Inclusive education in Australia: rhetoric, reality and the road ahead

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Inclusive education in Australia: rhetoric, reality and the road ahead

JOANNA ANDERSON and CHRISTOPHER BOYLE

Inclusive education (IE) is a term that has been part of the educational discourse in Australia for almost two decades. While there is no overarching definition under which IE operates in that country, it is accepted that the meaning behind the term has shifted from being exclusively about students with a disability to now encompassing the delivery of a high-quality education to all students. The public education system is carrying the burden of an increasingly diverse student population (Gonski *et al*., 2011), and as such, each of the eight educational jurisdictions responsible for the schools within their borders have developed policies and increased funding levels in the name of IE (Graham, in press). Despite this, there are currently no standards or guidelines provided at the state or federal level to measure the success (or not) of IE practices within Australian educational sectors. This article aims to do just that, by providing a 'report card' on IE in Australia. An extensive review of the current literature and related educational policies and reports was conducted, and Loreman's (2014) three guides for measuring IE – student participation, student achievement and post-school options – were adopted to evaluate the performance of Australia's public education system. The findings indicate that, despite operating under the same national legislative acts, the eight educational jurisdictions in Australia are managing and enacting IE in different ways, leading to inconsistent levels of access and educational outcomes for students. Rates

of segregation and exclusion (through both the provision of education in 'alternative' settings and disciplinary action) are on the increase, with disproportionate representation of students from minority groups. This has been exacerbated by the inception of a national testing regime, which some have argued is in breach of the Disability Discrimination Act as it excludes participation by particular groups of students. On the flip side, for the first time Australia has a consistent curriculum that has provided a set of outcomes for all students, and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the areas of literacy and numeracy is on the decrease, albeit a slow decrease. However, there is still a long way to go, and this paper discusses the need for a national approach to IE to enable the continued development of effective schooling for all students across Australia.

Key words: inclusive education, Australia, exclusion, Australian education, education reform.

Introduction

In 1990, the World Conference on Education for All challenged the prevailing educational paradigm that saw many children globally being excluded from accessing an appropriate education. Their message was that flexible, tailor-made programming and pedagogy would allow all students to successfully access education, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, socio-economic standing or ability (UNESCO, 1990). Four years later the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) carried this concept further, promoting the idea that all students should receive an education in regular classrooms within their local schools. Since then, the past two decades has seen the emergence of a global movement championing the cause of inclusive education (IE). This was, and continues to be, a response to the understanding and acceptance that educational systems were, and still are, excluding students on the presumption of difference – a practice that has been shown to be highly consequential for student access and engagement in mean-ingful education (Waitoller and Artiles, 2013).

IE is a philosophy that is grounded in social justice (Dixon and Verenikina, 2007). It works to reduce educational inequalities and exclusions, to embrace all students in successful learning. Research over the years has shown that engagement in learning is a predictor of success in life, with organisations such as the OECD (2010) and the World Bank (Hoff and Pandey, 2004) promoting this idea. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) concur, arguing that 'reducing (*educational*) inequality leads to a very much better society' (p. 197). IE has the potential to break cycles of disadvantage (Snow and Powell, 2012), as well as to increase people's skills, leading to increased innovation and productivity and subsequently to long-term economic viability (OECD, 2010).

The benefit to schools is also significant. IE assists children and teachers alike to increase their tolerance, understanding and value of difference (Boyle *et al*., 2011), perpetuating the continued development and improvement of the IE school culture. Within this environment, teachers are encouraged and challenged to use a variety of pedagogies and strategies to cater for the different learning needs, and this can have a positive impact on all students (Boyle *et al*., 2011; Loreman *et al*., 2011). Additionally, a study undertaken by Allan (2009) identified students advocating for IE, as they saw 'themselves as needing exposure to the diversity they are expected to live with as adults' (p. 246).

