**Making inherent requirements coherent: anticipating a means to inclusive education**

Inherent requirements (Australia), competence standards (UK) or essential functions (US) are often tied to notions of higher education academic integrity and linked to professional standards in practice-based professions like teaching. They are used to define and categorise core competencies students must demonstrate to prove proficiency, for example, with verbal capacity, behavioural regulation, physical dexterity or cognitive skill. The purpose of this discussion is to think with theory not commonly deployed in research related to inclusive higher education. Theoretical resources from critical disability studies and critical educational psychology are advanced to challenge the often fixed, universal, and deficit-oriented constraints used in inherent requirement applications. Responses from a 20-item survey involving academic staff in teacher training courses at an Australian university are considered through these orientations. The discussion is not intended to produce standard survey results so much as it offers ways of anticipating pragmatic means to inclusive education.

Keywords: inherent requirements, higher education, equity, disability, ableism, inclusive education

**Introduction**

May 2022 heralded a change in federal government in Australia. After almost nine years of conservative leadership, the Labor party was voted into office. Among the new government’s suite of policy priorities was its Australian Universities Accord. Facilitated through national consultation and led by a panel of chosen higher education and community-based experts, the Accord is the first broad ranging examination of higher education in the country since 2008 (Bradley et al. 2008). Key areas highlighted for attention include:

* meeting Australia’s knowledge and skills needs
* access and opportunity
* investment and affordability
* governance, accountability, and community
* connections between vocational education, training and higher education systems
* quality and sustainability
* delivering new knowledge, innovation, and capability

(<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/terms-reference>)

From the outset, the new Minister for Education set the bar high in what is expected of the review. He stated: ‘I want the Accord to answer the tough questions. I want new ideas…I want this to be something that inspires all of us – and outlasts us. Lasting reform. I want it to remind us that universities at their best have a soul. Look to the future not the past. To provide us with a compass to chart our path’ (Clare 2022). A significant prospect for the Accord and higher education practice in Australia is how equity matters will be systematically and ethically addressed via such reform. The panel submitted their final report entailing 47 recommendations in February 2024. The federal government is presently considering its formal response.

In this discussion we aim to contribute to this agenda targeting equity matters and higher education practice involving disabled students. The topic is of relevance to higher education systems and practices internationally. While our discussion considers inherent requirements (IRs) and how Australian university educators in a large teacher training course respond to their presence, similar practices are in place in the UK (known as competence standards) and in the US (known as essential functions). The staff survey discussed below was the opening move, an early glance at Minister Clare’s compass if you like, on a journey initiated by the work unit to develop teaching qualification course IRs for the first time. IRs are used to define and categorise core competencies or abilities students must demonstrate to prove proficiency in areas like verbal capacity, behavioural regulation, physical dexterity and cognitive skill (Brett et al. 2016). IRs can be applied at enrolment and/or at any time during course progression, are often tied to notions of academic integrity in higher education, and commensurately linked to professional standards in practice-based professions like teaching. For disabled students and workers, reasonable accommodations can be initiated by education providers and workplaces to support participation and performance. However, the relationship between inclusive actions and IRs are often complicated. For example, regarding the enforcement of professional standards, how might a vision impaired pre-service teacher on practicum placement be expected to monitor students in a schoolyard at lunchtime?

Our discussion moves in three parts. To begin, we engage work undertaken in areas of critical disability studies (Goodley et al. 2019) and critical educational psychology (Corcoran 2022). This section thinks with these theories to challenge traditional models of disability informed by essentialised understandings of students. ‘In this way’, Mazzei and Jackson (2023: 171) state, ‘theory acts as a provocateur, if you will. It’s a thinking with that is an act that produces not only an entirely different way of thinking but also a different way of being and approach to inquiry’. As Minister Clare intimated, new ideas are required to move beyond forms of discrimination like ableism which have historically informed international educational practice. In this discussion it is also necessary to examine the legislative and policy context informing higher education practice and how, for university educators and aspiring teachers (i.e., students), this is inextricably linked to knowledge and skills determined by government-industry/community relationships and alliances. Globally, universities have been encouraged by government to widen or increase access and opportunities for students belonging to marginalised populations (e.g., disabled students). However, successful interventions into equity matters in higher education remain unimpressive (Rice et al. 2023). Evidence shows that disabled students attain lower levels of study success, retention, satisfaction, and underemployment upon graduation (Brett et al. 2016; Kilpatrick et al. 2017). These matters are discussed in the second section. We then, in the final section, engage the survey and present its responses as readings of Minister Claire’s compass needle, intimating where the next stages of this work might best be oriented. We conclude questioning whether continued widespread reliance on changes to institutional practice (e.g., inclusive education policy initiatives) are pragmatically capable of shifting anticipations to a future that is not the past.

**Anticipating coherency**

Trepidation should always be present whenever someone says they are presenting new ideas. As Wittgenstein (1980 19e) remarked: ‘I don’t believe I’ve ever invented a line of thinking, I have always taken one over from someone else’. In this section, we bring to the discussion several ways of thinking about inclusion in education which may seem new to some. While certain terms might not have been read before, that does not necessarily mean the ideas do not belong to a lengthy tradition of ideas. What follows speaks to a preference and commitment to relationalism as a way of engaging with the world and others (Gergen 2009). In contrast to forms of reductionism and individualism that currently dominate ways of knowing/being in/with the world, we turn to critical disability studies and critical educational psychology to consider different ways of engaging with lived experiences concerning disability. In doing so, we offer a means to working with the many paradoxes present in inclusive education (Corcoran et al. 2019). For example, deficit-oriented diagnoses are often required to secure learning support in contemporary classrooms. But might differentiation be achieved in more affirmative ways? Relationships paradox invites us to are entangled and complex but in opening ourselves to prospects present in contradiction, we challenge ourselves to explicate preferred ideals.

