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A Review of Inclusive Education in New Zealand

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Running Head: REVIEW OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

A Review of Inclusive Education in New Zealand

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a worldwide response to the belief that *all* children have the right to be educated at their local early childhood centre or school. New Zealand's education system has undergone a series of transformations over the past 20 years, which has included modifications to how schools and their students are funded and managed, and the responsibilities various government departments have for ensuring all children receive the best possible education in a variety of environments. This article outlines those changes, suggests a way forward that will help ensure inclusive education practices in New Zealand match the current policies and rhetoric, and further reinforces the uniqueness that all children bring to their 'sense' of inclusion.

Introduction

New Zealand, also known as Aotearoa, is located in the South Pacific, 1600 km east of Australia, consisting of the North and South Islands and a number of smaller islands. The country has a total area of 268 000 sq km. and a current population of 4.2 million people. Data from Statistics New Zealand (2006) identifies the predominant cultural groups as New Zealand European, or Pakeha (68%), New Zealand Māori, who are tāngata whenua or indigenous people (14.6%), Asian (9.2%) and Pacifika (6.9%). The majority of people live in the North Island, with more than 25% of the country's population living in the Auckland area alone. Therefore, even though New Zealand is geographically small, some areas are remote and sparsely populated which can pose challenges to providing equal access to education services for all children.

The New Zealand education system

Free education is a right for from the age of 5 until the end of the calendar year following the student's 19th birthday, and is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16, although most children start their primary schooling on, or close to, their 5th birthday. Students with special educational needs can continue with free education until the end of the calendar year after their 21st birthday. Education in New Zealand is a national responsibility overseen by the Ministry of Education (Te Tahuhu o te Matauranga), and divided into the following four areas:

1. Early childhood education (birth to five years)
2. Years 0/1-8 or primary school (ages 5-13 years)
3. Years 9-13 or secondary school (ages 13+)
4. Tertiary education (not compulsory – ages 16+)

The New Zealand government provides most of the funding for state and "integrated schools", and about 25% of the funding for private schools (Ministry of Education, 2008a). A component of that funding is determined by the decile rating of the school, which indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Schools identified as low decile schools receive the greatest amount of funding per enrolled child, and high decile schools are allocated the least.

Goals and guidelines for curriculum and policy are set out under National Educational Guidelines, which include national curriculum documents, and National Educational Goals (NEGS), that set out specific learning and teaching responsibilities of schools.

Table 1.1: National Education Goals

NEG 1	The highest standards of achievement, through programmes which enable all students to realise their full potential as individuals, and to develop the values needed to become full members of New Zealand's society.
NEG 2	Equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders, by identifying and removing barriers to achievement.
NEG 3	Development of the knowledge, understanding and skills needed by New Zealanders to compete successfully in the modern, ever-changing world.
NEG 4	A sound foundation in the early years for future learning and achievement through programmes, which include support for parents in their vital role as their children's first teachers.
NEG 5	A broad education through a balanced curriculum, covering essential learning areas. Priority should be given to the development of high levels of competence (knowledge and skills) in literacy and numeracy, science and technology and physical activity.
NEG 6	Excellence achieved through the establishment of clear learning objectives, monitoring student performance against those objectives, and programmes to meet individual need.
NEG 7	Success in their learning for those with special needs by ensuring that they are identified and receive appropriate support.
NEG 8	Access for students to a nationally and internationally recognised qualifications system to encourage a high level of participation in post-school education in New Zealand.

NEG 9	Increased participation and success by Māori through the advancement of Māori education initiatives, including education in te reo Māori, consistent with the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.
NEG 10	Respect for the diverse ethnic and cultural heritage of New Zealand people, with acknowledgment of the unique place of Māori, and New Zealand's role in the Pacific and as a member of the international community of nations.

Ministry of Education (2009b)

New Zealand's national curriculum includes two documents, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007a), used in English language settings and implemented from 2010, and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 2008c), used in Maori language settings from 2011. The production of two national school curricula in languages that are not direct translations of each other, makes New Zealand the first country in the world to implement such documents. Both documents identify education outcomes for New Zealand students, including their entitlement to a wide range of learning opportunities in their compulsory schooling. In addition, achievement objectives are set out for each level of the following curriculum learning areas: English, mathematics, science, social sciences, the arts, health and physical education, technology and languages.

