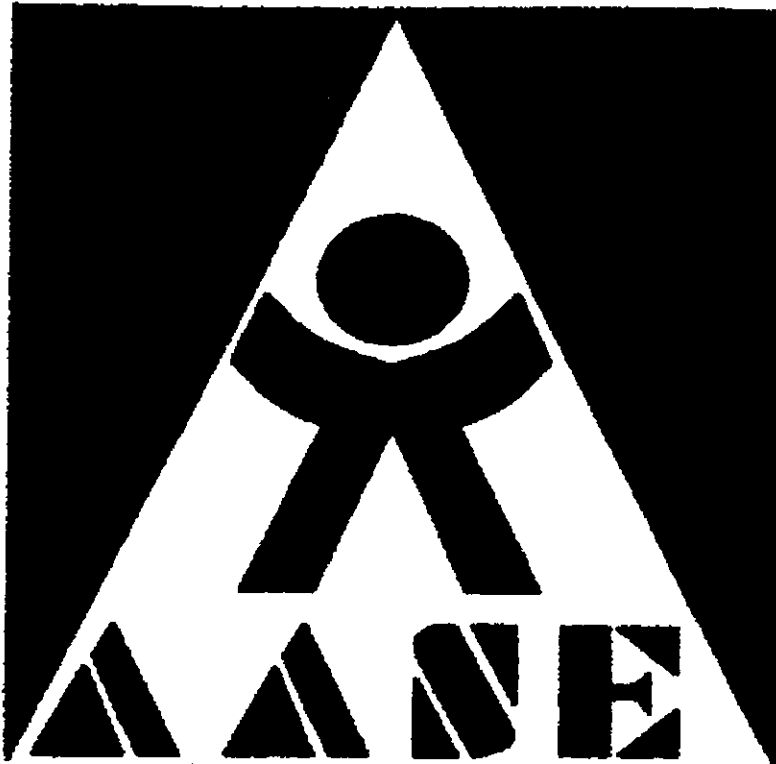


Submission
No 301

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS**

Organisation: NSW Chapter of the Australian Association of Special Education
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Position: President
Date received: 19/02/2010



Quality education for all

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH A
DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS**

NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee no.2

**NSW CHAPTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
SUBMISSION**

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The NSW Chapter of the *Australian Association of Special Education (Inc)* appreciates the opportunity make a submission to the *Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs*. We have chosen to focus our submission on the three terms of reference (TORs 2, 5 and 7) which are most closely aligned with the aims of our association and where we feel we have the expertise and research-based knowledge to provide quality advice to the inquiry.

The aims of AASE

The Australian Association of Special Education Inc is the national peak body of professionals, other paraprofessionals and community members with expertise and/or interest in the education of children and young people with special education needs.

The key aims of AASE are to:

- a) Provide educational leadership to the professional and wider community
- b) Advocate for quality education for all
- c) Commission, participate in and disseminate quality research to inform educational practice
- d) Arrange, promote and facilitate high quality professional learning events and conferences
- e) Coach, mentor and model best practice in teaching and leadership
- f) Build partnerships with universities, service providers and the community
- g) Actively influence policy and decision making

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

AASE RECOMMENDS:

- That all NSW education systems and sectors consider adopting an approach such as *Response to Intervention* as a model for determining the allocation of special education resources and services based on the assessed needs of individual students.
- That all NSW education systems and sectors consider extending the positive behaviour intervention and support model (PBL).
- That the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the NSW Board of Studies continue to be responsible for the development of inclusive curriculum documents that meet the needs of the **full range of students**, including students with intellectual disabilities.. AASE does not support separate curricula for students with intellectual or behavioural difficulties, but does recognise the need for individualised planning processes for some students, particularly those with more severe disabilities.
- That all teachers working to support regular teachers and those teaching students in special education classes and schools should have appropriate training and qualifications in special education.
- That the NSW Institute of Teachers should introduce rigorous evaluation procedures for special education qualifications and for professional development courses, comparable to those now in use for initial teacher education courses.

