

Submission 166
TE Inquiry

**AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF
SPECIAL EDUCATION INC.**

Chair
National Inquiry in Teacher Education
Department of Education, Science and Training
Location: 142
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

Dear Sir

Please find enclosed a submission for the National Inquiry into Teacher Education prepared by the Australian Association of Special Education. The Association is happy to discuss the content of this submission at your convenience, and looks forward to reading the final report on this important issue within education sectors across the country.

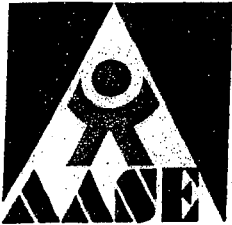
Yours sincerely

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5th May, 2005

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AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION INC.

Submission to the National Inquiry Into Teacher Education (2005)

1. Introduction

The Australian Association of Special Education (AASE) Inc is a non-categorical and cross sectoral association of 30 years standing which has a national membership of 900, comprising teachers, other professionals, parents and community members who have an interest in the education of students with special needs. The goals and objectives of the Association are attached in Appendix A.

Our members have a broad range of experience and knowledge concerning quality instruction, Australian and international research outcomes and current directions within education. The Association welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the work of the Inquiry as a task force member and brings the capacity to speak with authority about the instructional requirements of those students with special educational needs, and of the professional learning needs of their teachers and support staff.

AASE speaks for all students with special education needs, including those with identified disabilities and those with difficulties in the areas of literacy, numeracy or behaviour who do not have a disability. Increasingly students with special education needs are included in regular classes (in NSW, for example, 60% of students with a disability are included in regular classes) with the expectation that all classroom teachers can meet their diverse needs. In addition to students in regular classes, there are students in special education settings who need teachers with additional qualifications in special education if their needs are to be met. Teacher education programs need to prepare both regular teachers for this increased diversity in regular classes and the special educators who will support them.

This submission highlights priority areas that AASE believes need careful consideration if the Inquiry is to meaningfully address the preparedness of teachers to educate all students, including those with special education needs. This submission articulates the platform of the Association and will form the basis of its contribution to the Inquiry.

2. Quality Education Faculty Members (Term of Reference 4)

The quality of teacher education programs is dependent on the quality of the staff within teacher education faculties. These staff need to be well versed in the full range of current research, be active researchers, and have strong links to the field through ongoing partnerships with schools and community agencies. It is the position of AASE that staff selected for appointment in teacher education faculties should have a high level of achievement in special education. An essential criteria in recruiting staff to teach in special education should include a doctoral level qualification in special education, actively engage in research surrounding the education of students with special education needs, and qualifications in tertiary education.

The preparation of teachers to accommodate the needs of all of their students, requires teacher education courses to reflect a core desire that the diverse needs of students will be and can be met in classrooms. If this is to be achieved then staff within faculties need to reflect this belief in the delivery

of content and course work. Effective interventions and instructional practice, including explicit, systematic teacher directed approaches highlighted in the research (e.g., Kame'enui, Carnine, Dixon, Simmons, & Coyne, 2002; Swanson, 2005) should be addressed alongside more constructivist, child centred approaches in all curriculum subject areas (Knight, 2002; Rainforth & Kugelmass, 2003; Reusser, 2000). The new Disability Standards for Education will require teachers to be fully aware of the range of effective program design features and quality instructional strategies so they can adjust their programs to meet the needs of all students.

3. Educational Philosophy (Term of Reference 5)

Faculties of education must be places that promote rigorous academic debate about a range of issues. Faculties of education need to reflect this diversity of thought in the content that is included in teacher education programs. Over the past ten to twenty years, however, faculties of education have been dominated by singular paradigms (e.g., constructivism) of thought leading to insular debate, commentary and research paradigms. Beginning reading is one area that highlights the detrimental nature of this singular line of thought. Faculties of education from the late 80's have been dominated by the whole language philosophy. Despite the depth of research evidence that such a singular philosophical line does not promote quality literacy outcomes for a diverse range of students (e.g., Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, M., & Griffin, 1998), faculties of education today struggle to provide opportunities for primary graduates to exit programs with a strong understanding of how to teach reading and essential literacy skills (e.g., oral language, vocabulary). In a recent meeting of AASE members, new graduates in their second term of teaching were highly critical of how they were prepared to teach reading and associated basic literacy skills. They were now turning to professional associations like AASE to develop, and further, their professional knowledge so they are able to attain the best outcomes for all students in their classes.

Teacher education courses are currently being swept by a push towards promoting quality teaching pedagogies. While AASE is welcoming of this general push, there is still a need for it to be submitted to the litmus test of validated research. Importantly, these quality teaching models need to provide evidence they cater for students with special education needs – there is limited evidence nationally and internationally that models being posed have shown that they assist teachers cater for the needs of students with special education needs (Braden, 2004).

