Challenges of the secondary school context for inclusive teaching

Michelle Pearce, Jan Gray and Glenda Campbell-Evans
Edith Cowan University

Senate and State Government reviews into inclusion in Australian schools during the last two decades have revealed that the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools has proved challenging. A qualitative study involving interviews with 50 leaders in inclusive education suggest that currently the secondary school context is a barrier to the development of inclusive teachers. Although inclusive policies and legislation are in place, they are not supported by adequate funding and resources. This has had a negative effect on the capacity of systems, schools and teachers to be inclusive. From the views expressed by the participants in this research, it is clear that there is a continued need for systems to allocate adequate funding and resources, review current secondary school structure and professional learning, and for stakeholders to have access to specialist knowledge so as to enact the philosophy of inclusion.

Introduction

The Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) specified the supportive context in which teachers needed to work and learn the knowledge and skills required to become inclusive. For everyone in the community to work towards inclusion, it is important that systems allocate adequate funding and resources, that schools are reformed and that all the stakeholders receive training so as to understand the philosophy of inclusion. While inclusion legislation, policies and curricula indicated that Australian education sectors were following the blueprint for inclusion, reviews and research literature suggested otherwise.

Research, Senate and state government reviews into inclusion in Australian schools during the last two decades have revealed that the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools has proved challenging (Chadbourne, 1997; Department of Education of Western Australia, 2001; Department of Education Tasmania, 2000; DEST, 1998, 2002; Ford, 2007; Forlin, 1995, 2001; Hay & Winn, 2005; Loreman, 2001; McRae, 1996; Meyer, 2001; Ministerial Taskforce, 2004; Nitschke & McColl, 2001; Parkins, 2002; Vinson, 2002; Zipin & White, 2002). The reviews and research suggested inclusion in secondary schools has proved to be more challenging than in the primary school context (DEST, 2002; Shaddock, Smyth King, & Giorcelli, 2007; Vinson, 2002).

Some secondary schools have demonstrated a capacity to change cultures and adopt inclusive practices (Carrington, 2002; Smyth & McInerney, 2007), but lighthouse schools appear to be small in number and replication appears to be difficult (DEST, 2002; Hargreaves, 2005). It was anticipated that middle schools with their primary school structures would be more inclusive, but the employment of secondary school

teachers for their knowledge of curriculum and content has transferred secondary school practices and cultures to middle schools (Mathews, 2002).

The majority of secondary schools have retained their traditional factory model structures (Munt, 2004; Vinson, 2002), subjects tending to be the focus rather than pedagogy (Loreman, 2000). Hargreaves (2005) attributed teacher resistance to change in secondary schools to their structural division into subjects and departments, blaming "balkanization" for the limited opportunities teachers had for collaboration. In a traditional secondary school structure driven by subject-based timetables, teachers can be allocated four to six different classes each day, or between 100 and 200 students per week (Pearce & Forlin, 2005). The amount of time needed for preparation for such large numbers of students places high school teachers under considerable pressure (Fisher, Sax, & Pumpian, 2003; Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker, 2001). In addition to the lack of school reform, reviews and research maintained that funding and teacher preparation were inadequate.

The purpose of the paper is to explore the impact of the secondary school context on teachers and teaching from the perspective of leaders in inclusive education. Specifically, the research question posed was: How does the secondary school context impact upon the inclusive practices of secondary teachers?

Methods

Qualitative methods were chosen for this research. The opinions of leaders of inclusive education were sought to enable the construction of a portrait of an inclusive teacher in the secondary school context (Pearce, Campbell-Evans & Gray, 2010). A total of 50 leaders (L1-L50) from every Australian state and territory were interviewed in person or by phone for an average of one hour. Leaders were asked to share their experience of including students with disabilities in the secondary school context. Leaders were asked to describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes of secondary teachers whom they judged to be inclusive, to draw upon their experience in training and supporting teachers to explain how teachers learned to be inclusive and to discuss the secondary school context (see Appendix 1). For authenticity and to ground the responses in the reality of the secondary school context rather than theory, leaders were given five vignettes of hypothetical students with disabilities. The vignettes depicted students of different genders, disabilities, ages and learning profiles (see Appendix 2). The leaders were asked to suggest how a teacher could include the students in the vignette academically and socially in a nominated subject area (e.g. Maths; English). The leaders were also asked to comment on professional development and how they believed teachers learned to be inclusive.

Data were collected from members of the teaching profession directly responsible for the inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary schools. To be considered a leader in inclusive education, for purposes of this research, participants were required to have outstanding depth of knowledge and experience in supporting students with disabilities and their teachers in the secondary school context. Leaders needed to be familiar with the practices, processes, and thoughts of secondary teachers, students

with and without disabilities and their parents. Those selected were highly regarded by their peers and had a wealth of teaching experience overseas, in remote regions of Australia and/or states other than those in which they currently resided. Every participant had either taught in or been a consultant to secondary schools and most had experience teaching in primary schools, special schools, classes, units or centres. Several had experience as principals.

