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# Teacher education students' experiences navigating inherent requirements within their courses of study

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## ABSTRACT

Inherent requirements define core competencies that all students must demonstrate to be accepted, progress, and successfully complete professionally accredited programmes such as teaching. This paper presents research that examines how students of teacher education navigate supposed abilities to teach through their courses of study, to inform the development of a statement of inherent requirements for a large school of education in an Australian university. Drawing on critical disability perspectives, we present results from a survey conducted with students enrolled in teacher education courses. This analysis demonstrates that inherent requirements have little affect for students whose bodily capacities align with preconceived notions of abilities to teach. Yet, students with disabilities will likely experience impose barriers to their success within teacher education because of perceived inherent requirements to practice, which is not easily addressed through disclosure and reasonable adjustments. The paper concludes with a discussion addressing how when seeking to expand their impact in support of inclusive local and global communities, universities must necessarily start by paying close attention to the ways that they frame competency in relation to equity. Here we draw from concerns raised by students in the present study, and critical disability theory, to support an institutional transposition from inherency to coherency, reframing how ability to teach can align with contemporary policy aspirations and inclusive practices. The paper is unique for drawing on student experiences to inform the development of knowledge in the field of teacher education along with critical disability perspectives with which to analyse them.

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## KEYWORDS

Inherent requirements;  
disability; equity; ableism;  
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## Introduction

This paper foregrounds inherent requirements to address a persistent tension in higher education (HE), between widening participation for students with disabilities, and maintaining course integrity related to accredited professions. Inherent requirements define core competencies that all students must demonstrate to be accepted, progress, and successfully complete professionally accredited programmes (Brett et al. 2016). The paper reports a phase of research conducted to collect the experiences of students that was designed to inform the creation of an inclusive statement of inherent requirements for teacher training courses at an Australian university. Despite the

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absence of a published statement, through surveys, both students and staff articulated their familiarity with a narrow understanding of inherent ability to teach that could be exclusionary of aspirant teachers with disabilities (McCandless, Corcoran, and Whitburn 2023). This study joins recent scholarship reframing inherent requirements to enhance success and retention for students with disabilities in the fields of social work (Boucher 2021), occupational therapy (Johnston et al. 2016) and medicine (Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand 2021). Informed by pertinent findings of this work and critical disability studies, the paper advances a conceptual shift from inherency to coherency, characterised as shared action and resourcing, in support of students with disabilities to make a contribution to the teaching profession (Corcoran, Whitburn, and McCandless 2022b). We use a person first language in this paper, aligned with linguistic conventions in Australia.

The purpose of the paper, then, is to learn how supposed inherent ability to teach affects the study experiences of student teachers with and without disabilities, so as to reframe inherent requirements situating more inclusive possibilities. The paper is organised in four sections. First, we situate the context of the study through an exploration of the policy drivers of equity in Australian HE, the legislated position of reasonable adjustments and inherent requirements, and an analysis of the ways these position course integrity, abilities to teach, and the participation of students with disabilities. In the second section, we situate the empirical work conducted for this study, explaining ethical implications, its theoretical orientation to critical disability studies, and the methods of data collection and analysis that we employed. Following this we present an analysis of the collected data, which demonstrates that inherent requirements affect students differently depending on whether or not they experience disabilities, which is further complicated in relation to disclosure. The paper concludes with a discussion of how increasing participation of students with disabilities in teacher education courses must necessarily start with close attention to matters of supposed inherency and their discursive and material effects.

## **Backgrounding inherent requirements in teaching: a brief policy and literature history**

Since the publication of the National HE Framework titled 'A Fair Chance for All' (Department of Education Employment and Training 1990), the sector in Australia has emphasised increasing representation. Through this report, the government established six Equity Groups, including students with disabilities, for targeted support. Widening participation extends to students with various impairments and conditions, such as hearing, learning, mobility, vision, medical conditions, behavioural issues, and autism spectrum disorders under relevant law (Grant-Smith, Irmer, and Mayes 2020). The Australian Universities Accord (Australian Government Department of Education 2024) continues a focus on equity, aiming for fairness, access, and increased employability. Equity, as distinct from equality, might be understood to mean providing necessary support and reducing barriers for students with disabilities rather than assuming a level playing field (Crawford 2022). However, within this context the meaning of widening participation to more diverse populations primarily relates to social and economic mobility erroneously assumed available to all through higher education (Marginson 2016), falling short of transformative change to make the sector more inclusive for students with disabilities (Pitman, Brett, and Ellis 2023).