Our goal is not necessarily to discharge the old in exchange for something new. Rather, our ambition is to legitimise options. Contemporarily, two conceptual frameworks have dominated explanations concerning disability: the medical and social models. While these remain the primary means to conceptualising disability, disability studies scholarship continues to question their purpose and parameter. The referent critical disability studies (CDS) has been used to examine the interdisciplinary and intersectional potentials of disability conceptualisation (Goodley 2016). Consequently, this valuable work needs to be discussed in relation to understanding IRs and their potential application in higher education. Goodley et al. (2019) outline several ideas for consideration when engaging CDS. One important theme they raise has to do with purpose. In particular, and in concert with Mazzei and Jackson's earlier point, they recognise the potential for CDS to both assist understanding, as well as materially intervene, thereby challenging how ways of knowing disability produce life.

It is also important to CDS to be transparent and explicit regarding how theory~practice is potentially located in dominant ways of knowing/being. This concern invites examination regarding global north/south positioning and whether theory~practice actively addresses the power and privilege that implicitly comes with Eurocentric or North American intellectual traditions (Araneda-Urrutia and Infante 2020). Do higher education communities, for example, engage with epistemologies of the South to ‘allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms’ (de Sousa Santos 2018: 1)? For disabled students, this resonates with one of the guiding principles of disability studies and the Disabled People’s Movement: ‘Nothing about us without us’ (Charlton, 2006). By foregrounding disability within intersectional examinations of life, universities internationally could attune teaching and learning away from hegemonic one-size-fits-all applications toward affirmative responses to difference (McCandless et al. 2023).

CDS helps us recognise the presence of IRs as indicative of ableism in higher education. How else are various social, political and cultural conditions which benchmark and extol ability to be understood? If IRs are not just about setting standards regarding individual ability, what might they be achieving? Returning to the example of the vision impaired pre-service teacher, one might reasonably question school students’ rights to safety in playgrounds when staff are responsible for supervision. Let us be clear here, we acknowledge the complexities involved are substantial. However, our concern is that if we want to engage kinds of theory~practice which value ‘notions of interdependence, distributed competence, assemblages of possibility and human potentialities’ (Goodley et al. 2019: 985-986), disability must be understood as affirmative phenomenon when developing and applying IRs. Questions need to be asked not just retrospectively when a disabled student has disclosed to the university or their educator details concerning their circumstance but also, as we are doing here, prospectively guide teaching in higher education (Corcoran et al. 2022). That is, rather than presenting disabled students as an exception who may, under highly constrained circumstances, be accommodated, are there ways to anticipate and welcome the diversity disabled students offer higher education communities and their future workplaces? As suggested above, by confronting the presence of paradox, we challenge ourselves to explicate preferred ideals.

We began this section acknowledging the difficulties that come with trying to locate new beginnings. Ideas contributing to critical educational psychology (CEP) are, like CDS, interdisciplinary in kind and have existed on the margins of psychology since its origins as a formal field of inquiry. From its initial developments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, psychology has largely borrowed its ideas, ontologically and epistemologically, from medicine. Subsequently, psychology (and its close relative psychiatry) set about reifying concepts (e.g., intelligence) through theory, measurement, and scientifically validated interventions. Collectively, the psy disciplines have sought to objectify human beings by establishing categories of difference creating sociocultural and political divisions in society (Rose 1989). As psychology historian Kurt Danziger (1990: 108) explains, ‘[i]t was not an academic interest in the psychology of human cognition that motivated the normative study of individual performance but an interest in establishing who would most effectively conform to certain socially established criteria’. Clearly, ableist understandings of students confirm such conformity. In return, psychology has and continues to perform a principal role in classifying students, particularly those living with disability.

CEP provides a response to dominant forms of psychology (Corcoran 2024; Vassallo 2017; Williams et al. 2017). For instance, CEP aligns with other areas of educational practice, like critical pedagogy, to resist the homogenisation of difference. Giroux (2022: 205) expounds:

Education as empowerment must be able to take on the task of shifting consciousness in order to enable individuals to narrate themselves, prevent their own erasure, address the economic, social, and political conditions that shape their lives, and learn that culture is an instrument of power. For this to happen, people have to recognise something of themselves and their condition in the modes of education in which they are addressed.

Of course, Giroux’s statement applies to all in education because it targets enactments of power in relationships. In our deployment of the term, empowerment is not a response to implied deficit, it is rather an alliance against oppression. Let us first think about students. Is it any wonder that recent research suggests 11% of disabled students do not disclose conditions affecting their education to their university (Clark et al. 2018)? Anecdotally, we believe many who teach in higher education would consider this figure an underestimation. Nevertheless, there is a common contemporary saying that speaks to issues of recognition: You have to see it to be it. Whilst negligently ableist and ocularcentric in delivery, the aspiration of this maxim is sound. The empowering potentials of education are real but the responsibility for actualising those conditions or preventing them from being available in the first place, cannot be left solely with the disempowered.

