leadership practices. The team of researchers from the University of Manchester has found that such approaches are most effective in schools that have leadership practices that encourage confidence about how to achieve change. Even when features of ethical leadership are present, however, schools occasionally experience turbulence. In particular, teachers and leaders have described how their involvement in collaborative inquiry often led them to feel confused or uncertain as to how they should proceed. In some instances, this confusion led to

tensions within the staff research group, or resulted in doubts about the role of the university team, whom they had assumed were going to lead decision-making. Evocative images were used by various senior colleagues to explain what this felt like—for example, ‘wood for trees’, ‘lost in the fog’, ‘muddy waters’ and ‘herding sheep’.

Despite these difficulties, teachers’ approaches to critiquing and reviewing their own practice with a focus on equity and inclusion opened up potentially important spaces for new professional thinking, as colleagues discovered how to learn from one another and from their students in new ways. The processes, however, created challenges that have implications for the leadership of these initiatives. As one head teacher explained: ‘What we had to do was actually remind everybody that this was not going to be straightforward. It wasn’t following a formula, because you’ve got different personalities that like different things.’ The involvement of the university team provided different perspectives, supported critique and brought in new thinking, including ideas from formal research. This outside assistance was an important mechanism for supporting the new processes of critique and inquiry, and helped teachers move beyond their confusion to begin making changes to their practice.

Cultural change. Beyond developments in practice, the use of these approaches, over time, has the potential to have a deeper impact on schools, leading to cultural change. A review of international research literature that examines the effectiveness of school actions in promoting inclusion (Dyson et al. 2004) argues that some schools are characterised by an ‘inclusive culture’. Within these schools, there is a degree of consensus among educators around values of respect for difference and a commitment to offering all students access to learning opportunities. There may not be total consensus between staff members, and this process does not necessarily remove all tensions or contradictions in practice. It is likely, however, that these schools are characterised by higher levels of staff collaboration and joint problem-solving, and similar values and commitments may extend to the student body, to parents and to other members of the school community.

All of this means that attempts to develop inclusive schools should pay attention to the building of consensus around inclusive values within school communities. This implies that school leaders must have a commitment to the ethics of *care* and *justice* and a capacity to lead in a participatory manner, themes that we address later in this chapter. These experiences in England have thrown further light on some of the

challenges involved in promoting inclusion and equity within an education system where standardised testing has led to increased competition and marketisation of education. These challenges present dilemmas for school leaders as they attempt to maintain their own values in a policy context that pulls them in different directions. Drawing on experience in Australia, in the second example we explain how, within a network of schools, leaders supported one another in dealing with similar pressures.

Building a Culture of Ethical Leadership in Australia

Our research within an Australian context comes from a three-year study involving a network of six schools (five secondary schools and one primary school) and a university in Queensland (see Harris et al. 2018). Principals from the network schools worked with the university research team to focus on issues around ethical leadership. Each school was under intense pressure to demonstrate improvements in student outcomes from standardised testing in a relatively short period of time. The pressure for short-term improvement meant that educators tended to make important decisions quickly, which seemed to discourage deeper consideration of how these decisions could affect students in the long term. This was particularly relevant for students with disability or a learning difficulty. A number of the decisions examined by teams of teachers and school leaders in these schools could be described as responses to ethical dilemmas, such as grouping of students by ability, selection of student pathways, management of student behaviour, allocation of resources, and family support. School leaders described the need to find a balance in their decision-making to ensure that all students were treated fairly and the needs of every individual were addressed. Drawing on Starratt's framework, this meant balancing the ethic of care with the ethic of justice.

Teachers and school leaders from each of the participating schools in our research network engaged in collaborative inquiry projects related to these types of issues in their school, with a focus on improving equity and inclusion. We asked the questions: How ethical were the decisions that had been made? How inclusive were the resulting practices? Building on the experience of the Manchester research, network schools

were encouraged to strengthen their relationships with other local schools in order to engage in collaborative inquiry (Harris et al. 2018). University researchers supported each school to identify challenges, share progress, and learn from and support each other. In this section, we focus on the experiences of the leadership team from Arcadia Secondary School, which reflected many experiences of other leaders in the network. Principals within our network reported numerous barriers to the type of collaborative efforts that would encourage teachers to share knowledge and critique practices, in and with other schools. A key barrier was the competition for the enrolment of high-performing students, and how this competition between schools affected ethical decisions about students' study pathways and groupings. For example, some of our network schools had slipped into streaming classes by ability, with the assumed understanding that they were meeting students' learning needs and the short-term focus on improving student outcomes on standardised testing.

As discussed in [Chapter 7](#), the My School website provides school data, including average student achievement on NAPLAN, attendance, and demographic and financial information. It was designed to provide transparent information that could be used by parents to choose where to enrol their children (Munro 2017). One outcome of this approach was that schools with below-average levels of student performance on NAPLAN, such as Arcadia Secondary, stood to lose student enrolments regardless of the socio-demographic disadvantages that the school population faced. Some families, particularly those with the means to do so, could opt to move away from schools serving a student body that fell below the national average in educational advantage and enrol their children in another school that performed better on NAPLAN. School leaders, as a result, felt pressure to compete with other local schools to attract and retain high-performing students, alongside other efforts to improve test results. These expectations, system requirements and level of competition influenced schools to focus more on achieving short-term improvement in student results and implementing strategies that would attract students with previous high performance on standardised tests rather than on inclusive and equitable education that would promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations 2016a).

A key initiative of many of the network schools was to develop a 'point of difference' from other schools that would attract parents of high-achieving students. The strategy adopted at Arcadia Secondary, for example, was based on the premise that students learn best when their

teachers' pedagogical style is matched with their preferred learning style. While there is limited evidence to support this approach, the school promoted targeted classes to families of prospective students in lower secondary, providing the same teacher for core subject areas, and grouping students according to their preferred learning styles. Targeted classes were developed as a way of attracting and extending high-achieving, independent learners. Descriptions of these targeted classes suggested that they would support student learning overall and increase student equity by catering to individual student needs. This approach offered one class more opportunities for self-directed learning, whereas another class—recommended for students with gaps in their learning—was offered direct instruction with fewer students. The assumption on the part of school leaders was that this differentiated approach would better meet students' learning needs, where in reality the strategy was thought by teachers to be a way of streaming students that did not result in an inclusive structure. Students reported their belief that the targeted classes offered ability-based grouping. Despite rhetoric about students being able to select classes to suit their learning styles, students indicated that they believed that they were placed in 'lower' or 'higher' classes on the basis of their previous performance. In addition to their targeted classes, the school offered two classes for students with additional learning needs, which were situated away from the main school building.

Arcadia's involvement in collaborative inquiry drew on the ethic of critique to examine this practice. Supported by university researchers, initial inquiry in the school highlighted a widely held belief among staff that the targeted-classes initiative, in practice, was a form of ability grouping. Teachers in the school continued to use similar pedagogical strategies, regardless of the class groups they were teaching. Conversations between leaders of the five secondary schools involved in the network indicated that they were all using some form of ability grouping in an effort to improve average school performance on standardised tests. Leaders from each of our network schools reported that these groupings had been implemented to support students by ensuring that the teaching was targeted to the right level for them. Limiting the range of student ability within class groups was described by school leaders as a way to assist teachers in differentiating their lessons.

While this strategy can be effective in marketing the school to parents of high achievers, there is clear evidence that ability-based grouping or 'streaming' can inhibit a fair and equitable culture of learning. Streaming

can increase inequity and have negative impacts on students' performance and self-esteem, particularly those in the so-called 'lower-ability' groups (Francis et al. 2017). The increasing pressure of the school market, however, led each of these schools to adopt strategies to increase their market share of students who were likely to achieve well on standardised tests 'at all costs' (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith 2012: 71).

With a focus on ethical leadership, all of the schools taking part in the Queensland research gained from using collaborative inquiry processes to challenge their thinking and critique practices in their schools (Harris et al. 2018). At the beginning of the project, we saw schools looking to implement short-term strategies as they were under immense pressure and scrutiny. However, over time, school leaders within our research network began to engage more with ethical leadership approaches and use collaborative inquiry processes to gather evidence and develop analytic approaches to critiquing initiatives such as ability-based groupings and whether or not they provide care and justice for all students. School leaders valued this ethical approach and began to develop a language of review and reflection on practice that would support decisions to enable greater equity and build more inclusive cultures within their schools.

As none of the schools competed for the same group of students, leaders within our research network were able to share stories and the results of their collaborative inquiry. While collaborative inquiry within schools highlighted the perverse effects (O'Neill 2013) of initiatives with a short-term focus in schools, discussions between school leaders illuminated some of the systemic challenges they faced. The barriers experienced by school leaders in Queensland echoed many of the findings from the Manchester network. Critically, we found that pressure to rapidly improve student performance on national tests led school leaders away from a focus on inclusive and equitable education that would promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations 2016a). Discussions between leaders from the research network schools illuminated a need to adopt sustainable, long-term strategies for providing inclusive educational environments for all students. These experiences in two countries point to a series of lessons for ethical school leadership.

Four Lessons for Ethical Leadership

Lesson 1: School principals have a responsibility to be ethical leaders

Systemic pressure for schools to consistently improve the performance of students on standardised tests and to compete with one another creates a context in which students who have been traditionally disadvantaged or marginalised in mainstream schools are placed at further risk.

Discussions with the research network schools in both Manchester and Queensland highlighted the need for all school principals to act in an ethical and inclusive manner. Starratt's (2012, 2014) ethics of care, justice and critique have been used to examine leaders' ethical decision-making within their schools (Cranston et al. 2014; Ehrich & Carrington 2018). Principals in the Queensland research network described the ethic of care as upholding 'the best interests of the child' (Ehrich & Carrington 2018: 129) and 'hold[ing] high expectations' for all students (Ehrich & Carrington 2018: 130). Starratt (2012: 48) views the ethic of critique as examining a school in terms 'of structural justice and injustice' to promote 'some moral good' (Starratt 2012: 49) by, for instance, challenging staff to examine current practices and take responsibility for students' results (Ehrich & Carrington 2018).

Ethical leadership requires educators to take a stance that critically appraises school initiatives to ensure fairness and appropriateness for all students. This approach, however, is not without challenge. Given the complexities entailed in leading schools in a moral and ethical manner, it might be suggested that school leaders may experience 'tensions' or 'dilemmas' between ethical principles (Ehrich et al. 2011; Ehrich et al. 2015). Such tensions can arise when one ethical principle, such as following regulatory requirements, places another ethical principle, such as the provision of care for all students, in jeopardy. This is one of the key complexities that can arise for school leaders when trying to put ethical leadership into practice by developing a successful and inclusive school environment.

Lesson 2: Leaders need to be supported and challenged in ethical ways

Findings from the Manchester and Queensland research networks highlight how within-school approaches to critique, using collaborative inquiry, support data gathering and improve communication. In both

research networks, this prompted school leaders to listen to the teachers and to their students, and to value these perspectives as part of informed democratic and ethical decision-making (see Harris et al. 2018). In Manchester, groups of head teachers visited each of the schools to help review and develop leadership practices. Meanwhile, leaders from the five secondary schools and one primary school in the Queensland research network were involved in meetings with the university research team. The focus of these meetings was to share the challenges and progress of adopting ethical leadership approaches to leading their school teams in cycles of inquiry to support equity for all students. These meetings enabled collaboration and networking between schools to share challenges and good practice. Principals gave examples of professional conversations that promoted reflection and gave opportunity for engagement with an ethic of critique as ‘moral dialogue’ (Shields 2004). Their shared experience cultivated a context of openness and trust, where school leaders could challenge ideas and share their experience. Engagement in these networks not only provided school leaders with support for their experiences but also illuminated issues shared between and beyond schools.

Lesson 3: School partnerships can extend resources available for inquiry

Competition within the school marketplace and pressure to make short-term improvements posed challenges for schools as they sought to engage in true collaborative inquiry. Often, relationships between local schools, particularly for those in the Queensland network, were characterised by a level of distrust. While some initiatives might be shared, there was a lack of willingness of school leaders to share their data or engage in inquiry with other local schools. However, strong relationships between school principals arose within our network schools. Grounded in their mutual involvement, these relationships extended beyond the research. The collaborative nature of the work and the lack of competition for students helped to establish an environment where principals felt comfortable sharing their experiences. As such, school leaders were able to draw on the extensive resources, particularly the knowledge and experiences of other educators within the network. One network school, for example, sent teachers to observe literacy-teaching practices in another school that had achieved success in

standardised literacy testing. In addition, one of the principals acted as a critical friend for a school in the network to support them through major structural changes. These relationships were formed organically as part of the research network and provided an invaluable resource for all schools involved.

Lesson 4: Centralised directives and competition limit innovation and inquiry

Schools in both the Manchester and Queensland research networks found themselves at odds with the centralised directives and policies of competition in place within their respective systems. These policies focus on rapid improvement and, as such, provide little scope for schools to develop inquiry-based strategies for long-term success for all students. While it is hardly surprising that schools are tempted to use strategies to attract and accelerate the performance of already high-achieving students, this environment provides a disincentive for schools to innovate and implement strategies to support the needs of those at the greatest risk of marginalisation. Instead of risking failure, schools are rigidly adhering to traditional approaches, despite the potential for further entrenching the disadvantages for some students. Nevertheless, we found that where school leaders adopt an approach of ethical leadership, some space is available to identify and develop more equitable ways of working. School leaders in our networks reported that the processes of collaborative inquiry provided them with an evidence base with which they could critique policies that they felt were inequitable and support the development of more inclusive strategies for their students.

Conclusion

The experiences reported in this chapter have highlighted challenges for inclusion within competitive school marketplaces. They also show that, while the promotion of ongoing improvement and school choice places pressures on schools, collaborative inquiry can provide an opportunity for school leaders to explore new possibilities for addressing old problems. Collaborative inquiry requires participants to adopt an inquiry stance, to examine school practices from a range of perspectives. In order to promote inclusion and equity in otherwise competitive systems,

this process requires ethical leadership—specifically concentrating on the ethics of care, justice and critique—within schools to examine and amend existing practices with a focus on equity and inclusion. In such contexts, the presence of researchers—acting as critical friends, drawing attention to relevant research evidence, and advising how inquiry can be built into strategies that are trialled—can make a significant contribution.

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CHAPTER 11

Putting students at the centre

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Putting students at the centre of the learning and teaching process requires a shift from the way we currently perceive and deliver school education. It is a mindset that conceives of each student as an individual with unique talents and aspirations, and as the holder of personal insights that can help teachers to better craft their teaching. It signals a departure from the old ‘factory model’ of schooling and is consistent with recent calls for greater personalisation of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to improve outcomes for all students (Gonski et al. 2018). Putting students at the centre requires teachers and school leaders to consult students about their learning; however, genuine consultation requires teachers and school leaders to both enable and listen to student voice in all its forms. These practices of enabling and respecting voice, and consulting and communicating with students, are embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, United Nations 1989) and the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Standards 3.5 and 3.6; AITSL 2018), both of which have a bearing on educational practice. Teachers have additional responsibilities for students with disability for whom consultation is a human right under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2008), and

there is also a requirement for educators to consult in order to meet their obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Cth) (see [Chapters 4 and 5](#)). No longer is it a question of *whether* students should be consulted about their education; rather, the question is *how* to consult students—including those with disability—in authentic and meaningful ways. This chapter explores methods of eliciting and responding to students' voices that are inclusive of students with disability, including those with communication difficulties.

Hearing and Responding to the Voices of All Students

All students are unique and, as their experiences and perceptions are often far removed from those of their teachers, their perspectives cannot be intuited by adults. To fully understand students' points of view, all voices need to be heard and acted upon. Eliciting and listening to student voice, however, may feel threatening for teachers and school leaders who are charged with the responsibility of managing classrooms and schools that to this day still rely on a compact of adult authority and student compliance. The adoption of democratic processes, such as voice-inclusive practice (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant 2018), can feel risky in such environments. Teachers and school leaders may feel that they are inviting anarchy and/or that they will not like what they hear back. It takes courage to allow students to speak back to power, and even greater courage to listen to and act on their views. Yet it is a necessary step to achieve Goal 2 of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008: 8), which aims for 'all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens'. The ability to communicate, to act with moral and ethical integrity, to commit to national values of democracy and to participate in civic life are all listed as essential elements of active and informed citizenship in the Melbourne Declaration. Yet despite the Declaration being in place for over a decade, children and young people are infrequently provided with an opportunity to have input into what happens to them at school, or they are offered only tokenistic involvement opportunities (Lundy 2018).

Research has documented clear benefits from student-centred approaches to education, which have been shown to contribute positively

to academic and social outcomes, foster student agency, and position students as competent social actors with the ability to enact or participate in change (Harris et al. 2013; Rudduck & Fielding 2006). However, such approaches, starting with the elicitation of student voice, must be conducted carefully to mitigate known risks. One risk is that some voices may dominate, drowning out less dominant yet equally valid views. This raises another risk, which is that the most common preferences and the environment they produce may be alienating to other students. For example, very sociable students may express a desire for common areas and group learning, whereas introverts will experience significant stress in such environments. It may also be the case that only some students are comfortable expressing their views, and that what might appear to be the majority view is simply the view of those who are confident enough to make their voice heard. Students on the autism spectrum (Saggers et al. 2016), students with communication difficulties (McLeod 2011) and students with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Cefai & Cooper 2010) are at particular risk of not being heard. This can occur because students in these groups can find it difficult to communicate verbally, and their behaviour—which is a form of non-verbal communication—becomes the indicator of meaning. Not surprisingly, they are often misunderstood and punished when they are actually trying to convey their distress.

Effort must be made to include the perspectives of students in these groups; however, educators must take care to not coerce students, as the choice to remain silent should also be considered an expression of voice (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant 2018). To be inclusive of all students' voices and to respect the valuable contribution that their voices can offer, time and space must be allocated for the purpose of listening and responding to students within curriculum planning, pedagogical practices and classroom interactions. However, seeking and responding to the voices of students are not ad hoc processes, nor are they easy (Rudduck & Fielding 2006). In the next section, we present a well-known model that schools can use as a framework to seek and respond to student voice, along with a case-study example of how this was adopted with considerable success in a large secondary school serving a diverse disadvantaged community in south-east Queensland.

Fostering Participation through Student Consultation

The Lundy model of participation (Lundy 2007) provides a useful starting point for the application of children's participatory rights in educational practice. It is one of the most influential models of child participation, with impact across the three domains of policy, research and practitioner practice. In pulling together the four spheres of *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence*, the model provides a clear, practical and sequential process to foster participation through student consultation. It does this in a way that respects the indivisibility and interrelatedness of different rights affordances. In other words, it does not pit rights against one another. Instead, the process shows the interrelatedness of different rights in enactment. The process as conceptualised through the four spheres is as follows.

Sphere 1: Space

Adults must first provide a safe space for students to express their views, and they should encourage them to do so without coercion or consequence. Adults need to proactively and intentionally provide these spaces, rather than only seeking student input in response to predetermined agendas. A proactive pursuit of student perspectives would include eliciting input on exactly what matters affect them, and to what extent they would like to be involved in conversations and decisions about these matters (Lundy 2007). It is important to remember that if students indicate they do not wish to be involved in consultation about a particular matter at one point in time, this does not automatically exclude them from future conversations or consultations about their involvement. Nor does it mean that students should be forced to participate when they do not want to. Space alone is not sufficient, however, as children may require assistance and support in expressing their views—particularly if these opportunities have not been provided to them previously.

Sphere 2: Voice

Meaningful voice opportunities require adequate time provisions, appropriate information and adult receptiveness to listening to and acting upon children's expressed views (Lundy 2007). Some students may respond with scepticism about intention or be wary of sharing their perspectives; as we discuss later in this chapter, this can be addressed through the building of trust, the development of rapport, the minimisation of power relations and the provision of multiple opportunities for students to express their views. If students choose to remain silent despite these provisions, their silence should be respected as an expression of voice (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant 2018).

Sphere 3: Audience

Adults must also listen to students' expressed views and opinions, and take their perspectives seriously, providing an *audience* for their perspectives. Lundy (2007) describes the need for adult attentiveness to verbal and non-verbal 'voice' expressions and how this may require additional training in active listening skills. Audience also requires students' voice expressions to be communicated to those with the power to enact change or action.

Sphere 4: Influence

Students' perspectives must also be acted upon. This enables *influence* of children's expressed views to enact the provision of the right for their opinions to be given 'due weight' in accordance with the CRC (United Nations 1989). A common misunderstanding about acting on children's views is that a child's expressed preference automatically outweighs the views of other stakeholders—but this is not the case. The CRC provides *all* children with the right to express their views in *all* matters affecting them, and for their views to be taken seriously and acted upon by adults. However, this right does not extend to children's views vetoing or overriding the views of others. Instead, it emphasises the importance of ensuring that children are provided with the opportunity to have a 'seat at the table', and to have their views and opinions considered, incorporated and taken seriously. Children's perspectives must be sought and incorporated in the same way that adults consult with other stakeholders, and decisions must be based on careful integration and consideration of all perspectives. This practice supports the multiple representations of

perspective and experience, even when they are diverse or divergent. While some adults may be resistant to involving students, ‘respecting children’s views is not just a model of good pedagogical practice (or policy making), but a legally binding obligation . . . [that] applies to all educational decision making’ (Lundy 2007: 930). In some cases, this may also require a disruption to the beliefs of some adults about children’s capabilities.

Voice-inclusive practice

Voice-inclusive practice builds on Lundy’s model of participation by putting student views and opinions at the centre of educational activity (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant 2019). In this way, voice-inclusive practice initiates educational partnerships between adults and children so that voice may be authentically and meaningfully integrated into everyday educational practice. These partnerships need to value and embrace student contributions to their educational experience by ‘engaging with the child as both a recipient *and* as a key participant in the learning process’ (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan 2019: 127). Seeking and including the perspectives of *all* stakeholders across *all* matters affecting them through voice-inclusive practice maintains close alignment to student-centred educational principles. One matter of increasing educational interest and relevance to multiple stakeholders is student wellbeing. Few schools or systems, however, genuinely consult students on what wellbeing means to *them* or what *they* think will help to improve their wellbeing at school.

A Queensland Case Study

The following case study of a large secondary school in south-east Queensland, Australia provides an example of how student-voice initiatives helped guide reform to improve school belonging and student wellbeing (Gillett-Swan & Graham 2017). The participating school was situated just outside Brisbane.

The school’s leadership team had been driving reform for several years, and the school had developed a reputation for excellence, especially in sport. Enrolments had increased as a result of improving student outcomes, such that the school had become one of the largest in the state. At the time of the study, more than a third of its students were

from a language background other than English, with a large proportion of students from Pacific Islander families. Almost one in ten students were Indigenous. With increased size and student diversity, however, comes greater complexity. When faced with these challenges, together with performance indicators set and monitored by both regional and central offices (see [Chapter 10](#)), leadership teams may feel the impulse to exert control through homogenising practices that affirm the hierarchical order.