- That the NSW Government require a greater level of transparency and accountability for the learning outcomes of students with a disability or special needs and require evidence of the efficacy of services and programs being provided to these students.

TOR 2 *Best practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability, particularly whether allocation should be focused on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability.*

AASE believes that funding should be allocated to students on the basis of assessed need, rather than their disability category. Students with the same disability label may vary considerably in their educational needs and the type and level of support they require to access and participate in educational programs.

AASE suggests an exploration of an approach based on the *Response to Intervention* (RTI) model, particularly for students with less severe disabilities and special education needs who are included in regular classes. RTI is a system of providing quality instruction and interventions matched to student need and using data on student achievement for both decision making and progress monitoring. In this model, there are three tiers of intervention. In Tier 1 all students are given quality core instruction in the general education classroom with regular assessment to ensure students reach appropriate benchmarks. For students who do not make good progress, additional support in small groups of five or six students is provided. For students who do not progress with more intensive instruction, Tier 3 provides for daily individual instruction that may be provided by specialist teachers.

This model has been implemented in the US and has led to improved outcomes for students with fewer students being formally identified as having special education needs. This means that special education resources can be provided to students who really need them, regardless of a disability classification and students with special education needs who do not have more significant cognitive difficulties may be identified much earlier before they experience failure (Burns & Kimberley, 2008). AASE supports this approach as it clearly links the provision of funding and additional resources to educational need and because it includes the use of effective, research-based practice for all students.

In the social behaviour area, a similar three-tier continuum of support system, Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL), is gaining momentum in NSW schools. Within the NSW DET, over 20% of schools in the ten regions have commenced implementation of PBL.¹ The process is also growing rapidly in other states, including Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria. In the USA, over 10,000 schools are involved in this process. This three-tier approach ensures all students receive instruction and support on appropriate behaviour, and allows resources for dealing with students with significant behaviour problems to be targeted to that group. AASE supports NSW DET initiatives in this area

The foundations of PBL are evidence-based, and are aligned with systems change and sustainability considerations. There is an increasing base of research studies from the US demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach in reducing problem behaviour in schools. This approach asserts that an investment in the prevention of anti-social behaviour must occur with early intervention and data-based monitoring of problem behaviour (Horner, Sugai, Smolkowski, Eber, Nakasato, Todd, Esperanza, 2009). Consistent with studies in NSW concerning the value of quality teaching, PBL highlights the significance of effective *instructional practices* in encouraging pro-social behaviour.

The need for school-wide interventions is reflected in the Australian data, with the prevalence of students with challenging behaviour being reported as between 3%-6% (Carter, Clayton & Stephenson, 2006). In addition, it seems evident that the early onset of problem behaviour in pre-school age children, is likely to lead to peer rejection, low academic outcomes and mental health difficulties in adolescence and adult life (Conroy, Sutherland, Haydon, Stormont & Harmon, 2009).

¹ There is local variation of the name, including Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), Positive Behavioural Interventions & Supports (PBIS), Positive Behaviour for Success (PBS).

Australian research into the effectiveness of school-wide Positive Behaviour for Learning has been encouraging. A pilot study of schools in Western Sydney Region (DET) coordinated by the University of Western Sydney in 2008, indicated that student motivation and self-concept were generally more favourable for PBL schools. From the pilot study results, it appears that PBL has an impact on the attitudes of school staff through its advocacy of positive and preventative practices to behavioural management within a systemic school-wide approach (Mooney, Dobia, Barker, Power, Watson, Yeung, 2008). Following that study, the Australian Research Council has funded a three year longitudinal research project investigating the psycho-social drivers and the impact of the PBL on behaviour, well-being, academic engagement and achievement.

Further strength of the RTI model in academic and social behaviour is that it allows early identification of students with academic and behavioural difficulties. The importance of early intervention for children with difficulties cannot be overemphasised. For children with behaviour problems, although there is a window of opportunity for change at early adolescence, unless there is successful intervention before the age of seven these students are likely to continue disordered behaviour.