Within this policy landscape, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA 1992) requires reasonable adjustments are made to address barriers for students and employees with disabilities. Although the Act lacks clear articulation of reasonable adjustments, the purpose is to prevent less favourable treatment due to disability (DDA 1992, 5(1)(b)). Education providers and employers in the UK also adhere to similar obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Through these legislative instruments, inherent requirements, deemed essential for course integrity, must not be compromised by reasonable adjustments. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Attorney-General's Department 2005) in Australia drives institutional development of inherent requirement statements. As stated (s3.4)

In providing for students with disabilities, a provider may continue to ensure the integrity of its courses or programs and assessment requirements and processes, so that those on whom it confers an award can present themselves as having the appropriate knowledge, experience and expertise implicit in the holding of that particular award.

Correspondingly, schools of education within Australian HEIs that offer teacher preparation courses have been prompted to incorporate statements of inherent requirements into their admission procedures, as a way to ‘implement sophisticated and transparent approaches to selection that take into account each applicant’s academic capabilities and the personal attributes needed for teaching’ (TEMAG 2014, 7). Inherent requirements complement the existing Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL 2011), in that courses must frame teaching to these specifications and provide minimum amounts of time of school-based, practical placements. Inherent requirements are primarily concerned with integrity of teacher training courses from pre-admission through to placements and graduation. Yet, while inherent requirements are applicable to all students, their particular relevance is to those with disabilities in terms of their function to manage expectations about the extent to which reasonable adjustments can be made to their studies (Sharplin, Peden, and Marais 2016). Institutional inherent requirements statements specific to teacher training that can be located in Australia have largely centred conservative concerns, aimed primarily at establishing legal compliance at the point of undertaking course practicums, demonstrable professional skills, dexterities aligned with key bodily capabilities, and risk mitigation. The University of Western Australia, for instance, (2017) (8) requires teacher trainees to demonstrate:

- Production of accurate speech for the delivery of content and instruction.
- Visual acuity, sufficient for safe supervision of students and the delivery of discipline/content specific skills.
- Auditory acuity, sufficient for safe supervision of students and discipline/content specific skills.
- Agility for movement around classroom or other learning environment, as required for phase of learning and subject specialisation.
- Fine motor skills of sufficient dexterity, as required for phase of learning and subject specialisation.

In a critical discourse analysis of comparable inherent requirements statements, Corcoran, Whitburn, and McCandless (2022b) note that they emphasise supposed intrinsic attributes of students, rather than providing guidance to the acquisition and demonstration of knowledge and skills associated with teaching. In this way, the statement cleaves closely to a medical or deficit model orientation of disability, assuming attributes like accurate speech, sensory acuity, agility and motor skills are essential to upholding integrity of both the course and the profession. Statements of inherent requirements tend to urge students who think they might be impacted at any point of their studies by disability to disclose, or to register their need for reasonable adjustments, with institution-based Disability Support Services. Provided reasonable adjustments will not compromise the perceived integrity of a course, they can be ostensibly provided. However, reasonableness is difficult to ascertain in contexts where the purposes of possessing such acuities and agilities has been predefined.