The majority of research has found in favour of IE over exclusion for individual students, both in terms of academic and social outcomes (Loreman *et al*., 2011). Nevertheless, very few systems or schools are enacting IE successfully, despite many countries' adoption of the philosophy many decades ago (Allan, 2011). Today, schools throughout the western world are confronted with the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population while facing increasing levels of accountability and standardisation (Blackmore, 2009). In Australia, the challenges presented to educators are no different. In a society with an increasingly diverse population, and high levels of accountability and standardisation within its schools, the espoused philosophy of IE for the schooling of all students is at risk of disappearing.

The Australian story

IE was adopted early on in Australia for the provision of education to students with a disability (Forlin and Bamford, 2005). In response, the Australian Government

released the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Commonwealth Government, 2006), an explicit interpretation of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Commonwealth Government, 1992) for education systems. The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* was published in 2008 (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs). This document outlined two goals for education: Goal 1 – Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; Goal 2 – All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens (p. 6). The discourse used in this document was important: no reference was made to disability; rather the identified goals were aimed at all school students. From this time, IE in Australia became about the successful education of all students (Berlach and Chambers, 2011).

IE has different meanings in different nations (Waitoller and Artiles, 2013). The term itself has yet to be conclusively defined (Graham and Slee, 2008), so it is not surprising that in Australia, there is no one overarching definition to guide the IE agenda. An extensive review of the literature by Anderson *et al.* (2014) found three consistent components of IE: all students, regardless of circumstance, must be successfully *participating*, *achieving* and being *valued* within the regular classroom in their local school. Slee (2011) contends that to understand IE, exclusion and exclusionary practices need to also be identified and understood. The focus on these two aspects – inclusive as well as exclusive practices – when attempting to define IE is supported by Forlin *et al.* (2013); however, they do so with caution:

> 'Attempts to define inclusive education by what it is, however, are problematic because such definitions can be impacted by shifts in educational practice, context, culture, and circumstance that can quickly render these features irrelevant and outdated' (p. 8).

To understand Australia's current position with regard to IE, it is important to look at the construct as a whole. It needs to be considered not only in terms of outcomes for the learner or the culture of the school, but also within the broader contexts in which it operates (Anderson *et al.*, 2014). The Australian education system is a complex one (Dinham, 2008). It comprises three different sectors – public, independent and Catholic – with responsibility for funding being shared between the Commonwealth and state/territory governments. The amount of funding received by the independent, and to some extent the Catholic, sectors is a contentious issue. The Commonwealth government argues the current system

provides parental choice – but only those who have the financial capacity to pay for access are afforded this 'choice'. Interestingly, the OECD (2012) agrees, indicating that 'providing full parental choice can result in segregating students by ability [and] socio-economic background and generate greater inequalities across education systems' (p. 92). This is reflected in the population of Australian schools. The public sector carries a 'heavy burden' (Kenway, 2013, p. 287), with responsibility for educating a disproportionately high number of students from low socio-economic circumstances, students with diagnosed disabilities, students from remote areas and Indigenous students (Gonski *et al.*, 2011). Needless to say, students who attend schools within the public sector experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers in the other two sectors (Gonski *et al.*, 2011). In 2011, a review of the funding system for Australian schools was published. It proposed a model of funding that would utilise and distribute resources in more equitable manner, as 'all Australian students should be allowed to achieve their very best regardless of their background or circumstances' (Gonski *et al.*, 2011, p. 29). Unfortunately, since a change of Commonwealth government in 2012, the recommendations in this report are yet to be acted upon. Perhaps somewhat pessimistically, Kenway (2013) sees this as a reflection of the broader view towards education in Australia, where inequity is a 'long standing, seemingly intractable issue' (p. 286). In response to this, the focus of this article will be on IE within the public school sector.