How then might CEP assist teachers in higher education to redress potentially debilitative conditions like IRs? For starters, by purposively adopting relational pedagogies as a preferred mode for affirmative education (Gravett et al. 2021; Hickey and Riddle 2023). In contrast to individually oriented pedagogies which largely ignore economic, political, and psychosocial conditions shaping student lives, adopting a relational orientation acknowledges that disability is materialised through how people, spaces and places engage. Critical educational psychologists have advocated for reconsidering equity concerns as not simply matters pertaining to social justice. ‘Psychosocial justice’ they assert, ‘is about the orientation taken in anticipation of next engagements’ (Corcoran and Vassallo, 2021: 16). Immediately, attention is drawn to ongoing prospects involving enactment. If, as a practitioner of any kind, one acknowledges their being already in relationships with other material and non-material things (e.g., people, classrooms, attitudes, etc.), then how we choose to respond in the present, significantly affects how we go on. The academic staff survey responses engaged later in the discussion were sought to address such circumstance. As teachers in higher education, we can orient to what comes next by recognising learners as different or deficient. IRs as currently employed, leave little room for the former, encouraging complicit acceptance of the latter.

Psychosocial justice also takes seriously the presence and influence of non-material matters in our actual lives. Let us take attitudes as an example. Educational research is replete with journal articles and book chapters dedicated to explaining the influence of so-called negative attitudes on prospects regarding inclusive education (see for e.g., Antonak and Livneh 1988). In general, these assert that if societies could change non-disabled people’s attitudes to disability, ableism would be challenged, and inclusion would stand more chance of becoming standard practice. Not so fast. What kind of change is being suggested here? Shifting prejudice from an outright refusal to teach disabled students? Making actual impactful accommodations for disabled students? Or is it more a case of granting insignificant scaled allowances while holding to the idea that greater adjustments would invoke unjustifiable hardship for the institution? These questions are not rhetorical, they are evidenced by how legislation and policy are understood and presently applied. Higher education finds itself mired in a discomforting no-man’s (sic) land encumbered to idealistic policy and convoluted practices exposed via their paradoxical promotion of inclusive education and acceptance of IRs. It is to areas of policy and practice that our discussion now turns.

**Equity guidance in Australian higher education**

Most Australian universities are publicly funded (Marginson 2002). This means that work undertaken in higher education institutions, primarily involving research and teaching, is supported via targeted federal government grant schemes. As such, Australian universities operate under distinct policy frameworks influencing how the money gets spent and the work gets done. While these frameworks are unique to national socio-economic and political priorities, they nevertheless exist in international contexts and are subsequently informed by events and actions taking place around the globe. For example, in the context of equity matters in higher education, and specifically disability related matters, Australia, like many other countries around the world, is a signatory to international conventions like the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006; CRPD). Prior to delving into some of the CRPD’s key themes, its chronological placement relative to Australian frameworks should be highlighted.

By the turn of this century, education systems around the globe were strategically configuring and mobilising prospects aligned with inclusive education. Two fundamental principles regarding inclusive education, according to the CRPD, are that individuals possess a universal right to education and the presence of any disability should not discriminate or exclude the individual from equal opportunity. Article 24 of the CRPD is dedicated to Education and reaches across all levels (i.e., early years and primary, secondary, further and higher education), to recognise disability as a variance in humanity. In direct relation to the current discussion, the CRPD explicitly says that ‘State Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities’ (Art 24.4). In addition to recommending the right for individuals to learn free from discrimination and experience equal opportunity, the CRPD calls for its signatories to ensure reasonable teaching and learning accommodations are made available to disabled students. We will examine further the notion of reasonable accommodations below.

The point regarding chronology comes to bear when our attention turns to Australia’s *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992; DDA). Coming into law over a decade before the CRPD, the DDA’s explanations of individual being and treatment of disability are informed by deficit, i.e., when compared to able bodied individuals, and by pathology, i.e., possession of disorder, disease, or illness (see Part 1, Section 4 of the Act). When discussing models of disability, these orientations traditionally combine to actualise the medical model. For the majority of the twentieth century, the medical model was the dominant epistemology or way of knowing about disability. However, in comparison, the CRPD reflects a change in thinking, and while the term disability is not formally defined within the Convention, certain signals are evident highlighting this difference. For example, the CRPD recognises that ‘disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (Preamble [e]). Here, key features of social models of disability can be ascertained. Some might argue that one function of the DDA is to operationalise a range of rights involving disabled people’s access to funding and resource allocation. We caution anyone who believes the consequences of language use can be ignored because good intentions are present e.g., the promotion of individual rights. The primary concern drawn in contrasting these frameworks is that disability should not considered an inherent deficit or pathology possessed by the individual but rather that people are predominantly disabled by how the world responds to impairment/s individuals live with (Oliver 2013).

The DDA was comprehensively reviewed over the subsequent decade leading to the *Disability Standards for Education* (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment 2005a; DSE). A central purpose of the Standards, in relation to the DDA, was to clarify how education providers should ensure appropriate service to people living with disability. Since the introduction of the Standards to the present day, concerns have been raised regarding their effectiveness as binding and enforceable protections against discrimination in education (de Bruin 2019; Mavropoulou et al. 2021). In an erudite overview on the matter, lawyer and human rights advocate Catia Malaquias (2022: 243) forthrightly noted:

…while the CRPD recognises a strong prima facie right of students with disability to supports and accommodation, the DDA and the Standards, through the application of multiple qualifying concepts and weak tests for compliance, provide only for a limited duty to provide adjustments and substantial defences to breach. The effect of this is that students with disability are left with very few enforceable rights and protections under domestic law.