Putting students at the centre and encouraging them to express their views are the antithesis of hierarchical control. This, however, is what schools must do to discover what really affects students, and where reform is needed and will have the most leverage. Genuine engagement with students takes courage and leadership from educators who not only listen with an open mind but who also actively respond to student feedback in ways that will lead to genuine change. Key staff at this school had already identified student wellbeing as the next goal in their school improvement journey, and they saw this project as an opportunity to help realise their reform objectives.

The research project on which this case study is based began in 2018 with a survey that asked students in Years 7–10 about their wellbeing at school and used the responses to identify opportunities for change (Phase 1). A similar survey was distributed to school staff, with the aim of determining similarities and differences in the conceptualisation of wellbeing and perceptions between groups. This phase had the added benefit of providing a wellbeing ‘temperature gauge’ that could act as a measure to assess the impact of the initiatives developed in subsequent phases (see [Figure 11.1](#)). Focus groups were then conducted with students across Years 7–10 to discuss the survey responses. Care was taken to include a variety of students to test the salience of survey themes.

Phases 2 and 3 occurred concurrently. Following initial integrative analysis of the Phase 1 data, a staff working party was developed to support interpretation and further exploration of the key issues identified by both students and staff (Phase 2). The staff working party consisted of eleven staff members (the wellbeing coordinator, a deputy principal, the facilities manager, the business manager, five heads of year and two guidance officers) plus the university project team. At the same time, a multi-year-level student inquiry group was formed to investigate the findings emerging from the student survey and focus groups in more depth (Phase 3). The student inquiry group comprised 21 students

(thirteen females and eight males) from Years 7–10. These students then formed seven smaller ‘wellbeing inquiry project’ groups with two to five students in each.

The student inquiry groups each examined the Phase 1 findings, identified a topic of relevance to their group and then conducted a student inquiry project to learn more about their chosen issue through research with their peers. Connections between the student inquiry groups and the staff working party were created by the university project team and school wellbeing coordinator, who acted as intermediaries between both groups. Information about the activities of the groups was continually fed forwards and backwards between the staff working party and student inquiry groups, demonstrating to students that school staff valued their perspectives. This process also supported the further development of positive staff–student relationships.

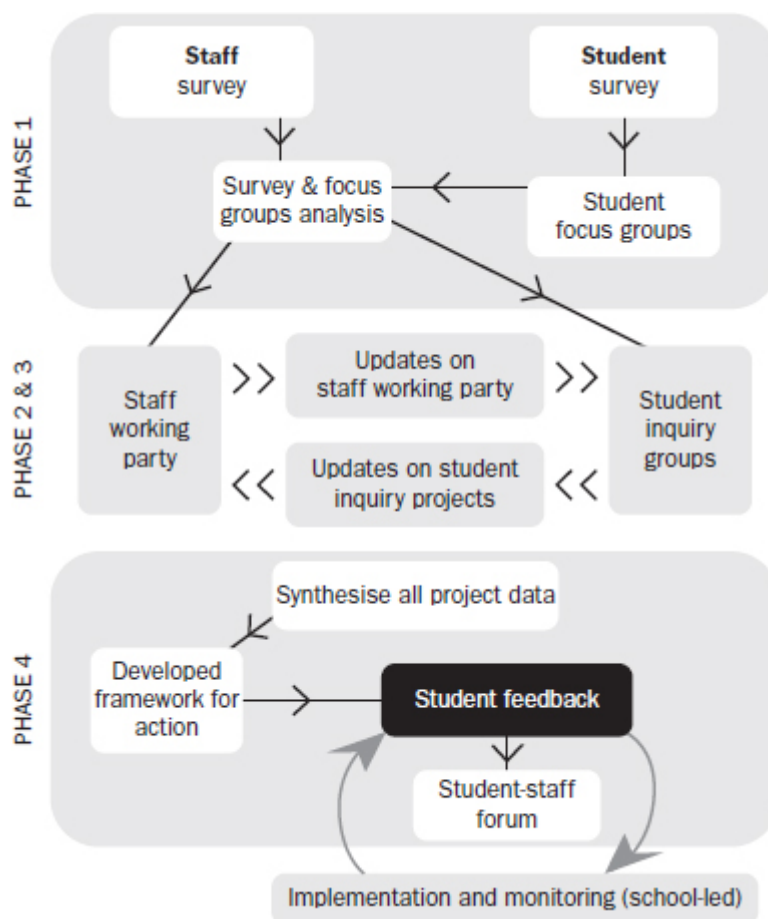


Figure 11.1. Research approach (Gillett-Swan & Graham 2017).

In the final integrative phase of the project, the student inquiry groups presented their findings and key implications to the school leadership via a student forum, where both students and staff had the opportunity to seek additional information and provide additional insight. Concurrently, the staff working party used the interpretations and data generated through all phases of the research to determine actionable ways to address and/or improve the issues identified. These actionable strategies (including policy review, streamlining of processes, and inclusion of extra support, resources and passion classes) were then taken back to the whole student body for further input.

These processes were compatible with each component of Lundy's model of participation (Lundy 2007). For example, Phases 1 and 2 provided direct opportunities for multiple *spaces* and opportunities for *voice*. Opportunities for meaningful student participation at the centre of the project were further enabled through the provision of time and regular opportunities for direct student engagement. For example, as most of the project activities occurred over a period of almost a year, this act of 'giving time' helped fortify student contributions. Further, the frequency of their involvement over the duration of the project provided multiple opportunities for students to develop a considered and informed view. Phase 3 enabled *audience* and *influence*, while also providing opportunities for adults at the school with the power to act upon matters raised by the students to examine and adjust their own perspectives about students' capabilities—with support from the researchers who acted as critical friends. Students were at the centre of subsequent decision-making, as those with the power to act upon and instigate change took students' expressed views and opinions seriously. Working *with* students in considering appropriate actions also enabled opportunities for consulting with students to become sustainable practice.

What did the students and staff say?

Findings from Phase 1 revealed that overall, staff members were more positive than students about what staff members were doing (for example, in the quality and quantity of support provision). Conversely, students were generally more positive than staff members about what students were doing, particularly in relation to their attitudes and effort; however, there was also a lot of variability within student responses. Trends in the data were synthesised into five 'areas of need' relating to students' perspectives on: (1) the value of education, (2) respect and

recognition, (3) relationships, (4) support provision, and (5) equality and fairness.

The value of education. Staff had a lower opinion of student commitment to school than the students, and this was statistically significant. For example, while students liked that there were a lot of different opportunities provided for them, and that the school prepared them for their future, they did not like the pressure to achieve or that assessment was seen as high stakes. They felt that the school paid too much attention to sport and physical appearance, and not enough to student socio-emotional needs. Students also felt that there was inconsistency in the practices and support provided by teachers, and that the current approach to behaviour management was ineffective.

Respect and recognition. Staff thought that students were being treated with respect more than the students felt that they were being respected, and this was statistically significant. In considering voice and participation specifically, just over 38 per cent of the student participants felt that adults at the school did not often *listen* to student concerns, and just over 42 per cent felt that adults at the school did not often *act* on student concerns. Thirty-one per cent of participants felt that they did not often have opportunities to make decisions at school. In thinking about the importance of seeking *and* acting upon children's views, these findings are particularly revealing.

Relationships. Staff and student perceptions were generally the same in their perceptions of relationships, although there was a significant difference between male and female teachers in that males were more likely than females to say that they told students when they did a good job. In general, students liked that most teachers tried their best and felt that there were some good teachers at the school. However, students also felt as though there were not many teachers that they could trust, and not many who cared. They felt that there was a lack of follow-up when students did go to teachers with problems and that there was a long response time before action. Students also identified a lack of rapport and relationship-building opportunities with teachers.

Support provision. Staff had a higher opinion of the support available to students than students did, and this was statistically significant. Students appreciated having additional academic and non-academic support available and felt that there were genuine teachers and staff. Even so, they felt that there was a lack of support for problems, and there was perception of different support and treatment for different students. Students expressed a lack of confidence in seeking help and thought that

there were not enough support options available. They also felt that there was a need for changes in the way that support in class is provided. They also questioned the effectiveness of the current support programs available at the school.

Equality and fairness. Students predominantly agreed that the rules at the school were fair, that all racial and ethnic groups were respected, and that the school would respond in an emergency. However, there were some differences by year level, with Year 7 responses being more positive about the fairness of school rules than the Year 8s and Year 10s. This was a statistically significant result. Overall, students felt that they were treated differently based on behaviour or stream (i.e. mainstream versus excellence), that the rules were not applied consistently, and that, in some cases, students or groups were targeted in rule implementation. They felt that there was a lack of inclusivity of mainstream (as opposed to 'excellence') students and the support received.

How did staff and students respond to the findings?

Staff response. Some of these findings were understandably confronting for staff, particularly when staff and student perspectives diverged or if there was an apparent misunderstanding about the different provisions or processes available. Initially, there was resistance from some members of the working party, who challenged or dismissed students' feedback. After approximately three weeks of weekly working-party meetings, all staff on the working party could appreciate that, although divergent from their own, students' perspectives had merit. By this time, the researchers had developed some rapport and trust with members of the staff working party. This, together with the leadership demonstrated by the wellbeing coordinator and deputy principal, reassured staff and ensured that they engaged with the process and with the data in good faith.

The working party's analysis of the data highlighted several areas for action. Each area involved different levels of complexity, and some issues were able to be addressed relatively easily. For example, there was general confusion and variability in student perspectives of support provisions. In discussing student experiences of obtaining support, and staff understandings of the same processes, it became clear that this confusion was not limited to the student experience. Staff initially considered some of the support concerns highlighted by the students as already addressed through existing provisions; however, it soon emerged that the pathway to *access* this support lacked clarity. While students

may have expressed this issue in terms of identifying a lack of support provision, it may have instead been that the support was there, but they did not know about it or how to access it. Therefore, in addition to revisiting and streamlining processes for support services and provisions, the school created an infographic and flowchart for clarity and ease of reference for staff and students alike. This is just one example of how student perspectives enabled greater insight into the student experience of wellbeing at the school and opportunities for further refinement and enhanced provision. It also emphasises the importance of collaborative interrogation of information to ensure that reactive changes are not made on adult and/or surface interpretations of what has been said.

Student response. Students were initially sceptical that the project would result in meaningful change. However, the authenticity with which the school sought, incorporated and respected student involvement and insight shows that students and staff can work together for school improvement. This is despite some of the student feedback being initially quite confronting for some staff. Responses to the follow-up survey suggested that some students appreciated that school staff were taking the time to listen and to find out more about the issues affecting students, and that they were trying to find ways to better support students and improve the school.

My reason [for indicating that my wellbeing is better this year compared to last year] is that the school listened to these surveys last year and improved on wellbeing. (Year 8 male, 2019 survey)

This was not universal, however, with others indicating that staff could go further. Students' responses were insightful, demonstrating their understanding of the tensions that accompany change and the difficulty that staff face when engaging with student perspectives.

Listen more. With an open mind at that. I think you're all used to the structure we've had for such a long time that you may not understand the change we are making. I understand it takes time to interpret. But please, listen with open ears and an open mind. (Year 11 female, 2019 survey)

Students also acknowledged that some desired changes are out of the school's control, but still valued the effort and genuineness of the staff as they strived to do their best.

Both the students and the staff reflected on the consultation process better enabling each group to see things from the other's perspective, in

turn supporting greater levels of mutual respect and relationship development. Despite the project focusing on student wellbeing, it was clear that some students were still also conscious of and concerned about staff wellbeing.

I do understand that sometimes not everyone can be heard, but it would be really good if we are able to be heard as students and I'm sure that the teachers would like to be heard as well. (Year 9 female, inquiry group, 2018 survey)

Student consultation and involvement in this project enhanced the school's reform efforts, as the initiatives developed through the process were based on students' lived realities and were targeted at students' identified needs. While some members of the staff working party were initially resistant and inclined to dismiss students' views, the value of seeking and listening to students' perspectives was roundly endorsed by project end. For some, it was clear that a school-reform agenda is better realised with the participation of and buy-in from students.

[A]lthough [principal] sort of says, this is your brief, this is the excellence I want to happen, I can't see how we're going to achieve that excellence without having that balance between the research and the student voice. It's gotta stay. The way that we hear the student voice, and the way that it's articulated might change . . . Those things could probably change, but that dynamic needs to continue to inform our teaching and learning practices, that's for sure. (Participant, staff working party, 2019)

Why should schools embed student voice into inclusive school reform?

This case study provides one example of the way that direct and meaningful consultation with students can contribute to school improvement. In consulting with students, adults are placing students at the centre of their educational experiences and positioning them as key stakeholders. In doing so, positive staff–student relationships may be further developed and fortified through mutual respect and a shared understanding that the student experience matters. Consulting students is also cost-effective. There is no need for funding other than the time required for students, teachers and others to engage in the process. Taking the time to engage with students to understand different aspects

of their experience may also contribute to lessening misunderstandings within adult and student perspectives. These views may initially appear divergent but could, in fact, be advocating for the same thing, as illustrated by our example of the sufficiency and suitability of support provisions. However, consulting meaningfully with students is not without its challenges.

The elevation of student voice and value associated with its relative power can be confronting for some adults, especially those who see it as a disruption to more ‘traditional’ approaches to education that position students as subordinate (Quinn & Owen 2016). Even in contexts where staff members are receptive to direct student contributions, they may still place limits on the scope of student involvement—allowing the adults to venture slightly out of their comfort zones but ultimately still maintaining the status quo. In this way, the process of engaging with students may be considered tokenistic or inauthentic by the students. This can lead to their reluctance to engage in consultation opportunities in the future, or scepticism regarding adult intention. By contrast, embedding voice-inclusive practice into everyday practice, as illustrated in this case study, supports the enactment of children’s participatory rights, rather than seeing direct student consultation as an add-on or additional burden (Sargeant & Gillett-Swan 2019). Finally, seeking student perspectives and placing them at the centre of the teaching and learning process also offer practical benefits (to teachers especially) by enabling and supporting adults to provide more focused and effective support to better meet student need. There is, however, no ‘one size fits all’ approach to voice elicitation and practice, and voice-inclusive practices need to be different for different students in different contexts. This is particularly relevant to students with disability with whom educators are legally obliged to consult.

Inclusive Education, Student Consultation and Reasonable Adjustments

As discussed in [Chapter 4](#), the right to an inclusive education for all students, including those with disability, without discrimination and based on equal opportunity has been in place for over a decade, and was clarified recently through General Comment No. 4 (GC4), which makes clear the legal obligations of States parties that have ratified the CRPD

(United Nations 2016). GC4 also states that educators are required to provide ‘participatory learning experiences’ and that students must be consulted, and their voices respected:

Consistent with Article 4, paragraph 3, States parties must consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organisations (OPDs), in all aspects of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inclusive education policies. Persons with disabilities and, when appropriate, their families, must be recognised as partners and not merely recipients of education. (United Nations 2016: paragraph 7)

The need to provide accessible consultative processes for people with disability, including children, has been mandated through the recently released CRPD General Comment No. 7:

States parties should also ensure that consultation processes are accessible—for example, by providing sign language interpreters, Braille and Easy Read—and must provide support, funding and reasonable accommodation as appropriate and requested, to ensure the participation of representatives of all persons with disabilities in consultation processes. (United Nations 2018: paragraph 45)

Of note is the clear direction provided in the statement ‘States parties should also ensure that consultation *processes* are accessible’ (emphasis added). Accessible consultation means that students can understand the content of a consultative conversation, can comprehend the questions that are posed to them, and are able to communicate a response that reflects their perspective. As authentic consultation requires effective, two-way communication, the consultation process may also need to be adjusted to ensure genuine participation of students with disability.

In Australia, the DSE (Cth) provides guidance for educators and education systems as to their obligations under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth) (see [Table 11.1](#)). As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), the DSE outlines the national legal obligations for education providers, which include the obligation to make *reasonable adjustments* for students with disability, as well as the obligation to *consult* students (or their associate) during the process of designing and implementing adjustments. The 2015 review of the DSE (Australian Government 2015) further reinforced the need to centralise the voices of students, stating that adjustments require ‘advocacy skills on the part of students with disability or their associate to achieve the best outcome’ (Australian Government 2015: 54). In order to self-advocate, however, students with disability must be given opportunities to express their views. They must

also be provided with the support necessary to do so, and genuine responses to students’ voices must take place.

Table 11.1: Educators’ obligations under international law and Australian legislation

Document	Obligations for educators and education systems	Context
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948)	Everyone has the right to education Everyone has the right to hold and freely express their opinions	International
Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989)	All children have a right to education All children have a right to express an opinion about issues that affect them	International
<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</i>	Students with disability are entitled to reasonable adjustments	Australia
Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth)	Students with disability are entitled to reasonable adjustments Students with disability are to be consulted about adjustments	Australia
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations 2008)	Students with disability have the right to inclusive and accessible education Students with disability have the right to equal and full participation	International

Document	Obligations for educators and education systems	Context
General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016)	Students with disability have the right to an inclusive education Students have the right to be consulted	International
General Comment No. 7 (United Nations 2018)	Consultation processes must be accessible	International

Despite requirements for students with disability to be consulted about their education provision, and agreement among researchers and practitioners that students' voices are worthy and important sources of information, the voices of students with disability continue to be largely excluded (Roulstone et al. 2016). Researchers have identified numerous inhibitors to student involvement in consultation, including varying perceptions of the relative credibility, capacity and value of the perspectives of children with disability, the costs and (assumed) difficulties associated with enabling their participation, the potential for student perspectives to undermine teacher authority, and the assumption 'that they have no views to express; [or] . . . that their interests and experiences will always be best articulated by adult caretakers' (Byrne & Kelly 2015: 197; see also Byrnes & Rickards 2011). Students are also not always aware of the possibilities available to them for participation in decision-making at school (Roulstone et al. 2016).

Consulting students with disability and incorporating their insights within classroom practices require a disruption to traditional teaching pedagogies (Ainscow 2005). This practice marks a clear point of departure from the segregated, special-education 'opportunities' of old that typically positioned students with disability (and their families) as grateful recipients of education, and offered limited consultation or collaboration with the student or their family. Inclusive education, however, positions students with disability as valued, engaged and central stakeholders in their education, and allows them to collaborate with their team in decision-making processes (see [Chapter 15](#)). As some students with disability also have communication difficulties, consultation is a step that is often dismissed as impractical. Yet the

international human-rights law and legislation that applies to students with disability applies to these students, too, and schools still have an obligation to meet. There are specific processes that can be employed where a student has communication difficulties that will assist schools in meeting those obligations.

Consulting students with communication difficulties

According to research with Australian teachers, over 13 per cent of students with disability also experience communication difficulties (McLeod & McKinnon 2007). This broad group can include—but is not restricted to—students with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD), a speech sound disorder, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, Down syndrome or intellectual disability, or students on the autism spectrum. As discussed earlier in this chapter, educators are obligated as per the DSE (Cth) to make reasonable adjustments for students with communication difficulties, and students must be consulted about the adjustments that are designed and implemented to support them. However, barriers within the consultation *process* need to be minimised or removed when consulting students with communication difficulties (Tancredi 2018).

Communication difficulties will impact the consultation process in several ways. For example, consultative conversations require all parties to engage in high-level reflection, negotiation and problem-solving. All parties to the consultation need to be able to process the shared information for meaning, integrate it with their own ideas and opinions, prioritise between group members, and finally design a plan of action or goal. The pace, linguistic complexity, level of complex and abstract content, and demands on working memory all represent possible barriers for a student with communication difficulties (Graham, Tancredi et al. 2018). Research shows that teachers are already less likely to consult students, because they are not adults, and their propensity to consult further decreases when students have a disability, especially one involving communication difficulties (McLeod 2011). Teachers also report not having an adequate understanding of communication difficulties (Dockrell & Lindsay 2001). Similar arguments are made to justify the exclusion or lack of consultation with any student due to assumptions around their relative capacities and potential contribution (United Nations 2009). In practice, this may mean that teachers overestimate a student's communicative competence, leading to

inadequate adjustment to the consultation process. The hidden nature of communication difficulties highlights the need for teachers to both *ask* students about the barriers they face and what helps them learn, and to *use* that information to proactively design curriculum and assessment that is accessible to *all* (Tancredi 2018). In the following section, we provide evidence-based suggestions to support teachers to meet their obligations to consult students with disability, with an emphasis on strategies that assist students with communication difficulties.

Approaches and Strategies for Student Consultation

When students are positioned at the centre of their education, they are consulted to share their insights and take part in decision-making regarding the learning environment, curriculum design, teachers' pedagogical practices and assessment. Through a process of reflective questioning and discussion, students can express their preferences and experiences. Different situations will call for different approaches to student consultation, and some common examples are outlined in [Table 11.2](#). While interviewing is the most commonly adopted approach, focus groups can offer a more naturalistic discussion platform for students to share their insights. A group situation will, however, require the facilitator to ensure that all students can contribute and have a genuine voice in the discussion. For students who have an established support network or team within their school, consultation may take place at regular intervals with members of the Student Support Team (SST).

For each of the above approaches to student consultation, additional strategies may be needed to ensure that students can genuinely engage in the process. The strategies discussed below have been shown to support students to engage in the process of consultation and share their thoughts and opinions. These strategies can be used with all students, but they are particularly important for students with disability and communication difficulties. A first principle for any consultation process, however, is accessibility.

The critical importance of accessible language

Student consultation typically involves the use of written or spoken language. Most teachers are proficient language users, making it difficult for them to understand the inherent language demands of the syllabus and how this impacts their own teaching, as well as the assessments they create (Graham, Tancredi et al. 2018). As adult language users, teachers also have large developmental differences to the multitude of students they teach. Mutual understanding is therefore affected by teachers' ability to match their vocabulary to their students' ages, as well as their socio-economic, cultural and language backgrounds. Given that students' responses are determined by the questions that are asked, it is essential for teachers to think carefully about the words and phrases they use to construct questions and frame consultative conversations. This is important, because the challenges imposed by language are more subtle than they might appear.

Table 11.2: Example approaches to student consultation

Approach	People involved	Activity	Considerations
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Approach	People involved	Activity	Considerations
Interview	Student Interviewer A support person may be present for the student	Can comprise: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a set series of questions (a structured interview); • an open discussion (an unstructured interview); or • both structured questions and unstructured discussion (a semi-structured interview). • Interviews can combine both verbal interaction and multiple means of students constructing and sharing their message. 	Interview should be transcribed verbatim to facilitate an objective record of what the student has shared. This reduces the risk that the student's words are paraphrased, and the student's intended meaning is diluted or changed.
Focus group	A group of six to eight students Facilitator(s)	An opportunity for discussion and innovative ideas that arises through interaction between the group members.	Strategies may need to be put in place to allow all students to have the opportunity to contribute.

