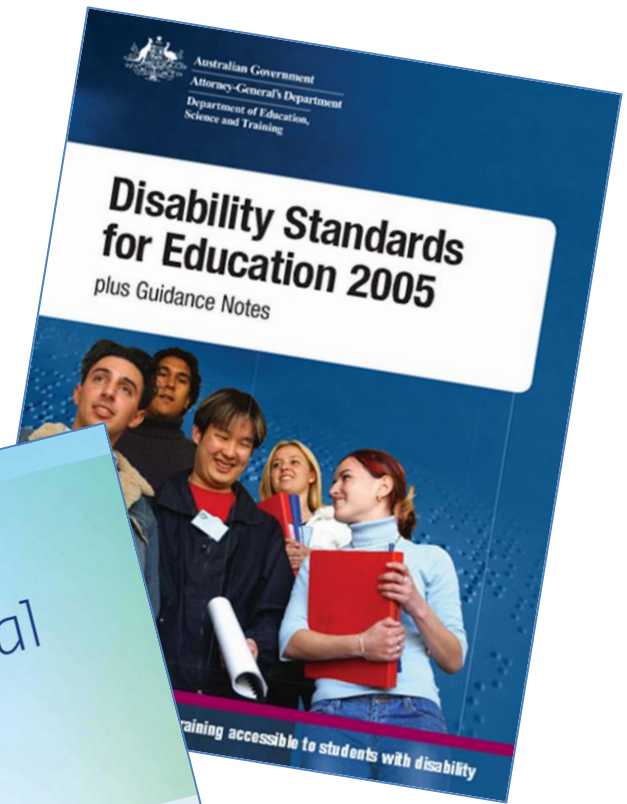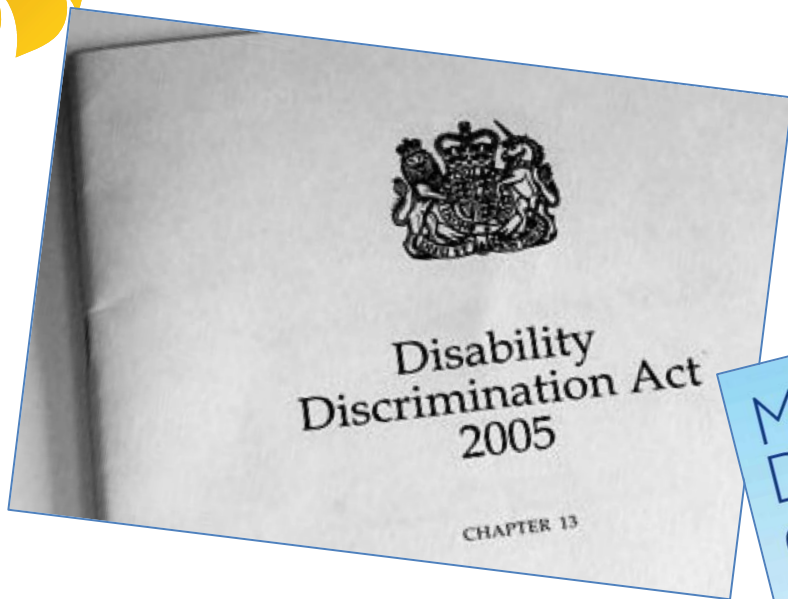# How do teachers achieve a student-centred inclusive learning environment?

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2016 AASE and PASS Joint National Conference
9th - 10th June, 2016 Crown Promenade, Melbourne, Victoria

Setting the scene…

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According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013), most students with disability* attend regular classes in mainstream schools.

Nationally, nearly one in five students (20%) are identified as having some level of disability or learning difficulty.
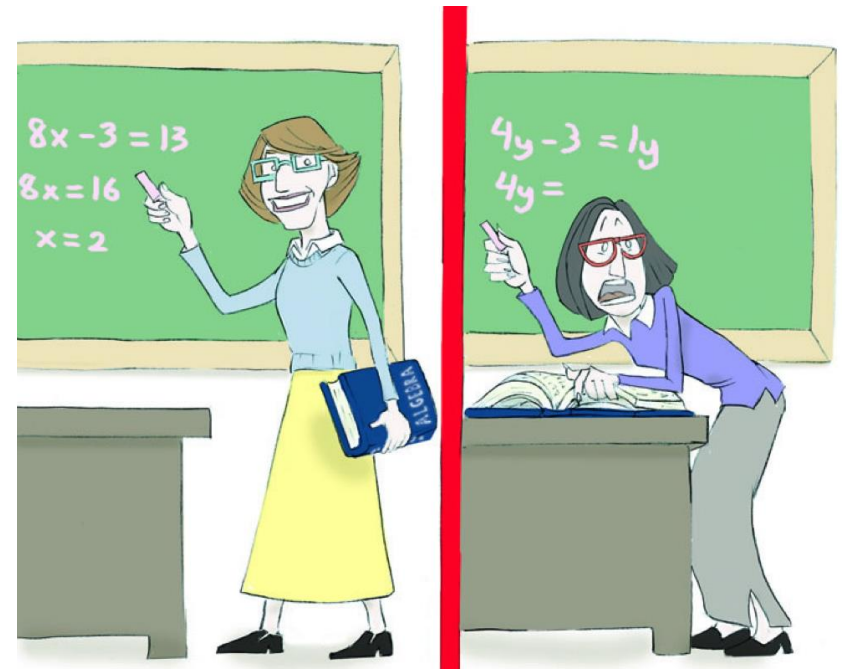
*any limitation, restriction or impairment, which restricts everyday activities and has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months.

