

## Do We Practice What We Preach? The Teaching Practices of Inclusive Educators in Tertiary Settings

Andrea Reupert  
*Monash University*

Brian Hemmings and John Connors  
*Charles Sturt University*

In this study, the practices and views of lecturers who teach inclusive education to trainee primary school teachers are examined in relation to their own inclusive teaching practices as they pertain to working with students with a disability. This examination draws on interview data gleaned from nine university lecturers. These data provide important information about inclusive education practices in higher education institutions generally and, in particular, education faculties. The results of the data analysis indicate that even though all the lecturers self identify as inclusive educators and adopt various inclusive teaching and assessment practices, barriers exist that impede inclusive practice in tertiary settings. Recommendations for future research and training conclude the paper.

Although the number of students with a disability attending higher education institutions is increasing (Hadjidakou & Hartas, 2008), such students continue to face a range of barriers in accessing and participating in higher education courses (Hadjidakou & Hartas, 2008; Tinklin, Riddell, & Wilson, 2004). At the same time, there are lecturers within universities who teach inclusive education to trainee primary school teachers, a subject based on the premise of equal educational opportunities for all children irrespective of individual differences arising from ability, ethnicity, culture and religion (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009). This study will explore the practices of these lecturers and, in particular, investigate the assumption that such lecturers will be advocates for, and potential role models of, inclusive educational practices, with a specific focus on working with students with a disability. Potentially, these data provide valuable information about inclusive education practices in higher education institutions generally and education faculties particularly, with implications for the ongoing training of lecturers across faculties.

The prevalence of higher education students with a disability varies across countries, depending on the way that disability is assessed and/or identified. Fuller, Bradley, and Healey (2004) report that in the UK, 5% of undergraduates (26,000) self-assessed themselves as having an impairment in 2000/2001, but as there is no obligation for students to disclose, they estimate that the number is probably higher at 10%. Dyslexia was the most commonly reported impairment, followed by the 'unseen disabilities' such as epilepsy, diabetes, and asthma. In the USA, the National Council for Education Studies (1996) reported that in 1994 over 14.5 million students were enrolled in higher education

institutions with just over 10% of these (1.4 million) reported to have at least one disability (as cited in Stanley, 2000). At the same time, students with disabilities are under-represented in higher education. In Australia, it has been estimated that while 19% of the population has disabilities or impairments, no more than 2-3% of the higher education student body has a disability (Alsop, Flood, Wibberley, & Lawrence, 2000).

Students with a disability enrolling in higher education institutions are increasing in number as a consequence of several factors, one of which is public policy and legislation. In the UK, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA, 2001) stressed the importance of widening participation for students with disabilities (Konur, 2006), while in Australia, the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) (1992) makes it unlawful for any university to discriminate against people with disabilities, in terms of admission to and participation in tertiary courses. Other countries, including the USA and Israel, have legislation concerning the integration of students with disabilities into higher education (Fuller et al., 2004). However, achieving optimal outcomes for such students requires more than legislative change. For example, Tinklin and Hall (1999) found that the quality of higher education provision depends on the attitudes, experience, and awareness of disability among both staff and students and that such attitudinal perspectives are not necessarily dictated by legislation. Thus, lecturers are pivotal in determining the success or otherwise of tertiary students with a disability.

The access and adequate provision of education for students with disabilities is multifaceted, as it involves the availability of resources, training for academic and

support staff, effective referral processes, and emotional support for students (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008). Farmer, Riddick, and Sterling (2002) describe three ways in which students with disabilities might be supported, the first of which involves providing personal or individualised accommodations for them (for example, Braille services or modifying teaching materials). The second approach is organisational; this could include offering appropriate professional development programs for faculty staff. The third approach is political, referring to a commitment for the equality and entitlement of education for students with a disability. Overall, the better informed and supported that lecturers are about student disabilities, legislative obligations, and appropriate accommodations, the more likely it will be for students with a disability to achieve their full educational potential. There have been a number of guides written to support lecturing staff when teaching students with disabilities. These guides focus on teaching practice, curriculum, and field work requirements (see for example, Alsop et al., 2000; Doyle & Robson, 2002; Gravestock, 2001; Teachability, 2000). However, how lecturers might use (or not use) such guides, and what this means for their practice, has yet to be explored.