A related issue is the importance of investment in early childhood education and intervention. There is an emerging research base to support the importance of intervention for pre-school children with autism and other disabilities. Education and appropriate intervention in these early years can set a stable foundation for learning, social behaviour and health into the school years and beyond. Quality early childhood education can lead to higher levels of school completion and participation in further education, better employment outcomes and general wellbeing.

Summary

AASE strongly supports funding models based on a student's assessed level of functioning and educational support need. We do not support resourcing based on disability category or label.

AASE suggests that the *Response to Intervention* model should be considered by NSW schools as a means of allocating special education resources and services and as a means of early identification of students experiencing difficulty.

AASE commends NSW DET on the introduction of one form of the RTI model, PBL, into schools in NSW.

AASE believes the allocation of substantial funding and resourcing in high quality early intervention programs for students with a disability or special needs in the pre-school years will have lasting effects on their social, emotional and intellectual development.

TOR 5 *The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students.*

AASE is strongly supportive of the initiatives undertaken by the NSW Board of Studies since 1996 to provide clear and explicit curriculum directions and associated assessment advice for students with a range of special education needs. AASE has worked closely with the Office of the Board of Studies in the preparation of curriculum documents which now cover all Stages of Schooling in NSW.

AASE is also strongly supportive of the inclusive approach to credentialing which has been adopted in NSW at both School Certificate (Year 10) and Higher School Certificate (Year 12) levels. This credentialing process ensures that all students with special education needs can demonstrate clearly what they know and can do across all curriculum areas.

AASE is of the view that **the majority of students with special education needs will be able to access the regular curriculum content** in each of the learning areas, some with adjustments or support

This may involve accessing:

- a course under regular course arrangements
- a course with adjustments ² to some or all of the learning opportunities and assessment activities
- a course option or course content designed for those students who cannot access the regular content. This content should be selected based on the strengths, interests and learning needs of the individual student.

² *An adjustment is a measure or action (or a group of measures or actions) taken by an education provider that has the effect of assisting a student with a disability*

(ii) in relation to a course or program – to participate in the course or program on the same basis as a student without a disability and includes an aid, a facility, or a service that the student requires because of his or her disability

For a small percentage of students, however, **particularly students with an intellectual disability**, there is a need for the curriculum documents in each learning area to include explicit advice and direction to teachers on the development of effective teaching programs and associated assessment for these students.

AASE has strongly supported the approach taken by the NSW Board of Studies to the development of curriculum documents for students in Stages 4 and 5 which incorporates Life Skills outcomes and content into each syllabus document. This provision has been warmly welcomed by teachers across New South Wales on the basis that each syllabus makes clear how teachers can effectively develop a teaching program and associated assessment opportunities for students with special education needs. This inclusive approach represents best practice and is strongly supported by the Australian Association of Special Education.

In addition to supporting the provision of adjustments for students undertaking regular course content in Stage 6, the NSW Board of Studies has developed a number of Life Skills courses for the small percentage of students with special education needs for whom the regular outcomes and content of Board Developed and/or Board Endorsed courses are not appropriate. The Stage 6 Life Skills courses can be undertaken in combination with other Board Developed and/or Board Endorsed courses to meet the requirements for the award of the Higher School Certificate. AASE **does not support** the adoption of a categorical approach to curriculum provision as clearly, students with special education needs do not fall within a single 'category' or 'group'. Their progress should be assessed, as for all students, on their individual completion of curriculum outcomes.

Summary.

AASE NSW does not support the provision of different curricula for different disability groups. It strongly supports the development of curriculum and support documents that cater for the needs of ALL Students, with appropriate adjustments and supports.

TOR 7 *The provision of adequate teacher training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training.*

AASE has a long history of advocating for quality programs for teacher training for both regular and special educators and for quality further professional learning opportunities for all teachers. AASE believes most strongly that teachers working with students with special education needs, whether providing support to teachers and students within regular classes or as teachers of special classes in units and schools, should be appropriately qualified. This means they should hold appropriate qualifications in regular education with additional qualifications at Diploma or Master's level in special education.