The leader participants were 50 in number and drawn from all Australian states and school sectors, and were currently engaged in a range of roles (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Demographic data on leaders in inclusive education

Demographic item		No.	Demographic item		No.
Australian state or territory	NSW	4	Current role	Academic	7
	WA	36		Consultant	16
	Tasmania	2		Psychologist	1
	Victoria	4		Administrator	2
	Queensland	2		Acting Principal	1
	ACT	1		Secondary School Teacher	1
	South Australia	1		Head of Dept	1
Education sector	Government	21		Head of Dept (Support)	4
	Catholic	10		Head of Dept (Special Education)	4
	Independent	12		Learning Support Coordinator	9
	University	7		Special Education Teacher	4
Gender	Male	7	Specialist role of consult-ants	Vision impaired	1
	Female	43		Learning Difficulties	2
Qualific-ations	Primary	28		Behaviour/Emotional	1
	Secondary	17		Physical/Hearing/Vision	1
	Primary and Second	5			
	Special Education	36			
	Psychology	6			
Highest qualific-ations	PhD	7			
	Masters	9			
	Degree	20			
	Diploma/Grad	14			

NB Some leaders were qualified in more than one field

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 leaders and telephone interviews with the 16 leaders who were at a distance. Interviews varied in length but on average were one hour. Questions were emailed to the leaders before the interview.

Data analysis was based on the principles of content analysis outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display and examination, data conclusion and interpretation. As part of the data reduction process, similar codes were grouped. In the second stage of the analysis, data bearing the same codes were collated. The display of the data indicated the strength of the opinion within the sample. Each descriptor needed to be identified by at least five leaders to be included in the final profile. Once these stages of analysis were completed, data conclusions and interpretations were made and

categories emerged which highlighted the challenges of the secondary school context for inclusive teaching.

Analysis of the data identified a series of challenges related to the secondary school context which, from the perspective of leaders in inclusion, faced secondary teachers as they worked towards meeting the expectations of inclusion as made explicit by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Three major challenges are outlined below.

Inadequate funding

The majority of leaders in inclusive education participating in this research held the view that the rhetoric of inclusive policies was not matched by funding. The massive injection of funds required to ensure that students had access to buildings had not been delivered in the leaders' view. They described old schools and schools built on several levels which required considerable expenditure to make them wheelchair accessible. On other occasions, schools could not afford to alter unsatisfactory modifications. Although it was only four years old, a school in which one leader was teaching had been built with ramps steeper than the building specifications. There were further examples of toilets which met the building regulations for disabled toilets but did not cater for the particular needs of the student in the wheelchair. Leaders were not impressed that schools which were inclusive and welcomed students with disabilities became prohibitive because they could not offer physical access. A significant dollar commitment was needed for the education sectors to renovate the buildings to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), 1992. The funds were not always available, or if they were available, not well spent.

Access to learning was also reported to be affected by funding. For example, one leader was exasperated because her cluster of schools faced a 30% reduction in funds supporting students with disabilities. This would reduce the number of assistants who could be employed, thereby forcing students with disabilities to be grouped in one class, contrary to the philosophy of inclusion. The leader understood that the funding cuts were the result of serious problems in the state's health budget, which had forced all government departments to slash their expenditure. Likewise, a leader-academic reported a secondary school with an inclusive model had been working impressively but was forced to abandon the model after two years due to lack of funding. A suggestion was made that:

> the other reason there's growing resistance to inclusion is that the bucket of money for inclusion is not getting any bigger but the number of kids to be incorporated in the bucket is rising exponentially. The rhetoric from government doesn't ever match the practice, and it's because there's a lot of rhetoric and not a lot of money that a lot of teachers just go, "Thanks, but no thanks!" (L47).

Another problem for secondary schools reported by the leaders was that funding diminished as children moved from primary to secondary school context in the misguided belief that as students grew older less support would be needed. This was at

odds with the reality that leaders encountered. Therapy services were almost unheard of in the secondary school context, not enough consultants were available to cover demand, Learning Support Teams (LSTs) were overwhelmed with referrals, and were stressed because they could not meet demand. In the experience of the leaders, high schools continually found themselves having to prioritise, and sometimes needed to take resources from one student to provide for another. Lack of funding made it difficult for secondary schools to comply with inclusive legislation and policies, or for systems to reform the organisational structure of schools.