Approach	People involved	Activity	Considerations
Student Support Team (SST)	Student Parent(s) and/or caregiver(s) Educator(s) Case manager School principal or principal's delegate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student attends all meetings. • Student's perspective is foregrounded in the design and implementation of adjustments or decisions regarding education provision. 	Student and their family are provided written feedback based on group discussions and action plans/outcomes.

For example, recent research with 96 nine- to sixteen-year-old students in Sydney, Australia (Graham, Sweller et al. 2018), found significant differences in the receptive and expressive vocabulary of students both *with* and *without* a history of behavioural difficulties. Anticipating that students in the first group would also have difficulties with language, the researchers carefully developed a range of interview questions that would be accessible to all students. Most questions were short, concrete and direct; however, a few questions were not. Subsequent analyses found significant differences between groups both in terms of expressive vocabulary and in their responses to the different types of questions. For instance, in response to the question, 'What do you think your teacher thinks of you?', students *with* a history of behavioural difficulties were significantly more likely to say something like, 'I dunno, I don't ask them' than students *without* language and behavioural difficulties. The researchers had deliberately included this abstract question, as it required 'sophisticated linguistic reasoning in addition to the ability to compare one's perception of self in relation to the perceived perceptions of others' (Graham, Sweller et al. 2018: 4). In other words, to answer this question students needed to interpret abstract language and impute mental states, then articulate that in a verbal response. Imputing mental states is a skill otherwise known as Theory of Mind, which is a documented weakness for students with disability affecting social communication, such as Autism Spectrum Disorder

(ASD). Notably, concrete questions such as ‘Do you like school?’ and ‘What happened to make you start disliking school?’ resulted in more definitive responses and fewer non-responses from this group of students (Graham et al. 2016). Using accessible language is a mandatory first step in consulting students with disability, but for students with communication difficulties, it will be insufficient on its own. For these students, a range of practical strategies can be employed.

Multiple methods and means of participation/engagement

While accessible language is critical to support genuine participation, language has its own limitations. This is where using multiple methods for engaging students in consultation can minimise the barriers imposed by language. To ensure that students can fully participate in consultation, we need to think about *how* students’ views are sought, as this impacts *what* they say (Owen et al. 2004). Carefully developed visual supports and activities can assist students to comprehend a consultative discussion and to articulate their thoughts (Lyons & Roulstone 2018). The information generated can also provide non-verbal data, which is helpful when interpreting meaning for students with complex communication difficulties (Clarke et al. 2001). In addition to supporting rapport building, the use of multiple methods and opportunities to consult students can improve the student’s understanding of both the process and the questions raised during consultation. In some instances, the student may prefer to be interviewed by a person who acts as a broker of information between the student and their teacher. When used collaboratively, these approaches can help to build trust, address power imbalances and ensure mutual understanding of the student’s intended message (Merrick & Roulstone 2011).

Visual supports and activities. Visual supports and activities provide a supplementary mode for both parties to communicate information in a consultative conversation. This is necessary, because the information exchange that takes place in a verbal conversation is transient. That is, once words are spoken, they must be comprehended quickly and accurately by the listener. If this process is disrupted, the listener may forget or misinterpret what has been said by their communication partner, which can impact the listener’s response. Consultative conversations also require students to reflect on their experiences, share

their opinions and express their views. The high-level and complex nature of this task risks students not understanding what has been asked, and students might not always have the vocabulary to explain the ideas they have. Visual supports and activities address both issues by providing a concrete, tangible addition to conversations, which can support all students to participate in consultation.

Visual supports can be pre-prepared (created ahead of the conversation) or produced in situ (created during the conversation). An example of a pre-prepared visual support is a list that uses text, images or a combination of text and images, which outlines options that are available for a task. When pre-prepared visual supports are used, it is important that students are given the opportunity to also contribute to the options that are available. This kind of visual aid can help students to understand the options that are available, support them to express their choice and facilitate brainstorming of other options. Drawing and mind-mapping are examples of visual aids that are created in situ. This strategy can help the student to organise and expand their thoughts by creating a static, visual record of ideas and insights. It can also enable the adult to clarify the student's ideas in real time and can help the student to expand their thinking (Tancredi 2018).

Activities can include arts-based approaches and interactive tasks. In one study, Merrick and Roulstone (2011) encouraged students to share their experiences by giving an adult a tour of their school. During the tour, students took the adults to particular places and discussed events that were meaningful to them. Students were encouraged to take photos of places and objects during the tour. These pictures were then used as visual supports to prompt reflection and storytelling during the consultative conversation that followed. More recently in Queensland, Kucks and Hughes (2019) worked with young primary-school students to redesign their play spaces. Students were asked to create collages and models that represented their idea of a fun, sensory garden. In combination with the ideas suggested by the teaching team, these young students' suggestions were used by the educational landscaper to create a new play space. As these examples show, hands-on activities can enable all students to express their ideas and opinions.

Multiple interviews. Asking students to share their stories requires the development of trust, as well as the active consideration and minimisation of power differentials (Merrick & Roulstone 2011). Conducting multiple short interviews provides opportunities for trust and rapport to be built, thereby reducing the potential of a power imbalance

between student and interviewer. Lyons and Roulstone (2018), for example, investigated the ways that students with speech, language and communication difficulties constructed their identities, using a narrative-inquiry approach. By conducting five or six short, semi-structured interviews with each student, the interviewers built rapport, enabling the students to trust the adults with their stories. Interviewing students on multiple occasions has other benefits as well. Through multiple interviews, students are provided with enough time and exposure to become familiar with the process of consultation, and students are provided multiple opportunities to share their insights. Given that not all students will have had the experience of consultation, particularly in relation to things that happen at school, multiple interviews can also help students to understand the unique nature of consultative conversations. This strategy helps to increase the student's participation but also mitigates any potential biases that the interviewer may bring to the interview situation. This is particularly important for students with communication difficulties, as the student's intended message may be misinterpreted by the interviewer. For example, Tancredi (2018) interviewed students with language difficulties on two or three occasions about the adjustments that they believed helped them to learn. In the final interview, she asked students to prioritise their preferred adjustments by numbering their top three preferences (where 'one' indicated the most helpful adjustment). This process revealed that what the students said in initial interviews, and the frequency of discussion about a particular adjustment, did not necessarily match the student's stated level of preference for the adjustments used by their teachers.

Engaging an impartial information broker. In some circumstances, the power relationship between students and teachers may make students reluctant to share their insights about what works for them at school with their teacher. Depending on the topic and situation, it may be inappropriate for a teacher to seek feedback from students about their own practice. This can place students in a difficult position, and they may withhold important feedback to protect their teacher's feelings. By engaging a trusted third party in the consultative process and having students' permission to feed their insights back to the teaching team, students may feel more comfortable about sharing their ideas and experiences (both positive and negative). This person may be another teacher, a school counsellor, a speech pathologist or a specialist teacher. Alternatively, teachers can use anonymous classroom feedback systems, such as a suggestion box into which students can submit tips for what

their teachers should keep doing, stop doing and start doing to further enhance students' learning.

Conclusion

All students have the right to an inclusive education and the right to express opinions. Internationally, these rights are provided through the CRC (United Nations 1989) and the CRPD (United Nations 2008), and they represent a student-centred approach to education. For students with disability in Australia, additional protections exist, where teachers are obligated to provide reasonable adjustments and to consult students about the adjustments that are designed and implemented, as per the DSE (Cth). As we have discussed in this chapter, students who are placed at the centre of their education experience are active participants, are consulted on issues that affect them, and are positioned as agents who can contribute to decisions and processes that take place at school. When students have a genuine voice at school, they are developing the skills of a democratic citizen. Their unique insights and reflections are valuable sources of information, which may provide innovative and dynamic solutions or outcomes. Without careful attention to the consultation process, however, students may go unheard.

To maximise success, the consultation process must be well planned to ensure that students can understand the questions posed during consultation and express their true ideas and opinions. The approach also needs to be considered and chosen based on the situation and context. A range of evidence-based strategies exists to support all students to express their views. These strategies include visual supports and activities to support verbal interaction, as well as asking clear questions that students will be able to comprehend and respond to with ease. Engaging in multiple interviews with students and engaging a third party to support the transfer of information between students and teachers can provide a supportive environment for participation and engagement. Putting students at the centre is essential for student participation and wellbeing, but its success depends on the enactment of a planned and intentional process. This may seem like a lot of work to time-poor teachers and principals, but by consulting students about their education and responding to their voices, educators are both upholding their

obligations and contributing to each student's personal and social development.

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CHAPTER 12

Nurturing close student–teacher relationships

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Close relationships between teachers and students are important for all classrooms. Close student–teacher relationships provide a critical foundation for learning and set the tone for the classroom climate (Hughes 2011). Students who experience close and supportive relationships with their teachers are more likely to interact positively with other classmates, to excel academically, and to feel a positive sense of school belonging and adjustment (Pianta & Stuhlman 2004). Close relationships are also powerfully predictive, with relationship quality in the early years of schooling predicting both social and academic outcomes in high school (Hamre & Pianta 2001; McGrath & Van Bergen 2015).

In developing close relationships with their students, educators face two inherent challenges. First, research shows that student–teacher relationship quality typically declines across the school years (Jerome et al. 2009), albeit with different trajectories and fluctuations for different groups of students (Lee & Bierman 2018; Spilt, Hughes et al. 2012). This may be because reduced student–teacher interactional opportunities in higher grades create conditions whereby teachers and students are less

invested in student–teacher relationships, and more attentive to relationships with peers and colleagues. It is also possible that teachers’ expectations of students change across time, as students grow older and as differences in student behaviour become entrenched. Finally, according to O’Connor and McCartney (2007), interactions are increasingly instruction-based and not relationship-based. Whatever the cause, strategies for ameliorating both reductions and fluctuations in relationship quality are important (Lee & Bierman 2018).

Second, some students and some teachers are at greater risk of experiencing poor-quality relationships than others. For example, boys are more likely than girls to experience a negative student–teacher relationship, as are students in at-risk groups—including minority students, students from low-income families, students with disruptive behaviour, and students with learning difficulties (see McGrath & Van Bergen 2015; Roorda et al. 2011 for reviews). Worryingly, it is these same at-risk groups of students who are most likely to benefit from close, supportive and caring relationships with teachers (McGrath & Van Bergen 2015).

For teachers, a host of different risk factors emerges. Teachers with low teaching self-efficacy and teachers who provide less emotional support in the classroom are each likely to experience poor-quality relationships with their students, as are teachers with depression (Hamre et al. 2008; McGrath & Van Bergen 2017). These results hold true even when student characteristics, such as disruptive behaviour, are taken into account (that is, statistically removed from the analyses such that the unique contributions of the teacher can be determined). Teachers with more years’ experience might also be at greater risk of experiencing poor-quality student–teacher relationships (Brekelmans et al. 2005), although findings are equivocal (Hughes 2011). Interestingly, despite evidence that student gender predicts relationship quality (McGrath et al. 2017), the findings for teacher gender are more complex. Gender *matching* appears important for female teachers, who report preferences for female students, but it is not vital for male teachers (Spilt, Koomen et al. 2012).

In this chapter, we explore the characteristics of different student–teacher relationships and the contexts in which they develop. We also draw on available research evidence to identify the benefits of close and supportive student–teacher relationships for all students. We conclude the chapter by considering the practices that can help teachers to nurture close relationships with their students. In doing so, we present a

blueprint that teachers, teacher educators and researchers can use to drive new lines of questioning and troubleshoot interactional problems as they arise. We note that all students have the right to expect a close, supportive and effective relationship with their teachers, irrespective of challenging learning, developmental or behavioural characteristics (Spilt & Koomen 2009).

Characterising the Student–Teacher Relationship

Research investigating student–teacher relationships typically characterises these relationships using three relational constructs: closeness, conflict and dependency (Hughes 2011; Murray & Murray 2004; Pianta 2001; Sabol & Pianta 2012). Applying these constructs, student–teacher relationships have traditionally been classified as being either positive or negative. A positive student–teacher relationship is defined as one that is both high in closeness and low in conflict and dependency. A negative relationship, in contrast, is one that is low in closeness and high in either conflict or dependency (Hughes 2011; Pianta 2001; Pianta & Stuhlman 2004).

While student–teacher closeness has been associated with positive adjustment, and conflict with poorer adjustment, the effects of dependency on student outcomes are less clear (Hughes 2011; Murray & Murray 2004; Solheim et al. 2012). This may be because the appropriateness and function of dependency are also variable across time and contexts. Dependency refers to how reliant a student is on the teacher, and is typically considered in terms of age-appropriate behaviour. Thus, what might appear clingy or possessive for an older child may be normative for a younger child who has not yet developed strong independence. Dependency is also likely to be culturally specific, with some cultures valuing independence and autonomy more than others (Solheim et al. 2012).

Due to challenges in operationalising dependency, it has sometimes been both reframed as a neutral (and not negative) relationship construct, and omitted from reviews of student–teacher relationships and their outcomes altogether (McGrath & Van Bergen 2015; Roorda et al. 2011). Following these same lines of reasoning, we encourage teachers to view dependency not as a relationship obstacle but as a call for additional

support. Hence, if a student is particularly dependent, the teacher has a unique and much-needed opportunity to support the student’s development of self-regulation and autonomy in a way that is developmentally and culturally appropriate. We discuss strategies for addressing dependency in our final section.

Towards a more nuanced view of student–teacher relationships

Given that dependency is often omitted, positive and negative student–teacher relationships have come to be synonymous with closeness and conflict. These relationship constructs are unlikely to be dichotomous in practice, however. Although closeness is a strong marker of an emotionally positive relationship, it is entirely possible for students and teachers who share warmth and closeness to also experience significant conflict (Spilt & Koomen 2009). Thus, a dimorphic view of student–teacher relationships may overlook important nuances in the combination of qualities characterising these relationships.

In recent research, McGrath and Van Bergen (2017, 2019) presented four relationship categories, based on bisections of both closeness and conflict data. They found evidence that more than 40 per cent of relationships may be ‘atypical’, with either high closeness and high conflict (a *complicated* relationship), or low closeness and low conflict (a *reserved* relationship). Together, these atypical relationship types exceed the number of purely negative relationships (see [Table 12.1](#)).

Table 12.1: Characteristics of four student–teacher relationship types (adapted from McGrath & Van Bergen 2019)

Relationship type	Characteristics	Incidence
Positive	High in closeness and low in conflict	41.2%
Complicated	High in closeness and high in conflict	15.7%
Reserved	Low in closeness and low in conflict	25.5%

Relationship type	Characteristics	Incidence
Negative	Low in closeness and high in conflict	17.6%

The identification of at least two atypical student–teacher relationship types, complicated and reserved, highlights the need for teachers and researchers to broaden their discussions of relationships beyond the positive–negative dichotomy. This is important for two reasons. First, and despite students benefiting strongly from relational closeness, those with complicated student–teacher relationships may still require support to improve prosocial behaviour and reduce aggression. As relational closeness may be less stable than conflict (Lee & Bierman 2018), it is also possible that these same students will not experience the benefits of close relationships with other teachers. It is therefore vital that teachers do not overlook including these students in behaviour supports, despite their own feelings of closeness towards the student.

Second, students with reserved student–teacher relationships may be particularly vulnerable to negative academic and social outcomes. As reserved relationships are characterised by both low closeness and low conflict, these students may go unnoticed by teachers and receive considerably less attention, time and support than students who experience other relationship types. Compounding this risk is a possible confound between reserved student–teacher relationships and shyness. Shy students often have great difficulty in forming positive relationships with their teachers, and therefore have relationships that are neither close nor conflictual (Coplan & Rudasill 2016). Interestingly, however, they also tend to have higher levels of dependency on teachers (Arbeau et al. 2010). This dependency may be due to anxiety when interacting with peers, which leads the student to over-rely on teachers for social interaction (Arbeau et al. 2010). To ensure the development of close and supportive relationships with teachers and peers alike, such students must be identified and supported.

Student–teacher relationships in context

When considering the characteristics of different student–teacher relationships, it is important to examine the broader contexts in which those relationships occur. These broader contexts have an impact on how close and effective student–teacher relationships are, and the influence of

the student–teacher relationship on other developmental outcomes. For almost 40 years, Bronfenbrenner’s seminal ecological systems theory (1979) has been used to describe how factors relating to the individual student, his or her family, the school, the peer group and the broader community each have complex and interrelated influences on child and adolescent development. At the individual level, for example, prior educational experiences may influence a student’s developmental outcomes and their relationships, while at the peer level, the educational values and antisocial behaviours of one’s friends may be of influence. At the family level, socio-economic status and family conflict each play a role, and at the community level, student safety and community involvement are likely to be influential.

Drawing upon Bronfenbrenner’s classic work (1979), relationship scholars in the modern era have also developed ecological models of development to examine both the role of student–teacher relationships in development, and the processes and experiences that may influence relationship quality (O’Connor 2010; Pianta & Walsh 1996). Research applying ecological models of development has identified important findings for student wellbeing, including that high-stakes testing negatively impacts close student–teacher relationships (Thompson 2013), that there is a bidirectional relationship between student–teacher relationship quality and peer liking (Hughes & Chen 2011), and that a close relationship with a teacher can protect against the negative effects of a poor child–parent relationship for young children (Hughes et al. 1999).

Using ecological models of development, student–teacher relationships have increasingly been targeted as a mechanism for enhancing development for students at risk. Not only do student–teacher relationships have powerful outcomes, but they also are amenable to intervention. This means there is the potential for whole-school communities to implement initiatives designed to improve the quality of specific students’ relationships with their teachers and, in doing so, also target other child and adolescent outcomes, such as peer relationships, academic achievement and student behaviour (Quin 2017). Other contextual factors that place students at risk of negative outcomes are less readily influenced by educators within the school community (Quin 2017). It is important to remember that the outcomes of these relationship interventions are also likely to be influenced by other in-school factors, including academic climate, interpersonal safety and institutional environment (Quin et al. 2018). Thus, other approaches

might also be needed in specific cases. When relationship interventions are paired with these other approaches, the chance of positive student outcomes is high.

The role of the teacher: emotional labour, relational labour and instruction

Above we describe how student–teacher relationships are characterised by closeness and conflict, and how dependency may also drive relationship quality in some cases. We further note how relationships exist within specific ecological contexts, and how contextual factors such as individual student or teacher characteristics, peer and family relationships, and school and community structures might also influence student–teacher relationships and student outcomes. As many readers of this book are pre-service and existing teachers, there is a need to also consider the work of the teacher specifically. Here, we focus on the role of the teacher in managing and building close and effective student–teacher relationships.

Teaching is often described as a type of *emotional labour*, requiring teachers to manage their emotions in accordance with professional rules and expectations. This classification does not fully consider the longitudinal and interpersonal nature of classroom dynamics, however. Given the inherently relational work of teachers, we identify teaching as also being a kind of *relational labour*. In addition to being required to manage their emotions to conform to predetermined rules, teachers are expected to have superior relational skills that allow them to form close relationships with a diverse range of students. Hence, the teachers who are most likely to be considered ‘effective’ by colleagues, students and parents are those whom students are able to connect with and relate to on a personal level. In this chapter, we use the term ‘relational labour’ to frame the practices that promote relational closeness between teachers and students.

Of course, relational work is not a teacher’s only task. Perhaps most prominent in popular discourse is the expectation that teachers should provide instruction that aligns with the prescribed academic curriculum. Yet relationships and instructional work are mutually dependent. When students struggle to understand a difficult concept, for example, those with close student–teacher relationships are likely to feel comfortable expressing frustration or difficulty in a safe and secure environment. The

teacher is then afforded the opportunity to offer emotional support while simultaneously providing more nuanced instruction. When there is a mismatch between a student's psychological needs and learning, teachers who are close to that student may be better able to disentangle these competing motivations. For this reason, the overlap between relational and instructional work is critical (Nie & Lau 2009).

Benefits of close student–teacher relationships for students, teachers and society

Just as student–teacher relationships are multifaceted, so too are their benefits. Below we highlight short- and long-term benefits of a high-quality student–teacher relationship for students, for teachers and for society. We note that these benefits are powerful and interlinked, with strong bodies of evidence to support them. Drawing on these benefits, we highlight the need for close student–teacher relationships to be prioritised in pre-service teacher training, whole-school interventions and broader educational policies.

Benefits for students. Close and supportive student–teacher relationships have powerfully important impacts on student outcomes. Students benefit from such relationships in the form of improved wellbeing and psychological engagement, more appropriate classroom behaviours, stronger academic performance and closer peer relationships (Hamre & Pianta 2001; McGrath & Van Bergen 2015; Quin 2017). In contrast, poor student–teacher relationships contribute to low academic achievement and greater disciplinary infractions, even when student behaviour is accounted for (Hamre & Pianta 2001). High-quality student–teacher relationships are also protective (McGrath & Van Bergen 2015). Students who have experienced high-quality student–teacher relationships are less likely to be absent from school, less likely to be suspended and less likely to drop out of school (De Wit et al. 2010; Rumberger 2011).

The benefits of close and supportive student–teacher relationships are particularly important for students who are otherwise vulnerable. For example, Meehan and colleagues (2003) found evidence of reduced aggression in students with supportive teacher relationships, with particularly strong effects for students in minority groups. Close relationships with teachers can also buffer the detrimental effects of negative parent–child relationships (Hughes et al. 1999). Finally,

students who do not experience positive adult role models outside of school may be particularly likely to turn to teachers to model a host of positive social processes and behaviours in the classroom (Catalano et al. 2004). Although a legacy of successive close relationships is optimal (Lee & Bierman 2018), just one teacher can make a powerful difference. McGrath and Van Bergen's (2015) review of 92 studies on student–teacher relationships highlights the finding that even a single close relationship can serve protective and predictive functions for students who are at risk.

Benefits for teachers. Although student–teacher relationships are typically discussed in terms of their benefits for students, they are also important for teachers. Teachers report considerable distress from managing disruptive classroom behaviours (Beaman et al. 2007), with long-term wellbeing and employment outcomes. In a large-scale study of 2569 Norwegian teachers, for example, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) found that problems with student discipline left teachers feeling emotionally exhausted, and this exhaustion in turn predicted both lower job satisfaction and higher motivation to leave the teaching profession. If close and supportive student–teacher relationships can arrest these behaviours, as we show above, the benefits for teachers and their schools are enormous.

Closeness with students is also an important source of teacher wellbeing more broadly (Milatz et al. 2015), and teachers typically report finding the relational aspects of their work highly rewarding (Gallant & Riley 2017). Given the benefits of closeness for students and teachers alike, strategies are needed to identify teachers who commonly experience lower levels of closeness. Although there is some counter-intuitive evidence that low levels of closeness may protect teachers from emotional exhaustion (Milatz et al. 2015), this strategy is likely to backfire. Low closeness with students is associated with teachers' feelings of helplessness (Spilt & Koomen 2009) and, as we show above, also places students at greater risk of negative outcomes. A more effective strategy, therefore, is to provide direct and indirect support for teachers as they engage in relationship-building and relational labour. We discuss this support in our final section.