Inclusive education in the Australian context

Australian schools are facing the challenge of working within a context where there are increasing numbers of 'disadvantaged students who are tuning out and switching off in alarming numbers' (Smyth, 2013, p. 119). For many reasons, students come to school with a diverse range of experiences and learning needs (Dinham, 2008). A longitudinal study of Australian children found that an estimated 12.3% of students in Australian schools have additional educational needs (Dempsey and Davies, 2013). It is the education of these students, along with those from minority groups who may be considered 'at risk', that is the focus of IE.

In Australia, while there are laws guiding compulsory attendance at school between the ages of 6 and 16, there is no legislated 'right' to an education. Unsurprisingly, there is no legislation that mandates the provision of IE (Carroll,

2002) or that stipulates a 'right' for students to receive their education within a regular classroom (Dickson, 2008). Nonetheless, education must be delivered in accordance with the following legislative acts:

- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Despite the lack of any explicit laws supporting the right to an inclusive education, it could be argued that Australia has the necessary legislation and policies in place to ensure it is an 'inclusive society having inclusive systems and schools' (Pearce, 2009, p. 101). However, these legislative acts appear to have had little impact on the provision of IE, particularly with regard to the education of students with a disability (Dempsey *et al*., 2002). Many are still denied access to an inclusive form of education (Cologon, 2013). There is much evidence to suggest that good policy does not guarantee good practice, and there is a definite policy/practice divide in Australia (Dixon and Verenikina, 2007). It could be argued that this is due in part to the responsibility for the provision of education being held by each of the eight individual educational jurisdictions. While each has some form of policy on IE practices, there are notable differences between them (Forlin, 2001).

A state-by-state approach

Berlach and Chambers (2011) compared the policies and related documents provided by each state or territory to support the development and implementation of inclusive practices within schools. They used five areas to make the comparisons: *definition of inclusivity*, *breadth of application*, *consideration of diversity*, *implementation guidelines* and *strategy and evaluation guidelines*. Each educational jurisdiction met the first four criteria; however, only the Northern Territory and Tasmania described *strategy and evaluation guidelines*, albeit in an implicit manner. It is important to note that these policies and documents are not static in nature, and a stark example of this is evident in the state of Queensland: a change in government in 2012 saw changes made to the IE agenda in that state, with the explicit nature of the agenda replaced by a less detailed and direct set of guidelines (Department of Education, Training and Employment, 2012).

While there are consistencies in the type of information provided by the various states and territories, the material contained varies greatly (Forlin, 2001). This is not surprising, as each jurisdiction is responsible for interpreting Commonwealth legislation to develop its own set of guiding policies and documentation for IE. As a result, IE is not implemented in a homogenous manner by the various states or territories across Australia (Boyle *et al*., 2011). Evidence of this can be seen in two areas.

The first is the identification of students needing additional support and the subsequent allocation of resources. Each jurisdiction relies on its own system of categorisation to identify need and apportion resources, and each of these is different (Angus *et al*., 2007). The second area is the provision of service offered to students deemed as needing additional support. Each of the eight educational jurisdictions offers either a fully inclusive (full-time placement in a regular classroom setting, with full participation in the curriculum and activities of that classroom) or completely segregated (the student is placed in a setting that is separate to the student's local regular school) model of education for students with additional needs (Forlin *et al*., 2013). All bar Victoria and Tasmania also offer 'partial inclusion', in special classes, units or centres situated on the grounds of a regular school (*Forlin et al*., 2013). Each of the educational jurisdictions has its own set of criteria and processes for enrolment in these various educational settings.

Once students with additional needs have been identified, placement decided and resources allocated, the impetus for the delivery of an IE is placed squarely at the feet of schools (Wrigley *et al*., 2012). Schools must interpret information from both the Commonwealth and state/territory level, and contextualise this into a vision for IE within their school (Boyle *et al*., 2011). Given that the factors that are influencing IE practices are different for each school and the contexts in which they operate differ, it is not surprising that what schools do in the name of IE differs from school to school (Boyle *et al*., 2012).

