Comparing Parents' Versus Teachers' Attitudes to Inclusion:
When PATI meets TATI

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Perceptions of inclusion held by 16 teachers of included students were collated and analysed together with data from a previous study of 10 parents of included children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The initial study that examined parental attitudes about Australian regular school settings used an established American scale, the 11-item Parent Attitudes Towards Inclusion (PATI). Based on the correspondence of PATI responses of Queensland parents to those from a large Californian study (Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, & Widaman, 1998), that study identified a range of "normal" responses to the 11-item instrument, an outcome with practical benefits for teachers of such children. A follow-up study modified the PATI scale to examine teacher attitudes in a convenience sample obtained at a conference. The most notable change in the 11 items was that each was reframed from the singular (my child) to the impersonal plural (children). Teachers were less positive than parents in some instances about the acceptance and treatment of children with autistic spectrum disorder and intellectual impairment in regular classroom settings. The significance of this shift is that it highlights potential incongruities in the responses of parents versus educators.

Collecting and measuring stakeholder attitudes to inclusion
Stanley, Beamish, Bryer, and Grimbeek (2003) provided a detailed critique of significant studies in the field of stakeholders' perceptions towards inclusion. Amongst other things, that literature indicated that the stakeholders who are most closely concerned with inclusion of the student with special needs in a regular classroom are parents (Giangreco, Edelman, Cloninger, & Denis, 1993; Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, Widaman, & Best, 1998; Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Ryndak, Downing, Morrison, & Williams, 1996; Wright & Sigafoos, 1998b) and teachers (Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2000; Coots, Bishop, & Grenot-Scheyer, 1998; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001; Wright & Sigafoos, 1998a). Existing data from these stakeholders has indicated a range of negative perceptions: teacher attitudes about working in inclusion programs; parental demands for inclusive placements irrespective of the disabling condition; teacher and parent fears about lack of academic, social, and behavioural benefits; and some ambivalence about benefits and reluctance to socialise from nondisabled peers (Fisher, Pumpan, & Sax, 1998). Understanding more about these negatives might help teachers and parents to reach agreement on effective inclusive practice.
Stanley et al. (2003) concluded that what has distinguished recent work from earlier and more general studies of inclusive attitudes is an ambition to collect data from stakeholders as a means to make changes in the school and classroom. More specifically, they argued that, within the regular classroom, teachers and parents need better tools to help them to (a) examine their own reflections on existing and desirable practice and (b) share their perspectives with each other (Salend, 1999). They noted that sets of tools have been designed to collect information from teachers (Salend, 1999) and parents (Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, & Widaman, 1998), respectively.

What distinguished these studies from more general studies of inclusive attitudes was an intention to use data from these stakeholders to make changes in the school and classroom. Salend (1999) proposed a highly detailed multicomponent process that comprised a combination of staff questionnaires, interviews, reflective journals, and focus groups, to enable staff to share varying beliefs, experiences, and strategies. Moreover, he emphasised the need for simultaneous investigation and comparison of how various stakeholders perceive inclusion. That is, teachers needed to be able to access other views about the included student.

Salend's proposed agenda can be criticised as being too cumbersome to administer. Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, Widaman, & Best (1998) designed the Parental Attitudes Towards Inclusion (PATI) in order to reflect the "multidimensional nature of parent perceptions regarding inclusive practices for children with significant cognitive disabilities" (p. 273). When Stanley et al. (2003) tested a small Australian sample on this scale, they reported meaningful cross-cultural similarities. Moreover, they identified items on which some parents' expectations were incongruent with the typical range of attitudes on that item and, thus, might be particularly salient to teachers in working with those parents and in sharing perspectives on those students. In order to further advance educational access to "user-friendly" tools for improving inclusive practice, it was considered that a teacher-adapted version of the PATI might help teachers to reflect on their own practice within the inclusive community as a whole. The scale reported in this study can be construed as a more manageable instantiation of Salend's agenda for teachers.

Stanley et al. replicated the original US study by surveying 10 parents who cared for children with a formal diagnosis of ASD by medical specialists. These parents from a Queensland seaside community ranging from Brisbane City into the adjacent Redlands Shire were all members of a parental support group. More important, this support group has neither promoted nor discouraged inclusion: This neutral stance has been nurtured by the Advisory Visiting Teachers (AVTs), employees of Education Queensland, the major provider of regular and special education in the state. These parents cared for male children with ASD. These children have been ascertained as Level 5 or 6 ASD, a determination that generally provides entry to specialised educational settings in Queensland. Eight children in the sample were diagnosed as impaired by Asperger's Syndrome (a subgroup of ASD). Two were also diagnosed as intellectually impaired at Level 5.