AASE believes any teacher education course or professional learning activity that is aimed at improving teacher skills and knowledge in pedagogy for students with disabilities and special education needs should include research-based practices that are known to be effective. Approaches for students with special education needs are likely to include direct, teacher centred instruction, regular formative evaluation of teaching programs and individualised planning (Purdie & Ellis, 2005; Rowe, 2006). Many of these strategies are likely to be beneficial for all students, as a recent analysis of research on education has shown (Hattie, 2009). It is important to note, as both Rowe (2006) and Hattie (2009) have pointed out, that many of these effective practices are not routinely used in schools and are not included in many teacher education programs. Rowe's research also shows that while factors such as the student's background and aptitude have some bearing on outcomes, the magnitude of these effects pale into insignificance compared with the quality of the teacher. We have attached the AASE position paper on quality programs for students with special education needs, which includes further description and references for evidence-based teaching practices for students with special education needs.

It is of concern to AASE that only 60% of teachers in special schools in NSW hold a qualification in special education (Thomas, 2009). A recent survey of support teachers (behaviour) in

three Sydney regions found that only 53% of these teachers had additional special education qualifications (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2010). In an effort to address the problem of inadequate numbers of properly qualified teachers, NSW DET is currently implementing online training courses for teachers in regular schools who will be supporting students with special education needs. AASE has significant concerns about the philosophy and quality of the content in these courses and the associated resources. The courses appear to promote a categorical approach to students, are not competency-based and the content is typically not research validated. Moreover, the capacity of these modules to improve the quality of teaching has not been demonstrated. Unfortunately, NSW DET has been most reluctant to allow access to the content to enable us to provide informed feedback and does not appear to have carried out any evaluation of the content of the courses. AASE believes that it is most important that teachers are provided with skills and knowledge based on evidence-based practices in the education of students with special needs

The clear need for further education for teachers underlines the importance of introducing standards for specialist qualifications and for professional development courses. The Institute of Teachers is yet to set professional standards for specialist teachers, and this is an issue that needs to be addressed. The Institute does accredit professional development courses, but apparently there is no examination and evaluation of course content as is carried out before pre-service teacher training courses are accredited. AASE recommends that the Institute be encouraged to develop standards for special education qualifications and that the rigour of the approval processes for professional development courses be increased. AASE would be happy to advise on and participate in these processes.

Summary

AASE is concerned at the lack of appropriately trained and qualified special educators in NSW schools, and the lack of appropriate quality control measures for specialist training and for professional development courses in the area of special education.

AASE recommends that the NSW Institute of teachers set up rigorous accreditation procedures for specialist teacher education courses and for professional development courses.

TOR 8 *Any other related matters.*

AASE is concerned that in 2010 there continues to be a lack of transparency and accountability for the educational outcomes of students with a disability or special needs. While the focus of this inquiry is on the provision and adequacy of resources, services, and education for students with a disability or special needs, what is critical is that we need to be sure these students are participating as fully and equitably as possible in education and achieving meaningful outcomes from their schooling. The measurable achievements of many students with significant levels of disability, in particular those students with moderate and severe levels of intellectual disability, have rarely been reported on, other than on an individual basis to parents and carers, and many thousands of students with special needs are exempted from any form of national or standardised assessment programs. AASE is also concerned about the efficacy of some programs (such as perceptual-motor programs, programs based on sensory integration and those based on the use of multi-sensory environments) being delivered to students with a disability in NSW. It is imperative that all instructional practices and intervention programs being employed in schools and classrooms have been rigorously evaluated to ensure they are beneficial and lead to improved student outcomes and that all education systems and sectors provide teachers with adequate information and support order to allow them to make fully informed decisions.

Summary

AASE strongly believes that special education funding should be only be invested in resourcing models and service delivery models, teacher training and classroom practices, and curricula, where there is unequivocal evidence that they improve student learning outcomes.