Benefits for society. Over and above the benefits of close student–teacher relationships for individual students, teachers and schools, there are also significant flow-on benefits for society more broadly. We note above, for example, that close and supportive student–teacher relationships can significantly reduce students' aggressive behaviour.

Given evidence that aggression at school predicts long-term unemployment and criminal activity (Kokko & Pulkkinen 2000), these early relationships may have much larger economic and social-justice benefits for individuals and communities. In addition, for students with high levels of aggression, there may be an indirect effect. Close student–teacher relationships support a reduction in aggressive behaviour, and a reduction in aggressive behaviour is in turn likely to support more positive and enjoyable peer interactions in the school context. We also note above that students who experience close relationships with their teachers are less likely to truant, to be suspended or to drop out of school. This may be because such students feel a greater sense of belonging at school. Whatever the cause, such trends have important societal outcomes: truancy and dropout are associated with diminished physical and emotional health (and, thus, greater societal health burden), reduced academic opportunities, poor vocational opportunities and increased mortality (Belfield & Levin 2007). The greater engagement students have with school, the stronger the social benefits overall.

Nurturing Close and Supportive Student–Teacher Relationships

In the final section of this chapter, we consider what teachers can do to build strong relationships with their students. We draw on our own research conducted with collaborators in Australia, and on research conducted by other teams internationally. Consistent with the view that teaching is a kind of *relational labour*, we organise this section by strategies and approaches that can be used to build closeness, reduce conflict and respond to dependency, as well as schoolwide approaches that can be taken to support teachers and create a positive school environment in which respectful and healthy relationships are prioritised.

In considering how teachers can best build close relationships with their students, it is important to also consider how the student–teacher relationship changes over time. Research focusing on the progression of individual student–teacher relationships across the school year is limited, yet it suggests that there are multiple opportunities to renegotiate relationship boundaries. In a longitudinal case study of a disruptive student and his teacher, Newberry (2010) describes four relationship phases:

1. *an appraisal phase*, where the student and teacher gather information about one another;
2. *an agreement phase*, where routines, expectations and interactional styles are established;
3. *a testing phase*, where boundaries are explored and re-established; and
4. *a planning phase*, where the student and teacher reflect on their past experiences and establish expectations for the future.

Critically, each phase offers opportunities for individual or whole-school interventions. Put simply, therefore, it is never too late to enhance student–teacher relationship quality.

Building closeness

Closeness within the student–teacher relationship is supported by care, warmth and open communication (Pianta 2001). Students are likely to feel closer to teachers who express an interest in their personal lives, who offer support when needed, and who care about their wellbeing. They are less likely to feel close to teachers with whom they clash.

Across the past ten years, a range of interventions has been developed to support the emergence of warm and supportive student–teacher interactions (Sabol & Pianta 2012). These interventions typically enjoy moderate support. In the ‘Banking Time’ intervention for younger children, for example, teachers work one-on-one with a student they are worried about to observe the student’s actions and emotions during play (Driscoll & Pianta 2010). To demonstrate emotional sensitivity and care, the teacher then narrates the child’s actions and emotions back to the student in an interested tone of voice. After just six weeks, teachers who participate in the Banking Time intervention report higher levels of closeness with the targeted student, increased frustration tolerance themselves and more successful classroom interactions (Driscoll & Pianta 2010). In the ‘My Teaching Partner—Secondary’ intervention for secondary students, teachers are offered strategies to increase closeness and boost their instructional success simultaneously (Mikami et al. 2011). They may, for example, be encouraged to ask about students’ extracurricular interests, and then to incorporate these interests into their teaching. Such interventions require the dedicated focus of a teacher on particular students, yet are otherwise easy to implement.

Interestingly, and as alluded to in the Banking Time intervention, teachers’ own attitudes and emotional responses are also important in

facilitating relationship closeness. When students are disruptive, teachers who make external attributions for this disruption and who express high emotional competence are likely to experience closer and more enjoyable relationships than those who do not (McGrath & Van Bergen 2019). Drawing on the notion of relational labour, such teachers may regulate their own emotional responses to frustration in order to nurture their ongoing relationships with students. They also appear to be more likely to express emotional self-efficacy: a belief that they are capable of regulating their emotional reactions and supporting students to regulate theirs. For teachers who have lower emotional self-efficacy, engaging with psychologists (or other expert coaches) in emotion-reframing strategies and self-efficacy interventions may be beneficial for both themselves and their students.

Finally, when considering how best to build close and supportive relationships for at-risk groups, we encourage teachers not to forget about the students in their classes who are especially shy. Shy students do not typically experience high levels of conflict with their teachers, and, thus, they are more readily overlooked. Such students are highly likely to turn to teachers for emotional support when they are feeling anxious about interacting with peers, however, and there is good evidence that relational closeness with a teacher can protect shy students from peer rejection and school avoidance (Arbeau et al. 2010).

Reducing conflict

In public discourse, student–teacher conflict is often attributed to disruptive and challenging student behaviours, such as calling out in class, shouting, hitting and swearing. Consistent, systematic and evidence-based behavioural interventions for students who exhibit disruptive and challenging behaviours are critically important. Students themselves often report a need for such support, with suspended students reporting that they would have been less likely to be suspended if they had learned alternative strategies to manage their behaviours, received additional assistance with schoolwork and been given support to manage stressors at home (Quin & Hemphill 2014). Interestingly, however, research has shown that just over half (53 per cent) of the variance in teachers’ ratings of conflict can be attributed to student behaviour (Hamre et al. 2008). Other factors include teachers’ own mental health and self-efficacy, with teachers who feel less able to manage their classroom and less able to motivate students also reporting higher levels

of conflict with the students in their class (Hamre et al. 2008). That these ratings of conflict exist over and above students' own disruptive behaviour suggests that initiatives and interventions to support teachers' own wellbeing and self-efficacy may have powerful implications for relational conflict, too. Even when particular students exhibit disruptive or challenging behaviour that is slow to change, teachers' beliefs and actions are powerful and important.

One mistake that teachers may make in an attempt to reduce potential conflict is to give a pre-emptive warning or reprimand. Yet our own research reveals that this approach may backfire. To better understand students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers, Van Bergen and colleagues (in review) conducted interviews with 96 Australian students in middle childhood and adolescence (Years 3 to 9). Some of the participants were enrolled in alternative school settings for students with behavioural difficulties, giving unique insight into the factors driving relationship quality for both mainstream and non-mainstream groups. Interestingly, although students themselves varied in age, school context and propensity for disruptive behaviour, the factors underpinning their perceptions of high- and low-quality relationships were remarkably consistent. Students reported close, supportive relationships with teachers who they perceived as being kind, caring, helpful or humorous, and negative, conflictual relationships with teachers who they perceived as being hostile or unjust (Van Bergen et al. submitted). Importantly, reports of injustice highlighted pre-emptive discipline as a key source of conflict:

Well, she always picked me out, as well, for misbehaving, so I got in a lot of trouble for that, but . . . like, a lot of people were just doing a lot worse than I was doing, but she was like, no, no, you've been bad before. (Sean, aged fifteen)

One reason that pre-emptive discipline is so likely to contribute to relational conflict is that it conveys negative expectations. In related research, findings over several decades have also highlighted the detrimental effect of negative expectations on academic achievement and progression (Rubie-Davies et al. 2006). To support student behaviour, reduce relational conflict and enhance other developmental outcomes, positive expectations and optimism are critical.

Responding to dependency

Throughout this chapter, we urge teachers to view dependency as a neutral relationship attribute. Specifically, we suggest that dependency should not be seen as a relationship barrier but as an opportunity to provide support for students who require it. In addressing dependency effectively, therefore, it is important to also diagnose the root cause. If the dependency is developmentally or contextually appropriate, and does not cause relational problems, then there is no particular reason to intervene. If, however, there are negative implications for the student, then intervention is appropriate.

Where students are overly dependent on teachers for organisational support, the focus for teachers should be on encouraging and scaffolding the students' autonomous and independent classroom participation. Where students are particularly shy, however, a different approach is needed. It is recommended that teachers refrain from asking too many questions of shy students directly, especially in front of others, and instead engage in conversation with shy students when others are not nearby. This allows shy students to gradually develop social confidence before being asked to speak in front of the class (Evans 2001), and also supports the development of closeness. Although these two approaches differ, they are consistent in that the needs of the individual student are identified and his or her own skills are supported.

Supporting Teachers

Thus far, our recommendations for enhancing close relationships, reducing conflict and responding to dependency have centred on strategies that individual teachers can use when interacting with students. Both in Australia and internationally, there has been a tendency to place the responsibility for improved student outcomes on 'super' teachers without addressing broader, systemic issues (Mockler 2014). Yet relationships and student outcomes are a function of the broader teaching context, and it is the responsibility of the entire school community to create an environment in which close and nurturing relationships with all children are modelled, supported and encouraged, and where conflictual and reserved relationships are addressed sensitively and urgently. An explicit whole-school approach is invaluable.

Given the heavy emotional toll that teachers may feel when managing student behaviour, interactions and relationships, the support of school

leaders (i.e. principals and executive staff) is critical. School leaders can play a vital role in creating a whole-school climate that is emotionally positive and supportive, and which promotes teacher efficacy (Wang & Degol 2016). Among Australian teachers who had left the profession, for example, Gallant and Riley (2017) found evidence of significant stress and burnout due to a perception of poor support, excessive workloads and short-term contracts. Although many of these stressors are structural, and beyond the control of any one school, leaders can provide emotional support to students, staff members and parents in the school community who are experiencing undue stress by addressing their concerns sensitively and directly. At an administrative level, school leaders should also seek to decrease those extraneous workload demands that are within their control, and to set clear behavioural expectations and values for the school community. Finally, leaders can demonstrate confidence in their teachers by allowing them greater autonomy where possible. Leaders who are effective in providing timely direction, intervention and support will create opportunities for teachers to invest greater time and energy in building relationships with their own students.

In addition to the support of school leaders, it is highly advantageous for teachers to have the support of a collaborative pastoral-care team that includes school psychologists and other specialist staff. Ideally, this pastoral-care team should work directly with school leaders to provide holistic support to the entire school community. For students, of course, psychological support is critical, and—as we note above—even highly disruptive students frequently identify this as a need (Quin & Hemphill 2014). Yet teachers, too, need support, and this is particularly the case when they are charged with managing complex student behaviours. Worryingly, school psychologists typically have limited time in which to work with teachers and their students (Tegethoff et al. 2014). In many cases, this means that teachers must manage at least some complex student behaviours with limited support for their own psychological needs. To address this problem, we advocate for widespread increases in educational funding for qualified specialist school staff.

Conclusion

Across this chapter, we have identified the key characteristics of close student–teacher relationships and discussed the benefit for students who

experience a close relationship with their teachers. Given the value of close student–teacher relationships for all students—irrespective of their learning, developmental and behavioural characteristics—we suggest that schools focus on relationships as an essential priority.

To support this goal, we have reviewed a variety of interrelated strategies and approaches for building close relationships. We see, for example, that teachers can begin to build a close relationship with any child—even if the child is at risk in other ways—by simply expressing care and positive regard for that child. This is an important finding, because it positions the quality of each student–teacher relationship within the teachers’ sphere of influence. Of course, the expression of care can sometimes seem extremely challenging, particularly in the face of chronic misbehaviour. The research clearly shows that close and supportive relationships between students and their teachers are both necessary and valuable, however. Moreover, they also help to mitigate misbehaviour. Teachers who manage, develop and pursue close and supportive relationships with their students are often adept at considering a variety of explanations for their students’ behaviour and in regulating their own emotional reactions carefully. Schools and communities must look for ways to support teachers in this task, such that no students (or teachers) fall through the cracks.

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CHAPTER 13

Promoting student wellbeing and mental health through social and emotional learning

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Teaching and learning build on the components of social, emotional and academic wellbeing (Durlak et al. 2011). Students' social and emotional capabilities can support and enable their learning; however, they can also hinder students' academic progress. Given that emotions and relationships directly impact learning and engagement, it is important that educators address these areas for the overall benefit of students (Durlak et al. 2011), thereby encouraging a 'whole-child' view of student progress. Social and emotional strategies have shown positive impacts on children's social-emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes, including the classroom environment (McCormick et al. 2015). This chapter will provide best-practice ways to create a learning community that is inclusive of all students, a community where students are valued and feel safe and supported. In particular, the chapter will explore why and how teachers should implement positive social and emotional learning practices that promote student wellbeing and mental health in the classroom and schoolwide.

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to learn how to address the complex situations that students face in terms of their academic and social relationships, and their mental wellbeing (Durlak et al. 2011; Zins et al. 2007). SEL provides structures to help students develop emotional and social capabilities, such as understanding and responding to emotions, setting and achieving goals, showing empathy for others, developing and sustaining positive relationships, and contributing to reliable decision-making (ACARA 2013; Taylor et al. 2017). SEL helps individuals establish a sense of self-worth and self-awareness, and contributes to the development of their personal identity. It can also build and deepen a positive school culture and climate.

SEL, Student Wellbeing and Positive Mental Health

In the 21st century, a key challenge for educators involves meeting the diverse and increasingly complex psychosocial and emotional profiles of students in early-years, primary-school and secondary-school settings. When teaching children with diverse learning profiles, educators may come across children with or without disability; children who might be exposed to risk factors associated with trauma backgrounds; children living with a parental mental illness; as well as children who are developmentally vulnerable due to the difficulties associated with poverty and/or social disadvantage. School settings are traditionally seen as a secure base for all children (Whitley et al. 2013). Knowledge, understanding and a repertoire of skills that are sensitive to the social and emotional profiles of all children are central to teaching diverse learners. Social and emotional learning has consistently been identified as an important component of learning for all children—regardless of background or disability—in terms of improving outcomes at school and later in life (Corcoran & Slavin 2016).

Curriculum frameworks

Often social and emotional learning is referred to as the ‘missing link’ in education, frequently taught in isolation from academic work (Elias 2009). However, in recent years there has been a notable shift in education policy worldwide to articulate the central role of schools in supporting emotional and social competencies of children and adolescents. This is evident in well-documented policy and practice frameworks. For example, social and personal skills are emphasised in the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities (ACARA 2013). In the Australian Curriculum, students develop their social and emotional capabilities as they learn about themselves and those around them. They manage their relationships, school and home life, as well as their learning. Social and emotional learning is a core foundation for student learning, engagement and active citizenship (ACARA 2013). The Personal and Social Capability section of the Australian Curriculum General Capabilities states:

Students with well-developed social and emotional skills find it easier to manage themselves, relate to others, develop resilience and a sense of self-worth, resolve conflict, engage in teamwork and feel positive about themselves and the world around them. (ACARA 2013: n.p.)

Policy frameworks

The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) states that social and emotional learning encourages individuals to be more confident and able students who ‘have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing’, with a sense of hope and ‘optimism about their lives and the future’ (MCEETYA 2008: 9). While on a societal level, it supports students to ‘form and maintain healthy relationships’ and prepares them ‘for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members’ (MCEETYA 2008: 9).

Impact of SEL on students’ outcomes

The Grattan Report (Goss et al. 2017) highlighted that many Australian students are consistently disengaged, and it estimated that approximately

40 per cent of all students in Australian classrooms are unproductive in a given year. Furthermore, disengaged adolescents are more likely to participate in multiple high-risk behaviours, such as substance abuse, violence, self-harm, suicide ideation and sexual risk-taking, including underage and/or unprotected sex (Hale et al. 2014). Children with limited opportunities to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with their peers and teachers are more likely to be exposed to a range of personal, social and academic difficulties at school and later in life.

Reviews and meta-analyses examining the impact of school-based SEL programs have found that well-designed and well-implemented SEL programs are associated with positive social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children and adolescents (Corcoran & Slavin 2016; Durlak et al. 2011; Jones & Bouffard 2012). In a meta-analysis examining links between SEL programs and student engagement across primary- and secondary-school settings, for example, Roorda and colleagues (2017) found strong associations between effective SEL programs and student engagement. Other research has demonstrated that mastery of social and emotional competencies is associated with student wellbeing and improved academic outcomes (Greenberg et al. 2017). In a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of 50 years of research that explored the effectiveness of school-based SEL interventions on academic outcomes in pre-K–12 classrooms, Corcoran and colleagues (2018) reported that SEL evidence-based interventions produced a positive medium-sized effect for reading, mathematics and science.

SEL literature suggests that self-awareness, social awareness, self-management and organisation, problem-solving, and building and maintaining relationships are critical skills for mastery of social and emotional competencies (Durlak et al. 2011; Jones & Bouffard 2012). As such, effective school-based SEL programs are developed with the view that academic skills are intrinsically linked to children's ability to manage and regulate emotions, and to communicate and problem-solve challenges and interpersonal conflicts. However, the scope and focus of SEL programs can vary considerably within school contexts (Corcoran & Slavin 2016). Most SEL programs tend to focus on emotional awareness and emotional regulation, alongside cognitive skills that support executive functioning, develop prosocial skills and address aggressive behaviour problems. Some programs might target self-regulated learning with the use of social-skill instruction to address behaviour, discipline, safety and academic outcomes. Others focus on educational interventions, such as bullying prevention (Tucker &

Maunder 2015), character education, conflict resolution and social-skills training (Durlak et al. 2011; Greenberg et al. 2017).

Given the differences in terminology and framing, it can be complex for school leaders and classroom teachers to navigate the identification and implementation of SEL programs to facilitate social and emotional learning opportunities across a continuum of need for diverse learners. To address some of the implementation challenges for schools, research has highlighted the need for effective SEL programs to be better integrated into education systems and practice. Integrated SEL programs provide an evidence base for improving student SEL outcomes more than stand-alone programs designed as intensive courses that are offered for blocks of time and implemented by external facilitators (Corcoran & Slavin 2016). Payton and colleagues' (2008) study demonstrated that SEL programs in primary and secondary settings need a multi-component framework that effectively integrates and targets SEL at a schoolwide level and within individual classrooms (Durlak et al. 2011; Jones & Bouffard 2012).

Reasons for focusing on SEL

Fostering and documenting a student's skills in the core social and emotional learning components can contribute to positive outcomes for a student's academic achievement, mental health and school engagement (Payton et al. 2008). In one study, for example, there were improvements in attitudes about self, others and school—as well as gains on academic assessments—when social and emotional skills were actively taught (Frydenberg & Muller 2017). There also can be a reduced risk of student academic failure and a decrease in behavioural challenges and emotional distress at school (Taylor et al. 2017). Finally, the development of SEL in the early school years can have long-term impacts into adulthood (Jones et al. 2015). For example, it can lead to a higher likelihood of an individual attaining a university degree or adult employment, and can reduce the chance of substance abuse or having issues with the law (Jones et al. 2015). Not only does teaching SEL have a positive impact on student learning (Durlak et al. 2011), but it also has a positive impact on teacher satisfaction and SEL. Research suggests that the use of SEL strategies has a positive influence on teachers' general teaching practices and their wider social conduct (Larsen & Samdal 2012). In a study by Larsen and Samdal (2012), for example, most educators became fairer and more student-focused in their teaching practices, more socially

capable and more aware of their students' profiles and potential challenges as a result of SEL strategies.

Schoolwide and Classroom Approaches

Schools can play a key role in providing students with the opportunity to gain greater social and emotional awareness through positive learning practices that promote student wellbeing and positive mental health in the classroom. However, not all SEL programs are evidence-based. Evidence-based programs are based on rigorous study of the effects or outcomes of specific interventions that report reliable and consistently positive changes (Durlak et al. 2011; Frydenberg & Muller 2017; Payton et al. 2008; Taylor et al. 2017). Key components of SEL programs and practices are largely informed by psychology (Zins et al. 2007) and neuroscience (Shonkoff et al. 2009). In terms of efficacy, research findings vary depending on the design and delivery of the programs. For example, SEL programs could be delivered by teachers or by non-school personnel in a format that supplements academic curricula, or they could be stand-alone programs with unclear links to the academic curricula. SEL program delivery can also vary in terms of frequency. Some, for example, might be delivered on a weekly basis, while others might be delivered as a block of time where SEL is taught over four to six sessions.

Programs also vary in design. Some SEL programs focus on one set of skills, such as recognising and expressing emotions, while others are broader and might include executive function or cognitive regulation. Programs focused on prevention tend to emphasise competencies related to building relationships, managing interpersonal conflict and building resilience. Research has shown that these SEL skills are important in programs that aim to reduce the incidence of bullying in schools and improve the likelihood of positive student outcomes and wellbeing (Greenberg et al. 2003; Marzano et al. 2005). In a meta-analysis examining 231 school-based SEL interventions, Durlak and colleagues (2011) found that SEL programs were more effective in improving student wellbeing and academic success when they were better integrated across school and classroom contexts. However, overall there tends to be a lack of research on the effectiveness of some specific SEL

programs, potentially impacting our understanding of whether SEL programs are efficacious or not.

School-based social and emotional programs

The growing interest in SEL programs in schools is driven by research that highlights the importance of recognising and understanding the different and diverse profiles of all learners (Yang et al 2018). In the contemporary classroom, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model provides a useful framework for understanding the many interrelated biological and environmental factors that can have an impact on students' personal and academic success (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006). From this perspective, children might be struggling at school and may not be meeting their academic potential because certain life events and/or family circumstances are impacting their home environment. We know that family circumstances—such as parental disability, chronic illness, mental-health concerns, domestic violence and social disadvantage (for example, unemployment, poverty or homelessness)—expose children to multiple risk factors that can adversely influence their wellbeing and learning, both at school and later in life (Greenberg et al. 2017; Zins et al. 2007).

Jones and Bouffard (2012) argue that schools should take a new approach to implementing SEL programs. In addition to mapping the key components of SEL programs, they propose a multicomponent framework that addresses the contextual factors that influence social and emotional development and competency in children and adolescents. The SEL framework presented by Jones and Bouffard (2012) highlights the importance of integrating the teaching and reinforcement of SEL skills into daily interactions and practices with students, teachers, school leaders and parents. A key feature of the framework is that it is underpinned by an understanding that children's SEL skills develop in a complex system of contexts, interactions and relationships. The model outlines three domains of SEL skills: emotional processes, social/interpersonal skills and cognitive regulation. This includes short- and long-term outcomes of SEL, such as academic achievement (e.g. grades, standardised tests of academic skills), behavioural adjustment (e.g. taking others' perspectives, getting along well with other children, solving conflicts, and exhibiting less aggression and behavioural problems) and emotional health and wellbeing (e.g. lower levels of depression and social isolation). Within a school and classroom context,

the model includes school culture and climate, as well as structural features of schools, such as schedule and staffing patterns.

Given the systemic nature of classrooms and schools, evidence suggests that effective SEL approaches should be targeted unilaterally across school contexts (primary and secondary), with the aim of consistently supporting ongoing opportunities for development at different stages of schooling. SEL approaches are strengthened when schools supplement programs with a focus on the daily interactions and practices of teachers across school and individual classroom contexts.