All participating parents were female and had one child between 6- and 13-years old. Each parent had chosen a regular school placement for the entire week, although her
child was eligible for a special school placement. This sample was not asked for detailed demographic information, but their urban-to-rural residential characteristics suggested they were representative of a cross-section of the Queensland population.

Analyses of scores based on responses from these 10 parents suggested that the PATI Scale is not only valid but also reliable, given that Australian scores from this small sample equated with those obtained from the much larger USA sample of 460 parents. Descriptive analyses strongly supported the notion that, despite apparent distinctions in student diagnosis (i.e., level of intellectual impairment, ASD), the American and Australian groups of parents responded very similarly to statements about inclusion. Stanley et al. concluded that, with appropriate guidelines, teachers could use the PATI scale as a tool to improve teacher-parent communication data gathering and decision-making.

The aim of the current study was to extend the scope of replication by comparing the responses of Australian parents and teachers in relation to the range of issues canvassed by the PATI scale. The current study did so by using an adapted version of the PATI scale, namely the Teacher Attitudes to Inclusion (TATI) scale, to elicit responses from the teachers of inclusion-eligible children with severe cognitive disabilities. The major change between the PATI and TATI scales was to change terms such as "my child" or "a student" to "children" or "students." It was surmised that this shift from the personal context of a single child or student to the relatively impersonal context of a number of children as students in a classroom setting would highlight potential differences in the attitudes of parents versus teachers to inclusion-eligible children.

**Method**

**Participants**

Seventeen teacher delegates at a special education state conference in Queensland, Australia, participated in the study during a presentation on attitudes to inclusion. The group of 16 females and one male ranged in age from 22-53 years (one age not stated). Ten of these (63%) were in the 41-53 year age group. Fourteen (82%) were born in Australia. Four (24%) of these participants had completed postgraduate awards. Eight were currently employed at regular schools (three in primary & five in secondary education). Fourteen had work experience at specialised sites. All had taught school aged children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), intellectual impairment, or both.

**Materials**

Participants were supplied with stapled sheets of paper that included the consent form and TATI scale, which was adapted from the PATI scale (Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, & Widaman, 1998; Palmer, Borthwick-Duffy, Widaman, & Best, 1998; Palmer et al., 2001). Each of the 11 items of the TATI scale listed one probable effect of placing children with significant cognitive disabilities in regular classrooms (see Table 1). Teachers were asked to respond on a 6-point Likert rating scale that ranges from "strongly disagree", scored as 1, to "strongly agree", scored as 6. Also, in keeping with the PATI scale, four of the items were negatively worded (Items 2, 3, 6, 9).
### Table 1
Teacher Attitudes towards Inclusion (TATI) scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The more time these children spend in a regular classroom, the more likely it is that the quality of their education will improve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The more time these children spend in a regular classroom, the more likely it is that they will be mistreated by other, nondisabled, students in that room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The more time these children spend in a regular classroom, the more likely it is that they would end up feeling lonely or left out around the regular education students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>When students with severe disabilities are enrolled in regular education classrooms, the positive benefits to the regular education students outweigh any possible problems that this practice may present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>It is possible to modify most lessons and materials in a regular classroom to meet the needs of these children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>If these children were to spend a lot of time in regular classrooms, they would end up not getting the extra help they need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>If these children were to spend much of their day in a regular classroom, they would end up becoming friends with nondisabled students in that room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>The quality of regular education students' education is enriched when students with severe disabilities participate in their classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>If these children were to spend much of the day in a regular classroom, they would end up not getting all the necessary special services that would be provided in special education classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Regular education classrooms provide more meaningful opportunities for these children to learn than do special education classrooms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The more time these children spend in regular classrooms, the more likely it is that they will be treated kindly by the nondisabled students in those rooms.</td>
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### Procedure

The first author presented an overview of his workshop activities on attitudes to inclusion held at a state special educational conference and then handed a package to each participant containing the consent form, a form enquiring about participant demography, and a copy of the TATI scale. The 17 participants filled in the consent form and other materials. The researcher then directed participants' attention to the TATI scale and asked them to read the instructions and rate the level of agreement for each item. At the end of the workshop, 16 teachers returned completed TATI scales.