Having appraised some of the prominent frameworks guiding disability related practice in Australian higher education, we now turn to examine more closely two commonly referenced concepts central to such practice: i) the provision of reasonable accommodations or adjustments relative to knowledge of/ model of disability invoked and ii) practicalities involved in pursuit of human rights. We argue, in line with CDS and CEP orientations, that both matters are contestable and require a shift in understanding if change regarding IRs can be made possible.

Questions regarding what accounts for/as inclusion speak to the uncertainties surrounding reasonable accommodations in education (Brett et al. 2016). Here, we are not ignoring the CRPD’s definition of inclusive education and its ‘pro-active commitment to eliminate barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students’ (2016: 4). However, after four decades, concerns persist around the effectiveness of inclusion-oriented initiatives like Universal Design for Learning (Zhang et al. 2024).

While the CRPD speaks to the ‘goal of full inclusion’, the Convention nevertheless invites the prospect of reasonable accommodations, albeit ‘within the general education system’. The presence of qualifying rhetoric, as in the use of the term ‘reasonable’, is akin to a leak in a waterproof vessel. Immediately, the likelihood of full inclusion starts taking on water and while the vessel might remain afloat, it is not the safest means to getting to where one intends to go – particularly for disabled students. This circumstance is laid bare in the DSE’s guidance documentation where further qualifications are extrapolated (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2005b). The Guidance Notes (3) state:

An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with a disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students. An adjustment is reasonable if it achieves this purpose while taking into account the student’s learning needs and balancing the interests of all parties affected, including those of the student with the disability, the education provider, staff and other students.

One could deduce that full inclusion is equivalent to the opportunity to participate ‘on the same basis’ and yet parity, in this regard, remains aspirational for many disabled students. Such circumstance guarantees continued debate among legal scholars regarding key concepts involved in the provision of inclusive education in Australia (Dickson 2022; Malaquias 2022).

Questions surrounding what might be understood to be reasonable inevitably end up within a costs/benefits analysis involving money, time or perceived level of risk. As stated earlier, these are complex matters but acknowledging such circumstance should not dissuade institutions from answering the tough questions (see Introduction). The legislated provision allowing education institutions, claimants or persons affected to opt out of their duty to provide reasonable adjustments is referred to as ‘unjustifiable hardship’. According to the DDA (Pt. 1, Sec. 11), the following circumstances may be used to support such a claim:

1. the nature of the benefit or detriment likely to accrue to, or to be suffered by, any person concerned;
2. the effect of the disability of any person concerned;
3. the financial circumstances, and the estimated amount of expenditure required to be made by the [claimant] person;
4. the availability of financial and other assistance to the [claimant] person.

As Dickson et al (2021: 76) note, it is ‘confusing that the relevant circumstances for proof of unjustifiable hardship overlap with the relevant circumstances for determination of reasonableness’. However legal nuances are understood and argued, it seems yet another paradox presents within inclusive education enactment.

Recall from our Introduction the open invitation for equity matters to be systematically refitted via the Universities Accord and associated reforms. Critical attention to legislative and policy revisions, and how these impact the lives of disabled people, should be a matter of concern internationally. It seems obvious this work, if it is going to have sustained impact on future practice, will need to reach beyond higher education in Australia to address the authority of the DDA. From our earlier discussion, it should have been noted that CDS and CEP both explicitly herald concern over the economic, social, and political conditions that shape the living of lives. To continue to think with theory which disregards such matters leaves little space for compassion or difference. To think with these theories is not to abstract our ideas from the lived experience of disabled students, but to use theory to understand experience, while allowing experience to inform theory – a relationality that is symbiotic.

We turn now to the reliance on human rights as another rhetorical manoeuvre in pursuit of equity matters in higher education. Like the way disability, when conceived through a medical model, posits impairment as inherent to individuals, recourse to the universalism of human rights is a common response to perceived transgressions of justice. Historically, this zeitgeist aligns with the push toward neoliberal policy arrangements promoted by the global north. There, economic philosophy aligns with a human rights agenda via the fixing of certain economic freedoms (e.g., market deregulation, privatisation and competition) and value placed on individual autonomy and responsibility, while devaluing relational or community support (Mikelatou and Arvanitis 2021). Freedom from discrimination and equal opportunity, key CRPD principles, are thus required for any individual to be able to effectively access educational opportunities and reap the social and economic benefits which come from advanced education (Baum et al. 2013).

It may seem absurd to question the legitimacy and pursuit of human rights. But as we conclude this section, our concern turns to further examination of the conditions which maintain the near unquestionability of rights-based arguments. Zembylas and Bozalek (2014) outlined several points used to critique the ubiquitous presence of human rights in contemporary life. The first matter they raise highlights problems that occur when attempts are made to universalise human being. Codifying normativities in this regard can lead to inflexibility in how we think about people (Grear 2018). Even though we earlier referenced the CRPD recognising disability as a socially and historically contingent ‘evolving concept’, ableism nevertheless remains a powerful force around the globe. Secondly, they suggest human rights provisions can be opaque and nebulous, failing to address the pragmatic consequences of injustice when lost in search for commonality. As Rorty (1999: 86) explains:

Pragmatists suggest that we simply give up the philosophical search for commonality. They think that moral progress might be accelerated if we focus instead on our ability to make the particular little things that divide us seem unimportant – not by comparing them with the one big thing that unites us but by comparing them with other little things. Pragmatists think of moral progress as more like sewing together a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt, than getting a clearer vision of something true and deep.

