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EDITORIAL

Welcome to this bumper issue of Special Education Perspectives; readers will find plenty of variety in these pages!

The issue begins with a Practically Speaking contribution from Greg Alchin in which he provides a concise and practical summary of the five-step Universal Design for Learning (UDL) planning process developed by Basham and colleagues.

In the next section is a refereed conference paper first presented at the 2013 AASE National Conference in Adelaide. Nancy Devlin and Hadla Trad report on their project in which preservice teachers engaged in an online learning environment as part of their teacher preparation course. An outcome of the project was the development of collaborative skills and they go on to discuss other, less anticipated, outcomes.

Moving to the Refereed Papers section, Patricia MacDonald and Gail Brown review the literature relating to the impact of iPads in special education. While acknowledging the transformative effect of new technologies, they challenge the reader to consider the effective implementation of those technologies in the classroom.

The next refereed paper is from Sarah McDonagh, Loraine Fordham and Julie Dillon-Wallace and reports on the educational context of the infant cohort of the large-scale Australian study Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). They note the trend for students to be included in regular classrooms and suggest some of the factors that may be in operation. They note, however, the need for some improvement in the operationalisation of support for those students.

In the final refereed paper Barry Fields presents a review of school behaviour management plans in Queensland, part of that state’s response to a MCEETYA taskforce report on the behaviour of students in Australian schools. While acknowledging the increase in rates of suspension and expulsion, the author notes the enthusiasm with which the Queensland Government developed and implemented plans for behaviour management. The paper concludes with observations about the need for a thorough and transparent review of the state’s approach.

In the Positively Influencing section of this issue we’ve been fortunate to have a contribution from Michael Wehmeyer, keynote speaker at the forthcoming AASE National Conference. Professor Wehmeyer describes the influence of Professor Lou Brown’s publications in the 1970s about the education of students with severe disabilities – publications that helped to inform Professor Wehmeyer’s beliefs about ecological validity and the significance of individuals’ roles in determining their own futures.

This issue of SEP concludes with a book review by Sheridan Kerr. She reviews the new publication (2013) by Peter Westwood - ‘Inclusive and Adaptive Teaching: Meeting the Challenge of Diversity in the Classroom’ and comments on the book’s direct and accessible tone.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the Editorial Committee and guest reviewers for their work on this issue and look forward to seeing all special educators at the AASE National Conference in Sydney in September – an exciting program has been developed that will have appeal to all participants.

David Paterson, Editor
Merran Pearson, Editorial Assistant
“There exists, for everyone, a sentence - a series of words - that has the power to destroy you. Another sentence exists, another series of words, that could heal you. If you're lucky you will get the second, but you can be certain of getting the first.” Philip K. Dick, VALIS

Language can empower our thinking and actions or it can constrict our thinking and creates barriers to participation. If we go back several decades, the terms handicapped and retarded were regularly used to label people, frame policy and control programs. Whilst the language we use today is far more inclusive and respectful, is it now time to reexamine the ideas and resultant actions of around the concept of reasonable adjustment?

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability Standards for Education (2005) are landmarks in the social and education landscapes about the rights of people with disability. The language used in the DDA and DSE has framed the thinking of policy makers and educational leaders around Australia. The NSW Board of Studies, Teaching & Educational Standards’ new Collaborative Curriculum Planning Tool is a recent example.

Both the DDA and DSE articulate the legal obligations and responsibilities that educational institutions have to ensure that all learners (with or without a disability) are able to participate in learning on the same basis. Furthermore, to ensure that all learners are able to participate in learning on the same basis involves the educational institution taking reasonable steps so that any adjustments required are made in a timely manner.

The aims and purpose of the DDA and DSE are not in dispute. What does need further examination is how the language of reasonable adjustment unwittingly creates barriers because of the myth of the average learner.

There has been considerable educational research that recognises that learners bring a huge variety of skills, needs, and interests to their learning. In particular, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) has specialised in the study of learner variability from pedagogical, neuro-scientific and cultural perspectives.

CAST’s research has highlighted that advances in neuroscience have revealed that learner differences are as varied and unique as our DNA or fingerprints particularly in the three neural networks of Recognition, Strategy and Affect. The extent of these differences debunks many presumptions particularly about the mythical ‘average’ learner, and teachers who ‘teach to the middle.’ The research clearly identifies that learner variability is ‘the norm, rather than the exception.’

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The concept of a reasonable adjustment implies that time and energy is invested in designing learning experiences and assessments for an average group before considering those learners at the margins. As such it is a reactive rather than proactive strategy that is also based on the myth of the average learner. Furthermore, because it is a reactive strategy in too many cases the same amount of time and energy is not invested in the adjustments and therefore the learners at the margins can be further disadvantaged.

To move to an inclusive and proactive approach, education must begin from the point of recognising that learner variability is the norm, rather than the exception. This redefines our learning design goal to designing inclusive learning opportunities that are usable by all learners, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design.

Rather than reactive adjustments, this requires considered thought about how to design in flexibility in the ways information is presented, learners respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and subsequently build and sustain engagement in the learning process.

A curricular design framework for supporting learner variability is CAST’s Universal Design For Learning Guidelines (UDL). The UDL Guidelines provides the understanding and processes on how to create curricula that meets the needs of all learners from the start, This is achieved through designing in flexibility of goals, methods, materials, and assessments as a means to reduce barriers, as well as optimise levels of challenge and support.

Inspired by CAST’s research Basham, Diedrich and Lawrence’s UDL Instructional Planning Process (UDL-IRN, 2011) provides a five-step planning process to follow when using the UDL instructional framework. It is similar to Wiggins & McTighe’s (2006) curriculum design model of Understanding by Design, only more explicit on learner variability.

The time has come to retire the concept of ‘reasonable adjustment’ and move to the more inclusive process of designing in flexibility through universal design for learning. Doing so is more in keeping with aims of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability Standards for Education (2005) as it enables all learners to participate in learning on the same basis from the start.

**UDL INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING PROCESS (UDL-IRN, 2011)**

As a framework, UDL requires educators to think proactively about the needs of all learners. In consideration of the UDL Critical Elements, educators implementing UDL should use a backwards design instructional process that incorporates the following five steps.

**Step 1: Establish Clear Outcomes**

Establish a clear understanding of the goal(s) of the lesson (or unit) and specific learner outcomes relate to:

- The desired outcomes and essential student understandings and performance for every learner. (What will learn look like? What will students be able to do or demonstrate?)
- The desired big ideas and their alignment to the established standards within the program of study that learners should understand.
- The potential misunderstandings, misconceptions, and areas where learners may meet barriers to learning.
- How will goals be clearly communicated to the learners, in ways that are understandable to all learners?
**Step 2: Anticipate Learner Variability**
Prior to planning the instructional experience teachers should have a clear understanding of the barriers associated with the curriculum as it related to learner variability within their environment. Understandings should minimally include:

- Curriculum barriers (e.g., physical, social, cultural, or ability-level) that could limit the accessibility to instruction and instructional materials.
- Learner strengths and weaknesses specific to lesson/unit goals.
- Learner background knowledge for scaffolding new learning.
- Learner preferences for representation, expression, and engagement.
- Learner language preferences.
- Cultural relevance and understanding.

**Step 3: Measurable Outcomes and Assessment Plan**
Prior to planning the instructional experience, establish how learning is going to be measured. Considerations should include:

- Previously established lesson goals and learner needs.
- Embedding checkpoints to ensure all learners are successfully meeting their desired outcomes.
- Providing learners multiple ways and options to authentically engage in the process, take action, and demonstrate understanding.
- Supporting higher-order skills and encouraging a deeper connection with the content.

**Step 4: Instructional Experience**
Establish the instructional sequence of events. As a minimum plans should include:

- Intentional and proactive ways to address the established goals, learner variability, and the assessment plan.
- High-expectations for all learners.
- High quality content integrated with explicit and targeting teaching.

Considerations should be made for how to support multiple means of...

- Engagement: A variety of methods are used to engage students (e.g., provide choice, address student interest) and promote their ability to monitor their own learning (e.g. goal setting, self-assessment, and reflection)
- Representation: Teacher purposefully uses a variety of strategies, instructional tools, and methods to present information and content to anticipate student needs and preferences
- Expression & Action: Student uses a variety of strategies, instructional tools, and methods to demonstrate new understandings.

**Step 5: Reflection and New Understandings**
Establish checkpoints for teacher reflection and new understandings. Considerations should include:

- Whether the learners obtained the big ideas and obtained the desired outcomes. (What data support your inference?)
G. Alchin

- What instructional strategies worked well?
- How can instructional strategies be improved?
- What tools worked well? How could the use of tools be improved?
- What strategies and tools provided for multiple means of representation, action-expression, and engagement?
- What additional tools would have been beneficial to have access to and why?
- Overall, how might you improve this lesson?

REFERENCES
Centre for Applied Special Technology. www.cast.org
COLLABORATION AS A KEY FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING: USING AN ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO HELP PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS SOLVE PROBLEMS ACROSS THOUSANDS OF KILOMETRES

Nancy R.F. Devlin and Hadla Trad
Charles Darwin University

A version of this paper was first presented at the 2013 AASE National Conference (Adelaide, 29Sep-01Oct 2013)

INTRODUCTION
This paper is about an assessment task in a final year unit for fully external students at an Australian university using online collaboration in order to solve a problem based on creating a more inclusive environment in a fictional school. It begins by looking at the context in which the assignment task was developed and then covers the specific task.

As more and more students discover the flexibility of online learning, it is becoming increasingly necessary for universities and other education providers to think creatively in order to satisfy course requirements and learning outcomes (Bore, 2008; Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012; Picciano, Seaman & Allen, 2010; Allen & Seaman, 2013). Twenty-first century learners are realising the potential of technology as they access educational opportunities which may not have been available to them traditionally. This has meant that they are no longer captive to traditional face-to-face courses, and those who may not earlier have been afforded opportunities to complete tertiary study are able to access a variety of courses, both undergraduate and postgraduate. This includes students who live in remote areas, or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who may have been hindered due to financial hardships, and can now learn at a time which suits them (Bore, 2008; Spooner, Algozzine, Wood & Hicks, 2010; Picciano, Seaman & Allen, 2010).

The concept of distance education is not new (Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012), however, technology has made many changes to its delivery and effectiveness. It can therefore be argued that, by creating an online learning environment, Charles Darwin University (CDU) is taking steps to bridge the educational gap, especially for those students who may not have traditionally been able to access tertiary education. Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith & McKay (2012, pp. 1-4) argue that the onus is on universities to provide “at-risk students” with supports and systems in order to
“bridge sociocultural incongruence”, and although there is a perception that online learning delivers inferior educational outcomes, growing trends indicate a major consensus that online learning is “as good as or better” than face-to-face instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 5). However, attention needs to be given to the nature of the learning and assessment tasks; as these need to be student-centred and collaborative to enable pre-service teachers to practise the collaborative skills which are integral to successful teaching (Gerber & Popp, 1999; Cook & Friend, 2010; Brinkman & Twiford, 2012).

As teachers, we understand theoretically the need to do better to support each other to help our students, but doing it is not easy. In our isolated classrooms it is a daunting task to create collaborative networks for ourselves, paraprofessionals, specialists and families. Doing this in our classes and in society more generally is extremely important when we are teaching students whose abilities are on the margins. With an estimated 7 per cent of our children being recognised as living with disability (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012) it becomes imperative for teachers to gain strong collaborative skills in order to cater for and manage students effectively (Weidman & Bishop, 2009; Brinkman & Twiford, 2012).

In addition to this, the implementation of the much-anticipated National Curriculum in 2014, has made Australian educators even more aware of their role in providing quality educational programs to meet the complex needs of their students. Greater emphasis is now placed on the accountability of schools to provide effective programs to support and meet the needs of students using a whole-school approach that requires genuine collaboration from all stakeholders, particularly teachers. Cook and Friend (2010) argue that collaboration has certainly made positive contributions to schooling, especially for students with special needs. Working in a group to solve difficult problems or to create new ways of doing things, is something we need to practise more. Many of us have not had much practical experience in working together online (Webb, 2010). This was the reason behind the development of this case study.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The idea for the assessment task was prompted by a series of workshops with Professor David Boud, attended by the first author, and a strong resolve to make assessment tasks more engaging for the pre-service final year external students in an Inclusive Education unit. The assessment strategy had already required students to work in small groups, but what was needed was more reflection and research specifically related to the field of study as a focus for collaborating with other members of the group (Boud & Costley, 2007). For internal students it was relatively straightforward, because they could just be asked to work in groups in class, but it was not the same for those studying externally. At CDU external students never have to attend an internal class; many students are located interstate and overseas. It had been noted that some students used the online groups well, but for most students it was a token effort and very little cross fertilisation of ideas were taking place. Hence, the impetus to make some substantial changes.

Whilst creating educational bridges is one of the targets for this particular course unit, it was by no means the only one. The assignment in focus here was created with three main objectives; the first was to strongly encourage students to engage in a peer/cooperative learning task; the second was to coach them as they practised the skills of collaboration under the guidance of experienced lecturers and the third was to familiarise them with the new Australian Curriculum, especially as it applies to students with special needs. The overarching objective was for students to use the online and other ICT tools available
to them to achieve these goals. Students were encouraged to use CDU’s Blackboard learning system (‘Learnline’), wikispaces, Google docs, Facebook and any other accessible social media tool. This allowed them the opportunity to sample some of the tools which they might themselves use in the classroom. Students were required to check in with the unit coordinator to ensure that their choices were ethically sound. The highly structured management of the students and assessment task was vital as student discipline is essential to success in an online learning environment (Picciano, Seaman & Allen, 2010).

Given the current, extensive use of Online ‘Learning Management Systems’ (LMS) such as Moodle and Edmodo in schools, it can therefore be argued that universities should take on some of this responsibility and create opportunities where students can experience the use of online learning tools. Also, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Association (ACARA, 2012) identifies the need for school students to develop an “ICT capability” which will allow them to “make the most of digital technologies available to them.” (p. 14). This is further supported in a guide for effective and appropriate media use, published by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSWDEC, 2012), which states that “if Facebook was a country it would be the third most populated country in the world.” (p. 11). So, in a world where a “troll” is not found under a bridge but on the internet, this certainly provides much food for thought in the argument for the effective use of ICT in the classroom.