Children in compulsory education in New Zealand have their rights to inclusion protected by the Education Act (1989), which gives children the right to be educated in their neighbourhood school, and this right is further protected under the Human Rights Act (1993). The New Zealand Education Act deemed that all children were "Entitled to free enrolment and free education at any state school during the period beginning on the person's fifth birthday and ending on the first day of January after the person's 19th birthday" (Education Act, 1989, section 3). Further section 8 provides that "... people

who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as people who do not."

This statute was the first to guarantee that those children who had special educational needs had the same right to enrol in their neighbourhood schools, and receive the supports they required to function effectively, as any other child in New Zealand. It became illegal for schools to exclude children based on their disability (Ministry of Health, 2001).

At the same time, the Special Education Service (SES), later Group Special Education (GSE) was developed as an independent Crown Agency that would provide advice, guidance and support that would benefit people under the age of 21 with difficulties in learning and development. The model of inclusion adopted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education in their *Special Education in New Zealand: Statement of Intent* (1991) had as its main thrust decentralization of special education services. In 1996, the Ministry released *Special Education 2000* as a framework that would satisfy a "continuum of need" of a diverse range of students. In order to meet these legal obligations, students in compulsory education have access to a range of services, and specific funding. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (ratified by New Zealand in 2008), among other things requires New Zealand to promote access, inclusion, empowerment, equality, and the right to education. The 2001 *New Zealand Disability Strategy* includes a commitment to ensure that no child is denied access to their local, regular school because of disability and that all children have equitable access to resources.

Inclusive Education in New Zealand

“Inclusion is the philosophy that all people have the right to be included with their peers in age-appropriate activities throughout life” (Miller & Schleien, 2006, p.11). The goal of educational inclusion, according to Stainback, Stainback, East, and Sapon-Shevin (1994) is, “not to erase differences, but to enable all students to belong within an educational community that validates and values their individuality” (p.489). In New Zealand, special education is defined in the Special Education Policy Guidelines as "the provision of extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support children and young people with accessing the curriculum in a range of settings"(Ministry of Education, 2003).

Special Education Policy Principles

1. Learners with special education needs have the same rights, freedoms and responsibilities as people of the same age who do not have special education needs.
2. The primary focus of special education is to meet the individual learning and developmental needs of the learner.
3. All learners with identified special education needs have access to a fair share of the available special education resources.
4. Partnership between parents and education providers is essential in overcoming barriers to learning.
5. All special education resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible, taking into account parent choice and the needs of the learner.
6. A learner's language and culture comprise a vital context for learning and development and must be taken into consideration in planning programmes.

7. Learners with special education needs will have access to a seamless education from the time that their needs are identified through to post-school options (Ministry of Education, 2007b).

Support provided by the Ministry of Education to assist schools falls into two broadly defined categories (Ministry of Education, 2010b). The first is not related to individual students but is rather supplied to the school based on a roll and decile formula, or as in the case of the Enhanced Programme Fund (EPF) related to the number of students identified as having moderate special needs in the school. The second category allocates resources to the school based on the number of high or very high needs individual students attending that school.

As shown in Figure 1, there is a wide range of resources available to support students with special education needs. The triangle does not cover all of the support available to students and schools for special needs education, as some individually allocated resources are not shown (e.g., Interim Response Fund, as well as additional support to some students covered by ACC). Early childhood resourcing is for children identified as having high or very high needs and accounts for 5% of children aged 0-5 years. Moderate to high-level needs resourcing for children not eligible for Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS) funding is provided to between 4-6% of school-aged students. Some resources in this category are individually allocated, such as supplemental learning support and some are school-based resources such as the Special Education Grant (SEG). The top section of the triangle identifies resources that are supplied to individual children who are identified as having very high to high level needs. Approximately 3% of school-aged children receive support in this way.