Following the presentation of the survey responses, we will reconnect with the suggestion that we should focus on this patchwork quilt and stop trying to solve the one big thing, i.e., attaining inclusive education.

Zembylas and Bozalek’s third critique seeks to expose the political hegemony often implicit in actions taken in the name of human rights. As mentioned above, neoliberal ideology, with its focus on the individual and increased profit, does not pretend to address the socioeconomic structures which contribute to the marginalisation and oppression of significantly large sections of population. What these issues combine to do is limit potential for actual social, economic, and political change in communities around the globe. In countries like Australia, where the work being discussed was undertaken, it is naïve to be convinced of the categorical benefits encumbered in a pursuit of human rights without acknowledging the pragmatics involved. As we now move to discussing the responses received in our survey, it is important we remain diligent when responding to the tough questions (see Minister Clare’s comments from the Introduction). If we are committed to enabling change, reform will require more than complicit repetition of the past or an ignorant reliance on how life has previously been known thinking with conventional theory. Change is always subversive; it can undermine both our ways of knowing and our ways of being. To understand that our theories help affect change is to understand the extent to which ideas can subvert power structures holding disadvantage in place.

**Observing the compass needle**

...there are two ways in what appear to be theoretical utterances can be used: (1) one is in an after the fact representational fashion, as stating a claim about the nature of the hidden reality thought to be responsible for observed events [and] (2) the other is as before the fact aids to perception, as utterances which direct us to attend to this rather than that aspect of events occurring within our current circumstances (Shotter, 2014: 532-533).

Our goal with the survey is to sense the scale of the task regarding bettering current provisions in higher education for disabled students. The survey is literally a compass reading as it provides one means to understanding the current situation as expressed in staff attitudes. Ours is a fundamentally different orientation to that of reductionism and individualism discussed earlier. Those orientations traditionally start from the premise that truth is fixed and therefore any attitudes that deviate from an always already existing truth, require correction. Below, attitudes are not reified as individually possessed, retrospectively measured, mental constructs waiting to be found after-the-fact regardless of the lived reality and experience of the staff involved. We do not approach attitude research from the presumption that so-called negative attitudes are inherently problematic and demanding rehabilitation of the possessor. Informed by CDS and CEP orientations, the survey engaged staff attitudes as not already existing phenomena, but as psychosocial matter created in/through material and non-material engagement with the world.

Hence, the survey acknowledges its contribution to the making of what might be understood. This is a necessary move if we accept the prospects of thinking with different kinds of theory. We do not engage with the soon to be discussed responses as survey results. Instead, we adopt a before-the-fact orientation following the lead of British social psychologist, John Shotter. As he intimates above, if an understanding of our orientations is to be anticipatory, we must change the way we approach inquiry. CEP offers an alternative understanding of attitudes. Corcoran (2023) asks us to re-examine our relationships with psychosocial phenomena, including the things we have come to know as attitudes. Instead of situating such phenomena as interiorly located possessions of individuals, we can understand attitudes as coming into being in flows of daily life. Recognised as emergent phenomena, we can discard the pretence that attitudes are fixed, stable phenomena already waiting to be found in the world. In this project, attitudes are recognised as being irrevocably entangled in the psychosocial milieu and our inquiry, instead of trying to solve the problem of negative attitudes, aims to dissolve attitudes. By this we approach attitudes as forming part of a solution (consider liquid as a metaphor here). As part of a solution, attitudes cannot be extricated from their circumstance. Table 1 summarises our approach.

**Table 1. Attitude orientations**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **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 Tim Corcoran. 2023. “Attitudes toward inclusion.” In *International Encyclopedia of Education Vol. 9*. (4th ed.), edited by Rob Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye Erkican,328-333.

To reiterate, in understanding attitudes as made and not found, we acknowledge that attitudes need not be presumed to be fixed or static but emerge within ongoing psychosocial living. This allows us to reorient understanding of attitudes as anticipatory matter which, in responding to the questions posed, can speak to prospective conditions within ongoing psychosocial life. For example, our question regarding IR impact is not simply limited to retrospective account. Given our recognition of making and emergence, attitudes here are not assumed to be mere reflections or representations of worldly circumstance. Each respondent diffracts their experience, not to relay the content of their understanding, but to show how they orient to prospective teaching. Hence, attitudes are equivocal. As researchers we can engage these responses as a means of direction to next possible options.

A survey consisting of 20 items was developed to engage teacher training staff attitudes to IRs. The survey involved closed-ended questions involving staff demographics, including disability status, awareness of IRs, the propensity of IRs to affect student progress, their experiences of course teaching, and knowledge about facilitating reasonable adjustments. Built on the digital Qualtrics platform, the survey was designed with particular consideration to adhering to web content accessibility guidelines (Web Accessibility Initiative, n.d.) and distributed by email to all staff working in teacher training courses through the School of Education. The survey received ethics approval from the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (ref. no. 2020-363). The survey remained active from May to November 2021. Although 48 staff began the survey, only 33 completed responses were received (approximately 25% of teaching staff). Of the 15 survey responses that could not be included, two responses had not read or agreed to the Plain Language Statement and were thus unable to complete the survey. 13 responses logged in to the survey platform but did not answer the first question. The survey received 3 responses from staff identifying as living with a disability or related condition. To reaffirm what has been outlined in this section regarding enacting method (i.e., survey), the number of responses was not of primary concern as generalisability or mirror-like representations were not essential epistemic attributes for the kind of inquiry anticipated. Table 2 provides a distribution of staff survey respondents across period of time employed in their current role.