**METHODODOLOGY**

The assessment task itself was designed as a small- group, problem-based role-play where each student in the group needed to take on the persona of a learning support team member, including a parent. Small- group work can benefit students academically and socially (Slavin, 1980; Igel & Urquhart, 2012) and the online nature of the course made it possible to link ICT and collaboration in this assessment task with collaboration being the gelling ingredient. It is interesting to note evidence which suggests that online discussions and forums encourage more participation from students than face-to-face and more traditional ways of learning (Al-balooshi, 2002 cited in Chang, 2008).

As such, it was important for students to put into practice the core values of collaborative learning through a cooperative learning experience, and two main reasons were identified for the chosen structure of this assignment.

Firstly, cooperative learning experiences help to reduce the stress of learning on students as the learning is shared (Bishop, 1989 & Coleman, 1961 cited in Johnson & Johnson, 2010). Johnson and Johnson (2000, p.114) point out that competition can create “high levels of anxiety that interfere with performance, especially when tasks are new and complex” (p. 2) as was the case in this assignment.

Secondly, as pre-service teachers, students need to gain strong collaborative skills to become effective teachers. The authors recognise that teachers need to work with a variety of professionals and community members. As such they wanted students to be involved in an experience that allowed them to acquire and practise collaborative skills that would enable them to collaborate effectively with each other, other professional groups and the community. The authors also identified the need to make this experience guided and constructive in order for it to be successful (Mesch, Lew, Johnson & Johnson, 1986).

Collaborative learning is advantageous, especially as it offers opportunities for “higher order thinking, increased motivation, and greater student satisfaction” (Barkley, Cross & Major, 2005 cited in Weidman & Bishop, 2009, p.51). These were also driving factors in the
structuring of this assignment and were evident from comments made by students through discussion posts and emails. The most common comments were that students extended themselves in terms of productivity, and felt the need to meet group deadlines so they would not be letting the other team members down.

Furthermore, as Australian schools move towards a more inclusive curriculum, collaboration becomes more significant as a factor contributing to the success of educational programs. Knight, Knight and Teghe (2007) maintain that there is a difference between cooperation and collaboration, and suggest that for the latter to occur the relationship between stakeholders must be “durable and pervasive.” (p. 51). Whilst the duration of this assessment task was weeks rather than years, it is anticipated that students were able to identify the importance of forming such relationships, and could begin to transfer collaborative skills to other settings.

As the assignment evolved, it became more problem-based and in 2011 the criteria included the introduction of group work and groups were randomly selected. Tasks included role-playing a school committee with suggested roles, but the choice of who played what role was left to the students. The problem that was set for them was to create a new Inclusive Education Policy for their school. It was a bit scary for most people, including the lecturer! We also found that Blackboard was clunky and many students chose to work outside that environment. Both of the unit lecturers (the first author and a previous staff member) were based on campus and were able to meet to discuss this assignment. Both lecturers attended the presentations given by on-campus students, created the assessment tasks and completed the online marking together. As the assignment was designed for a placement unit, it was assessed on a Pass Ungraded (PU) basis. This made it easier for the first author to play around with the assignment and be a bit more creative without jeopardising the students who might have expected to gain a High Distinction.

There was a maximum of five students in each group. However some of the groups were a little smaller. This was due to the total number of students in the external class not being divisible by five. Also, in some cases, students joined the external class late and needed to be placed in a group.

In 2012 and 2013 a similar type of assignment was given. Those doing it needed to collaborate online with others in their group to do the task. In 2012 the topic was to create a well-being policy with, in 2013, the additional requirement of using the Australian Curriculum for students with special needs. The other new element was that the first author and a different second lecturer, who was no longer on campus in Darwin, also had to create a way of working together online. This added a further dimension to the assignment, as not only were the students collaborating through online tools, but so were the lecturers.

In all years the task has been relevant to what the students were doing and it was also topical. Many students said they found it very useful to their future role as teachers, especially the need to be organised, contribute early and respect each other's opinions. As the lecturers, we too have found it very interesting to see how different groups collaborated and how different the products have been.

However, despite the success of the assessment, it should be noted that a conscientious and synchronised effort was required from the lecturers and students themselves. Johnson and Johnson (2000) liken teamwork to “being on a diet” and maintain that “effective cooperation” would result from a careful “regimen.” (pp. 114-115). With respect to the assessment task, this started with an acknowledgment from the lecturers that in order to make collaborative
learning successful it was necessary for both the lecturers and students to work within a regulated framework, outlined in the assignment guidelines. Students were expected to "check in" through emails, discussion posts and to collect and share evidence as they progressed. It is an accepted educational perspective that ongoing and open communication between students and teachers plays a significant role in the learning process (Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008) and this was certainly the case in this type of learning environment. The technological aspect of this task certainly enhanced the ability of lecturers and students to keep communication open and ongoing.

**DISCUSSION**

The two authors of this paper met for the first time online, the second time by telephone (mostly mobile) and third face to face. After that they have primarily worked either online or by phone. In the two years during which they have worked on the unit together they have met twice. The first time for a few hours and the second time for a little longer where they had time to have a meal together. When meeting to collaborate on the writing of this paper for the third time the authors spent a working day together.

Their collaboration began in desperate times where far too many students were enrolled in a unit that had only one person assigned to handle the work. It was already Week Three and the collaborative assignment had already begun when the second author was employed. Once the lecturers finally made contact (this took about three different tries using both phone and email) they realised they would find this partnership beneficial to them and to their students. While they come from very different cultural backgrounds their differences, they thought, would contribute to a strong partnership. What they have in common is a strong sense of justice about what is right and fair for all students. They both have a background of working with students from minority cultures and lower socio-economic groups. They both feel that trying to create inclusive environments for all students to prosper in is very important. While this is probably obvious, given the name of the unit, they did find that they were expressing the same sense of social justice.

In the beginning of their collaboration they checked in very frequently to find out whether they had common understandings of what was important in the assignment and they noticed that the students did the same. This ‘checking in’ has proved to be an important feature of the partnership. Any issue, no matter how mundane, created a flurry of back-and-forth ‘discussions’ by email, phone and text. This simple strategy has helped to create a strong sense of trust (Mesch, Lew, Johnson & Johnson, 1986; Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008).

They felt fortunate to have been able to meet three times face to face. iPhones were used extensively for messaging and phoning and though Facetime was not used, it could also have been an option. As the unit uses the Blackboard system they have had options from this support system and they have made extensive use of emails, especially with attachments when moderating assignments.

The first author has been the primary contact as she is the coordinator of the unit, but both authors have entered the discussion board and provided comments to students in the general discussion board (a threaded discussion list) as well as in the individual group discussions (also threaded). A main source for general comments has been the FAQ section, where students have posted their questions about the assignments and the subject in general. Many of the comments in this section were based on the assignment tasks. This enabled the authors to trouble shoot quickly when students were becoming confused and to clarify what was required. It also helped to calm the entire class down once students knew they could go online and find answers to
their questions, in many cases without having to ask for support. This highlights the flexibility of online learning in that information can be accessed at a later stage and a time which suits individual student needs.

Many students contacted the first author, in her role as coordinator, through emails and when given an answer were asked to put the exchange up in FAQ. This gave them more confidence to use the forum themselves and in many cases students were able to answer each other’s questions. It did mean though that it needed close monitoring to make sure that the information in this forum was accurate. Even when all assignments had been completed students still asked for clarifications about other topics such as general university requirements. Collaborative learning encourages independence and autonomy, but it is heavily reliant on effective and ongoing communication between student and instructor (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, cited in Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008).

Other forums on the main discussion board included an introduction from everyone that focused on a time when they felt included and when they felt excluded. Most students included personal information like whether they had children, their jobs, their family etc. Many also supported their comments from some of the reading they were doing. This was encouraged in comments by both authors, as they wanted these introductions to have a scholarly as well as a personal aspect. They also suggested other readings students might like to consider that went beyond the core requirements. A change over previous years was to make “posting an introduction” as the first mandatory assessment task. It gave them a way of troubleshooting within the first few weeks, because if they hadn’t heard from a student they knew they were in trouble either on a personal or a technical level.

As many of the students were also geographically isolated in rural and remote areas of Australia, it was important to create many levels of support. Students were given access to lecturers through telephone numbers, email addresses and the Blackboard learning system. This allowed them to seek support at a time which was convenient to them. Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith & McKay (2012) stress the importance of providing support systems, especially for students from Low Socio-Economic Status (LSES) backgrounds, and providing them with opportunities which may have elusive due to distance and remoteness, as well as financial limits.

There were four forums related to the different parts of the set text. Entering into these forums was at the students’ discretion and posts could be made into any forum. Many students accessed this but it was not compulsory, and not everyone made a contribution. As it got later in the semester fewer students visited these forums. This was partially because it was no longer needed as a support for their own learning. As students began to gain confidence, they also gained greater independence (Bullock, Gable & Mohr, 2008).

One of the comments frequently made at the end of the semester in regard to the unit was that the lecturers had responded quickly to students’ questions. Many external students commented about feeling a part of the class. This was an important issue for the coordinator as so many students were fully external and the discussion board enabled all participants to experience a classroom-like environment. In the task the most successful groups were the ones who frequently accessed the group site and continued to be active.

One of the most pleasing features of this assignment was that all students completed the task to a passing standard. What was even better is that, although only a Pass Ungraded was available for this unit, many groups created work that would have merited a Distinction or a High Distinction had this grade been available. One of the most successful groups worked on the assignment using two of the features open
to them: file share and the group discussion. They also used Facebook and their own email to contact each other. They discussed using a wiki as well. This was a new tool to at least one of them and students worked together to ensure that everyone in the group could access and use this tool.

This particular group had almost two hundred postings in their discussion board from 3rd March till the 5th April when the assignment was due. A key feature was the way many posts ended in a question asking for confirmation from the other members of the group. It became obvious very soon after beginning the task that one student stood out as the leader. It was interesting that the last role to be chosen was the one of the principal. Although a little later another changed roles as the group felt it would help the assignment more when the group became four rather than five participants due to an internal student being misplaced in the group. This reflects the need to constantly evaluate group goals and the reason this group was so successful was because they did this regularly. None of the students was living overseas, though they spanned the country from east to west and therefore time zones were an issue if they wanted to meet through Skype or other real-time media. A key feature of their discussions was the respect they showed each other. There was no sense of hierarchy. They exhibited exemplary project behaviour with everyone focused on the goal of completing the assignment by the due date.

This respectfulness, lack of hierarchy, sense of trust in each other and focus on the task at hand was true for all of the most successful assignments. It was interesting that not all of the groups used all the tools the same way. For example, another group used the journal feature six times, file exchange twenty-six times and the group discussion only nineteen times. A third group used the tools provided, but had only two entries in file exchange and just under one hundred in the group discussion board. It did not use the journal tool at all.

As with the study conducted by Lou (2004), positive comments and patterns began to emerge as students became more familiar with each other and the requirements of the task. As it was an open-ended task, students were at first rather unsure which direction they would take. This was also an excellent opportunity for students to work collaboratively because the first part of the task was for each group to decide how they wanted to present their information. Weidman and Bishop (2009) also identified the strong individual accountability of each student as they completed their tasks. This was also something that was observed from each group through emails to the lecturers and posts in the online discussion.

The other unique aspect of this task was the relationship between the two lecturers. The main lecturer and unit coordinator was based in Darwin with CDU. The second lecturer was based in Sydney and employed in a part-time capacity. At times, the term “organised chaos” took on a new meaning! It quickly became evident that a level of trust needed to be quickly established. Communication needed to be swift and on-going. This ranged from hour-long conversations on the phone which did not always centre on students and the task, to quick emails sent from iPhones and iPads. What became even more evident throughout the course of the semester was the reliance of the lecturers on technology and the need for a competent level of technological skills (Vrasidas & McIsaac, 1999 cited in Bore, 2008). It became apparent that if you didn’t know how to do it, you got help! For example the second author did not have experience with using the Blackboard system as a teaching tool and needed to be guided through it by the first author. This also added to the overall success of the task as students were encouraged to seek help from the lecturers and each other. Students would post links to articles, websites and other useful resources which they would share. It was interesting to see that many
Students were happy to share resources and as sense of “giving others an edge” did not seem to enter the discussion. In many ways the process the lecturers went through was similar to that of the students and served as a ‘pilot study’ for the overall assessment task. If they couldn’t do it how could they expect the students to do it?

**CONCLUSION**

Using the tools so differently showed the authors that the process they had set in train was working. Once the students trusted the process and the lecturers, it allowed for a great degree of creativity and flexibility. It also gave them a lot of joy to see how differently students were able to successfully complete the task. Like the students they too needed to let go and allow for this creativity to happen. Although the end results may not have been what was originally expected, all the students were able to show how they successfully improved their collaboration skills, understanding of legislation and policy related to inclusive practices and how much more familiar they were with the new curriculum and its ability to be used to support students with special needs.

The authors believe that the use of newer technology has helped to free them and their students, allowing them to achieve more than they could ever have done in a classroom-only environment. Even more importantly though, it has created a much more inclusive environment for all, especially for people who are living in contexts that until now would have constrained their ability to participate successfully in higher education courses.

**REFERENCE LIST:**


Refereed conference paper: Online collaboration for effective teaching


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IS APPLE TRANSFORMING SPECIAL EDUCATION? ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF THE IPAD AS AN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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ABSTRACT
This paper assesses recent research involving the uptake of iPads in schools. Research-based practical affordances of the iPad are outlined, along with potential applications for students with special education needs. With ever-increasing adoption of technology, and specifically of the iPad, in classrooms, the link to effective, research-based practices may not be prominent in schools. This paper makes a case for the potential benefits of iPads with an iOS7 operating system, for supporting a range of students and extending the benefits of existing, non-technology based practices that are research-proven and already familiar to some classroom teachers.

INTRODUCTION
Swipe, tap, pinch, slide, pull, touch and drag are the experiential verbs used to describe the hands on capabilities and functionality of the highly popular iPad. Clever marketing strategies by Apple (2013) have promoted the iPad as a revolutionary device aimed at radically transforming education through new modes of teaching and learning, which saw a significant uptake of the first release of iPad devices since their inception in 2010 (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012; Cumming & Strnadova, 2012; Murray & Olcese, 2011). With minimal evidence-based research about the efficacy of the using the iPad in classrooms during its launch (Bannister, 2010; Brice, 2011), many education authorities and schooling regions expressed strong interest in the possible affordances that the device could provide for students and set about implementing pilot programs and trials to determine the iPad’s effectiveness as a learning tool (Catholic Education Parramatta Diocese, 2010; NSW DEC CLIC, 2012; Queensland DETE, 2012; Victorian DEEDC, 2010; ). Such trials have gathered qualitative data from large numbers of students, including...
the suitability of using iPads as assistive devices for students with special education needs. However, explicit links to evidence based research on effective teaching still present a challenge to the adoption of technology and iPads within classrooms. Whilst a significant amount of qualitative data and information was gathered during these trials, findings presented generalised themes for suitably utilising the iPad as an assistive device for students with special needs. As such best-practice research and case studies focusing on the iPad were limited and thus highlighting the need for further support to be provided as teachers adopt their use in practice.