Secondary school structure and professional knowledge

While the physical structure of some secondary schools was restricting the access of students in wheelchairs, the leaders believed that the organisational structure was impeding teacher acquisition of student knowledge. Two leaders who had worked in a middle school praised its structure as being conducive to inclusion, largely because teachers found it easier to know their students personally. The leaders found that longer lessons of 100 minutes, open-plan classrooms and integrated subjects gave teachers the time needed to get to know their students. In their experience, teacher collaboration with parents and support staff was "smoother and more frequent" in a middle school structure (L20). The "sheer size" (L24) and structure of secondary schools, with teachers being responsible for teaching so many classes and students, "the transient nature" (L1) or "rotation" (L11) of students made it very difficult for teachers to get to know their students. Communication of student knowledge to teachers was described as "almost impossible" (L21) and "labour intensive" (L44). With the possibility of one student having at least sixteen different teachers at any given time, sharing student knowledge depended on co-ordination, but leaders said that many schools did not have a Learning Support Co-ordinator to facilitate the information sharing. Consequently, not every school had efficient student data recording processes in place and teachers still had to find the time to read the limited information in student records, databases and files.

The majority of the leaders were fairly sympathetic to secondary teachers, one consultant-leader, for example, accepting that:

> … it's the way secondary is made up and of course we have a huge amount of pressure on secondary teachers. … I'm never critical of secondary teachers because they have a huge role and it is completely different to primary school because of that (L5).

The leaders understood that secondary teachers had to work their way through the curriculum because they had exams "looming" (L35) over them, making comments such as "It's not their fault that they're driven by the timetable and what happens at the end of secondary school" (L44). One leader believed that for inclusion to have any hope of success, the whole structure needed to be seriously reformed with a rethink of secondary education, to "design a new wheel" rather than "patch up a few holes and reinvent the old one" (L40).

However, a minority of the leaders interviewed were less sympathetic because they believed teachers supported the secondary structure and its characteristic subject domination. They criticised secondary teachers for their "real resistance to moving away from just teaching the curriculum topics as they come up and teaching the topics one after the other. It doesn't matter where the kids are. You just go onto the next topic and each year, just go on to the topics for that year" (L47). Most of the leaders claimed teachers were "caught up in wanting to teach and having to teach the secondary program" (L18), "getting through the curriculum or syllabus and the examination" (L35) or "imparting chunks of knowledge" (L2). There was consensus amongst the leaders that secondary school teachers lacked the pedagogical knowledge and flexibility necessary to give students access to the curriculum. One leader proposed that flexibility was a characteristic of primary teachers due to the nature of their training and role. The domination of the curriculum and subjects in secondary schools attracted people for their interest in curriculum and subjects, which was reinforced by their training.

Leaders participating in this study shared the view that secondary school teachers were reliant on systems and schools to upgrade their knowledge and skills during their teaching careers. They commended professional development programs which had an action research component and provided ongoing support to teachers as they developed their skills. The majority of leaders reported that curriculum and content continued to dominate formal professional development activities.

Many leaders also noted that teachers trained to deliver syllabuses or content-based curricula experienced problems when courses became more esoteric or teachers had to develop the curriculum themselves, such as in an inclusive classroom. One leader expressed this in the following way:

> I understand the push for inclusive schooling. I understand the courses of study... We need to be realistic about how long it's going to take inclusive schooling to be up and running in order to show how courses of study and inclusive schooling can marry and how we can define that. Teachers need a prototype. Show us what that looks like on paper and show me what it looks like in the classroom and then I think you'll have a very happy marriage of all those things (L32).

The organisational structure of secondary schools is, according to the leaders, making curriculum and content knowledge a priority. As a result, the pedagogical knowledge of secondary school teachers, which would assist them to differentiate of the curriculum and pedagogy, teach the whole child and manage students with challenging behaviours, was not seen by the participating leaders to be the priority of professional development initiatives. Each of these challenges is explored in detail below.

Limited pedagogical knowledge

Leaders who had observed teachers in secondary classrooms reported the majority lacked pedagogical and pedagogical content knowledge. In their view, curriculum and

exam-driven secondary school teachers relied upon traditional "chalk and talk" (L15) teaching methods. The typical lesson, according to another leader, was that of the teacher modelling an example on the whiteboard at the beginning of the lesson, followed by the students using their textbooks to complete tasks, and correcting their own work at the end of the lesson. Several leaders noted that teachers were highly competent at setting tasks, but not at giving students strategies to help them learn. As one leader explained, "they regurgitated material and expected the kids to pick it up, as opposed to ensuring that kids picked up the learning" (L34). Another commented that "their culture is to present information regardless of the skills of the students" (L41). The conclusion to be drawn, based on the data supplied by leaders in inclusive education, appears to be that secondary school teachers perceived their role to be teaching subjects, believing their students had the responsibility to learn.

Several leaders thought secondary teachers were either unaware or did not want to acknowledge their lack of pedagogical knowledge. Without this realisation, teachers did not seek or welcome opportunities to learn new knowledge, the attitude of a typical secondary teacher being, "I haven't had to change my teaching for 25 years. Why should I change now?" (L42). A member of the research sample, employed by a secondary school specifically for her pedagogical knowledge, had the same impression. Far from providing leadership to her secondary colleagues, the leader found that when she developed programs which featured collaborative learning, rubrics or outcome statements, the secondary teachers criticised and altered them to suit their narrow interpretations of curriculum and pedagogy. They made it very clear to the leader their belief that they were the experts because she was 'only primary trained'. According to this group of leaders, the domination of subjects left teachers with limited pedagogical knowledge, thus reducing their capacity to individualise their teaching, teach the whole child, manage diverse classes and moderate the behaviour of some students.

