



# Putting Research into Practice: producing inclusive teaching professionals

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# Understanding contemporary educational contexts

- **World is rich with information and opportunity**
  - inequitable in terms of access and participation
- **Disadvantage is spatialised**
  - by geography and socioeconomic status
- **Schools in vulnerable communities**
  - more dependent on government policy and funding
  - certain policies exacerbate marginalisation and division through competition and parent “choice”
- **Debates about education**
  - commentators mistake politics for policy
  - rhetoric of ‘declining standards’ not supported by research evidence



- **Structure of the academic curriculum**
  - rewards privilege and compounds disadvantage (Teese, 2000; Graham, 2007)
  - crowded curriculum increases pace of delivery, reducing opportunities for teachers to backtrack and consolidate student learning
  - particular groups of children have difficulty accessing the curriculum
  - disengagement and behaviour problems set in leading to early leaving
  
- **Finland consistently performs well in the OECD rankings... Why?**
  - Concentrates on raising the performance of the lowest achievers (Luke, Graham, Sanderson, Voncina & Weir, 2006)
  - 35% of students in early primary years receive learning support (15% in later years)
  - international comparative research shows neoliberal market policy weakens the social fabric leaving education to do its work relatively uninsulated (Luke et. al, 2006)
  - empirical evidence from UK shows marketisation, parent choice, under-funding and economic rationalism lead to dire consequences for children with learning difficulties, disabilities and challenging behaviour (see Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Ball, 2003; Armstrong, 2005).



## Teaching excellence *makes a difference...*

- **50% of the variance in student performance is student-based**
  - influenced by ability, motivation, parental involvement and so on
  
- **30% comes down to teacher knowledge, actions and values**
  - excellence in teaching can build bridges and narrow achievement gaps
  - see Hattie, J. (2003) “Teachers make a difference: what is the research evidence?”
  
- **Teacher excellence depends on excellent teacher education**
  - teacher education or teacher training?
  - what is the difference?
  - what are modern universities doing and why?



## Recent developments in teacher education

- **Increase in student diversity and disadvantage**
  - global flow and migration of non-English speakers
  - inclusion of students with disabilities
  
- **Increase in standards required**
  - decreased labour market for low-skilled workers
  - senior school retention rates have increased
  - 35% completed Yr 12 in early 1980s, increased to above 80% post-recession
  - now fallen to approx 75% (resources boom luring kids to trade sector)
  
- **Accountability regimes and standardised testing**
  - measure school and teacher performance through student academic achievement
  - some students (and therefore schools) are always likely to do better at this game



## Training teachers to manage ADHD and associated problems... What *are* some of the problems?

- **1. The contemporary educational context and inconvenient kids...**
  - class sizes, crowded curriculums, litigious societies, drive towards higher standards coupled with decreasing resources and devolution of public responsibility
  - research in the UK has shown that teacher perceptions of students behaviour as “disorderly” increases with class size (Glass & Weagar, 2000)
  - the same survey study found that the majority of teachers surveyed did not believe ADHD to be of biological origin but approximately 70% of those teachers still supported the use of stimulant medication...
  
- **2. Labels mystify... teachers don't realise they *can* make a difference**
  - labels deliver preconceptions influencing what we think children can do (Graham, 2006 in *Schools & Diversity*)



## Training teachers to manage ADHD: associated problems?

- **3. Labels evoke a self-fulfilling prophecy**
  - an ADHD label can discourage schools and teachers from looking at what else might be going on, leading to assumptions that the problem is “within-child” (Dudley-Marling, 2004) and not related to pedagogy, curriculum or effectiveness of learning support structures
- **4. Teachers can be reluctant to accept these kids into their class**
  - research into teacher attitudes show teachers are most willing to include students with mild intellectual disability and least willing to include students with behaviour disorder (Fields, 2006)
  - growth in segregated and excluded populations in NSW public schools, particularly acute for ED and BD categories (Graham, forthcoming)
- **5. Labels homogenise and discourage innovative practice**
  - discourages differentiated instruction and a reliance on “what works” manuals



## Responding to the challenges: putting research into practice

- **Criticisms of pre-service teacher education**
  - too much theory, not enough focus on “practical know-how”
- **Problems with special education modules**
  - do not go deep enough, knowledge is shallow
  - classroom teachers feel ill-equipped to teach to diversity
  - may lead to teachers to believe the responsibility for difficult to teach these kids lies with the STLA, AVT (behaviour) or teachers aide (special)
- **Tension between general and special knowledges**
  - an inclusive education environment demands the democratisation of “special” knowledges: there is no such thing as a ‘general’ or mainstream anymore
  - however, to achieve this classroom teachers must be well-equipped and supported in both their pre-service and professional learning programs



## What do these different aspects of the “problem” tell us?

*Highly educated, intellectually curious, creative and innovative teacher professionals are of fundamental importance...*

*Adequately supported, they can make all the difference for children who experience difficulty in school and with learning*



## Specific strategies or engaging pedagogies?

*In today's educational context, key practitioner attributes are flexibility, creativity, persistence and positive attitudes towards difference*

Strategies for children who end up with a diagnosis of ADHD can be beneficial for all children

*Engaging pedagogies, stimulating curricula and inclusive school cultures positively influence student engagement, attitudes and behaviour*

Universities do not “train” teachers in their pre-service education programs

*Modern universities seek to produce inclusive teaching professionals who can draw on a rich pedagogical repertoire capable of responding to the breadth and depth of student needs now present in the local school*



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