**Table 2. Total survey responses and time in current role**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Time in current role | Number of responses | Proportion of responses |
| 1 – 5 years | 8 | 24% |
| 5 – 10 years | 13 | 39% |
| Over 10 years | 12 | 36% |

*Presence*

It was of interest to establish a collective staff understanding regarding IRs. 36% of responses said they were aware of the School of Education having operational IRs. This result was confounding given the School did not have, nor ever had, operational IRs in its history. Even more confounding, definite awareness of IRs increased with length of service.

* Of those with under 5 years in their role, only 1 (13%) was Aware, although 6 (75%) reported to being Somewhat Aware.
* For those with 5-10 years’ experience, being Aware increased to 31% and then to 58% for those with over 10 years’ work experience.
* There was 1 person in each cohort who was Not Aware of IRs.

In a related question, nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents said IRs Strongly (15%) or Somewhat (58%) impacted the programmes they teach. 21% were not sure and only 6% thought they did not impact programming. This was more or less consistent across the cohorts, with those in the 5 to 10 years of experience cohort being more unsure (23%) than the other two groups.

*Standards*

The next responses speak to the role IRs play in setting academic and professional standards. Approximately three-quarters of staff agreed that IRs set minimum academic expectations for students. While only two responses strongly disagreed, there were 6 who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (i.e., almost 1 in 5).

* Agreement increased with length of service as only half of those with less than 5 years’ service agreed at all.
* This result increased to over 80% for the other two cohorts. Half of those with under 5 years’ service neither agreed nor disagreed. Just over half of respondents (55%) agreed with the statement that IRs set professional standards and that university courses respond to these. Those with less than five years’ service were most likely to agree (63%), while only half of those in the two cohorts with over five years’ experience did.
* Around a third of those in the two cohorts with more than 5 years’ experience neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

*Reasonable adjustments*

Overwhelmingly, 73% of staff strongly agreed and 24% somewhat agreed with the statement suggesting reasonable adjustments must be available to students in support of existing learning support plans. Only 1 person neither agreed nor disagreed. Those with 5 to 10 years’ work experience were the most likely to strongly agree (85%). Reporting on their own teaching, 69% of staff agreed to some extent to having the skills to ensure students would be able to meet the IRs in courses they taught (24% strongly, 45% somewhat).

* Almost 1 in 4 neither agreed nor disagreed and 2 people in the above 5 years’ work experience cohorts somewhat disagreed. 1 of the respondents who identified as having a disability or related condition neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.
* None of those with under 5 years’ work experience strongly agreed. Almost two-thirds of those with under 5 years’ work experience neither agreed nor disagreed.
* 1 of those who identified as having a disability or related condition neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement and they were in the over 10 years’ work experience cohort.

In relation to IR applications, given 97% of our survey respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed to their mandatory provision, to what extent are reasonable adjustments negotiated and how do they develop from the experience of disabled students? These questions await further investigation.

*Becoming teachers*

Over 90% of all responses agreed at some level, 58% strongly agreeing, that teaching as a profession should be available to all members of society.

* Both of the over 5 years’ work experience cohorts returned a single somewhat disagree response.
* 1 person with less than five years’ work experience neither agreed nor disagreed.

However, when asked to what degree IRs impact students when they undertake professional learning or placement units, nearly three-quarters (73%) of respondents either strongly agreed (45%) or somewhat agreed (27%). Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents were not sure in this regard and this was fairly consistent across the three years of experience cohorts. Finally, when asked how IRs impact students post-graduation when applying for professional accreditation, 21% reported IRs strongly impacted, 24% saying somewhat, 42% were unsure and 12% did not think IRs impacted future professional opportunity at all.

Regardless of years of experience teaching in higher education, there seems to be considerable confusion regarding the presence and application of IRs. This is not an unexpected result considering no formal IRs existed in the School at the time of the survey. Almost all staff surveyed recognised legal responsibilities in adjusting their teaching if a learning plan was in place to support student learning. Even so, the educators surveyed acknowledged that IRs as currently understood could impact a student’s potential to successfully complete their qualification and apply for professional accreditation. In this circumstance, inherency is likely to have been understood via a deficit orientation, applied in anticipation and justification of student exclusion.

**Conclusions**

Institutional attempts to support inclusive education do not meet expectation nor aspiration because these do not share the requisite anticipatory responses to proficiently engage difference. Herein exists the after-the-fact paradox of inclusive education in Australia and most likely, internationally. Against a backdrop of deficit-laden theory, muddled legislation and policy, and universal human rights declarations, inclusive practice in the Australian higher education sector is largely enacted by how far, i.e., to what cost and level of inferred risk, educational settings are prepared to go to accommodate difference. As university profit margins return to pre-Covid levels, perhaps one action the federal government’s new Accord could take to show its commitment to disabled students would be to increase expenditure on teaching and learning infrastructure. But believing the availability of more money will adequately and sustainably change systemic practice is far too naïve (Corcoran and Whitburn 2020). Teaching staff are aware of the institution’s academic standards and the likelihood disabled students will be enrolled in their programs. So, how is it possible to get to a place where formal direction for accommodations in higher education are no longer required since systems and practices already anticipate an appropriate response? That is our goal.