A number of recent meta-analyses (Carter, Stephenson & Strnadova, 2011; Ellis, 2005; Hattie, 2009; The National Reading Panel, 2000) have determined the most effective instructional practices that yield significant improvements in academic achievement, literacy and numeracy for students with special learning needs. Effective teaching practices have also heavily centred on behaviour, student engagement and classroom management (Carlson, Hemmings, Wurf & Reupert, 2012; Westwood, 2004). The time has never been more important to consider how the current uptake of modern technologies can be embedded into these existing proven practices to more likely ensure that the learning outcomes for such students are enhanced rather than compromised. Throughout this paper, an exploration of how one technological device, namely the iPad, could be used to assist students with special needs is outlined by assessing its capabilities as an assistive technology through reference to relevant evidence-based literature. In addition to this, teaching and learning strategies that are underpinned by evidence based research in the field of special education will be drawn from extensive recent literature to demonstrate the pedagogical affordances that the iPad can offer students with special education needs and in turn, improve the quality of teaching and learning practices used with this device.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND iPADS: DEFINITIONS

Assistive technologies by definition enable individuals with disabilities to develop greater independence via the use of a device that supports physical impairments, biomedical intervention, communication, organisation and learning (Foley & Ferri, 2012; Reichle, 2011). Farrall and Lyon (2012) outline the types of assistive technologies that are available for allowing people with these special needs to more successfully participate in school and daily life enabling significant increases in access across settings than might otherwise happen. In particular, these devices can be categorised based on their primary use as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), access equipment, environmental control units (ECU), assistive listening devices (ALD), visual aids and mobility and positioning technologies (eg, wheelchairs) and thus further determined as low-tech or high-tech gadgets according to the degree of electronic and computer components incorporated within the device.

What exactly is an iPad?

An iPad is a handheld tablet device that was launched in January 2010 by Apple Incorporated. The device is about the size of an A4 piece of paper, weighs around 800 grams, has a glossy touchscreen and offers WiFi, Bluetooth and connectivity to the internet. Since its inception, newer generations of the iPad have also been released and including in a smaller tablet design known as an iPad Mini. Like other Apple portable devices, such as the iPod and iPhone, all iPad tablets run on the Apple operating system known as iOS. This system runs applications, or apps, which can be accessed or purchased from Apple, via the iTunes online store. Despite all of these technical specifications, the affordances of
the iPad promoted by Apple (2013) to offer portability, instant connectivity to the global community and possibilities of radically transforming teaching and learning have excited teachers, schools and education authorities alike.

**Ipads in relation to existing assistive technologies**

Social constructs perceive assistive technology, on occasions, as polarising disability because the devices draw further attention to an individual’s needs and highlight a deficiency (Foley & Ferri, 2012). For adolescent students with learning difficulties in inclusive settings, being perceived different from one’s peers, especially when wanting to fit in, can be challenging. Some researchers suggest that there has also been a shift in the paradigm of assistive technologies becoming multimodal and generic in the way they are utilised, thus appealing to a wider range of individuals with varying disabilities (Edyburn, 2000; Maor, Currie & Drewry, 2011). With this considered, the iPad slots into the role as a non-disability specific assistive technology and appears to be an extremely attractive option for supporting students with learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms to access the curriculum (King-Sears, Swanson & Mainzer, 2011). In their K-12 Horizon Report, The New Media Consortium (2013) predicted that there would be a sharp rise in bring-your-own-device (BYOD) technologies within schools over the next two years. This would enable mainstream students to bring their personal tablet devices such as iPads into their classes to participate in the curriculum and as such, students with special education needs would also be afforded this same access.

Taking this a step further, as new technologies emerge and uptake demands increase, the cost of acquiring mass-produced devices drops significantly, thus improving access and availability (Ayers, Mechling & Sansosti, 2013; Foley & Ferri, 2012; Murray & Oclese, 2011). For students with significant needs, traditional assistive technologies, such as visual aids like Braille typewriters for students with sight loss and augmentative and alternative communication devices with voice-over technology, are being challenged by the high cost of enabling these devices to be effective in small niche markets. In comparison, an iPad manufactured by Apple is mass-produced with lower overhead costs (Foley & Ferri, 2012; Murray & Oclese). Ayers, Mechling and Sansosti (2013) assert that parents of children with disabilities are now frequently

![Figure 1 Screen shot of the Accessibility options available on the iPad from the General Settings.](image-url)
requesting or purchasing mobile technology devices, such as iPads, for use in the role of an assistive technology device because these are less expensive, and may be able to support their child in the classroom and towards independence in a range of settings. Therefore, it is imperative that research compares the affordances of the iPad with how it may possibly meet the needs of students with special learning needs and more importantly, be used as a learning tool that has evidence-based research to support its use within classrooms.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS
The iPad affords many possibilities to students with special learning needs. An assessment of the Apple (2013) homepage reveals that the company foremost promotes the Accessibility feature available via an iPad’s iOS7 General Settings (see Figure 1). Immediate analysis of the Accessibility screen draws attention to the device’s capabilities as an augmentative and alternate communication device through the high technology features Speak Selection and Speak Auto-Text, as a visual aid through reference to VoiceOver, Zoom, Large Text (See Figure 2) and Invert Colors options and access equipment presets on the iPad for those individuals with physical impairments so that navigation and use of the device can be manipulated for an individual’s physical needs such as Assistive Touch and Triple-Click Home.

Dhillon, El-Glaly, Holbach, Smith-Jackson & Quek (2012) have studied various ways to increase the accessibility for individuals with blindness and severe vision impairment when using tablet devices such as iPads by adopting modes of visual aid and augmentative and alternative communication elements. Their recent research has helped to instigate a spatial touch audio annotator and reader system known as STAAR. STAAR enables users with vision impairment to place a grid-like overlay on the iPad screen that assists them to read text from the screen in conjunction with the VoiceOver feature. Whilst STAAR

Figure 2 Large Text option for increasing the text and icon size displayed on the iPad.
is in its infancy, Rodriguez and Mahini (2011) also suggest that screen readers are highly effective with iPad devices and that Bluetooth enabled Braille display devices were also easily connected with iPads as a means for students with vision impairment to successfully use email, word processing via the Pages application, and navigate certain websites via Safari. However, challenges still remain for these students with regards to accessibility of social networking, PDF files and learning apps, as screen overlay readers and advanced Braille interpreting devices cannot decode these sources. Future improvements, with iOS7 and beyond, may eventually solve some of these problems.

Maor, Currie and Drewry (2011) stress that new longitudinal studies over a period of years are needed to ascertain the true effectiveness of assistive technologies for students with special needs, because their meta-analysis of studies in assistive technology revealed that small participant numbers in studies, different age ranges, varying devices, little baseline data and inadequate and comparison control groups may hamper these results. Despite the iPad’s relatively short and impactful history, large pilot programs conducted by education authorities have focused on ways to implement the device into mainstream classrooms (Catholic Education Parramatta Diocese, 2010; Ellis, 2011; NSW DEC CLIC, 2012; Queensland DETE, 2012; Victorian DEEDC, 2010). Despite this move into mainstream classrooms, it could be suggested that further attention should be focused on curriculum differentiation and case study examples of how students with learning difficulties were adequately supported during these trials.

To this point in time, it appears that only Victorian DEEDC (2010) and Queensland (2012) have produced app guide documents for students with special education needs and as such these guides pertain to different categorised apps (life skills apps, communication apps, literacy apps, numeracy apps, multimedia and presentation apps, and art, music and photo apps) and how these apps may suit certain learning disabilities (autism spectrum disorder, hearing impairment, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, speech-language impairment and vision impairment). These documents do not appear to include a rationale outlining the link between the selection of apps and research based evidence. As argued by Heward (2003) and Westwood (2004), it is imperative that instructional choices in special education employ pedagogical methods with research evidence of significant gains in student attainment of academic and social outcomes. Therefore, special educators must carefully consider what specific instructional practices they are using to support student learning, especially when considering how an iPad will be included within an effective instructional process.

As previously stated, the iPad adopts the affordance of being a non-disability specific assistive technology and as such has been gaining prominence in assisting learners across different areas of special education, such as children with autism spectrum disorder, moderate/severe disabilities (Burton, Anderson, Prater & Dyches, 2013; Haydon, Hawkins, Denune, Kimener, McCoy & Basham, 2012; Reichle, 2011) and hospitalised medical conditions (Green, Hopkins, Strong & Zazryn, 2012). Two separate studies, focusing on students with autism spectrum disorder and using video modelling recorded via the iPad (Burton, et al, 2013; Cardon, 2012), demonstrate the instructional principles of generalisation and maintenance (Reeve, Reeve, Townsend & Poulson, 2007; Stokes & Baer, 1977). By providing modelling across settings and with different student groupings, research proven practices are clearly identifiable and highly effective when used in conjunction with the iPad.

Burton, et al (2013) focused on teaching adolescents with autism and moderate
disabilities using video modelling on an iPad to work through five consumer finance story problems with different prices and money denominations. This study also encapsulated elements of task analysis into the video modelling, in which the students participating had to demonstrate eight-percent accuracy over three consecutive sessions, as a means for generalising making purchases whilst shopping. Limitations of these studies may suggest that a larger sample size of students and conducting the research over a longer number of sessions or period of time may give greater insight into the results yielded about the effectiveness of the iPad as an assistive technology (Maor, Currie and Drewry, 2011). In a similar fashion, Cardon (2012) incorporated control stimuli (Mesmer, Duhon & Dodson, 2007) into her study by involving various family members of the participant child by requiring them to act out scripted dialogue with explicitly modelled target behaviours for that participant. Following this modelling, the child with autism would watch and then re-enact that scene with the same family member, with significant results yielded in post-intervention assessment measurements. However, it can be seen from these selected studies, the iPad is not the focus of the learning; rather the evidence based instructional methods are playing a significant role in the students achieving desired learning outcomes and the iPad is enabling and facilitating this learning (Carter, Stephenson & Strnadova, 2011; Heward, 2003).

Ayers, Mechling and Sansosti (2013) claim that students with special education needs may prefer to learn through tablet technology in a similar manner to their peers and therefore, mobile technologies, including iPads, can also be utilised to assist with supporting and teaching independence to students with autism and moderate to severe disabilities. High engagement with using iPads in different subject areas has been highlighted by a number of studies (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012; Cumming & Strnadova, 2012; Murray & Olcese, 2010). Research by Haydon et al (2012) emphasises significant disparities in the results generated by students with emotional disturbance in mathematics between drill and skill activities presented via the iPad with interactive apps (selected using the criteria of evidence-based computer-aided instruction pedagogy) and using traditional worksheets. When these students engaged with the iPads, researchers observed significant gains in on-task learning during the fifteen instructional sessions of forty minutes. They suggested these gains resulted from instantaneous corrective feedback, repetitious skill practice for generalisation, fast-paced learning, positive motivation provided within the apps used and interactivity using the iPad touch feature such as swipe, slide, drag or touch. An additional direct consequence was that the teacher was able to spend more time assisting individual students within the positive learning environment that was established. In comparison, they reported that these students with emotional disturbances had lower levels of accuracy when attempting the same style of mathematics questions on the worksheet and exhibited more off-task learning behaviours. As reinforced by these studies, special educators have been investigating how to effectively incorporate the iPad as part of evidence-based instructional methods when teaching students with learning disabilities and use curriculum-based measurements to discern the degree to which learning outcomes have been achieved and demonstrated (Hintze, Christ & Methe, 2006).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS SPECIFIC TO LITERACY

Whilst in its infancy, the use of the iPad as an assistive technology in the realm of literacy acquisition and reading development holds some promising signs for students with special education needs. Currently, there is heavy criticism from classroom teachers
about the lack of locally produced apps for supporting literacy and reading instruction (Goodwin, 2012). This is because numerous phonics and spelling activity apps and story readers available via the App Store (Apple, 2013) have American English or British English accents that articulate vowel and certain consonants in different manner to Australian English (Harrington, Cox & Evans, 1997). Despite such issues surrounding the accent of English used within apps, the Speak Selection accessibility feature that will be discussed further in this section offers the iPad user the ability to modify the dialect of English selected as an assistive voice-over technology.

Recent debate argued by some studies (Dundar & Akcayir, 2012; Schugar, Schugar, & Penny, 2011) suggest there may be minimal differences in reading comprehension acquisition demonstrated by mainstream student learners irrespective of whether they read using an iPad or a traditional print text. Other researchers claim, if the iPad is viewed as an assistive device for students with learning disabilities, this device may be able to promote fluent reading practices (Thoermer & Williams, 2012) and may lead to development of other literacy skills through systematic direct instruction app activities (Hutchinson, Beschorner & Schmidt-Crawford, 2012; McClanahan, et al, 2012). In turn these actually reflect evidence-based practices asserted by The National Reading Panel (2000) and Ellis (2005).

Thoermer and Williams (2012) suggest that digital devices such as iPads allow students to draw upon features such as the in-built dictionary, text size, digital notes and text-to-speech recognition tools that may model and support fluency during independent reading. This instructional scaffolding, provided by the iPad, would likely support similar (traditional) effective teaching practices used by classroom teachers for improving reading fluency (Heckelman, 1969; Silber & Martens, 2010). As well, iPads may possibly provide some students with additional practice with modelled repeated reading, either at home or at

Figure 3 Speak Selection settings available via the iPad's General Settings.
school, when a more competent reader is not available to scaffold their decoding. Increased time spent on repeated reading has been shown to increase its effects and impact on reading comprehension (O’Connor, Gutierrez, Teague, Checca, Kim & Ho, 2013).