Therefore...

Teachers must be able to cater for a diverse range of student background & learning needs in their classroom, including students with a disability.

What is student-centred inclusive learning?

Think-Pair-Share activity

1) Think about & write your definition for the above question on a post-it note.

2) Share & discuss with a partner, each other's definition – agree on & write on another post-it note, a shared definition.

3) Share & discuss with your table group each partner definition – agree & write on poster paper a shared definition for the table.

4) Whole group discussion – key themes?

Inclusive education?

Australia, has no over-arching definition for inclusive education, perhaps the reason for the challenges experienced in trying to enact it within our schools

(Anderson & Boyle, 2015)

What is inclusive education?

A few definitions from the literature:

- "…[a] process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs, abilities, characteristics, and learning expectations of students by eliminating all forms of discrimination (Barrett, 2014, p.76).

- "A field dedicated to educating students of varying abilities and social identities in communities of acceptance and support" (Danforth & Jones, 2015, p.2).

- "Classroom practices that foster equity and fairness and support students with different needs and abilities" (Gajewski, 2014, p. 27).

Combined with student-centred learning...

Teaching and learning that:

- Caters for individual differences in interest, achievement and learning styles;

- Develops students' ability to take control over their own learning;

- Uses authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration;

- Emphasises building meaning and understanding rather than completing tasks;

- Involves cooperation, communication and negotiation;

- Connects learning to the community (Black, 2007).

So... what might this look like in practice?

Loreman (2009) suggests the features of inclusive education include:

- All children attend their neighbourhood school.

- Schools & districts have a 'zero-rejection' policy... All children are welcomed and valued.

- All children learning in regular, heterogeneous classrooms with same-age peers.

- All children follow substantively similar programs of study, with adapted and modified curriculum if needed. Modes of instruction are varied and responsive.

- All children contribute... and are supported to make friends and to be socially successful with their peers.

However...

Inclusive education & student-centred learning are COMPLEX & COMPLICATED... with a range of factors that influence successful implementation.

Identifying barriers helps to:

- understand the complex nature of a student-centred inclusive approach to teaching & learning, and

- identify ways to overcome these barriers.

What are some of the barriers to successful student-centred inclusive learning?

Table group brainstorm activity

- Nominate a scribe & a speaker

- Brainstorm and write down your responses to the question

- Remember in a 'brainstorm', there are no right or wrong responses, and there are no discussions about responses – all ideas are written down.

Anderson & Boyle (2015) identify a number of barriers to inclusion:

- Lack of a nationally agreed upon definition of inclusive education;

- Attitudes of educators;

- Inconsistencies in resourcing;

- Lack of process & reliable data to evaluate & identify successful inclusive practice;

- Continuation of exclusive practices – in teaching, student management, & assessment;

- Negative impact of categorisation & labelling;

- Initial teacher education.

So…

What ARE some of the strategies, processes and practices that support successful student-centred inclusive learning?

What influences successful student-centred inclusive learning?

Using the 'stickies' on your table:

- Silently write down strategies, processes, & practices that support successful student-centred inclusive learning.

- Stick these on the poster paper for your table/group.

- Silently sort the range of ideas into related categories.

- Whole group sharing.

What influences successful student-centred inclusive learning?

- Teacher attitude;

- School culture & leadership;

- Teacher professional development & support;

- Collaboration;

- Quality teaching & utilising evidence-based teaching & learning strategies.

Teacher attitude

- "Teachers who hold a positive attitude about disability possess & employ an array of instructional & assessment strategies which address individual needs and abilities… [this] benefits all students, not only those with special needs" (Gajewski, 2014, p. 27).

- "Two broad areas affecting the implementation of inclusive practice… attitudes, beliefs, & values of teachers, & their pedagogical knowledge, skills, & perceived efficacy…" (Copfer & Specht, 2014, p.94).

School culture & leadership

- "The school's philosophy, climate, democratic leadership, collaboration among school professionals, attention to learner diversity, resources, & liaison with parents play an important role in promoting inclusion" (Curcic, 2009, p.535).

- "a school culture of high expectations; setting an explicit & shared school improvement agenda; creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate in evaluating & improving their day-to-day teaching; & providing professional learning focused on improved teaching practices"
(Masters, 2012 as cited in Policy Insights, 2016).

