



The changing rationalities of Australian federal and national inclusive education policies

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Abstract

Ideas and practices associated with inclusive education have featured prominently in the policies and reforms of successive Australian federal governments since the 1990s, yet there are limited historical analyses of these developments. This paper analyses federal and national inclusive education policies in Australia spanning from 1992 to the present. Drawing upon the concept of ‘political rationality’, the paper examines how the modes of reason underpinning inclusive education policies have evolved over time. Three distinct phases of policy development are identified, which we suggest are characterised by three dominant rationalities: (1) standardisation, (2) the neo-social and (3) personalisation. We argue that examining these rationalities reveals fundamental shifts in ways of thinking about and reasoning inclusive education in policy. We conclude by considering the implications of the different rationalities and single out the potential tensions emerging between rationalities of standardisation and personalisation as an area for future investigation.

Keywords Inclusive education · Political rationality · Australia · Disability policy

Introduction

In this article, we examine the development of inclusive education policies by Australian federal governments over the last 30 years, with a specific focus on policies relating to disabilities. Drawing upon the concept of ‘political rationality’, derived from governmentality studies, the paper examines how the modes of reason underpinning inclusive education policies have evolved over time. We pay particular attention to how governments have framed and justified policies designed to intervene in the education of students with disabilities. It is pertinent to focus on the

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development of inclusive education policies at the federal level because while successive Australian federal governments have played leading roles in driving national reform to the education of students with disability, few studies have been completed that provide historical and conceptual accounts of these developments. Analysing the development of federal inclusive education policies, with specific attention to the modes of reason underpinning these policies, offers an important means to develop an understanding of how ways of conceptualising and articulating inclusion have evolved over time and to explore the potential implications of this.

We begin the article by describing what is meant by the term *inclusive education* and outlining how it has emerged as a key reform agenda internationally and in Australia. In doing so, we consider literature that has examined the development of inclusive education policies. Second, we outline our conceptual and methodological framework, which draws principally on the concept of policy rationality and interpretive approaches to policy analysis. Third, we examine the development of federal inclusive education policies over the last three decades. We split the analysis into three historical phases, which we argue are defined by three dominant rationalities: (1) standardisation, (2) the neo-social and (3) personalisation. We conclude by considering the implications of the different rationalities and single out the potential tensions emerging between rationalities of standardisation and personalisation as an area for future investigation.

Inclusive education: international and Australian developments

In recent decades, the policy aspiration of inclusive education has been globally embraced, to the extent that it now represents a core aim of many contemporary reform agendas (Terzi, 2014). Inclusive education is defined in various ways, rendering the term somewhat ambiguous but also contested (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Haug, 2017). Considering the various approaches taken to defining inclusive education and the differing positions that underlie these definitions, Dyson (1999) has argued that it makes more sense to talk not of inclusion, but of *inclusions*. Thinking in terms of inclusions, in plural, is useful because it encourages researchers to think about and examine the multiple and different meanings of inclusion that circulate within and across policy, research and practice (Engsig & Jhonstone, 2015). While definitions and understandings of inclusion are multiple, at its core, inclusive education is aimed towards providing more equal educational access and opportunities for all children.

While policies geared towards the pursuit of inclusive education have expanded rapidly since the 1990s, there is a longer historical arch preceding contemporary articulations. Indeed, if we consider the evolution of inclusive education in Australia (Forlin, 2006), the United States (Hardman & Dawson, 2008) and the United Kingdom (Hodkinson, 2012), some of the core foundations of current incarnations can be traced back to at least the 1960s and 1970s, when activists and advocacy groups began to challenge policies of segregation by urging education authorities to include students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The term ‘inclusive education’ specifically came to the forefront globally with the ratification of *The Salamanca*

Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1994 (Messiou, 2017). Representing the consensus of participants from 92 governments and organisations, the *Salamanca Statement* urged all governments to adopt inclusive education in either policy or law as a matter of priority (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix). Magnússon et al. (2019) argue that far from presenting a clear definition of inclusion, in the *Salamanca Statement*, “inclusion encompasses an amalgam of political ideals, including welfare-state ideals where education is viewed as a public-good, as well as market-ideals of education as a private-good” (p. 667).

