

## Editorial

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The role of the special educator is under considerable pressure to find a place in the school systems of today. James Kauffman, in discussing "today's special education" highlighted a number of issues that he considered to be important as special education places itself for the coming years.

These concerns expressed by Kauffman are equally as applicable to special education in Australia and New Zealand. It is not a time to be gazing into the crystal ball, or looking into a limited number of classrooms, and making sweeping statements about what are effective practices for students with special needs in Australia. A fundamental premise for addressing educational issues of students with special education needs is found in definitions of special education - "... It is empirically supported practice, drawn from the research" (Zigmond, 1997, p. 385).

In drawing on "practice", it would appear that it is time for the research that has been conducted to be synthesised, and put forward for examination. A recent paper by Vaughn, Gersten and Chard (2000) presents an overview of four syntheses that have been completed in the area of students experiencing difficulties learning. These syntheses relate to problem-solving, written expression, reading comprehension and grouping practices. Their conclusions appear to be quite clear, and have a familiar ring.

While the findings of these syntheses are voluminous, there are some general implications. First, the findings do not make special education foreign. "Teachers need not worry that the instructional adaptations implemented for students with disabilities are interfering with the learning of average-to-high achieving learners." (Vaughn et al., 2000, p. 110).

Second, the findings promote the need for explicit and intensive instructional practices. This

includes maximising learning time, ensuring students are given sufficient practice to be accurate and fluent in essential skills, controlling task difficulty, use of interactive small group instruction, and teaching strategic cognitive skills. "It may strike the reader that the big principles of instruction summarised from these syntheses are not revolutionary. Unfortunately, these principles are too rarely implemented in classrooms" (Vaughn et al., 2000, p. 111).

A message emerges from these syntheses. The quality of research being conducted needs to be monitored for its rigour. Future research needs to address these concerns of research design quality, and help provide future directions for meeting the needs of students with special education needs.

These syntheses do have important implications for work being conducted in Australia and New Zealand. The Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour program in New Zealand, for example, brings together several of the findings from these syntheses. In Australia, recent reports on the education of students with disabilities and learning difficulties highlight some of the features of effective instruction from these syntheses. In each instance, however, there is a need for educators to put personal opinion and self-interest aside, and actively support the implementation of effective educational practice.

Finally, it is important that special education researchers in Australia and New Zealand continue their work. At a time when research work is suffering from reduced funding, special educators need to work together to strengthen current findings, and assist in the development of tomorrow's effective practices.

The papers in this issue of the *Australasian Journal of Special Education* continue to promote

special education research. The work of Barry Carpenter is well known to readers, and his papers reminder of his passion for supporting quality special education programs. Ed Kameenui and Deborah Simmons provide a well articulated paper on the school-wide interventions

for students with special education needs. Finally, Nicole Todd provides a thought provoking insight to learning support in the secondary school sector.

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Editor

Kauffman, J. (1999). Commentary: Today's Special Education and Its Message for Tomorrow. *Journal of Special Education*, 32, 244-254.

Vaughn, S., Gersten, R., & Chard, D. (2000). The underlying message in LD intervention research: Findings from research syntheses. *Exceptional Children*, 67, 99-114.

***Special Issue***  
***Early Intervention***  
**Call for Papers**

Manuscripts are invited for consideration in a special issue of AJSE. This issue will focus on early intervention and education programs for young students with special education needs. Manuscripts reporting outcomes of research studies, literature reviews and critical analyses should be with the Editor, AJSE, by August 1, 2001. Publication is scheduled for December 1, 2001.

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