The significance of national reform

Since the Melbourne Declaration in 2008, the educational landscape in Australia has undergone rapid change (Davies, 2012). For the first time in its history, Australia has a national curriculum. It was developed on the premise that 'All students are entitled to rigorous, relevant and engaging learning programs'

(ACARA, 2013, p. 4). After initial concern that the mandated curriculum would not contain provisions to provide access to all students (Conway, 2010), further work was undertaken which saw the release of supporting documentation centred on student diversity (see the ACARA website for further information). Despite this, a recent review of the Australian Curriculum has raised concerns about its capacity to meet the needs of all Australian learners (Donnelly and Wiltshire, 2014). The review concludes that further research into current successful curricula (they cite England and Victoria, Australia as having programmes that should be investigated) is required to ensure the national curriculum caters to needs of all students across the nation.

Perhaps the more contentious reform has been the inception of a national testing regime. A National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been in place since 2008, and purports to assess all Australian students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The purpose of the testing regime has been to provide an insight into student achievement in literacy and numeracy in Australia (Cumming and Dickson, 2013). However, it has become a high-stakes test for schools that requires strict levels of confidentiality and compliance with standardised procedures (Cumming and Dickson, 2013). These procedures offer a very limited set of supports that students can use to access the tests, and only with prior approval. Since 2008, participation rates in the testing process have been falling (Adams, 2012). Unsurprisingly, it is estimated that more than a third of students identified as having additional educational needs do not participate in NAPLAN (Dempsey and Davies, 2013). Additionally, students with an intellectual disability can be automatically excluded from sitting the test (Cumming and Dickson, 2013). Clearly, current testing practices 'are not inclusive and potentially offend the requirement in the Disability Standards for reasonable adjustment' (Cumming and Dickson, 2013, p. 227). Students who have additional learning needs are not being given a 'fair go' (Davies, 2012, p. 62). The resulting consequence is that their needs are not considered in the discussions and subsequent resourcing that is allocated to schools, based on testing outcomes (Davies and Elliott, 2012).

Increasing rates of educational exclusion

There is evidence to suggest that students are being placed into segregated settings in increasing numbers. In both NSW and Queensland, the past few years have seen the number of students being placed into segregated classrooms within

regular schools, or placed into segregated settings, increase, and the number is continuing to rise (see DETE, 2014; Graham and Spandagou, 2011 for more details). While there is no readily available data for the other states and territories, since 2000 the number of segregated settings nationwide has increased by 13%, while the total number of schools has fallen by 1.3%. This suggests the trends noted in NSW and Queensland are part of a national phenomenon. Interestingly, this pattern of increasing exclusion from regular school classrooms is occurring without any evidence to support improved educational outcomes for these students (Graham *et al.*, 2010), at a time when governments Australia-wide are committing increased levels of funding to education systems in the name of IE (Graham, in press).

As a consequence of this recent movement of students into segregated educational settings, the issue of disproportionality in these populations once again becomes a concern. Research out of the USA and the UK (see Ciolfi and Ryan, 2011 and Dyson and Gallannaugh, 2008 for discussions on disproportionality in these countries) identifies disproportionality as a very real issue in the population of students being placed into segregated educational settings. While there is little data collected at a national level to investigate this in depth, it cannot be assumed that it is not happening (Sweller *et al.*, 2012). What is known is that there is an over-representation of Indigenous students in segregated settings. The reasons for this are complex, but the statistics cannot be ignored. As Sweller *et al.* (2012, p. 121) so succinctly put it:

'It cannot be claimed that increases in Indigenous enrolments in special education settings are due only to increases in the Indigenous population: If this were the case, the enrolments of Indigenous students should increase at similar rates for both mainstream and special settings.'

