

## INTEGRATION: SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR TEACHERS

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Australian Association for Research in Education 1995 Conference

'Directions: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow'

26-30 November 1995

Wrest Point Convention Centre

Hobart, Tasmania

Social justice based on access, performance and outcomes has been high on the educational agenda in recent years and, for children who had

previously been excluded from full participation in education because of disability, the strategy for providing justice for this group has been integration (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993). Ideally, this inclusive process would focus on the "diverse and dynamic nature of individuals" (Hayes & Elkins, 1993, p. 19) and, within educational systems, would be fully supported both financially and professionally (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993).

But unresolved problems with inclusive education as it is currently being practised cause the reality to fall far short of the ideal (Wiltshire, 1994). The adequate financial and professional support is not forthcoming (Elkins, 1991), and schools and teachers have been left

to struggle on, trying to implement the policies demanded by systems, governments and the community at large. The results have been extremely stressful for many teachers whose self-esteem has been undermined by the inability to cope with situations for which they are largely unprepared and unassisted (Esteve, 1989; Bernard, 1990). This is not genuine social justice (Rizvi & Lingard, 1993).

In reviewing current literature dealing with the needs of teachers as they attempt the integration of exceptional children into regular classrooms, there seems to be no argument with the view that integration makes the classroom teacher's task more difficult and complex. There are many needs to be addressed if the integration is to be successful.

Firstly, there is a need for teachers to develop positive attitudes to integration (Centre and Ward, 1987; Patching 1988). The development of these attitudes may be assisted by the acquisition of expertise through research, experience and reflective practice in the areas of teaching, learning and curriculum development (Ashman and Conway, 1988; Hayes and Gunn, 1988). In addition, research shows that positivity in practitioners depends upon the construction of effective support networks of personal and professional relationships among students, parents, teachers and professionals from other fields and the provision of effective resources to aid the project (McDonnell, 1987; Gow, Ward, Balla & Snow, 1988; Westwood, 1993).

The struggle to come to terms with one's attitude to integration impinges mightily upon the consciousness of the classroom teacher. Ultimately, the teacher is the linchpin upon whom the structure of successful integration relies. To some, this may be an exciting challenge - the stress of which may be life-sustaining, enjoyable and beneficial (Selye, 1975; Bernard, 1990). To others, the outside stress

from community, system, administration and classroom combined with the internal stress of the teacher's attitudes, coping skills and lifestyle take their toll. They may produce physiological, psychological and behavioural reactions which often lead to breakdown in physical and mental health (Otto, 1986; Kyriacou, 1989; Thornton, 1994).

Figures released by the Queensland Government reveal that the number of teachers "invalidated out" (Southorn, 1994, p.1) of the state school system because of stress-related problems has increased significantly over recent years. Payouts of \$5 million were made in the 1993/1994 financial year to teachers suffering symptoms of mental and physical illness due to causes ranging from exhaustion through to chronic stress brought on by "worry and hard work" (Southorn, 1994, p.1). Continued integration of exceptional children into regular classrooms is a factor in the "increasing workloads" cited by Southorn (Ibid.) and must carry some of the blame for the current wastage of teachers throughout all educational systems (Curtis, 1994).

In the light of these findings, it is desirable that continuing research into the needs of teachers of exceptional children be carried out in order to provide authentic and current information to those who have the power to facilitate change in situations where injustice prevails. For this reason, it was decided that a case study of the integration of one particular exceptional child, carried out by those actively involved in the situation, would provide valuable data, the dissemination of which could assist integration both locally and in the wider community.

## THE STUDY

The study focussed on Martin, a child with Down Syndrome, as he entered Year 1 at a Catholic systemic primary school in the Brisbane Archdiocese. The school had an enrolment of 154 students, a full-time teaching staff of six and a part-time staff of six comprising two teachers, a teacher-librarian, a special needs support teacher and two teacher-aides. The Catholic Education Centre employed the services of Special Education support personnel upon whom the school might call. In addition, it was possible for the school to apply for funding for the employment of a special needs teacher-aide to assist the integration. The staff had participated in a discernment process before the enrolment was accepted and agreement was made by the whole school community to strive to make this a positive experience for all in terms of education and justice. It was acknowledged that the task would not be easy and that adjustments may have to be made in teaching, curriculum provision and supervision in order to meet the child's needs.

The purpose of the study was to discover the needs of a classroom teacher in implementing the integration. Specifically, the researcher attempted to discover what was needed in the areas of teacher development and support throughout the integration process by addressing three principal questions:-

1. Does the integration of an exceptional child place additional demands on the classroom teacher?
2. What are the needs of the classroom teacher in an integration situation?
3. How can the needs of the teacher be met so as to promote justice in the workplace?