Teacher education courses in the future need to prepare pre-service teachers education students who are skilled to critically evaluate education research and policies. Pre-service teacher education students need to be consumers of education research and literature so they are able to maintain and promote their own professional knowledge. It would also minimise the acceptance of practices that "sound good" or "are common sense" yet have limited, flawed or no empirical research evidence to support their effectiveness. Special education is one area that has been plagued by education practices that are generally described as "snake oil treatments" (Kauffman, 1999; Mostert, 2000). If new teachers are to avoid these practices, they need to be equipped to make informed decisions through skills developed in analysing and evaluating current research.

The translation of research to practice is another feature of teacher education programs that needs to be addressed. In special education, evidence-based practices have been identified (e.g., peer tutoring, comprehension instruction, direct instruction (Kavale & Forness, 2000), yet their translation to practice has been limited (Carnine, 1997). The reasons for these are complex:

... the research to practice gap likely is influenced by how we prepare teachers in *pre-service preparation programs* [emphasis added], the type of professional development we provide teachers as they learn about evidence based innovation, the context in which these innovations are implemented, and the nature of the research that we conduct to replicate these practices. (McLesky & Waldron, 2004, p.12).

Teacher education programs need to be of a sufficient duration (e.g., 4 years), including sustained engagement in the field, which permits pre-service teachers to develop a sound understanding of the art and science of education practices. Teacher education programs then need to work with the employment sectors to ensure new graduates are able to enter the profession with collegial support that promotes long term engagement in the field. Recently AASE through its chapters in each state embarked on a series of seminars to support new graduates. These seminars cover issues and practices that our members highlighted as not being well developed during pre-service teacher education courses but essential for them to provide effective programs for all students in their classroom (e.g., teaching of reading, classroom management, managing instructional groups, strategies for adjusting the classroom curriculum). The chapters of AASE also provide ongoing professional seminars that support experienced teachers in a range of areas (e.g., behaviour management, catering for students with autism, curriculum adjustments, meeting the needs of students with mental health difficulties, using technology in the classroom).

4. Preparation of Teaching Graduates

Teacher education programs for all primary and secondary teaching graduates must address issues relating to the education of students with special education needs. AASE is firmly committed to the position that all teacher education programs must have a subject that addresses issues, policy and effective practices that assists cater for students with special education needs. These subjects need to be staffed with qualified special educators with who are actively engaged in research, and are skilled in delivering evidence-based practices for students across the school years. Content of a subject in special education – content that must be supported across all curriculum areas - would include:

- Awareness of the historical background of special education
- Knowledge of legislation, including the Disabilities Discrimination Act and Standards
- Working collaboratively within school communities including three tier strategies for quality intervention strategies
- Strategies for adjusting the classroom curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Principles and practices of effective instruction, including the effective teaching cycle
- Instructional classroom management, including positive approaches to behaviour management
- Assessment for evaluating lesson outcomes, and monitoring the progress of students (e.g., curriculum-based evaluation, curriculum-based assessment)

A major focus in preparing teaching graduates to implement quality education programs that prevent difficulties from emerging. In the area of early literacy, in particular learning to read, primary graduates should be well acquainted with the essential features or big ideas of beginning reading programs (National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). Secondary graduates should be skilled in adjusting curriculum and instruction that permits all students to engage in a meaningful education program (Deshler, 1996).

An element of this term of reference relates to how teachers "deal with" parents/caregivers of students with disabilities. AASE is concerned that the wording of this term of reference reflects negatively on the role of the family (and other agencies) in providing quality education programs for students with special education needs. Parents/caregivers are an essential part of planning, implementing and evaluating programs for students with special education needs. It is AASE's position that graduate teachers need to be prepared in how to work with their school community, including parents/caregivers, community agencies and educational personnel. School communities that harness their skills, knowledge and values provide a powerful base on which to implement effect programs (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, & McLaughlin, 1999). Engaging in rhetoric that "deals with" parents/caregivers sets an image of conflict in which the student is the one who is most likely to be disadvantaged.

Working knowledge of whole school partnerships is a critical component of teacher education programs. The work of Sugai, Lewis and colleagues provides a strong research base in this area, and in particular, working with students who exhibit challenging and disruptive behaviours. Their work has shown that teachers who work within whole school partnerships are supported in meeting the challenges of disruptive behaviour in their classroom; further, these teachers and school communities are better equipped to deal with serious and chronic challenging behaviour. The practices embedded in whole school partnerships has been shown to be effective in promoting quality literacy outcomes for student in the first four years of schooling (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2003), and allocation of valuable resources for students with special education needs (Reschly, 1999).

5. Conclusion

The Australian Association of Special Education supports the priority being given to enhancing the education programs provided to students with special education needs. The results of this inquiry must provide recommendations that ensure that students with special education needs are provided with the highest quality of education program. Teacher education programs at the pre-service (and in-service) level need to ensure that educational research forms the basis of these programs, and that approaches not supported through research do not have a predominant role and remain unchallenged through critical reflection by teachers. The effectiveness of teacher education programs must be on the provision of quality programs for students with special educational needs.

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