As seen by Figure 3, a student with poor reading fluency can be supported by the iPad setting feature known as Speak Selection and this will enable highlighted individual words and sentences on websites, documents, online programs and e-books to be converted to spoken text. In the settings box for Speak Selection, the speaking rate can adjusted to suit the student’s reading fluency and adding the Highlight Words feature enables the student to follow the text simultaneously as it is read back to them. This adjustment in speaking rate may require some initial teacher (or parent) support, which might be faded as the student’s fluency improves and the student learns to control the iPad’s features. More importantly, one of the resounding bonuses of utilising this iPad affordance is that the speaker voiceover dialect can be changed to reflect an Australian English accent and thus overcoming issues related to pronunciation mentioned in previous studies (Goodwin, 2012).

In secondary school settings, students with learning disabilities and poor reading skills are often confronted with texts with challenging readability across many mainstream subject areas, so utilising the Speak Selection features may be a viable option when attempting to decode excerpts of text from books, online textbooks or during internet activities. Whilst it is well known that reading fluency correlates with reading comprehension, poor readers may be inefficient at decoding or lack the automaticity to recognise orthographic units within words (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, Tarver & Jungjohann, 2006). Therefore, using the iPad’s Speak Selection could enable student to access complex text and provide support during independent reading activities. In this way, the iPad would be useful and practical in a secondary classroom, especially during a lesson where a special educator or teachers’ aide is not available, and in content areas like Science, where text is particularly complex. Furthermore, to potentially
Refereed paper: The assistive iPad

In general, the iBooks app can be used to access a number of texts in many genres and facilitates access to age-appropriate reading content for students with learning difficulties in the same manner as wanting to use similar technology to their peers (Foley & Ferri, 2012) and is far less costly than accessing audiobooks. As displayed by Figure Four and Figure Five, the relative ease at highlighting selected text for the iPad to convert to speech is shown, as are other simple adjustments including font size, font type and background colour themes to help make the reading experience more pleasurable for the student.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this way, the iPad highlights some promising affordances for reading instruction in line with some current evidence-based reading instruction practices. However, future research needs to focus on measuring to confirm student learning outcomes gained in fluency and comprehension, using curriculum-based assessment. It would also be appropriate to have control measures in place to compare the student reading performance when assessing differences between those who have read a narrative-style text via iBooks or the printed version, as well as curriculum-based reading measures of expository-style text via iBooks and its printed text version. As special educators, it is essential to always put the learning before the technology (King-Sears, Swanson & Mainzer, 2011) to ensure that teaching and learning practices for students with special education needs will yield the best improvements in outcomes based empirically researched instructional methods (Hattie, 2009; Heward, 2003; Westwood, 2004) even when new technologies do emerge.

This paper has methodically explored how the iPad may be utilised in classrooms to assist students with special needs. Extensive evidence-based literature has highlighted various teaching and learning instances where the iPad has yielded significant gains in student engagement, generalisation of newly learnt social skills, enhancement of achievement in some academic and behavioural outcomes plus also ways to support literacy acquisition. Whether
Apple (2013) is truly transforming special education is still to be debated, but the iPad has the potential to enable educators to think about how they could use the device as an assistive technology with a wide range of students. Within the field of special education, as has been consistently asserted throughout this paper, learning outcomes are at the forefront for our students and the challenge is to select the appropriate, effective evidence based instructional methods that work towards meeting these goals with frequent assessment to measure student performance. The iPad is a tool that may be employed to implement, capture or assist with student progress and is ultimately shaking up the assistive technology market so that many more students can experience successful learning outcomes, regardless of their additional, special education or other needs. The future for many students is brighter, when such technologies are used to their advantage and such advantages will, undoubtedly, continue to improve over time. The challenge will be for educational professionals to effectively use, and continually update, these technologies in their classrooms, today and tomorrow!

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THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT AND SERVICES OF CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS IN THEIR FIRST YEARS OF SCHOOL IN AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT
In Australia, children with additional needs are now primarily educated in mainstream regular classes and schools. While discussion has focused on teacher attitudes, teacher preparation and professional development to support the academic progress of children with additional needs, there is limited research examining the educational contexts and services provided to such children in Australian schools. This descriptive paper examines the educational contexts of 563 Australian children with additional needs, in reference to 3600 of their typically developing peers. Data in relation to educational setting, retention, prevalence of additional needs, access to specialist services, learning support, and individual programming are reported.

INTRODUCTION
Now, more than ever before teachers require the knowledge, expertise and ability to plan for and differentiate instruction in the regular classroom. An increasing emphasis on inclusive classroom practice in Australian schools requires teachers to cater for students with a diverse range of abilities in regular education settings (Dempsey, 2009). This research examines the representation of, and services provided to children with additional needs in their first years of primary school in Australia; specifically children who have intellectual, sensory, physical, speech/language impairments, learning difficulties in reading or mathematics, emotional/behavioural problems, or autism spectrum disorder.

In Australia, approximately 4.4% of children enter their first year of formal schooling with, or at-risk for, chronic physical, developmental, behavioural, or emotional conditions, and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by the majority of children generally (Goldfield, O’Connor, Sayers, Moore, & Oberklaid, 2012). In addition, a further 18% of children experience difficulty or impairment in one or more areas of development that are of concern to teachers (Goldfield et al., 2012). The majority of these children are educated in a regular school and classroom setting. Furthermore, data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
indicated 9% of Australian children aged between 5 - 14 years had a reported, diagnosed disability (ABS, 2012). These data illustrate the variability surrounding the classification and identification of children with additional needs in Australia, and that disability exists on a continuum. The inconsistencies reported in the prevalence rates of children with additional needs in Australian schools is an outcome of the methodology used around the identification and classification of need, and the age/stage at which the additional need is identified (Dempsey, 2004). For the purpose of this study, we recognise the nexus between children’s actual learning need and the level of support they receive in educational settings (McLeod & McKinnon, 2007). As a consequence, we adopt a broad approach to the classification of need and examine the educational context of children with learning difficulties in reading or mathematics, speech/language impairment, intellectual disabilities, sensory impairment, physical disabilities, emotional/behavioural problems, or autism spectrum disorder. In examining specific categories of need in this study we are not advocating for a categorical approach to the education and provision of services to children with additional needs in Australia, rather, we are seeking to provide a more comprehensive view of the services provided to a broader population of children with additional needs in schools in this country.

EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT AND SERVICES
Significant change in the landscape of education for children with additional needs has occurred over the previous 25 years. This transformation has occurred in Australia largely as a consequence of: a strong advocacy movement driven by principles of equity and social justice; the Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth Government of Australia, 1992), and the supporting Disability Standards for Education (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005); Australia becoming a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006); the requirement of basic special education training for pre-service teachers; and, the wide-scale adoption of education policies that promote inclusion (Dempsey, 2007; Foreman & Arthur-Kelly, 2008; Smyth King, 2012).

In Australia, children with additional needs should be educated in the least restrictive environment (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; Commonwealth Government of Australia, 1992). This least restrictive environment falls on a continuum based on student need: ideally, for the majority of students this environment is the regular classroom (Smyth King, 2012). For others, this may be in the form of a more traditional specialised segregated classroom placement such as classes for students with mild, moderate or severe intellectual disability; behaviour disorders; emotional disturbance; sensory impairment; and language difficulties. In Australia, parents primarily choose the educational setting in which their child with additional needs is educated (Dempsey, Foreman, & Jenkinson, 2002) and more frequently these children are educated in government schools rather than Catholic or Independent schools (Dempsey, 2011). In New South Wales alone, 77% of students with a disability, learning or behaviour difficulty are enrolled in government schools (Smyth King, 2012). Furthermore, a greater proportion of children with an Individual Education Program (IEP) are educated in government schools (Dempsey, 2012).

An emphasis on inclusive educational placement prevails within Australia. Clearly this poses challenges for systems in terms of how best to support students with additional needs to be successful in inclusive contexts. In addition, it presents a challenge for teachers in terms of their capability to understand and respond to
the learning needs of all students, and for the quality of instruction that teachers are required to design and deliver for diverse student populations (Smyth King, 2012).

Class size is frequently viewed as one variable that may be altered to improve the quality of classroom instruction and produce significant improvement in student achievement. Reduced class sizes have been found to raise average achievement levels and reduce achievement gaps for students with and without disabilities (Bosworth, 2011). Likewise, grade retention has been used in education systems as a means of supporting children with disabilities to be successful in their educational setting (Tingle, Schoeneberger, & Algozzine, 2012). While intuitively appealing, longitudinal research provides little empirical support for the practice of grade retention (Goos, Van Damme, Onghena, Petry, & de Bilde, 2013; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Tingle et al., 2012).

One means of improving the capacity of teachers to respond to student learning needs and provide high-quality differentiated instruction is through the provision of educational services. Educational services may include specialist support provided to students through IEPs, specialised personnel support that is tailored to specific student need, and the provision of aide time in the classroom. In Australia, there is a lack of continuity in policy regarding the adoption of IEPs and widespread variability around the development, implementation, and evaluation of IEPs. As a consequence, there is inconsistency around the quality of instruction provided to children with additional needs and a lack of accountability for educational outcomes students achieve (Dempsey, 2012).

Education systems and schools are increasingly recognising the diversity in classrooms and are supporting both students and classroom teachers through the addition of classroom aides (Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2011). This increase in the prevalence of and access to aides in regular classroom settings persists, despite the absence of a sound theoretical or empirical basis for their inclusion in the classroom (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). In one study Webster et al., (2010) found that while the provision of aide time may serve as a means of supporting teachers in the inclusion of children with additional needs in regular classrooms, there may be minimal resultant outcomes for the children themselves.

In summary, the prevalence of children with additional needs at the local level and within specific states in Australia has been well documented (Dempsey, 2004; 2007; 2012; Dempsey et al., 2002; Goldfield et al., 2012; Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011). However, few studies have examined the educational context of children with additional needs from a national perspective. While there is some disparity in the reporting of the incidence and prevalence figures regarding the representation of children with additional needs in Australian schools, there is nonetheless widespread ideological and legislative support for their inclusion and this support has translated into practice in the sense that the majority of these children are being educated in regular education settings. Various educational services and supports are provided to children with additional needs in Australian schools including the use of IEPs and specialised personnel support. While it is known that these supports are provided to some students, little is known regarding the nature of these supports, the context in which they are provided, and the specific populations of students to whom the supports are allocated.

**Purpose of this study**

This study seeks to provide an overall picture of the education of children with additional needs in their first years of school in Australia. It seeks to build on the work of Goldfield et al. (2012), by examining specific populations of children
with additional needs: in particular children with learning difficulties in reading or mathematics, speech/language impairment, intellectual disabilities, sensory impairment, physical disabilities, emotional/behavioural problems, or autism spectrum disorder. Using data from Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Sanson et al., 2002) affords the opportunity to capture the educational experience of children with additional needs across Australia at one point in time. Specifically, this study provides descriptive information in relation to children with additional needs in Australian schools, their educational context, and the services provided to these children. It will provide an indication of the diverse representation of these students in Australian primary classrooms as well as an indication of current educational practice. Findings have the potential to inform policy and resourcing decisions for education providers of students with additional needs. The specific questions the study addressed were:

1. What proportions of children with specific forms of additional needs are typically represented in Australian schools?

2. What is the primary educational context in which children with various additional needs are educated in Australia?

3. What educational and/or specialist services do children with additional needs in Australian schools have access to?

METHOD

Sample and Participants

This research uses data from the Birth (B) cohort of Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC). The LSAC study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Australian children’s social, emotional, physical and cognitive development in the context of their experience within their families, educational settings, and communities. The LSAC study will further our understanding of children’s development, inform social policy, and highlight opportunities for prevention and intervention in policy areas for children and families (Sanson et al., 2002). Data for the study children have been collected longitudinally bi-yearly across four waves from parents, child-care providers, teachers, and the children themselves. Using Medicare Australia’s enrolment database, 5107 children born between March 2003 and February 2004 were recruited to participate in the study as the B (infant) cohort. A two-stage clustered sample design was used to ensure the LSAC sample and the sample characteristics (state, postcode, sex, cultural background and socioeconomic status) were broadly representative of the population (Gray & Smart, 2008) as ascertained by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data in 2007. The data reported in this article relate specifically to the Wave 4 data collection period for children in the B (Infant) cohort in 2010, at approximately 6 years of age.

At Wave 4, the B cohort consisted of a nationally representative sample of 4242 Australian children. With the consent of parents, a 58-question survey was mailed to the classroom teacher of each of the study children for data completion and return. For the purpose of the current study, children were included in the sample when they had teacher-reported information regarding their educational context. The maximum sample size was 4163 children given the teacher report data that was available. The mean age of the study children was 6 years and 3 months with an age range between 6 and 8 years. Of these children, 51% of the sample were male, 49% were female. Students in the sample population were grouped according to additional needs using one item from the Wave 4 Teacher Survey requesting the main reason the child requires additional assistance or specialised services. This item captures 11 categories of need. For the purpose of this
study, four categories were collapsed and recoded. Students who were identified as having English as a second language or who were gifted, were subsumed into a broader category of students classified as having ‘no disability’. Students with hearing or vision impairment were recoded into one category ‘sensory impairment’, in order to increase the sample size of this population of students. This recoding resulted in the creation of the following nine categories: learning difficulties in reading (n=235), learning difficulties in mathematics (n=85), speech/language impairment (n=85), emotional/behavioural problems (n=70), autism spectrum disorder (n=49), physical disabilities (n=15), intellectual disabilities (n=13), sensory impairment (n=11), and students without a disability (n=3600). The authors note that given the small sample size of some of these categories of groupings, the generalisability of these findings is limited (Cohen, 1992). However, we consider maintaining the integrity of the groupings of students is paramount to providing both a detailed and more representative view of children across groupings of additional needs in the context of Australian schools.

Measures

Eleven LSAC-developed items from the LSAC Wave 4 Teacher Survey were used in this study. Teachers were required to report descriptive information in relation to their students, their educational context, and educational services. These items and their related response options included:

1. In what year/grade is the study child enrolled? (Year 4/Grade 4, Year 3/Grade 3, Year 2/Grade 2, Year 1/Grade 1, Pre-year 1, Not Assigned to a Grade)
2. Is the study child currently repeating this year/grade? (Yes/No)
3. What specialised services does this child receive? (Speech Therapy, Psychological Assessment, Learning Support, Behavioural Management Programs, Other)
4. Does this child currently have an Individualised Education Plan (IEP)? (Yes/No)
5. Is this school? (Government/Public, Catholic, or Independent/Private)
6. Which of the following best describes your school structure? (Primary with a preschool program attached; Primary only; Primary and secondary; Preschool, Primary and secondary; Ungraded school program; Special school)
7. Which category best describes your class organisation? (Single grade/year level; Multi-age/multi-grade; Ungraded special education class; Ungraded alternative school program)
8. How many children are present in your class for the main educational program?
9. How many children in the class have a diagnosed disability?
10. In a typical week, how many total hours do paid aides spend in your classroom?
11. Which of the following specialist staff does this class have access to? (Specialist learning support teacher).