In seeking answers to these questions, it was hoped that the knowledge gained might lead to the development of strategies which would ensure that the integration of an exceptional child might be a positive and rewarding experience, both personally and professionally for any classroom teacher.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In a study such as this, because the questions raised were more philosophical than empirical, it was considered that formal testing and monitoring would not achieve the required results. Evaluations in such cases rely heavily on the participation, observation and value judgments of the researcher, so there is a need to supplement traditional survey techniques with observational measures (Wilson, 1979; Hayes and Gunn, 1988; Harker, 1991). In support of this argument, Stainback and Stainback (1984) quote research findings which acknowledge the usefulness of such qualitative research methodology in the investigation of special education and integration, where studies at specific sites may reveal data which could be applied to other contexts.

In the course of this case study, data were collected over a period of eighteen months by means of participant observation, teachers' journals, interviews with stakeholders, profiles, case review and documentary analysis in an attempt to discover answers to the three research questions.

## DISCUSSION

### THE DEMANDS PLACED ON THE TEACHER.

Yaffe (1979) and Bernard (1990) found that integration of exceptional children was difficult, frustrating and stressful for teachers, and

often the cause of low morale and loss of job satisfaction. Their research shows that the high degree of stress in the workplace is the result of additional and often unrealistic demands on teachers' professional and personal capacities.

The data reveal that, in this case, the professional and personal demands placed on the classroom teacher by the presence of an exceptional child far outstripped those encountered in the normal course of teaching. These demands may be categorised as:-

- \*The demands of preparation
- \*The mental, physical and emotional demands placed on the teacher by the exceptional child, his peers, parents and other professionals.

In a professional sense, the initial integration was a new experience for the teacher and her colleagues. Thus one of the major goals of staff development for that first year was to gain expertise in the area of integration, for the benefit of the child and the teachers. Consequently, the quest for knowledge associated with integration, the child and his disability began in the year prior to his enrolment. This goal was achieved by visits and continued liaison with the child's parents, pre-school teachers, doctors, occupational therapists and other professionals with expertise in the area of Down Syndrome.

Normally a classroom teacher is not required to do this amount of pre-enrolment preparation. The mental preparation that was demanded of this teacher was exceptional. She took several weeks to make the decision to agree to the principal's request that she teach the Year 1 class. Her reluctance was largely due to the fact that there was to be an exceptional child enrolled. Such an extraordinary situation really forces a teacher to do some deep soul-searching in an effort to come to terms with a personal philosophy of education and to deal with any conflicts which arise between the philosophy and reality. Having made the decision to take responsibility for the Year 1 class, the teacher found that many of her concerns were realised as the school year began. The child was often unco-operative and unable or reluctant to follow the simplest instructions. The teacher soon noticed the burden of having to spend so much time attending to his needs.

The organisation of one-to-one attention put tremendous demands on the teacher's time and energy and caused her considerable concern. She continually felt that she was putting his needs above those of the other children and, in so doing, was being grossly unfair to them. When parent and peer tutors were arranged, the child's response was varied and often unpredictable. He tired very easily and, if efforts were made to keep him on task, he often became angry and quite abusive. Resistance to change in routine, regressions after holidays and absences and the inconsistency in the things he feared or disliked,

were compounded by the limitations in the child's verbal communication. Thus it was often difficult for teachers to monitor what he was learning and to understand what he wanted or how he felt.

Initially, the teacher found it hard to cope with the fact that the

child refused to join in any activities with the others, and it was not until she was able to encourage him to participate that she felt more comfortable. Although it is possible that Martin's inability to communicate effectively with his peers was initially a hindrance in the formation of good relationships within the class, another element of the child's behaviour which did not ease the situation was the intensity of feeling, both positive and negative, for the other class members. Certain children were able to assist him in a peer tutoring role and he would kiss and hug them. If others tried to help, he pushed them away or hit them forcefully. This was a concern for the teacher for two reasons. Firstly, as Martin grew stronger, he may hurt the other children. Secondly, negative messages about this behaviour have the habit of unsettling the parents of the other children in the class - especially those who are on the receiving end of the blows! Although the parents in this case did not express great concern about this matter, quite unknowingly, they placed pressure on the classroom teacher in a variety of ways.

