

## Making Inclusion Happen – Podcast Episode 1: The Mainstream

**Intro:** Welcome to Making Inclusion Happen.

**Haley Tancredi:** Welcome to Making Inclusion Happen. A podcast that opens up conversations about what genuine inclusive education is and is not. And what we can do to make inclusive education a reality. My name is Haley Tancredi, and I'm joined today by Professor Linda Graham. Linda is Director of the Centre for Inclusive Education (C4IE) and a Professor in the Faculty of Creative Industries, Education and Social Justice at QUT. Her research investigates the role of education policy and schooling practices in the development of disruptive student behaviour and the improvement of responses to children that teachers can find difficult to teach. Welcome Linda.

**Linda Graham:** Thank you Haley for having me.

**Haley Tancredi:** It's great to have you with us on this, our first podcast in the *Making Inclusion Happen* podcast series.

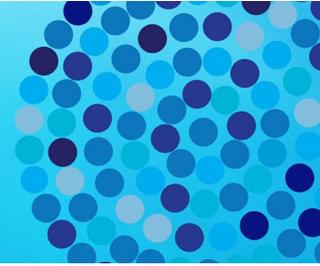
**Linda Graham:** It is our very first podcast, that's true.

**Haley Tancredi:** We're very excited to have you. So today we are really keen to talk to you about what inclusion is and what inclusion is not. So, I'm sure people will be familiar with the book that you edited that was released in 2020, *Inclusive Education for the 21st Century*. In the book, there's a statement in chapter one that reads, if we're ever to realise inclusive education, there are some things that we must get straight, and language is one of them. You go on to discuss the incompatibility of the terms inclusive and mainstream. Could you tell us a little bit more about that?

**Linda Graham:** Yeah. I think I'm gonna go on about that in more depth in the second edition of the book, which is scheduled to come out mid next year sometime. But when I first started writing about the mainstream and it was pretty cathartic to do it in that chapter, I did that because people's sort of... the use of language is to me a very important thing, because it has, it seems so, you know, easy to do, to get language right, but then unfortunately, we don't tend to, we can be lazy around that. And the problem with that is, I think, unthinking use of language leads to, if you are imprecise in your language, you can be imprecise and pretty much everything else.

**Haley Tancredi:** And everything else you mean like the thinking...

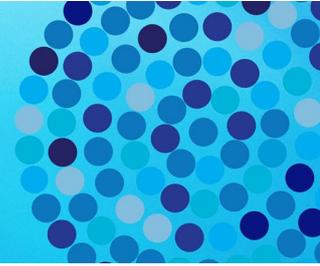
**Linda Graham:** Well, yeah. Because if you're not precise in your language, how can anybody else really fully understand what you mean? And so, I guess the thing about, what irritates me enormously about when people uncritically use the term mainstream... and, you know, I've done it. And there have been times where... you struggled to find a different word. Because, I mean, the thing is we have so many words. When you look at the literature over a long period of time, you'll see that there are different kinds of iterations that are used. So, the neighbourhood schools, local schools, inclusive schools, regular schools, general education, all that sort of stuff, but mainstream, I think, is used very unproblematically and there's a big problem with that. And the reason why is



that you cannot have a mainstream unless you have some other form of stream. And if you have some other form of stream, then that mainstream is not inclusive, is it? I think particularly since the CRPD committee published General Comment number 4 in 2016, which I was very happy that they did because they didn't just define inclusive education, but they also defined, you know, other things that were being passed off as integration. Number one, mainstream is really integration. And because integration happens alongside, typically alongside other forms or other streams, and so when you're talking about mainstream and saying 'Well, mainstream, it's not working well.' No, of course, it's not working because that's not inclusive. And I want academics, as much as anybody else, to change their use of the word mainstream, because quite often academics will be using that term and talking about including students with disabilities into mainstream schools. No, that's not correct. So actually, if we're going to define what inclusive education is, and we're going to define what integration is and what segregation is and what exclusion is, then please don't re-muddy the waters by saying, we're going to include students in mainstream schools because you can't have that unless you have segregation.

