

In the past years, special education in the Australia and New Zealand has been placed under pressure from a number of sources. There are perceptions by some that special education has been reduced in status, with special education directorates or departments being restructured and/or included in other administrative structures. The reduced visibility of special education administrative portfolios could be viewed as special education being reduced in importance and value.

Special education teacher training programs have been a focus of attention for many years. Some states have been successful in ensuring all new teacher graduates have completed at least one pre-service subject in special education. Other states and territories continue to fight for this provision.

A more disturbing trend has been the down-sizing of university education faculties, and in some cases the closing of faculties. The result of these effects has been increased pressure to reduce excess, with special education programs one of the "excesses" that have been targeted as a luxury for programs to carry.

Throughout these developments, many special educators and support groups have lobbied to maintain the status quo, or at least retain services and teacher training programs that provide the fundamentals. These ongoing efforts are to be congratulated.

The up-shot of these efforts and the debate over service and program reductions, has been the challenge to define special education. Naomi Zigmond (1997) in a discussion of special education, developments over the past years of inclusion and integration, challenges the reader to reconsider what is meant by special education. Zigmond went on to define special education as: . . . focused on individual need. It is carefully

planned. It is intensive, urgent, relentless, and goal directed. It is empirically supported practice, drawn from the research." (Zigmond, 1997, p. 385)

In considering this definition, examination of current issues could be viewed differently. Discussion over service delivery in differing education systems, for example, is often influenced by setting. While education setting is a critical factor, the quality of the curriculum and instruction for the individual will heavily influence the outcome for students.

Pre-serve courses in universities is another example where the concept of special education is debated with students and amongst academics. The diversity of views is reflected in the differing offers in the universities across Australia and New Zealand. The issues of curriculum design, effective instruction, education environment and the individual child are issues that can be lost in debates over aetiology and factors that are often "unalterable".

The principles of special education as defined by Naomi Zigmond, need to be considered on a regular basis as the debate over the role of special education continues in differing education settings. These principles are special, and require persons with a deep understanding and skill to utilise if the special needs of students are to be met. *Importantly, special education programs are different and special.*

The articles in this issue of AJSE have a specific focus on inclusion. The first article in this issue recognises the invaluable contribution of Len Cosson to special education in New Zealand. Keri Wilton who delivered the 1997 Len Cosson Memorial Lecture, outlines a number of issues relating to inclusion, and to issues about the current status of special education.

Bailey and du Piessis address the concept of

inclusion in their paper, with the attitudes of Principals the specific target of their research. The importance of the Principal in guiding effective education programs for students with special education needs cannot be emphasised enough. Their results given plenty of ideas for further developments in the area.

In a follow-up to a paper in the previous issue, Wright and Sigafos discuss inclusion from the point of view of parents of students with and without special education needs. Their research raises a number of points, including concerns that are similar to those raised by teachers and administrators.

Lockwood and Lockwood discuss physical education and sport in relation to students with special education needs. Their topic, which receives little mention in the literature, and research outlines a number issues that could be the basis for more research in the area.

The final paper by Carter, Chalmers, Clayton and Hook, is an extensive examination of teacher perceptions relating to students with high support

needs. The paper outlines differences in perceptions between teachers in special education schools and teachers in regular school special classes, as well as teachers with and without specialist qualifications. The differences are again important contributions to the debate over the future and need for qualified special educators in schools.

The papers in the issue of AJSE are a critical part of the need to promote the value of special education to students with special education needs. The results of reduced services, and the reduction in the quality of special education programs, will unfortunately mean the work of people like Len Cosson may be short lived. Special education has an important part in the education programs delivered in schools, and to allow their importance to be down played or be reduced to the lowest common factor would result in special education no longer being "special", as described by Naomi Zigmond.

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