The fact that tutors, resource people and consultants visited the room frequently became burdensome for the teacher. The child seemed to enjoy the attention that was given to him, but when the attention was withdrawn and he returned to class activities, he became demanding and disruptive. It was hard for the teacher to deal with the fact that the people who caused the disruption often left her to deal with the consequences. It was especially disconcerting when supporting consultants gave conflicting advice or espoused goals for Martin which were impossible to implement in the classroom setting. These findings coincide with those of Norwich (1990) who agrees that the input of too many professionals can hinder rather than help the situation.

Westwood (1993) asserts that a teacher has a very difficult task in managing professional, parent and peer groups in an effort to develop a positive and accepting atmosphere where optimum learning can occur. This was certainly borne out in this case. In considering all the professional and personal demands that the integration of this child placed on the teachers, one would have to agree with Devlin (1993) and Wiltshire (1994) that inclusive education, as it is presently being practised, is placing considerable strain on teachers and is neither equitable nor socially just.

## THE NEEDS OF THE TEACHER.

In view of the demonstrated exacting demands on the classroom teacher of an exceptional child, the data were examined in an effort to discover the needs of a teacher in this situation. The findings can be described within two broad categories. The first encompassed teacher needs in the development of positive attitudes, expertise and knowledge about the child's disability, teaching, learning and the provision of curriculum. The second category of teacher need was in the area of support and the provision of adequate resources.

## TEACHER ATTITUDES TO INTEGRATION

Although the teachers within the study were confident and capable in regular classrooms, the feelings and concerns that they expressed reflected their inexperience in teaching in integrated situations. This placed them squarely in the role of novices with a need to gain expertise through the experience that comes with actually engaging in a situation.

There was a need to accept the challenge to overcome the concerns and the inexperience and strive to make the integration work. The fact that these teachers took up the challenge reflected positive attitudes and a commitment to the concept of integration and its practical application.

The data show that there was a real struggle to hold on to the philosophy when faced with the demands of the reality. The feelings of concern and frustration and the often overwhelming calls on their patience, tolerance and energy were enough to make teachers have doubts about whether the philosophy could be borne out in practice.

What is needed when working with a child who has a disability is a great strength of character to be able to rise to the challenge that exists in acknowledging that there will always be a vast gulf between the ideal and the reality. In addition, the setting of realistic goals for teacher and child is vital so that successes and failures may be seen for what they are and the teacher's self-esteem remains intact, thus keeping attitudes positive. This supports the work of Gow et al. (1988) and Norwich (1990) who see the attitudes and confidence of the teacher as vital to the success of the integration. This positive attitude is enhanced by the empowerment of teachers to choose whether or not they will be involved in integration.

## CHOICE FOR TEACHERS

Gow et al. (1988) and Hayes and Gunn (1988) found that goodwill of teachers was severely reduced when exceptional children were integrated into their classrooms without consultation or regard to choice. In this situation, the whole staff participated in making the decision to enrol the child. A great deal of discussion was entered into and much information sought so that this decision might be made with a clear view of what might be expected. All staff needed to be committed for, in a small school, the child would be taught by most of the staff as he moved through the year levels.

Sadly, the Commonwealth Government Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Queensland Department of Education Policy on Inclusive Education (1993), in enshrining the right of parents to choose where their exceptional children will be educated, combine to rob schools and teachers of choice. This being the case, teachers of the future need to be aware of the implications of integration and be prepared to meet the situation as part and parcel of the normal teaching task and be ready and willing to develop the expertise to deal with the situation as it is enacted in their own classrooms.

## REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE FOR TEACHERS OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Within the context of this study, all the participants acknowledged that they were novices. They had gathered information about the child and his disability before his enrolment, but it was only when the school year began that the teachers' real learning took place. For teachers of exceptional children there is a need for flexibility and a willingness to learn as they go - a task which would be risky for

teachers with a highly structured approach to their profession.

During the course of the study, the development of expertise through reflective practice was attempted using the strategies of mentoring, networking and journal writing. The task of mentoring single school situations was taken on by consultants working in geographical regions, each containing approximately twenty schools. With little time to spend at each school, the consultant had limited opportunity to advise and assist with curriculum planning and the provision and suitability of resources. This work was done mainly with the school-based special needs support teacher who in turn was available on a limited basis to act as mentor for the classroom teacher. Little (1987) and McDonald (1989) found that many experienced teachers were not comfortable in

being closely observed by a mentor and, in this case, the teachers had similar feelings. Not only was there a tension with yet another visitor to the room, but there was also a perception that the mentor, being an intermittent observer, did not really understand what it was like to cope daily with the situation. While this exercise can be valuable in providing support and reassurance for the classroom teacher, the limitations on availability does not enhance reflective practice in the same way as networking.