It is not obligatory to disclose a disability or related condition to HEIs. Many students conceal impacting conditions associated with reasonable adjustments due to perceived or experienced hostility to diverse learning needs, stigma, discrimination, and unclear or inapplicable deficit-based categories of impairment to which they do not identify (Clark, Kusevskis-Hayes, and Wilkinson 2018; Grimes et al. 2019; Hughes, Corcoran, and Slee 2016; Nolan et al. 2015). Disability, as will be discussed in more detail in the methodology, is also a complex category of identity, with anti-discrimination law having to account for potential variation in student understanding of their conditions before or after enrolment, during their studies or after graduation. In addition, work-integrated learning, such as the school-based placements that are core to teacher training, presents particular obstacles

to students with disabilities with respect to disclosure (Dollinger, Finneran, and Ajjawi 2023). Research of this kind suggests that both students and institutions have vague and divergent understandings about the purposes and benefits of disclosure (Riddell and Weedon 2014). Some students living with disabilities or similar impacting conditions self-exclude and pursue less restrictive academic programmes (Brett et al. 2016). Others actively camouflage any mitigating conditions, thereby further compromising data collection about, and in support of, students with disabilities who access the sector (Pitman, Brett, and Ellis 2023). Nevertheless, inherent requirements statements should remain relevant to all students throughout their career preparation.

Accounting for these complexities, the current study was conducted to make a broad, multi-stakeholder contribution to the design of an inclusive inherent requirement statement for a School of Education, to increase and support more students with diverse life experiences to enter the teaching profession. While the broader study comprised a discursive analysis of extant inherent requirements (Corcoran, Whitburn, and McCandless 2022b) as well as engaging the input of students, academic, professional staff and leadership, the current paper is limited to reporting the survey administered to capture student experiences. Further details about the research design, methodology, data collection instruments and analysis follow.

## Methodology

Designed to capture the experiences of all students studying teacher education at a HEI in the Australian state of Victoria, the phase of research reported in this paper consisted of an anonymous, online survey distributed to those undertaking pre-service, in-service, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. There are approximately 66,000 students enrolled in the university, comprising roughly 14% (approximately 9400 persons) disclosing disability. The School of Education attracts 5,542 students to undergraduate and postgraduate teacher preparation courses that obligatorily comprise professional learning placements in schools, and of this total, 9.3% (approximately 512 individuals) disclose disability. All students enrolled in these courses were invited to participate in the study to learn about their experiences about potential barriers to their achieving course success that might be captured in a statement of inherent requirements. A high-risk ethics application was therefore submitted at the university to undertake the study.

## Conceptual framing

The study is conceptually framed within critical disability studies (CDS). It thereby starts from the premise that disability is a interrelated category of human variability, meaning that it is discursively, materially, and contextually experienced (Feely 2016; Shildrick 2019). As these scholars of disability studies argue, an unfortunate byproduct of the field has been, until recently, a focus on essentialising knowledge that situates disability as a pejorative category of personhood. An example that Feely offers is of a person diagnosed as living with cerebral palsy who is unable to speak and is simplistically described as disabled. Yet as Feely points out, with the invent of technological and human interconnections in specific contexts, communication potential is enhanced. A CDS orientation accordingly foregrounds co-existence and co-action, and as Goodley et al. (2019, 985) observe, 'Critical Disability Studies cherishes notions of interdependence, distributed competence, assemblages of possibility and human potentialities'. Institutions of higher education have tended to situate the concept of disability on a dualism between a medical or social model concern (Moriña Díez, Gavira López, and Molina 2015; O'Byrne, Jagoe, and Lawler 2019; Pitman, Brett, and Ellis 2023), which has resulted in divergent understandings about the causes of disability and the extent of support universities might provide students.

A medical approach to disability gives emphasis to an individuals' diagnosed impairment/s, to which supports must be provided to achieve parity. Such supports are generally provided in the form of legislated reasonable adjustments, which Bunbury (2019) argues perpetuates the oppression

of people with disabilities, for the ways that assumptions are made that living with an impairment automatically limits their capacity to function equally as those without disabilities. A social model perspective, in contrast, locates disabling barriers within the environment of learning (Oliver, 2009). That is to say, a person is not disabled in terms of their biological impairment but any limitations that obstruct their capacity to participate in an activity such as learning or teaching is understood to be physically and socially constructed. Following a social model understanding, then, reasonable adjustments may well be obsolete despite their legislated provision, on the basis that study supports specific to learners with disabilities ought to be made available to all students (Pitman, Brett, and Ellis 2023).

