Higher Education and Inherent Requirements: Beyond Inherency to Coherency

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Abstract

This paper examines how inherency, established in statements universities produce asserting the core abilities necessary to enter and qualify for their degrees, connects with employment in accredited professions, creating barriers for people with disabilities and related conditions. There is no consistent definition of inherent requirements (IRs) across higher education internationally. To assist the ongoing development of IRs, our discussion is set out across three parts. We start by reviewing the origins of IRs highlighting an inconsistency in form and content across the sector. We then provide an analysis of two IR statements from actual institutions noting how they position disability, ability, and the competencies deemed inherent to teaching and learning. Finally, we examine areas where governance and policy, teaching and learning, and employability, can potentially change how IRs are deployed in future practice. Our goal is to shift academic and work-related requirements beyond inherent possessive limitations to coherent performative prospects.

Keywords

inherent requirements – higher education – disclosure – employability

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine how inherency, as established in statements universities produce asserting the core abilities necessary to enter and qualify for their degrees, connects with employment in accredited professions, creating barriers for people with disabilities and related conditions. There is no consistent definition of inherent requirements (IRs) across university sectors internationally (Brett et al. 2016; Johnston et al. 2016: 2), including Australia, which provides this discussion's chief example. Although the term can be used to infer a legally mandated set of minimum requirements students must possess if they are to gain admission to and graduate from a course, the actual status of these statements remains unclear. In Australia, IRs differ across the university sector, across courses at different universities (e.g., education degrees) and across different courses in the same university (e.g., education and nursing). On one level this arrangement is hardly surprising. The skills needed to become a teacher are different to those needed to become a nurse and so the IRs of these courses might be expected to be different.

Significant to the analysis offered in this paper is the theoretical framework, resourced with concepts from critical disability studies and critical psychology, which together give emphasis to inclusive education as a processual, contingent, relational, and contextual production to which IRs contribute (Corcoran, Whitburn & Knight, 2022). While critical disability studies have developed varied analytical threads (Goodley et al. 2019), our interest in this paper turns to how ableism persists through institutional practices and are evidenced in IRs i.e., how ability is dependent on a tacit yet pre-conceived notion of ability. Hence, ableism is mobilised as what Allan (2003) interrogates as 'fitness to teach', which is defined in very narrow and ability-centric ways, excluding people living with disabilities from teacher education while paradoxically espousing inclusive principles. With respect to critical psychology, the forthcoming discussion provides a means to reconsidering how certain attitudes, so often targeted as a key area requiring change for inclusion to occur, are permitted to be understood. In inviting orientations to prospective, relational, and performative teaching and learning enactments, critical psychology contributes to knowing difference differently. Together, this conceptual framework emphasises collective potential to reframe the ability to teach. As an interdisciplinary collaboration, in attending to coherency over inherency, critical disability studies and critical psychology can assist higher education institutions to better their commitment to sustaining inclusive communities.

A Potted History of IRs

In 2000, four Western Australian universities collaboratively published a report entitled *Guidelines and Procedures to assist Universities to Examine the Inherent Requirements of their Courses* (*When accommodating students with disabilities and / medical conditions*) *Volume 1* (Watts et al. 2000). The first recommendation of the report was for a second volume of the report to be written entitled *Guidelines to Determine the Essential Requirements of University Units/Subjects* (*Part 1*) *and Procedures to Provide Reasonable Accommodations for Students with Disabilities and/or Medical Conditions* (*Part 2*). Over twenty years later, the second volume remains unpublished. To assist the progress and development of IRs in higher education, our discussion addresses the following problems in relation to their use within the tertiary sector:

– A lack of consistent definition of IRs across tertiary providers in both form and content
– Origins of IRs in workplace legislation
– IRs and equitable access to students with disabilities and related conditions

In the second section we undertake an analysis of two IR statements from actual institutions (referred to as Dainton University and Bojak University to maintain anonymity), noting how they position disability, ability, and the competencies deemed inherent to teaching and learning. This section draws specifically on the concept of ableism in teacher education to consider alternative ways for universities to develop their programs of study and IR statements. Carrying this forward, the final section examines three areas where reorientations in higher education governance and policy, learning and teaching, and employability, can potentially change how IRs are deployed in future higher education practice. Our goal is to shift notions of academic and work-related requirements beyond inherent possessive limitations to coherent performative prospects.

Inconsistent Definitions of Inherent Requirement Statements

Form & Content

The promise of IRs is that they have 'the potential to empower students to make informed decisions about their capacity for success in a course and to provide guidance for university staff in their support and management of students' (Sharplin et al. 2016: 225). Although many tertiary institutions draft their own IRs, they have not used a consistent approach in either form, content or in how they require their various courses to develop such statements. While all categories of Australian universities were equally likely to have IRs, overall

only around half were found to have such statements associated with their courses (Brett et al. 2016). Despite audits finding such statements increasingly common in the tertiary sector, issues of consistency, form and content remain.