Despite these potential levels of support, numerous barriers exist for students with a disability in higher education institutions. These students identify a number of barriers, including learning in lectures (for example, having to take notes and listen simultaneously), a lack of understanding from lecturers, field work requirements, and confusion surrounding assessment expectations (Fuller, Bradley, Healey, & Hall, 2004). They also report problems in receiving support, even though some university personnel know of their disability. Confidentiality issues and poor communication between stakeholders were often the result of lecturers not knowing who among their student group had a disability. Across Scottish universities, Tinklin et al. (2004) found that assistance for students with a disability was provided at an individual but not an institutional level, involving mostly individual negotiations between students and staff. Hadjikakou and Hartas (2008) interviewed tutors at various Cypriot higher education institutions and found that support for students with disabilities was seen as an extra service that they provided and was not necessarily embedded in organisational practices. Cole and Cain (1996) revealed that social work lecturers report feeling overly burdened by the responsibility to accommodate students

with disabilities. Similarly, Leyser and colleagues (2000) found that many lecturers from the USA and Israel feel inadequate in their knowledge of disability resources and how to support students with disabilities. Fichten (1995) has argued that faculty attitude and practice can create obstacles for students with disabilities that are more disabling than the disability itself. Hence, it is important to provide faculty with advice and support when developing curricula and inclusive learning for students with a disability.

In this study we investigate the views, experiences and practices of faculty teaching inclusive education subjects to students training to be primary school teachers. Inclusive education subjects in teacher education programs are concerned with preparing trainee teachers to work effectively with school students, irrespective of their special learning needs, differences or disabilities (Moran, 2007). While the concept of 'inclusion' is complex, the basic principle of inclusion is a receptivity to and acceptance of diversity, underpinned by notions of equity and entitlement. In relation to education, regardless of the setting, inclusion can be defined as the provision of an appropriate educational experience to meet the needs of all students (Ashman & Elkins, 2005). Not only does inclusion necessitate the provision for students with diverse needs, but, as a philosophical attitude, inclusion signifies the identification and celebration of difference within institutional structures and teaching dynamics (Moran, 2007).

We would expect, though we need to reiterate that this is an assumption that this study aims to further explore, that lecturers who teach inclusive education would be advocates for and subsequent role models within tertiary settings for inclusive educational practice. At the same time however, we are also cognisant of the research that has examined the two very different contexts of schools and universities and in particular the difficulties for those who have worked in both. Murray and Male (2005) interviewed teachers who had been seconded from schools to work in education faculties. Seconded teachers are teachers selected from school or educational consultancy positions to work as a member of an educational faculty (Reupert & Wilkinson, in press). It was found that these seconded teachers drew on their 'first-order practitioner identity' and 'context' of the school setting whilst working with university settings and consequently experienced difficulties in meeting the demands of the 'second order context' of universities, which required a different set of pedagogical skills in

relation to the teaching of adults. Murray and Male (2005) conclude by pointing out that there is no simple transfer of practices from one setting to another. Nonetheless, as champions of inclusion and special needs students, we believe that lecturers who teach inclusive education will provide useful insights into inclusive education practice in university settings.

Accordingly, given the philosophical basis of inclusive education programs, we are assuming that inclusive tertiary educators would be advocates for students with a disability, regardless of their setting, as well as appropriate role models for inclusive practice in their workplace. Together with the more general estimates of higher education students who have a disability (reported earlier), it can be expected that tertiary educators working in education faculties will have experience of working with such students in tertiary settings. Finally, we also take note of the argument that:

The same kind of issues and challenges are often faced across an institution. All too frequently within and between HEIs [Higher Education Institutions],

Table 1  
Gender, Years of Tertiary Teaching Experience and  
Inclusive/Special Education Qualifications of Participants

Demographics	Number of Participants
Gender	
Male	4
Female	5
Years of tertiary teaching experience	
Less than five	1
Between five and ten years	3
Between 11 and 15 years	3
Between 16 and 20 years	0
More than 20 years	2
Qualifications obtained in inclusive or special education	
Bachelor	2
Graduate Certificate/Diploma	1
Masters	8
Doctorate	3

the silo 'mentality' means there is rarely effective sharing of simple and subtle solutions to common issues (Adams & Brown, 2006, p. 1 888).

Therefore, the experiences and views of inclusive educators provide potentially useful data for other lecturers across faculties.

### The Research Goal

The aim of the present study was to ascertain the inclusive educational practices of inclusive educators in various teacher education faculties across Australia. Through an analysis of interview data collected from inclusive educators, we wanted to investigate how tertiary inclusive educators model and demonstrate the principles of inclusiveness in their own teaching practices (if at all). Throughout this process, factors that hinder and support inclusive practices at a tertiary level will also be highlighted. Such information is useful when developing professional development activities for higher education staff and in identifying accommodations that might be provided, as well as support services and resources that can be accessed by lecturers when working with tertiary students with a disability.