The social model has been put to work to adequately explain the vexing issue of inclusion in HE in relation to students with disabilities (Moriña Díez, Gavira López, and Molina 2015), and it has unquestionably informed the development of CDS in drawing attention to the material barriers that frequently beset participation of people with disabilities (Shildrick 2019). As much optimism about the social model persists, its limitations also lie in its lack of theoretical complexity that could overturn how disability is generally understood, and could indeed transform how inclusion in a professional field such as teaching might be made possible. As Shildrick (2019, 33–34) explains, in spite of the prevalence of the social model:

disabled people continue to be the targets of widespread discrimination, oppression and alienation, not so much for their differences (both visible and hidden), but because their performativity of embodied selfhood lays bare the psychosocial imaginary that sustains modernist understandings of what it is to be properly human.

Being properly human in the context of teacher education, is to draw on a set of perceived attributes, characteristics, or inherent requirements of a teacher, such as those discussed earlier in relation to accurate speech, acuities, agilities and motor skills that typify inherent requirements associated with teaching. Essentialism of this kind is closely aligned with ableism, which is generally understood as the ‘self-sufficiency, autonomy and independence’ (Goodley et al. 2019, 986) deemed necessary in order to teach, or as the mechanisms by which to exclude students with disabilities from studying teaching. By centring how abilities are made to matter in inherent requirements, the study demonstrates how stringent policies can have unintended and exclusionary affects in spite of the presence of legislation aimed at promoting equality. Applied in the discipline of teacher education, studies disrupting ableism have accentuated the interconnectedness of teachers, students, and their environments across the sectors in the service of inclusive schooling (Naraian 2021), as well as the ways that teachers are frequently subject to deficit-based disability knowledge through continuous professional development (Whitburn and Corcoran 2021). The current research similarly acknowledges the processual, contingent, and unstable conditions of ability, disability, and the capacities to teach. Let us now turn to a discussion of the methods undertaken to capture data informing the study.

### ***Survey design and dissemination***

We developed a 20-item survey to gather data from students on their experiences undertaking teacher training courses. The survey, chosen for its ability to engage a diverse student body, was not intended to elicit explanations of experiences related to diagnostic categories. Instead, it aimed to understand demographic characteristics, perceptions of teaching ability, and factors influencing students’ study and career decisions in relation to inherent requirements (Nolan et al. 2015). The data collected would inform the development of an inclusive statement of inherent requirements for the School of Education, intended to facilitate equitable support for all students. Distributed via email via both the School of Education and institutional Disability Support Service, the survey was active from May to November 2021.

The survey comprised 16 closed-ended questions largely comprising ternary scale (yes/no/unsure options), and 4 open-ended questions. The first four questions sought consent and demographic information from participants, including age, sex, and enrolment status. Questions 5 and 6 were aimed at ascertaining at which point (prior or after enrolment) participants became aware of the inherent requirements of their course of study. Disability disclosure was considered in some depth in questions 7–11. Here participants were asked to identify who they might seek support from in the event they needed to disclose; reasons that they might avoid disclosing related to their course; and more specifically how inherent requirements were implicated in their decisions related to disclosure. Three of the survey items were open-ended to encourage participants to explain their reasoning. Questions 12–15 asked students to identify if they had undertaken and/or had passed any of the obligatory professional learning placements of their studies at the time of responding to the survey, and how they felt inherent requirements impacted their potential, including to what extent they believed inherent requirements were reasonable. The remainder of the questions asked participants if they identified as disabled, if they were registered with the university's Disability Support Service, and if they had a plan containing reasonable adjustments.

### Participants

A total of 118 students completed the survey, which is approximately 2.13% of the student population enrolled in the school. While this is an admittedly low percentage overall, our intent was to demonstrate the divergent experiences that students with and without disabilities have when they encounter inherent requirements related to their course of study. Table 1 provides demographic details about participants, including reported gender, age group, disability disclosure, and awareness of inherent requirements. The overrepresentation of students with disabilities responding to the survey indicative of the convenience sampling approach undertaken. Subsequently, a great insight can be gained as to how perceived inherency to teach affected students with disabilities in open-ended questions.

