

**SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHER EDUCATION:
GRASPING THE POTENTIAL**

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EDUCATION: GRASPING THE POTENTIAL

- My background:
 - Lecturer in physical education, with a PhD that considers colonial and postcolonial impacts on curriculum – and therefore culture and society – in Papua New Guinea (QUT, 2006)
 - Taught in South Australia, Northern Territory, Queensland, Taiwan schools; department head: UPNG, Biola University USA
 - RMIT since 2006
 - Program manager for B Education / B Applied Science (Disability) since 2011.
 - The university closed this program in 2012; it has its final graduating cohort in 2016
 - Re-developed the School's undergraduate offering B Education (Primary Education and Disability Studies) which commenced in 2014.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EDUCATION: GRASPING THE POTENTIAL

- Currently in Australia
 - Initial teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers to teach
 - Based upon
 - knowledge and understandings provided by expert teachers' knowledge and experience
 - good practice
 - well-founded research.

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- **Currently ...**
 - There is an increased focus on education's requirements to address and meet the needs of learners with disabilities.
 - Special education teacher education is of great value to those desiring to teach learners with special learning needs
 - Some teachers have specialist qualifications; many do not.
- **Most educators accept ...**
 - It is intended for schools and learning to be inclusive
 - Teacher education culture and practice therefore increasingly seeks to implement inclusive teaching, while valuing and respecting diversity.

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- Numbers of children with disabilities in Australian schools are growing
 - More widespread, improved assessment strategies and techniques, and reporting
 - Social, nutritional and lifestyle changes to healthy practices and behaviours.
- “8.3% ... of all Australian children aged 5-20 attending school with disability” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Profiles of Disability, 2009*, released in 2012).
- Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood is seeking a clearer view and understanding of data through the *Nationally Consistent Collection of Data: School Students with Disability* (DEEWR 2013).

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- Children with disabilities are enrolled in
 - Mainstream schools
 - Special schools
- However, it is reported that most teachers are poorly or not equipped to teach learners with special learning needs
 - *Held back: The experiences of students with disabilities in Victorian schools* (Victorian Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission 2012)
 - Children with Disabilities Australia (2013) Gotlib
 - Media reports: Milligan and Holland (2016) ABC (January 2016)

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- And importantly, now, in particular:

- *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (TEMAG 2014, p.21)

[Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group, set up by then Minister for Education, Pyne MP]:

3.1.2 Preparation for student diversity

“... beginning teachers were not adequately equipped to address diverse student learning needs ... the ability to work effectively with special needs students, and in particular students with disability and learning difficulties, needs to be considered a core requirement of all teachers rather than a specialisation.”

“FINDING:

“Teacher education programs are not consistently equipping beginning teachers with the evidence-based strategies and skills needed to respond to diverse student learning needs.”

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So ...

- Commonwealth and State Education authorities are publishing reports and policy recommendations, directing schools to address the needs of children with disabilities
- Teacher education programs are being required to provide courses to all teacher education students
- All practising teachers will be required to provide evidence of professional development and implementation of teaching for learners with special needs, to maintain registration (VIT 2015).

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- In Victoria, Australian Professional Standards for Teachers are being addressed, in particular, for registration purposes:
 - 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the different learning needs of students across the full range of abilities
 - 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of students with disability
 - 4.1 Support student participation.
- (AITSL 2016)

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- This is an opportunity which teacher education providers must grasp.
- Currently the capacity to provide completions of specialist graduates is inadequate to meet the States' and National needs
 - for specialist teachers in special schools
 - leave alone specialist teachers employed in mainstream schools, and
 - generalist graduates equipped to work with learners in mainstream schools.
- To meet this opportunity specialist teacher education programs and courses must expand, grow, and become more effective, to meet the learning needs of children with special learning needs.

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- However....
 - The biggest impediment to the successful delivery of such programs may be the very place where the majority of the Education programs are held and delivered –
 - Universities.

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- There are currently 3 undergraduate initial teacher education programs in Victoria delivering special education
- There are currently 3 postgraduate programs available.
- Specialist teacher education programs in Victorian universities have experienced fluctuating fortunes:
 - Some have been discontinued (Deakin's undergraduate program in 2008 (as reported by Hall, 2015); RMIT's Disability Studies and Education/Disabilities Studies program (Doecke 2015)
 - A new program was opened by a Victorian university when it saw another being cut (opened 2014, as reported by Round 2014)
 - Some have been heavily cut back (LaTrobe, as reported by Keeffe 2016).

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- Attitudes and understandings held by university administrators and academics towards 'disability' are diverse (Doecke 2015)
 - Some do not support studies in disability.

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- Several universities offer only postgraduate programs so long as they are online.
- Feedback from teachers in special schools suggests that wholly online courses are inadequate for teaching quality behaviour management and effective methodological practice required for the skill of one-on-one or small group engagement, crucial for working with children with behaviours of concern.
- This can be most effectively delivered – and practised - through face-to-face teaching.