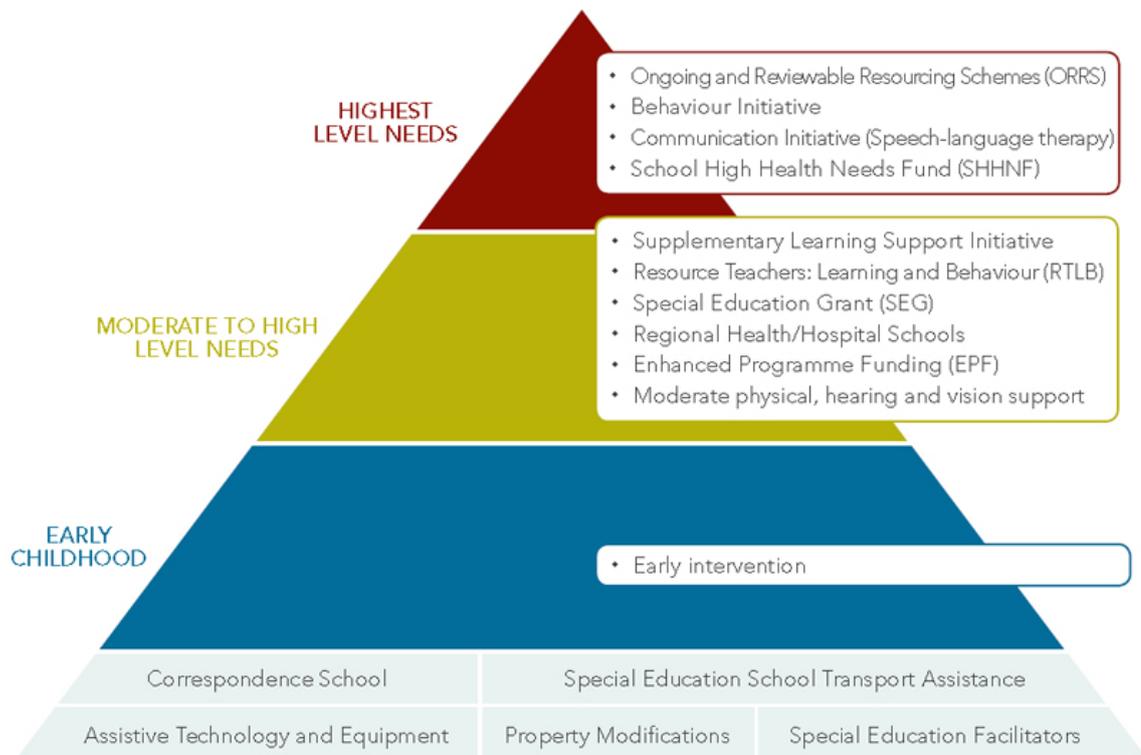


Figure 1. Triangle for resourcing of special needs in New Zealand. (Ministry of Education, 2010b, p.12)

The high percentage of children with special educational needs attending their local schools reflects the trend of moving away from special schools and unit or special class placements, resulting from attitudinal and legislative changes towards inclusion over the last decade (Ballard, 1999; Kearney & Kane, 2006). However, New Zealand does still have special schools that provide support to high needs students. These include 28 day schools and eight residential schools supporting students who are hearing or vision impaired, have severe behavioural needs, or educational or social and emotional needs with a slow rate of learning (Ministry of Education, 2011a). In 2009, 0.4% of New Zealand's students were enrolled in a special school. In comparison, the OECD average was 2.53% of students (Mitchell, 2010). Some caution must be taken here when

comparing such international data, as different countries will use differing definitions for both students with special educational needs, and the educational settings in which they learn.

An independent survey was undertaken in 2007/08 to inform the Government about the level of special education resources received by school and resources allocated to students. The goal was to provide the Government with a better understanding of the actual support children were receiving, and just how schools were using the individual and school-targeted funding (Ward, Purdie, Weston et al, 2009). Key findings from the review included the importance of both teacher aide and full time teachers in supporting students with special needs across the survey schools. The priority for schools was to increase internal support from within the school by increasing teacher aide and teacher hours rather than bringing in additional outside support.