Since the ratification of the *Salamanca Statement*, the prominence of concepts and practices associated with inclusive education and equal rights of people with disabilities in Australian education policies has significantly increased (Anderson & Boyle, 2015). Australia is a federation in which governmental powers and responsibilities are divided between federal and state/territory governments. Constitutionally, Australian states and territories are chiefly responsible for education, yet the last four decades have seen a blurring of the division of responsibilities between state and federal governments (Savage, 2021). As a result of these shifts, federal governments have assumed an increasingly prominent role in steering national education reform. This broader trend is reflected in disability education policies, where successive federal governments have driven national reforms relating to the education of students with disabilities, especially following the legislation of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA) in 1992, which mandates that individuals with disabilities have the right to access and participate in mainstream schools.

The years following the DDA’s legislation saw widespread changes, including large numbers of students previously attending segregated educational settings becoming enrolled in mainstream schools, the completion of a multitude of reviews into the schooling of diverse learners and the launch of the first national agreements pertaining to the education of students with disabilities (Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Department of Education, 2002; Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2001). The past two decades have seen the development of a more wide-ranging set of federal and national policies, reforms and initiatives. Prominent developments include the *Disability Standards for Education* (Australian Government, 2005), which clarifies the obligations of education providers under the DDA, the *National Disability Agreement* (Council of Australian Governments, 2010), the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (2013) and *The National Collection of Data on School Students with Disability* (2015). Concerns regarding inclusion and disability have also been incorporated into other prominent national developments including the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and consecutive reviews into school funding arrangements (Australian Government, 2011, 2018).

While successive Australian federal governments have played a prominent role driving national reform of the education of students with disabilities, few studies have been completed that provide a historical and conceptual analysis of the development of inclusive education policies at the national scale. Prior studies have tended to focus on specific reforms (Gallagher & Spina, 2019; Guthrie & Waldeck, 2008; Whitburn, 2015) and have primarily provided descriptive accounts of policy

developments (Anderson & Boyle, 2015; Boyle & Anderson, 2020; Forlin, 2006). Considering that successive federal governments have taken the lead in ushering in the development of national disability reform in Australia, it is important that more detailed historical and analytical accounts of the last 30 years of reform are conducted.

While few accounts have been written of the development of Australian inclusive policies, over the past decade there has been an increasing amount of research examining the development of inclusive education policies in other nations. A key theme in this literature is that since the 1990s, national approaches to inclusive education policy have undergone major changes in response to shifting political contexts. Analyses of policies from countries as diverse as England, Denmark, Korea, the United States and Italy have observed similar shifts from initial policies focussed on human rights, towards more neoliberal approaches to inclusive education policies, which emphasise human capital, standardisation and accountability (Dyson, 2005; Ensig & Johnstone, 2015; Grimaldi, 2012; Kim, 2014). Although there are similarities in the policy directions taken by different governments, how the purpose and scope of inclusive education is characterised in policies is ultimately influenced by and reflective of nationally specific social, cultural, and political contexts. As Waitoller & Kozleski (2015, p. 4) argue, the “wide range of definitions and interpretations of inclusive education” is largely a result of how globally mobile policy ideas are “interpreted and implemented in culturally, politically and socially charged contexts”. Following this, it is especially useful to examine Australian inclusive education policies from a historical perspective, as doing so can provide insights into the shifting contexts in which policies have been produced and the implications of these contexts for the shaping of those policies.

Policy rationality and interpretive policy analysis

With origins in the work of Foucault, scholars working with a governmentality approach typically conceptualise government as “the conduct of conduct” (Burchell, 1991, p. 29) and focus attention on how practices of governance work to shape, guide or affect the conduct of individuals and groups (Foucault, 2002). Rationality and technology are two key concepts of the governmentality approach. Political rationality refers to ways of thinking about, reasoning and justifying governance (the ideas realm), while political technologies denotes the various techniques and instruments through which governance is practised (the technical realm). Political rationalities and technologies are intimately connected and co-constitutive realms (Rose, 1999). While we are aware that technologies and rationalities are intimately connected and can be productively used together, in this paper we focus solely on the concept of rationality. This is because we are primarily interested in examining the *modes of reason* that have informed inclusive education policies over time and therefore focus our lens on the ideas realm.