Staying with enhancing prospects for coordinated action, let us broaden the question further. What is anticipated when disabled students enrol in universities or prepare themselves for a professional career? As outlined above, IRs, as they have been determined and applied in higher education to date, anticipate chronic and inherent deficit, the subtext driving the responses to our survey. Given ongoing advancements in teaching, learning and workplace assistive technologies, how appropriate is it to place temporal conditions on disabled students? As detailed at length in this discussion, the matter fundamentally questions how disability is understood and responded to. The survey respondents recognised the incongruence between current framing of IRs and how these potentially structure anticipations for disabled students on practicum placement and later, when attempting to register to practice as a teacher. According to the CRPD and the survey respondents, people living with disability should be able to become teachers. So, how do we get to a place where this becomes reality? Not just that they have achieved the qualification, but also secured employment. That is our goal.

According to Shotter, ‘...others around us can only coordinate their behaviour with ours, if we all share in a structure of anticipations that we all, in our verbally articulated utterances and other expressive activities, arouse in each other as to our possible next steps’ (2017: 37). Subsequently, coordinated action in higher education relies on participants sharing certain values and ideals. Our argument takes onboard Rorty’s suggestion that rather than working top down, relying on grand schemes or sweeping policy to change institutional practice, we should focus on the immediate ‘little’ things that affect how we are able to go on together. For instance, the development and application of IRs. We understand this to be a matter of coherence. Be it in any combination of theory, policy and practice, if what is valued and aspired to does not cohere, all that can be hoped for is more of the same. We accept it takes tough questions to shift anticipations to a future that is not the past. This means concertedly turning attention to pragmatically addressing those after the fact problem-oriented settlements and paradoxes that daily, do more to divide and marginalise us, than promote ways to move forward. Here is where thinking with theory, in this instance contributions from CDS and CEP in higher education around the globe, offer considerable opportunity.

To conclude, around the time our research was undertaken, the university launched a new marketing strategy. The advertising slogan proclaimed: The future belongs to the ready. Indeed.

**Acknowledgement**

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this writing was conducted: the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, paying respect to their Elders before and after now.

**References**

Antonak, Richard, and Hanoch Livneh. 1988. *The Measurement of Attitudes Toward People with Disabilities: Methods, Psychometrics and Scale*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Araneda-Urrutia, Carlos, and Marta Infante. 2020. “Assemblage theory and its potentialities for dis/ability research in the Global South.” *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* *22*(1): 340-350.

Australian Government. 1992. *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Baum, Sandy, Ma, Jennifer, and Kathleen Payea. 2013. *Education pays 2013: the benefits of higher education for individuals and society*. New York: The College Board. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572537.pdf>

Bradley, Denise, Noonan, Peter, Nugent, Helen, and Bill Scales. 2008. *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final report*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

Brett, Matt., Harvey, Andrew., Funston, Andrew., Spicer, Rachael, and Adam Wood. 2016. *The Role of Inherent Requirement Statements in Australian Universities: Final Report.* La Trobe University. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/resource/9292/the-role-of-inherent-requirement-statements-in-australian-universities-ncsehe>

Charlton, James. 2006. “The dimensions of disability oppression.” In *The disability studies reader* (2nd ed.), edited by Lennard Davis,217-229. New York: Routledge.

Clare, Jason. 2022. *The Bradley Oration*. November 16. Accessed 4 January 2023. <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/bradley-oration>

Clark, Colin, Wilkinson, Matthew, and Rita Kusevskis-Hayes. 2018. *Enhancing self-disclosure of equity group membership: an investigation of self-disclosure by Indigenous students, students with disabilities and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds at university*. <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/project/enhancing-self-disclosure-of-equity-group-membership/>

Corcoran, Tim. 2022. “Critical educational psychology”. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1742>

Corcoran, Tim.2024. “From dialogics to ecologics: When the how is the what.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 37(2): 438-450.

Corcoran, Tim. 2023. “Attitudes toward inclusion.” In *International Encyclopedia of Education Vol. 9*. (4th ed.), edited by Rob Tierney, Fazal Rizvi, and Kadriye Erkican,328-333. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.12067-6>

Corcoran, Tim, Claiborne, Lise, & Ben Whitburn. 2019. “Paradoxes in inclusive education: a necessary condition of relationality?” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 23(10): 1003-1016.

Corcoran, Tim, and Ben Whitburn. 2020. “Messing with inclusive education.” In *Moving towards inclusive education: Diverse national engagements with paradoxes of policy and practice*, edited byLise Claiborne, and Vishalache Balakrishnan, 68-77. Leiden: Brill.

Corcoran, Tim, and Stephen Vassallo. 2021. “Psychosocial justice: always more-than to consider.” *Educational & Child Psychology* 38(2): 8-18.

Corcoran, Tim, Whitburn, Ben, and Elizabeth Knight. 2022. “Inherent requirements in higher education: locating you in us.” *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* *26*(2): 69-75.