In 2009, the Education Review Office (ERO) published a major report on the management of Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB). In summary, this report said:

Just over half (22) of the RTLB clusters were not well governed or managed ... In many of these clusters RTLB were not getting their employment entitlements, particularly in relation to professional supervision and performance management. Aspects of referral and intervention practices were inconsistent with RTLB policy, and the lack of monitoring systems at management level meant such inconsistencies were not being identified or addressed (Education Review Office, 2009, p.1).

As a result of this report and its recommendations, schools anticipate that there will be changes to the RTLB scheme to ensure a more consistent and higher quality service.

Following these reports, the Government approved a wide-ranging review of special education and produced a public discussion document in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010b). At the completion of this year-long review the Ministry launched a new campaign, *Success for all – every school, every child* (Ministry of Education, 2011b), which is a four-year plan of action to achieve a fully inclusive education system. To this end, the Government has allocated an additional \$69 million for special education initiatives.

From 2012, children in the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Scheme (ORRS) who are deaf, blind or have low vision will have the opportunity to receive more flexible specialist services and support. Teaching resources will be allocated to Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) and the two Deaf Education Centres (DECs) meaning students will have more access to specialist teachers, interpreters or notetakers. Additional specialist services will also be available to children between 5-8 years of age to make successful transitions from early childhood education to primary school. By 2014, the aim is for a further 1100 children with high or very high needs to receive ORRS support. National Standards will include ways to assess, track and report on the learning and development of children and young people with special educational needs, as well as performance targets for schools measured by ERO that will include the demonstration of inclusive practice within their school by 2014 (Ministry of Education, 2010c).

A new specialist training qualification was developed by the Ministry of Education in an attempt to honour the Ministry's objectives and intention of success for all (Ministry

of Education, 2010b). The *Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching* commenced in 2011 and teachers undertaking this qualification specialise in one of six areas:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Blind and Vision Impairment
- Deaf and Hearing Impairment
- Early Intervention
- Gifted and Talented
- Learning and Behaviour

Research has shown that many classroom teachers work hard to achieve the best results they can for the students they teach, however, they do not always have the knowledge or the support required to adapt the curriculum to meet their students' diverse needs (Gilmore, 2001; Kearney & Kane, 2006; Kearney & Poskitt, 2001). The intention is that this new specialist teaching qualification will increase the pool of people with expert knowledge available to support students, teachers and schools when needed. In addition, The New Zealand Teachers Council will require teacher education providers to include a focus on inclusive education in future initial teacher education programmes. Work also continues on the development of a strategy for deaf education in response to a range of issues with provision of specialist education services (Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Throughout this legislative and policy development, no mention was made of tertiary students with disabilities apart from an intention signalled in the Government's *Success for all* to "better coordinate the funding and support to help young people with special education needs move from high school to work or tertiary training" (Ministry of

Education, 2010c). New Zealand does not have any specific anti-discrimination laws, therefore, tertiary institutions' legislative obligations to address the needs of students with disabilities fall under the *Human Rights Act 1993* and the *Education Amendment Act 1990*. Since 1998, New Zealand tertiary institutions have received a Special Supplementary Grant (SSG) for Tertiary Students with Disabilities (TSD). The SSG made it possible for tertiary institutions to provide essential resources and technological assistance for students with disabilities. This funding package was designed to cater for a small portion of tertiary students who have high cost service needs. The grants were intended to (a) improve the access of students with disabilities to educational opportunities at tertiary institutions, (b) increase the level of enrolment of students with disabilities in tertiary institutions, (c) improve the levels of educational achievement by students with disabilities, and (d) increase the accountability of tertiary institutions for their support of students with disabilities, consistent with their obligations under the Human Rights Act 1993 and the Education Act 1989 (Tertiary Education Commission, 2005). While students have entitlements to "reasonable accommodation" protected under the Human Rights Act 1993, there are exceptions to providing these if the tertiary institution can prove unreasonable disruption, undue hardship, or a risk to health and safety. What tertiary institutions deem reasonable will depend on the individual circumstances.