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APPENDIX

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION INC. POSITION PAPER

TOPIC: Quality Education for Students with Special Educational Needs

BACKGROUND

AASE Inc is committed to advocating for the provision of quality education services for students with special educational needs. It is imperative that such provisions be based on current research and exemplary practice. AASE's position is informed by the Disability Standards for Education 2005 which require that students with disabilities are treated on the same basis as other students in regards to enrolment and participation in education. Full participation may require the provision of specialised support services, adjustments to curriculum, assessment activities and pedagogy. We endorse the Melbourne declaration which calls for all children to receive high-quality schooling, regardless of disability or other factors. This paper will review the literature to pinpoint the essential features of a quality evidence-based educational program for school-aged children with special education needs. These features should be apparent in any adjustments to curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and support services and in both mainstream and segregated settings, and are likely to reflect good practice for all students. This position paper refers to quality programs in school settings, quality programs for very young children and for adolescents who are in transition to the work-place may have different characteristics.

The literature review identifies a range of concepts and issues which can be addressed through the contexts of curriculum, instruction and school environment. Consideration of these contexts is the same when planning programs for all students. The field of special education provides an intensive analysis of curriculum, instruction and the school environment in order to maximise learning outcomes for students. Its critical features are the individualising of instruction and programming and the use of effective teaching strategies. As such, special education is a process rather than physical place

Curriculum

Curriculum is the mechanism that organises the knowledge, skills and values expected to be achieved by students during their school life. It provides a set of learning outcomes which allows for the development of knowledge and skills as well as strategies for learning how to learn across the full range of content areas (Howell & Nolet, 2000; Shelden & Hutchins, 2008).

Well designed curriculum delineates well connected and extensive knowledge structures which enable students to build on prior knowledge, chunk increasing amounts of information and provide a framework to access and integrate new information (Howell & Nolet, 2000). This statement recognises that some content can be analysed into a fixed sequence of steps whereas some higher order skills are less structured yet build and depend upon prior knowledge (Rosenshine, 1995).

A thorough knowledge of a content domain and curriculum design principles is the foundation for effective assessment, evaluation, decision-making and instruction (Heward, 2003; Howell & Nolet, 2000). To fulfil these roles, the curriculum must be “developed so information in a particular domain ... is selected, prioritised, sequenced, organised and scheduled for instruction” (Simmons & Kameenui, 1995, p. 5) and be flexible in assisting to meet positive learning outcomes for individuals. Thus curriculum articulates what has to be taught in the academic and social domains rather than prescribing how the skills, knowledge and values are to be taught (Howell & Nolet, 2000). Such a curriculum can be adapted to accommodate individual student’s needs through organising content into smaller or larger segments, accommodations that have significant effects for instruction learning (Wehmeyer, Lance, & Bashinski, 2002; Wehmeyer, Lattin, & Agran, 2001). A good understanding of the principles of well designed curriculum sets higher expectations for all students and increases the chances of meeting the needs of the full range of students with special education needs (Westwood, 2007). For some students with higher support needs, a validated process for personalised curriculum planning will be necessary to ensure that as well as having access to the general curriculum, students have the opportunity to learn functional skills important for an independent adult life (Shelden & Hutchings, 2008),

Curriculum needs to be the basis upon which assessment and subsequent programming and instructional decisions are made. Curriculum-based assessment and curriculum-based measurement both assess student performance in relation to the curriculum (Deno, 2003; Hosp, Hosp & Howell, 2007). These assessments, which can be implemented by teacher, are more sensitive to student learning than traditional assessment methodology and reflect a closer match to knowledge, skills and values taught in classrooms (Deno, 2003; Hosp, Hosp & Howell, 2007; Howell & Nolet, 2000). Curriculum-based assessment directly assesses curriculum outcomes being taught in classrooms and forms the basis for instructional decisions. Curriculum-based measurement assists in monitoring student progress and making decisions regarding placement and resource allocation by comparing peers on content drawn from the curriculum (Deno, 2003; Hosp, Hosp, & Howell, 2007).

The close link between assessment and curriculum assists in providing feedback to parents, students and the community as well as providing a credential at the end of schooling for all students.

Instruction

Curriculum is what we teach;
Instruction is how we teach it; and
Evaluation guides the process.