Some universities have begun 'the use of IR statements, in conjunction with illustrative vignettes' or statements being written according to a set structure of 'domains and sub-domains' (University of Western Australia, n.d.). Consequently, there has been a move towards universities providing descriptions on the nature of IRs in their courses and attributes that students must demonstrate to prove they meet these requirements. Attributes needing to be demonstrated, either upon commencement or at completion of a degree, are usually defined using categories of impairment. As a result, categories structure the requirements themselves. While differences exist in the categories covered in course IRs, Brett et al. (2016: 24) found that in order of frequency of occurrence, the most likely categories requiring compliance were verbal and non-verbal skills, behavioural stability, cognition, written skills, motor skills, ethical behaviour, and literacy. That is, the statements focused upon the attributes of students, rather than the tasks they might be required to perform in their course (Allen 2014). Subsequently, what is positioned as 'inherent' are the presumed deficits of students, rather than the requirements of the course.

Such an imposition of barriers to participation is heightened by what Brett et al. (2016: 36) refer to as the warning tone adopted in these statements, with phrases such as 'students must possess' or 'adjustments must not compromise'. An example is provided by the IR statement for the *Bachelor of Social Work* at the authors' institution, Deakin University: 'Inherent requirements are those skills, values, and behaviours which students must demonstrate in order to complete a program of study. Although IRs are non-negotiable, there may be a range of ways in which these can be demonstrated.' (Deakin n.d.). While this statement ends by stating the possibility of demonstrating these non-negotiable skills in a variety of ways, it is not clear how students applying for a degree will understand how such non-negotiable requirements might otherwise be demonstrated. Brett et al. (2016: 26) stress, '[t]here are no references to complaints or grievance policies or procedures in the inherent requirement statements'. The implication for potential students is that if they do not meet the strictures detailed in these statements, presented as mandated minimum requirements, it is likely their application to enrol would be rejected. As such, by not documenting how students might learn of alternative pathways into and through a course of study, or even the existence of potential alternative pathways through the course, or indeed of the requirement for universities to provide reasonable adjustments for students to meet the demands of the course, potential students are likely to self-exclude by not enrolling.

Connection to Workplace

IRs originated in industrial law. As recognised by Dickson and Duffy (2019: 134) referring to Australia's *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA): 'The term "Inherent Requirement" is copied over to the education context from the work context where employers are permitted by the DDA to discriminate against a person with a disability if he or she cannot perform the inherent requirements of a particular job'. That is, while it is otherwise illegal to discriminate against someone due to an attribute they live with, this is not considered legally discriminatory if that attribute makes it impossible for them, as a potential or actual employee, to meet the IRs of the job. This origin of the concept is problematic for many reasons, not least for the initial focus upon finding reasons for the exclusion of people with disabilities.

In relation to tertiary institutions, IRs continue to be more likely in degree courses with a clear link to a vocational pathway, that is, degrees that are a necessary prerequisite for entry to a profession (such as teaching, nursing, or law). Such degrees generally also require various forms of in-field professional practice to be undertaken as part of qualification requirements. This results in an imprecise connection being formed between the university, as the qualifying agent for their own degree course, and an external professional association linked to the employing profession that ultimately decides if a suitably qualified person can ultimately join the profession (Watts et al. 2000: 10). In an empirical study on the implementation of IRs at the point of professional learning in initial teacher education, Sharplin et al. (2016: 227) stress the intent of their project was 'to reveal insights into what stakeholders perceive to be the IRs of a professional practice and to generate illustrative vignettes to enable better judgments about those IRs within pre-service teacher education'. Such requirements place university courses in the middle of intersecting and competing objectives wherein education providers must try to take into consideration legislation requiring equitable access to courses, whilst pre-empting the needs of professional accreditation bodies, the ultimate employers of most graduates (Watts et al. 2000).

Concerningly, '[m]any university staff are unaware that the requirements for employment and education are different and believe people with disabilities can be excluded if they might not be able to gain professional registration' (Brett et al. 2016: 15). Nevertheless, vocationally oriented degrees present prospective students with the expectation that they will, upon completing their degree, have cleared a major hurdle towards gaining potential employment within the field. That is, that 'the role that universities may have unwittingly assumed as the "gatekeepers" for the professions' (Watts et al. 2000: 13). This check must be balanced against the rights of students to enrol in subjects

they are otherwise qualified for. According to the *Acting Against Disability Discrimination* (Attorney-General's Department 1994) manual: 'Educational authorities are not able to pre-empt the decisions of a qualifying body' in pre-determining the likelihood of a particular student gaining employment if they were to graduate from their course. However, if potential students self-exclude due to their interpretation of the IRs, such pre-emption remains hidden, since no tangible relationship has yet been formed between the university and potential student.