Prior to enrolment, the school-based planning team began forming a network of professionals who were willing to assist the integration. The child's paediatrician and occupational therapist offered advice and on-going assistance and a speech consultant from the Catholic Education system agreed to add support. The team also visited Martin's pre-school and his Special Development Unit where the teachers were extremely helpful and offered suggestions to make the period of change easier.

The initial contacts with the child's mother provided valuable information about his behaviours and abilities. In fact, Martin's parents have probably been the most valuable members of the network. Another valuable strategy was the teacher's attendance at workshops for teachers of exceptional children in integrated classrooms. Not only did she obtain valuable practical strategies to deal with a variety of situations, but the feelings of isolation that she had been experiencing diminished considerably as she listened to what other teachers had to say. This outcome was enhanced considerably by the informal conversations which occurred and the links that were forged by actually knowing names of teacher contacts in neighbouring schools who were in similar situations and who were willing to share insights and strategies for coping.

Within the school context, the special needs support teacher met regularly with the class teacher to review the child's individual educational program (IEP) and plan for the future. This was accomplished in the light of advice given by the consultants and the store of experience they were both accumulating through their day-to-day interactions with the child.

The appointment of a special needs teach-aide was to provide a very strong link in the network. The teacher acknowledged the support which the aide was able to give and said how good it felt to be able to talk daily to someone who knew the classroom situation as intimately as she

did. In this relatively small school, there was a sense of family

among staff members and all were willing to help in whatever way they could. This involved working together to solve classroom problems, suggesting resources and, in general, watching out for the child when he was outside the classroom.

The researcher, as principal of the school, gave very close attention to the situation. Of particular concern was the stress level of the classroom teacher, and every opportunity was taken to monitor reactions as informally as possible and to put in place strategies which would ease the situation.

The most formal of the networking strategies were the case review meetings involving all stakeholders. These meetings were held at the end of each semester. They were loosely structured to allow for wide-ranging discussion along with treatment of specific points of interest. The sessions were invaluable in keeping open the lines of communication and providing channels for effective dissemination of information.

The effectiveness of all these networking strategies in assisting reflective practice supports the social reconstructionist theory of Zeichner and Tabachnick (1992) with the commitment to the communal aspect of reflection. The linking of teachers to their colleagues and to other stakeholders in the project enhanced holistic change and growth and the involvement of a range of key personnel did indeed assist the project in many ways.

Although all these networking strategies allow for free and frank discussion, many teachers are unwilling or unable to open up their innermost thoughts to the examination of others. For these people, journal writing is an option for assisting reflection.

During the first year of integration, it was agreed that the classroom teacher, the special needs support teacher and the principal would keep journals to document significant happenings, feelings, knowledge gained and reflections on the integration in general. An unintended, yet valuable, source of written reflection began to accrue as the teacher-aide wrote comments in the evaluation section of the written curriculum plans for the child. The researcher, as principal of the school, was vitally interested in the written reflections of the classroom teacher. Analysis of the document supplemented insights gained through other, less formal strategies. Although there were opportunities for discussion on a day to day basis, it was only when the year-long reflections were viewed as a whole that the dominant patterns emerged. Although the participants found the journal-writing

time-consuming and difficult to sustain, this form of writing does stimulate increased awareness of personal attitudes and values and helps to crystallise ideas about teaching and learning.

## THE LEARNING PROCESSES OF CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Berry (1989) and Stratford (1989) express firm optimism regarding the educability of children with Down Syndrome. This optimism was shared by the teachers who worked with Martin. Although he had a depressed

level of comprehension and his expressive language was limited, academic and social progress was marked and often surprising. However, what his teachers needed to come to terms with was the fact that progress was extremely slow when compared with that of peers. Not only do teachers need understanding and great patience with the slow pace and the constant regressions typical of exceptional learners, but they must also come to terms with the fact that this is not a reflection on their abilities as teachers. On the other hand, teachers need to keep expectations positive. Martin's teachers were conscious of this fact and had to actively discourage other children from "babying" him into the learned helplessness described by Westwood (1993).

Behaviour modification was largely achieved by positive reinforcement by means of praise and small rewards. Intrinsic motivation or the social motivation to be like other children and do what they do did not seem to figure largely in Martin's consciousness. He could not work independently at a task for long and the only real learning seemed to take place when he was in a one-to-one situation with an adult. He did not relate well to other children in groups, so co-operative learning strategies were not effective for Martin in his first year of school. After a slow start, Martin reached an unexpected level of proficiency in the use of the computer. Although he needed to be continually assisted by an adult, he managed to stay on task much longer when working with the computer than in any other classroom activity. This led the researcher to concur with Deiner (1993) and Rowe (1993) that the use of computers has great potential to assist this child's learning and to give him a certain amount of power over his environment.

