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**Abstract:**

Bob Jackson examines the necessity of inclusion. He suggests it is the question of who we see as belonging and who does not. Some reasons he outlines for inclusion are being good for the child, the school, teacher and society.



social development institution in our society after the family – therefore we have an extremely powerful tool to reverse the rejection of society and bring the child to a state of belonging with his or her peers. Inclusion has an inherent 'rightness', whereas segregation strengthens the rejection from shared experiences with peers over the developmental period which goes against all of the basic religious and secular values of our society. Inclusion fits the meaning of a 'fair go'.

2. *It's good for the school and essential for society*

Many of us worry about our society. We seem to be driven by four very powerful values:

- Materialism
- Individualism (the central importance of individual choice, rights and freedoms)
- Utilitarianism (valuing things and people by their usefulness and productivity).
- Hedonism – personal comfort and pursuit of pleasure and excitement.

If these are strong values of our culture, then we have to ask whether they are adding to or taking away from the 'glue' that binds us together as a community. Most would agree that the values above weaken 'community'. Take two other lists of values:

Compassion  
Caring  
Consideration  
Altruism  
Empathy  
Cooperation  
Assistance  
Friendship  
Commitment  
Humanism

Rejection  
Unconcern  
Insensitivity  
Selfishness  
Putting down  
Competition  
Undermining  
Devaluation  
Apathy  
Materialism

As parents and community members we want teachers to bring out the values on the left in the children in their care. These are all values that will increase the 'glue' that holds our community together. They are of course exactly the values that a child with a disability WILL bring out in other children with proper adult guidance and modelling. We call this the role of interpreting the culture and how it should respond. It is taught, consciously or not by how we act. What this means is that the child with a disability label can be a major asset to the school and can be *essential* to the building of a cohesive set of community values in the next generation, if we interpret this well. Children with a disability label are a wonderful resource who can transform a school's values and help build a very different world for the next generation, if we take the opportunity to interpret this well. These children are not a burden who should be grateful for anything that they get, unless we interpret it that way. We should therefore be grateful for the potential they bring to help build strength into our schools and society. On the other hand, we should ask what values we model if we refuse to count the child with a disability label as belonging.

## Should Schools Include Children with a Disability<sup>1</sup>?

Robert Jackson<sup>2</sup>, Ron Chalmers<sup>3</sup> and Darrell Wills<sup>4</sup>

Many parents struggle with decisions about the best education for their child who has been given some form of disability label. Despite a world-wide trend towards the inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, many psychologists, therapists and teachers will commonly recommend segregated education as being in the child's best interests, often putting considerable pressure onto parents to choose the segregated option. In particular, many schools see a child with a label as a burden who will increase the demands on an already stretched system. If a school accepts such a child it is likely to be seen as a noble act for which parents should be duly grateful.

The first point to consider about inclusion is that it is fundamentally a moral issue. It is a question of whom we see as belonging and who does not. It is a question of whom we share our resources with and who waits until resources arrive. It is a question of the forced segregation of children against the wishes of their parents and whether we want to be part of that. The question of costs and benefits of inclusion are ultimately secondary to these questions. Like all great moral questions they come down to where individuals stand, what they believe in and their own judgements based on their conscience and experience.

First, a definition of inclusion: it has 3 parts (Wills and Jackson, 1996)

- Physically included in the mainstream classroom to the same extent as all other children (that is, not in a separate room or in a 'pull out' program).
- Socially included with mainstream children (this means not isolated within a classroom with an aide).
- Included in the full regular curriculum, accommodating for the needs of all the individual differences in the class groupings.
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In forming judgements about inclusion, we should have the benefit of factual information and that is the purpose of this paper.

### Reasons for Inclusion

#### 1. *If is the right thing to do.*

A common experience of children with a disability and their family is rejection. This may come from family, friends, neighbours and acquaintances or just from the uncomfortable stares of total strangers. The child with a disability may have had no experiences of shared play in the sand pit, sleepovers or going over to a friend's place to play. Similarly families may be isolated from their own friends and support networks by this feeling of rejection. School is the most powerful

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3. *Long term outcomes*

The goal of segregated education reported in numerous policy documents from all over Australia over the last several decades is to prepare children with a disability to fit into the world after school. The small, segregated class structure with highly specialised teachers and therapists is said to be superior in achieving this goal. However, despite half a century of experience, it is obvious that this goal has not been realised for many children. A large number of people with a disability are unemployed after school and a significant proportion of the people who do have a job are in segregated employment on wages of a few dollars per week. Despite the introduction of a variety of government and non-government community support programs, many who live in the community are lonely and isolated with limited community friends and networks.