While some university degree courses are more aligned to a vocational pathway than others, not everyone who completes an education degree, for instance, goes on to become a teacher. Although the data are not clear, with no recognised method of assessing the proportion of qualified graduates who ultimately become teachers, '[t]he Victorian Supply and Demand Report suggests that up to 20% of Victorian ITE graduates do not apply for provisional registration in Victoria' (Weldon 2018: 68). Similarly, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) estimate the rate of attrition of teachers in their first five years is somewhere between 8% and 50% (2016: 8). That is, although gaining a qualification from a university in ITE would seem to imply an ambition to become a teacher, a significant proportion of people holding this qualification either never go on to teach or leave early in their career. Perhaps only two-thirds of those with a teaching qualification ultimately use it in careers within the classroom teaching (Weldon 2018).

Brett et al. (2016: 13) state that '[i]nherent requirement statements have developed contemporaneously with Australia's higher education regulatory and standards framework, but not in an aligned way'. And further, that '[o]ne question arising from the AQF [Australian Qualification Framework] is whether inherent requirement statements in Australian university handbooks should be assessed partly according to whether they promote or stymie a student's progress into the labour market in their chosen professional fields' (13). To restrict access to such qualification based on a presumption that someone will never work as a teacher ignores the fact that an initial teaching qualification can provide access to many other occupations related to, but significantly different from, classroom teaching, including the training industry, educational research, or government educational policy development.

Connection to Disability

The link between IRs and students with disabilities (SWDs) may often be implied or remain unstated, but it remains the major concern for these statements. Such a connection brings to the fore the relationship between IRs and a university's requirements to provide people with disabilities and related

conditions reasonable adjustments to allow access to and successful completion of their courses. Since universities often require SWD s to prove they have a disability before reasonable adjustments will be made, rather than seeking to provide universal access as a design feature of their courses, there is a necessary connection between IR s and a university's policies regarding reasonable adjustments and inclusive education. This means that almost invariably the initial step towards obtaining a reasonable adjustment is a student's willingness to disclose their disability. While some authors see this disclosure as being in the best interests of the students, where 'well informed students understand how disclosure impacts positively on the success of their study' (Bialocerkowski et al. 2013: 3), this does not always translate into SWD s actively wanting to self-disclose (McNaught 2013). The expectation that they may be treated differently to other students, or even excluded from their course of study, actively bars the option of disclosure for many students (Clark et al. 2018; Office for Students 2019; Williams et al. 2019). Students may feel disclosure puts them in a situation where 'these structures – designed to protect and support SWD s – simultaneously stigmatise and differentiate' them and where potential ableism informs curriculum that can be accessed 'with required efforts to accommodate SWD s regarded as exceptions to the norm' (Ostiguy 2018: 242).

While it is illegal for university courses to exclude potential students on the basis of 'the cost of providing appropriate support services' (Drage et al. 2012: 23; see also Dickson & Duffy 2019: 2), a potential incentive exists for universities to encourage student self-exclusion using IR s stressing student responsibility, while ignoring the legally mandated support universities are required to provide (Johnston et al. 2016: 6). This means that 'the development and publication of statements of inherent requirement by education providers may create unnecessary and potentially illegal barriers to access rather than supporting the rights of people with disabilities in higher education' (Johnson et al. 2016: 3). IR s ought to provide students with invaluable advice in deciding if a particular course or unit would be appropriate for them. These statements ought to make clear the qualifications, attributes and skills students need to successfully complete the course, but importantly, these statements also need to document the assistance available to meet these demands. Sharplin et al (2016: 225) say in this context, 'the identification of inherent requirements of a course, or course component, has the potential to empower students to make informed decisions about their capacity for success in a course and to provide guidance for university staff in their support and management of students'. Given that so few IR statements address either issue, such circumstance is largely yet to be addressed in higher education.

The near absolute nature of IRs, even if accompanied with references to reasonable adjustment policies, 'may systematically reduce the capacity of education providers to develop bespoke solutions in response to individual circumstances' (Johnson et al. 2016: 6). Brett et al. (2016: 41) conclude that '[t]he incremental increase in the use of inherent requirement statements runs significant risks of establishing sector wide normative practices that are inconsistent with the objectives of disability discrimination legislation'. This is particularly troubling since they also found '[t]here is little evidence or research that examines the impact of inherent requirements on prospective, enrolled and graduating students' (41). This situation was exacerbated when Brett et al. (2016) only found two universities had referenced diversity in their IRs, and even in these cases, not in every statement. That is, virtually no courses provided information to students on their rights to apply for or receive reasonable adjustments to meet the IRs of courses they were considering applying for. As the course guides passed over these topics in silence, a message was being sent to applicants about the likelihood of their application being successful. Even where course guides stressed access to reasonable adjustments, these where often couched as allowing students to meet the IRs. As Johnston et al. (2016) point out, it is not always immediately obvious prior to discussion and interaction with SWDs just how powerfully reasonable adjustments can facilitate meeting the demands of IRs.