Schoolwide approaches

From a broad systemic perspective, research suggests that the most meaningful way SEL efforts can effectively influence a range of positive student outcomes is to address issues that stem from school culture (Hemmelgarn et al. 2006) and school climate (Thapa et al. 2012). At an organisational level, culture and climate describe the consistent and regular patterns that characterise how members of the school staff (leaders, teachers and non-teaching personnel) think, feel, interact and behave (Durlak et al. 2011; Jones & Bouffard 2012). Culture is shaped by the school's values and expectations (Yang et al. 2018), whereas climate is mainly associated with teaching practices, attitudes to diversity, and the interactions and relationships between school leaders, teachers, students and parents (Thapa et al. 2012). Specifically, school climate is influenced by the combined impact of these factors on student learning and wellbeing.

As such, a schoolwide approach to SEL can influence changes to culture and climate by magnifying and spreading the positive influence of students and adults with strong SEL skills. However, in order for teachers to help students build social and emotional skills and competencies, it is vital for teachers to have a repertoire of strong SEL skills themselves. Building on [Chapter 10](#), it is therefore critical that school administrators and leaders recognise this dynamic and support SEL initiatives across the whole school community by ensuring that all staff have access to professional-development training and SEL resources.

The Five Key Competencies of SEL

Evidence-based SEL programs are designed and implemented so that the teaching and reinforcement of these skills are integrated into daily interactions and practices with students in the classroom. Five key competencies are taught explicitly and implicitly, practised and reinforced through SEL programming (CASEL 2015) in primary- and secondary-school settings. The five competencies are emotional self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-regulation and relationships skills. Teachers can help students develop social and emotional skills by explicitly teaching these key competencies through formal lessons and intentional teaching.

1. Emotional self-awareness

The aim of teaching emotional self-awareness in children and adolescents is to help them identify and recognise their own feelings; build a feelings vocabulary to help improve emotional literacy; express feelings and find ways to assess the intensity of feelings; understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and reactions; identify patterns in their own emotional life and reactions; and learn to recognise similar patterns in others. Teachers can also help their students to recognise strengths and weaknesses in themselves and others. While this helps students to build important insights and to develop a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence, self-awareness is equally about developing realistic expectations of oneself. Collectively, these skills are foundational for building emotional intelligence in children and adolescents, as well as adults.

2. Social awareness

Teachers can teach skills that support the development of social awareness in students. For example, teachers can help students learn to read and interpret social cues; respect and appreciate differences in how people feel and think about things; understand and develop empathy by taking another's perspective; understand how someone else is feeling in a particular situation, and respond with care and sensitivity; and understand social and behavioural norms in their community (for example, what is and is not acceptable behaviour).

3. Responsible decision-making

Teaching critical-thinking skills, evaluation and reflection is a central component of academic curricula. When children and adolescents are given opportunities to practise problem-solving and responsible decision-making alongside social and emotional learning, they become better equipped to know if a thought or feeling is ‘ruling’ a decision. Applying these insights to issues that involve risk-taking behaviour (such as substance abuse and unprotected sex) is particularly important in adolescence. For children and adolescents, an important part of responsible decision-making is taking personal and ethical responsibility, recognising the consequences of one’s own decisions and actions, accepting feelings (good or bad) and moods resulting from decisions and actions, and following through on commitments (e.g. to study).

4. Self-regulation

The integration of emotional self-regulation skills has become a priority in school-based SEL programs. Research has shown that unmanaged emotional reactions to stress not only lead to behavioural problems in young people but can also create physiological conditions that inhibit learning and development (Bothe et al. 2014; Morrish et al. 2018). Teachers can help children and adolescents by teaching strategies to control impulses and delay gratification; handle stress through exercise, mindfulness and relaxation methods; manage feelings by monitoring ‘self-talk’ to catch negative messages, such as internal put-downs; realise what is behind a feeling (for example, the hurt that underlies anger); practise positive ‘self-talk’, using positive internal dialogue as a way to cope with challenges or to reinforce one’s own prosocial behaviour; use steps for problem-solving and decision-making that involve impulse control, goal-setting, identifying alternative actions and anticipating consequences; and build resilience through persistence and self-motivation.

5. Relationship skills

Positive interpersonal relationships are related to a range of wellbeing indicators and can provide valuable resources to ‘buffer’ individuals from difficult circumstances (Appelqvist-Schmidlechner et al. 2016). Teachers can teach children how to deal with disagreements and help them develop the skills they need to nurture effective interpersonal

relationships. Teachers can also facilitate opportunities to develop, build and maintain relationships by teaching children to talk about their feelings effectively; become a good listener and question-asker; distinguish between what someone does or says, and one's own reactions or judgements about it; send 'I' messages instead of assigning blame; use effective non-verbal behaviours, such as communicating through eye contact, facial expressiveness, tone of voice, gestures and so on; and use effective verbal behaviours, such as making clear requests, responding effectively to criticism, resisting negative influences, asking for help when needed, helping others and participating in positive peer groups.

Strategies to develop SEL competencies

The five key SEL competencies of emotional self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, self-regulation and relationship skills are foundational in children's primary years (Woolf 2013). These competencies can be reinforced and strengthened throughout their primary and secondary years by implicit teaching approaches that recognise when opportunities and needs arise, and by using everyday strategies to help students learn. These strategies include:

- *building relationships*: teachers can encourage social norms and expectations related to establishing and maintaining relationships with peers and adults (see [Chapter 12](#));
- *teachable moments*: identifying and utilising teachable moments, that is, the explicit application and extension of SEL lesson content to other contexts;
- *teacher modelling*: teachers can help influence and modify how students relate to each other and adults through modelling social and emotional skills through positive interactions with students, colleagues and parents on a day-to-day basis; and
- *setting the tone*: teachers can set an example of how to manage emotions, stress and conflict through working collaboratively and cooperating with others to problem-solve and negotiate mutually fair resolutions.

It is important to note that students' emotions in the classroom (e.g. boredom, disengagement) should not be confused with their emotion skills (i.e. social and emotional skills), and, in turn, emotion skills themselves should not be confused with teaching approaches designed to

enhance these skills (e.g. social and emotional learning programs). For example, disengagement is an emotional response/reaction, but it is not necessarily reflective of students' emotional skills (to which SEL refers). Collaborative-learning strategies are evidence-based inclusive teaching practices that actively and explicitly promote and encourage the development of SEL skills, applying the above SEL strategies. However, these learning strategies may not be of benefit to all students. If a teacher is cultivating positive student–teacher relationships (see [Chapter 12](#)), then they are likely to be aware of the strategies that would or would not work for their students. For example, with a student who may not engage well with group work, teachers should adjust the task or reconsider this approach.

Collaborative-learning strategies

Collaborative-learning strategies involve and encourage peer-to-peer interaction, rather than focus on teacher-centric communication. Collaborative-learning strategies offer students the opportunity to develop SEL skills while learning new knowledge. Effective SEL strategies provide students with a chance to learn and apply their personal and social skills, and to practise for future social situations. Collaborative-learning tasks necessitate a high level of organisation from the teacher, as they need to facilitate and monitor students' interactions both with each other and with the academic task at hand. The teacher is an important part of the effectiveness of delivery. The most successful SEL programs are the ones that offer teachers professional development in how to plan and provide SEL in academic activities (Natvig et al. 2003).

Examples of collaborative-learning strategies include student-to-student activities such as role-play and simulation, critical-thinking tasks, skills-development exercises and themed games, paired sharing, small-group work, problem-solving discussions, scenario-based discussions, storytelling, experiential activities and class-wide discussion. Many SEL skills are developed while using collaborative-learning strategies. These include teaching students how to regulate negative emotions, take turns and share, and support responses and interactions with each other (Hromek & Roffey 2009). Teachers and students who are less familiar with using collaborative-learning strategies may need to spend time establishing classroom behavioural expectations, agreements and/or norms for interaction and collaboration; explicit teaching about the use

of social and personal skills in paired and group work may also be necessary.

Evidence-based Recommendations

From the aforementioned research and practice, there are four key recommendations for teachers, leaders and policymakers to promote SEL and positive mental health in the classroom and schoolwide.

1. Challenging the academic/non-academic divide in education

Effectively educating all students requires academic and social, emotional and psychological engagement from students, staff, leadership and families. SEL skills are fundamentally interconnected and equally dependent, and they should not be implemented separately from one another. Social competencies are key to a student's chance to learn and productively engage with the school community. SEL skills should be taught explicitly and be reflected and reinforced in school practices and in curriculum planning. To reduce the academic/non-academic divide, educators may consider assessment processes that reinforce the progress of SEL skills, support students to apply the skills they have developed and show the ways in which education is collaborative and interactive.

2. Developing social, emotional and wellbeing school policies

Policies that support social, emotional and psychological wellbeing are important, as they establish processes and procedures that set a standard of expectation for the school community. All areas of school life are vital to a successful student's learning experience. Incorporating SEL and mental-health policy alongside educational domains offers a school and its members direction, and ensures that every member of the school community is responsible for creating a positive, safe and inclusive learning environment that is preventive in nature.

3. Establishing practices that maintain relationships and provide mental wellbeing

Some of the most frequently used methods to address student discipline can segregate students from their peers and teachers. For example, suspending or excluding students from their school provides little to no chance for students to grow from or repair their actions (Graham 2018). It also does not offer emotional help. Moreover, students who are at risk—for example, children with disability, and those who are exposed to risk factors associated with their backgrounds—may be disproportionately affected by punitive or zero-tolerance practices. This potentially pushes them into the ‘school to prison pipeline’ (Christle et al. 2005), which in turn does not address the challenging or stressful experiences that may result in behavioural concerns for these students.

4. Supporting educators to become skilled in social and emotional competencies

The use of SEL practices and collaborative-teaching strategies in curriculum development is not the norm for some teachers, schools and communities. Therefore, to deliver SEL curriculum confidently and effectively, teachers need to have adequate time to prepare their curriculum and lessons. They also need continuing professional development to help grow their SEL skills to cultivate classrooms and schools that support the emotional and social needs of students, alongside their academic needs. All educators need to understand the policy rationale and positive benefits of SEL approaches for the teacher, student and school (Payton et al. 2008). Pre-service teachers should have access to increased expertise and knowledge development of SEL skills through their teacher-education programs and professional-experience placements. Confident and effective delivery of SEL programs requires leadership that supports teachers to engage students actively and experientially in the SEL process during and outside of school—encouraging the infusion of SEL in curriculum development.

Conclusion

Research shows that meeting students' social and emotional needs has a positive impact on their academic achievement, future outcomes and mental health. SEL should not be an add-on to the academic goal of education or taught in isolation from learning; rather, it should be used throughout the curriculum and considered in planning. The social and emotional aspect of learning is interdependent with academic achievement. What matters is whether schools take advantage of these opportunities to educate the 'whole child' and provide students with the tools they need to flourish in school, and as citizens of the world. SEL provides an efficient means to address academic, social, emotional and mental-wellbeing needs, while also preparing students to be personally and socially reliable, self-aware and responsive to themselves, their teachers, the school and their community. Every interaction presents an opportunity for students, teachers and leaders to model adaptive behaviours, build SEL skills and foster healthy relationships.

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CHAPTER 14

Developing productive partnerships with parents and carers

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Parents and those who do the work of parents, such as grandparents and other carers (who will all be referred to as ‘parents’ throughout this chapter), are typically accorded a natural authority in children’s lives. Kendrick (2009) argues that parents’ authority derives from a place of love, responsibility and specific family knowledge; parents have to live with the consequences of decisions that are made regarding their children, and they have to witness over time the successes and failures of interventions in their children’s lives. Parents—and it is typically mothers who are the major contributors of parental care and advocacy in schools—are natural partners in the work of schools, and there is plentiful evidence to suggest that parental engagement is a critical factor

in improving children’s learning outcomes (Pushor & Amendt 2018). Parents’ authority gives them a legitimate and critical place in school communities and at the decision-making table.

About This Chapter

Despite the key role that parents can play in schools, knowing how to work well with parents has not typically been a consistent feature of teachers’ pedagogy (Pushor 2015) or the teacher-education curriculum (Saltmarsh et al. 2015). For guidance about developing productive partnerships with parents in the 21st-century inclusive classroom, what is known more generally about positive parent–teacher partnerships can be a useful place to start. For example, Pushor (2015: 235) describes effective parent–teacher relationships as ‘side by side and reciprocal’ rather than ‘hierarchical and primarily unidirectional’; Willis (2016: 125) highlights the value of co-generative dialogues between teachers and parents, that is, engagement in ‘substantive conversations . . . while adopting an open disposition to the possibilities of learning from others’ views and ideas’; and Povey and colleagues (2016) conclude that a respectful and welcoming school environment is critical to effective parent engagement. When children are made particularly vulnerable, however, for reasons such as disability or English as a second language, working with parents might involve additional considerations.

This chapter will offer an insight into those additional considerations and a deeper understanding of parents’ experiences when their children have a disability. An appreciation of what it is like for families in these circumstances is critical to the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers (Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2018), and to the capacity of teachers to work sensitively and cooperatively with their parent partners. Using relevant research findings, the following sections will consider: (1) family systems and the impact of a child’s disability on the family; (2) parental experiences of partnerships with teachers when their children are more likely to experience educational exclusion; and (3) ways that teachers can develop positive partnerships with parents so that student engagement and learning in inclusive contexts will be enhanced. First, however, we will consider the legislation and policy pertinent to partnering with parents.

Australian Legislation and Policy on Parent–Teacher Engagement

In Australia, the development of parent–teacher partnerships is an important area of national education policy and a requirement for professional teacher accreditation. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA 2008) acknowledges the shared responsibility of parents and teachers for the improvement of student outcomes. It clearly states that all Australian governments, in collaboration with schools, commit to the development of stronger partnerships between schools and parents as a means to enhance engagement and achievement for all students. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (DSE; Cth) clarify and elaborate the legal obligations of educators towards persons with disability under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA; Cth). As part of the process for planning and providing reasonable adjustments to students with disability, educators are required to consult with students and/or their associate (typically a parent) to ensure that students with disability are educated on the same basis as students without disability. This presupposes that school staff members will inform parents of students with disability about their rights according to the DSE, to enable active parental participation in any decision-making about appropriate educational supports. The effectiveness of the process is also dependent upon how school staff members interpret the notion of ‘consult’. Sometimes this is mistakenly held to mean that school staff members direct parents on how to parent their child.

Apart from the national legislation, engagement with parents is recognised as one of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Standard 7.3), which necessitates the development of teachers’ knowledge and implementation of ‘strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers’ (AITSL 2018: n.p.). Additionally, in recognition of the value of building and sustaining strong family–school partnerships, the Australian government—in collaboration with national parent bodies and other key stakeholders—developed the Family–School Partnerships Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2017) to be used as a national comprehensive resource for schools, parent groups and families interested in developing partnerships. The key dimensions of the framework can be used as guidelines for promoting parent engagement.

The Australian Student Wellbeing Framework (Department of Education and Training 2018) is another recent national resource that considers building effective partnerships as one of the foundational elements to support student learning, safety and wellbeing. Among the recommended practices within the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework, schools are encouraged to proactively build collaborative relationships with families, including those from vulnerable groups (Department of Education and Training 2018). Features of collaborative partnerships include shared understandings, welcoming and inclusive relationships, and two-way reciprocal exchange of knowledge.

Parent–teacher engagement at state level

In alignment with the various national tools and frameworks for improving student learning and wellbeing, education authorities in different states have developed evidence-based frameworks to assist school staff with this multifaceted process. Given the well-documented impact of parent engagement on student learning and wellbeing, parent–teacher partnerships are one of the key elements in all these instruments.

Across the Victorian government school system, for example, staff members are encouraged to use the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes (Victoria State Government 2019), with community engagement in learning being one of the four statewide priorities of the improvement model. Parent involvement is one of the four dimensions within this priority area. Teachers are provided with a four-level continuum of practice (emerging, evolving, embedding and excelling level of proficiency) to help them improve communication and meaningful partnerships with parents.

In response to the *Review of Education for Students with Disability in Queensland State Schools* (Deloitte Access Economics 2017), the Department of Education in Queensland has developed the Parent and Community Engagement Framework (Department of Education 2018a) as a model to facilitate effective relationships between schools and the parents of all children. In this framework, developing effective communication, establishing quality partnerships with parents, involving parents in school decision-making and nurturing respectful relationships with parents are recognised as essential elements contributing to genuine parent engagement.

As part of the statewide Engaging Families project, the Department for Education in South Australia has developed a practice guide for

working with families from pre-birth to eight years (Department for Education 2013). This partnership model includes a seven-step process for building relationships with parents. Free interactive online training in the model is provided for ongoing professional development.

Similar policy initiatives have been implemented in other states and territories in Australia over the last few years. As an example, in the New South Wales public-education system, parent–teacher partnerships have been identified as a means for promoting community participation. Another example is the Family Partnership Model developed by the Department of Education in Tasmania in response to the Improved Support for Students with Disability Ministerial Taskforce Report (Tasmanian Government 2015).

UK Legislation and Policy on Parent–Teacher Engagement

Elsewhere in the world, educational policymakers have also responded to the issue of parent–teacher partnerships. For example, several authors of this chapter report on the emergence of parent partnership as a persistent policy discourse in England. The term ‘parents as partners’ first emerged in 1978 with the publication of the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science 1978: 150). The Warnock Report was also a key moment in the history of inclusive education, as it reflected a changing view that students with disability could be successfully included in regular education. Although the commitment to parent partnership was seemingly unequivocal in the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science 1978), subsequent government policy and guidance have shown varying degrees of commitment to ‘equal’ partnership with parents.

For example, when England’s Department for Education published its first code of teaching practice for students with disability in 1994, the document included a designated section on partnership with parents. However, although parents’ views were regarded as ‘important’, parents were also characterised as having ‘anxieties’ (Department for Education 1994: 24). In other words, implicit in the 1994 document was the idea that teachers’ views were driven by rationality, whereas parents’ views were driven by anxiety. Such views clearly undermine the commitment to equal partnership. In 2001, a revised code of practice was published

(Department for Education and Skills 2001), and a whole chapter was dedicated to partnership with parents. Again, a close reading of the revised document reveals ambivalence towards equal partnership, as parents were positioned as holding ‘key information’ rather than as being key decision-makers in their children’s education. Significantly, in the latest iteration of the code of practice (Department for Education & Department of Health 2015), there is no longer a chapter dedicated to parent partnership, although the document states that the views of parents must be taken into account. Not surprisingly, given the ambivalence towards partnership with parents in the policy documents, parent–teacher partnership remains a highly contested area in education in England (Hellowell 2017; Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2008).

It is clear that policies regarding parent–teacher partnerships are widespread but changeable. It is also clear that, although necessary and useful, policies alone have not guaranteed positive parent–teacher partnerships. Further to knowing policy, teachers must have some understanding of the experiences of parents if they are to work together in a meaningful way. In the following section, we begin our exploration of parents’ perspectives by looking at the impact on the family when a child has a disability.

Understanding Family Systems and the Impact of a Child’s Disability

Parents (and teachers) will vary in their capacity to partner with each other and their desire to do so (for example, due to different employment commitments, family situations, cultural backgrounds and feelings about schools). However, there are experiences that are common in families when one or more children has a disability, and these are likely to influence the parent–teacher relationship. In order to develop productive partnerships with parents, it is essential that teachers understand family systems and how the family life cycle is experienced when a child has a disability. This understanding forms the basis for effective communication, trust and respect within a partnership. Yet it is clear from Gilmore and Mann (2019) that teachers often fail to appreciate the perspectives of parents. Parents say that teachers have limited understanding of the ways in which families are affected when one or more of their children has a disability, and that they feel ‘buffeted’ by the

school system and put into the ‘too-hard basket’. The aim of this section is to describe the potential impact of a child’s disability on the family life cycle.

Developmental stages and transitions in the family system

In Western societies, families go through a series of typical developmental stages as they progress from being childless adults, to parents, and then rearing their offspring through the stages of early and middle childhood into adolescence. These stages of the family life cycle are typically followed by ‘launching’ (Olson et al. 1984) the son or daughter into an independent adult life, after which parents typically enter a time of reduced parenting responsibilities. Developmental stages are separated by periods of transition that generally involve adjustment to somewhat different roles, responsibilities, tasks and expectations. Individuals are more vulnerable at these times of transition, with the potential for increased confusion, stress, anxiety and conflict (Seligman & Darling 2007). All families are unique, however, and while these developmental stages are typical, systemic differences such as family structure and cultural values are likely to impact on the family life cycle. Additionally, when a child has a disability, families are likely to face extra, unexpected or significant challenges associated with systems that can be unresponsive to their needs. When parenting a child with a disability, some stages may occur later or may require more intensive and extended support. For instance, the child may commence school at a later age than his or her typically developing peers, and ‘launching’ may, for some young adults with disability, be delayed or involve careful planning and ongoing parental involvement.

For most parents, the time of their child’s diagnosis is their first personal contact with disability. As they get to know their son or daughter and come to terms with raising their child in an ableist society, they may find that their life is turned upside-down, at least for a time (Bridle & Mann 2000). Therapy and medical interventions can play a large part in life when a child has a disability, and—unlike most other families—parents in these circumstances are more likely to have to work with professionals very early on, and to learn how to become advocates for their child.

The transition to school is a major event that can be particularly difficult and traumatic for parents who have a child with a disability. For example, decisions about school placements can be more complicated—particularly when parents hope for an inclusive-school enrolment—and their child’s relationships with peers can be harder to facilitate. At this time, a child’s disability may become more visible, and comparisons with same-age peers can raise parents’ fears about their child’s safety and acceptance (depending on how inclusive and welcoming the school is). The next stage of the family life cycle, adolescence, coincides with the transition to high school. Teenagers typically desire more autonomy, with less dependence on parents and closer connections with their peers. For young people with disability, some of these normative milestones may be more difficult to achieve. At this transition, many parents become increasingly aware of differences in the experiences and opportunities that their child has compared with others of the same age. Some will be distressed by the lack of opportunities and supports for their child to live more independently. Worries about the future can become more intense as the young person moves towards adulthood, particularly regarding how parents’ hopes and dreams for their sons and daughters will be fulfilled. Feelings of fear, worry and uncertainty might resurface periodically throughout the family life cycle, and will be more likely at times of transition. An urgent need for parents to plan, support and advocate for their child (and for others to partner with them in these endeavours) may also continue to re-emerge at different stages in the child’s life.

The impact of a child’s disability on the family

It is important to highlight that many families report positive effects of having a child with a disability, such as increased family cohesion and personal growth (Hastings 2016). Various factors increase a family’s adaptability and ability to cope with challenges and crises, including the resources that are available to them; the quality of the engagement they experience with professionals; their ‘dispositional optimism’, that is, their tendency to view life events positively rather than pessimistically (Blacher et al. 2013); and their beliefs about the meaning of disability (Durà-Vilà et al. 2010).