**Table 1.** Age, gender, disability or related condition, and awareness before and after commencing course of inherent requirements.

Age		
18–28	41%	48
29–39	35%	41
40–49	19%	22
50 +	6%	7
Gender		
Male	21%	25
Female	77%	90
Non-Binary	1%	1
Prefer not to say	1%	1
Disability or Related Condition		
Yes	37%	43
No	62%	73
Prefer not to say	2%	2
Awareness of Inherent Requirements Prior to Commencing Course		
Yes	46%	54
No	25%	30
Unsure	29%	34
Became Aware of Inherent Requirements Since Commencing Course		
Yes	53%	63
No	25%	30
Unsure	22%	26

## Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was undertaken on collected data, using Qualtrics' inbuilt clustering of survey responses. Inductively identifying Patterns and Themes within survey responses forms the basis of descriptive analysis (Creswell 2008), and clustering survey responses provided easily ascertainable frequencies within the data including simple demographics, such as age range, sex, enrolment status and disability. To strengthen the analysis, we were careful to think with the CDS-informed conceptual resources that frame this study. This meant that we combed the data for evidence about how notions of fixed ability, requisite knowledge and inherency affected participants in particular ways. From here we noted patterns from the survey items in which participants indicated their becoming aware of inherent requirements, from which it also became apparent that students with and without disabilities had contrasting experiences, which appeared to be further complicated in relation to disclosure. Inductively distilling the data through continual comparing and contrasting the numeric clusters with qualitative comments about these experiences, we developed two broad themes: (i) awareness of and becoming acquainted with inherent requirements; and (ii) negotiating institutional barriers to course success. That there was a proportionally overrepresented group of students with disabilities responding to this survey leads to the second theme being larger in scope. Let us now develop these core themes through a presentation of the analysis.

### Awareness of and becoming acquainted with inherent requirements

Bearing in mind that a statement of inherent requirements did not yet exist in the school of education, significant to our analysis of the collected survey data is that participants experienced perceived inherent requirements associated with their chosen courses of study differently depending on their reported abilities or disabilities. That is to say, while a majority of surveyed students (approximately 73 individuals, 62%) reported that they did not have a disability or related condition, less than half of all respondents (46%, 54 individuals) related being unaware or unsure about any inherent requirements associated with the profession before enrolment. Furthermore, approximately 42% (approximately 50 participants) felt that inherent requirements of the course were reasonable, only 15% (18 individuals) did not agree inherent requirements were so, and 43% (51 individuals) were unsure. Awareness of inherent requirements increased gradually however after enrolment, with approximately 53% (63 individuals) of all participants indicating growing awareness of inherent requirements affecting their studies after commencing.

As a point of contrast, of the 43 students who disclosed disability in the survey, 74% of respondents (approximately 31 individuals) reported becoming aware of inherent requirements after the commencement of their studies. This was particularly acute at the point of entering the obligatory blocks of school-based professional learning, wherein 56% (34 individuals) of students felt they were impacted or somewhat impacted by the listed inherent requirements related to the practical components of their courses, in comparison to approximately 89% of participants with disabilities (approximately 39 individuals). Returning to the matter that the School of Education was yet to develop an explicit statement of inherent requirements, it is unclear if participants were interpreting inherency within course learning outcomes, assessment or practicum requirements, or from published statements of inherent requirements from elsewhere. However, that students with and without disabilities largely encountered perceived inherency contrarily indicates the length to which taken-for-granted knowledge about abilities to teach affect experience, with exclusionary ends for some (McCandless, Corcoran, and Whitburn 2023). One participant, who identified as having a disability in their survey response, was unable to complete a professional learning unit because of complications associated with their condition. While it is unknown if the students' experiences formally constitute discrimination, they indicated perceived inherent requirements associated with the school-based placement prevented them from taking up their teaching ambitions. As they related:



I have found it difficult to return to study with the prospect of having to redo a placement looming over my head. Would be amazing if ... [Disability Support Services] would advocate for me to be signed off on this as I have expressed this placement is holding me back many times but thus far they have not been able to advocate for me to be signed off for the placement which makes it hard to want to finish the degree. Without it I have no qualification though, so I am between a rock and a hard place presently.