Two key documents released in the last few years support the goal of New Zealand becoming a more inclusive society, including equal access to all levels of education. The first of these was the *NZ Disability Strategy – Making a World of Difference* (Ministry of Health, 2001). The aim of the *NZ Disability Strategy* was to eliminate barriers that people with a long-term impairment might encounter doing things that most

New Zealanders take for granted. The barriers identified ranged from the purely physical, such as access to buildings, through to attitudinal barriers due to poor understanding of disability issues.

Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have. (Ministry of Health, 2001, p. 1)

The government believed, when it later released the *Tertiary Education Strategy 2002-07* (Ministry of Education, 2002) that providers, communities, and government agencies would work collaboratively to achieve the vision outlined in the Disability Strategy. As a means of assisting tertiary institutions to implement the Disability Strategy objectives, ACHIEVE (The National Post-Secondary Education Disability Network Incorporated) initiated and developed, *Kia-Orite Achieving Equity: New Zealand Code of Practice for an Inclusive Tertiary Education Environment for Students with Impairments* in 2004. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Disability Issues endorsed the *Code* as a guideline document. While the *Code* is not a legal document to be complied with, it is however, required practice if tertiary institutions are going to meet their own equity policies, and their statutory obligations.

New Zealand studies (Kirkland, 1990; McKay, Ballard & Smith, 1998; McKay, Rowlands, Ballard, Smith & Gleeson, 1995; Neal & Hayward, 1997) outlined the experiences and range of supports and services available to students with disability within the tertiary education sector. The main barriers identified in these early studies were physical and attitudinal, compounded by lack of institutional resources. Wilkins and Lambert (2005) believed that the implementation of specific institutional funding for

tertiary students with disability in 1998, and the fact that their campus was relatively new and built with accessible buildings, meant that attitudinal barriers, and the need for flexible teaching and assessment practices, were the main issues for their institution.

The policy of inclusion embraced in the compulsory years of schooling should be an ongoing objective in tertiary education. These two documents affirm the responsibility for equity in education to be squarely with each tertiary institution.

The way forward

New Zealand educational institutions are bound by legislation and policy that has at its core the aim of maximising the participation of all learners. Powers (1996, 2000) was of the opinion that inclusion is a philosophical concept based on community membership, and is a value system, not a place, or a particular set of learning circumstances. Inclusive education is more about attitude than legislation and policies (Kearney, Bevan-Brown, Haworth, & Riley, 2008; Mentis, Quinn & Ryba, 2005). Inclusive values and beliefs must underpin the whole culture of schools because they determine the policies and practices that will be put into place (Ministry of Education, 2009a). Ensuring that teachers are well prepared to teach diverse student populations and meet the needs of all learners requires an understanding of the principles and practices that underpin inclusive education environments. Therefore, it is vital that all pre-service teacher training explicitly includes such content, both in theory and in pre-service practicum. Currently this is not a requirement in New Zealand. Additionally, teachers need to have access to ongoing professional development, which will assist in their being able to adapt to changes in both what they teach, and how they teach, for all students.

The New Zealand Government has affirmed their intentions to provide an inclusive society by the international treaties and conventions they have signed, most recently the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Such requirements must be supported with appropriate funding. The current changes indicated by the *Success for all – every school, every child* (Ministry of Education, 2011b), has an initial allocation of an additional \$69 million for special education initiatives. This funding will need to have some flexibility, which allows individual schools to accommodate the needs of their own student population. In addition, for the New Zealand education system to be considered truly inclusive, boards of trustees and school management must take the position that all children have the right to a quality education, the right to be and learn together. To do this there must be a national policy framework that ensures that teachers and schools have the knowledge, and the appropriate assistance and professional development they require to successfully teach all children well.

Summary

Research has shown that regular schools have some changes to make before it can be said that all children are welcome and included as fully participating members of the classroom. “Many of our neighbourhood schools are not good places even for those children whose right to a desk therein is never questioned” (Slee, 2005, p.157). The right to be included at every level of society is a goal worth pursuing, as it is central to what our society believes. Teachers sharing good practice and developing learning environments that are barrier-free, responsive and flexible is what is required for all students to participate fully. New Zealand is a country with strong inclusive values such as fairness, social justice, equity, and respect for diversity and by continuing to work

towards an inclusive education system that encompasses these values, our society and all our children, will profit.

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