We should not be surprised at this outcome however. The segregated model works on the logic of segregating a person with a disability for the whole of the developmental period; surrounding him or her with student models who also have limited social and other skills; and teachers using a very different curriculum using specialist tools and therapies. After 12 years of this experience it is assumed that the person will be ready to be fully included in the general society. In common-sense terms, it doesn't make sense to be apart doing different things to learn to live together.

The cost of this model is huge. If people who fail to be included after this separation are then cared for, for the rest of their lives in residential care the cost to the community is millions of dollars per annum. Similarly a person who fails to be included in employment after this separation incurs a financial cost to the community and if they fail to be socially adept after this separation and are receiving a day service such as sheltered work additional costs are incurred. Again, in common-sense terms, it doesn't make sense to be apart doing different things to learn to live together. However we know that people with a disability who are included in regular education have a much higher probability of paid employment due to their learning of appropriate social skills and the established networks of friends from school will enhance their job contact networks. They are more likely to become contributors to the financial wealth of the community and live an ordinary life.

4. *It's good for the child with a disability*

We now have over 40 years of comparative research of the impact of segregated versus inclusive education. In our combined studies we have not found the research that would validate segregation over inclusion. In fact, in a recent review of the literature that the senior author conducted for an international conference on inclusion, NOT EVEN ONE research article could be found that compared inclusion with segregation and favoured segregation. Professors or Heads of Education at Australian Universities were written to stating this finding and asking if they knew of any contrary finding. No one came up with a contrary finding. The finding was not challenged by any of the international experts at the conference, who indeed agreed with the finding. Similarly, Directors General of Education in all Australian States were asked for the research base on which they recommended segregated schooling. While many referred to government reports, they also could not provide empirical evidence in support of segregated schooling for children with the intellectual disability

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label. Therefore we can only conclude scientifically that the belief commonly stated to parents that children with a disability are better off in segregated education is unsupported by research. In fact the opposite is true. Based on studies involving thousands of children in several countries, the research (some key references have been attached at the end of this paper) is clear:

- Children with an intellectual disability do better academically and socially when included.
- The more they are included, the better they do, academically and socially. That is, pull out programs or part-time inclusion models are detrimental in comparison to full inclusion. The longer the child is in segregated education, the larger the gap with the child who is included.
- In some major studies, inclusion was found to be *significantly* better than segregation, and children who were segregated *lost* percentile ranks.
- These findings also apply to children with severe and profound levels of disability. They also do better academically and socially in inclusive settings, and do better the more that they are included.
- Students with an intellectual disability in special schools tended to have fewer friends than students with an intellectual disability in mainstreamed schools, most of them meeting friends at school only.
- Students in special education schools felt lonelier than students in mainstream. They also responded more passively.

It is very important to note that the above research DOES NOT say that children fail to learn in segregated settings. Numerous studies show that children do develop skills in such settings. The point from the research is that they learn significantly better if they are included, regardless of the extent of their disability.

#### 5. *It's good for other children*

We have seen how the inclusion of children with a disability label allows us to demonstrate and directly teach values critical for the future generations. This is also demonstrated in research findings that have been remarkably consistent over decades and across many countries. It has been found that for children who share inclusive schools with children with disability labels:

- Students who participated in social integration programs have more positive attitudes towards children with disability labels.
- They learned how to match their language to the ability of the children with a disability label.
- They engaged in less disruptive behaviour and spent an equal amount of time working, playing and talking with their peers.
- There was no reduction in academic progress for non-labelled children.
- Non-labelled children do not pick up undesirable behaviour from the children with a disability label.
- Students showed:
  - A reduced fear of difference.
  - Growth in social awareness.
  - Improvement in their own self concept.
  - Development of personal ethics.
  - Development of warm and caring friendships.
- The more contact with labelled children, the better the outcomes, for example:
  - Tolerance of others.
  - Positive changes in their social status with peers.

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- Valuing relationships with children with disability labels.
- Development of personal values.

6. *It's good for teachers*

Classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse with children from other countries; children from a range of home backgrounds, some with very significant issues; children with significant learning difficulties, and children who may be one or two years ahead of the class. With the worldwide increase in accountability of teachers in relation to student outcomes, teachers have to teach children at multiple levels simultaneously. The child with a disability label has a major developmental impact on teachers in learning how to teach to diversity more effectively and how to break down or 'scaffold' curriculum to make it accessible to all. This has significant benefits for all children, many of whom can be overlooked in the day-to-day business of the class. As the teacher learns to individualise curriculum, the child who is advanced is also given extension. Other noted benefits are the increased use of careful groupings and structuring classroom environments; greater accent on positive and developmental teaching, and major boosts to teacher self esteem. Many see it as the best thing that happened to them in their teaching career if they have been properly supported through the process. Research also has cast considerable doubt on some common concerns. For example it has been found in large review studies that:

- The presence of students with 'severe disability' labels had no effect on levels of (teachers') allocated or engaged time.
- Time lost to interruptions of instruction not significantly different to non-inclusive classrooms.