Disability sociology stresses there should be 'nothing about us without us', although the literature rarely finds this evident within the development of IRs. As Johnson et al. (2016: 5) stress, '[i]ssues to discuss include the apparent lack of involvement of people with disability in their development process; a question about the need for this level of regulation and the mismatch between likely outcomes of inherent requirements and current professional physiotherapy practice'. This could be understood as a form of indirect discrimination, since the universities are able to argue that 'inherent requirements are not about disability but rather apply to all students and are simply about the nature of the program being offered by the university' (Johnson et al. 2016: 5). However, those most likely to be excluded by these statements are clearly SWDs or related conditions.

Knowing Disability

Having explored how IRs are mobilised in pertinent literature linking minimum standards within courses of higher education with professions, we now narrow the scope of analysis. Drawing on Gee's (2015) distinction between big

D (upper case) and little d (lowercase) discourse, we analyse the D/discourse of two IR statements from different Australian institutions using the pseudo-nyms Dainton University and Bojak University. The selected statements apply to their ITE programs, and both cite disability directly. Big D Discourses for Gee are the integrated conventions of language, actions, interconnections, objects, beliefs, technologies, and values that designate the 'kinds of people' (3) deemed suitable to teach. The Discourses of disability, after all, are widely varied, and the power to construct, administrate, and exclude lurks within the words in use (Grue 2016; Titchkosky 2020). Centring the study of ability favourit-itism (ableism) in this analysis demonstrates its prevalence in the Discourse of fitness to teach (Allan, 2003). Whereas the ableism evident within these integrated interconnections might help us to examine how the big D Discourse of IRs position the potential presence of disability in teaching courses, it is the language in use in these statements which we designate as little d discourses, through the domains or categories that support the statement's intent, that further entrench the means by which IRs occupy ableist orientations.

The purpose of undertaking an analysis of this kind is to apply critical disability perspectives to the examination of inherency embedded in teaching, from enrolment in ITE programs through to the promises of employability in classrooms, thereby demonstrating how IRs position different ways of being and knowing (Corcoran et al. 2022). That is to say, critical disability studies provides conceptual resources to explore not only how disability distances a student from learning, but how programmes of study are designed with the ideal of ability at their core. We now present the selected IR statements, to which the reader will notice we retain some distance (i.e., by avoiding direct quotations) so as to protect anonymity of the associated institutions. After explaining the composition of the selected statements, their connections to legislation and workplaces, and the way they position notions of ability and disability, we go onto provide analysis of the big D and small d discourses at work, to consider alternative approaches to situating inherency.

Selected Statements

The example statements from Bojak and Dainton Universities have been selected as they adhere to the same Anti-Discrimination legislation (the afore-mentioned Australian *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992), and they meticu-lously attempt to balance risk with teaching competence. As discussed, the DDA is the foremost Australian legislation that protects the rights of SWDs to enrol and study in higher education on the same basis as people without dis-abilities, on the grounds that they are able to meet the requirements inher-ent to courses. To that end, the DDA mandates that providers of education

make 'reasonable adjustments' to facilitate students with disabilities to study a course, unless making adjustments would be unjustifiable or unreasonable, and therefore cause hardship to the provider.

On the surface, the IR statements of both Dainton and Bojak Universities are similar in scope. Both consist of a lengthy explanatory introduction followed by a series of domains covering areas as diverse as legal responsibilities of both students and the institution and drawing attention to individualised characteristics such as behavioural expectations, cognitive, motor, communication and sensory capacity, sustainable performance, and interpersonal engagement. Justification is provided for each domain, with most aligning their raison d'etre to the Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2011), a national framework by which teacher qualifications are benchmarked.

Aligning the IR statements with legal and professional frameworks in this way ensures the statements can be read as binding, inviting potential students to weigh up the extent to which they may comply either easily or with potential challenges. Furthermore, extending credibility to the statement, Dainton University declares that their statement came about through extensive empirical investigation with various members of the local educational community, including school principals, teacher educators, and university equity representation. To this end, empiricism (consultation among community members) meets rationalism (legal and professional frameworks) demarcating what counts as essential/fundamental to teacher professionalism, who has authority to speak and who can/need not apply. We turn now to consider how ableism is positioned within these statements, and how they subsequently invite students and potential students to regulate their actions.