Differentiation of curriculum

With secondary school teachers continuing to use "the one size fits all approach" or "the factory model of education" (L24), the leaders concluded that many students with disabilities affecting learning were being denied access to the curriculum. Legislation may have given students "physical access but they don't have participation" (L47). With limited student and pedagogical knowledge, secondary teachers were unable to match pedagogy to their students in order to cater for individual needs. Based on her observations in classrooms, one leader explained that high school teachers:

> … have problems varying instructional approaches, coping with instructional levels … even their level of oral communication complexity makes it difficult for the students to understand what is spoken within the classroom. Content in their key learning area is considered the priority. They provide a shortage of concrete or practical learning experiences. A lot of the instructions are theory based and abstract … Content is delivered usually at too great a pace. Presentation of written material is usually far too wordy, too lengthy, too difficult for students to manage to actually read through (L28).

The research participants were critical of the lack of differentiation in curricula and assessment methods. One described how the curriculum "goes along like a freight train and won't stop for anybody because the end point is the Year 12 exam so all classes have to complete x amount of work in a year, and they have common assessment tasks" (L23). Assessment tasks were described as "standardised" (L23), with leaders thinking secondary teachers taught to the middle level in each class and urgently needed to learn how to differentiate. One leader summarised this view by saying "I think the one we still need to target is differentiating the curriculum, and how to layer it for different levels of student ability to improve student ability to access the curriculum" (L10).

Leaders noted that teachers who experienced difficulties individualising the curriculum, strategies, tasks and assessment also experienced problems developing and implementing Individual Education Plans (IEPs). While most leaders were strong advocates of the IEP process, two leaders questioned the practicality of IEPs in the secondary school context, insisting that teachers did not have time for lengthy documentation or collaboration.

Leaders felt that one of the main reasons for teacher resistance to individualisation and the management of diverse classes was that "teachers think it means extra work for them" (L14). The leaders agreed that lack of time and resources were adding to the teachers' workloads:

> When we ask them to adjust for a child with special education needs, in the range from learning difficulties down to moderate disabilities, teachers have to put in effort and they don't have the time or the energy, let alone the knowledge. There are no materials out there for teachers to adjust with, and no-one's really supporting them out there to do that (L29).

The leader cohort noticed that teachers strongly upheld principles of equality and fairness rather than equity. A Head of Learning Area described the attitude of her colleagues as being, "why should I put extra time into that one child when I've got 32 others? They deserve one thirty-second of my time and no more" (L33). Those interviewed for this research accepted the difficulty of regular teachers delivering the intensity of teaching necessary for some students. They understood that teachers could not immediately stop teaching the class to address issues relevant to an individual student, but knew that if teachers did not act immediately, students with intellectual disabilities, for example, may not recall the situation or understand why they had suffered the consequences. Subject teachers did not have any time or flexibility in their timetables to teach intensively within or outside class times.

Teaching the whole child

Leaders also believed that limited pedagogical knowledge of secondary teachers and domination of subjects led to a narrow focus on intellectual development rather than the whole child:

> I actually believe that's because primary school teachers tend to look after the whole child more than the secondary school teachers. It may be because they have the one class all the time, but they are actually more in tune with the social and emotional side of the child as well as their academic learning. Secondary school teachers have got this content that they've got to get across to the class in this amount of time (L14).

Most of the leaders in this research believed that social outcomes, for example, were not a government or systemic priority or considered to be "value adding" in the secondary school context, as explained:

> I think the problem is the way the government's selling academic excellence as a model at all levels now. The more we go to these report forms which will highlight the fact that the kids that are at the bottom are at the bottom, we're never going to change. I think the kids with special needs know that they're not doing the same as everybody else and the system is pretending that by integration in a regular classroom that they are, and they're certainly not (L47).

It was clear from the data that the leaders believed that because secondary teachers had not been trained in child development, and teaching literacy, numeracy or living skills, they did not consider teaching the whole child to be their responsibility. As far as teachers were concerned, the academic development of students consumed their time and they did not have time to learn or focus on other aspects of child development. Managing diverse classes and the challenging behaviour of students were also adding to their unmanageable workload, making it even less likely that they would welcome their responsibility to teach the whole child.