According to Rose (1999, pp. 26–28), rationalities have three qualities. First, they are moral, in that they incorporate conceptions of the nature and scope of government authority and the ideals or principles that guide the exercise of authority, such

as justice, responsibility, equity, competitiveness, quality, inclusion and so on (Rose, 1999, p. 26). Second, rationalities have an epistemological quality. Discussing the ‘epistemological character’ of rationality, Miller and Rose (2008) argue that rationalities “are articulated in relation to some conception of the nature of the objects governed—society, the nation, the population, the economy”, adding that “they embody some account of the persons over whom government is to be exercised” (p. 58). Third, rationalities are grounded in a distinctive idiom. Miller and Rose (2008) explain that rationalities are “a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political deliberations” (p. 277). For this reason, the concept of rationality provides a useful lens for examining ways of thinking about, reasoning and justifying governmental action, which in this paper we apply to an analysis of the modes of reason underpinning inclusive education policies at different periods in time.

Our approach to analysing policy rationality is informed by an interpretive approach to policy analysis. Interpretive approaches to policy analysis pay close attention to the context-dependent ways that meanings in and around policies are formed (Bevir & Blakely, 2012). Describing the key aspects of interpretive approaches to policy analysis, Yanow (2014) explains that interpretive policy analysis “shifts the analytic focus in policy studies to meaning-making—its expression as well as its communication—seeing that policies and policy processes may also be avenues or vehicles for human expressiveness” (p. 7). In this way, interpretive approaches are well suited to an analysis of political rationalities, as to understand the construction of rationalities, one must closely examine the textual construction of ideas and meanings at work in policy documentation.

Informed by interpretive approaches to policy analysis, we analysed the meanings articulated through policy documentation, engaging in an in-depth textual analysis of the key policies and reforms related to inclusive education and disability that have emerged since the 1990s. We examined formal policies, statements, and legislation, in addition to complimentary departmental documents such as media statements, online materials and reports. These documents were first organised into an historical timeline, which included the title of the document, a brief description of the key elements of the documents and quotes. The timeline was then reviewed to identify the presence and evolution of rationalities over time, which, as we now explain, led to the identification of three phases of reform that we suggest have been defined by distinct forms of rationality.

Three phases: standardisation, the neo-social and personalisation

In what follows, we shift attention to examining federal and national inclusive education policies in Australia spanning from 1992 to the present. Drawing upon the concept of ‘political rationality’, we focus on how the modes of reason underpinning inclusive education policies have evolved over time. Three distinct phases of policy development are identified, which we suggest are characterised by three dominant rationalities: (1) *standardisation*, which privileges standards, consistency, coordination and alignment as policy solutions; (2) *the neo-social*, which frames social

goods such as inclusion as primarily important for their role in fostering greater economic productivity; and (3) *personalisation*, which suggests that the quality of a public service (such as education) can be enhanced through tailoring it to the needs and preferences of the individual citizen/consumer.

Phase one (1992–2005): the rise of standards-based national reforms in response to global trends

Since at least the 1980s, there has been a significant and well-documented intensification of global policy mobilities, which has seen national education reforms increasingly influenced by transnational policy ideas and practices (Lewis et al., 2019). As Rizvi and Lingard (2009, p. 42) argue, although national policies are primarily still made by governments within those nations, global policy influences and dynamics have played “a significant role in driving national systems of education towards a similar policy outlook”. This trend is clear in Australian education policy broadly (Savage, 2021) and inclusive education policies specifically, with a strengthening of national reforms in response to intensifying global debates concerning the education of students with disabilities.

For example, although concerns regarding access to education for students with disabilities had emerged periodically since the 1970s, it was not until the legislation of the aforementioned Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, Australian Government) in 1992 that protecting and promoting the educational rights of people with disabilities became a more central tenet of federal and national education agendas. The roots of the DDA can be clearly traced to international declarations in the decades prior, including *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons* in 1975 and associated Australian developments including the *Royal Commission on Human Relationships* in 1977, which both emphasised the need to secure basic human rights for people with disabilities (Soldatic & Pini, 2012). A series of subsequent international and Australian reports in the 1980s reinforced this message (Lindsay, 1997).