Capacities to Teach

Drawing on Gee's (2015) principles of big (uppercase) D Discourse, which designate the 'kinds of people' (p. 3) deemed fit to teach through the integrated conventions of language, objects of discussion and values espoused in the IRs, both Dainton and Bojak Universities situate students, ability and disability, and the teaching profession as inherently and essentially definable. Both statements open with a simplistic definition and purpose of inherency, stressing that while Dainton and Bojak are legally committed to ensuring SWDs are not discriminated against, both explicitly reference 'knowledge', 'skills' and 'abilities' that are 'essential' to achieving core learning outcomes associated with teaching. In terms giving effect to this tension, inherency is mobilised as explanatory of the fundamental parts of a course or unit that must be met by all students, without exception, to ensure academic integrity is not compromised. To this end we might express relief that at least the statements are

inclusive of SWDs. In both instances, however, reference is given upfront to the statements addressing the 'impact' of disability, suggesting an orientation placing value above all on unimpacted performance capacity (Goodley et al. 2019; Wolbring 2012). In neither case is impact explained, despite both documents trading in absolutes, pitting disability squarely in conflict with implied ability, and in so doing, declaring that reasonable adjustments, as mandated by the DDA 1992, cannot undermine academic integrity of the program of study. As such, the ableist Discourse takes shape from the introductions to each statement, fuelled by their choice of linguistic presentations in the statements' subordinate domains.

Examining Small d Discourses of Ability

For Gee (2015), small d discourses point to the way language in use guide interpretation. Here we examine how the selected statements position easily-definable skills through particular language that are connected to a student's supposed competence to teach – namely sensory, communication and physical abilities. Indicative of their significance to the supposed fitness to teach, both Dainton and Bojak include domains specific to these functions in their statements. For example, both statements contain domains that explicitly position the essential ability to both express information through intelligible speech, and concurrently, to receive it audibly and visually. Both also give emphasis to the necessity for visual and auditory acuity so as to appropriately observe students, to ensure safety and adequate supervision, and to support learning, in order to achieve effective scope of teaching practice. Teaching is also considered a profession dependent on strength and manual dexterity with domains specific to these, including gross motor skills, such as, sitting, lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, standing, twisting, and bending, along with a series of similar fine motoric capabilities. Additionally, connected to the Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2011), it is a requirement that teachers are able to undertake many physical tasks and classroom routines. Furthermore, it is assumed that through these inherent capacities, student-teachers will be able to demonstrate adaptive and collaborative practice with professional colleagues – another explicit standard to teaching (AITSL 2011).

In another example domain, Dainton and Bojak share explicit references to sustainability in terms of ethical behaviour and performance. In a domain common to both IR statements, the ability to self-regulate is cited as central to teaching, and this is presented as a matter of professional and ethical conduct. Explicitly mentioned is the necessity to appropriately respond to challenging situations, to manage emotions, receive performance feedback and retain a professional demeanour. The rationale of this domain is expressed in temporal

terms, whereby ethical accountability is understood as a principle that must be permanently applied. In Bojak's statement, a student must demonstrate ethical behaviour adhering to codes of conduct and professional standards for teachers at all times and in all foreseeable contexts, in order to ensure that the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of the individual or individuals is not placed at risk. In Dainton's statement this concern is expanded to include the ability to positively manage the dynamics of social interactions, so as to provide quality learning experiences for students, as well as contributing to harmonious and productive work environments. To this end, sufficient physical and mental endurance is an essential requirement needed to perform multiple tasks across varying periods of time to provide safe and effective participation in all teaching, field, and professional experience activities. All bases are covered here in that, in both statements, achieving course outcomes, as well as daily teaching functions, are accounted for in terms of timely completion of activities and assessment. Inherency is thereby defined by the stability of an optimistic and highly regulated disposition, irrespective of situation, who can work independently at a tacitly agreed pace.

Challenging the Ableist Discourse of Knowing Disability in IR Statements

While we would not wholly disagree with some of the prerequisite considerations set out by Dainton and Bojak universities, our concerns lie in the ways that IR statements define essentialism, and moreover, how, by design, they place onus on individuals to demonstrate ability in particularly narrow ways. The big D Discourse of IR statements written in this way disavow disability, and at the same time, some of the challenging conditions of personhood in society, while promoting a preferred ability ideal (Goodley et al. 2019). Orientating to disability as lack measures progress on assumed characteristics intrinsic to a person's capacity to study and to teach – to perform diligently in the service of progressively improving schooling outcomes for young people – in seemingly unassailable terms. To this end, inherency goes generally untouched, being characteristically connected with maintaining the integrity of courses and the supposed fitness to teach (Allan, 2003), as well as assumed categories of dis/ability. Meanwhile, inclusion in a course is mobilised as either a demonstrated capacity for individuals to perform at a particular standard, or else a demonstrated ability to receive bolt-on support guaranteed to meet this standard as a stated minimum. Ignored are any number of considerations: the intermittency of some disabling conditions; the contingent corollaries of social disruptions; the asymmetry and non-normativity of time for people with disabilities

(Whitburn & Thomas 2021); nor, most importantly, how education is yet to engage disability in a meaningful and inclusive way (Naraian 2021; Slee 2018).

