

Editorial

In introducing the second issue for 2003, I am pleased to report that AJSE has now been added to the DEST Register of Refereed Journals. This will make it easier for contributors who work in Universities and who need to document their academic publications to gain recognition for papers published in AJSE.

A recent issue of *The Journal of Special Education* (Vol 37, No 3) contained a number of papers reflecting on the question "What is special about special education?" contributed by a range of people with expertise in specific areas of special education. There was a general consensus among the contributors that special education does have a range of educational strategies that have been shown to work including systematic, direct and explicit instruction, mnemonic instruction, strategy instruction, curriculum based measurement, data-based decision making and other teaching and assessment strategies drawn from applied behaviour analysis, such as functional assessment of problem behaviour. As Zigmond (2003) commented "The bedrock of special education is instruction based on *individual* needs," there is no one strategy that will meet the needs of all students in all contexts.

What is of concern however, is that even though this knowledge base is available, the contributors also believed that implementation of effective practices appears to be lacking, and that where effective practices are implemented, the implementation may leave something to be desired. Teachers need clear guidelines and information about which practices are demonstrated to be effective, and which practices are not yet clearly supported, or indeed have been shown to be ineffective. It is clear that more work is required on the best ways of introducing effective practices and supporting teachers who are beginning to use them.

The US has strengthened its commitment to the support of research based educational strategies. The No Child Left Behind Act contains provision for rigorous and systematic research

as part of educational reform and requires recipients of federal grants to spend the money on the implementation of evidence-based strategies. These current moves to evidence-based practice may increase the motivation and resources available for implementation in school systems and sectors, but those who deliver initial teacher education and professional development to practicing teachers need to take some responsibility for disseminating and supporting effective practice. Research shows that most teachers do not begin implementing good practices simply because they know about them. They need coaching and feedback based on actual classroom observations, ongoing support from experts, mentors and colleagues working on the same strategies and of course, appropriate resources including time.

This issue of AJSE contributes to the information base available to teachers. Julie King and Richard Taffe describe the application of peer tutoring (a strategy with research support) to literacy education with deaf students using sign language. The other paper from Greg Robinson and Paul Whiting explores the relationship between learning difficulties and ability to recognise facial expression. This paper addresses the nature of individual differences in students with special education needs, and although the concept of Irlen Syndrome remains controversial, as the authors note, the link between learning difficulties and problems with recognising and interpreting the emotions of others is well established.

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References

Zigmond, N. (2003). Where should students with disabilities receive special education services. *The Journal of Special Education*, 37, 193-199.

Articles from *The Journal of Special Education* may be accessed online through <http://www.findarticles.com>.