## CURRICULUM PROVISION

Martin's teachers favoured the view of Norwich (1993) who argued that true inclusion and equity demanded a common curriculum for all with specialised additional goals for those children with special needs. With this in mind, Martin was encouraged to participate at his own level in all activities with his peers. In areas where the learning

lacked proficiency, special attention was given by the special needs support teacher and followed up daily by the teacher-aide and parent tutors. The individualised education program was implemented within the classroom and sometimes in a withdrawal situation. Although Martin obviously preferred to remain in his own classroom, one-to-one teaching in a withdrawal situation allowed for a greater degree of intensity of instruction with minimal distraction from classroom noise.

The planning and implementation of Martin's education program were made possible by the assistance of support personnel in the form of resource teachers, consultants, special needs teacher-aides and parent tutors. Westwood (1993) considers that the classroom teacher has a very difficult role in managing the attitudes and inputs of parents and peers in the facilitation of integration. From this research, it is evident that the teacher needs to be a born diplomat.

#### THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS AND PEERS

Throughout the length of the study, no adverse comment about the enrolment of an exceptional child was made to members of staff by parents in the school community or, more particularly, by those who had children in Martin's class. They seemed accepting of his presence and encouraged their children to treat him as one of their friends.

However, it was reported to the researcher that some parents, talking together informally, expressed concern that their children were not receiving the attention they were entitled to because of Martin's demands on the teacher's time as she coped with his disruptive behaviour. Knowledge that parents have these feelings is stressful for the classroom teacher, especially when the attitudes of the parents are transmitted, knowingly or unknowingly to their children.

Initially, the classroom teacher found that Martin's age peers were very hard on him. They laughed at him, talked about him and were generally irritated by the grinding of his teeth and his constant wanderings. Gradually they learned to ignore the annoying habits and in accepting him, began to enjoy his company. As his classmates progressed they were able to take on a peer tutoring role which allowed the teacher more time to attend to the needs of others.

On the whole, teachers need to be able to balance the positive and negative experiences of daily classroom life. Martin was indeed a lovable and loving child who made remarkable progress socially and academically during the course of the study. However, it was difficult for his teachers to recognise and celebrate his progress when the negative aspects of his integration were mentally and physically

exhausting.

## CONCLUSION

In the analysis of the data gathered during the eighteen months of the case study, definite patterns emerged which helped to answer the research questions. Firstly, it was revealed that where integration of a child with special needs exists, there were certainly more demands placed on the teachers over and above those placed on teachers in regular educational settings without special needs children. The demands related to planning, consultation and preparation both prior to enrolment and throughout the year. Moreover, during the implementation of the integration, mental, physical and emotional demands were placed on the teachers by the exceptional child and to a lesser extent, by the child's peers and their parents.

In exploring the needs of teachers in integrated settings, the data revealed that their personal requirements encompassed issues of attitude, philosophy, awareness, commitment and the ability to choose. In a professional sense, there was a need for teachers to develop expertise through reflective practice, to gain knowledge of the child, the disability and to explore the implications for teaching and learning. Moreover, the provision of effective curricula and the co-ordination and employment of suitable human and material resources were essential.

Since integration is becoming a fact of life rather than an option, the finding of effective ways to support teachers of exceptional children is essential if there is to be justice in the workplace for these professionals. The data reveal that professional support in the form of pre-service and in-service training and professional networking is desirable. Financial assistance to provide teacher-aide time, smaller class numbers, better teaching resources and release time for networking with colleagues would certainly make the task easier. Finally teachers must have the moral support of the principal, colleagues, parents and students of the school community if they are to

feel that they are not alone and their efforts are valued.

The teachers involved in this study acknowledge that they have made tremendous professional gains during their time spent in an integrated classroom. The lived experience has increased their understanding of the education of children with Down Syndrome and has given them the confidence to work with exceptional children in the future. In particular, the experience has given the teachers a great respect for

the often unrecognised devotion and untiring efforts of the child's parents.

The stakeholders in this case still acknowledge the justice of allowing parents to choose the type of education they desire for their exceptional children. However, since these children place tremendous demands of their teachers, it is only with the adequate professional and financial support described by Rizvi and Lingard (1993) and the moral support of the entire school community, that justice for teachers of exceptional children in integrated classrooms is both done and seen to be done.

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