**Haley Tancredi:** Yeah, I see, like in the book you've written some examples of what people say about inclusion into mainstream not working. And you say that they are correct and that including into mainstream doesn't work. Is that kind of what you mean?

**Linda Graham:** Yeah. Yeah. And actually, there was a story in *The Age* this morning that someone sent me. It was on suspensions and exclusions of kids with a disability. And within, it was actually a pretty good article, but within it there was a lot of evidence of the kinds of, I guess, what we call terminological slippages or where people are talking about one thing and then using the terminology of something else. And then to someone like me, I can see what that is. For example, there's like... two paragraphs in particular stood out to me of this article and it says, one veteran principal who spoke anonymously due to the sensitivity of the subject, said mainstream schools often struggled to accommodate students with significant behavioural problems. The end result is those students figure more prominently in expulsion and suspension data. He says, it's not because kids with disabilities are being picked on. Sometimes it just doesn't work. And so that's an example of what I was saying. I give, I kind of make up examples of that sentiment in the book. And the point that I'm making is, 'Well yeah, we know that integration doesn't work. We found that out in the 1970s.' And what we learned is that you actually have to fundamentally change how you deliver education and the way that you teach, even in terms of the configurations of classes and so on. It's interesting when, so, I remember making a suggestion a few years ago and you were there, I think you might remember. It prompted this was at a meeting of the research group that we were before we were at centre. Do you remember we were having conversations with people in science education around quality of teaching and that we need more time, like teachers need more time to work with students and so on? It just confuses me as to why we don't change the model that we currently have. Why? Why we have such a lock-step approach to education? So, I think at the time, I think Eddie Woo had just been nominated... Yeah, Mr. Wootube. And we ended up in that debate about where I was kind of saying, there are some teachers who are absolutely great at whole-class instruction, who are content-knowledge experts, and are really, really good at certain elements of teaching and getting through to kids in that kind of lecture style. And then you have other teachers who are, you know, maybe excel at being really supportive and working together in small group situations and so forth. And I just put that out there. I think it came from that whole idea or discussion about flipped learning, which I'm not a huge fan of because you need a lot of self-regulation in order to, you know,



**Haley Tancredi:** Be your own teacher, lead your own learning.

**Linda Graham:** Yeah, exactly. But kind of thinking more about if we do have teachers who are absolutely outstanding at teaching particular things. Well, why can't we have those teachers doing a bit more of that and teaching and then reaching more students through however they do it. But then free up some more time for other teachers to be able to provide that kind of small group support and so forth. And you remember the protracted debate that happened out of that and it was like, 'No way'. And I was quite shocked that something, I thought, as innocent as that little suggestion which I would never dare ever again, that could be met with the kind of appalled horror that it was. But what was clearly motivated by that, that response was motivated by none other than, you will be kind of McDonaldised, and that's just a way of getting rid of teachers. And I'm like, What? No, it's not. How do you get that?

**Haley Tancredi:** And I think the things that you're speaking about align with the definition of inclusion that it's enshrined in General Comment 4. Like it's a systemic reform. It's not just perpetuating or tweaking what is. It's thinking, how can we do things differently? That's right.

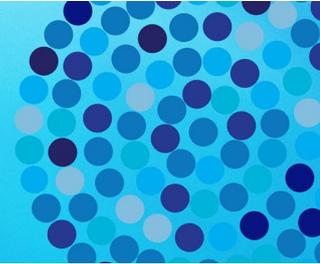
**Linda Graham:** Exactly.