By contrast, parenting a child with a disability is experienced more negatively by others (in some cultural groups, for example, disability is believed to be a punishment for sins in a previous life), and for most

families a child's disability is associated with increased family stress. The factors that are most consistently associated with higher levels of family stress, and which can be attributed to exclusionary practices and a lack of available support, include excessive or chronic caregiving demands, challenging child behaviours and financial worries (Baker et al. 2002; Seligman & Darling 2007). Research also shows that families of a child with a disability tend to experience more health problems than other families (Gilson et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2017) and to have restricted or disrupted leisure and social activities such as outings and holidays. For families who already have risk factors, such as poverty and marital conflict, a lack of support for raising a child with a disability is likely to exacerbate existing levels of stress.

Of significance to the school years, family stress is likely to increase around times of transition when new tasks, schedules, routines and people are encountered and when new decisions need to be made (and this includes the transition from year to year, when parents must continually begin new partnerships with different teachers). A potentially major yet less recognised source of stress is 'the seemingly endless burden of securing appropriate services and the frustrations engendered' (Blacher et al. 2013: 169) from various service systems. This includes the frustrations associated with schools. Many parents indicate that there are increased complexities involved in the enrolment process when a child has a disability, and describe the particular stress associated with choosing and sustaining a regular school enrolment. The mother of a twelve-year-old girl with cerebral palsy described the process of enrolling in a new school as 'enormous . . . it was like jumping through hoops'. When interviewed (Gilmore & Mann 2019), she became tearful as she recalled the experience: 'I felt like I had to justify why my child should be there.'

Implications for teachers

It is critical for teachers to have some understanding of what life is like for families of children with disability, because they are not working with a child in isolation from the family. Parents of children with disability have many competing demands—more than most families of children without disability. It is also important for teachers to realise that many parents have had difficult and distressing experiences with other professionals in the past. Parents may have repeatedly heard bad news about their child's weaknesses and problems, and, not surprisingly, they

may respond to practitioner feedback with despair, frustration, anger or defensiveness (Turnbull et al. 2006). Arguably, one of the most important steps a teacher can take in developing positive partnerships with parents is to discover, nurture and celebrate a child's abilities and strengths, as well as focus on the commonalities between the child and his or her peers rather than the differences. In a study of parents and teachers in regular schools (Gilmore & Mann 2019), the mother of an eleven-year-old boy with a developmental disorder described the sensitive feedback that she received from her son's teachers: 'They will always find something really nice and positive to say.' By contrast, another mother said: 'We don't hear much from them unless something's happened . . . they never ring up to say "gosh, your child's so wonderful".' Other steps that can be taken to facilitate positive partnerships will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, but first we will look at what parents have told us about their experiences of parent-teacher partnerships in an inclusive education context.

Parents' Experiences of Partnerships with Teachers

The inclusive education literature tells us that collaboration is a critical feature of inclusion, yet research repeatedly describes the problematic nature of parent-teacher relationships when children have a disability (e.g. Love et al. 2017; Mann et al. 2015). Parents and teachers can have very different perspectives with regard to the implications of disability for schooling (Lalvani 2015) and also with regard to the partnering experience. Recognising that parents might think and feel differently to educators is a critical first step when developing positive partnerships, and while educators may not be able to fully understand a parent's very individual and personal experiences, making a genuine commitment to listening to and engaging with parents' thoughts and feelings will help them to connect (Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2018). This section of the chapter offers some insights into what it has been like for parents in their efforts to work with schools, although it must be remembered that not all families will have the same experiences. The focus of the following discussion is parents whose children have a disability, although these are not the only families for whom the parent-teacher relationship is critical

(see, for example, the discussion on relationships with Indigenous parents in Trudgett et al. 2017).

Within special education, there is a long history of the knowledge and expertise of parents being largely disregarded. Parents have traditionally been positioned as empty vessels to be filled with the knowledge and expertise of trained teachers, who will demonstrate to them how to parent their child (Hodge 2006; Hornby 2011). So embedded is this view within our society that teachers are often unaware that this is a particular model of working that they have absorbed and adopted, often uncritically. In the experience of two of the authors (Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2008), when teachers are asked if they enable partnership with parents, they state that they do. When asked for an example of how this occurs, a teacher might report that they develop a program of learning for a student and then send a copy to the parent so they can carry out the activities at home. Receiving the copy of the program is the first engagement that parents have with it; they have not been enabled to play an active role in its development. Many of us will recognise this example of what Hornby (2011, citing Swap 1993) terms the ‘Transmission Model’ from our own practice or that of colleagues. In this model, the ‘expert’ practitioner brings the parent into the project of learning as a resource in order to imitate the practice of the teacher beyond school hours.

The Transmission Model is dependent upon teachers maintaining a ‘professional’ distance from parents that operates to sustain their status as expert. Many parents perceive education as a ‘closed shop’ and have described their frustrations at being left out of school decision-making and problem-solving—for example: ‘My knowledge on my daughter was not welcome or wanted’ (Gilmore & Mann 2019). Teachers appear as a closely networked collective of people who communicate together through a shared specific language that disadvantages and excludes parents (Gavrielidou-Tsielepi 2013; Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2008; Hodge & Wolstenholme 2016). The members of this closed shop are perceived as valuing their own contributions over those of parents (Hodge & Wolstenholme 2016). It would appear that for some parents, inclusive education policies have done little to change this. One parent in Fleming’s (2019) UK study into how parents experience relationships with school practitioners reflected on how ‘our LA [Local Authority]¹ won’t put anything in the EHCP [Education, Health and Care Plan]² if a parent says it but will if a teacher backs it up’. Similarly, in Queensland, reports from some parents indicate that their input is not yet regarded by

teachers as valid: ‘But I have been saying that, and saying that, and it has never been listened to!’ (Gilmore & Mann 2019).

The fundamental problem with the Transmission Model is that it fails to recognise that parents are privileged with a breadth and depth of knowledge about their child that teachers can never come to acquire over the relatively short time that they spend with a child. Teachers bring with them knowledge of educational theory and methods of teaching, and often experience of enabling an extensive and diverse collection of children. Parents will be the experts on their particular child; they will know what motivates their child or turns them away from learning, which strategies of support are likely to be welcomed and which might be less well received by the child. They may well know, too, what their child’s aspirations are and who their child hopes to become. New codes of practice, both here in Australia and elsewhere, do not yet seem to be securing recognition of their expertise for all parents. One parent in Fleming’s (2019) UK research echoed the experiences of some other parents in the study when she found herself still calling for teachers to ‘trust me more and my knowledge of my child’.

If experiencing the current system in this way emerges as commonplace, then this raises the worrying concern that—in spite of changes to legislation and policy—it remains ‘still “more rhetoric than reality” about family and school working together as *genuine* [sic] partners’ (Christenson & Sheridan 2001: 181). It is clear from the research described here that parents can feel frustrated, excluded and unheard when attempting to work with schools. We know from research described elsewhere that they can feel distrustful of teachers (Scorgie & Sobsey 2017) and emotionally distressed by the process of advocating for an inclusive placement for their children (Mann 2016). What can be done with this understanding? We now look at the implications of these insights for the parent–teacher partnership and, in this final section of the chapter, consider ways in which positive and productive partnerships can be developed with parents.

How Schools can Develop Positive Partnerships with Parents to Benefit Student Engagement and Learning

If teachers are to be successful in their partnerships with parents, it is essential that they move away from the Transmission Model. They need to practise instead what Hornby (2011, developed from Swap 1993) terms the 'Partnership Model'. In this model, there is greater equality between teacher and parent, with the particular knowledge, skills and expertise of each recognised, valued and enabled. Similarly, Marshall (2013) proposed that teacher–parent partnerships that successfully lead to benefits for student engagement and learning are dependent upon a small number of factors: collaborative problem-solving, shared responsibility and mutually agreed goals. We would rephrase the last of these to 'mutually developed and agreed goals'. This then highlights the need for goals to be negotiated between teacher, student and parent in ways that enable each party to feel confident that their particular expertise and potential contribution is recognised and valued, and also informs the program of engagement and learning.

Research suggests that the critical element for the success of the Partnership Model is the quality of relationships between teachers and parents (Fleming 2019; Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2008). This will be dependent, in particular, on the degree to which the teacher commits to coming to know and understand what it means to the mother, father or carer to parent their child (Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2018). However, coming to know, understand and appreciate the experience of another is a complex process (Hodge & Runswick-Cole 2018). Few teachers are supported with developing the skills needed to become an effective partner. They may be used to directing parents on what to do and how to support their child's learning, but they are not practised in really listening to parents, nor skilled in techniques for enabling parents to talk (Hornby 2011). This is a longstanding barrier to successful collaboration between teacher and parent, and whether new policies—for example, Queensland's new Inclusive Education Policy (Department of Education 2018b) and the United Kingdom's new Code of Practice (Department of Education & Department of Health 2015)—will have an impact on this remains to be seen. In Fleming's (2019) inquiry, some parents continue to identify feeling a lack of equality within the relationship. They repeat long-heard calls for practitioners to provide the climate that enables parent/carers to have a voice and to communicate to parent/carers that their voice is equal; and for teachers to be more proactive and to take the initiative in developing communication with parents.

The experiences of other parents in Fleming's (2019) study illustrate how positive the experience can be for student, parent and teacher when

the modes and means of communication are clear, accessible and regularly practised: ‘We work collaboratively and have regular contact. They are easily reached via phone’ (Parent 3); ‘I have clear channels of communication with all teams involved in supporting my child. I feel that I am listened to, and that my child is supported in the appropriate way the vast majority of the time’ (Parent 4). These sentiments are echoed by Gilmore and Mann (2019), who also found examples of effective parent–teacher communication and the positive impact of this on student learning. One parent recounted her partnership with teachers, saying, ‘We are always involved if there are major changes. We have always worked cooperatively to get the best for [our child] and we are happy with that.’ These examples from the research illustrate how communication with parents about the everyday school experience of students needs to move on from the recording of these within the traditional home–school diary. Teachers should find out what parents want to know about and what they feel comfortable sharing themselves. Preferred modes of communication should be established, as well as how and when communication should occur. Many schools now make good use of a variety of social-media channels for those parents who welcome this. A single WhatsApp message with a photograph of their child doing an activity can be a lot more meaningful to and valued by parents than a list of ‘incidents’ starkly represented within a home–school diary.

Research by Pomerantz and colleagues (2007) illustrates how the most effective partnership is dependent upon schools developing their own policies and practices. Staff and parents can then take ownership of partnerships, and the fundamentals of good practice become embedded within the fabric of the school. As illustrated above, an essential component of this will be quality communication. To enable this, some staff members may need support with developing what Hornby (2011: 83) terms ‘competence in interpersonal skills’: learning to really listen to parents so that staff members come to understand and appreciate the individual experience of parenting. Embracing this will provide schools with the opportunity to promote the expertise of parents by enabling those who are able and willing to do so, to lead on and/or contribute to staff development. Local parent-support groups for children with disability are also great additional sources of expertise if required.

Partnerships will benefit, too, from teachers feeling freed from the pressure of being the ‘expert’ on every aspect of student development. A culture needs to be developed of whole-school acceptance and promotion of staff and parents learning together and from each other. As one parent

observed: ‘The teachers and the leadership of the school, they are probably learners, too; they learn from everyday experiences and experiences they haven’t encountered’ (Gilmore & Mann 2019). Hornby (2011) highlights additional significant enablers of positive partnership. These include developing specific school policies on working collaboratively with parents, providing designated spaces for parents to use in school and making sure parents are influential contributors to the governance of the school. Hornby also argues that where communication takes place is important, too. For some families, a home visit might be appreciated if they feel uncomfortable within the school environment or it is difficult for them to access. Other parents may prefer to meet in school or at a neutral location. Hornby highlights, too, the diverse nature of parents and how positive partnership will embrace a variety of practices that can respond to particular cultural requirements.

Key Messages for Developing Productive Parent–Teacher Partnerships

As has already been established, student engagement and learning depend on successful parent–teacher partnerships. It is critical then that teachers pay attention to the ways in which they work with parents. Here, again, are the points for developing successful partnerships that have been considered in this chapter:

1. Value the expertise of parents:
 - Parents have a central place in school communities—they are not visitors or ‘receptacles of teacher knowledge’, nor are they there just to implement teacher programs.
 - Parents have a breadth and depth of knowledge and experience regarding their children that teachers are unlikely to have. Parents’ knowledge and experience are critical to the inclusive process.
 - Equality between teacher and parent expertise is a feature of positive partnerships, with a particular focus on recognising, valuing and enabling parent knowledge, skills and experience.
2. Prioritise positive, good-quality relationships with parents:
 - Positive partnerships require a commitment on the part of teachers to come to know and engage with the experiences and perspectives of parents.

- Being proactive in establishing effective communication will assist teachers to come to know parents' experience and perspectives. This means:
 - developing positive interpersonal skills;
 - becoming skilled in listening to parents; and
 - developing skills to help parents express their views.
 - It is important to recognise that the experiences of many parents have led them to find following an inclusive pathway stressful and that teachers can contribute to that stress (e.g. by not listening to or acting on parents' views).
 - In response to the stress reported by parents, teachers can develop a positive school and classroom climate. Elements of this positive climate could include:
 - developing trust between parents and teachers;
 - creating a feeling of welcome—both parents and children feel they belong;
 - establishing a feeling of safety—parents feeling that their child is safe and that it is safe to voice their perspectives; – flexibility—responding to diverse hopes, fears and capacities of parents; and
 - recognising and celebrating children's abilities and achievements.
3. Be open to working with parents and others:
- Teachers should be willing to be learners and to accept that they do not have to know it all. They should be willing to find out what they don't know and/or to rely on parental knowledge and expertise.
 - Teachers and parents share responsibility for children's outcomes and for raising aspirations.
 - Teachers and parents share responsibility for the development of educational goals and for problem-solving.
4. Build effective communication with parents:
- Regularly practise clear, accessible communication (e.g. quick, simple strategies such as the use of photographs and apps).
 - Avoid or explain jargon.
 - Be proactive—actively find out what parents want to know and what they are comfortable sharing.
 - Work flexibly—find out about and use preferred modes of communication. This involves more strategies than just traditional home-school diaries. Consideration should be given to where communication takes place (and the power messages of the school environment).

- Be positive—don't just communicate about big issues or when things go wrong. Stay solution-focused rather than problem-focused.
 - Speak (and write) sensitively, and be considerate of the language that is used about the child.
5. Develop school policies and practices that support parent–teacher partnerships:
- Set aside designated school spaces for parents to use.
 - Create a whole-school 'learning culture'. Accept that everyone is learning together; no one must know it all—learn with and from each other.
 - Parents contribute to the governance of the school.
 - Parents contribute to staff development (e.g. local support groups).

Notes

- 1 The Local Authority in the United Kingdom is the local government body that is responsible for assessing the special educational needs of the children in its region.
- 2 The Education, Health and Care Plan is the formal setting out, in the United Kingdom, of the developmental and educational program and provision for a child with a disability.

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CHAPTER 15

Collaborating with colleagues and other professionals

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Schools are working environments where interpersonal interactions are an essential component of the work life of teachers and other professionals. Harvesting the professional skills available within, as well as between, schools and external service providers through collaboration can contribute significantly to student learning success and participation in social and extracurricular activities within inclusive-school contexts. Collaboration in schools may take many forms and involves multiple stakeholders, including students, parents/carers and teacher aides (see [Chapters 11, 14 and 16](#), respectively). This chapter focuses on professional collaboration as the interaction between teachers and other professionals when engaged in collective problem-solving and joint action. After defining professional collaboration in the inclusive-school context, we will discuss the known benefits for both professionals and students, describe some of the activities that may be undertaken, and explore factors that will add to its success. Finally, we will use a series of

vignettes to show how professional collaboration may be enacted in inclusive schools.

Professional Collaboration in the Inclusive School Context

Professional collaboration is defined as a process where two or more professionals work towards a common goal by sharing responsibility and contributing professional expertise in the spirit of reciprocity and trust (D'Amour et al. 2005; Friend & Cook 2010). Collaboration requires commitment and a planned approach by all parties involved. In the context of inclusive schools, professional collaboration can exist both between individuals from the same professional group (known as intra-professional collaboration) and between individuals who come from different professional backgrounds (known as inter-professional collaboration). Collaboration may also take place between professionals who share a workplace (for example, between staff from the same school or education system) or can take place across workplaces and/or services. An example of this is when a school partners with a health-services team on a project or to support a particular student or group of students. Professional collaboration can take place to directly support students and their learning and/or to facilitate professional development of the staff involved.

Teachers are keenly aware of the need to work with other teachers (such as other classroom teachers, curriculum leaders and learning-support teachers) and with stakeholders from other professional groups to maximise their effectiveness in the classroom (Murawski & Hughes 2009). Modern schools therefore employ a range of professional staff. In Australia, guidance officers and/or educational psychologists work as part of the school team. Increasingly, schools are recognising and using the services of allied health (speech pathologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists), health professionals (nurses, social workers and medical practitioners) and staff from external agencies including registered nurses, youth workers, social workers and paediatricians (Shahidullah et al. 2019). School-based non-teaching professionals may be employed through a staffing schedule or as part of support services offered by the education system (Australian Psychological Society n.d.; Speech Pathology Australia 2017). While allied health professionals are

often referred to as ‘student support and services’ (Queensland Government n.d.), increasingly schools are engaging allied health services for collaboration on whole-school projects, teaming with teachers for professional development or working with school teams to progress systemic and cultural change in teaching practice in areas such as inclusive education and literacy (Christner 2015; Murawski & Hughes 2009; Tancredi 2018).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) commenced in Australia in 2016 and has resulted in changes to funding arrangements and access to community-based support (which may include allied health services or specialist equipment) for people with disability. Some school-aged students with significant and permanent disability are eligible for funding through the NDIS to enable participation in activities of their choosing or to receive support to achieve their goals (NDIA 2019a). Clear guidelines have been provided by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA 2019b) to delineate what the NDIS will and will not fund in schools. The NDIS *cannot* be used to fund education services (such as teaching assistants, Auslan interpreters, adjustments to buildings or therapy delivered within the school to support education or curriculum-based teacher professional development). The NDIS *can* fund support for a student’s self-care at school (such as support with eating), specialised transport and equipment (such as mobility aids and speech-generating devices). For school teams, it is important to understand the parameters of the NDIS and how it intersects with education-support services. With this understanding, stakeholders can identify when NDIS-funded external agencies or supports can and cannot be engaged to support students. Furthermore, when students are accessing the NDIS, professional collaboration must consider and include NDIS-funded stakeholders as part of the student’s collaborative team. It is important that all stakeholders are considerate of each other’s responsibilities and that external professionals respect the policies and processes of the school, particularly when it comes to requests to withdraw students from the learning environment.

High-quality professional collaboration is fundamental to all students having access to high-quality learning, social and wellbeing experiences at school. However, collaborative approaches are particularly important for some groups of students, including students from a language background other than English (Pardini 2006), students with mental-health concerns (Mælan et al. 2019), students with complex medical or learning profiles (Shahidullah et al. 2019) and students in out-of-home

care (Edwards et al. 2010). There is also extensive literature about the importance of professional collaboration in the education of students with disability (Murawski & Hughes 2009; Scruggs et al. 2007; Tancredi 2018). General Comment No. 4 (United Nations 2016: 4) names professional collaboration as an essential component of supporting teachers to provide inclusive learning environments, stating ‘an inclusive culture provides an accessible and supportive environment that encourages working through collaboration, interaction and problem-solving’.

Professional collaboration is explicitly named within a range of professional standards and clinical-guideline documents in Australia. For teachers, collaboration is named within the three domains of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2018): Professional Knowledge (e.g. Standard 2.1: Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area), Professional Practice (e.g. Standard 3.2: Plan, structure and sequence learning programs) and Professional Engagement (e.g. Standard 6.3: Engage with colleagues and improve practice). Similarly, the importance of professional collaboration between speech pathologists and teachers was highlighted in a recent project investigating the role of speech pathologists in Australian schools (Speech Pathology Australia 2017). Professional collaboration is also outlined in the Australian occupational therapy competency standards (Occupational Therapy Board of Australia 2019). Professional associations such as Australian Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools (APACS) and Learning Difficulties Australia (LDA) provide professional learning opportunities for members to develop skills and knowledge about collaborative practices. However, these professional associations do not have a role in professional registration, and therefore do not monitor the uptake of their members.

From a conceptual basis, professional collaboration has been described as an evolving process, grounded in the concepts of equality, sharing, partnership, power, interdependence and process (D’Amour et al. 2005). Conceptualising professional collaboration in schools in this way reminds us that when professionals work collaboratively, no team members are in the position of ‘advice giving’, but instead are equal partners in the everyday work that takes place in schools. Essential to a shared partnership is a balance of power and interdependence, where all parties contribute unique but important knowledge, skills and expertise. In order to avoid so-called ‘turf wars’, all participants must be positioned as contributors rather than competitors, where reciprocal relationships

are the foundation for successful teamwork (D'Amour et al. 2005; McKean et al. 2017). We will discuss the 'drivers' for successful collaboration later in this chapter.

Benefits of professional collaboration

Professional collaboration takes place with two goals in mind: to enhance the school experience of students, and to contribute to the professional development of the professionals involved. Research has demonstrated that collaborative approaches do benefit both students and the professionals involved (McKean et al. 2017; Nochajski 2002; Scruggs et al. 2007; Tancredi 2018). Collaboration enables those involved to learn about the breadth of practice that other professionals are able to offer, and therefore what supports are available (Nochajski 2002; Tancredi 2018). By working together, teachers and other professionals can work with their colleagues to problem-solve and consider new methods and pedagogical approaches for implementation in the classroom (Scruggs et al. 2007). Collaboration has also been shown to create more accessible and inclusive learning programs for all students through consistent whole-school and year-level planning; explicit naming of content within the unit, and the concepts and vocabulary to be taught; as well as forward planning to determine how these elements will best be taught (Boudah et al. 2008).

Professional collaboration activities

Although the importance of professional collaboration within schools is well established, models that underpin related work and activities can vary significantly (Scruggs et al. 2007; Sileo 2011). There are also some activities that are more conducive to upholding a student's right to an inclusive education than others (Tancredi 2018). For example, while information sharing between professionals (e.g. teachers and paediatricians sharing information about a student's behaviour and learning profile) is important, without joint goal-directed action and contribution to outcomes, information sharing alone is not likely to harness the benefits of true professional collaboration (Shahidullah et al. 2019). In deciding on a model of collaboration and the activities that will take place, it is important that a variety of factors are considered:

- What is the goal and purpose of the collaboration?
- Is the collaborative work going to support a specific student, a group of students or a whole-school project?
- What data or information will inform decision-making and the activities undertaken?
- Are there any time, resourcing or logistical constraints to consider?
- Do the professionals involved have an existing relationship?