Danziger, Kurt. 1990. *Constructing the subject: historical origins of psychological research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

de Bruin, Kate. 2019. “The impact of inclusive education reforms on students with disability: An international comparison.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 23(7-8): 811-826.

de Sousa Santos, Boaventura. 2018. *The end of the cognitive empire: the coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Department of Education, Skills and Employment. 2005a. *Disability standards for education*. Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767>

Department of Education, Skills and Employment. 2005b. *Disability standards for education: Guidance notes*. Commonwealth of Australia. <https://www.education.gov.au/swd/resources/disability-standards-education-2005-guidance-notes>

Dickson, Elizabeth. 2022. “Barriers to inclusion embedded in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth).” *Australian Journal of Education* 66(3): 265-280.

Dickson, Elizabeth, Cumming, Joy, Wyatt-Smith, Claire, and Amanda Webster. 2021. “Reasonable adjustment to assessment: what do Australian teachers need to know and consider?” *International Journal of Law & Education* 24: 62-79.

Gergen, Kenneth. 2009. *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giroux, Henry 2022. *Pedagogy of resistance: against manufactured ignorance*. London: Bloomsbury.

Goodley, Dan. 2016. *Disability studies: an interdisciplinary introduction* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Goodley, Dan, Lawthom, Rebecca, Liddiard, Kirsty, and Katherine Runswick-Cole. 2019. “Provocations for critical disability studies.” *Disability & Society* 34(6): 972-997.

Gravett, Karen, Taylor, Carol, and Nikki Fairchild. 2021. “Pedagogies of mattering: re-conceptualising relational pedagogies in higher education.” *Teaching in higher education* 29(2): 388-403. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2021.1989580

Grear, Anna. 2018. “Human rights and new horizons? Thought toward a new juridicial ontology.” *Science, Technology & Human Values* 43(1): 129-145.

Hickey, Andrew, and Stewart Riddle. 2023. “Proposing a conceptual framework for relational pedagogy: pedagogical informality, interface, exchange and enactment.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2259906>

Kilpatrick, Sue., Johns, Sam, Barnes, Robyn, Fischer, Sarah, McLennan, Darlene, and Kerri Magnussen. 2017. “Exploring the retention and success of students with disability in Australian higher education.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(7): 747-762.

McCandless, Trevor, Corcoran, Tim, and Ben Whitburn. 2023. “Normative power in higher education: The ghost of inherent requirements.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. [https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2023.2274115](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F10.1080%2F13603116.2023.2274115&data=05%7C01%7Ctim.corcoran%40deakin.edu.au%7Cc8e8152ea2c349f36b3f08dbd0677b13%7Cd02378ec168846d585401c28b5f470f6%7C0%7C0%7C638332915094694018%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=o1kJcceXAwN57zwH%2B73VG261nCEcQlbebwJtktlawJM%3D&reserved=0).

Malaquias, Catia. 2022. “Unrealised promises and hollow claims: Australia’s failure to enact its international obligations under the CRPD for the education of students with disability.” *Australian Journal of Education* 66(3): 235-250.

Marginson, Simon. 2002. “Nation-building universities in a global environment: The case of Australia.” *Higher Education* 43(3): 409-428.

Mavropoulou, Sofia, Mann, Glenys, and Suzanne Carrington. 2021. “The divide between inclusive education policy and practice in Australia and the way forward.” *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities* 18(1): 44-52.

Mazzei, Lisa, and Alecia Jackson. 2023. “Inquiry as unthought: The emergence of thinking otherwise.” *Qualitative Inquiry* 29(1): 168-178.

Mikelatou, Angeliki, & Eugenia Arvanitis. 2021. “Pluralistic and equitable education in the neoliberal era: paradoxes and contradictions.” *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 27(14): 1611-1626. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1904018>

Oliver, Mike. 2013. “The social model of disability: Thirty years on.” *Disability & Society* 28(7): 1024-1026.

Rice, Suzanne, Garner, Alice, and Lorraine Graham. 2023. *Seeing ourselves at school: Increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.

Rorty, Richard. 1999. *Philosophy and social hope.* New York: Penguin.

Rose, Nikolas. 1989. *Governing the soul: the shaping of the private self* (2nd ed.). London: Free Association Books.

Shotter, John. 2014. “From ‘after the fact’ objective analyses to immediate ‘before the fact’ living meanings.” *Culture & Psychology* 20(4): 525-536.

Shotter, John. 2017. “Persons as dialogical-hermeneutical-relational beings – new circumstances ‘call out’ new responses from us.” *New Ideas in Psychology* 44, 34-40.

United Nations. 2006. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York: United Nations. <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

United Nations 2016. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: General Comment no. 4.* New York: United Nations. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRPD/GC/RighttoEducation/CRPD-C-GC-4.doc>

Vassallo, Stephen. 2017. *Critical educational psychology.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Web Accessibility Initiative. *W3C accessibility standards overview*. <https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/>

Williams, Antony, Billington, Tom, Goodley, Dan, and Tim Corcoran, eds. 2017. *Critical educational psychology*. London: Wiley.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1980. *Culture and value* (P. Winch, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zembylas, Michalinos, and Vivienne Bozalek. 2014. “A critical engagement with the social and political consequences of human rights: the contribution of the affective turn and posthumanism.” *Acta Academia* 46(4): 29-47.

Zhang, Ling, Carter Jnr, Richard, Greene, Jeffrey, and Matthew Bernacki. 2024. “Unravelling challenges with the implementation of Universal Design for Learning: a systematic literature review.” *Educational Psychology Review* 36: 35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-024-09860-7>.