The DDA offers uniform cover for everyone in Australia against discrimination based on disability, making it illegal for schools to deny or limit the enrolment and participation of a student with a disability (Guthrie & Waldeck, 2008). The legislation of the DDA, as well as subsequent policies and initiatives, were also deeply shaped by other global declarations and influences, of which the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was a central force. Between 1990 and 1994, for example, the Australian federal government ratified a series of UNESCO declarations including *the World Declaration on Education for All* (UNESCO, 1990), which mandated equal access to education for children with disability, the *United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (UN, 1993) and the *Salamanca Statement* which called on governments to adopt the principle of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994). These declarations played a vital role in driving and informing the introduction of national reform in the Australian federation. For example, in 1994, the Keating Labor government introduced the *Commonwealth Disability Strategy*, which

outlined a 10-year framework aimed to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunity to access all Commonwealth programmes, facilities and services. The strategy was introduced directly in response to the DDA and the aforementioned *United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993.

The influence of the UN can also be seen in a related 1994 report introducing the *Commonwealth Disability Strategy* (Department of Human Services and Health, 1994), in which clear links are made between the UN Standards Rules and emerging federal government initiatives:

Internationally, the Commonwealth played a significant role in the development of the recently endorsed United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Like the Disability Discrimination Act, the Standard Rules focus on human rights and access issues. Australia's support for the Rules commits it to a programme of action to encourage equality of opportunity for people with a disability. (p. 4)

This extract highlights the UN's key role in propelling the Federal government towards acting on protecting and promoting the rights of people with disabilities, doing so with a national vision in mind that would apply across all states and territories.

In the decade following the legislation of the DDA, federal Labor and Liberal governments proceeded to launch multiple federal and national initiatives addressing the rights of people with disabilities, including the *DDA Standards Working Group* (1993), the *Commonwealth Disability Strategy* (Dept of Human Services and Health, 1994), the *Commonwealth State Disability Agreement* (Yeatman, 1996) and the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005). Through introducing these reforms, the federal government sought to generate and solidify new national scale norms and standards in disability policy.

We argue that during this phase, federal government efforts to develop a national approach to disability policy hinged on a specific mode of reason that framed the development of clear, consistent and *national* standards (and associated reforms) as the necessary and most effective response to addressing disability-based inequalities. As a further illustration, for example, a 2007 report evaluating the implementation of the *Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement* argued the introduction of the first agreement in 1992 stemmed from “concern” and “frustration” regarding “considerable overlap and confusion” in arrangements for disability services (The Community Affairs Committee, 2007). Reflecting the belief that better policy outcomes would arise from greater collaboration and “national policy alignment” (see Savage, 2021), one of the key goals outlined in the *Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement* was to “provide an opportunity for a joint and cooperative governmental approach to policy, planning and funding for disability services in Australia” (Yeatman, 1996, p. 2).

These developments in disability policy mirrored broader policy trends in education, with consecutive federal governments from the late 1980s onwards seeking to generate a more coordinated and national approach to key areas of schooling, such as curriculum, assessment and teaching standards (Savage, 2021). These attempts

reflected wider global trends towards standards-based reform, which were advocated by influential organisations such as the OECD. As Savage (2021) argues, standards-based reforms were seen as the panacea for a variety of perceived educational issues. Central here was the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (Australian Education Council of Ministers, 1989), through which all education ministers (federal, state and territory) agreed to develop common national learning goals for students, common curriculum areas and national collaboration on other core areas of schooling. Four years after the *Hobart Declaration*, under the Labor Keating government, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) was formed to optimise the coordination of policy making across related portfolios. MCEETYA was subsequently a driving force behind several national education strategies including the *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling* (MCEETYA, 1995), which was endorsed by all education ministers. Broader attempts to create a more national approach to schooling policy was further reinforced through the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (MCEETYA, 1999). *The Adelaide Declaration* provided broad directions to guide schools and education authorities in seeking to maintain a high-quality and equi European Journal of Psychology in education system (MCEETYA, 1999). While these attempts to achieve national consistency represented new forms of intergovernmental collaboration across the federation, it is also clear the federal government was the major driving force behind these national reforms, exerting its fiscal and political powers to encourage states and territories to pursue a standards-based reform agenda that aligned with its preferences (Lingard, 2000). Standards can be seen, in this sense, as a key ‘political technology’ (e.g. Foucault, 2002; Rose, 1999) in the arsenal of federal political power.