### Method

#### Theoretical Framework

Within an interpretative research paradigm, a qualitative approach to data collection was employed as

a means of identifying participants' views and experiences of inclusive education in tertiary education settings. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for the negotiation of meaning between the interviewee and researcher. This is in accord with an approach recommended by Kvale (1996) when describing interview processes in qualitative research.

#### Recruitment and Participants

In 2008, participants were identified by Internet searching of all undergraduate primary teacher education faculties across Australia. In order to get a 'representative' sense of the inclusive educational practices across Australia, we sought to interview one lecturer from each of the eight states/territories across Australia. Most Australian states and territories have statutory bodies, called registration boards, which attempt to regulate the teaching profession (Ingvarson, Beavis, Kleinhenz, & Elliott, 2004). Hence, universities tend to work closely with their respective state or territory registration body. Given this territorial foci, we believed identifying representatives from each state and territory to be a valid sampling process. Once identified, potential participants were invited to participate in the study, via email. An information sheet and consent form was also forwarded. The total number of participants was nine, as two lecturers from one institution elected to be interviewed together about their course. Participants' gender, years of tertiary teaching experience, and inclusive or special education qualifications are reported in Table 1.

## Context of the Study

There are 39 universities across Australian and, according to O'Meara and Petzall (2008), there are close to one million students enrolled in the various undergraduate and postgraduate courses these universities offer. From the early 1990s, Australian teacher education pre-service courses such as a Bachelor of Teaching (3 years), Bachelor of Education (4 years), and Graduate Diploma of Education (1 year) have included a mandatory special education subject. This mandate was brought down by the heads of the respective Australian state/territory education departments. Initially, the main issue addressed in these special education subjects was one of *integration*, a term commonly defined as the process of moving students to a regular classroom setting or to a less restrictive (or segregated) environment (see for example, Ashman & Elkins, 2005). During the past decade, the mandatory special education subject in Australia for trainee teachers has taken another form. This change has been the result of a philosophical shift embracing *inclusion*, and a greater recognition of the principle of social justice that underpins it (Ashman & Elkins, 2005). Consequently, the traditional special education subject, which gave prominence to the study of specific disabilities, has been superseded and replaced by a subject often using the terms inclusion or inclusive education in its title. This new subject moves beyond educational issues to wider societal issues by embracing not only diversity in ability but diversity in cultural, racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Foreman, 2005). It is within this context that the lecturers are interviewed for the present study.

## Interviews

Individual, one-hour interviews were conducted over the telephone with semi-structured questions based on the research aims. This allowed the participants the opportunity for reflection and discussion. Sample questions included:

- What are the principles which provide the framework for how you teach in a tertiary setting?
- How do you make decisions about pedagogy? Curriculum? Assessment?

- How do you ascertain student teacher learning needs, if at all?
- How do you accommodate student diversity in your own teaching, if at all?
- What are the barriers, if any, that impede inclusive teaching practices at a tertiary level?
- What are the supports, if any, that encourage inclusive teaching practices at a tertiary level?

Interviews were audio taped (with consent) and then transcribed for data analysis. The Human Ethics Committee at Charles Sturt University provided ethics approval for the study.

## Data Analysis

After the interviews were transcribed, member checks were sought, whereby interview participants were invited to review the original transcripts with an invitation to delete and/or change any material that they believed to be potentially identifying and/or incorrect and to add any information they believed was worthwhile (Merriam, 1998). Then, for each individual interview transcript, the first two authors independently used an open coding system of analysis, attaching labels to lines or paragraphs of data, and then describing the data at a concrete level (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Focused coding followed, which moved the coding process to a conceptual level, from which categories were created and named (Constas, 1992). The first two researchers then met to reach a consensus for each of the transcripts (inter-rater reliability: Liamputtong & Douglas, 2005). Rather than coming up with an index of agreement, consensus was reached through discussion between the two researchers, who at this point constantly referred back to the transcripts. The first researcher then conducted a cross-interview analysis of all transcripts, and through a constant comparative method, the relationships and patterns across categories were identified for the final themes reported in this paper.

## Results

The following themes and related sub-themes were identified: self-image as an inclusive educator; being inclusive in tertiary settings (identifying student diversity/teaching practices/assessment practices); barriers to inclusive teaching; and supports for inclusive teaching.