Managing challenging behaviours

Leaders nominated the management of challenging behaviours as an important pedagogical skill of inclusive teachers. From their observations of high school teachers, however, leaders concluded that very few teachers had the knowledge, skills or desire to manage students with challenging behaviours, not always associated with disabilities. Frequent reference was made to students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD), Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and autism throughout the interviews. Leaders with primary backgrounds directly linked poor teaching with student misbehaviour in secondary schools, regardless of the student's disability. They felt that student behaviour was aggravated by the use of traditional teaching methods which often excluded students with learning difficulties from the curriculum. Leaders observed teachers who felt frustrated when the students did not "get the subject. They didn't value the child. They taught a subject not a kid" (L34). As the frustration level of the teacher rose, the student's self esteem fell, behaviour problems escalated and the teacher reacted adversely without understanding the cause or knowing how to respond.

All the leaders agreed the behaviour of secondary school students was far more difficult to manage than those in primary schools, with Year 9 students described as

"feral" (L19). They were sympathetic, particularly special education teachers who taught in secondary schools, realising that teachers did not have time to give students with behavioural issues the attention they needed to change those behaviours. The challenging behaviours of students in secondary school were not only a challenge to schools and teachers, but to inclusion itself. Leaders in the study commented that in their experience, secondary teachers were not renowned for their patience; but more for their inclination to exclude difficult students. A leader-academic indicated that:

> It's still quite traditional for students with severe behavioural problems to be excluded and to be placed in alternative schools. If you have got a problem and you don't want to have to deal with it, then you make sure everybody is aware of the problem and exclude (L49).

Rigid teacher attitudes such as "the rules are the rules" (L39) did not support the needs of students with disabilities and escalated negative behaviours. Leaders also reported that consistency was a problem when each student had so many teachers and communication of student knowledge was such a challenge. It was also apparent some schools lacked effective behaviour management policies and procedures. Expertise in challenging behaviours was regarded as a specialist field, even amongst the leaders, several of them acknowledging their own lack of expertise and training in controlling challenging behaviours. Leaders recounted stories of students who challenged their skills, but they were more confident in their ability to draw upon previous experience, did not take the behaviours personally, and dealt with each challenge as a problem-solving exercise.

The domination of subject knowledge rather than pedagogy in professional development, no increase in time allocations for planning, and little support in classrooms had resulted in secondary teachers finding individualisation, teaching the whole child, managing diverse classrooms and students with challenging behaviours difficult. The leaders' solution was to give teachers the knowledge they needed to include students with disabilities at point of need, but the context was proving to be less than conducive to this change in focus.

From their experience in the field, leaders recognised that teachers were at different points in their understanding of inclusion and varied in their capacity to teach students with disabilities. Teaching students with disabilities was not like mastering the curriculum or pedagogy where accomplishment at high levels could be attained following years of mounting experience. Even the experience of teaching students with the same disabilities did not necessarily prepare teachers for the next student. Leaders were aware of situations where a new student, whose needs were beyond the skills of the teacher, arrived without notice.

Access to specialist knowledge

Leaders recommended that teachers needed access to teachers or consultants with special education expertise at point of need. They were concerned, however, that the lack of resources and expertise meant the availability of special education knowledge

could not be guaranteed. A supported viewpoint was that, "the issue with inclusive education is that knowledge and experience around teaching disability, students with disability and strategies are equally important. It is not something that we want to lose" (L37).

Systems and schools did provide consultants, Learning Support Teams, Learning Support Co-ordinators and special education teachers, but leaders in these roles were experiencing difficulties in meeting demand. The efficacy of the consultation model depended on availability. Leaders who were consultants acknowledged that teachers had limited access and often had to wait long periods to access their expertise.

Leaders in general thought that learning support coordinators (LSCs) with special education expertise had the potential to play a vital role in the development of the knowledge and skills of regular teachers. However, leaders who were LSCs reported that their value was restricted by inadequate time allocation. For example, an LSC who only worked one day per week claimed she could only communicate the most essential student knowledge to teachers, with no time being available to recommend or teach skills, share expertise or co-teach. Another LSC in the sample found it difficult being in a part-time position yet being responsible for a large number of students with disabilities. She regarded her greatest problem as being: "Lack of time. Lack of resources. There's only me three days a week supporting all the kids and that's difficult" (L21).

Leaders in the research sample suggested that an additional cause for concern was the lack of special education expertise amongst LSCs. Without specialist expertise, the co-ordinator needed to consult others with special education expertise and then communicate the information to the teachers involved, thereby adding another stage to the process.

With a shortage of consultants or visiting teachers, the process is slowed considerably, with potentially serious consequences for teachers and students, as Leader 10 explained: "One of the things that most alarms me is the people being appointed as learning support specialists who have no special ed training at all". Leader 16 considered that "it would be very difficult for the Learning Support Co-ordinator in a school who didn't have an Ed Support background to be advising mainstream teachers on the strategies that work really well with students with an intellectual disability".