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- What might be included in the list of constraints expressed by universities?
 - Cultural values towards 'disability'
 - "Let's face it Phil. Disability's not sexy." (Mooney 2012)
 - Academic elitism; academic values and perceptions towards 'disability'
 - University administrators' concerns about the financial viability of small 'boutique' programs:
 - Research output potential
 - Academic 'status' potential
 - Industry engagement potential
 - Perceived income generation potential
 - Community and student inquiry potential
 - International student potential
 - Personal / cultural views of disability.

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- University requirements for lecturer applicants to have a PhD
 - There is a reticence to ensure that those hired to teach in special education (teacher education programs) can display a record of successful teaching in schools.
 - It is very difficult to identify experienced school teachers who also hold doctorates.
 - Who actually *is* the most successful holder of authentic knowledge in teaching about learners with special learning needs?

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- Where does this concern arise?
 - The starting point for my disquiet is what I've experienced in Australian and international universities for 18 years as a lecturer, department head, chair, program manager
 - Prior to that, many years as a primary school and secondary school teacher.
 - My involvement in professional associations and networking.
- It will form the basis for further research.

SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER EDUCATION: GRASPING THE POTENTIAL

- Impediments to the establishment and growth of potentially successful programs and courses through resourcing must be removed
 - Staffing
 - Limitations imposed by exit-only qualifications
 - Research
 - Funding.
- They ought to be replaced by an attitude of praxis that includes assisting, ensuring and monitoring how teacher education providers take on board new government policy which stipulates specialist courses – to the fullest extent.

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- Teacher education programs need to have as their goal:
 - How best to ensure that each learner in school with special or additional learning needs is acknowledged, and provided with the best possible opportunities to learn by means of the best possible program to fulfil their desire for a complete and satisfying life
 - To take their place alongside all others in their family, community, and society.

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- **Universities' responses to TEMAG, AITSL, VIT directives (in Victoria)**
 - **Initial teacher education programs**
 - **Embody principles of inclusion, diversity and recognition of specialisation at all times throughout *all* courses and programs**
 - **Professional development requirements for practising teachers pursuant to regular registration renewal**
 - **Provide Professional Development sessions and experiences to practising teachers in their region**
 - **(Monash and LaTrobe have already advertised some - for credit. RMIT's will be for PD experience).**

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- Selection:
 - Approaches, strategies and ethics to initial teacher education selection are under scrutiny by governments and teacher education providers at this time.
 - The adequacy - or not - of ATARs to provide a comprehensive picture of the potential future teacher
 - (media concerns about recent unreasonably low ATARs for Teacher Education applications)
 - The need for additional, qualitative information about or provided by the applicant, the enormity of the task to scrutinise and evaluate this data, the issue of subjectivity, integrity of authorship - how do you know?
 - To whom are places offered?

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- The applicability to special education:
 - Concepts such as 'care' and 'compassion' need to be part of specialist teaching selections.
 - How do you place a measure on these?
 - How do selectors evaluate applications and recognise these?

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- I argue that in the last decade Australian universities have not had a good track record with respect to special education teacher education.
 - *Some* have, and continue to lead the way in special and inclusive education studies globally, and in Australia - but arguably too many have not
- Given the requirement and motivation to address the needs of learners with disability, by means of ensuring that such principles of inclusion and pedagogy are incorporated into teacher education programs offered,
 - Leaders in universities are indeed encouraged to grasp the potential.

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- **Research output potential**
 - This conference exemplifies quality research that is being undertaken; it needs on-going, expanded support
- **Academic 'status' potential**
 - Attitudes of social justice need to replace elitist academic attitudes
- **Industry engagement potential**
 - Strategies developed between teacher education providers and schools and the wider community, to expand and enrich reciprocal community engagement for those with disability
- **Perceived income generation potential**
 - Providers adequately supported or subsidised by governments as key providers for its citizens, as a constitutional, ethical and moral right
- **Community and student inquiry potential**
 - Benefits of an enriching career better promoted to school leavers and experienced others
- **International student potential**
 - Universities should survey and ascertain that Australia is in a region of the world where many neighbours currently are not yet equipped to provide for their special needs learner populations
- **Personal / cultural views of disability**
 - There is no place for decisions based upon prejudicial views or inequity related to disability in universities., especially its leadership.

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- Schools, school's leadership, PASS, AASE:
 - Actively seek partnerships with universities' Schools of Education – Teaching Academies (Victorian model)
 - How can you contribute to having substantial input into programs which produce graduates whom you will seek to employ as teachers
 - Contribute, invite pre service teacher students on placement
 - Then engage in and about the student placement experience
 - Recognise and acknowledge success – and build on it...
 - For the learner to be indeed be central in this experience.

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