Unfortunately, this pattern of disproportionality in the representation of Indigenous students in segregated educational settings is also reflected in school suspension and exclusion statistics. Students throughout Australia are being suspended and excluded from schools for a myriad of reasons, at increasing rates (Beauchamp, 2012). The reasons for this are many and varied and beyond the scope of this article; however, a report completed into this area by Daly (2013) found that in Australia, students who are Indigenous, from a low socio-economic background, not achieving academically, male or have a disability are more likely than their peers to receive a suspension. In some cases the difference is eight-fold.

Questions are being asked about the influence of both current levels of government funding for IE (Dickson, 2008) and policy solutions being offered to address student disengagement (Blackmore, 2009) in the increasing levels of student exclusion, whether as a result of educational placement or disciplinary action. Whatever its cause, Slee (2011) questions the purpose of the practice – is it for the benefit of those being excluded, or for the perceived benefit of those from whom they are separated?

Measuring the success (or not) of inclusive education

Measuring the success, or not, of IE is complex and challenging (Forlin *et al.*, 2013). The construct itself does not present an obvious set of standards to measure against. Loreman (2014) suggests viewing the success of IE through the lens of its outcomes: student participation, student achievement and post-school outcomes. In light of the information discussed to this point, Australia's achievements in these three areas are described in Table 1. The list does not profess to be exhaustive, but it does identify the major points that need to be considered when looking at the success of current education practices in Australia in terms of their inclusiveness.

Australia's report card

Governments are injecting more money than ever before into the resourcing of programmes to support student participation and achievement at school (Graham, in press). However, there is no evidence to support the effectiveness of the strategies adopted; on the contrary, the evidence suggests some programmes are having the reverse effect. An example of this can be seen in the provision of teacher aides as a form of support. Additional funding has been allocated to fund more of these positions within schools across the country, without any evidence to suggest that this form of intervention is in any way effective (Boyle *et al.*, 2011).

Rates of exclusion, through disciplinary actions and the placement of students into various segregated environments, are increasing. In the case of disciplinary action, the increase may be a result of the increased power provided to principals in many educational jurisdictions to suspend and exclude students. This is starkly

Table 1. Current educational practices in Australia related to IE

Outcome	Current educational practices in Australia
Student participation	• The Australian curriculum is consistent across the nation; however, concerns have been raised about its capacity to meet the needs of the diverse range of learners within Australia. • Students receive different levels of resourcing to support their participation in the curriculum, depending on which of the eight educational jurisdictions they reside in. • The number of students not participating in the national testing regime is increasing, with those reported as having additional learning needs or disability being overly represented in this group. • Students with some forms of disability are not able to access the national testing regime due to the strict and standard guidelines on support provisions. • Increasing numbers of students are being placed into segregated programmes and settings for their schooling. • An increasing proportion of students are starting and ending their school careers in segregated settings (Dempsey *et al.*, 2002). • There are increasing rates of exclusions and suspensions from schools, with a disportionally high rate of students from marginalised groups. • Schools with lower ICESEA* rankings have lower levels of student attendance.
Student achievement	• Students from schools with lower ICSEA* rankings achieve lower NAPLAN and secondary school completion scores. • Indigenous students achieve lower NAPLAN and secondary school completion scores (Maher, 2013). • Many students with a disability cannot access the NAPLAN tests in their current format, so they are not included in the data collection for student achievement.
Post-school outcomes	• Indigenous students, students with a disability, students that come from a low socio-economic background or students who recently settled in Australia are less likely to move into higher education or gain employment (Afra, 2008) upon completion of secondary school.

* The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) was created by ACARA. ICSEA provides a scale that numerically represents the magnitude of influence of students' family backgrounds or level of educational advantage on their educational outcomes at school (ACARA, 2011).

evident in Queensland, where the Education Act was amended in 2013 to award principals the authority to suspend and exclude students for a wider and less well-defined set of reasons, while decreasing the circumstances in which students and their families can appeal these decisions. However, this is not the only explanation. Slee (2013) lays part of the blame for the increase in both forms of exclusion on the national testing regime. He argues the result of this type of high-stakes testing is that 'schools exercise educational triage, where they sponsor those with strong academic prognoses and jettison those who present risk of

failure' (pp. 895–896). An increase in the catergorisation and labelling of students has also been linked to increasing rates of exclusion (Graham, in press).