(Howell & Nolet, 2000)

The characteristics of effective instruction are reported by educational researchers who study the critical teacher behaviours in classroom settings (Ellis, 2005). The literature also refers to the terms *effective teaching* and *explicit teaching or instruction*. However, it must be noted that effective instruction is not defined as a single method of teaching but rather as a series of characteristics which can be embedded into a range of teaching approaches (Swanson & Deshler, 2003). Effective instruction enables the efficient use

of class time to maximise learning outcomes for students maximises on-task behaviour of students and minimises inappropriate behaviour

The effective instruction literature identifies a number of teacher behaviours that positively correlate with academic success for students, and which also support the learning of typical and high-achieving students (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Effective instruction involves implementing strategies in planning, managing, delivering and evaluating instruction (Heward, 2003; Ysseldyke, 1995). Meta-analyses of the research indicate that teaching approaches that combine direct instruction (explicit, teacher-directed instruction in basic skills and content) and strategy instruction (explicit instruction to teach cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies) are most successful (Ellis, 2006). Effective teachers are competent with a wide array of instructional strategies, including teacher-directed, explicit instruction and are able to select the most appropriate strategies for individual students and specific content (Bakken, 2008; Hattie, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003). Effective teachers use the following strategies with high fidelity:

Planning instruction

- Use assessment, including curriculum-based measurement to determine place in the curriculum and monitor the effects of instruction and evaluate programs (Deno, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Hosp & Ardoin, 2008; Howell & Nolet, 2000)
- Define expected student outcomes/goals (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Hattie, 2005; Ysseldyke, 2001)
- Set challenging and realistic expectations for all students yet allowing for individual differences (Hattie, 2003; Wehmeyer et al., 2002; Wehmeyer et al., 2001)

Managing instruction

- Establish a positive class environment (Hattie, 2003; Westwood, 2007)
- Establish then teach lesson rules and procedures (Kern & Clements, 2007; Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers & Sugai, 2008)
- Allocate time for directly teaching skills, knowledge and concepts (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael, Dolezal, 2002)
- Maintain a high rate of task engagement (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Kern & Clements, 2007; Simonsen et al., 2008; Westwood, 2007.)
- Minimise disruptions by organising the physical space, keeping transitions between activities short and restricting interruptions (Kern & Clemens, 2007; Simonsen et al., 2008)
- Where necessary, teach and reward the social skills needed for classroom participation (Landrum, Tankersley & Kauffman, 2006).

Delivering instruction

- Provide tasks which ensure students achieve a high rate of success (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Kern & Clemens, 2007; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)
- Inform students of the instructional goal (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Heward, 2003; Westwood, 2007)
- Use clear and precise instructions/language (Hattie, 2009; Westwood, 2007)
- Review previous work at the start of the lesson and provide advance organisers (Gagnon, Maccini & Maccini, 2001; Swanson & Deshler, 2003)

- Analyse tasks into components (Ellis, 2005; Swanson, Hoskyn & Lee, 1999; Vaughn, Gersten & Chard, 2000;)
- Actively teach cognitive strategies (Ellis, 2005; Hattie, 2009; Swanson et al., 1999; Westwood, 2007)
- Model skills and strategies and provide worked examples (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Gagnon, Maccini & Maccini, 2001; Pashler et al., 2007; Rosenshine, 1995; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)
- Maintain a brisk pace (Ellis, 2005; Kern & Clemens, 2007)
- Provide a variety of exemplars (Ellis, 2000; Howell & Nolet, 2000;; Rosenshine, 1995)
- Question students frequently to check understanding (Ellis, 2005; Hattie & Timperley, 2007)
- Scaffold instruction to support students to complete a task (Dickinson, Chard, & Simmons, 2000; Kameenui, Carnine, Dixon, Simmons, & Coyne, 2002; Larkin, 2001)
- Provide for guided and independent practice which allows for a mix of lower and higher order thinking skills (Ellis, 2005; Hattie, 2003; Maccini & Hughes, 2000; Swanson & Hoskyn, 2001)
- Practice skills or apply concepts, using distributed practice, until the students are fluent (Hattie, 2009; Heward, 2003; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001)
- Use peer assistance, classwide peer tutoring and collaborative learning (Anderson, Hamilton & Hattie, 2004; Baker, Gersten, Dimino, & Griffiths, 2004; Simonsen et al., 2007)
- Actively supervise or monitor the work of all students (Rosenshine, 1995; Simonsen et al., 2008; Westwood, 2007)
- Use errors as opportunities to provide further instruction (Rosenshine, 1995, Simonsen et al., 2007)
- Provide immediate feedback to students which is specific to the situation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Pashler, 2007; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)
- Teach the use of mnemonic strategies to help students remember important information (Kleinheksel & Summy, 2003; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)
- Adjust the lesson to meet student needs (e.g., extra instruction or intensive review) (Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks & Jacobson, 2004; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)
- Provide a closing summary at the end of the lessons (Marzano et al., 2001)
- Include cumulative reviews (Pashler et al., 2007; Kameenui et al., 2002)
- Take advantage of technology to support and assist student learning (Simonsen et al., 2007; Wehmeyer et al., 2002; Wehmeyer et al., 2001)
- Teach in small interactive groups, and provide 1:1 instruction if required (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003)