So far we have discussed examples of how higher education institutions exacerbate disability and impairment categories through IRs of teaching courses. We might wonder how this situation constitutes inclusion in either education or work. We also lament how in Australia, at least, teaching is a profession seemingly exempt from aspirations to develop a diverse workforce. It is unknown how many teaching professionals disclose disabilities – though we suspect this to be very low – while only approximately 2% of teachers in Australia signify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander when this population accounts for 3.3% of the total population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018). What we are pointing towards here is that disability, and moreover diversity, plainly presents an ongoing challenge to education, one that is reliant on a way of knowing disability that presumes a universal character, and positions this knowledge against its binary opposite, ability. Exclusion from education, for disabled people, is a given, both at the learning stage, as well as within the profession of teaching. What we turn to now is to consider alternatives to inherent requirements, by moving away from inherency to coherency, and that draw from concepts from critical psychology and disability studies.

Inviting Coherent Requirements

While, to date, IRs have favoured knowing ability and disability in demonstrably instrumental ways, a study of ableism turns us instead towards an embodied and materialist consideration of being. We suggest critical disability studies and critical psychology can contribute to educational inclusion by foregrounding relationships, interconnectedness, and strengths, and accepting that neither disability nor inclusion are fixed precepts, but are constantly in flux, contingent and enacted. The affirmative potential of this orientation is in acknowledging that our ways of being (e.g., student or teacher) are in co-existence with the actions of people, environments, animals, and machines, thereby rejecting essentialist and normative forms of education-driven ableism. Thus, the ambition of our argument is to shift notions of academic and work-related requirements beyond inherent possessive limitations to coherent performative prospects. In this final section we discuss three areas of higher education practice wherein opportunity for change – beyond inherency to coherency – is possible: institutional, learning and teaching, and employability.

Institutional

Leadership is a term bandied about education sectors these days. If any reader has recently engaged in a promotions process, the ubiquitous leadership yard stick is usually extended across one's application to consider how you measure up. And yet, requisite displays of leadership come in many forms. In contemporary higher education institutions, tension persists between old-school hierarchical management styles and more distributed forms of decision making. According to Ainscow and Sandill (2010: 412), 'the logical starting point for inclusive development is with a detailed analysis of existing arrangements'. Is it fair then that we rate higher education institutional leadership in inclusive practice by focussing on what their efforts have to show? Not necessarily. Universities do not exist in petri dishes, though some Faculties might be more comfortable with this metaphor than others. It is far too easy to lay claims of inaction at the feet of governance, specifically Vice Chancellors and University Executive, whilst government persists in draining financial support away from the higher education sector. Following the 2021 federal budget, universities in Australia are due to lose nearly 10% of their funding over the next three years (Zhou 2021). In a post-Covid world, universities are rightly questioning their place in community and how they can support future social and economic development. Regrettably, current higher education funding models do little to recognise the value universities can add as beacons for leading community in inclusive practice.

So let us say government funding for universities was not, in a best-case scenario, decreasing going forward. We would still be challenged by a prevailing culture in higher education oriented to individualism and competition over inclusion and cooperation. Universities have a lot of work in front of them and this must start with an acknowledgement that understanding students, or staff for that matter, via concepts of inherency should be a thing of the past. Critical educational psychologist Stephen Vassallo (2021: 159) puts it this way:

> The promise of psychological discourse to depict inherent, objective, and unequivocally beneficial student profiles is false. Any act of naming and measuring students is bound to history, power, culture, politics, and ideology. These acts will have both unintended and intended consequences which are reflected in the interpretation of experience, the formation of selfhood, pedagogical structures, and forms of self-regulation.

Through this discussion we have touched on some of those consequences. One example used was the potential for SWD s to regulate by self-exclusion. The topic of disclosure is an important consideration for educational institutions

and one we will come to momentarily. For now however it is important to note recent data on higher education attainment. In Australia, the past decade records 17% of people living with disability aged 20 or over attaining a bachelor degree or higher. This figure is about half the number of people without disability attaining the equivalent level of education (35%; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). Presently, there is no method to ascertain SWD self-regulation from the available data. Potentially one way this could be improved is for higher education equity policy to broaden its focus beyond matters of access to include graduate outcomes (Bennett 2018). But even with this extension, an accurate understanding of the number of SWD s enrolled at universities would remain unclear.