### Results

Parent responses from the PATI replication study and teacher responses from the present study were collated and analysed together as a composite group to identify group communalities and differences related to specific items. To simplify describing and analysing outcomes, participant responses were collapsed into dichotomous categories such that responses of "strongly disagree, disagree, slightly agree" were treated as "Lack of agreement" and responses of "agree, strongly agree" were treated as "Agreement."

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1 Other data collected in the course of the workshop but not discussed or analysed here included group and individual reflections on the relevance and validity of TATI scale items.
Figure 1. Percent agreement on the 11 items used in the PATI & TATI scales, incorporating pattern-based identifiers for the two items on which parents and teachers significantly disagreed.
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As shown in Figure 1, when considered as a composite group, parents and teachers showed more than 70% shared agreement that materials could be modified. More than 50% of the composite group agreed that students would be fairly treated, that the quality of education would be enhanced, and that these students would be less lonely. Approximately 50% agreed that inclusive education would increase learning opportunities.

Fewer than 50% of the composite group agreed that inclusion would increase the quality of regular student education, that these students would make friends with regular students, that regular students would treat them more kindly, that regular students would benefit, or that special services would be available. Fewer than 30% of the composite group agreed that extra help would be available.

For two of the items with less than 50% levels of agreement, chi-square analyses of group differences found significant group differences. Chi-square analyses were performed for all items. Teachers and parents differed on whether regular students would benefit ($\chi^2(1) = 6.518, p < .05$) by the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular classrooms and on whether these students would become friends with regular students ($\chi^2(1) = 4.626, p < .05$). For both positively worded items, teachers were less likely than parents to agree with the positive statement made by the item.

Discussion

In summary, parents and teachers as a composite group were more likely to affirm some items than others. Despite the array of differences that one might expect from two such demographically disparate groups, therefore, these small samples of teachers and parents, taken together, were more likely to agree than to differ in their estimation of the plusses and minuses of inclusive education. On two items, levels of agreement of these two distinctive groups differed significantly.

It is acknowledged that these initial PATI and TATI studies can be characterised as probes of the inclusion measure as a tool rather than full-scale studies of attitudes to inclusion. Participants were female and had direct experience of children with ASD at home or at school. Because sampling sources used in this study, however, were limited in number and disparate in site (viz., parent support group versus teacher conference workshop), interpretation of the results requires caution.

It is of particular interest that the deliberate shift in context encouraged by the use of impersonal and plural contexts (children, students) did not produce more instances of teachers and parents disagreeing about the relevance of individual items. For that reason, it can be concluded that this shift in context did become important when applied to the two items affirming the likelihood of regular students benefiting or becoming friends with students with disabilities.

One way of interpreting these parent-teacher differences is that parents and teachers disagree on these issues. Another is that the change in context afforded by the shift from personal to impersonal contexts produced the measurable differences. If the latter, then one might conclude that regular students are more likely to benefit from the company of "my child" than from the generic company of "students with disabilities." Likewise, regular students are more likely to become friends with "my child" than with the more
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impersonal "children with disabilities." It follows that such shifts in context might well have influenced the responses of parents as readily as teachers.

For the composite grouping analysed in this study, a simplifying assumption was made that parent and teacher responses encompassed groups of children with similar ranges of individual differences. A third option is that the 10 parent and 17 teacher responses were in relation to different children and that these two parties might have been in total agreement had they been considering the same children. Individual differences between the children and settings represented by the teachers and parents separately may, in part, contribute to the specific differences in the responses of the two groups.

The effect of the coincidence of shifts in the choice of stakeholders coupled with shifts in the use of context in this study on one level constitutes an obstacle to arriving at a straightforward interpretation of the outcome. Certainly, future studies need to involve sets of parents and teachers dealing with the same child. Moreover, it becomes necessary to ask both teachers and parents either version of these items in order to assess the effect of specific contexts as opposed to the point of view of specific classes of stakeholders.

At another level, despite these shortcomings in the research design, the outcomes of this study pose an interesting question about the value of context as a tool for identifying "hard to tease out" incongruities in attitudes related to inclusive education. Certainly, Salend's (1999) agenda of developing tools that help teachers and parents to examine their reflections on existing and desirable practice and to share perspectives with each other could benefit from the deliberate use of context. It seems very likely that the perceptions of stakeholders might be explored more effectively if the contexts for eliciting these reflections were varied deliberately. Future research could investigate further the influence of context on the attitudes toward inclusive education of larger samples of teachers and parents of students with ASD.

References


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