### Self-image as an Inclusive Educator

All the lecturers interviewed unreservedly identified themselves as inclusive educators within a tertiary setting. Sometimes, this self-identification came as a result of their teaching and/or research area, but most commonly it arose because of their ideals and general philosophy regarding student diversity and inclusivity, regardless of the educational context. For example, one participant reported, "I take a strong social justice perspective." More specifically, lecturers regarded themselves as role models for the trainee teachers whom they taught in terms of how to be an inclusive educator:

If we are teaching students about cooperative learning, we'll model cooperative learning in the way that we conduct the workshop... so there's this kind of resonant embedding in the process of teaching that means *we model what we walk* or try to do that as best we can in the way we deliver the experience [emphasis added].

[We are] trying very hard to practise what we preach.

For several lecturers, being a role model for inclusive teaching, meant that when teaching other subjects besides inclusive education to tertiary students, they used the same principles and strategies:

I think the principles of universal design, which have become a contemporary way of looking at differentiation, suggests that those pedagogies that work to help differentiate and structure for kids with differences also work very successfully for all learners, so the principles that we've adopted and designed... we use if we're teaching elsewhere.

Such a statement also indicates this participant's belief that the principles of differentiation can be generalised across schools and tertiary settings.

### Being Inclusive In Tertiary Settings

A number of inclusive teaching approaches were identified, including identifying student needs and specific teaching and assessment practices.

**Identifying student diversity and needs.** All lecturers acknowledged the diversity amongst their students. For example:

I have students who are recovering from post traumatic stress disorder, I have mature aged students, I have a student with obsessive compulsive disorder, I have students with Aspergers, I have students who are just overloaded, I've got students who are substance abusers ...it's a real conglomerate, and people tend to look at our students and think they're homogenous, but they're far from it.

At the same time, the manner in which students with special or additional needs were identified varied, with some describing a formal university system of registering students:

If they're of a level where they need specialist support from across the University, they would be registered as having special consideration.

It needs to be noted, however, that this same lecturer did not articulate how she might become aware of such students. Another participant indicated the formal university referral system, but pointed out that students themselves needed to initiate this process:

In this university, students who have specific learning needs are able to take themselves to a learning support unit from which they gain a level of assessment and recommendation for accommodations that might be necessary.

The pathway from support services to the lecturer is highlighted in the following quote:

[If a student has special needs they would go] through our learning support centre, which provides support for students with disabilities and medical and health needs, so they can actually have a formal document made up for them, and that's done elsewhere, and *they can bring that to me*, and that just outlines the sort of modifications they might need to help them get through the course [emphasis added].

Some lecturers reported that students need to self-identify:

I would be very up front from the beginning and say [to students] if they do have any issues they need to come and see me about the way the material is presented.

If students have particular needs, if students have particular issues, they would come and see the unit coordinator or tutor.

Well we do [try to be accommodating to student needs, but] we can only be guided by what students tell us.

I'm really dependent on students coming to see me if they have particular needs, because with such large numbers their difficulties might not be apparent early on.

One lecturer described encouraging this self-disclosure via the subject material and her role as the 'special ed. person':

Whenever I do the learning difficulties and disabilities lecture in the generic unit, invariably four or five of [the students] will come up and tell me they have anything from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to learning difficulties and learning disabilities. I support a lot of students as the third year coordinator because they know that I'm the, if you like, special ed. person.

One lecturer used self-disclosure to encourage students to disclose their learning needs:

One of the first things I do when I'm teaching is disclose my own hidden disabilities and talk about them, which as in past years it's depended on the group; this year I've had a number of students come and actually disclose their own hidden disabilities and talk about their learning needs...

Another stressed the importance of lecturers and tutors needing to be aware:

I think it really relies on the tutor to have a really good look at... and to be sort of aware as best as they can, to pick up on any distress or additional stress that students may be going through, for a whole range of reasons.

However, this same lecturer continued by stating:

You may not be quite aware that there are some difficulties that individual students may be experiencing; you can try and double guess perhaps, but I think it's the lack of awareness [that is] maybe quite a barrier, and it's not because people aren't aware, or tutors and lecturers aren't aware, but it just seems to be the nature that it's very difficult to determine any [needs].

While there were two lecturers who described the university system of identifying students with additional needs, nonetheless, it was the responsibility of the student to self-identify and request assistance from lecturing staff.

**Teaching practices.** On the whole, for the lecturers interviewed in this study, inclusive education teaching in tertiary settings meant applied, interactive and authentic learning tasks or in the words of one interviewee "hands on learning", with the following quotes as select examples of such approaches:

Students have to integrate theory and practice, but in a way that requires them to produce [a] product that ultimately is very much connected to the practice that they're involved in. So one example of that... [in] workshops [we] have the students conduct a real time meeting and then evaluate it.