Full information about the teacher survey and a copy of the questionnaire is available from the LSAC website (http://www.growingupinaustralia.gov.au/).

Data analysis

Teacher survey responses were analysed using the IBM SPSS statistics program, version 20 (IBM, 2011). Descriptive statistics, crosstabs, and one-way ANOVA (p < .05) were used to provide a picture of the representation of children with additional needs in Australian schools, a context for the settings in which children with additional needs were educated, and an overview of the services provided to these children. The independent variable, ‘additional need’, included nine groups: intellectual disability, sensory impairment, physical disability, speech/language
impairment, learning difficulty: reading, learning difficulty: mathematics, emotional/behavioural problems, autism spectrum disorder, and no disability. In the instance of a lack of homogeneity of variance, the Welch tests were interpreted. Follow-up tests evaluated pairwise differences among the means using Dunnett’s C as equal variances were not assumed. Alpha was adjusted to control for Type 1 error across each pairwise comparison. The magnitude of relationship between the independent and dependent variables was assessed using effect sizes, reported as eta squared ($\eta^2$), an index of the proportion of variance explained by a variable (Grimm & Yarnold, 2000). Scores ranged from 0 to 1, with .01 as small, .06 as medium, and > .14 as large (Green & Salkind, 2003).

RESULTS

Representation of Children with Additional Needs

In this study, 4163 children were included in the analysis. Of those, 3600 children were identified as having no disability (86.5% of the sample population) and 563 were identified as having some additional need (13.5% of the sample population). Of those students with an additional need, 235 had a learning difficulty in reading (5.6%), 85 had a learning difficulty in mathematics (2.0%), 85 had a speech or language impairment (2.0%), 70 had emotional or behavioural problems (1.7%), 49 had autism spectrum disorder (1.2%), 15 had a physical disability (0.4%), 13 had an intellectual disability (0.3%), and 11 had a sensory impairment (0.3%).

Teachers were asked to report whether the study child was repeating the current grade level. Of 3332 children, a total of 25 were repeating their current grade level, and of these, 12 children had an additional need. For children with additional needs, reasons provided for repeating the current grade level included academic learning difficulties (5), social or behavioural difficulties (5), the disability (1), and changed schools (1).

Educational Context

In this sample, the majority of children with additional needs in Australia were educated in regular school settings (99%). The remaining 1% of students, the majority of whom had autism spectrum disorder or an intellectual disability, were educated in special schools. Table 1 provides a frequency count for the educational setting students attended with reference to the child’s additional needs status. Students with additional needs were primarily educated in government schools (68%), rather than Catholic (18.5%), or private/independent schools (13.5%). In relation to the specific class structure 96% of children identified with additional needs were educated in the regular classroom and 4% were educated in a special education classroom. Again, special education classes catered most frequently to children with autism spectrum disorder (39%), an intellectual disability (26%), or speech/language impairment (17%).

Data for the number of children in the study child’s classroom for the main educational program were comparable for both children with additional needs and their typically developing peers. For children with additional needs, the mean number of children in their class was 22, with a range of 4 to 39 children reported by teachers. Likewise, for typically developing children, the mean number of children reported in their classrooms was 23, with a range of 4 to 40 children. However these findings were statistically significantly different, $F(8, 3267) = 14.46, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$. Teachers indicated that class sizes were greater for typically developing children in comparison with those with intellectual disabilities (mean difference = 7.15), autism spectrum disorder (mean difference = 3.88) and speech/language impairment (mean difference = 1.70). No significant differences in class size were detected.
between children without a disability and children with a physical disability (mean difference = 0.80), learning difficulties in mathematics (mean difference = -0.25), sensory impairment (mean difference = 0.16), learning difficulties in reading (mean difference = -0.15), or emotional/behavioural difficulty (mean difference = 0.06).

Across categories of need and for typically developing children, 55% of children in this study were educated in classrooms in which one or more children with additional needs were educated beyond the study child. Statistically significant differences were found between groups for the number of children reported in the class with an additional need, $F(8, 3295) = 47.84, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.10$. Teachers reported differences in the number of children with additional needs represented in the classroom of typically developing students in comparison with those classes with children with intellectual disabilities (mean difference = -4.29), autism spectrum disorder (mean difference = -2.80), sensory impairment (mean difference = -1.69), speech/language impairment (mean difference = -0.93), and emotional/behavioural difficulty (mean difference = -0.57). No significant differences in the number of children with additional needs in the class were reported by teachers of typically developing children and children with a physical disability (mean difference = -0.46), learning difficulties in mathematics (mean difference = -0.25), learning difficulties in reading (mean difference = -0.15), or learning difficulties in mathematics (mean difference = -0.12).

**Educational Services**

Data for the proportion of children in the sample who were offered some form of specialist services by classification of need are reported in Table 2. This service may have been provided in or outside of the school. The number of children within each category is listed in the header cells of the table. Teachers identified 567 students (both with and without additional needs) who had access to specialist services. From this data, these figures are then further broken down to illustrate the percentage of students within each category of need that accessed a specific form of service. For example, there were 13 children in the total sample identified with an intellectual disability. Of those 13 children, teachers identified that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>No Disability</th>
<th>Autism Spectrum Disorder</th>
<th>Emotional/Behavioural Problems</th>
<th>Maths</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Speech/Language Impairment</th>
<th>Physical Disability</th>
<th>Sensory Impairment</th>
<th>Intellectual Disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular School</td>
<td>3270</td>
<td>2732</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Frequency count of educational setting attended by additional need status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Regular School</th>
<th>Special School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3270</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
all 13 students were provided some form of specialist service. Seventy-seven percent of children with an intellectual disability received some form of learning support, 54% were provided speech therapy, 23% received ‘other’ support, 15% received support with behaviour management and 0% undertook a psychological assessment. Data presented in the table for each category of need are not independent. For example, a child with an intellectual disability may access speech therapy, learning support, and behaviour support. Data in the ‘no disability’ category include children who have been identified as gifted, and children who have a poor understanding of Australian English or may be English Language Learners. Teachers reported 93% of students identified with an additional need were accessing some form of specialist service with the greatest proportion of children (65%) receiving some form of learning support. In addition to the specialist services provided to the children, teachers were asked to indicate the number of hours per week in which aides were present in the study child’s classroom. Of those teachers of children with an identified additional need in this study that responded, 2% indicated they were provided no aide time, 44% indicated they received between 1-5 hours, 19% received 6-10 hours, 10% received 11-15 hours, and 7% received between 16-20 hours aide time per week. Mean hours aide time per week as indicated by classroom teachers was 4.8 hours. Statistically significant differences in teacher reporting of aide time were evident, F(8, 3847) = 19.01, p < 0.001, η² = 0.04. Teachers indicated receiving a lesser amount of aide time in classrooms for typically developing children in comparison with those classrooms with children with intellectual disabilities (mean difference = -12.96), autism spectrum disorder (mean difference = -7.65),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Special Service</th>
<th>Learning Support</th>
<th>Speech Therapy</th>
<th>Behaviour Support</th>
<th>Psych Assessment</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psych</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2 Provision of Specialist Services to Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional Need Status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>No Disability</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Autism Spectrum Disorder</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Emotional/Behavioural Problems</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Maths</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Speech/Language Impairment</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Physical Disability</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Sensory Impairment</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Intellectual Disability</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3328</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>3264</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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sensory impairment (mean difference = -7.62), learning difficulties in mathematics (mean difference = -3.94), emotional/behavioural difficulty (mean difference = -3.83), learning difficulties in reading (mean difference = -3.51), speech/language impairment (mean difference = -3.50), and physical disability (mean difference = -2.90).

In this study 367 children (11% of the sample population), had an IEP. Table 3 reports the proportion of children in the sample with an IEP by their additional need status. Of the 559 children with an additional need, 217 had an IEP. This represents 38.8% of children with additional needs receiving some form of specialised programming for an identified need. In addition teachers reported that 150 children (5.4%) who were identified as having ‘no disability’ in the study also had an IEP.

DISCUSSION
The aim of this study was to provide a picture of the educational context and services provided to children with additional needs in their first years of school in Australia. Specifically it sought to report on the representation of children with specific forms of additional needs in Australian schools, their educational contexts and the types of services that these children access.

Educational Context
In this study children with additional needs in Australia were primarily educated in government schools. These findings are consistent with those from prior research (Dempsey, 2011; 2012). Data from this study reflect the shift in policy within systems toward children with additional needs being educated in regular education settings, with 99% of children with additional needs receiving their education in regular schools, and 96% educated in regular classrooms. Furthermore, in 55% of reported instances, teachers reported that in their classrooms, additional children with additional needs were educated beyond the study child.

These findings may suggest that the shift in the legislative and policy framework over the past decade in Australia has translated into the practice of educating children with additional needs in the least restrictive environment. This is considered a positive outcome for children with additional needs.
and their families. Interestingly, while data from this study reflect the reduction in enrolment of students with additional needs in specialised placements as reported in other studies, the data from this study do not reflect trends in the pattern of enrolment of children with behavioural difficulties or emotional disturbance in segregated school placements as reported in other studies (Dempsey, 2004; 2007; Dempsey et al., 2002). Given findings from other studies reported prevalence figures for specific states within Australia, this data provides a clearer look at overall trends across the nation. Data from this study indicate that children with autism spectrum disorder are most likely to receive instruction in a segregated, special class/school environment.

Data from this study reflect the evidence-based trend to reduce class size in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations of students (Bosworth, 2011). Class sizes were significantly smaller for students with an intellectual disability, speech/language impairment, or autism spectrum disorder. These findings were consistent with the greater representation of these groups of students in special education classes. Class sizes for students in all other categories of additional need were comparable to those of typically developing students.

Given that less than 1% of the entire sample population and 2% of children with additional needs were retained, it would appear that repeating a current grade level is not widespread practice for either typically developing children or children with additional needs in Australia. This finding is encouraging given the converging research evidence that suggests the practice of grade retention does not close the gap in achievement and is related to negative school adjustment, poor attendance, increased behavioural problems, and later school withdrawal (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). These data indicate the practice of retention in Australian schools is lower for both children with additional needs and their typically developing peers in comparison to prevalence figures reported in the US, France, Spain, Belgium, Germany, and The Netherlands (Goos, et al., 2013; Tingle et al., 2012).

Educational Services
Findings from this study are consistent with those of Goldfield et al. (2012) in that 13.5% of students within the sample (children with and without additional needs) required and were receiving some form of access to specialist services. Of those students identified with an additional need, 93% were accessing some form of specialist support, although it is unclear as to whether this support was provided in the context of school. In most instances, this support was aligned with the most prevalent forms of need (learning difficulty in reading or mathematics and speech or language impairment) and students’ identified area of need, with a high prevalence of students accessing learning support, ‘other’ services, or speech therapy. Detail regarding the frequency, intensity, duration, content, quality, mode of delivery, and nature of these services was not provided. These findings are consistent with those of McLeod and McKinnon (2007) in terms of the number of children receiving services and the form of services provided. In this study children with either a sensory impairment or physical disability were least likely to receive specialist support.

In addition to specialist services, all but 2% of teachers reported receiving aide support in their classroom each week. Teachers of children with intellectual disabilities, sensory impairment, and autism spectrum disorder reported receiving a higher allocation of aide time in comparison to teachers of typically developing students. The prevalence of support time allocated in classrooms in which children with additional needs are educated would likely be perceived as positive by classroom teachers and may assist teachers in
maintaining positive attitudes toward inclusion in their classrooms (Webster et al., 2010). However, given 55% of teachers reported multiple students with additional needs in their classroom, the mean time allocation of 4.8 hours per week may be insufficient to enable classroom teachers to support the needs of multiple students with additional needs. These data are consistent with ongoing teacher concerns regarding a lack of support to ensure the successful inclusion of children with additional needs in regular classrooms (McNally, Cole, & Waugh, 2001).

Similar to findings from prior research (Dempsey, 2012; McLeod & McKinnon, 2007), the majority of students with an identified learning need were not provided an individual education program. Trends in this data reflect that in Australia, there is no requirement in the legislation, standards, or state policies for education providers to individually plan for students with additional needs (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005; Commonwealth Government of Australia, 1992; Dempsey, 2012). Interestingly, 150 students (5.4% of the LSAC sample population) were identified by their classroom teacher as having an IEP, yet they had no identified disability. Given that only 39% of the students formally identified with additional needs were provided with an IEP it would appear that the specific learning needs, instructional pedagogies and programs, and evidence of learning outcomes of many students with additional needs remain undocumented. These data are troubling given the lack of accountability for the educational programming of these students (Dempsey, 2012).

In summary, data from this study are encouraging in terms of the practices employed in the education of children with additional needs in Australian schools. Children with additional needs are educated in regular schools and classrooms, and in many instances they have access to specialist services, learning support, aide time, and IEPs. While educational services are provided in the context of the early school years, data from this study reveal significant variation around access to these services and the categories of need for which these services are provided. Children with higher support needs such as autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability appear to access a greater proportion of services and individualised programming in comparison to students identified with different additional needs. For those other students, access to services, individual programming, and learning support is more variable.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of using data from a large multi-faceted study such as LSAC apply to this study. This study provides a picture of the representation and services provided to children with additional needs in Australia at one point in time and cannot be used to make broader generalisations over time. Teacher report provided the primary indicator of student additional need status, the educational context, and services provided to children with additional needs. No additional objective data was sourced in relation to the variables of interest.

While data from this study provide an indicator of the educational context and the services provided to children with additional needs in Australian schools, additional research examining teacher attitudes and student outcomes on a variety of measures is required to establish relative progress in relation to the education of children with additional needs in Australia.

CONCLUSION

The overall goal of inclusive education is that “people with disability achieve their full potential through their participation in an inclusive, high-quality education system that is responsive to their needs” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011). Descriptive findings from this study suggest
that we have come a long way as far as the representation of children with additional needs in regular schools is concerned, and that we are moving forward in relation to National Disability Strategy (2010-2020) targets regarding the proportion of children with additional needs in mainstream schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, pp. 53-55). These findings also suggest there is still much to be achieved in terms of defining the level of support specific students require and operationalising this support in practice through programs and related funding. Additional teacher education around pedagogies, programs and practices may be required to ensure the successful inclusion of children with additional needs in the regular school and classroom environment and to ensure students progress to their optimum level given the primary environment in which they are educated.