This analysis suggests that while most students are unaffected by inherent skills associated with teaching, some students with disabilities may have their participation adversely affected by them, which in some instances can lead to disqualification. This situation is given more analytical consideration in the presentation of the second theme.

### Negotiating institutional barriers to course success

This theme affected students with disabilities specifically, though it did so in nuanced ways worthy of closer scrutiny for rearticulating inherent requirements that give less emphasis to ability-based orientations to competence. Aligning the current analysis with previously published research (Clark, Kusevskis-Hayes, and Wilkinson 2018; Grimes et al. 2019; Hughes, Corcoran, and Slee 2016; Keane, Heinz, and Eaton 2018; Riddell and Weedon 2014), inherent requirements either imposed barriers to students with disabilities, compelled them to disclose their condition/s to the institution in order to receive legislated rights to reasonable adjustments, or acted as a policy function of potential exclusion from their chosen course of study, which students actively avoided where possible. Recalling that reasonable adjustments are stipulated not to interfere with inherent requirements, we were interested to learn how students navigated the purposes and benefits of disclosure. When asked if the presence of inherent requirements would compel students to disclose a disability or related condition to the institution, approximately 25% of survey respondents (30 individuals) indicated they would more likely disclose in order to receive adjustments, around 11% (13 individuals) were less likely to disclose, and over 63% (75 individuals) indicated inherent requirements would make no difference to their propensity to do so. While these figures confirm that most respondents were both largely unencumbered and unfamiliar with the function of inherent requirements because they did not experience disabilities, the ways that perceived inherency was experienced by the minority of student participants was highly contingent on the circumstances of disclosure. Those students who were able to side-step disclosure to the university did so on the basis that perceived consequences might disproportionately impede their progress to the teaching profession. When asked why they would choose not to disclose, one student wrote: 'I have already experienced too much stigma with my medical condition to risk disclosing'. Another participant, who was enrolled as an international student, chose not to disclose a condition because they considered personal risk of exclusion would be heightened through disclosure:

Because I might be seen as inadequate or "unfit/inept" for study due to my disability. Also, I might be viewed as a "hassle/inconvenient" student. Also, that I would be disqualified from studies and expelled from the university for being below average and not being able to fulfil visa requirements because I'm too slow.

Some participants with disabilities related in their survey responses that being compelled to disclose their conditions to the institution was emotionally challenging for them. They used terms such as 'worries' that their condition might impact their enrolment, and concerns that they would be 'looked at differently'. One student expressed 'fear[?][?]' of inequitable access to the course and broader teaching profession, while another articulated their being distressed if having to disclose: 'I don't want to face any potential stigma or have to explain myself, the thought of this is traumatic.' Another participant related that because there was no explicit statement of inherent requirements at the time, there were unknown risks of disclosing disability:

I have tried to find the inherent requirement statement for my course ... since seeing this notification but have not been successful. The only time I knew there was an inherent requirement was from this survey. In any case, I usually do not disclose my condition in any situation unless I absolutely have to.

This suggests that this learner would carefully consider any potential barriers to their participation in direct relationship with risks disclosing a need for reasonable adjustments. Perceived coercion to disclose a condition at the risk of differential treatment and possible exclusion from a teaching career was carefully managed by another student, who related 'I do not feel my condition will impact my ability to be a teacher unless I am acutely unwell and eligible for sick leave. As such, I'd rather avoid stigma and being treated differently from other students.' Differential treatment was a particular concern to other students, as another related 'I would disclose but I would still feel uncomfortable about 'standing out''. These students' comments are acutely illustrative of the increasing impropriety of the policies and practices in higher education that assume a medical model orientation to disability (Bunbury 2019; Pitman, Brett, and Ellis 2023), which serve to individualise how they navigate inherent requirements rather than to reframe how they can become a more broadly relational consideration (Corcoran, Whitburn, and Knight 2022a; Hughes, Corcoran, and Slee 2016).