At institutional levels of engagement, inherency is encouraged to move toward coherency when the onus of responsibility for disclosure commensurately shifts from individual obligation to relational endeavour. In most higher education circumstance, barriers to disclosure and the pursuit of relevant learning accommodations are devolved to the student. In a systematic review involving thirty-six studies and over five thousand SWDs from six countries, Lindsay et al. (2018) distilled four main obstacles. Firstly, evidenced concerns regarding stigma and discrimination. Here, feelings of discomfort and inadequacy reportedly merge with fear of potential unequal treatment in the event of disclosure. Secondly, lack of knowledge concerning available supports and accommodations. Thirdly, distinctions between courses (e.g., undergraduate versus postgraduate or, as we discussed earlier, courses with significant practical components) and teacher/instructor orientation to working with SWDs. Finally, type of impairment (e.g., the perceptible presentation of physical disability compared to an undetected mental health concern) was also reported as a potential barrier to disclosure or the attainment of reasonable adjustments. Each of the obstacles highlighted directs our attention to where concerted institutional effort can be made to reshape relationalities in higher education, facilitating movement from inherency to coherency. What is clear is that opportunities inspired by learning must be prioritised over categorisations of the individual for institutions to mobilise as leaders in their communities.

Learning and Teaching

To talk with a new voice is to invite the other to treat one in a different way; to define oneself differently also defines the other in a new way (McNamee & Gergen 1999: 27).

Mentioned at the conclusion of the previous section, one reported barrier to SWD s disclosing their circumstance and pursuing reasonable adjustments in higher education is teacher/instructor orientation. Inclusive education research is replete with studies from around the globe discussing the topic of educator attitudes toward inclusion (e.g., Krischler & Pit-ten Cate 2019). Most commonly, the aim of this work is to unveil all that can be known about so-called negative attitudes to then suggest ways in which educator orientation to teaching and learning can be changed. The irony embedded in this approach is, just as disability is reduced to pathology afflicting the individual, attitudes are understood to be undesirable mental constructs possessed by educators. Both matters of inherency! How then might higher education institutions encourage their staff, educators and professional student support services, to orient to successfully engaging diverse student populations? As we have been arguing, attitudes, like IR s, need to be made coherent.

Following McNamee and Gergen above, and earlier parts of our discussion, we need to reassess how matters of disability, and attitudes toward SWD s, are spoken into being. Section two of our discussion laid out an argument recognising the futility in positioning knowledge of disability in direct correspondence to ability. It should come as no surprise that engaging diverse student populations presents a real and distinct challenge to education (across every sector) and educating (teaching and learning) when both are premised on normative and ableist after-the-fact presumptions. So then, if changing attitudes is what is required, and this can support more enabling ways to enact IR s in higher education, we need to disengage with those aspects of practice that are retrospectively captured, approached as faults to be solved, narrowly represented, and considered clear reflections of disorder. Table 1 below suggests how a potential shift in attitude affiliation could occur.

TABLE 1   Attitude affiliation

	After-the-fact	**Before-the-fact**	
retrospective	*Attitudes are fixed*	*Attitudes are emergent*	prospective
solving	*Attitudes are faulty*	*Attitudes are entangled*	dissolving
representation	*Attitudes are found*	*Attitudes are made*	orientation
reflection	*Attitudes are facsimiles*	*Attitudes are equivocal*	diffraction

Reproduced from Corcoran, T. (in press). Attitudes toward inclusion. In Slee, R. (ed.) *International Encyclopedia of Education* (4th Edition). Elsevier.

It is not too far of a stretch to posit that, as educators, we might engage an understanding of attitudes much as we might practices involved in teaching and learning. In turning our attention beyond inherency to coherency, we purposively connect with prospective activity, created and made anew via our orientation to knowledge in the making. Attitudes cannot be ours alone for they are made in our engagements with material and non-material aspects of living. But because we habitually can adopt attitudes as our own, they may be considered unique kinds of psychosocial matter, essentially equivocal. This is the kind of conceptual reorientation needed to encourage movement from inherency to coherency.

In response to concretised after-the-fact substantiations of negative attitudes, institutions and communities often turn to diversity training to encourage change in individual behaviour. This can be problematic for several reasons. For starters, if diversity training only exposes educators to disability as inherency, and attitudes as individually possessed and blameworthy, then opportunities for before-the-fact affiliations are simply not possible (Whitburn & Corcoran 2021). In their extensive research into the effectiveness of diversity training, Dobbin and Kalev (2018) highlight several other concerns. They contend that the presence of institutional equity policies combined with the availability of diversity training can lead to university staff complacency when attending to their own biases. In such circumstance, personal change may not be considered urgent given the organisational responses thought to be in place. To address this, it is recommended staff include diversity-specific role-related goals in personal annual processes like performance reviews. Further to this point, there should be an amount of agency offered to staff regarding diversity training being voluntary or to ensure choice is given to the type of diversity training undertaken. Mentoring is also recognised as an effective activity in this regard. These points tie back to Ainscow and Sandill's (2010) discussion on the development of inclusive education systems. Their key message being that collaboration, communication and consensus are achieved in relational action and cannot be left to individual responsibility.