**Haley Tancredi:** But not with investing more work, just different work.

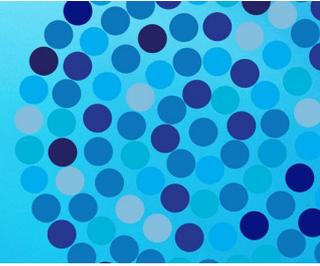
**Linda Graham:** Well, yeah, exactly. And not and not having any kind of hierarchy and maybe mentioning Mr. Wootube as an example did kind of precipitate that debate, in that there might implicitly be some sort of superstar status and cleaner-upper status or something or I don't know, but but that's not at all what I'm, what I was thinking about because you would have different specialists where some are the ones who unpack and explained and the content, um, but then there are others who really work in sort of one-on-one. If you think about it, if we were to diversify in that kind of way, you could have small groups. And yes, you could be extending some subgroups and you're extending everybody. But yeah, you know what I'm getting at. But that is an example of what I mean by a difference between mainstream and inclusive schooling in that there are ways in we can think about turning education on its head. And I think one of the things that freaks people out is particularly about, 'Oh my God, you can include them'. Because they're thinking, they're thinking about, you know, that means, 'Oh no, we've got to bring that kid into this environment. And this is how we do things in this environment.' No, no, we change it up. So it's, it is about thinking differently.

**Haley Tancredi:** So inclusive education is about all. Are there any tensions within this?

**Linda Graham:** Yes, they are. So there's two different, I mean, that I can think of right at the moment. I feel a little bit like poor little Anthony Albanese yesterday when he was asked about what was the cash rate? What was the unemployment rate? Yeah, poor man, anyway. Yeah, there's actually two kinds of tensions that come to mind. So, there's probably more, but like him, I don't necessarily have everything front of mind all of the time. But the two that I think are worth sort of considering is: one where, for example, we say that inclusive education is about all. There's that danger of being about everything, but also then about nothing. And I do think that in the past, inclusive education, because it hasn't been around, didn't just happen yesterday, it's not a new



fad or idea, has been around for decades, but I do think that at various periods there's been like any sort of movement or kind of progress, there are ebbs and flows and roundabouts, and things are being developed as you go along. And I think that initially there was a lot of focus on things like just getting this... just getting kids into schools and focusing on culture and about welcoming students and all that sort of stuff. Making sure that they are kind of... not that just that they're happy to be there, that everyone's happy for them to be there, because life is pretty bad when you not welcome to be there. But I think what ended up being missed, and as part of that evolution, there was a lot of, particularly around the 2010s, there was a lot of focus of there was a sustainability development goals and education for all. There was this kind of bleeding of inclusive education together with the Education for All movement. I was always a little bit 'sus' on that, because even though the two are very... they are intertwined and they are... there was... you can dilute as well. And so I do think that there has been a bit of, you know, some challenge around that. But as well, there's this whole sort of... but inclusive education is about all students. And yes, it is. But the tension within that is that some students learn differently to others, and what it takes to include some students is different to what it takes to include some other students. And I think sometimes we can end up in this kind of very simplistic kind of thing where I guess you get, you don't get into the real depth for anyone. And so you've got these very different groups who are being treated almost the same. But ultimately what it, what it takes to include, for example, a non-binary, different gender identifying young person, that's gonna be very different to including a student with intellectual disability. And the process of yes, wanting to include them in like say for example, the first child I mentioned, you know, you might take a look at, for example, the toilets that you have, the way that you talk about gender, if at all within the classroom, the way how curriculum might be unpacked in certain ways or whatever. But it doesn't fundamentally change the way that you teach. And so I think sometimes what has kind of happened in the past is that there has been a lot of focus around certain things to do with inclusive education like culture, like all. And then that ends up, I think taking focus away from the very real difficulty, the really complex work of changing teaching. The other issue involved on that side is that when you do start saying, 'Oh, inclusion is about all', and there's a specific graphic that comes to mind, where, you know... In wanting to do the right thing, whether it's a school or departments or whatever will say, 'Oh, inclusive education is about these groups'. Well, they never, ever point to the group that so-called doesn't have to be included. So what you do is you point up a difference for all of the other groups and then you naturalise a particular way of being. And then by doing that, you really cement both who sits at the centre and who sits at the margins. So it actually goes to that whole thing of dilemma of difference in that do, how do you identify groups that need to be included and how do you how do you avoid denying difference? But then how do you do that in a way that doesn't stigmatise those groups or reify another. And so when we're talking about inclusion, you never see in any of these graphics that, 'Oh, we need to include cisgender, white, middle-class, whoever, whoever. Girls or boys, depending on whatever they're studying'. So you can never see that. So what it does is it particularises, certain groups, and I think that's a real problem. Then on the other side... you are the one that asked the question. I talked you about the first problem, which was sort of meandering. But the other side of this is when we say it's about all. I think that freaks people out. And I'll never, ever forget, I was getting a keynote at the ACEL Disability Inclusion Conference back in 2018. And so there was like, I don't know, 250 people in the audience and I gave a presentation on what is inclusion. And I did that because at a previous conference, not ACEL, a different one, nobody seemed to know what it was, even though I was meant to be in the inclusive education stream. So I thought, okay, let's talk about what inclusive education really is. And also nobody had seemed to have heard of General Comment 4 or the



