

This special issue of the Australasian Journal of Special Education relates to Quality Education Programs for Individuals with High Support Needs. The education of individuals with high support needs provides a most significant challenge to special education. Such students typically require support in a complex and wide range of areas including physical management, adaptive behaviour, communication, behaviour and health needs. The present special issue focuses largely on understanding derived from research. No apology is offered for this focus, it was the specific remit of the issue. However, equally important is the social agenda that drives many of the changes that impact on the quality of life of individuals with high support needs. The challenge is to maintain some balance between social imperatives that should result in improved lives for individuals with high support needs and research that, in part, verifies that imputed improvements really exist. The recent saga of facilitated communication illustrates, as well as any, the great risks for individuals with high support needs, their families and educators, inherent in losing such balance.

Perhaps the two most pervasive issues in the literature addressing education of students with high support needs in recent years have been communication and challenging behaviour. Several papers in this special issue of the journal provide insight into these areas. O'Reilly and colleagues present two case studies that demonstrate the practical and successful application of functional analysis in addressing challenging behaviour. Woodyatt and Sigafoos use similar technology to examine the relationship between levels of activity and social interaction and stereotypic behaviour in individuals with Rett syndrome. Carter provides a case study that examines the impact of a graphic augmentative

system on communication and speech in a preschool aged child. The contribution of Drasgow, Halle and Sigafoos explores the nature of generalisation difficulties related to communication and nexus between communication and challenging behaviour. In particular, the importance of motivation and response competition in generalisation is examined. Their argument that failure to generalise conventional communicative behaviours may be a result of competition from established non-conventional modes has important practical implications. In particular, it blurs what Drasgow, Halle and Sigafoos describe as an "artificial boundary" between interventions addressing communication in general and those addressing challenging behaviour.

Efforts to provide effective educational programs for students with high support needs have, for the most part, been supported by a developing base of research. However, translation of research into practice has not always been seamless. Educators and other professionals report difficulty in implementing some aspects of "best practice" (Chalmers, Carter, Clayton, & Hook, 1998; Dule, Korner, Williams, & Carter, 1999) and such best practices are often derived from expert opinion, rather than hard evidence of benefits for students (Chalmers et al., 1998). Some of the problems of translating research into practice are considered in the present special issue. O'Reilly and colleagues highlight the need for a flexible approach in the successful translation of empirically verified research strategies into classroom practice. The research agenda elucidated by Arthur, Foreman, Pascoe, Butterfield and Bennett offers the opportunity for evaluation of needs and priorities in the education of students with high support needs, appraisal of current practices in Australian

classrooms and, importantly, examination of factors associated with quality outcomes in the classroom. Such school-based research may assist us in moving from the educational programs that "could be" based on current research knowledge to the educational programs that "should be".

The special issue draws on a wide range of contributors from several countries to address some key concerns for those attempting to provide quality services. Those working with

individuals with high support needs should anticipate continued development of our knowledge base into the new millennium. More importantly, we should expect and demand improvements in the quality of life of students that we educate.

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Guest Editor

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References

Chalmers, S., Carter, M., Clayton, M., & Hook, J. (1998). Education of students with high support needs: Teachers' perceptions of possible best practices, reported implementation and training needs. *Australasian Journal of Special Education*, 22, 76-94.

Dule, K., Korner, H., Williams, J., & Carter, M. (1999). Delivering therapy services for students with high support needs: Perceptions of roles, priorities and best practice. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 24, 243-263.

Early Intervention

Manuscripts are invited for consideration in a special issue of AJSE. This issue will focus on early intervention and education programs for young students with special education needs. Manuscripts reporting outcomes of research studies, literature reviews and critical analyses should be with the Editor, AJSE, by August 1, 2001.

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