In contrast to the experiences of the above participants, others held less reservations about disclosing a disability or related condition, on the basis that they felt their progress would be otherwise adversely impacted without legislated adjustments to their studies. To this end, the survey prompted participants to identify how they might address seeking an intervention of any kind to support their progress in relation to meeting inherent requirements. This line of questioning revealed a particular inclination among students that might give university educators and administrators pause for thought. Approximately 38% of respondents (45 individuals) unsurprisingly declared interventions were not applicable because they did not have a condition for which adjustments to their studies would be required. Of the remaining, 16% (19 individuals) indicated they would approach the academic leader of a particular unit or subject, approximately 7% (8 individuals) would go to the course director, 6% would still decline to disclose (approximately 7 individuals), and 32% (38 individuals) would approach institutional disability services to seek an intervention.

These figures say as much about perceived approachability and flexibility of teaching staff for students, as well as the persistence of specialist traditions in educational institutions that assume disability is the foremost responsibility of administrative procedures rather than teaching staff (Hughes, Corcoran, and Slee 2016; Whitburn and Corcoran 2021). We are not making the argument here that specific infrastructure in place within universities such as resource centres in support of students with disabilities is bad: the rise of such support mechanisms is a significant pillar in developing inclusive study opportunities. Yet, in keeping with the CDS orientation with which we frame this study, we do want to emphasise the inclusive opportunities afforded through co-existence and co-action of responsibility (Corcoran, Whitburn, and McCandless 2022b). When prompted to explain the reasons upon which they based their decision to disclose an impacting condition to a member of the university staff, one student detailed an encounter with unsupportive lecturers, motivating them to register with the disability resource centre. As they wrote:

I've gone and asked the lecturers a bunch of time to elucidate on the assignment tasks since I don't understand the questions nor do I understand what they want despite reading the rubric and the question thoroughly [sic]. They just keep on re-repeating what's written, what's the point of asking anything? It makes me think that if I don't understand what's being asked then I'm "unfit" because most of the time I need examples otherwise I misinterpret things and steer off in a completely unrelated dimension. Anyway, the point is, I guess I feel inept in myself for having a disability. The system is wired to benefit neurotypical individuals and is very abelistic, in my experience.

This students' reported experiences of seeking unfulfilled support from teaching staff may suggest why more survey participants expressed a preference to approach disability services to receive procedural adjustments, such as more detailed explanations in this case, rather than to rely on the potential uncertainties associated with engaging directly with teaching staff. This situation resonates with research reporting student experiences in Spain (Moriña Díez, Gavira López, and Molina 2015) which located the inaction of lecturers as the foremost barrier to inclusive learning for students with disabilities in higher education. While there is no doubt that the actions of teaching and resource

centre staff are important to the project of inclusive education, we offer a broader policy-oriented position advancing inherent requirements, which we discuss in the following section.

## Discussion

Our analysis develops two themes relevant to the experiences of students of teacher education underpinning a conceptual shift from inherency to coherency: (i) awareness of and becoming acquainted with inherent requirements; and (ii) negotiating institutional barriers to course success. Together, these themes demonstrate that when encountering inherent requirements, whether or not they have been made explicit, most students will not be affected, on the basis that they possess the requisite bodily capacities assumed inherent to teaching. Yet, students with disabilities may be more likely to encounter barriers within inherent requirements, which can prevent them from graduation; compel them to disclose a need for reasonable adjustments; or camouflage their conditions where possible at the risk of not receiving support to which they may be entitled (Brett et al. 2016). Our contention in this paper is that when positioned to centre individual dexterities, inherent requirements (either perceived or existing) reduce the teaching profession to normative functions assumed as abilities to teach. They assume a medical model orientation to disability as an inherent deficit within individuals, subsequently restricting students with disabilities from contributing to the profession, or preventing them from disclosing as a byproduct of upholding course and professional integrity.