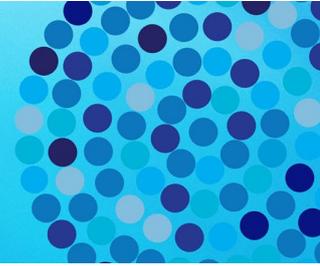
CRPD. So anyway, in 2018, I decided to give this keynote. And as part of that, I was explaining what inclusive education is and how it differs from other things and so on and so forth. And then a participant stood at the end and said something to the effect of: 'So, are you claiming or are you saying that my 50-year-old sister, who has an intellectual disability and is faecal smearer, that she should be included in a mainstream class?' And then it was deathly silent.

**Haley Tancredi:** Everybody leaned forward.

**Linda Graham:** And I was thinking. Who let her in? And look good on her. I think she thought she had me on that one. And I have to say I had to collect my thoughts. But I did and I was a bit annoyed with myself actually because I collected my thoughts and did some very clever wordsmithing and, and basically said, 'No, I'm not saying that your 50-year-old sister could be included or should be included in a mainstream classroom.' What I did say, was that if she had been when, oh, and she did also mention that her sister had been in a special school and so on. And so the point that I tried to make was, look, that her... that she'd always been in a home and so on. And at the point that I tried to make was 'Look, if your sister had been included, the outcomes would have been better and not suggesting that she could be now.'

**Haley Tancredi:** I don't think anybody wants to 50-year-old who is still at school really...

**Linda Graham:** No, I think though that what that brings up is that there are these extreme examples right? Where everyone always goes for the most extreme example to say, 'Oh, are you saying that they can be included?' And so they'll come out with like Jack the Ripper or whatever and it's like, 'No, I'm not saying that Jack the Ripper can be included, a least not now.' But you know, what I am saying is that it is a constant process. There will be without doubt, there will be children who, for example, there are hospitals-schools, and there are some very good reasons for hospitals-schools because if you have cancer and you are undergoing chemo, you cannot be in a school. So sorry, yeah, in that respect, all does not mean all. And *all* also doesn't mean 100% of the time. I think one of the challenges there, and I don't think many of us in inclusive education actually talk about this, and I think one of the reasons that we don't is because, you kind of, there's been so much misappropriation and where things that people have said, and I'll get onto that in a minute, but where people have said something and then it gets taken up and used in different ways. So that can make people reluctant. Inclusive education researchers like myself, reluctant to actually put stuff out there. But because of how it can be sort of bastardised if you like. So for example, inclusive, being inclusive does not mean that a student needs to be in the same classroom a 100% of the time, all the time. There can be... because as well that they might not, they might not want to be. One of the things that is a central tenant of inclusive education and one of the Disability Standards for Education, and it's an obligation which is to consult students. So, for example, if you're making a particular type of adjustment or you're doing something or other and the student doesn't want it to happen in front of other people, then you need to listen to them. Or for example, if there is, I don't know, whether they're doing some sort of like... for example, if we'd been having all these conversations in our one of our current projects around the Australian Curriculum and how it can inherit flexibility of the Australian Curriculum and how that ends up being curtailed at some point along the way, such that an assessment ends up becoming prescriptive and saying that a student must do a speech. So yes, one of the adjustments can be that a student can deliver that that speech in the teacher's rooms or whatever. So they don't have to be in there 100% of the time. What we get worried about though, is, how do you stop that from becoming another form, like a proxy for



