

The training of teachers across Australia and New Zealand has come under scrutiny in recent times. This focus has been heightened by the perception that teacher training courses are not preparing the next generation of teachers to meet the challenges of schools and their complete educational programs. For example, the inclusion of students with special education needs in schools has posed a range of challenges to many teachers.

Yet, it is still not accepted that pre-service education courses should allocate an emphasis within their course on the education of students with special education needs. While many pre-service teacher education courses within Australia and New Zealand do have a dedicated special education subject, the regular accreditation of courses requires special education staff to justify at length the inclusion of a subject in special education practice.

Of greater concern are those courses in Australia and New Zealand that do not address in a comprehensive manner quality inclusive education practices. This may be evident through no core subject on special education with a reliance on material to be filtered through all subjects in an uncontrolled manner, and special education subjects staffed with personnel who have no recognised qualification in special education.

Special education subjects that are offered, have also been questioned in regards to their content. Some core subjects continue to focus on disability with little emphasis on quality special education practices. In other instances subjects are given over to issues that should be the basis of all education programs (e.g., behaviour management, effective teaching strategies, curriculum planning).

Many of these issues have been highlighted

in New South Wales as part of the Ramsey Review of Teacher Education. Teachers, members of the community, and school personnel, for example, made strong representations for behaviour management to be an integral part of all pre-service teacher education courses. The importance of teachers developing knowledge and skills in this area is crucial, and should be shared by all aspects of a teacher education course. Special education can focus on specific aspects, and highlight the collaborative nature of school based learning teams. It cannot take full responsibility for this complex area.

Inclusion of students with special education needs goes beyond managing behaviour. A strong understanding of curriculum, and the content within, is crucial for all teachers (Mast, 2001). This understanding is required for teachers to make decisions about programming, sequencing, organisation of resources and instruction for all students, especially those with special education needs. While many courses address the differing curriculum areas within the school, a strong and diverse range of skills in this area is not often achieved. This outcome is the responsibility of all aspects of teacher education courses, with special education making a strong contribution.

If teacher education courses are designed to address the essential features of quality education programs, this leaves special education to address more specialised and advanced qualities of education programs for students with special education needs. This could include behaviour management, curriculum adaptations and modifications, intensive assessment evaluation and monitoring, effective instruction practices, and working collaboratively with parents/cares and the school community.

For now, it is important that special educators continue to promote the need for all teachers entering the profession to have a basic understanding of special education practices, and be skilled in enhancing these qualities through their own professional development (e.g., further study, working with qualified special educators). Further, these practices need to be embedded within the research.

The papers in this issue of AJSE continue to promote quality education practices. Papers are drawn from a range of topics, and from educators from across the globe.

Computers in special education classes are not a big focus of researchers. This paper prepared by Maria Van der Kaay and colleagues at the University of Auckland, gives an overview of a project that starts to inquire about the value of this medium in classrooms to student learning. While the project does not set out to make big claims, it provides valuable guidance for future research in the area.

Tim Lewis visited Australia three years ago. His work was received warmly by those teachers who were fortunate to attend his sessions. The paper he has prepared for this issue of AJSE summarises his thoughts clearly, and gives a wealth of information for follow-up reading.

Bortoli and Brown have presented a fine paper for inclusion in this issue of AJSE. A great model for every author, this paper gives an in depth overview of prelinguistic communication. The implications drawn from this paper are worthy for all special educators to consider.

Bruce Knight and Judith Smith provide a detailed description of study involving students experiencing difficulty with spelling. An area that is not given much attention, Knight and Smith provide a number of issues for the reader to consider.

The final paper in this issue is a special one. There are few papers that address the issue of writing, especially for students with special education needs. It outlines some key principles for designing programs that have a common ring to them.

This issue of AJSE has been some time in coming. I believe that the range of papers, from a differing parts of the Asia-Pacific region are a true representation of where the journal stands.

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Editor