Inherent requirements regulating professional suitability exist in disciplines other than teaching. In social work the absence of guidance on reasonable adjustments to inherent requirements causes tensions for academic gatekeepers to formal training courses, and prevents students with various conditions entering the field (Boucher 2021). To challenge conditions of this kind, Boucher recommends placing 'focus on the personal and political aspects related to inherent requirements' (689), while Australia New Zealand Medical Deans (2021) suggest widening participation in the medical professions necessarily requires early dialogues involving students, medical schools, institutional and external student support services, and, where applicable, students' primary support personnel and resources. Inherent requirements have also been reframed as relational concerns in occupational therapy (Johnston et al. 2016). In an empirical case study in which a student with vision impairment successfully completed a clinical placement in an acute hospital ward, these authors note how careful onboarding planning, consultation, collaboration and problem solving on the part of the university were key to its capacity to support the student affirmatively. These were complemented by reasonable adjustments consisting of a person who could access and read medical records when prompted, and full communication from the student about the limits of his vision, which together were integral to charting successful course completion. These approaches collectively offer constructive ways to reframe inherent requirements by politicising institutional assumptions about student abilities and fostering coherency to address barriers to practice.

Coherency in teacher education politicises inherent requirements by shifting institutional power away from prevailing individualist practical considerations of teaching, to emphasise instead shared meaning making about both what is deemed skills for teaching, as well as the contextuality of disability. Drawing on Deleuzian materialism, Feely (2016) refers to this shift as one of considering context-specific capacities, wherein a body (either teaching as a practice or disability as an experience) is not judged on what it is or is not, but rather what its actual and potential capacities are in particular circumstances. As he explains, 'Because a body always/already exists within a specific material context, its capacities – the things it can and cannot do – are always contextual and relational. Therefore, a list of these capacities will necessarily be ongoing' (871). Coherency would both address the central themes generated in the current study. First, student awareness about what is required to teach and how they could contribute would be openly shared from pre-admission. Second, students would not be placed in a position of negotiation, but appropriately resourced to achieve learning outcomes. Coherency starts then by foregrounding interconnectedness – giving

emphasis to co-action, contingency, and processual variation, in place of perceived notions of fixity and individualisation. Acknowledging the affirmative potential of this perspective involves recognising that our roles (such as teaching educator, student teacher, school-based supervising teacher and support assistant) coexist with the multifaceted influences of individuals, surroundings, animals, and technology, thereby challenging essentialist and conventional educational standards.

## Conclusion

Arguments have been levelled at the HE sector in Australia that it remains unambiguously elitist, in spite of over 40 years of attempts to address persistent barriers to equity for marginalised groups of students (Heffernan 2022). That this occurs leads disability researchers to question '... whether commonly used institutional categories [of disability] are apposite to an understanding of the ways in which students perceive themselves and, importantly, their engagement with the university and success within it' (Hughes, Corcoran, and Slee 2016, 488). Taking this matter very seriously, we have presented analysis of a survey of student experiences in this paper, specific to how they navigate supposed inherency within teacher education courses. Our purpose was to collect data foregrounding student experiences encountering real or perceived skills necessary for teaching, to inform the design of an inclusive statement of inherent requirements specific to teacher education courses at a large Australian HEI, which was not in existence at the time. We contend, and explore empirically, consequences associated with the narrow framing of abilities to teach through inherent requirements that situate bodily functions such as accurate speech, sensory acuity, physical agility and motor skills as indicators of teaching competence, thereby reducing both the teaching profession and disability to anachronistic frameworks of knowledge.

Drawing on a critical disability studies framing of this concern, while turning to other disciplines with significant experiential learning components within their courses, we urge a shift in conceptualisation from inherency to coherency. Characterised as shared meaning making, supportive relations and resourcing, politicising inherency in this way recognises the contextual experience of disabilities and abilities to teach. The shift to coherency therefore brings forth important questions. For instance, are teaching skills only verifiable when individuals can independently demonstrate their application physically present at the front of classrooms? Can students with disabilities demonstrate teaching skills in alternate ways? And finally, for now, how can practical knowledge be enhanced through interconnection and interdependence? Other disciplines have begun turning to a relational approach to navigating supposed inherency to practice, and teaching must surely follow.

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