Negativity and fear of failure

Although leaders could see the big picture and believed that inclusion had been beneficial to many students with disabilities and teacher attitudes had become more positive, there was a high level of agreement that teacher attitudes to inclusion in secondary school were mostly negative. While leaders were impressed with the inclusivity and collaboration of teachers in primary schools, they had difficulty conjuring images of inclusive secondary school teachers. Some leaders spent several minutes trying to think of inclusive teachers in the secondary school context and eventually based their answers on one teacher who was reasonably inclusive, or

combined the characteristics of several teachers. Validation feedback from one participant captured the view of the leaders: "particularly agree with the statements about the 'inclusive teacher', but where do you find them???? In general, they're pretty thin on the ground!!!" (L15).

Negative teacher attitudes were identified by many of the leaders as a major barrier to inclusion in the secondary school context. These leaders claimed that if teachers "don't want them there, then they go out of their way to find every excuse as to why they can't be there" (L49). Leader 11 remarked, "If teachers don't believe that a child should be included, it's not going to happen". The experience of leaders was that, rather than trying to understand the educational impact of a disability on a student, some teachers immediately reacted negatively to the label. An interviewee stated her "biggest concern was the pejorative nature of labels. As soon as the girls have the labels stuck on their heads, the doors shut" (L11).

As part of their roles, leaders endeavoured to nurture positive teacher attitudes to inclusion, but it was evident in their comments that they had experienced a great deal of frustration with minimal success. Leaders suspected that teachers and some principals did not want to change their attitudes, one asking rhetorically, "How do you motivate teachers to want to gain the skills and the knowledge? They're quite happy to continue in their blinkered little worlds" (L23). Another leader was equally pessimistic about changing negative attitudes when she stated, "Attitudes. I mean that's extremely hard. Even after PD I don't know whether their attitudes would change" (L21). When a leader was asked to prioritise the professional development needs of teachers, she responded that her "first impression is to say attitudes and attributes but you cannot professionally develop those by specifically targeting them" (L43).

Most leaders, however, attributed the negative attitudes to teachers being conscious they were not qualified in special education, which led to the conclusion they lacked the knowledge and skills to teach students with disabilities. One leader's comment was a typical response:

> Probably the main problem is that teachers have a negative aspect towards teaching the kids with the disabilities because they're not trained in doing so. I hear time and time again that they say, "We weren't trained in teaching these kids. We don't know how to teach these kids . . . . I don't want to be a special ed teacher" (L48).

It was abundantly clear to the leaders that a secondary teacher's subject knowledge was the source of their professional knowledge and from this sprang their feelings of efficacy, confidence and professionalism. Leaders spoke at length, and with some derision, about secondary school teachers' love for their subjects which appeared to motivate them far more than teaching children. It was only to be expected, therefore, that teachers whose pride and sense of value rested on their knowledge and teaching skills did not like to feel "stupid" or to be seen as "failing" in front of their colleagues, parents or students because they did not know how to teach students with disabilities (L2).

Diffusion of responsibility

The teachers' conviction that they lacked the necessary qualifications, expertise, time and support, their fear of failure and negative attitudes, led to a belief that they could not meet their responsibilities. Consequently, teachers resorted to what leaders termed "diffusion of responsibility" (L17).

A special education class within the school was the ideal target for diffusing responsibility. Leaders with a special education background recounted instances of students being sent back to units on the slightest pretext. Schools without an LSC were especially vulnerable to diffusion of responsibility, with student knowledge becoming scattered and lost amongst Year Co-ordinators, Heads of Houses, Heads of Learning Areas, deputy principals, psychologists, home teachers and teaching assistants. "There is always somebody else. You can say it is their issue. It is their problem. It is not mine." (L49).

Probably the easiest way to shift responsibility, however, was to pass it to the assistants. Leader 29 explained that "because of the lack of time, many teachers just flick it to the aide to do". The majority of the leaders were quite clear about the boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of teachers and education assistants: teachers are responsible for the development and implementation of the program of every student in the class; assistants are there to assist in program implementation and to be directed and closely supervised by the teacher. Despite their role clarity, the use of assistants was a concern of every leader because in their experience assistants were being given much of the responsibility for programming, and making educational decisions. Leaders reported instances of assistants teaching, developing programs, writing outcomes, differentiating the curriculum, reporting to parents, writing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and being given responsibility for managing the behaviour of the students.

The term "velcroed" was disapprovingly applied by many of the leaders to describe an assistant's close proximity in classrooms to a child with disabilities. In each case, the assistant was attached to the child with a disability because the child generated the funding. With insufficient "planning, training and clarity" (L9) of their roles and responsibilities, assistants were considered by many of the leaders interviewed to be under-utilised. Adding to the confusion, assistants were under the supervision of a range of people including Heads of Learning Areas, LSCs, unit and deputy principals.

Despite their expressions of sympathy for teachers in the secondary school context, leaders also felt that teachers used their lack of training as an excuse to resist inclusion rather than trying to learn to teach students with disabilities. One leader felt that teachers "do not, at the secondary level, generally tend to accept that they should have any responsibility for students with disabilities. 'I am the Science teacher. I wasn't trained to teach these kids'" (L15). In other words, regular teachers did not accept "ownership" (L18) for teaching students with disabilities and did their best to pass the responsibility to someone else in the school. The structure of secondary schools lent itself to this process, particularly when roles and responsibilities were not clearly

defined. Leaders reported that teachers frequently asked special education teachers and LSCs to remove students with disabilities from their lessons.