Evaluating instruction

- Monitor student progress (Baker et al., 2004; Howell & Nolet, 2000; Heward, 2003; Rosenshine, 1995; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003; Ysseldyke, 2001)
- Use student progress data to make instruction decisions (Deno, 2003; Howell & Nolet, 2000)

School environment

The context of the delivery of any program is vital to meeting the needs of all students. The amount and quality of instruction, classroom management, climate, student/teacher interactions, motivation and parental encouragement and support of learning are critical variables in influencing students learning (Anderson et al., 2004; Eber, Sugai, Smith, & Scott, 2002; Hattie, 2003; Simonsen et al., 2008). In addition, school culture, administrative issues and community influences are a moderate influence (Hattie, 2003). High quality special education programs recognise the impact of the school and seek to positively structure or restructure the environment to ensure success for all students (Sigafoos, Arthur & O'Reilly, 2003; Sugai, 2003).

Teacher-student relationships directly influence students' attitude and achievement (Hattie, 2009). There is a danger of creating a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers have low expectations of students with special educational needs (Hattie, 2009; Westwood, 2007). Teachers and school executive are able to create a positive school climate that values and accepts all students (Eber et al., 2002; Sugai, 2003). School climate can foster learning when high expectations are held for all students. High expectations, combined with work at an appropriate level and effective teaching strategies serve to strengthen student/teacher interactions, student motivation and academic achievement (Westwood, 2007).

Parents, along with their children, are partners with teachers in the education process (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). Effective home-school links should be based on mutual respect, recognition of the equity of the differing roles of parent and educator, sharing of information and skills leading to participation in the decision making process. Schools should support parents in maintaining high expectations for their children and ensure parents comprehend the "language of schooling" (Hattie, 2009). Parent involvement in school activities will enhance the working partnership and assist the student to receive the best possible education (Hattie, 2009).

With the advent of inclusive curriculum, collaborative partnerships between students, families, special educators, teachers, teacher aides and other relevant professional are imperative (Hines, 2008; Shaddock, Smythe-King & Giorcelli, 2007). Collaboration provides the vehicle for the pooling of knowledge about curriculum, current curriculum trends, and the knowledge of effective practices to meet the needs of the diverse range of students in any class (Hines, 2008; Hoover & Patton, 2008). It should be noted, however, that there is little research evidence to support some collaborative approaches such as team-teaching (Hattie, 2009; Murawski & Swanson, 2001)

The above mentioned features underpin quality educational programs. Students need to access relevant curriculum and appropriate instruction within a positive school environment. A highly trained teaching force is essential if students with special education needs are to access quality educational programs. Teacher and administrators need the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the diverse range of educational needs within every classroom. Special educators need to be trained in curriculum design, instructional methodologies, consultancy skills and collaboration.

These conclusions have implications for teacher training and the professional development of teachers. Training course must provide graduates with the necessary competencies if students with special education needs are to receive a quality educational program. After graduation, teachers and administrators require systematic development of their skills, knowledge and values, to ensure curriculum and instruction practices benefit all students, and are based on research validated principles.

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