I give them field based tasks where they go out with a camera and find examples of access issues around the University, and then we relate [these] to the Disability and Discrimination Act.

Some mention was made of innovative teaching practices. For instance, one lecturer described using "self-questioning, advance organisation [and] peer mediation" in his teaching. Another lecturer described accessing students' prior experiences:

[Students] would bring to the tutorial their understandings and experience and knowledge from those prior backgrounds, and then [I would] use that to engage in discussion about the material and content of the unit.

However, teaching was primarily focused around the lecture and workshop or tutorial. While many highlighted the shortcomings associated with providing lectures, these were often employed as a way of

delivering information to large student cohorts. At the same time, many lecturers attempted to do this in an interactive, interesting and engaging manner.

Unfortunately we have lectures still which I loathe, but a number of us are focusing our projects on affective learning, so we're looking at ways of stimulating the feeling aspect of what they're learning, so I actually have a lot of activities that match into that.

When addressing student diversity, a number of teaching accommodations were identified, in particular providing students with more time. For example, one lecturer reported that using the internet or other forms of mediated online teaching was not that useful for students who were struggling, and instead indicated that:

Offering time was a better time efficient model of giving support than trying to deliver things online for them, when students don't find online learning all that simple really.

Others described providing information in multiple mediums, such as handouts of lectures, mind maps and diagrams. Similarly, various resources were utilised, including DVDs, case studies, guest speakers (including people with a disability to discuss their school experiences) and print (text book and journal articles).

**Assessment practices.** Similar to the teaching practices identified by lecturers, assessment was applied and authentic. Many lecturers described providing choices about which assessment topics and/or avenues students might use, as can be seen from the following two excerpts:

I try and create a great deal of flexibility so we have different sorts of tasks; one is the sort of written task that's fairly standard. We have presentation tasks that our students present in all sorts of different ways, and we encourage them to be extremely creative, so some people go off and develop videos, some people go off and develop teaching materials, some people run a lesson, some take us out and make us actually experience disability, so we encourage them in their own teaching and learning styles to develop that.... so

they have free reign on how they follow up on it to express their response to those sort of processes.

There's quite a lot of flexibility in terms of how they demonstrate their understanding: there is an opportunity to respond in a verbal presentation, there are written options, there's also an opportunity to present information visually in a kind of poster.

One lecturer did note, however, that:

Because of the laws of the University I'm required to give them an exam, so they do a multiple choice exam which is based on the text book and it's an open book exam.

Accommodations for assessment were made in terms of flexible deadlines:

My deadlines for example are extremely flexible... I tend to say, look if there are lecturers who are less flexible, please do their assignments first, because I figure that way we're going to have less chance of losing our students.

Lecturers also provided assessment support to students by looking at draft pieces of work and spending more time discussing assessment requirements with individual students. Capturing some of the themes as well as barriers reported here, the teaching and assessment practices of the lecturers can be best summarised in the words of one participant who stated:

We try and practise what we preach, and we try to be fairly accommodating for different student needs, but obviously there are certain requirements of the course, and students need to fulfil those requirements in order to pass it, and so even though we are flexible to some degree, nevertheless we don't compromise the integrity of the course by making too many changes.

### **Barriers to Inclusive Practice**

Lecturers identified a number of barriers to teaching inclusively in tertiary settings. These barriers



tended to involve university guidelines regarding assessment and teaching:

All our assessment has to go through a curriculum like many universities... We used to send them out to do a case study in real life, but ... the University decided that they wanted us to prove that they weren't copying from each other... [instead] the University thought it would be nice to have exams.

I'm always getting castigated that my students have high marks, but I think if we teach them well enough they all should. I think a ... principle of mark allocation is really it doesn't represent whether it's good teaching as far as I'm concerned, we don't do that in our classrooms in primary schools; for example, kids who do well get their marks. [Many universities in Australia have policies on the allocations for grades, and scaling may occur to meet these policies. This means that a certain percentage of students may achieve high marks, regardless of a student's raw mark.]

Similarly, another lecturer made the comment that university systems generally are not adaptable to inclusive practice:

I think the biggest barrier... would be in the extent to which the University - while it would probably be very supportive of everything I've said - is actually in its organisational design not ready and prepared for this kind of work.

Teacher accreditation bodies were another issue for some:

Actually the whole sort of framework for that unit has kind of been laid down by what the [teacher accreditation body wants]... so if I change that very dramatically, they won't accredit it, so that will stay as it is.

Physical layout and accessibility were other barriers impeding inclusive practice:

It's always a challenge particularly when you're working in lecture theatres, and first of all not physically accessible.