The secondary school context the leaders described was complex, with insufficient time for stakeholders in a student's education to collaborate and share information, define roles and responsibilities or learn new skills. Lack of teacher training, resources and support had led to negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion and a conviction that they were incapable of teaching students with disabilities. The result was a diffusion of responsibility on the part of teachers, and a support for the continuum of services on the part of the leaders.

Limitations of the research

The nature of qualitative research means that the findings are restricted to the opinions of the participants and cannot be generalised or assumed to be representative (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Extensive quantitative or qualitative research would need to be conducted to determine if the views are representative. The findings can, however, draw attention to issues which may be present in other context (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The research can inform teachers, parents and researchers who can then examine different contexts for similarities or differences.

Conclusion

Interviews with 50 leaders in inclusive education suggest that currently the secondary school context is a barrier to the development of inclusive teachers. This is consistent with Brennan (2000, p.21), who argued that the context of secondary schools could be disabling for any student who does not assimilate into the system.

> High schools internationally are at a cross roads: they have reached the point where their purposes and practices have largely been called into question. Many high schools and their wider communities have thus been struggling with the lack of "fit" between their existing practices and the wide range of often contradictory pressures to change.

Although inclusive policies and legislation are in place, they are not supported by adequate funding and resources. Implementation of these policies requires extra teachers, support staff, resources, equipment, technology or a reduction in class sizes, all of which necessitate substantial funding (Prochnow, Kearney, & Carroll-Lind, 2000). Also, when funding is inadequate, the working conditions of teachers are affected (O'Donoghue & Chalmers, 2000; Watson & Hatton, 2002). The inclusion of students with disabilities intensifies teachers' work, producing negative teacher attitudes, stress and dissatisfaction with their roles (Chadbourne, 1997; Forlin, 2001; Watson & Hatton, 2002; Zipin & White, 2002).

Leaders interviewed in this study suggested that education systems could not afford to reform the physical or organisational structure of secondary schools, and therefore

were unable to comply with policies or legislation. This has had a negative effect on the capacity of systems, schools and teachers to be inclusive.

While physical access was uncertain, leaders indicated that curriculum access was an even greater challenge for teachers and students. Secondary schools were subject-centred rather than child-centred and, as a consequence, the expertise and confidence of subject teachers emanated from their subject rather than their pedagogical knowledge. Leaders in inclusive education understood the difficulty of teachers acquiring student knowledge when they spent little time with their students, and were allocated so many students compared to primary school teachers.

The view of the leaders, who delivered in-service training as part of their roles, was that curriculum and content knowledge dominated both. As a result of the inadequacies of their training and the fact that secondary school teachers have not been given additional time or support to develop their skills during their careers, teachers' pedagogical knowledge remained undeveloped. This is consistent with the findings of Mock and Kauffman (2002). The leaders blamed limited pedagogical knowledge for reduced teacher capacity for differentiation, teaching the whole child and managing diverse classrooms, especially when teaching students with challenging behaviours.

The leaders reported that teachers did not always have access to special education expertise within their schools at point of need, and described teachers with special education expertise who were available as being overwhelmed by the need of so many teachers for support. In addition they found some teachers and LSCs averse to working collaboratively. This finding is supported by the literature. For example, (Idol, 1997) suggested that collaborative skills are not innate and have to be learned, but few teachers have been trained in collaboration (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005). Hargreaves (2005) warned of the difficulties of contrived collegiality. The findings showed that rather than work collaboratively, teachers preferred to withdraw students or work in segregated settings.

As a result of the barriers of the secondary school context to their knowledge acquisition and their perceptions of their own knowledge and skills, leaders believed that secondary school teachers had negative attitudes to inclusion. Although leaders were sympathetic towards secondary teachers facing many barriers to knowledge acquisition, they were critical of teacher resistance to inclusion, believing some teachers lacked empathy for their students and used their lack of knowledge and skills as an excuse to avoid including students with disabilities in the curriculum. Leaders observed that high school teachers often transferred their responsibilities to a colleague, a special education teacher or an assistant. The leaders concluded that only a minority of secondary school teachers were inclusive.

From the views expressed by the participants in this research, it is clear that there is a continued need for systems to allocate adequate funding and resources, review current secondary school structure and professional learning, and for stakeholders to have access to specialist knowledge so as to enact the philosophy of inclusion.

