

## Editorial

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As this issue of the Journal goes to press, the 19th National Conference of the Australian Association of Special Education is about to be held in the city of Darwin, capital city of Australia's Northern Territory, a cosmopolitan city being Australia's closest capital to the countries of Asia.

Throughout many western countries, Australia and New Zealand included, a diverse range of cultures is represented in school populations. In spite of this, teaching and learning are conducted from a predominantly middle-class western traditional view of education, no doubt influenced by the views in most school communities that students need to learn the knowledge and skills of traditional western society in order to cope in that world.

A result for Special Educators however, is extreme difficulty in assessment and programming for students who do not cope with the demands of schooling usually encountered in schools. Is their failure to learn at school the result of pathology, of a "learning disability" or of a deficit in social learning? Or is it a reflection of cultural and, in some cases, linguistic difference in many students' cultural heritage? Indeed for some students, failure to thrive at school may be due to a combination of cultural difference and pathological factors.

Teasing out cause and effect in these cases and developing programs to help these students attain the educational outcomes expected by parents and teachers in our modern society creates many difficulties for Special Educators. These include technical problems involving assessment and diagnosis, where appropriate means of partialing out relative effects due to cultural difference and developmental problems are not yet present. But other problems also arise. For example, the nation of the individualised curriculum development, which is embodied in the environmentally driven curricula used for many students with disabilities, suggests that greater concern may need to be maintained to helping students from minority cultures to develop some of the skills and knowledge prized by their family communities.

These are important but difficult questions for school systems to come to terms with in general. They are made more difficult in Special Education however, by the problems of ascertainment or diagnosis, when teachers and psychologists attempt to develop plans for particular children from minority cultures and presenting apparent learning difficulties.

Our best efforts in research and practice may need to address questions involving the role of Special Education for students from minority cultures and it seems appropriate that this Journal should encourage research and dissemination in that area. May I take this opportunity to encourage the submission of manuscripts on this area for consideration for future issues of this Journal.

This issue of the Journal marks a minor change to format as readers will notice. The new binding format should be more convenient for readers. It is made possible by the increasing size of the Journal in recent years which reflects increased manuscript submission. These developments in the size and presentation of the Journal are gratifying for the production team and hopefully valued by our readers.

The present issue is wide ranging in content. Topics covered deal with: The Teaching and Learning Partnership, Hospital School Education, Students with Severe Disabilities, and Characteristics of Autistic Spectrum Disorders, including Asperger's Syndrome. International contributors report on a study of Perceptions of Success in Gifted Families and a Survey of Special Education in Finland. This may be especially interesting for potential travellers to the 10th World Congress of IASSMD in Helsinki in 1996.

*Ken Linfoot*  
Editor