The answers to these questions may impact on the model that is chosen and how the collaborative work is enacted. In the following section, we outline some common collaboration activities.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching is often cited as a popular means for providing high-quality instruction in primary- and secondary-school classrooms (Friend et al. 1993; Scruggs et al. 2007). Friend and Cook (2010) define co-teaching as an instructional delivery approach where the classroom teacher and another professional share responsibility for planning, delivering and reflecting on classroom instruction. In their meta-synthesis of the literature, Scruggs and colleagues (2007) identify five models of co-teaching: (1) one teach, one assist, where one professional (usually the classroom teacher) assumes teaching responsibilities and the other provides individual support as needed; (2) station teaching, where learning stations are created and supported by professionals; (3) parallel teaching, where professionals teach the same or similar content in groups; (4) alternative teaching, where one professional takes a smaller group of students to a different location for different instruction; and (5) team teaching (or interactive teaching), where professionals equally share teaching responsibilities and are equally involved in leading classroom instruction. Sileo (2011) describes an additional model—one teach, one observe—where one professional is responsible for whole-class instruction, and the other observes students and gathers information (primarily about the students, but this may also be for professionals to learn about their co-teaching partner).

Criticisms of co-teaching reflect the pervasive confusion over what co-teaching is and how models of co-teaching are labelled and enacted. Specifically, the term ‘co-teaching’ is often used interchangeably with ‘collaboration’. While the collaborative nature of co-teaching is not disputed, collaboration refers to how professionals interact more broadly, while co-teaching refers to a specific instructional activity. The efficacy of co-teaching has therefore been difficult to establish, due to the varying fidelity with which co-teaching models are applied (Solis et al. 2012).

However, anecdotal evidence indicates that teachers feel that co-teaching has a positive impact on student achievement, particularly for students with disability (Scruggs et al. 2007). Friend and colleagues (2010) caution, however, that poorly enacted co-teaching can potentially increase segregation for students with disability or learning difficulties, where classroom teachers may, in fact, spend less time with some students, instead relying on the presence of a specialist teacher or other professional to assume the role of key teacher. Joint preparation and clarity in roles and responsibilities are essential elements of effective co-teaching (Friend et al. 2010).

Collaborative planning. While collaborative planning is an essential component of co-teaching, collaborative planning can also exist as a separate activity (Jitendra et al. 2002), involving only teachers (for example, teachers from a year-level cohort or a classroom teacher working with a learning-support teacher) or teachers working with someone with a different professional background. Collaborative planning may focus on a unit of study, a series of lessons or an individual lesson. Ideally, planning will foreground students' expected learning outcomes and utilise universal approaches to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (as discussed in [Chapter 8](#)). This will enable accessible learning experiences to be designed proactively for all students, reducing the need for retrofitted adjustments (Hinder & Ashburner 2017). Collaborative planning between teachers and speech pathologists has been shown to enhance curricular and pedagogical access for all students, as well as increase teacher confidence and skill in accessible pedagogical practices and designing adjustments (Starling et al. 2012; Tancredi 2018). Planning tools are an effective way to structure collaborative-planning discussions and to support teachers to identify and map the key concepts and vocabulary to be taught (for an example, see Boudah et al. 2000). By schematically mapping lessons, weekly plans and/or curricular units using a planning tool, teachers can collaboratively agree on areas of teaching focus and the connections that they want their students to make in their learning. Planning tools can also form the basis of discussion and a platform for joint planning to identify and remove barriers that may exist within activities or assessment. When barriers are identified, teachers and other professionals can work to design and implement adjustments to ensure that all students, including those with disability, are able to participate fully (Jitendra et al. 2002).

Coaching. Coaching is a person-centred approach, which is defined as an 'activity with classroom observation at its centre and professional

learning as its aim' (van Nieuwerburgh 2012: 7). It has the 'potential to cross-pollinate good practices, and develop reflective, exploratory and metacognitive teachers' (Gallagher & Bennett 2018: 20). Coaching is intentionally dialogic; therefore, coaches need to be skilled communicators and attentive listeners (Gallagher & Bennett 2018; van Nieuwerburgh 2012). When using coaching to improve learning outcomes for students with disability, Gore (2014) suggests that coaching should firstly focus on general teaching and then consider practices for specific students' learning needs. Coaching, in this context, would involve a colleague with professional expertise in a specific area taking on the role of coach, and the 'coachee' seeking to change something in their own practice. This type of specialist coaching is predicated on the coachee choosing their coach, which may have practical implications to consider, such as the availability of an appropriate coach and adequate time to foster the coaching relationship.

Collaborative consultation. Collaborative consultation is an interactive process between professionals who work together to address complex issues in a student-centred framework (Idol et al. 1995). The collaborative-consultation model is commonly used by external allied health professionals who provide services to schools. Within the collaborative-consultation model, both the consultant and consultee share expertise and joint leadership to identify goals that will progress students' learning outcomes. Thus, the collaborative-consultation model may offer opportunities to professionals who are teaching students with disability, mental-health concerns or complex medical and learning profiles. There has been some criticism of this model, as professionals working in this way often do not progress beyond information sharing, meaning true collaboration is unlikely to be taking place (Shahidullah et al. 2019; Villeneuve 2009).

Student Support Team processes. The Student Support Team (SST) is a referral-based service that exists in many schools. SSTs engage in meetings and problem-solving processes that aim to collaboratively design adjustments and interventions for students who would benefit from an explicit team approach to support their learning progress. Engaging professionals with a shared vision and a willingness to be genuinely collaborative is essential for this team. In many schools, the SST core members include a member of the school-leadership team, a curriculum leader, a support teacher, a school counsellor and a speech pathologist. Procedures that promote success of the SST include:

- having a well-defined student referral process (and sticking to it);
- managing the pace and focus of the SST meetings;
- scheduling SST meetings frequently enough to discuss referrals;
- disseminating meeting minutes to all relevant school staff;
- allowing enough time to discuss the student referral in detail (25 to 45 minutes);
- including the right people for student-referral discussion (including the class teacher and parents and/or caregivers); and
- developing a student support plan for implementation, which includes a review date (Powers 2001).

The SST is deliberately a collaborative solution-focused approach. There are some key roles and responsibilities that will contribute to the success of the group. For example, the classroom teacher is responsible for initiating the student referral and then coordinating the implementation plan. The SST coordinator is responsible for scheduling and chairing meetings, having the document ready for the meeting, and disseminating meeting outcomes.

Quality Teaching Rounds. Professional development in schools has traditionally adopted a passive approach to learning, through single-session formats (Bowe & Gore 2017). In recent years, collaboration as a means for professional development has grown in popularity, seeing the emergence of communities of practice and professional-learning communities within schools and professional groups (Vescio et al. 2008). A process known as ‘Quality Teaching Rounds’ has been cited as a pedagogically based, collaborative approach to professional development that focuses on teachers improving their practice (Bowe & Gore 2017). Quality Teaching Rounds combine collaborative discussion of a professional reading, classroom observation and reflective discussion about the learning and teaching that was observed, and coding and discussing a lesson using the Quality Teaching framework (Bowe & Gore 2017). Significant positive effects on teaching quality have been found for Quality Teaching Rounds, with maintenance six months post-implementation (Gore et al. 2017).

Drivers for Successful Professional Collaboration

Several studies have identified factors that are likely to drive the success of collaborative partnerships. The strength of the interpersonal relationship that is formed between parties both prior to and during the professional collaboration is a critical factor in their success (Ploessl et al. 2010). Personal commitment to the collaborative work is required for longevity and sustained activities, and parties are more likely to engage with one another if they have learned about each other and built a relationship. In a recent study that trialled a process of collaboration between teachers and an external agency for students with mental-health concerns, initial whole-school initiatives provided positive opportunities for professionals to build interpersonal relationships, which later lay the foundation for more productive targeted professional collaborations. Simple steps such as learning about someone's professional background and their family or interests can form the basis of an interpersonal relationship, on which trust and collaboration can be built.

Provision of time and resources

Professionals require time and resources to develop skills in collaborative practice and to engage in the activities of collaborative work. School-leadership teams, external service leaders and education systems must therefore support professional collaboration through education policy and school priorities that support this way of working (McKean et al. 2017; Nochajski 2002). For example, supporting team members by providing additional planning time or resources to support access to professional learning may be required. Individual professionals can also prioritise the importance of professional collaboration by developing professional-learning goals that reflect a dedication to professional collaboration. For example, a professional-learning plan might include goals that focus on building a professional network or identifying skills that need to be developed to support effective collaborative-working relationships.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

To support realistic and practical recommendations, team members need to take time to discuss their roles, their perspectives and how they can contribute to student outcomes (Rens & Joosten 2014; Truong & Hodgetts 2017). Recent research has identified that team members from

different professional backgrounds may approach their work with different priorities or anticipated student outcomes in mind (Gallagher et al. 2019). For example, allied health professionals may wish to see students further develop their communication or motor skills, while teachers may focus on increased curricular content development. A lack of understanding of other collaborators' roles or the context of their work has been demonstrated to be a barrier to effective collaboration (Christner 2015). One way of building the understanding of each team member's role is to work together with the student in the classroom or to observe each other in action. After a while, less time will need to be invested, as a shared understanding of each person's role and scope of practice will improve with experience and knowledge (Casillas 2010). Given that at times there will be overlap between professionals' areas of expertise, it is also important to clarify where each person's professional skills begin and end, and where the boundaries meet and overlap. [Table 15.1](#) summarises the professional skills that members of a professional collaboration may contribute in the school setting.

It may also be important for each professional to examine their own beliefs about another profession. For example, Aguilar and colleagues (2014) found that occupational therapists and physiotherapists each attributed values and beliefs to the other's profession that were not held by the profession itself. By extension, a teacher may believe that a therapist's role is to withdraw students from the classroom in order to work with them, and that the allied health professional's role is to 'fix' the student's difficulties so that they can learn better in the classroom. Similarly, allied health professionals may not understand the complexities of a teacher's role and the fact that teachers are more likely to apply strategies in the classroom that contribute to quality differentiated teaching practices and the provision of reasonable adjustments (Mælan et al. 2019).

Some authors have also stressed the importance of what has been termed 'boundary skill' (Akkerman & Bakker 2011). This is described as the ability to negotiate the boundaries of one's professional role and the capacity to engage in dialogue with professionals from different backgrounds, while understanding the different perspectives and lenses through which they perceive situations and problems that arise. In other words, boundary skill reflects an understanding of the underlying philosophy of the profession, as well as the values and beliefs that drive the suggested actions, recommendations and problem-solving approach of each professional. Boundary skill can only be fully realised when each

professional involved in the collaboration has an understanding and appreciation of the professional identities of the other professionals involved in the collaboration. For example, a teacher’s professional identity is deeply rooted in their pedagogical approaches and epistemological beliefs about teaching. Conversely, an allied health professional’s identity may be grounded in the biopsychosocial model of disability (see [Chapter 2](#)).

Table 15.1: Collaborators and the professional skills that they contribute

Team member	Professional skills: areas of knowledge and understanding
Classroom teacher	<p>Understanding how students learn and the implications for pedagogical practice</p> <p>Curricular structure, content and concepts, and teaching strategies across teaching areas</p> <p>Leader in pedagogical practices</p> <p>Formative and summative assessment practices, and using data to progress students’ learning</p> <p>Lesson planning and adjusting lessons to progress the learning goals of all students</p> <p>Leader in the classroom context</p>
Learning-support teacher	<p>Understanding how students learn and the implications for pedagogical practice</p> <p>Curricular structure, content and concepts, and teaching strategies across teaching areas</p> <p>Leader in pedagogical practices (such as Universal Design for Learning, Differentiated Instruction)</p> <p>Formative, summative and diagnostic assessment practices, and using data to progress students’ learning</p>

Team member	Professional skills: areas of knowledge and understanding
Guidance officer/school psychologist/school counsellor	<p>Collaborative lesson planning and adjusting lessons to progress the learning goals of all students and/or for specific students</p> <p>Explicit teaching processes, including task analysis</p> <p>Reviewing recommendations from other providers to identify relevant and specific adjustments for students, and how these adjustments can be incorporated into teacher planning</p> <p>Understanding how students learn and the implications for pedagogical practice</p> <p>Diagnostic assessment and using data to progress students' learning</p> <p>Collaborative lesson planning and adjusting lessons to progress the learning goals for specific students</p> <p>Explicit teaching processes, including task analysis</p> <p>Reviewing recommendations from other providers to support class teachers to incorporate recommendations into teacher planning</p> <p>Providing recommendations for teachers to address specific learning/support needs of the student</p> <p>Developing and implementing specific intervention strategies directed at student engagement and/or student wellbeing</p> <p>Leader in the whole-of-school context for student and staff wellbeing</p>

Speech
pathologist

Typical communication development

Identification of communication-based barriers to students' access to the curriculum, teachers' pedagogical practices or demonstration of learning

High-level understanding of the language and communication skills underlying the curriculum

Observational, criterion-referenced and standardised assessments of language, speech, fluency, voice, literacy and swallowing

Able to support the design and provision of high-quality teaching practices and targeted adjustments that support communication and/or literacy competence and/or communication difficulties

Diagnosis: communication, literacy and swallowing disorders

Therapeutic interventions: communication, literacy and swallowing

Occupational
therapist

General child development and the functional impact of disability

Knowledge and understanding of a range of areas of human function (e.g. motor skills, cognitive skills, processing sensory information, play skills, social interaction, using objects and tools)

Task analysis: understanding the components or subskills involved in completing a task

Identification of barriers within an environment or task that impact access or participation in school life

Therapeutic interventions aimed at supporting the child's skill development, or adapting the task or environment to enable participation and independence

Educational psychologists and speech pathologists have been shown to have different perspectives on what should be prioritised as the focus of support for students with communication difficulties (McConnellogue 2011). This variation stems from underlying professional values and beliefs, which need to be explicitly identified to minimise barriers that varying perspectives may have on effective collaborative information sharing and working. Forbes (2003) argues that effective collaboration needs to take the differences in discourses between allied health professionals and teachers into account. A teacher's discourse and beliefs may stem from a belief in the universal provision of education, a focus on provision of curriculum across a year and a perspective of whole-class provision of supports. Therapists may come from a remediation and/or developmental perspective, with a focus on the rights and needs of individual students, and they may believe that delivery of therapy support is not a universal provision. Therefore, time needs to be taken to ensure that the perspective of each stakeholder is clarified and to enable reciprocal working relationships to be built.

Clear and effective communication

Effective communication skills underpin successful professional collaboration. During interactions, active listening by all stakeholders is required to enable each partner to share and receive all ideas and viewpoints. Approaching interactions in the spirit of trust and open communication also requires participating parties to understand that any ideas can be accepted, rejected or adjusted. Regular in-person or written communication is required to review progress, make adjustments and ensure forward planning. Meeting minutes or discussion summaries will support a goal-directed focus and can help to track the progress towards goal attainment over time. For collaboration to be successful, individuals must know how to resolve conflict, develop relationships, and plan and evaluate supports and progress, and they must be allowed the time for planning and implementation (Friend & Cook 2010).

Goal setting

A central tenant of effective professional collaboration is that clear goals are established between stakeholders. When discussing goals and how these goals will be met, it is important to consider *what* the goal and

associated activities may be, as well as to develop a shared understanding between stakeholders about *why* the goal is important and *how* it may best be achieved. Given the school-based context of the collaboration, goals need to:

- align with information gathered through consultation with the student and their family;
- foreground every child's right to an inclusive education; and
- demonstrate respect and understanding for each professional's skills, working context and capabilities.

For example, the teacher, student and their family may identify achievement in maths as an area of focus. The school psychologist may suggest some teaching strategies identified from their cognitive assessment of the student that will assist their achievement. The speech pathologist may identify the specific linguistic concepts being taught in the maths curriculum in the semester and provide strategies for developing the student's vocabulary in those areas. The school team may work with the family (at their request) to provide some fun home-learning activities that will reinforce the concepts learned at school.

Professional Collaboration in Practice

The following vignettes provide practice-based examples of how school teams can effectively engage in a goal-directed process of professional collaboration. These examples outline a process of planning, joint decision-making and reflection.

Example 1: Coaching in the secondary-school context

Coaching is a process that enables a person to identify a specific issue and to develop a plan to address this issue. Fiona, a Year 9 Home Economics teacher, is troubled about how her class is progressing. Her students are not as engaged in lessons as she would like, and some students are not completing tasks. This is placing them at risk of failing the subject. Fiona seeks out a colleague from within her faculty to support her in problem-solving this issue. As the coaching process commences, the coach works with Fiona to identify the reality of the

situation and tease out some of the key issues. A key tenet of coaching is that the solution lies within the coachee (van Nieuwerburgh 2012). In this situation, the coach explores the issues with Fiona, who then concludes that the literacy demands of her workbook may be too complex for some students. They discuss ideas about how to make these more accessible and consider the instructional language that she uses when teaching. Fiona then seeks the support of the speech pathologist to discuss the literacy demands of the workbook and requests that the speech pathologist observe her teaching to give her specific feedback about instructional language. Through coaching, Fiona has developed a deeper understanding of the language and learning profiles of her students, and the adjustments that she needs to implement so that students can access her instructional language.

Example 2: Collaborating for universal outcomes

When analysing Prep and Year 1 student-outcomes data, the principal at Jacaranda Primary School notices that many students are struggling with early-reading and spelling skills. When she raises this with the early-years teachers in a cohort planning meeting, the Prep and Year 1 teaching-team members agree with the pattern identified by their principal and self-identify that they would like further support to develop students' oral language and handwriting skills. In this school, speech pathology and occupational therapy services are available through the education system. With the principal's support, a process of professional collaboration for joint planning and co-teaching commences. All Prep and Year 1 teachers agree to work collaboratively with the speech pathologist and occupational therapist on the provision of universal high-quality differentiated teaching for all students. At the initial meeting, each member of the team clarifies their role and what they can contribute to the shared goal of improving students' reading and spelling skills. It becomes clear that within the team, there are diverse perspectives on approaches to teaching literacy. Time is spent respectfully discussing these views and where they may be divergent. Through this discussion, team members agree on the scope of the collaboration, the purpose of the shared work, and the goals.

Members of the team agree to collaboratively plan and co-teach the Foundation level (prep or kindergarten) and Year 1 English curriculum with a review after four weeks. The team members feel unsure about how students might react to activities with so many 'teachers' present

and decide to have a quick debrief in the break after the first lesson to check in and alter things to suit the classes better. After four weeks, the team members have a more formal meeting, where they review the data collected as they monitored student learning. At the meeting, the team members work together to develop a strategy for the remainder of the term. They decide that the role of the occupational therapists and speech pathologists will change to focus on building teacher capacity in teaching vocabulary and handwriting, and that they will provide some focused support to students whose data suggests that they require a more intensive level of support. The team members agree that their goals have been met. The teachers feel confident to continue the work and schedule less frequent allied health input for the following term. Through understanding roles and responsibilities, being open to negotiation, having shared goals and addressing barriers as they arise, the team has developed a highly effective collaboration that has resulted in significantly improved student-learning outcomes.

Example 3: Working together to design extensive adjustments

Suzie is a Year 6 student in Mr Teal's class. She loves watching YouTube, hanging out with her friends and swimming. Suzie also has cerebral palsy and cortical vision impairment, which means that she uses a wheelchair to move around and requires support to transfer onto the toilet. To communicate, Suzie skilfully uses picture symbols and a voice-output device, which she has accessed through her NDIS package. Ever since she was small, Suzie's parents have made sure that she has an active and central role in her team, which also includes Mr Teal, her learning-support teacher (Ms Fey), her physiotherapist and her speech pathologist. In October, all Year 6 students at Suzie's school will go on a camp, so in March, the team starts planning to ensure that Suzie is fully included at camp. The process commences with a collaborative-planning meeting, where Mr Teal asks Suzie what she is looking forward to most about camp. Suzie says that she can't wait to sleep in the same cabin as her friends and do all the activities. The team plans for a series of meetings to identify and design adjustments so that Suzie can participate fully at camp.

To support the collaborative-planning process, the deputy principal ensures that Mr Teal is released to attend all meetings. Ms Fey chairs the

meetings and takes notes, recording the different tasks that each team member will take on and the actions that are required. Over the next two months, the team plans and arranges for the Year 6 students to travel, stay and do a range of activities at camp that can be accessed by wheelchair. During the planning discussions, Suzie's parents explain that Suzie has supplementary nutrition and medication at night through PEG into her stomach. All Year 6 teachers receive training from a nurse to support Suzie with her night-time feeding and medication, and the team creates a health plan that includes protocols for when to contact Suzie's parents if needed and information about health and emergency services near the camp. All staff members going to the camp attend training by the physiotherapist to learn how to safely support Suzie's toilet transfers. To make sure Suzie is able to communicate with her friends and others about the activities at camp, the speech pathologist works with Mr Teal to ensure that Suzie's communication device has the camp-related vocabulary that she will need. In the week before camp, the team has a final meeting to plan check-ins with each other and Suzie's family throughout the camp.

Suzie has an awesome time at camp. She doesn't feel homesick once, and her favourite part is staying up late. At a debrief meeting the week after camp, the team reflects on the processes that made Suzie's experience of camp so positive. Everyone agrees that they are glad they started planning early and that open communication and shared decision-making allowed the team to anticipate and minimise any barriers to Suzie's full participation.

Conclusion

While many professionals in schools cooperate on a daily basis as part of their role, true collaboration requires that professionals share responsibility for working towards a common goal (D'Amour, et al. 2005; Friend & Cook 2010). Professional collaboration in schools provides teams with the opportunity to engage in shared decision-making, joint action and localised professional development. Drawing on a breadth of expertise, classroom teachers, learning-support teachers, school counsellors and allied health professionals can engage in reciprocal working relationships. This can happen within and across professional boundaries, with the potential to improve the inclusive-

school experience of all students. As discussed in this chapter, effective collaborative work requires that time and space are allocated for collaborators to develop a working relationship, establish roles, and plan, implement and reflect on their collaborative work. While there is a range of activities in which professionals may engage, certain factors can support or inhibit the collaborative relationship. For example, stakeholders need to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear, and team members must engage in joint goal setting and reflection. These drivers for collaboration are enhanced when school leaders and education systems support professional collaboration through policy, school priorities and resourcing. The importance of collaboration is supported across international and local legislation, policy and professional standards, and the efficacy of professional collaboration has been documented in the research literature. All that remains is for education systems, schools and individual professionals to ensure that professional collaboration is central in the enactment of inclusive education for all students, and particularly for students with disability.

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CHAPTER 16

Rethinking the use of teacher aides

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Many schools in many jurisdictions worldwide employ additional adults (commonly called teacher aides or teaching assistants) to support the inclusion of children and young people with disability. Research, however, has raised questions about the educational effectiveness of this model of student support, particularly in the United Kingdom where the research has been sustained and rigorous. This chapter discusses the research findings on the impact of teacher aides/assistants (TAs) in inclusive classrooms. Further, we explore the evidence on the deployment, practice and preparation of teachers and TAs, and explain why, on the basis of our extensive collaborative and developmental work with schools, a reconceptualisation of the TA role around promoting student independence offers a potentially transformative and impactful alternative model to TA utilisation.