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A REVIEW OF SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT PLANS: BLUEPRINTS FOR THE MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT OF STUDENTS EXHIBITING PROBLEM BEHAVIOURS

Barry A. Fields
University of Southern Queensland

ABSTRACT
In response to growing public and political concern about behaviour in schools the Australian Government set up a task force to examine the extent of the problem and to make recommendations for how the situation could be improved (MCEETYA, 2002). The taskforce encouraged schools to take a holistic and whole school approach to understanding and responding to student behaviour. Queensland was the first state to respond to the MCEETYA report, establishing its own inquiry into behaviour in the state's schools (MACER, 2005). Of the sixteen recommendations made in the MACER report, eleven were accepted for immediate action, with a further four being accepted in principle. Subsequently, the Queensland Department of Education and Training developed a Code of School Behaviour for its 1400 plus state schools and required all its state schools to draw up, in consultation with the broader school community, comprehensive behaviour management plans - called Responsible Behaviour Plans for Students (RBPS). These plans provide a unique insight into how schools view student behaviour and go about the business of encouraging positive behaviour and responding to misbehaviour, including serious forms of disruptive, antisocial and illegal behaviour. As the vast majority of students with emotional and behavioural disorders typically attend regular schools, these behaviour plans define the nature and extent of services and supports available to this group of students as well as to all students whose behaviour is disruptive and challenging to teachers. This paper provides a summary description of the RBPS of 30 state primary schools and an analysis of the procedures and strategies used by these schools to manage challenging and disruptive behaviour.

INTRODUCTION
Student behaviour has for decades been a concern for schools and school systems in Australia and elsewhere around the world (Australian Education Union, 2009; Bushaw & Lopez, 2012; Lewis, 2006; Steer, 2009). More recently, in Australia, it has become a priority for politicians, policy makers and school administrators. School discipline is seen as a major social issue and, for better or worse, is viewed in concert with growing community concern about
youth alienation and antisocial behaviour (Weatherburn & Indermauer, 2004). In this environment it is not surprising then that media coverage and public angst have led policy makers to seek answers and politicians to call for action (Fields, 2005). Of particular concern for educators has been (1) the negative impact of disruptive behaviour on the learning of well-behaved students (Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal (MACER), 2005; Steer, 2005), (2) evidence of widespread bullying in schools (ABC News, 2008; Rigby & Slee, 2008) and (3) the damage to teacher efficacy and wellbeing caused by the demands of managing uncooperative and unruly students (Barker, Yeung, Dobia & Mooney, 2009).

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR: SIGNS OF PROGRESS
Following decades of inertia, it is comforting to note that progress is being made on many fronts. In 2003, the Commonwealth Government sponsored Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released the National Safe Schools Framework, an initiative designed, in part, to ameliorate a growing community perception that students were increasingly at risk of experiencing violence in and around schools. The Framework incorporates advice to school systems and individual schools about

... existing good practice and provides an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities address issues of bullying, harassment, violence, and child abuse and neglect (MCEETYA, 2003, p.3).

The report and its recommendations are now widely adopted in both government and private education systems around Australia. Bullying is being tackled at a national level (Department of Education Training & the Arts, 2009; Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2010) and state education systems have acted quickly in response to public concern by acknowledging that the problem is real, by formulating clear policies and guidelines for how it should be managed and by making available a rich array of professional development resources to teachers and school communities (Department of Education & Training, 2010a; Rigby, 2010).

Prior to the release of the National Safe Schools Framework, MCEETYA had commissioned the Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce to provide ministers with advice on how best to deal with more broadly defined student behaviour issues. MCEETYA is a highly representative body, consisting of national, state and territory ministers of education and the New Zealand minister of education. Decisions made by this body invariably have an impact right across the country. The Taskforce initiated the Student Behaviour Management Project with the aim to develop

... guiding principles and practices that could be used to support the development of successful student behaviour management programs on a systemic, district, school, classroom and individual level in Australian education environments (De Jong, 2005, p. 355).

In 2004, the MCEETYA Taskforce delivered its report on student behaviour management (De Jong, 2005). The principles developed by the Taskforce encouraged schools to take a holistic and whole school approach to understanding and responding to student behaviour; to see that student behaviour was directly linked to the quality of the teaching-learning experience, and to give priority to practices and strategies which created safe environments for students. Additional principles included the development of an education experience that was fundamentally student-centred and responsive; recognizing and embracing student diversity and inclusive practices as key driving forces in school education; and giving priority to the development of good
teacher-student relations.
More specifically, the Taskforce described the characteristics of ‘best practice’ in behaviour management. These included (1) a clearly articulated and comprehensive behaviour management policy, (2) a health promotive culture, (3) a relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum, (4) effective pedagogy, (5) a democratic, empowering and positive classroom environment, (6) well established internal and external support structures and partnerships, and (7) an alternative flexible learning environment for students who have great difficulty conforming to school expectations for behaviour (De Jong, 2005).

It is now possible to say that governments and school authorities have at their disposal, a much clearer picture of what constitutes ‘best practice’, certainly at the system level, on the subject of behavior management and behavior support. How that information is actioned by those authorities is less clear. This paper examines the actions of one school system – the Queensland state school system, as it seeks to address behavior issues in its schools.

THE QUEENSLAND RESPONSE
Of all the Australian states and territories, Queensland responded with the most urgency to the nationally recognised imperatives in relation to behaviour management in schools. In 2004, the Queensland government established the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal (MACER) and identified student behaviour as one of its priority topics for advice to the Minister for Education, Training & the Arts. The Behaviour Management Sub-Committee of MACER delivered its report, entitled Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour, in November 2005 (Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal, 2005). Of the sixteen recommendations made in the report, eleven were accepted for immediate action by the Department. A further four were accepted ‘in principle’. The recommendation rejected was that behaviour support staff should have formal tertiary qualifications in behaviour management. The Department of Education and the Arts determined that mandatory qualifications were not required and that the practice of selecting staff for such positions, based on demonstrated ability, was sufficient (Department of Education, Training & the Arts, 2005).

A feature of the Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour report was its recognition of the reciprocal relationship between student behaviour, effective learning and teaching, and school leadership. In this sense, the Queensland report paralleled the findings and recommendations of the UK report on school discipline - Managing Challenging Behaviour (Office of Standards in Education, 2005). Other similarities between the two reports included the importance attached to achieving consistency in the development and implementation of standards of behaviour within and across schools, the provision of professional support and training for teachers and the monitoring and evaluation of, in the case of Queensland, its new policy and approach to behaviour management.

Within a year of the release of the Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour, report the Department of Education, Training & the Arts had developed the Code of School Behaviour for implementation in all 1,400 Queensland state schools (Department of Education & Training, 2006a). The purpose of the Code of School Behaviour was to provide a basis of certainty and consistency in standards of behaviour for all state school communities. The Code of School Behaviour reiterated a key finding of the Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour report, that the primary purpose of school education is learning, but that there is a close relationship between learning, achievement and behaviour. While educators had intuitively understood this linkage for some time, pedagogy and student behaviour (certainly the management of student behaviour) had been treated as two distinct
aspects of schooling both at the policy level and in practice in many schools. Policy makers were alerted to how teachers viewed pedagogy and behaviour management in the findings of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001). In that study, which became the basis for the Productive Pedagogies, many teachers saw behaviour management as a policy issue and one that had priority over considerations of teaching practice. In other words, matters of discipline and how behaviour problems were responded to, were so important that they superseded educational developments that might conflict with them. This view clearly opens the way for the existence of a lack of congruence between pedagogical practices and behaviour management (Fields, 2003) and Education Queensland’s most recent initiatives in respect of behaviour management are an attempt to overcome this thinking.

As well as articulating expected standards of behaviour, the Code of School Behaviour clearly defined the rights and responsibilities of students and teachers, the values which underpin Education Queensland’s view of behaviour in the school context and guidelines for the delivery of consequences for unacceptable behaviour. As originally conceived, parents were to be provided a copy of the Code of School Behaviour on enrolment and were asked to sign that they understood and supported it (Department of Education & the Arts, 2005).

Apart from the urgency with which the state government applied itself to responding to the MACER recommendations, the initial actions taken in developing and promulgating the Code of School Behaviour are largely indistinguishable from the actions taken by other Australian state school systems. However, where many school systems stop at system (i.e. state) level policy statements and guidelines, the Department of Education and Training initiated steps to make sure individual schools were actively adopting and reinforcing the Code of School Behaviour. To maximise the likelihood that schools put into place plans and strategies to ensure that standards of behaviour were being met and that efforts were being made to reinforce appropriate behaviour and to help students who were having difficulty meeting behaviour expectations; schools were required to formulate detailed behaviour management plans that reflected the objectives of the Code of School Behaviour (Department of Education & Training, 2006b). These plans, called the Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students (RBPS) began rolling out across Queensland state schools in the latter part of 2006. RBPS were to be developed under the following headings: (1) rationale for the school’s behaviour plan, (2) beliefs about behaviour and learning, (3) processes for facilitating expected behaviour, (4) processes for responding to unacceptable behaviour, (5) consequences for unacceptable behaviour, (6) the network of support for students with behaviour problems, (7) consideration of individual circumstances and (8) related legislation, policies and resources (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2012).

In many ways RBPS are extraordinary documents. They provide an unprecedented and detailed insight into a school’s strategy for achieving acceptable standards of behaviour and how misbehaviour is to be managed. They provide a unique and informative insight into the thinking of school level educators and school administrators, as well as other stakeholders within the school community. They represent a blueprint for action and a mechanism for evaluation and accountability.

**PRIMARY SCHOOL RESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR PLANS (RBPS)**

What follows is a description and analysis of the RBPS of 30 state primary schools with enrolments ranging from 350 – 500 students. The schools were chosen at random from Brisbane school districts and south east Queensland regional cities.
RBPS were accessed via the schools’ websites. While RBPS have eight components, the focus of description and analysis was on how the schools viewed student behaviour and the procedures and processes employed by the schools to (1) establish and reinforce positive behaviour, and (2) to respond to unacceptable behaviour. It is these components that effectively define the school’s understanding of student behaviour and approach to behaviour management. The paper concludes with a discussion of how closely aligned the RBPS are to the characteristics of best practice in behaviour management outlined earlier.

**Beliefs About Behaviour**

In developing their RBPS, schools are required to formulate and state their beliefs about behaviour. Schools are guided in this activity by the values and principles set out in the Code of School Behaviour. However, these alone are not sufficient to provide a comprehensive statement of beliefs. What we find in school behaviour plans, is evidence of school communities drawing on a wide range of research, theories and perspectives about behaviour, learning and pedagogy; to respond to this requirement and in the process making very public, not only their beliefs, but their familiarity with and critical understanding of educational research and findings on what constitutes contemporary understandings and perspectives on student behaviour – how it is learned and influences on it.

A recurring feature in the great majority of RBPS examined is the cognitive-behavioural perspective that children are capable of and do make conscious decisions to behave as they do. Of the 30 RBPS examined, 21 incorporated ‘belief’ statements along these lines. The outcome of this from the school’s perspective is that children can legitimately be expected to “take responsibility for their own behaviour and learning” (p. 2). It also appears as a school value or virtue in most RBPS examined for this paper. Typical of statements in this respect are: “Children choose their behaviour and therefore must accept responsibility for it”. It is not uncommon for schools to draw on the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools when identifying their adopted values. From this source, ‘responsibility’ is defined as being accountable for one’s actions, and the capacity to resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways (Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005).

If students are viewed as capable of choosing how they will behave, there is the potential for schools and teachers to focus attention less on teaching students how to behave and more on consequences (both positive and negative) for the behavior choices that student’s make. All 30 RBPS examined for this paper provided detailed information about how positive behaviour was to be recognised and rewarded. However, far greater emphasis was given to defining the consequences, including sanctions, for unacceptable behaviour in most RBPS reviewed. How the balance between the provision of support for students to learn how to behave and the application of consequences for misbehaviour plays out in schools cannot be determined solely through an assessment of school behaviour plans. However, the thinking and particularly the aspirations of schools around this topic can be seen in many RBPS. These aspirations, and some conflicting considerations will emerge as we continue to explore other components and features of RBPS.

More than one third of the school RBPS examined made reference in their belief statements to the ‘purposefulness’ of behaviour, and this was often linked to the view that students choose their behaviour e.g., “All behaviour is purposeful and children choose to behave as they do”.
The understanding that human behaviour is ‘purposeful’ is an emerging theme in school behaviour management operations, particularly in those schools that have adopted Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) as their overall framework for the management of student behaviour. PBS, also known in Australia as Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS), and Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL), employs a process called Functional Behaviour Assessment (FBA) as its primary means of understanding why a student misbehaves. Behaviour is understood to serve one of two functions (1) to obtain something, or (2) to avoid something. When a student repeatedly exhibits unacceptable behaviour, the understanding is that it must be ‘working’ for the student, i.e. its function is being achieved (Crone & Horner, 2003). Employing this line of thinking, teachers then must find ways of helping students get what they want by using more appropriate, prosocial behaviours. So, when ‘purposefulness’ and ‘choice’ are linked in this way it opens the pathway for teachers to engage in the provision of behaviour support, namely teaching students how to behave and guiding students to make appropriate, prosocial decisions about how to behave.

Invariably, RBPS belief statements about student learning and behaviour are constructed with reference to how the school and teachers need to operate to encourage positive outcomes in both areas. School belief statements about ‘learning’ reflect the view that all students are capable of learning, learning is enhanced when students basic needs (belonging, power, fun and freedom) are met, when the curriculum is inclusive and engaging, when individual differences are taken into account, when high standards are set and when all students are required to actively participate in the learning experience. Similar thinking is applied to beliefs about behaviour.

**Establishing and Communicating Expectations for Behaviour**

All 30 RBPS provided clear and often very detailed information about the school’s standards for student behaviour. Most often, these were in the form of school rules, with a parallel set of classroom specific rules that reinforced those at the school level. Rules identify the school’s expectations for how students are to behave. They establish the boundaries for behaviour, making clear what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. The attention given to rules is premised on the importance assigned to students having a clear understanding of expected behaviour and of providing a consistent approach to behaviour in all school settings.

Most schools establish 3 – 5 rules that apply across all school operations. These tend to focus on safety (e.g. behave in ways that do not expose others to injury or harm), respect (how we talk and behave to one another), property (how we look after personal property, the property of others, and school property), and learning (behaving in a way that does not interfere with the learning of others).