It was in the context of this wider shift towards a federally driven nationalised and standardised approach to education policy that the Disability Standards for Education were introduced. The Standards were developed through a lengthy process of deliberation between federal, state and territory governments that began in 1995 and were overseen by a taskforce established by MCEETYA. Reflective of broader national schooling policy developments at the time (see, for example, Brennan, 2011; Lewis et al., 2019), tensions between governments strongly permeated the development of the Standards. These tensions shaped the content of the Standards, as well as the rationalities that underpinned the reform. The dominant rationality hinged on the view that better outcomes could be reached through creating a more standardised system, but during the process of deliberating the Standards, it was clear that economic concerns were also central. For example, during the taskforce’s deliberations, tensions emerged between the federal government’s prioritisation of the claimed positive impacts the Standards would have on protecting students’ rights and the states concerns regarding the financial costs of the Standards. Throughout the preliminary stages of development, the federal government emphasised the importance of the Standards as a tool for enforcing the rights of students with disabilities. In a 1997 discussion paper prepared by the taskforce, it was argued that “Disability Standards have the potential to make rights and obligations under the DDA clearer and easier to understand, comply with and enforce” (Lindsay, p. 5). State and territory governments, however, persistently raised concerns about the

additional costs that would be incurred as a result of the Standards (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2004). For example, some state ministers argued that following the introduction of the Standards, the number of students classified as having disabilities would grow, resulting in a significant increase in expenditure (Department of Parliamentary Service, 2004).

Due to state and territory concerns about the costs associated with the Standards, numerous drafts of the legislation were rejected. In response, the federal Liberal Howard government commissioned an independent consultant, The Allen Consulting Group (2003), to publish a report on the costs associated with the Standards (Department of Parliamentary Services, 2004). In what we argue indicates the beginning of a shift in rationality towards emphasising the economic gains of realising social goals such as inclusion and equity, the potential outcomes of the Standards, including the enhanced access and participation of students with disabilities in schooling, are argued to be beneficial in the following ways:

- to the community as a whole with higher level of human capital and increased productivity growth
- to the business sector through a more highly skilled workforce and
- to the individual in improved employment prospects and higher wages.

Improved employment prospects also lessen the burden on the welfare system (Allen Consulting Group, 2004, p. 47).

As this excerpt demonstrates, social goods such as increased access and participation in education have begun to be recast in relation to economic goods. Following the publication of the report, federal, state and territory governments failed to reach an agreement and in 2005, after 10 years of deliberation, the Liberal Howard government made the move to unilaterally introduce the Standards. The shift towards emphasising the economic benefits of creating a more accessible, inclusive, and equitable education observable in the Standards foreshadowed how in the subsequent decade a neo-social rationality that melted together social and economic goals became the dominant framing in national and federal disability policy.

Phase two: the spread and consolidation of the neo-social (2007–2012)

From the mid-2000s onwards, federal governments played an increasingly prominent role in driving national disability initiatives and reforms. Indeed, in the space of a decade, an array of interconnected reforms, agreements and initiatives were introduced including the aforementioned Standards (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2005), the *National Disability Strategy* (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2010), the *National Collection of Data on School Students with Disabilities* (NCCD, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2015) and the *National Disability Insurance Scheme* (Department of Social Services 2013). The increasing role of the federal government in leading national reforms on the education of disabled students was again reflective of broader trends in education policy at the time. What distinguished this phase from developments above,

however, was a strong shift towards developing and justifying national reforms based on a neo-social rationality. The concept of the neo-social was first introduced in Rose's (1999) work on advanced liberalism and was subsequently developed in education research by Savage (2013, p. 87), who describes it as "a rejuvenated governmental interest in enabling healthy and positive social environments, but primarily for the sake of fostering greater economic productivity". Economic and social goals, therefore, are melded together.

To understand the growing prominence of national reform and the spread of neo-social rationality in disability policy it is important to understand the broader political context in which these reforms were introduced. Attempts to transform core elements of Australia's education system at the national scale were central to the Rudd-Gillard Labor government's agenda following its election victory in late 2007. The Rudd-Gillard government launched an unprecedented number of interconnected national reforms, under the banner of the 'education revolution', in multiple areas of schooling, including the curriculum, teaching standards, assessment, school funding and more (Savage, 2021). Savage (2021) argues these reform agendas were strongly informed by a neo-social vision, whereby equity, the economy and education were framed as harmonious cogs.

