

Editorial

This Editorial is the last I will write before I hand over to the new editor of AJSE, Dr Jennifer Stephenson. Over the past few years as I have worked through the tasks of Editor, I have been increasingly perplexed by the nature of special education, and where it stands today. As more students with special education needs receive some or their entire program in a neighbourhood school, debates continue about how we can best achieve quality programs for these students. For example, the recent Senate Report on the Education of Students with Disabilities recommends that teachers need to be better trained in how to cater for these students. Senate hearings heard how there is need for quality supports for those working for students with special education needs.

Despite this cry, it would appear that the profession of special education is faltering, or in the words of Jim Kaufman, we are 'lost in space'. Universities, for example, have made cuts to programs in a number of programs in Australia. In some cases Departments have been abolished, while there has been a general cut in staffing across Faculties with few exceptions.

Education systems and sectors are under continual pressure to provide support for students with special education needs. This pressure in some cases is being met through additional funding and resources, and valiant attempts to provide quality programs. The outcome of this is that students with special education needs are being placed in neighbourhood schools where teachers with little support and/or training are required to provide an appropriate program. The only person losing from this situation is the student – in the long term, it will be society.

Special education, as a field of education, has much to offer to all aspects of education. It would appear, however, that many people in general education circles are not aware of what special education has to offer. It is important, therefore, that special educators agree on what

is meant by special education. In attending meetings with a range of people (politicians university administrators, education administrators, principals, parents, teachers) it is apparent there is not a common agreement. For example, in response to ASSE's submission to the Senate hearing into the education of students with disabilities, Lyn Alison wondered if AASE's position on quality programs was 'a radical departure from the status quo or whether it was a academic exercise in the self-evident.'

Given that the submission by AASE was based on research evidence from around the world, it could be argued that AASE's position was neither the status quo or the self-evident. If it was self-evident why is it so difficult to have accepted effective education practices that are individualised, intensive and goal directed. If it was the status quo, why the need for the enquiry in the first place.

Special education has an important place in the educational arena. As we move forward, special education should be firmly grounded in effective teaching and learning research and practices. Hence, special education programs should be individualised, intensive, goal-direct, and continually monitored for their effectiveness. Anything short of this is ignoring the large corpus of research material that supports quality education programs for students with special education needs.

As outgoing Editor, I believe AJSE has an important part to play, and in doing so support those who work with students with special education needs. In achieving this goal, however, we need to be proud that we have valid and reliable instructional practices to offer to all students, be aware of what we have learned from the past about effective instructional practices, and believe without doubt that all students have the right to an effective education.

David Evans PhD
Editor