Expectations for student behaviour are described in RBPS. Some schools provide visual reminders of them in the form of posters placed around the school, periodically remind students of them, and publically celebrate students who follow the rules. As we shall see later in this paper, rules underpin the school’s approach to and system of consequences for misbehaviour. In many schools, rule compliance determines the student’s ‘behaviour level’, the formal classification of a student’s behaviour within the school.

**Encouraging Positive Behaviour**

School behaviour management policies and plans have traditionally focused most attention on defining and responding to unacceptable behaviour. This continues to be a focus in current school behaviour...
plans. However, increasing emphasis is being given to the acknowledgement and reward of positive behaviour. This, in part, can be attributed to (1) the recent emphasis on whole school behaviour management and, in particular, to Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) which has a strong emphasis on positive behaviour; and (2) to the recognition that the great majority of students are normally well-behaved and as such deserving of acknowledgement for such behaviour.

Schools encourage positive behaviour first and foremost by establishing and communicating the school’s expectations for behaviour. This creates the boundaries for behaviour, making clear what is and is not acceptable behaviour. More and more now we see schools framing behaviour expectations positively, what the school wants to see in the way of behaviour, as opposed to stating what students are not to do. This is demonstrated best in SWPBS schools. Seventeen of the 30 schools surveyed identified as having adopted the SWPBS framework. These schools included the standard PBS rule statements – Be Safe, Be Responsible, Be Respectful. There were numerous variations of these statements, including Care for Self, Care for Others, Care for Learning, Care for Property, all providing statements of the behaviour students should aim to display.

To operationalise rules, many schools provided examples of the specific behaviours that typify the various rules and link these to important school contexts, activities and times of the day where student behaviour can be a problem. Settings included the classroom, playground, hallways, stairwells, eating areas, toilets, bus lines, bike racks, movement around the school, transitions, routines, excursions, arrival at school, before school and after school time. The specific behaviours linked to the rules were displayed in the form of a ‘behaviour matrix’. One third of the RBPS examined for this paper included such a matrix. Eleven of the RPBS made specific reference to expected behaviour being taught, with six schools identifying daily lessons during class time (up to 15 minutes) devoted to discussion, role play and revision of expected behaviour.

By far the dominant means of encouraging positive behaviour was the formal recognition and reward of such behaviour. Many schools had elaborate processes for the acknowledgement of rule-abiding and prosocial behaviour. Gotcha’ tickets featured in SWPBS schools. These tickets were dispensed by all teachers, in all areas of the school, throughout the school day whenever teachers sighted instances of positive behaviour. In awarding the tickets, reference was made to the school rule that was being adhered to. On school assemblies and parades various awards were publicly dispensed (e.g. student of the week, good choices awards, ‘most improved’ certificates). At the class level, receiving stars, stickers, certificates, stamps and earning points for good behaviour seemed to be common practice along with activity rewards such as free time and access to games and other preferred activities. Several schools included phone calls or letters to parents acknowledging their child’s positive behaviour as an important strategy for recognising and encouraging positive behaviour.

At a broader school and school community level, awareness of and garnering school community support for the school’s RBPS was a stated objective of the schools operations and efforts to encourage positive behaviour. The importance of home-school communication and partnership was stressed in RBPS as was school community commitment to the schools defined values. Seven schools specifically highlighted the responsibility of teachers to provide engaging and inclusive pedagogy and of teachers developing strong respectful and supportive relationships with students. ‘Student welfare’, ‘mental health’, ‘connectedness’ and ‘belonging’ featured as important outcomes in RBPS as did the...
right of students to feel ‘safe’ and ‘happy’ at school – language rarely evident in school behaviour management documentation a decade ago.

Responding to Unacceptable Behaviour

Unacceptable behaviour is generally defined in RBPS as behaviour that does not conform to the school’s expectations for behaviour as outlined in the school rules. Most schools use the SWPBS three-tiered depiction of behaviour. Three levels of behaviour are identified. The first includes frequently occurring milder forms of misbehaviour, often referred to as low-level disruptive behaviour. The great majority of students exhibit this type of behaviour at some time. It is regarded as manageable within the classroom through what is described as Universal Behaviour Support. This includes engaging pedagogy, relevant curriculum, efforts to establish positive teacher-student relationships, skilled classroom management and effective re-direction and correction of off task and unacceptable behaviour. Two other behaviour levels are defined. These encompass behaviours that are significantly more disruptive and challenging and requiring ever increasing level of intervention and behaviour support. The more serious the behaviour the more school levels and broader community level programs, services and supports are needed. It is not unusual for schools to table a detailed list of behaviours indicative of each behaviour level along with the supports the school is able to marshal for each level.

The management of low level disruptive behaviour is considered to be the primary responsibility of class teachers. Consistent with the belief that students choose to behave as they do and must accept responsibility for their behaviour, efforts are made to support students to change their behaviour with the least amount of teacher direction. Initial correction often involves (1) referring the student to the behaviour expectation that has been infringed as a reminder of what they should be doing, (2) allowing students the time and space to reflect on their behaviour, and (3) providing the opportunity for students to consider and express how their behaviour needs to change. This process is seen as a precursor to student’s capacity for self management and self-discipline.

It is not unusual in RBPS for schools to communicate the specific strategies that will be employed when re-directing and correcting student behaviour. It appears that Queensland state schools have been influenced by employer professional development programs in this regard; most notably Education Queensland’s Essential Skills for Classroom Management (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2013a) and the Better Behaviour, Better Learning Online Course (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2013b). These programs present a range of strategies along a continuum of least to most intrusive. Intrusion in this context relates to the degree to which employment of the strategy interrupts teaching and learning. Milder, frequently occurring forms of misbehaviour attract strategies low in intrusion in order to maintain the ‘flow of the lesson’. More intrusive and more directly assertive or confronting strategies are employed when initial intervention is not successful, or when the behaviour warrants a more direct response. Strategies typical of those cited in RBPS include: planned or tactical ignoring, signal interference, proximity and body language, distraction or diversion, adjacent peer reinforcement, name dropping, cueing descriptive encouragement of good behaviour, rhetorical question, ‘I’ message, direct appeal, rule reminder, Glasser’s ‘triplets’, explicit re-direction, ‘you have a choice’, etc. Over thirty strategies have been identified in the RBPS reviewed for this paper.

The consequences applied for misbehaviour has traditionally been a sensitive topic and one where school have been somewhat reluctant to provide very much detail. With
the introduction of RBPS Queensland state schools are now far more forthcoming about types of consequences they employ for various forms of misbehaviour. Queensland state schools are guided by the Code of School Behaviour in their application of consequences. Consequences are expected to be educative in nature i.e. to teach students how to behave more appropriately. They are also expected to help students accept responsibility for themselves and their actions. Twenty-three different types of consequences were identified in the RBPS reviewed for this paper. They included warnings, loss of privileges, changed seating arrangement, teacher conference, classroom ‘community service’, letter of apology, restitution, time out relocation in the classroom, detention, restricted access to playground areas, being sent to a ‘buddy classroom or the ‘Responsible Thinking’ room, office referral, change of school behaviour level, alternative recess time and/or class timetable. For the most serious forms of misbehaviour consequences include parent call, police call, alternative school/centre placement, suspension and expulsion.

What is evident in RBPS is the reduced emphasis on reference to particular models of behaviour management other than the adoption of the SWPBS framework (Department of Education & Training, 2008). In their place are behaviour management repertoires (strategies) drawn from a synthesis of ‘best practice’ research that very much have the imprimatur of the employing authority. In the case of Education Queensland there is no longer a reluctance to specify how schools should go about the business of behaviour management and support. Further evidence of the ‘confidence’ being displayed by education systems in this regard is Education Queensland’s leadership and specific guidance to schools about the management of bullying in schools, the use of personal technology devices at school, responses to emergency situations and critical incidents including specific strategies for defusing threats to safety and property, and the appropriate use of physical restraint.

THE CODE, RBPS AND BEST PRACTICE IN BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT
The Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of MCEETYA identified in its study of behaviour management in schools the characteristics of best practice in addressing student behaviour problems (De Jong, 2005). Seven characteristics were isolated and these provide a useful basis for the review of any school system and school level behaviour management policy and strategies. What follows is an examination of how well Queensland’s Code of School Behaviour and school RBPS meet the seven characteristics. In this discussion, characteristics associated with curriculum and pedagogy have been combined because of their similar relation to student behaviour. As such, six characteristics, framed as questions, are discussed here:

Does the Plan include a clearly articulated and comprehensive behaviour management policy?
The answer to this question is in the affirmative. The Department of Education, Training and Employment revised its policy on behaviour management in 2011 bringing it into line with its many initiatives following the MACER report (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2011). Its Code of School Behaviour and RBPS has provided a clear and consistent view on behaviour management from the Departmental level to the school and classroom levels. The plan and related strategies have been developed in response to both national and state reviews of disciplinary practices in schools and to current thinking about how the management of student behaviour should be approached. Best practice is seen here as being student-centred, inclusive, responsive to individual differences and needs, educative rather than
purely punitive in orientation, non-coercive and based on rights and responsibilities (De Jong, 2005). These concepts find a place in many of the RBPS examined for this paper and represent a significant advance on earlier Queensland policy and strategy both in terms of relation to research on behaviour management and to detailed advice and guidance to teachers and school administrators.

Does the Plan incorporate a health-promotive culture?

A health-promoting approach is adopted when a school attaches major importance to safety as a basic need and right within the school setting, encourages positive peer relations and the development of prosocial behaviour (De Jong, 2005). Schools are on track to satisfy these criteria for best practice when they develop a strong pastoral care program and aim to maximise student connectedness and involvement within the life of the school. It has been noted earlier that the provision of a safe and supportive school environment has been a major goal of Education Queensland’s new focus on behaviour management and was a central theme of its earlier behaviour management policy entitled Management of Behaviour in a Supportive School Environment—Schools and Discipline (Department of Education, 1998). Based on an examination of 30 RBPS, it was found that many schools have highly developed pastoral care programs and anti-bullying strategies. Some schools have identified that they use commercial and/or pre-packaged social skills training programs for students needing targeted or intensive behaviour support. The listing of the Mind Matters mental health program (Department of Health & Ageing, 2012) as a resource for schools was observed for 23 of the 30 school RBPS examined for this paper. The issue of the mental health of students has only recently come to the fore in Australia and there is a sense that schools are playing ‘catch up’ in respect of how mental health is formally addressed within the broad school curriculum and what might be the role of teachers in this regard.

Does the school provide a relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum and a pedagogy which is challenging and responsive?

While not a direct feature of behaviour management plans, the link between curriculum, quality teaching and student behaviour is now widely acknowledged. It is difficult to imagine that students will wholeheartedly engage in the learning experience when learning tasks and activities are viewed by them as having no immediate or practical benefit and when teaching is uninspiring. Where the outcome is poor literacy and numeracy skills, disengagement and alienation can follow, with obvious flow on effects to student behaviour.

The relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and student behaviour is reciprocal, with the very best learning experiences and teaching failing to have an impact where classroom management is poor and behaviour management ineffectual. The interrelationship between curriculum, pedagogy and student behaviour is recognised in the Code of School Behaviour and finds a place in many school RBPS. School behaviour plans however, do little more than stress the importance of the teaching-learning experience to student engagement and cooperation. What constitutes good pedagogy and an engaging curriculum remains very much a matter addressed at the school level separate to or at best parallel with the subject of behaviour management. Educators, including teacher educators it seems, haven’t as yet a language and a means to comfortably tie the two together.

Does the Plan promote a democratic, empowering and positive approach to classroom management?

The primary distinguishing feature of this characteristic are the efforts made at the school and classroom levels to build
positive teacher-student relationships. The emphasis on ‘relationships’ in behaviour management is not new, but the current focus clearly elevates the subject to a new level of importance. It reflects a shift in thinking about behaviour management away from what teachers ‘do to’ students to how teachers ‘work with’ students and to the relationship teachers develop with students. The goal remains the same – student cooperation and student engagement, the means is different and one which is potentially more democratic, empowering and positive. No doubt teachers will readily accept the reasoning underlying this shift. Whether they can, with any confidence or commitment, move towards working with students and ultimately towards the goal of student self-discipline remains to be seen.

Does the school have well established internal and external support structures and partnerships?
The identification of support for students at the three levels of behaviour support discussed earlier in this paper (whole school, targeted and intensive) is a major component of RBPS.

Students needing targeted and intensive interventions require extraordinary provisions, often involving agencies and services drawn from outside the school itself. Given the recognised percentages of students at these two levels i.e. up to 20% of the school enrolment, the demand for support services can be considerable. Schools in their RBPS list an impressive array of support persons and services including behaviour support teachers, Guidance Officers, school nurses, parent volunteers and mentors, teacher aides, police liaison officers, Life Education Program, Community Health, Child & Youth Mental Health, and the Juvenile Aid Bureau to name just a few. On paper schools may appear well resourced. In reality, services can be stretched to the limit or spread thinly to the point of being ineffectual. In a school of 500 students as many as 30 – 100 students might, for example, benefit from work with a school Guidance Officer. As Guidance Officers may service two to three primary schools their capacity to provide for the needs of all but the most difficult and challenging students is severely limited. If needed services and support cannot be provided, the goal of achieving a supportive school experience for students with behaviour adjustment problems can be undermined. One can imagine schools, perhaps reluctantly, needing to fall back on highly managerial and even punitive responses to students who cannot or will not conform to school standards of behaviour. As the Code of School Behaviour recognises that the rights and needs of all members of the school community need to be accommodated, it is not difficult to predict that the interests of the majority will prevail over the minority of students who have difficulty adjusting to school standards of behaviour and who are viewed as unappreciative and unresponsive to efforts made by the school on their behalf.

Does the school provide an alternative flexible learning environment for students with behaviour adjustment problems?
This characteristic acknowledges that the traditional school curriculum and structure is difficult for many students to adjust to and that alternative timetables, curriculum options and programs may be necessary for many students to complete their schooling. In some cases an alternative educational placement may be the best option. Several states have such alternative school provisions variously described as Suspension Centres or, in the case of Queensland, Positive Learning Centres. These centres are few in number and can cater for a relatively small number of students, most often secondary students. Where students must remain in the primary school for their education it is seen as good practice that they are provided with an individualised education program, one which shares many of the elements of IEP’s
Refereed paper: School Behaviour Management Plans

for students with disabilities but where
the focus is predominantly on behaviour.
In Queensland these plans are called
Individualised Behaviour Support Plans
and are developed by school personnel in
collaboration with regional office behaviour
support specialists and Guidance Officers.
So, in respect of this characteristic of
best practice, Education Queensland has
responded well; although one could argue
that the 14 Positive Learning Centres
established over the past year or two are
grossly insufficient in an school system
that caters for 490,000 students and which
reports over 60,000 student suspensions
annually (Vogler & Chilcott, 2013).