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Appendix 1: Leader interview questions

1. Could you tell me briefly about your current role?
2. Outline your background eg qualifications, experience?
3. Describe some of the problems you have encountered in including students with disabilities in secondary school.
4. Think about an inclusive secondary school teacher with whom you have worked. Describe them to me – knowledge, skills, attributes, attitudes, strategies they used, what happened in the classroom that made you think the teacher was inclusive.
5. I will give you some profiles of students with disabilities for you to read. Could you tell me how the teacher in each scenario could include the student:
6. You have identified some of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and attributes of inclusive teachers in secondary school. Which of these do you think professional development needs to target to have the most impact?
7. This question asks you to consider HOW professional development is to be delivered. What are the best methods for improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of secondary school teachers?
8. NSW is closing half its special education classes, Victoria and Tasmania do not have special education classes and WA is introducing Learning Support Co-ordinators without special education qualifications. What role do you see special education teachers as having in the future?
9. Education assistants are employed across Australia to support teachers and students in regular classes. Where do you see the boundaries between the assistant's role and the teacher's?
10. Are there any other comments you would like to make about inclusion of students with disabilities in secondary school?

Appendix 2: Vignettes

Simon is aged 16 and is in a Year 10 Maths class. He has a mild intellectual disability and struggles to read and write. He can copy slowly and writes simple sentences. His attention span is short and he finds sitting still a challenge. Teachers have suspected that he may have ADHD but his parents do not want him to take drugs or be labeled. Simon can add and subtract single digit algorithms. Computer games are Simon's passion and he can beat many of his peers. Simon does not attract any funding to

enable him to access an education assistant. What should the Maths teacher do to include Simon academically and socially when the class is studying algebra?

John has acquired brain injury, is 14 years old and in Year 9. John was a very intelligent, happy student until he had an accident while riding a horse. He was in a coma for a long period of time and his family is overjoyed that he is doing so well. He has basic literacy and numeracy skills, about a Level 1 standard. John's memory has been affected and he cannot remember where he is going or who people are. He loses his belongings constantly. He must always be accompanied by an adult. Most of the time, John talks or sings to himself quite happily but on some occasions he becomes violent and hits anyone near him who happens to attract his attention. He also tries to kiss any girls who come close enough. His parents have high hopes of even further improvement so want him to remain in the same class as his peers. His peers feel embarrassed by his behaviour and torment him when no-one is looking. This provokes him even further. How can John's Science teacher include him academically and socially?

Jenny has Down Syndrome, a moderate intellectual disability and is aged 17. She is the only child with a disability in her school. Jenny can write her name and recognizes 21 sight words. Her Maths skills are not even at a Level 1 standard. No matter how hard her tutor, teachers and parents have tried, Jenny seems unable to grasp even one-to-one correspondence. Jenny is a friendly student and is liked by her peers, although at recess and lunch she wanders around the playground on her own. Her teachers worry she is vulnerable to unscrupulous people because she is so friendly and naïve. Jenny has poor muscle tone so tires easily and detests sport and PE. She is quite overweight and eats a lot of junk food. Her speech is difficult to understand so Jenny uses Compic to assist. Her parents would like her to work in their restaurant when she leaves school, but it is difficult to motivate Jenny to work. How can Jenny's English teacher include her academically and socially? The class is studying Hamlet.

Katie has autism. She is in Year 8 and has a full time assistant. She is fairly quiet but rocks on her chair in class and plays with leaves in the playground. Katie does not talk. No-one knows whether she can talk or chooses not to. Katie seems absorbed in a different world. She has always been in a regular class. The other students ignore her completely, even when she gets agitated and makes noises. She cannot feed herself, although her education assistant is trying to make her more independent with toileting and eating. The assistant feels as though she is used as a babysitter because Katie just sits in classes and in the playground and no-one attempts to interact with her. The assistant hears others questioning why she is in their school and stating that everyone would be better off if Katie went to the Special School. What can Katie's Health and PE teacher do to include her academically and socially?

Emily has a learning disability and is in Year 9. Her IQ has been assessed as Superior but her reading and comprehension is at a Level 2 standard. Emily used to try hard in primary school but has given up. She resists working and knows every trick in the book to avoid work. This is frustrating for her teachers and parents, but better than failing as far as Emily is concerned. Emily has turned her attention to being the class problem

and is frequently in trouble for being rude, mimicking the teacher or denigrating her peers. She hopes she will be thrown out of school so that she can hang around the street with her real friends. She feels good when she is with them because they don't know or care that she has trouble reading and writing. The one learning area in which Emily excels is drama. Emily's mother has to read scripts to her but Emily has an exceptionally good memory and impresses everyone with her performances. How can Emily's History teacher include her academically and socially? The class is studying World War II.

Dr Michelle Pearce has experience as a teacher, principal and consultant in special education, and is currently involved in research for the Commonwealth funded Positive Partnerships project, supporting teachers and parents of children with autism.
Email: pearcemv@iinet.net.au

Dr Jan Gray is an Associate Professor of Education at Edith Cowan University.
Email: jan.gray@ecu.edu.au

Dr Glenda Campbell-Evans is an Associate Professor of Education at Edith Cowan University.
Email: g.campbell_evans@ecu.edu.au