

## Publication Summary

The following summary was provided by Carol Barnes. Carol is an Honorary Visiting Fellow within the School of Education at the University of NSW. She is national coordinator for *Gifted Learners with Disability (GLD) Australia*, a not-for-profit online learning community focussing on intellectually gifted learners with disability. She is currently consulting (as a volunteer) to government on numerous *GLD*-related projects, inquiries and reviews. A retired lawyer and a resident of Queensland, Carol is undertaking a Bond University PhD in Law on the legal aspects of disability adjustments for *GLD* children.

**Hornby, G. & Kauffman, J.M. (2023). Special education's zombies and their consequences. *Support for Learning*, 38, 135–145.**

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This 2023 open access article should be considered against the backdrop of an ongoing controversy that has emerged around the inclusion of students with the full range and types of disability into general education classes. Its authors represent universities in the UK, Poland and the US.

The article defines 'zombies' as ideas or persistent myths that should have already died out but have not - in Australia perhaps somewhat akin to 'furfies'. They are potentially harmful ideas which include thinly veiled untruths and which persist despite evidence contradicting their reliability. Somewhat surprisingly, they have become popular even amongst some special educators.

The authors posit that special education's biggest 'zombie' is that only full inclusion can engender authentic social justice and provide the most effective education for students with disability, since special education has allegedly failed to achieve this.

Three examples of specific 'zombies' about full inclusion are presented:

- that full inclusion has been internationally accepted policy since the 1994 Salamanca Statement, which in fact did not categorically call for the universal introduction of full inclusion at all;
- that the feasibility of full inclusion has been demonstrated in some jurisdictions, such as Italy (which in fact has not closed its publicly funded special schools) and New Brunswick (where there has been widespread and longstanding public criticism of inclusion in the press, and where inclusion has not yet ever been formally evaluated); and
- that there is extensive research evidence that inclusion is more effective than special education in achieving successful outcomes for students with disability, despite the existence of studies whose findings support the contrary conclusion and point to possible deleterious effects of iron-clad demands for full inclusion for all.

The authors argue that all these 'zombies' are false, but acknowledge that they are nevertheless widely publicised, even though they arguably result in cruelty to the very students whom they are designed to support.

The article considers six strategies that have been used to promote inclusion 'zombies' to the general public and legislators in various countries around the world.

These are:

*Reframing the nature of the problem which full inclusion is supposed to address*

Instead of the 'problem' being the educational and social-emotional needs of students with disability, the 'problem' becomes the allegation that special education is hindering the implementation of the 'social model' of disability which argues for the full integration of people with disability into society.

*Denying the reality of that problem*

Again the claim is made that special education needs are mythical: no one requires placement in any educational setting other than mainstream.

*Portraying special education as something which most people do not favour*

Special education is portrayed as something 'malevolent and despicable', similar to racial segregation. Pejorative expressions such as 'segregation' and its variants are called upon to denigrate and demean the placement of students with disability in any setting other than the mainstream classroom.

*Presenting full inclusion as something which most people want,*

since it is ostensibly a precondition to justice and fairness or some other lofty pillar of democracy.

*Making the distinction between inclusion and traditional special education appear to be outstandingly stark*

This is achieved by positioning inclusion as an all-or-nothing, for-us-or-against-us, be-all-and-end-all binary choice, thereby seeking to polarise views and separating adherents of each view into 'warring camps'.

*Inappropriate casting of all challenges to the mandated full inclusion*

Challenges are reported to be addressing the wrong question or relying on flawed research, and instead demanding unthinking belief in full inclusion. Contrary evidence is not cited and then thoughtfully refuted – it is simply ignored or labelled 'wrong'.

The authors argue that full inclusion 'zombies' must be exposed, challenged and finally eradicated so that continued development of theory, research and practice in the education of children with disability can again focus on achievable goals and evidence of effectiveness, rather than placement or school setting. They argue that the 'what' is more important than the 'where'.

The authors clarify that they are not unalterably opposed to inclusion in all cases and for all students with disability, but rather they counsel that sometimes 'all' should be modified to 'most' or 'many'.

**Carol Barnes**