We argue that very similar trends can be seen in developments targeting the education of school students with disabilities that were introduced in the years after the election victory of the Rudd-Gillard government. In these developments, it is clear the social and economic domains of governance were collapsed together—treated not as distinct aims, but as two sides of the same coin. For instance, the apparent economic benefits borne of pursuing social goals such as equal access and inclusion were strongly emphasised in the National Disability Strategy (NDS) in 2010, whose implementation was a central election promise of the Rudd Labor opposition government (Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008). The NDS outlined a set of objectives and strategies for improving the lives of people with disabilities, their families and their carers. In a 2010 report delineating the key features of the NDS, it is asserted that the central aim of the NDS was to create "an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens" (Council of Australian Governments, 2010, p. 8). Ensuring people with disability achieve their full potential through their participation in an "inclusive high-quality education system" (2010, p. 52) is one of the central priorities related to education listed in the NDS. However, these social goals associated with developing an inclusive education system are presented as inseparable from the economic gains that such inclusion is seen to generate. As stated in the report, "The role of education is vital to Australia having a productive, sustainable and inclusive future. By acquiring new skills and knowledge throughout their working lives, individuals have the capacity to contribute at their full potential to the country's prosperity" (p. 53).

Neo-social framings of inclusive education were further reinforced in the landmark *Review of Funding for Schooling* (Australian Government, 2011, pp. 107–108), an influential federal government report (typically referred to as 'the Gonski Report' after the chair of the review, David Gonski) that was designed to create a new federal funding system for schools. The review asserts, for example, that "Maintaining

a fair and inclusive education system is one of the most powerful levers available to make society more equitable”; however, it directly follows this statement by arguing that: “The long-term social and financial costs of not maintaining a fair and inclusive education system are also high, in that people without the skills to participate socially and economically generate higher costs for countries” (Australian Government, 2011, pp. 107–108). As this excerpt suggests, ensuring that education is fair and inclusive was rationalised as primarily important for leveraging economic gains. This further supports arguments by Savage (2013) that during this period of federal Labor, political and policy statements that foregrounded the importance of equity were “melted into broader productivity agendas” (pp. 196–197), with education primarily framed as central to Labor’s economic nation-building ambitions. Savage (2021) further notes, for example, that during this period, then federal education minister Julia Gillard regularly framed inequity as a wastage of human capital, rather than a social, ethical or moral problem in its own right. In line with this, making education more inclusive is seen as a means for ensuring the human capital potential of young people with disabilities is not wasted.

Extending these arguments further, we argue that the neo-social rationalities underpinning education policy also informed broader reforms to disability services that occurred during this period, including the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). For example, in a federal government commissioned report focussed on the changes that are required to introduce the NDIS, the imperative to transform the lives of people with disabilities is described in the following ways:

The necessity to act now and introduce an NDIS is undeniable – it is required for the economic safety and security of Australia, it provides a fair go for all Australians. It is the right thing to do for the future wealth of Australia – in both economic and social terms. (PwC Australia 2011, p. 8).

Under federal Labor, neo-social rationalities therefore not only framed education policy, but became one of the central rationalities of social policy more broadly.

Phase three: the rise of personalisation

Emblematic of international trends in education policy (Mincu, 2012), we argue that since the mid-2010s there has been a distinct shift taking place towards the rationality of personalisation in Australian inclusive education and disability policy. Personalisation is a contested and often fluid concept, with origins that can be traced back to marketing theory. For some, personalisation is seen as a key feature of the neoliberal political agenda (Hartley, 2007) whereas for others, it is articulated as an educational philosophy with a strong emphasis on social justice (Nagel & Bishop, 2021). For others still, it is little more than an innocuous set of technical adjustments to teaching and learning practices (Pyket, 2009). While its meanings and usages are diverse, in general terms, the central tenet of the rationality of personalisation is that a service, in this case, the publicly funded service of education, can be enhanced

through tailoring it to the needs and preferences of the individual consumer (Hartley, 2007).

We suggest that the emergence of rationalities of personalisation in Australian inclusive education policy has been triggered by key developments in other areas of reforms in the late 2000s, including *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and the Australian Curriculum. These developments were significant because they stressed the importance of personalisation as a new mechanism for catering to students' diverse needs. The Melbourne Declaration was signed by all education ministers (federal, state and territory) and proclaimed that equity and excellence would be the number one goal of Australian schooling. Promoting "personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian" (2008, p. 7) was among the other key goals of the Melbourne Declaration. The promotion of personalised learning in the Melbourne Declaration arguably influenced key reform initiatives that were put into development in the years to follow, especially the Australian Curriculum, which frames personalisation as the primary way teachers can cater to student diversity and ensure equitable student outcomes. The Australian Curriculum stipulates that to create an inclusive education system, teaching and planning must revolve around the needs, aspirations and interests of individual students (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013, p. 7).