Much of the provision of student support is allocated through various forms of label-attribution. The number of students receiving labels is increasing (Slee, 2013), resulting in the movement of higher numbers of students into segregated classrooms or settings (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011). Furthermore, this dependent relationship between labels and the provision of support presents difficulties for students with additional needs who do not receive a label, and therefore cannot access additional funding (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011). The entire process of categorising and attaching labels to students, as discussed previously, is fraught with inconsistencies between the various educational jurisdictions. The result of this is that different levels of support are offered to students with similar types of learning needs, and consequently students' participation and achievement at school is dependent on, at some level, the state or territory in which they reside. This increased dependence on labelling brings with it a set of different, and perhaps unintended, problems for the delivery of IE. Lauchlan and Boyle (2007) identify a multitude of negative consequences that are associated with labelling, which can ultimately result in reduced life opportunities. These include stigmatisation, bullying, misclassification, lower expectations and adoption of generalised intervention programmes. Not surprisingly, the reliance on labels and categories to deliver support to students suggests a shift away from the original intent of the IE movement (Boyle, 2014; Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011).

The move to make the education system in Australia more inclusive appears to have had limited success (Dempsey, 2007). There seems to be a 'significant gap' between envisioned IE and the reality of what is happening in schools (Graham and Spandagou, 2011). If the current policies, strategies and support provisions were working, the expectation would be that students, regardless of background or ability, would be participating, achieving and succeeding post-school at the same or similar rates. It is clear that this is not the case. While it does need to be acknowledged that some gains have been made in recent years (examples can be seen in the narrowing of the gap in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and the increase in the rates of post-school employment for people with a disability), in many areas the outcomes are actually going backwards (such as the increase in exclusionary practices). There is still a long way to go.

Barriers to inclusive education

In 2007, the Commonwealth government released a report into the education of students with a disability. It identified a number of barriers to the implementation of successful inclusive practices in Australia. Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat disappointingly, many of the same barriers to the provision of IE are still being identified in the literature today. This suggests that there is no quick fix; no single path that can be followed to achieve the desired outcomes. However, the identification and acknowledgement of barriers, perceived or real, must be the first step towards the creation of an environment in which inclusive practices can prevail. Research into this area has identified the following barriers to IE in Australia:

- Defining IE – the term itself has yet to be definitively defined (Graham and Slee, 2008), which has led to confusion and angst among policy makers and educators alike (Connolley and Hausstätter, 2009).
- Attitude of educators – the attitudes of educators have a direct correlation with the success (or not) of IE (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). Pearce (2009) argues that the importance of having a positive attitude towards IE outweighs possession of the knowledge and skills for its effective implementation. While there is evidence to suggest that early years pre-service teachers hold a positive attitude towards IE, attitudes become less favourable once they enter the profession (Boyle *et al.*, 2012).
- Resourcing – plentiful and high-quality resourcing has been linked to positive educator attitude towards IE (Boyle *et al.*, 2012). In Australia, there are inconsistent and complex procedures for both the identification of and provision of support for students with additional needs across the eight educational jurisdictions (Forlin *et al.*, 2013).
- Evaluation processes – there is a lack of process and reliable data for the evaluation of current IE strategies and practices (Sweller *et al.*, 2012).
- Exclusive practices – evidence suggests that exclusive practices, in the form of educational segregation and disciplinary action, are on the increase. Slee (2013) contends that this is due to these practices becoming 'part of the order of things' (p. 897).
- Teacher education – 'teachers are seen as needing better preparation for inclusive education' (Forlin *et al.*, 2013, p. 5), and while some universities now offer units in IE (Berlach and Chambers, 2011), further research is needed to ensure that universities continue to grow and improve their courses (Varcoe and Boyle, 2014).