A large student cohort was another issue, with one lecturer pointing out that "it's very hard to differentiate learning in a big lecture," and another reported:

It's very difficult with big groups to build a true social cohesion. I despair of teaching... I didn't want to teach any more groups of 30, it's wrong it's flat out wrong to teach 30 people in a tutorial.

Other lecturers' understanding of disability or lack thereof was a hindrance:

I find we have lecturers who are still well behind the times in their understanding of disability... [their] understanding of the nature of disability is a real issue.

One lecturer more bluntly stated that "the understanding of my university is the biggest barrier" to teaching inclusively. Even though barriers were identified, many participants described creative ways of working around university regulations, for example, delivering lectures but not making attendance at lectures compulsory, and providing many ways of assessing students within the guidelines established by the University.

### **Supports for Inclusive Teaching**

Personnel that provided support included library staff, the unit convenor, colleagues, and teachers coming in from schools. These personnel were useful when developing and accessing resources including electronic media, assessment, moderating grades, ideas for tutorial activities, and unit design. Problems with existing sources of support include the lack of specialised professional development:

I don't know about professional development in the area because it's available on a broad basis but not terribly useful.

In like manner, another lecturer reported:

My actual support base is very limited if you look within [the] context of the University.... So I think I've had to be proactive and find out for myself.

Lecturers were clear that support for inclusive practice was required at all university levels:

I think it's important to ensure that there is some element of leadership given, you know, from the Dean, even right through to the Vice Chancellor statements, you know, from time to time; we've got all the equity policies at the University, like most universities have, but, it really needs to be supported from people on high, within the academic structure of the University, to give it some credence and some power.

While current sources of support for lecturers centered on other staff, lecturers also saw the need for support from university leaders when supporting students with a disability.

### Discussion

All the lecturers in this study identified themselves as inclusive educators and, in particular, emphasised they were role models of inclusive teaching. They also acknowledged the diversity of needs within the student group and the need to vary and accommodate their teaching and assessment practices. Strikingly, one participant reported that she tries "very hard" to practise what she preaches, indicating that, while the will is there, inclusive teaching is not always possible. Many lecturers, for instance, describe using lectures and exams but highlight the shortcomings of both approaches as effective teaching strategies generally, and particularly for students with a disability. This finding is consistent with the work of Fuller et al. (2004), who reported that 44% of the students they surveyed felt that learning in lectures was a major barrier to learning, and 30% of the same students identified examinations to be another barrier.

Even though two lecturers described a formal university process of identifying students with special needs, the typical practice described by the lecturers interviewed in this study was for students to self-identify and request assistance and support from lecturers themselves. One of the students surveyed by Fuller et al. (2004, p. 313) reported that "I did not like the fact that it was all up to me to make arrangements [for learning support] as ... I had enough on my plate." These researchers point out that there was no mechanism within their institution for information regarding a student's disability status to be relayed routinely to tutors. It is difficult to ascertain from the data whether there are mechanisms within the various Australian universities for identifying students with

additional needs, though the lecturers here did not, overall, describe such a process. It would appear that while issues regarding confidentiality need to be considered, there also exists a requirement for a sensitive and mutually agreed upon process by which students with a disability are identified, and then supported, within higher education institutions.

While some innovative and inclusive teaching practices such as self-questioning, advanced organisation, and peer mediation were described, on the whole, the lecturers interviewed described inclusive practice in terms of 'hands-on' or applied teaching and assessment strategies. There is some tentative support for experiential teaching and learning (Smith, 2002), though courses with a strong element of practice and applied information, such as teaching, are perhaps more appropriately placed to use this teaching strategy than other, more theoretically-oriented courses. In addition, while typically highlighted as an inclusive teaching strategy, it is not the only strategy or teaching tool that tertiary educators should be employing when working with students with a disability (Alsop et al., 2000; Doyle & Robson, 2002; Gravestock, 2001). Indeed, there would be some students with mobility issues for whom experiential 'hands-on' strategies would be inappropriate.

It was evident that many of the lecturers attempted to individualise their instruction and tailor assessments to meet the needs of individual students with additional leaning needs. At the same time, such accommodations appeared to be provided on a one-to-one basis, negotiated between the lecturer and the student, and were not embedded in university frameworks. This result is similar to other studies of lecturers in social work faculties (Cole & Cain, 1996) and lecturers in Cyprus (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008), the USA, and Israel (Leyser et al., 2000). Such arrangements appeared to be provided on an ad hoc basis rather than proactively or in a systematic manner.