Following the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, personalisation was incorporated into key national disability reforms, including the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD, 2015) as well as the guiding inclusive education policies of some states. For instance, personalisation is included as one of the key principals for inclusive practice for students with disabilities in the New South Wales inclusive education statement. The statement makes clear that: "We have high expectations of all students. We will continue to work with parents/carers and disability and education experts to personalise support so that every student is engaged and learning to their fullest capability" (NSW Department of Education, 2021, p. 2). At the national level, personalisation was reinforced through the NCCD. The NCCD was progressively phased in over three years, from 2012 to 2015 by the Gillard-Rudd Labor governments and then subsequently during the Abbott-Turnbull Liberal governments and involves the annual collection of data on the number of school students with disability and type of adjustments they are provided. The NCCD encourages schools to personalise learning through requiring them to provide evidence that personalised adjustments and supports are being implemented (Department of Education WA, 2015). More recently, personalised learning has received increased attention following the publication of *Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (Australian Government, 2018, p. x), which was commissioned by the Turnbull Liberal government and recommended moving towards a more personalised approach in assessment and curriculum. The review does not specifically link personalisation to the term inclusion, but instead frames it as an effective strategy for improving equity and educational outcomes. For instance, the report argues that: "Personalised learning and teaching—based on each child's learning needs and informed by iterative evaluation of the impact of

those strategies—are effective at improving education outcomes for all students” (2018, p. x).

Personalisation diverges from the key rationalities during the prior two phases in several ways. Distinct from the neo-social rationality, for example, which emphasises the collective social imperatives of creating a more inclusive education system, personalisation rests on the belief that education serves learners as individuals, rather than as groups and, in doing so, generates productivity and other benefits. For example, in the resource *Planning for Personalised Learning and Support* (Australian Government Department of Education & Training, 2015, p. 2), it is asserted that for schooling to be inclusive “Educators need to provide personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each student”. The mode of reason that education serves learners as individuals reframes both the moral purpose of and basis for inclusion so that enhancing individuals’ capabilities and autonomy is prioritised.

We suspect that this shift from collective to individual conceptualisations of inclusion has potentially negative effects because the focus on individual interventions may risk being at the detriment of addressing the deep-seated structural problems affecting the education of students with disabilities such as creating more equitable systems for funding support and challenging discriminatory practices, including students being restricted access to mainstream schools. The continuing commitment to addressing widescale aspects of provision is important because personalisation is unlikely to serve the ends of social justice unless these wider structural problems are systematically addressed. Furthermore, the focus on the individual may come at the expense of a recognition of collective forms of marginalisation and commitments to equality for all young people. The rationality of personalisation emphasises students’ individual rights and teachers’ individual responsibilities to ensure learning is inclusive. Through focussing on the individual, personalisation could contribute to processes of privatisation and responsibilisation where universal rights and the responsibilities of the state are supplanted (or at the least, outweighed) by a focus on individual responsibilities. Discussing the linkages between the personalisation of health care and responsibilisation, Rose (2013, p. 349) observes that while personalisation seems to give people more power to make key choices about their health care, the trade-off is that in making these choices, individuals are subject to new expectations about their skills and capacities and are expected to accept the consequences of their decisions.

Another central shift, is that in contrast to the dominant rationality of standardisation during the first phase, whereby creating a more coordinated and consistent national approach to policy was framed as key to creating a more inclusive school system, the rationality of personalisation rests on a view that school systems can chiefly be made more inclusive through teachers tailoring education to students’ individual needs and aspirations. For example, in documents such as *Diversity and the Australian Curriculum* (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013) and the Western Australian inclusive education policy *Students at Educational Risk* (Government of Western Australia, 2015), it is outlined that teachers can foster inclusion through using their knowledge of students’ learning and support needs to make personalised adjustments. By rendering inclusion achievable through making individual interventions, personalisation may obscure the importance of introducing

more widescale reform that addresses the deep-seated structural issues that generate exclusion (Slee, 2008). As Barton (1997, p. 334) argues, inclusion pertains to far more than reductionist measures alone, such as introducing individual interventions: “It is a quest for the removal of policies and practices of exclusion and the realisation of effective participatory democracy”.