support classes, withdrawal intervention, basically a way of getting kids out of regular classrooms.

**Haley Tancredi:** What I'm hearing is it's very much about the decision-making and that it can be falling back into old habits, needs to be checked and critiqued. And that actually if students are having targeted support or if there's a particular system in place, it's really finding the alignment between that practise or support, and the fundamental concepts of inclusive education. And do those things sit together or are we making decisions on the fly with maybe good intentions, but there's not that same alignment?

**Linda Graham:** Yeah, I think that we like... it happens to and for everybody where you are having to make decisions, you make decisions for a number of reasons. There's not just one sort of impetus behind that, but it's about making sure that you question your decisions and make sure that you're not going for expediency every single time, and that you, that the reason that you've made a decision that is totally justifiable, but also that the student's best interests or are actually at heart.

**Haley Tancredi:** Best interests and right to inclusive education, right? That's front and foremost. So, you did, you kind of alluded to the idea of inclusion as a journey. And I know that previously you've described this as being problematic. So what do you think is the problem with the term inclusion as a journey?

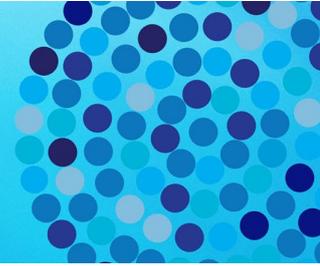
**Linda Graham:** I hear it so many times, particularly in the last few years. But I don't like it because it's... there's this whole kind of... it's a journey to where? Where's the destination? And it seems to me that it's a journey that's never finishing. Going back to what I alluded to before about misappropriation, that once upon a time, people used to describe inclusive education as a process not a place. And the reason that they did that was not because they were saying that segregation was okay. They were saying that it's not simply about moving kids from one place to another. Because they tried that through integration, which was also described as main dumping in the 1970s and figured out, 'Oh whoops, okay, that doesn't work. We've actually got to change some stuff.' We can't, so it's not... just as Roger Slee says: 'Just a change of scenery?' And so you've got to make it more, about more than that. It's not about necessarily where they're being educated, it's how they're being educated. And so when they say that it's a process and not a place that's been turned around and actually used to justify segregation saying 'inclusive education is a process not a place, so special schools can be inclusive'. No, it can't because it's segregation. So yeah. There's that. But then in terms of what you were saying then...

**Haley Tancredi:** I think you've answered the question very well. When we're talking about journey...

**Linda Graham:** Journey, yeah, that's my favourite word. But yeah, basically a journey is, you might never get there.

**Haley Tancredi:** Well, I think distinct from schools that are already making great leaps in being inclusive. Yet they might know that there's refinements that they want to make, but that's not saying that...