In terms of assessment practices, the lecturers interviewed in this study describe providing assignment alternatives (e.g., written assignment or an oral presentation) as well as accommodations, principally in terms of providing more time. Such strategies have caused much debate throughout higher education (Sharp & Earle, 2000; Stowell, 2004; Zuriff, 2000). Sharp and Earle (2000), for example, argue that alternative forms of assessment constitute a violation of the requirement that assessment should be valid tests of specified competencies. On the other hand, Stowell

(2004) argues that many traditional assessments prevent students with a disability from being assessed in the same way as their non-disabled counterparts. At the very root of such arguments is the often perceived tension between the maintenance of academic standards and the policies of equity and subsequent widening participation of students with a disability in higher education. The participants in this study also highlighted the need to maintain the 'integrity of the course' and follow university guidelines. When one participant tried to challenge the moderating system that is in place in many Australian universities, he was, in his own words, 'castigated.' Consequently, rather than challenging the status quo or instituting systemic change, participants here provided individual support to students who they considered required additional support.

It is apparent from most interviews that there is a strong pressure to conform to the dictates of outside authorities as well as the University. Within the University, many felt obliged to use lectures and examinations, even though many lecturers reported their frustrations in having to teach this way. Thus, while lecturers want to 'practise what they preach' and report various creative ways of working around these requirements, these same barriers also impede inclusive practice. Other barriers identified by lecturers concerned the physical layout of the University and large student groups. Additionally, the attitudes of lecturers and others within their respective universities constituted a major obstacle.

At the same time, however, there appears to be a tension between lecturers' self-perceptions as inclusive educators and their actual practice. While many are strong advocates for inclusive education, their practices demonstrate real shortcomings in terms of inclusive educational practice, not all of which can, we believe, be accounted for by institutional barriers. For example, when asked what inclusive educational supports they used in their teaching, lecturers provided very little information about the resources and support services available at a university level such as assistive technologies, interpreters and scribes, and the University's Disability Officer or Centre, resources which typically exist in each Australian university. Staff turnover in academic and support positions could be the reason why information is not consistently relayed between stakeholders. Another reason could be a lack of time for lecturers to collaborate with disability supports. Overall, however, an acute lack of insight

regarding the broader dimensions of inclusive practice is evident from the interviews conducted. What is apparent is that the lecturers tend to be narrowly focused on their dealings with students in an ad hoc, individualistic manner. This is particularly concerning given that these lecturers were approached as potential role models for inclusive practice within higher education institutions and thus highlights the need for specialised training and support for university staff in disability and access issues. Raising the awareness of staff about what support is currently available and how university supports might be accessed and most effectively employed would need to be incorporated into such training programs.

An obvious limitation of the current study is that the views and practices of the interviewees could not be verified. In order to remedy this shortcoming, future studies could observe the practices of lecturers and gather data from their respective students as a triangulation exercise. The importance of the lecturer's attitude has been highlighted in this study, though it demonstrates at the same time that having the 'will' does not always translate into inclusive educational practice. As disability legislation is transforming our student cohorts, universities need to respond in proactive and strategic ways that not only focus on broader institutional barriers and requirements (i.e., being flexible around the way information is delivered and students are assessed) but also work with individual lecturer attitudes and practices. As disability per se does not appear to play a significant role in predicting student attainment (Richardson, 2009), it is essential to sensitise institutions, faculties, and individual lecturers to the barriers that impede inclusive teaching practices and to highlight the practices across all levels that best accommodate the needs of all students

## References

- Adams, M., & Brown, S. (Eds.). (2006). *Towards inclusive learning in higher education*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Alsop, L., Flood, M., Wibberley, G., & Lawrence, A. (2000). *Inclusive practices for students with disabilities: A guide of academic staff*. Sydney, AU: University of New South Wales.
- Anfara, V. A., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher*, 31(7), 28-38.

