



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 & Wagar, 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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