Background

The long-term, international trend towards inclusion over the last 30 years has been accompanied and assisted by an increase in the number of support paraprofessionals in schools. Australia, Italy, Sweden, Canada, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom have all experienced large increases in this sector of their education workforces (Giangreco et al. 2014). Policies of inclusion and provision for students with learning difficulties and disability in regular settings in other OECD countries now rely heavily on this ‘non-teaching’ workforce (Masdeu Navarro 2015). These staff are known variously as teaching assistants, learning-support assistants or classroom assistants in the United Kingdom, and paraeducators, teacher aides, education assistants or school learning-support officers in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. In this chapter we refer to all personnel with equivalent classroom-based support roles collectively as TAs.

No other education system in the world has expanded both the number and role of TAs to quite the same extent as England. The number of full-time equivalent TAs in mainstream schools has almost trebled since 2000, from 79,000 to 224,000 in 2017. TAs comprise 28 per cent of the school workforce in England (Department for Education 2018), with a national annual spend of around £5 billion (Webster et al. 2016). Australia has seen a comparatively small increase in TAs over the last ten years, with approximately 90,000 TAs employed in schools (Australian Government n.d.). The most common model of deployment internationally is for the TA to support students in regular classrooms, alongside the teacher. The second most common model is for TAs to deliver structured intervention (or catch-up) programs, which typically take place outside of the classroom, during and away from regular lessons. The third most common model is the use of TAs to support students’ behavioural, emotional and social development (Butt 2016). However, the most common methods of deployment are not necessarily the most effective, and research evidence can provide critical guidance to maximise the effectiveness of this important resource.

The Impact of TAs

Investing in TAs seems to be a worthwhile investment, based on the not-unreasonable assumption that support from TAs leads to positive

outcomes for students with learning difficulties and/or disability—the groups that TAs are shown to spend the most time working alongside. Until recently, there has been little research on the impact of TAs and the support they provide. What we have learned in the last decade challenges the veracity of the assumption that TA support always leads to positive outcomes. We now consider the evidence of the impact of TAs in terms of the three ways they are commonly used in schools, as summarised above.

Support from TAs in regular classrooms

Much of the research investigating the use of TAs in regular classroom environments is small-scale and describes what TAs do. Almost all of it has some focus on how TAs facilitate the inclusion of students with disability (Alborz et al. 2009; Sharma & Salend 2016). Early research investigated teamwork between teachers and other adults, such as parent-helpers and TAs (Geen 1985; Thomas 1992), and led to a useful collaborative study with schools on alternative ways of organising classrooms (Cremin et al. 2005). Both the qualitative and quantitative work on impact relies principally on impressionistic data from school staff.

Large-scale systematic analyses investigating the effects of TAs on learning outcomes are rare. One experimental study in the United States found no differences in the outcomes for students in classes with TAs present (Finn et al. 2000). Longitudinal research in the United Kingdom has produced similar results (Blatchford et al. 2004). There are very few randomised control trials that investigate the impact of TAs in regular classrooms, but two conducted in Denmark have found mixed effects (Masdeu Navarro 2015). One of these two studies involved 125 schools and found no strong effect of TAs on student learning. It did, however, find positive impacts for TAs on teachers' job satisfaction and workload. A second randomised control trial involving 105 primary schools measured the impact of unqualified TAs and qualified teachers working as TAs, compared to a control group. There was a positive impact on reading for both types of aide, but no impact on maths. However, there was insufficient data on school leaders' decision-making and classroom practices to conclude what drove the effects. Secondary analyses of school expenditure have suggested that the expenditure on TAs is positively correlated with improved academic outcomes (Brown & Harris 2010; Hemelt & Ladd 2016; Nicoletti & Rabe 2014). However,

these analyses of TA impact do not adequately rule out the possibility that other school factors might explain the correlations found. The conclusions drawn are also not supported by the evidence collected; in particular, they do not include data on what actually happens in classrooms.

The largest and most in-depth study ever carried out on the use and impact of TA support in everyday classroom environments is our multimethod Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project in the United Kingdom (Blatchford et al. 2012a). Unlike other studies, it linked what TAs actually do in classrooms to effects on student progress. The results show that TAs in the United Kingdom have a predominantly pedagogical role and spend much of their time supporting students with learning difficulties and/or disability. Teachers in the DISS project felt that deploying TAs in this way allowed them to devote time to the rest of the class, in the knowledge that the TAs were giving potentially valuable individual attention to the students in most need. There are additional benefits in terms of reductions in teacher workload. Importantly, however, the DISS project also found that there are *serious unintended consequences* of this model of support: a negative relationship existed between the amount of TA support received and the progress made by students, especially students with complex learning profiles (Webster et al. 2010). Put simply, the more support students received from TAs, the less progress they were found to make. This finding was not explained by student characteristics (such as prior attainment or social disadvantage), whether the student had a disability and whether the student was found consistently over seven different year groups in regular primary- and secondary-school settings. Later, we describe the explanatory factors in the relationship between TA support and academic outcomes.

Structured intervention programs

In contrast to in-class support, the evidence on the role of TAs in delivering structured interventions in one-to-one or small-group settings shows a much stronger, positive impact on student attainment. This research shows a consistent, moderate impact on attainment of approximately three to four additional months' progress over an academic year (Higgins et al. 2013; Slavin et al. 2009; Slavin et al. 2011). The average impact of TAs delivering structured interventions is, perhaps unsurprisingly, less than that for interventions using experienced

qualified teachers, which typically provide around six additional months' progress per year (Higgins et al. 2013; Slavin et al. 2011). That said, TA-led interventions generally produce better outcomes than volunteers who deliver interventions; effects for volunteer-led interventions are typically one to two months' additional progress (Slavin et al. 2011). The positive effects of TAs delivering structured interventions may challenge the assumption that only qualified teachers can provide effective one-to-one or small-group support; however, teacher-led interventions tend to be expensive to deliver, requiring additional and often specialist staff.

Crucially, though, the positive effects are only observed when adults work in structured settings with high-quality support and training. The research investigating TAs delivering interventions is small, but it is growing. The majority of this research has been conducted internationally, and is small-scale work involving between 30 and 200 students. However, the emerging findings from larger-scale evaluations in the United Kingdom, funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), are showing consistency with the international picture (Sharples 2016). Overall, more research has been conducted on literacy interventions than for mathematics, although positive impacts are observed for both.

Studies showing positive impacts of TA-led interventions on learning outcomes tend to measure learning outcomes at the end of the intervention. Less is known about the extent to which any immediate, positive improvements translate into long-term learning and performance on national tests. Encouragingly, a recent evaluation of ABRACADABRA, a twenty-week literacy program delivered by trained TAs to small groups of students (aged five to seven years), showed that students who participated in the program continued to do better than their comparison-group peers a year after the intervention finished (Martell 2018). Studies of a reading intervention for similar-aged students have also found residual impacts (Savage & Carless 2005, 2008).

The evidence on TA-led structured interventions stands in contrast to the research on the effect of classroom deployment. Where TAs are used in more informal, unsupported instructional roles, there is little or no impact on student outcomes. In light of the DISS project, then, the most salient evidence gap is in terms of the impact of TAs in regular classrooms. A model called Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants (MITA)—developed through our collaborative work with schools (Webster et al. 2013), and subjected to further refinement and

extensive professional validation through a ‘research-into-practice’ program in the United Kingdom—is the subject of an ongoing impact evaluation. This large-scale randomised control trial involving 128 schools directly addresses the gap in research relating to TA deployment in classrooms and student attainment (EEF 2018a).

Behavioural, emotional and social development

In addition to the effect of TAs on learning outcomes, the DISS project also assessed the effects of the amount of TA support in relation to students’ behavioural, emotional and social development, which we called ‘positive approaches to learning’. Support of this nature is provided by TAs in both in-class and out-of-class situations, and our measurements did not distinguish between where support was provided. Measured variables included distractibility, confidence, motivation, disruptiveness, independence and relationships with other students. Our results showed little evidence that the amount of TA support that students received over a school year improved their positive approaches to learning, except for those in Year 9 (13–14-year-olds), where there was a clear positive effect of TA support across all outcomes (Blatchford et al. 2012a). At that age, students with the most TA support had noticeably more positive approaches to learning. However, there was no trend for students in other year groups.

Summarising the evidence on impact

On the basis of the DISS project findings, and subsequent work focusing specifically on students with complex learning profiles who attend regular schools, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the students who receive high amounts of support from TAs receive a different and less effective pedagogical diet. TAs assume much of the responsibility for moment-by-moment pedagogical decision-making for these students and provide a high amount of verbal differentiation. They do this in part to make classroom teaching accessible, but also to compensate for the teachers’ failure to make appropriate adjustments (Webster & Blatchford 2015, 2018).

Importantly, as evidence from the DISS project showed, while TAs’ interactions with students were well-intentioned, the nature and appropriateness of their interactions were qualitatively different to

teacher-to-student talk. More detailed studies of adult–student interactions have found that TAs tend to close down talk, rather than open it up, as teachers do (Radford et al. 2011). Elsewhere, analyses by Rubie-Davies and colleagues (2010) found that, compared to teachers, TAs are more concerned with task completion and correction than learning. Other research points to concerns that TAs can encourage dependency, because they act in ways that do not encourage students to think for themselves (Moyles & Suschitzky 1997). Evidence shows that over-reliance on one-to-one TA support leads to a wide range of detrimental effects on students, in terms of interference with ownership and responsibility for learning, and separation from classmates (Giangreco 2010). Overall, the evidence of the impact of TAs on what we might call ‘soft’ outcomes is quite thin and largely based on impressionistic data. It is an area that warrants further research and greater attention from governments and education providers.

Making Better Use of TAs

We noted above that the DISS project findings were unable to be explained in terms of student factors. Importantly, these results were not attributable to TAs, either. The findings are best explained in terms of the situational and structural factors within which TAs work but, crucially, over which they have little or no influence. This is an important point, because the effects of TA support are consequences of decisions made *about* TAs, not decisions made *by* TAs. The wider pedagogical role (WPR) model (Webster et al. 2011) was developed to explain the DISS project results. It was built on the basis of an extensive data-collection effort, which combined results from classroom observations, staff surveys, interviews and audio recordings of lessons (Blatchford et al. 2012a). The WPR model not only serves an explanatory purpose, but also a developmental purpose.

There are three main components of the WPR model: deployment, practice and preparedness. The main explanation for the DISS project results on attainment appeared to be the way TA-supported students spent less time interacting with the teacher and became separated from the teacher and curriculum. In other words, there was a tradeoff in terms of more TA support that meant pupils had less time with their teacher, and it is perhaps unsurprising that these students made less progress than

their peers. The less-effective pedagogical diet we referred to earlier—where TA–student interactions are centred on task completion and correction—constitutes the second WPR component of practice. Writ large in the DISS project and other research on the effectiveness of TAs (Butt & Lance 2005; Howes et al. 2003; Lee 2002) is preparedness. Preparedness captures: (1) the time for joint planning, preparation and feedback between teachers and TAs, before and after lessons (what we call the ‘day-to-day’ aspects); and (2) the training and professional development that teachers have received (or not) on how to manage and organise the work of TAs, and the extent and quality of training that TAs have had to help them perform their role optimally.

The debate about the deployment and effectiveness of TAs has been informed and sharpened in recent years by research and commentary on major reforms to policy and practice regarding the education of students with disability (Blatchford & Webster 2018; Masdeu Navarro 2015; Peacey 2015; Sharma & Salend 2016; Skipp & Hopwood 2016; Webster & Blatchford 2013, 2015, 2018). It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the model of ‘inclusion’ we have drifted towards over the last 25 years—which is more appropriately described as ‘integration’ by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD; United Nations 2016)—stands as a proxy for unresolved questions about how students with disability are taught in regular classrooms. Rather than improve the quality of teaching for students with disability (Hodkinson 2019), the education system has looked to other forms of support and provision. In the case of the English system (and indeed others), this has meant a considerable increase in the number of TAs. A key conclusion from the DISS project aimed at policymakers and practitioners is that it is TA deployment that is the fundamental issue, not TA employment. In other words, the point of departure post-DISS is to ensure that schools make the best use of TAs, not get rid of them. In the remainder of this chapter, we use the structural components of the WPR model to put forward an alternative approach to TA deployment and practice, paying particular attention to how TAs can be prepared for these roles. We provide some practical strategies, many of which have been developed and validated by schools that have participated in the MITA program.

1. Deployment: Supplement, not replace

The essence of effective TA deployment is to ensure that TAs supplement, and do not replace, the teacher. This is essential in the case

of students with disability, as a key conclusion arising from the evidence is that TAs are often used as an informal teaching resource for students with the most complex learning profiles. Guidance for school leaders, formulated on the basis of the evidence, makes it clear that decisions about TA deployment provide the starting point from which all other decisions about TAs flow (Webster et al. 2016). The critical first step is for schools to determine the broad types of role that TAs are required to perform. There may be a case for some TAs to have a full or partial role in non-pedagogical activities, such as easing teachers' administrative workload or helping students to develop 'soft' skills.

Ultimately, the requirements of the students must drive decisions around TA deployment. For example, teachers need to adopt the mindset of deploying TAs in ways that add value to their teaching. A practical suggestion is for teachers to first envisage the classroom as it would be with the teacher, but without the TA, and then make decisions about how the teacher would need to organise things to provide the best educational experience for all pupils in the class. Following this, the TA could then be introduced back into the classroom, so to speak, in such a way that they provide an additional resource. Furthermore, all staff and students need to be clear on the roles, boundaries and expectations of teachers and TAs.

2. Practice: Scaffolding for independence

The evidence is quite clear: students with disability who experience high amounts of TA support are at risk of developing learned helplessness. We can invert this by training TAs to foster student independence and ensure classroom talk focuses on the *processes* of learning, not products (i.e. task completion). One of the most promising ways to get TAs to foster student independence—and reduce dependence—happens to be one of the least expensive to implement. The work of Paula Bosanquet and Julie Radford (Bosanquet et al. 2015) has produced a straightforward and practical scaffolding framework that schools can use to improve TAs' interactions. It resembles an upside-down five-layered triangle, with each layer representing ever-decreasing amounts of student independence.¹ The framework recognises that you cannot really *teach* independence; you have to create the opportunities for students to experience and learn from it. In effect, the transformative potential of

training and deploying TAs to scaffold for independence lies in another apparent contradiction: always give the least amount of help.

The TA's default position (layer one of the framework) is to observe student performance, allowing time and space for them to process, think and try the task independently. Bosanquet and colleagues (2015) refer to this as 'self-scaffolding' strategies. TAs need to get comfortable with students engaging in purposeful effort, and recognise effort (as opposed to struggle) as an essential component of learning. Layer two of the framework is prompting or encouraging. Here, TAs might intervene with a nudge: 'What do you need to do first?'; 'What's your plan?'; 'You can do this!' The third layer of the framework is clueing. Often students know the problem-solving strategies that the prompts are designed to elicit, but they find it difficult to call them to mind. Clues are a question or small piece of information to help students work out how to move forward. They should be drip-fed, always starting with a small clue. Prompts and clues are less effective when students encounter a task that requires a new skill or strategy. This calls for layer four of the framework: modelling. TAs, as confident and competent experts, can model while students actively watch and listen, then students can try the same step for themselves afterwards. Correcting (layer five) is where TAs provide answers. It requires no independent thinking and should be avoided in all but essential circumstances—for example, when there is a danger that doing anything else will frustrate the teaching and learning process.

3. Preparedness: Teacher–TA liaison for planning and feedback

Preparedness is a persistent problem, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing training, and especially in terms of the day-to-day aspects of readiness for lessons. The picture regarding day-to-day preparedness revealed through the DISS project is consistent with other studies (e.g. Butt & Lance 2005; Howes et al. 2003; Lee 2002). The majority of teachers had not had training to help them work with TAs in classrooms, nor did they have allocated time for planning and feedback, or other allocated time with TAs they worked with (Blatchford et al. 2012a). In their review of the literature, based on 28 peer-reviewed articles, Sharma & Salend (2016: 124) cite international research published from 2005 onwards that identifies TAs 'having effective communication and

collaboration [and] planning time with supportive teachers’ as ‘critical factors contributing to their efficacy’. Conversely, where this is absent, TAs report that their performance was ‘hindered’.

The comment below from a TA interviewed as part of our Effective Deployment of Teaching Assistants (EDTA) project (Blatchford et al. 2012b: 81), typifies the reactive position that TAs are in when they do not have pre-lesson preparation: ‘You come into a classroom, you listen to the 20 minutes of teaching, and from that, you should know. And then you’re to feed it to the children. It’s scary.’ Unpacking this, we can see that in the absence of a pre-lesson briefing, this TA has to tune in to the teacher’s whole-class input in order to understand the concepts being taught, the skills to be learned or applied, the tasks and instructions, and the intended learning outcomes. Then the TA is expected to apply her/his judgement and provide any differentiation s/he deems necessary; this is what this TA meant by ‘feed it to the children’. Add to this the very probable subject and instructional knowledge differential that exists between the teacher and the TA, plus the fact that the TA is working with the students who find it hardest to access the curriculum and teacher’s pedagogical practices, and it is small wonder that this TA describes the situation as ‘scary’.

The picture from the research evidence aligns fully with what we hear from school leaders, teachers and TAs in our work with schools. Over 500 schools have accessed the MITA program across the United Kingdom, and perhaps the most common refrain we hear from them is that the lack of opportunities for teachers and TAs to meet—to plan, prepare, provide feedback and talk about students’ learning and progress—is the biggest barrier to fully unlocking the potential of classroom support. Few things exemplify the persistent problem of preparedness more vividly than the comment from the TA quoted earlier. Mitigating, if not avoiding altogether, the effects of TAs ‘going into lessons blind’ (Blatchford et al. 2012a: 61) is an essential component of ensuring TA effectiveness. Finding extra time within schools is, of course, never easy, and it is probably why so many school leaders focus on this practical barrier in sessions on our MITA program. Nevertheless, without adequate out-of-class liaison, it is difficult for teachers and TAs to work complementarily and collaboratively.

In the EDTA project, schools found creative ways to ensure that teachers and TAs had time to meet, thereby improving the quality of lesson preparation and feedback (Webster et al. 2013). For example, head teachers standardised TAs’ hours of work, so that they started and

finished their day earlier, thereby creating essential joint-planning time between TAs and teachers before school. Other schools that have created dedicated liaison time report that teachers and TAs feel the benefits almost instantly, and TAs' sense of value and confidence soar. To ensure that teacher–TA preparation time is used productively, it may be necessary to set expectations of what it is (and is not) for. In the EDTA, one school had to introduce a loose planning framework to guide meetings, after TAs were found to be doing administrative tasks instead of discussing lessons and learning.

Although we emphasise *joint* preparation time, the responsibility for planning lessons and setting appropriate tasks for students rests with the teacher. It is essential that teachers plan lessons effectively, and explicitly plan the TA's role in them. Lessons should allow opportunities for TAs to be deployed in ways that supplement teaching. Teachers need to think about how to make use of the additional capacity in their classroom to achieve learning objectives and ensure that they—*the teachers*—spend time with students who require additional support. Effective and efficient lesson planning starts with a good understanding of what students can and cannot do at the end of the previous lesson. Teachers should encourage TAs to record their observations of students' performance during lessons, and be clear about what they want TAs to feed back at the end of the lesson.

Encouragingly, it is possible for schools to create time for teachers and TAs to meet, and the effects of achieving this are positive. In the EDTA project, the quality and clarity of teachers' lesson plans improved, and plans were shared with TAs and supplemented with daily discussions, which made explicit the role and tasks of the TA for each lesson (Webster et al. 2013). Very early informal indications from the MITA project suggest that primary schools are replicating and extending these practices and drawing benefits. For example, school leaders report that TAs feel more valued, and some of the palpable problems of 'going into lessons blind' are being alleviated.

Acting on the Evidence

The evidence on effective TA deployment, practice and preparedness is relatively straightforward. Acting on it can be summarised in one clear principle: use TAs to supplement what teachers do, not replace them

(Sharples et al. 2018). At the same time, there are also clear benefits to schools in reframing the way TAs are used, in terms of student outcomes, school outcomes and overall staff satisfaction and morale (EEF 2018b). Nevertheless, our experiences of working with schools to improve the way TAs are trained and deployed suggests that actually *making* those changes is not straightforward. It can be a complex process, requiring changes across the school (involving senior leadership, middle leadership, teachers and TAs) that address the existing models of working, the provision of training at all levels and sometimes the implementation of structural alterations (in terms of timetabling and working arrangements). Encouragingly, we have seen that when schools overcome practical barriers to change, they do so by investing time, attention and effort into making improvements—not by spending lots of money (Webster 2018).

Our developmental work with schools (Webster et al. 2016) has revealed a number of key principles to successfully taking action on recommendations made in practical guidance (Sharples et al. 2018). To conclude this chapter, we outline four steps that schools could consider. First, the school-leadership team, including the principal, should form and lead a small development team with responsibility for managing the changes. Involvement of the principal is essential, as staffing and contractual issues inevitably feature in decision-making, and change cannot be sanctioned without leadership understanding and approval. Second, the development team should schedule dedicated time over the course of two or three terms for discussion, planning, decision-making and action. Time is ring-fenced for these discussions. As change is rolled out gradually, school leaders should encourage the testing of ideas and win support from staff across the school. The initial team is extended to include a small group of enthusiastic teachers and TAs who are interested in working with research evidence and willing to test new strategies and provide feedback on progress. Third, the senior leadership team should develop and communicate a clear vision for what the school needs from its TA workforce. The team should think about the TAs' role and contribution, and what students and staff will do differently as a result of improving TA deployment and preparation, as well as keep discussions open and positive. Finally, the school-leadership team should conduct a thorough audit of the current situation in their school. This audit can include:

- self-assessment of current practices;

- anonymous surveys of staff to gather their honest views and experiences;
- conducting observations and asking questions about teachers' decision-making regarding TA deployment;
- making an effort to observe and listen to TAs' interactions with students;
- a skills audit to collect details of TAs' qualifications, certifications, training, experience, specialisms and talents; and
- obtaining and considering carefully the views of other school stakeholders, including students and parents and/or carers.

Conclusion

A constant refrain in both our research and development work is that, in order to bring about consistent and fundamental change, it is important that the whole school is involved, and that reform and improvement are driven by school leaders. That said, we know better utilisation of TAs is achievable at the classroom level when informed and motivated teachers become more aware of their responsibilities to both TAs and students with disability, and make changes in areas within their control, such as through more thorough lesson planning. This chapter has attempted to give a clear, evidence-based rationale for attending to TA deployment, practice and preparedness, and provided field-tested strategies that teachers can use to ensure that TAs are used to supplement great teaching and add value to the classroom.

Notes

- 1 A summary of the framework is available online at <http://maximisingtas.co.uk/assets/content/06eef-tasupplementaryscaffoldingframeworkv3.pdf>.

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