Teacher professional development

- "Many teachers do not feel that they have the necessary skills to implement inclusion, so professional development & teacher education should reflect the provision of opportunities for staff to learn effective pedagogical approaches" (Loreman, 2014, p.467).

- "Teachers must be able to access supports & resources to enhance & improve their practice in the classroom" (Gajewski, 2014, p. 32).

- "Highly effective practices include… providing professional learning focused on improved teaching practices" (Policy Insights, 2016).

- "Creating opportunities for ongoing embedded professional learning is essential to enable all staff working in inclusive schools to increase their capacity to provide quality inclusive learning environments" (Barrett, 2014, p.82).

Collaborative practice

- "collaboration needs to occur at all levels, between districts & schools, & the school & the community… Inclusion & ultimately student success needs to be viewed as a shared responsibility by all stakeholder groups" (Loreman, 2014, p.469).

- "In order for inclusion to be more than a mere placement, planned instruction & collaboration among professionals are recommended" (Curcic, 2009, p.535).

- "[Teachers] need time to work and plan together to develop strategies and plans to adjust instruction to be responsive to students' learning styles. Teachers require meeting and planning time to engage in these activities" (Barrett, 2014, p.82).
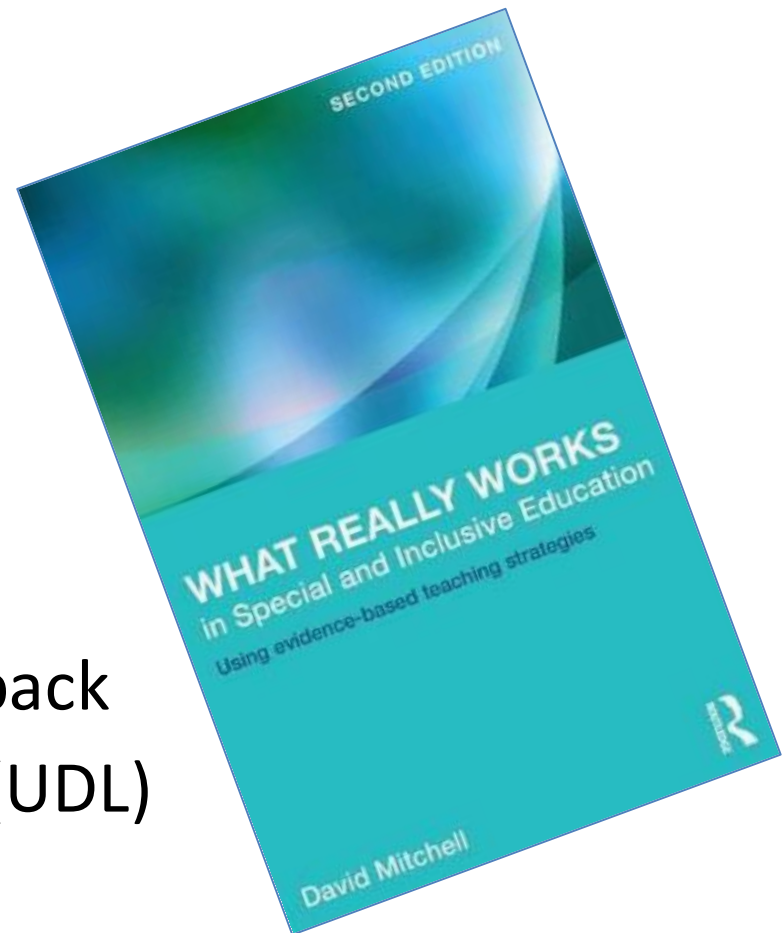
Quality teaching

- "Quality teaching is foundational to student success… the success & achievement of students, particularly students at risk, are directly linked to teacher quality… Teaching quality needs to be framed in terms of the ability of the teacher to meaningfully plan for, instruct, & assess all students" (Barrett, 2014, p.81).

- "Inclusive classrooms change the way in which they work so as to address the strengths & needs of students rather than subject content" (Curcic, 2009, as cited in Loreman, 2014, p.468).

- "…effective teachers conserved instructional time by preparing lessons that clearly communicated expectations that engage all students in learning… They established routines that enabled them to spend large amounts of instructional time with individuals & small groups" (Jordan, Glen, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009, p.264).

Use of evidence-based strategies

Mitchell (2014) describes a range of effective strategies for inclusive educational environments, including:

- Cooperative Learning

- Peer tutoring

- Memory strategies

- Review & practice activities

- Reciprocal teaching

- Direct instruction

- Formative assessment & feedback

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- Response to Intervention (RTI)

SECOND EDITION

WHAT REALLY WORKS
in Special and Inclusive Education
Using evidence-based teaching strategies

David Mitchell

So, we know...

Inclusive education & student-centred learning are COMPLEX & COMPLICATED... but there are some things that can make these processes more successful.

What makes a difference?

- A positive teacher attitude;

- A positive school culture & supportive leadership;

- Opportunity for focused teacher professional development & support;

- Opportunity & support for collaboration;

- Quality teaching, utilising evidence-based teaching & learning strategies.

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Thank you