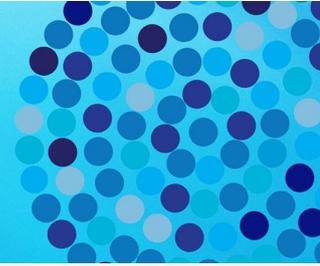
**Linda Graham:** Well, there's also the thing of 'Well, but we're on a journey.' Yeah, you've been on that journey for a very long time... When are you going to get to the station? So



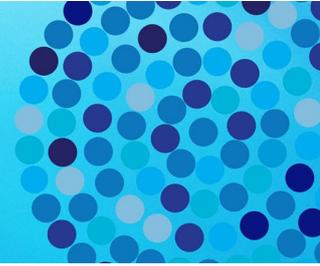
there needs to be accountability around that. We can't be, I think we'd all love to be on a journey to preferably somewhere exotic like Vietnam. But yeah, we, we can't. And so there does have to be, I think it's problematic language to use and I understand that it is maybe acceptable language to try and get people on board... get them on the train. Because we're going to journey to somewhere and don't worry, we never have to get there. But no, I think the time for those gone.

**Haley Tancredi:** So, in terms of making inclusion happen, C4IE aims to produce high-quality written, impactful research on matters that affect students in their school education, with an Australian focus, but also an international focus. So, the plan is to change the world. How does your research contribute to the important goal of the Centre for Inclusive Education?

**Linda Graham:** Well, I guess... So, I suppose you could characterise my research. I don't necessarily... I'm not the kind of person who goes looking for everything when it's going right. And so, I'm problem-oriented. And so, yeah, I want to change the world in that I want to know what's going wrong and I want to fix those things. There's a part, I mean, obviously, there is a corollary to that, which is finding what works. But there's a delicate balance in that. There's a lot of people out there who are doing work around that. And I do think, and that's why actually one of our programmes is called *Inclusion and Exclusion* because those two things are... they are mirror images of each other in that... and Tony Booth used to be, he probably still is, but I think he's retired. He was a researcher in inclusive education, did a lot of work with Mel Ainscow and so he's from that era, and he wrote something at one point that stuck with me. Which was that inclusion is a process, but that process involves increasing inclusion in education but also decreasing exclusion. And there's been actually, recent times where I've looked at that quote and gone hum... We can actually improve on that further because I think it was talking about access and participation or... I'm not sure what, but I think previously, and I alluded to this earlier, in that when a lot of the early work was concerned with culture and so on, there wasn't as much focus on pedagogy. And actually, how you teach to ensure that kids are included. And not only that, to ensure not just that they're there, but they are learning. And as, you know, as a mother of two young people who have a disability, I'm not... Yeah, I want them to be welcome, but I as sure as hell, I want them to learn. So, I think we are starting to really work on that a bit more now. And to get back to the point, which I'm not very good at doing... Which, back to your question about how does my research figure into all of this? Well, there's the... we've got so many projects going on at the moment, but alright. So one of them is a big ARC linkage funded by the Australian Research Council, and that's with three secondary schools working with the English teachers in Year 10. And basically, we're looking at how, how they can... how to optimise their... the writing of assessment tasks sheets so that they are absolutely, as clean as possible to students so that they understand what it is that they have to do. They understand what they're being asked and what they're being told. And we're also taking that across into the teaching. So we're working with 24 English teachers this year, and then many more in Science, history, math, and something else next year. And basically, in that project, we are attempting to show that basically accessible or inclusive quality teaching is good for everyone. But we have a core group within the students that we've recruited who have language and attentional difficulties. And essentially what we're trying to show is that if we can improve instruction such that it works for these kids, actually everybody benefits. And that... I think we need to think like that an awful lot more because currently, education... this whole back to mainstream again, that whole mainstream general education thing because it's got the power of numbers, and it's the same within the university sector, like in Initial Teacher Education, right? Because the majority of people are sort of in curriculum areas or something like that, so