However, we are realistically cautious here. We appreciate that these are overall results and do not mean that any one individual child cannot be a significant problem in a classroom. However, this is not a 'disability' issue, as it is too often stereotyped, as almost any child can have that effect. Inclusion also pre-supposes appropriate support, school leadership, planning and in-service. These are 'how' questions which are outside of the scope of this paper, but the subject of some of our other writings as well as those of our colleagues around the world and in Australia who have achieved positive results consistently.

7. *It doesn't cost any more overall*

While a lot of the argument about inclusion focuses on resources, when systems have moved to inclusion the consistent outcome is that it doesn't cost any more. Huge resources are held in the segregated systems, and as the demand for these falls, resources become available for inclusion. We do think resources need to be differently distributed and we have written on this elsewhere. (see Wills & Cain, *Interaction 16#4*).

Similarly, while resources are held to be critical, evidence does not support this. A consistent finding is that attitudes are the single most important determinant of success. Then issues such as school leadership, school policies of the inclusion and belonging of ALL children, a positive support teacher, assistance with curriculum modification, and in-class support start to figure.

8. *It's a world wide trend*

Inclusion is not just some new 'fad'. One of the first examples of coverage of the

topic goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a letter to Helen Keller by Alexander Graham Bell advising, "send the teachers to the children, not the children to the teachers". The law was changed in America in 1974 to enforce inclusion as the first choice of schooling for all. Italy went to a full inclusion system over a decade ago. Education in the UK is increasingly supporting inclusion. Canada is strongly implementing inclusion with some provinces such as New Brunswick moving to a full inclusion policy with no segregated system. New Zealand has moved to parent choice in education. Most countries in the third world are on an inclusion path. In the Salamanca statement made over a decade ago now, the United Nations endorsed inclusion as the policy that should be supported world wide for education.

9. *It's certain to be policy*

In Australia, Victoria and Tasmania have moved to a parent choice model so that if a parent wants full inclusion, that is what is provided with support. In 2002 the WA Department of Education carried out an extensive review of special education services. All of the feedback and documents emanating from the Department point to parent choice being the policy for the future, and there have been dramatic improvements in support for inclusion coming from the Department and many schools. Queensland is similarly undergoing an extensive review of their system with a similar outcome expected. While details are not known of the other states and territories, it is inevitable that all will be brought to a similar position through moral and political pressure. While some private schools are reportedly trying to avoid the issue by referring children with a disability label to the state 'special education' system, their moral vulnerability on the issue can be expected to bring them towards a policy of inclusion rather than rejection. Other private schools have shown great moral and educational leadership in a similar way to many of the public schools.

10. *It's the law*

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 states that both direct and indirect discrimination against a person with a disability is unlawful. *Direct discrimination* is where a person with a disability is not accorded the same rights and benefits as all other persons. For example, if a child with a disability were refused enrolment at a school when others in a similar situation were allowed enrolment, this would most likely be direct discrimination and if so it would be illegal.

*Indirect discrimination* is where, if a person with a disability requires supports in order to access a benefit available to others without a disability, it is the responsibility of the organisation involved to provide the necessary supports. The obvious example is where a child in a wheelchair cannot access the school due to steps blocking access. It is the responsibility of the school to adapt the environment to provide access – in this case probably by a ramp. For a child with an intellectual impairment, if the support needed to access the learning environment is adult assistance in the classroom, then this also must be provided under the law if a claim of indirect discrimination is to be avoided.

The defence against a charge of discrimination is unjustifiable hardship. This requires a balancing of the benefit or detriment against the hardship in meeting the requirements of the Act. It should be noted that financial considerations are unlikely to be considered unreasonable hardship as the whole budget of the



education department is considered, not just the school budget. Similarly, while a ramp might cost \$40,000, it will last 20 years and therefore the cost considered would be \$2,000 per year. It has also been found in key cases to go before the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that segregation is inherently discriminatory so substantial benefit would need to be shown to compensate for the inherent discrimination of segregating a child. There are increasing numbers of cases going before the Equal Opportunity Tribunals around the country, most being settled 'out of court' to avoid publicity. It is likely that this trend will continue.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, there is a provision for Educational Standards to be set to ensure that schools are complying with the Act. Committees have been working on developing these standards for several years, and it is planned that they will come into effect in early 2004. This will mean that all schools will have to demonstrate how they are actively supporting children with disabilities to access the same educational opportunities as all children in an inclusive environment and what adaptations they have made to make this a reality.

We leave you with these 10 compelling reasons to consider "why include". If we can get past why, we will have demonstrated our *will to include*. With the will, it will work because we can focus all of our energies on developing the *skills* to make it work. Developing the skills is an issue but after all that is the business of education.

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