- Categorisation and labelling – despite evidence of their negative impact on students (Lauchlan and Boyle, 2007, 2014), both categorisation and labelling of students are on the increase (Slee, 2013). Graham (in press) argues that the current reliance on categorisation and labelling to allocate resources is placing undue pressures on medical professionals to diagnose. As a result, 'labels proliferate and some children receive several' (p. 14).

Interestingly, most of the barriers mentioned above, perhaps with the exception of resourcing, are not dealt with in relevant policy. Subban and Sharma (2006) raised this concern a decade ago, specifically in relation to teacher attitudes towards IE. Unfortunately, the ensuing years have not seen a shift in policy to begin the work towards overcoming these barriers. Perhaps, before this can happen, the broader context of IE should be interrogated. Successfully providing truly inclusive schooling requires 'attitudinal change' (Forlin and Chambers, 2011) at all levels of design and implementation, from social commentators, to policy makers, to all of those who work in and support schools (Smyth, 2013).

The road ahead

The road to attitudinal change is a complex and difficult one. Assumptions cannot be made that all who live within communities value a just and fair society (Rawls, 2001); discrimination will still, and will probably always, exist (Loreman *et al.*, 2011). There seems to be a growing indifference to the harmful impact of exclusion on the vulnerable; as Slee (2013, p. 897) explains, 'social exclusion . . . is everywhere and it has been there for a very long time. In this way, the fact of exclusion has come to be seen as natural; it is a part of the order of things'. The suggestion is not that the construct of IE has failed, but rather that 'a narrow, instrumentalist view as to the purposes of education in a modern society continues to prevail – preventing the reconceptaulisation of schooling that a rapidly growing number of students so clearly require' (Graham and Sweller, 2011, p. 951). In Australia, this reconceptualisation must comprise a number of critical elements.

First, funding should be allocated on a needs basis, eliminating the current reliance on labelling and categorisation. Second, the national curriculum and testing regimes need to be revised to ensure they meet the needs of all learners. Third, teachers, both pre-service and practising, should be provided with 'best practice' instruction in both the *why* and *how* of IE. Fourth, access to resources,

in the form of funding, trained support staff and other professionals, should be plentiful and meet the needs of the learners and teachers. Fifth and finally, the Commonwealth government must develop policy and guidelines for IE that are reviewed and refined regularly, to ensure consistency in the access to and implementation of IE practices throughout Australia.

Nevertheless, before the barriers to IE can be considered and eradicated, Australia needs to engage in explicit discussion about the purpose and goals of IE, in other words, about what 'constitutes a good education' (Biesta, 2009, p. 36). This needs to be done from a 'deeper philosophical basis' in order to deal with the increased prevalence of exclusive practices in a system that professes to be inclusive (Graham and Jahnukainen, 2011).

Conclusion

Transformation of the status quo requires unified support through a shared understanding of IE, the direction in which it needs to go and the outcomes it aims to achieve. As Smyth (2013) argues, 'social change of any consequence comes through collective commitment to ideas' (pp. 119–120). The challenge for educators and policy makers is to create the space for this change to occur: 'It is necessary to *unsettle* default modes of operation in order to replace them with new settlements about what is to be valued, taught and expected in schools' (Johnston and Hayes, 2007, p. 376). While this may seem an insurmountable task, Smyth (2013) views it a little more optimistically. He ascertains that if an issue is viewed and considered *carefully* but *creatively*, change is possible.

Much has been learned since Australia adopted the philosophy of IE almost two decades ago. Research indicates that current practices have not met the original intent of the IE movement. However, all is not lost: in the words of Armstrong *et al.* (2011, p. 37), 'it is by going back to the *big picture of inclusion* and reformulating it in the light of knowledge, experiences and learning accumulated during the last 20 or so years that we can find a way forward'.

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