By focussing on interventions made in the classroom, the rationality also frames teachers as primarily responsible for inclusion. Moreover, as we have argued previously (AUTHORS forthcoming), such policies also place significant new responsibilities on parents who must advocate for their children to be provided the support outlined in policy. Power et al. (2021) make a similar observation, commenting that personalisation has been enacted as a mechanism involving an increasing responsabilisation of individuals. Framing teachers as responsible for realising inclusion through personalising learning is based on several assumptions including teachers having the materials, capacity and time to tailor education to a student’s needs. These assumptions are problematic because research has consistently documented that inadequate teacher training and resourcing are among the key issues that hinder the ability of schools to support the needs of students with disabilities (Boyle & Anderson, 2015). These issues mean that in the current context, it may not be feasible to practice personalisation.

Conclusion

How something is rationalised matters and is important to analyse and trace historically. This is because the modes of reason and meanings attached to key terms have material impacts on the conditions of possibility for education, determining what it can be—and, in this case, how young people with disabilities can experience and navigate schooling systems. In this paper, we have sought to identify trends over time in terms of the dominant rationalities underpinning Australian federal and national inclusive education policies. Consistent with the findings of Rezai-Rashti et al. (2017) and Savage (2013), who have argued that concepts such as equity have been rearticulated in diverse and new ways in education policies over time, we distinguished between three phases of policy development during which we argue distinct rationalities have emerged and gained dominance.

During the first phase, federal governments developed inclusive education policies in response to international developments and framed improving the education of students with disabilities as primarily a human rights issue. Reflective of wider trends in Australian and international education policy (Lewis, et al., 2019; Verger, et al., 2017), this phase saw the emergence of a mode of reason that framed the development of clear and consistent national standards and associated reforms as the necessary and most effective response to addressing disability-based inequalities. This mode of reason aligned with the introduction of broader national agreements, standards and other reforms that laid the foundation for the development of a more nationally consistent approach to inclusive education that went on to be further consolidated in the subsequent phase of policy development.

During the second phase, we observed that economic framings of inclusive education became increasingly prevalent. Researchers analysing inclusive education policy in different contexts have reached similar findings and tend to associate economic rationalities with neoliberalism, which they argue threatens policies of inclusion (Danforth, 2016; Dyson, 2005; Grimaldi, 2012). We provide a different perspective by arguing that the second phase was defined by the emergence of neo-social rationality, which collapses economic and social goals together, thus foregrounding the importance of inclusion for the sake of fostering human capital and economic growth. Rather than simply subjugating inclusion, we argue that economic rationalities have rearticulated the meanings and practices of inclusive education. The emergence of neo-social rationalities represents a major shift from the first phase, whereby the social benefits of inclusion tended to be emphasised, towards a new mode of reason that sought to align social justice goals with economic objectives.

The third phase, which we argue is still evolving, has seen the rise of personalisation. Distinct from the prior two phases, rationalities of personalisation frame inclusion as primarily an individual good and responsibility, which we suggest represents a radical change in how the moral worth and means of achieving inclusion are understood and justified. The rise of personalisation may represent a double-edge sword, as while the focus on the individual might serve to obscure broader system efforts and collective responsibilities, recent research we have conducted provides evidence to suggest that parents want their children with disabilities to receive personalised attention tailored to their needs (AUTHORS forthcoming). The shift towards personalisation also raises issues regarding the increasing responsabilisation of teachers. Under this rationality, teachers are framed as primarily responsible for inclusion and have been assigned new, time-consuming roles such as being required to extensively document the provision of adjustments as part of the NCCD. We therefore argue that the material impact of rationalities of personalisation needs to be considered closely.

In summary, our analysis suggests that we are currently experiencing new and yet unexplored tensions as rationalities of standardisation (which continue to define many core areas of schooling policy) come into new forms of interaction with rationalities of personalisation. Specifically, there appears to be a conflict emerging between well-established efforts to align and standardise policies and practices at the national scale, and the more recent impulse to differentiate and personalise practices at the school and individual level. To further understand these potential tensions, it is important that we continue to critically analyse the ongoing evolution of inclusive education policies and extend this to a consideration of how these policy imperatives are interpreted and enacted in practice.

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Declarations

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