literacy or science or whatever. And so inclusive education sort of sits on the periphery. It's like these small little weird group over here who... who I kind of get wheeled in at the end to tell us how to work with those kids. And it's like actually no, that's not how it should work, because what works for these kids, actually works for everyone. But also similarly, what gets in the road for these kids, it gets in the world for everybody, but the other kids have may have more resources or ways around those things. It doesn't mean that they don't get held up by them. I think that's the way that we really need to get people to start thinking. So that's one way in that my research is helping. But then there's also take a bit of a... kind of public service role, I think in... 'Well, that's the way I like to look at it, in terms of, I think dealing with or investigating topics or issues that either nobody else really, all nobody else wants you to investigate. Or you know, sort of... yeah. So, for example, segregation, looking at who gets segregated and why and how that changes over time. And I'm especially interested in looking at, I suppose, previously it's been called the political economy of special educational needs or whatever, where you're looking at, what role does the system itself play in this problem? So, a lot of my interest is around things like... how support funding is allocated? Who is and isn't allocated to? It's also about, who gets segregated and who gets suspended and excluded? And the biggest thing I think for me is what happens for those kids before they get suspended, excluded, or segregated? And the answer is typically not a lot. And I'm increasingly concerned about the actual... the evidence-base behind what we do. So, it's not, it's not a popular job. You're not really producing research that makes people happy. But I think it's important research. So you kind of... the messenger gets shot quite a lot. But, you still need to, that messenger needs to just pick themselves up and go: 'Alrighty' onto the next one. Because if we don't look at the things that we are either doing or not doing. So, for example, if there are kids who like, for example, the paper that we have on reading. And if kids are not being provided with high-quality systematic instruction that teaches them to decode in the early years of school, and then if they're not being identified for reading difficulties that they do actually have, then if they're not being provided with evidence-based programs that can correct the difficulties in decoding that they have, you know, like who's to blame for that? That's not them, that's us. So yeah, that's really how I'm trying to change the world, which is I think sometimes these kids end up getting a raw deal. And I think that sometimes because the things, the exterior stuff that we see quite often may come from a sort of challenging background. I do think actually in the sociology of education, we've been far too successful in talking about social background and it as a determinant of outcomes. Because I think that that's actually had a bit of a blinker effect. Where in actual fact, we... I think we need to acknowledge that those difficulties are there, but there's nothing we can do about them by the time a child ends up at school. Yes, there are things that can be run like breakfast programs and tutoring programs and so on. But we can't change the life circumstances of children through schools. And schools are not responsible for that. But what we do need to do is think much more about what we can do when they arrive. And I would like governments to start thinking a bit more out of the box about these things themselves. So, for example, in some very... like in the areas that I typically recruit kids from, which are very low SES background areas and so on. Why does prep have to happen within one year? Why can't we, for some of those pockets where we know that, because we've got the EDC data, we know where there are significant areas of poverty and so on. Why can't we come up with a better, kind of more intensive transition to... Well, transition to... not to school because I don't want us to start reaching down into early childhood. I think, early childhood, if we have quality education in early childhood that they've got things covered or could. It's more about how can we work on the transition through maybe going back to... kind of a little bit what we used to have where we had infants. Remember that? Junior infants and senior infants, or am I really too old?



**Haley Tancredi:** No, no, NSW in the 1980s had that model.

**Linda Graham:** Yeah. I mean, yeah, I think we there is so much pressure now on teachers on getting them ready for Year 3, and I think that concept of, hey, some kids might actually need to consolidate those early skills over two years rather than one, or maybe the first six months of Prep needs to be spent on doing things that are around self-regulation, around kids learning those really important skills that they don't have yet. Because what we're seeing is that those kids never... either never acquire them, or they acquire them to late for those skills to help them in those critical early years. So it's around about that sort of thing.

**Haley Tancredi:** Fantastic. Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Linda. This has been our first episode of *Making Inclusion Happen* podcast, but we will have upcoming episodes with legal scholars and talking about the obligations under the Disability Standards for Education that you mentioned earlier. And we also have an upcoming issue, episode on rights at school. So, we look forward to sharing those with our listeners. Alright.

**Linda Graham:** Thank you for having me I am,

**Haley Tancredi:** Linda Graham, it has been great.