- Ashman, A., & Elkins, J. (2005). *Educating children with diverse abilities* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education Australia.
- Cole, B. S., & Cain, M. (1996). Social work students with disabilities: A proactive approach to accommodation. *Journal of Social Work Education, 32*(3), 339-349.
- Constas, M. A. (1992). Qualitative analysis as a public event: The documentation of category development procedures. *American Educational Research Journal, 29*(2), 253-266.
- Doyle, C., & Robson, K. (2002). *Accessible curricula: Good practice for all*. Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Institute Cardiff Press.
- Farmer, M., Riddick, B., & Sterling, C. (2002). *Dyslexia and inclusion: Assessment and support in higher education*. London, UK: Whurr Publishers.
- Fichten, C. S. (1995). Paradigms, partnerships, and the next generation of movers and shakers: College students with disabilities. *Canadian Journal of Rehabilitation, 9*(1), 3-16.
- Foreman, P. (2005). Disability and inclusion: Concepts and principles. In P. Foreman (Ed.), *Inclusion in action* (pp. 2-34). Southbank, UK: Thomson.
- Fuller, M., Bradley, A. & Healey, M. (2004). Incorporating disabled students within an inclusive higher education environment. *Disability and Society, 19*(5), 455-468.
- Fuller, M., Bradley, A., Healey, M., & Hall, T. (2004). Barriers to learning: A systematic study of the experience of disabled students in one university. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(3), 303-318.
- Gravestock, P. (2001). *Learning support for disabled students undertaking fieldwork and related activities*. Geography discipline network, University of Gloucestershire.
- Hadjikakou, K., & Hartas, D. (2008). Higher education provision for students with disabilities in Cyprus. *Higher Education, 55*(1), 103-119.
- Ingvarson, L., Beavis, A., Kleinhenz, E., & Elliott, A. (2004). *Pre-service teacher education in Australia: A mapping study of selection processes, course structure and content, and accreditation processes*. Melbourne, AU: MCEETYA Taskforce on Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership.
- Konur, O. (2006). Teaching disabled students in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 11*(3), 351-363.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Leysner, Y., Vogel, S., Wyland, S., Brulle, A., Sharoni, V., & Vogel, A. (2000). Students with disabilities in higher education: Perspectives of American and Israeli faculty members. *International Education, 29*(2), 47-67.
- Liamputtong, P., & Douglas, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Melbourne, UK.: Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moran, A. (2007). Can competence or standards model facilitate an inclusive approach to teacher education? *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(1), 1-17.
- Murray, J., & Male, T. (2005). Becoming a teacher educator: Evidence from the field. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(2), 125-142.
- O'Meara, B., & Petzall, S. (2008). What do we know about the chancellors of Australian universities? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 30*(2), 187-199.
- Reupert, A., & Wilkinson, J. (in press). "A whole new language, a whole new world": Seconded teachers' experiences at an educational faculty. *Alberta Journal for Educational Research*.
- Richardson, J. (2009). The academic attainment of students with disabilities in UK higher education. *Studies in Higher Education, 34*(2), 123-137.
- Sharp, K., & Earle, S. (2000). Assessment, disability and the problem of compensation. *Assessment & Evaluation, 25*(2), 191-199.
- Smith, J. (2002). Learning styles: Fashion fad or lever for change? The application of learning style theory to inclusive curriculum delivery. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 39*(1), 63-70.
- Stanley, P. (2000). Students with disabilities in higher education: A review of the literature. *College Student Journal, 34*(2), 200-211.
- Stowell, M. (2004). Equity, justice and standards: Assessment decision making in higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 29*(4), 495-510.

- Symeonidou, S., & Phtiaka, H. (2009). Using teachers' prior knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs to develop in-service teacher education courses for inclusion. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(4), 543-550.
- Teachability (2000). *Creating an accessible curriculum for students with disabilities*. Glasgow, UK: University of Strathclyde.
- Tinklin, T., & Hall, J. (1999). Getting round obstacles: Disabled students' experiences in higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher Education, 24*(2), 183-194.
- Tinklin, T., Riddell, S., & Wilson, A. (2004). Policy and provision for disabled students in higher education in Scotland and England: The current state of play. *Studies in Higher Education, 29*(5), 637-657.
- Vogel, S. Leyser, Y., Wyland, S., & Brulle, A. (1999). Students with learning disabilities in higher education: Faculty attitudes and practices. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 14*(3), 173-186.
- Zuriff, G.E. (2000). Extra examination time for students with learning difficulties: An examination of the maximum potential thesis. *Applied Measurement in Education, 13*(1), 99-117.

---

ANDREA REUPERT is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Clayton, Australia. Andrea has worked in university settings for over ten years, teaching educational and counseling psychology. Her primary research area is focused on families where a parent has a mental illness.

BRIAN HEMMINGGS is currently a Senior Lecturer in Education at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga campus, Australia. Brian has held a number of key posts at Charles Sturt University, including Head of School and Sub-Dean (Quality Assurance). His main research interests focus on those factors that affect academic achievement.

JOHN CONNORS is an adjunct lecturer in the School of Psychology at Charles Sturt University, Australia. For over thirty years, he has taught in a range of areas in psychology. His recent publications have been mainly in the fields of social psychology and health psychology.