DISCUSSION
In 2004 the Queensland state government
set the wheels in motion for a major revision
of how behaviour in state schools was to be
addressed. The approach taken was a bold
attempt to create a discipline strategy for the
state that is based on research and current
thinking. The enthusiasm with which the
Department of Education, Training & the
Arts accepted the recommendations of its
independent committee set up to provide
advice on exemplary practices in behaviour
management shows an openness that
has not always been evident in relation
to either curriculum development or
behaviour management policy. In 1996
after a very successfully state wide trial
of Restorative Justice involving 119 state
schools, funding of this approach was
withdrawn (Thorsborne, 2001). Restorative
Justice is a conferencing strategy for
students who engage in serious forms of
antisocial behaviour, it is used extensively
in the juvenile justice system in Australia
and elsewhere (Johnstone & Van Ness,
2006). The project coordinator offered as
explanation for the Department’s lack of
support namely, that central office staff
were uncomfortable with the shift from
control and punishment as the primary
approaches to discipline to one of building
and sustaining positive relations in school
communities (Fields, 2003). There has been
no such hesitancy in the recent actions of
Education Queensland to the challenge of
managing student behaviour in its schools
today and real leadership and forward
thinking is being shown in this regard.
Many educators and educational researchers
would be surprised at the way in which a
large government body has so readily taken
on the findings of educational research, an
input which has notoriously struggled to
find a voice in government policy making
in the past. One can only suggest that the
social and political imperatives and strident
calls for answers to behaviour problems
in schools and more broadly within the
community has contributed to the state
depart of education’s willingness to take
advice and to act so quickly.
Three things stand out in the approach.
Firstly, there is the desire to establish well
defined standards of behaviour for all
members of the school community and to
have these standards apply consistently
across the state. Secondly, there is the
unequivocal linking of teaching, learning
and behaviour so that while the primary
purpose of schooling is learning, factors
such a quality teaching and effective
behaviour management are seen as
integral to the achievement of this goal.
Finally, there is the emphasis placed on
the importance of developing positive and
constructive relations among all members
of the school community – educators,
students and parents. It is these three things
that are seen as guiding school behaviour
management plans in Queensland state
schools today.
In 2013 the Department of Education,
Training and Employment released a
statement reaffirming its commitment
to improving behaviour in state schools
(Department of Education, Training &
Employment, 2013c). It reaffirmed (1) the
importance of having clear and consistent
expectations for behaviour, (2) it made
clear its preference for an evidence-based,
whole-school approach to behaviour
management and support, and (3) it stressed
the responsibility of schools to explicitly teach appropriate behaviour to all students. Behaviour improvement is clearly seen as central to the operations of the school and to the school’s pedagogy.

While the Queensland government through its Department of Education, Training and Employment has been vigorous in establishing and implementing its plan for behaviour improvement, almost ten years down the track there has been no formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the approach. Individual schools are required via their annual reports to provide information on student behaviour, with school suspension data being the primary indicator of behaviour improvement. The sobering reality is that the number of suspensions and expulsions in state schools continues to rise – 64,324 in 2012, compared with 63,936 in 2011 (Vogler & Chilcott, 2013). In 2013, Discipline Audits were introduced for state schools as part of the Department of Education, Training and Employment Great Teachers = Great Results plan (Department of Education, Training & Employment, 2013). By the end of that year 20% of state schools had been audited. The Discipline Audit is an independent review of a school’s efforts to improve discipline and is similar to the Teaching and Learning Audits that have operated since 2010 (Department of Education & Training, 2010b). Most indications are that the results of these audits will remain ‘in house’ and not collated for public distribution. Given that public concern about behaviour in schools was a major factor in various national and state actions to improve behaviour and safety in schools, one would have thought some information on the success or otherwise of these initiatives should be made available.

REFERENCES


Positively Influencing

Lou Brown and the Education of Students with Severe Disabilities

Professor Michael L. Wehmeyer

Michael L. Wehmeyer, Ph.D. is Professor of Special Education; Director, Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities; and Associate Director, Beach Center on Disability, all at the University of Kansas. Dr. Wehmeyer has directed federally funded projects totaling in excess of $27 million conducting research and model development pertaining to the education and support of youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He is the author or co-author of over 300 peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters and has authored, co-authored, edited, or co-edited 32 books on disability and education related issues, including issues pertaining to self-determination, positive psychology and disability, transition to adulthood, the education and inclusion of students with severe disabilities, and technology use by people with cognitive disabilities.

Dr. Wehmeyer is Past-President of the Board of Directors for and a Fellow of the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD); a past president of the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT); a Fellow of the American Psychological Association (APA), Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Division (Div. 33); and Vice-President for the Americas and a Fellow of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSIDD). He is former Editor-in-Chief of the journal Remedial and Special Education and is a founding Co-Editor of the AAIDD journal Inclusion. He is a co-author of the AAIDD Supports Intensity Scale, and the 2010 AAIDD Intellectual Disability Terminology, Classification, and Systems of Supports Manual.

In 2013, Dr. Wehmeyer was awarded the Distinguished Researcher Award for lifetime contributions to research in intellectual disability by The Arc of the United States.

I began my career as a public school teacher for students who, at that time in the U.S. were referred to as having “severe and profound handicaps” or just SPH for short. This was 1981 and the implementation of the “Education for All Handicapped Children” Act (now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was in its nascence, having been passed in...
1975 with the intent that it be fully implemented in schools by 1978. Of course, the “full implementation by 1978” idea was, by and large, wishful thinking, and through much of the first half of the 1980s, students with the most extensive support needs were still making their way to public school for the very first time. The model under which education programs for students was designed was the prevailing model within the “mental retardation” field; segregated settings that, supposedly, maximized resources for the education of this population. So, like many other teachers launching their career in public schools at that time, I found myself as the “SPH teacher” for adolescents (broadly termed ages 12 to 21) with extensive support needs. My room was a self-contained classroom on a segregated campus and my paraprofessional and I did the best we could to provide a quality education for the dozen or so students we were responsible for. There was very little information about what, exactly, we should teach at that time… and frankly, the expectations of the district administrators was very low, focused mainly on containing behavior problems. As was the norm for that time, the curriculum we implemented focused on functional, life skills. The segregated building we taught in was considered state of the art: we had a room with a kitchen, beds for making, a washer and dryer—essentially everything we’d need to “teach” students to function successfully in their homes. There was also a separate “workshop” teacher who taught pre-vocational skills to prepare students for sheltered employment, though none of the students in my class were considered employable, so we did some pre-vocational training the classroom with the hope that a student might qualify for a work activities center (day program) and then, perhaps eventually, graduate to a sheltered workshop.

In the mid-1980s, three experiences profoundly altered my beliefs about educating students with extensive support needs. The first two involved my participation in workshops on non-aversive behavior management and supported employment. The former influenced how I dealt with problem behaviors and the latter challenged me to prepare students for real jobs in the community. Both experiences altered what I did in the classroom and the expectations I had for the students I taught.

The third experience was attending a workshop by Professor Lou Brown. Like the previously mentioned experiences, this workshop, and the articles published by Dr. Brown’s research team, fundamentally altered how I viewed students with severe disabilities and what I did as a teacher. I could identify several articles published by Lou Brown and colleagues that heavily influenced me: an article on what “least restrictive environment” meant for students with severe disabilities (Brown, Wilcox, Sontag, Vincent, Dodd, & Gruenwald, 1977); a book chapter on the principle of ultimate functioning (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976), but the article that I remember most vividly was titled “A Strategy for Developing Chronological-Age-Appropriate and Functional Curricular Content for Severely Handicapped Adolescents and Young Adults” (Brown, Branston, Hamre-Nietupski, Pumpian, Certo, & Gruenwald, 1979). The article begins by challenging the prevalent ways of understanding children with severe disabilities: the MA-CA Discrepancy Hypothesis—which emphasized the spurious Mental Age construct; the Earlier Stage Hypothesis and closely related “Not Ready For” Hypothesis, both of which were based on extrapolations of knowledge about typical child development to understanding adolescents and adults with severe disabilities (Brown et al., 1979, p. 81).

Brown and colleagues attacked the lack of evidence supporting these ultimately harmful assumptions, and suggested that what was important was to focus on instruction in chronologically-age appropriate activities in natural environments. The article confirmed what I was beginning to expect based upon my own, albeit limited, teaching experience.
That is, that the students I taught were learning how to wash and dry clothes or load a dishwasher or make a bed in our simulated classroom just fine, but were not transferring those skills to their home. What Brown and colleagues’ articles did was force me to look for ecologically-valid places for students to learn those skills and, more importantly, along with the innovations in supported employment, caused me to think about the students I taught as adolescents and young people who could, in fact, learn the skills that would enable them to live, learn, work, and play in their communities. From that point on, the community was the reference point for all I did, first as a teacher, then as a researcher, and now as a researcher/teacher trainer. In the thirty plus years since the publication of this article, we have made much progress, but we have much yet left to achieve. But, the vision established by Lou Brown and his colleagues in the early 1980s and, which I believe, triggered the emphasis on inclusion and full integration, remains, I think, a clarion call for equality and justice.

REFERENCES


In his introduction, Westwood’s authoritative yet supportive tone addresses teachers directly acknowledging how teaching inclusively ‘demands very careful planning and continuous complex multitasking by classroom teachers’ (p. x). He sagely advises ‘to differentiate as little as possible, by applying those strategies that are really beneficial to your students, within your own range of expertise, sustainable and feasible in your current teaching environment’ (p. x). This direct tone makes the book quite accessible and upon reading, it may feel like you are having a cosy conversation about pedagogy in a café around the corner from your school. He writes to a broad audience citing international examples from the US and UK as well as Australia. He puts inclusive education in a global context not simply based on one country’s (changeable) policies or legal frameworks but stepping back to see broader trends and issues, based on a broader human rights perspective, such as that in the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). He briefly explores how in some contexts inclusive education remains a contested approach (p. 3).

Westwood addresses the issue of inclusion by stating that it is not solely about disability but about addressing diversity which occurs in every classroom as a result of differences in gender, cultural background, ethnicity, language skills, amount of support from home, extent of prior knowledge and experience, competency in reading and writing, access to resources, special talents, ability or disability. This increases the relevance of the text to every classroom. He then addresses in chapter three how these differences may result in some students being exceptional in the classroom as a result of learning difficulties, intellectual disability, autism, sensory impairments, physical disabilities, speech and language disorders, and addresses how these students may be impacted in terms of their learning.

The text is aimed at readers in mainstream settings, although from the opening chapter onwards, Westwood defines inclusive education as a philosophy rather than a specific place or context. He states that inclusion is most effective when it is an ideology underpinning the practices of a whole school, supported by collaborative problem solving, coordinated communication including with support personnel and families, and adequate resources. All this must be in place to support the pedagogical changes that the teacher may make.
in the classroom. Westwood returns to this idea in the last chapter giving many explicit strategies for accessing and utilising support, such as resources and personnel, as well as families, again reinforcing that it is not the sole responsibility of the class teacher to make inclusion work.

Westwood devotes the next four chapters to specific strategies that teachers may wish to utilise in the classroom. The chapters are entitled: Adapting Curriculum Content, Adapting Teaching Methods, Adapting Teaching Resources and the last chapter addresses Assessment of Learning. In the chapter on curriculum adaptation, Westwood places it as the strategy of last resort citing that students may feel singled out, or the strategy may have the effect of widening the achievement gap if these students are denied access to the same learning opportunities as their peers. He briefly mentions Universal Design for Learning (p. 35) and Bloom’s Taxonomy (p. 37) as two tools that may be effective in terms of planning multiple approaches to a topic with appropriate learning objectives for all.

Chapter five on adapting teaching methods is structured around two approaches, teacher directed and student centred, (which he acknowledges is something of a false dichotomy). He explains and critiques strategies such as interactive whole class teaching, direct instruction, adapting teacher presentation, questioning, feedback and setting relevant learning tasks. Some of the information may be new to some (perhaps early career) teachers, however, some may find it as stating the obvious, such as ‘The assignments set, whether for purposes of extension, enrichment, practice or consolidation, should be interesting’ (his italics, p. 49). His guidance on adapting student centred approaches is less than one page and is underscored by his comments that students with special needs do better under direct teaching approaches (p. 50).

Chapter six addresses how teachers may adapt teaching resources. Westwood discusses how using multiple representations can be an effective approach when using textbooks, worksheets or study notes. He suggests simply using an enlarged photocopied page of the textbook, with key terms and phrases highlighted may be beneficial to some students. The rest of the chapter explores e-learning and assistive technology, as powerful tools that can provide ‘private’ and individualised feedback. Here Westwood points out the vast and rapidly changing nature of this area and he refers the reader on to relevant, specific and more detailed resources.

Chapter seven, Assessment of Learning highlights that teachers must also adapt their assessment in order to complete the teaching and learning cycle, evaluating the success of the student’s learning and of their own teaching. Westwood describes multiple means of utilising formative assessment such as modifying learning tasks and student outputs and modifying assessment materials and procedures. He outlines possible strategies for students with specific needs such as those with vision impairments, hearing impairments, physical disabilities or intellectual disability. Finally he highlights methods for adapting feedback for students such as using a rubric.

The text is extremely short at 87 pages, before references, giving at best, only an overview to those interested in inclusive teaching. Perhaps the text is best suited to undergraduate students or those wanting an update on current thinking in this area. Furthermore, as Westwood’s explanations of strategies also include a critique of those strategies, some readers may finish the text feeling confused or unsure about what may work in the classroom. A more experienced teacher may see the relevance of providing the ‘pros and cons’ approach to many of the approaches, but may find the lack of depth unsatisfying, needing to use the further references supplied at the end of each chapter to answer their
questions. Westwood asserts that the key to successful inclusive and adaptive teaching is a whole school approach that enables the teacher in the inclusive classroom to draw on ‘the many sources of administrative, professional and emotional support that are available within the school and community’ (p. 87). Therefore a principal interested in moving a school along the inclusive continuum may find the text a valuable resource.