Employability

A third area where higher education could make considerable contributions to shifting prospects for SWDs is in practices oriented to employability. We have already discussed links between certain higher education degrees and professional work (e.g., teaching and nursing) and the precarious relationship which exists between qualification and employment. How then might the presence of IRs be relative to the concept of employability? Bennett (2018: 32) offers clear distinction between employment or finding work and employability

meaning 'the ability to create and sustain work over time'. This definition has been influenced by Holmes' (2013) model of employability in that institutional focus moves beyond supporting the acquisition or possession of job-ready attributes and the positional use, more often witnessed at research-intensive universities, of available social and human capital. In this application of employability attention is given to instilling students with an understanding that employability is processual or an orientation to career that is in constant development throughout their working life.

Potential institutional shifts to more process-oriented engagements with employability are certainly welcome. However, to suggest higher education as a sector, either in Australia or internationally, has made this transition would be incorrect. A persistent adherence to inherency being one of, if not the most significant, barrier to taking this great leap forward. How can it be otherwise when the development of the person, from student to graduate to employee, is framed by current understandings of IRS? To conclude this section and our discussion regarding employability, we now turn to show how insidious ableism can be infiltrating work undertaken, often with the best intentions, in higher education.

The prevailing model of learners and learning in higher education, in fact across all education sectors, is informed by social constructivism (Kelly 1955). Briefly, this kind of theory is an advance on cognitive orientations enamoured with internalised psychological processing. Instead, constructivism places the person-in-the-world, acknowledging their active participation in, and the social situatedness of, learning (Corcoran 2012). This kind of psychology is used to explain employability in higher education (Bennett 2018) and it is via such explanation that our concerns are raised. Our primary issue has to do with the premise of individualism which is embedded in most psychological theory. The rational actor sketched out in current employability literature is an able individual whose performance is consistent across time. No matter how much recognition is given to the person-in-the-world or the idea that employability is about ongoing development, s/he/they remain bounded decision-making units. Gergen provides an alternative to commonplace social-cognitive framing of student-institution relationship:

> I am not speaking here of a relationship of bounded units, causing each other's movements like so many billiard balls. Rather, they are engaged in a relationship in which they are mutually creating meaning, reason, and value. The student does not possess meaning until granted by the teacher; the teacher speaks nonsense until the student affirms that sense has been made. Without co-action, there is no communication and no education (2009: 245).

Call it co-action, entanglement, ecology; the term is not as important as the principle. In movement to coherency, we call for higher education institutions to show staff, students and community how inclusion is enacted. Such opportunities occur each and every time meaning is mutually made possible. Certainly, the provision of inclusive policy is one aspect of enactment but we know it not to be the guarantor of practice implementation (Ball et al. 2012). A prospectively oriented shift to coherency is a corresponding and necessary condition for creating inclusive relationalities.

Conclusion

In orientating towards coherency and co-action, it is absurd to think that inclusive education can ever centre on the needs of individuals, on the false pretence that inherency lies solely within students (Whitburn & Corcoran 2019), and disability, in opposition to ability, is a pervasive form of naturalised deficiency (Goodley et al. 2019; Wolbring 2012). Relatedly, nor could SWDs be reasonably anticipated to experience inclusion in higher education on the basis that they are cajoled into disclosure; expected to perform adequately against preconceived criteria of physical, sensory, self-regulatory, and ethical capabilities; and whose inclusion in the push for increasing employability is not the concern of universities. It would be laughable if this reality did not cut quite so close to home for many SWDs and related conditions. For others who can 'manage' their conditions and get by without disclosure or disruption to the general order of IRs, the coast may seem clearer. For institutions of higher education to make good on their frequently stated strategic promises to expand their relevance to industry, local communities, and to attract more students living different ways of being, the sector has more work to do to come to terms with the convictions of their values.

We have levelled an argument in this paper that for higher education to progress in a meaningfully inclusive way, institutions must engage varied ways of knowing/being and relate, via an articulated systemic agenda, to difference differently. This will firstly strengthen higher education's position as a community leader in such practice, and secondly position the sector as an ally and intermediary between prospective workers and industry. As the prevalence of IR statements rises across the sector in Australia at least (Brett et al. 2016), the way IRs are conceived of, designed, and implemented must necessarily follow by presaging difference not just differently but also constructively. An interdisciplinary partnering of critical disability and critical psychology theory affirmatively displaces inherency with coherency and has the potential to

assist higher education providers to enact relational leadership, redressing traditions of institutional ableism that have persisted in the sector. We anticipate university leadership and administrators will want to know where to begin. Simply start by drawing a line down the middle of the page. Place inherency at the top of one column and coherency atop the other. Through these filters, get reacquainted with the mission of higher education. This is not an invitation to yet another exclusive duality, it is recognition that life always offers more-than can be known (Corcoran & Vassallo 2021) constantly providing us with resources for rousing reverence to the relational.

Acknowledgement

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