

11. HOW 'SPECIALESE' MAINTAINS A DUAL EDUCATION SYSTEM IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

I found it difficult to settle on a way of approaching and understanding my own and other families' experiences of education through our eyes and those of our children, grandchildren, siblings, cousins and other family members. I have been writing, studying, researching, observing, thinking, teaching, advocating and talking so much and often not getting very far, since our daughter Maggie Rose was 'diagnosed' 17 years ago that it's hard not to get tired of saying the same things. I know I'm not the only parent who has to fight similar battles over and over. Unfortunately I hear people whose adult children are now in their 30s and 40s saying the same things about their experiences of being excluded from and within education. National New Zealand organisations such as People First, IHC Advocacy, CCS Disability Action, Inclusive Education Action Group and the Disabled Persons Assembly speak as and on behalf of disabled people. Disabled people, their families and allies are providing the critique that our education system needs to inform its transformation.

For some years before I moved to Wellington, I was operating under the (false) assumption that research conclusions, disabled people's voices, the influence and leadership of the human rights discourse reflected in the Education and Human Rights legislation, United Nations Conventions, the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001), early childhood and school education curriculum documents and resources, shared a consensus view about inclusive education. I anticipated that we would have dismantled our dual special-regular education system and replaced it with a fully inclusive one by now. We would have done this at the same time and for the same reasons as we shut down all segregated, institutional settings for disabled adults and supported their rights to live and participate in the community. Unfortunately, it seems such thinking is rare in the New Zealand education system and is often dismissed as politically naive and off the mark.

This chapter considers key barriers to realising an inclusive education system in Aotearoa New Zealand. These barriers are 'Specialese' the language and culture of exclusive education and the attitudinal and structural features of the education system that inhibit change. To examine these obstacles more closely I turn to a bit of discourse analysis, poetry and metaphor. This allows me to expose and examine the language and culture of Specialese and its impacts on inclusive education. I use the Ministry of Education's Special Education web pages and their inclusive education work plan related documents as sources of insight into Specialese and its impacts on creating an inclusive education system.

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Because of the support for inclusive education in educational research, local and international disability movements, NZ government strategies, laws and agreements, I have become very interested in why and how inclusive education is so actively resisted in government policy, and by a significant proportion of schools. Within New Zealand's *Success for All* policy development and document (Ministry of Education, 2010) there was and is no option for a fully inclusive education system. I try to diagnose why governments ignore and/or pay lip service to their own laws, agreements and commitments, day after day, month after month, year after year, decade after decade. In the final section of the chapter, I set an assignment for New Zealand governments to create an inclusive education system.

BARRIERS TO AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM: THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE OF 'SPECIALESE'

Special education can be understood as a conservative reaction to the increasing diversity of school populations (Danforth, Taff & Ferguson, 2006). The knowledge, techniques and provision of special education have been used to control, sideline and diminish any potential influences diversity might have on the social order and status quo (Danforth, et al., 2006). Roger Slee has described the movement of problematic students and populations out of the regular school system into special education as one of, "theoretical, and political deflection". Special education, coupled with resistance to inclusion and diversity within general education, Slee claims, have created space for the continuation of an "unreconstructed school system" (Slee, 1997, p. 407).

I went to the Ministry of Education website looking for clues to explain the preservation of special education, schools and units. What I found was a language and culture of Specialese and a strong commitment to retaining and growing special education. What I read on the website and Ministry of Education documents seemed sad and empty of ideas that would bring about systemic change. But it did reveal how Specialese co-opts and morphs the language and concepts of inclusive education into deficit and exclusionary responses to disability and difference.

In an attempt to expose Specialese and its cultural and political meanings, I have taken commonly used words, terms and phrases from the Ministry of Education website and recent documents and presented them as poetry. Specialese is unfortunately so familiar that we can read it and not notice how the language and terms of inclusive education and disability rights have been distorted. This poem is a little prayer-like for two reasons; firstly under current policy direction it would seem a systemic emergence of authentic inclusive education needs a miracle to pull it off. Secondly, prayerful treatment also seems necessary because the Ministry's current sole strategy is apparently to convince, cajole, request, prompt, remind and pray for regular schools to co-operate in including all students, except of course for those students that are fully or partially excluded in special schools and units.

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Apart from “warm, fuzzy, soporific, mantra/s and suffocating”, the words used in Specialese 1 & 2 are all from the MOE website and documents.

SPECIALESE 1

Warm / fuzzy / soporific / suffocating / special / optimistic

Let us join together
In robust partnerships
Let us promote ‘inclusive practices’
Let inclusion and special education be our mantra/s

Let us use resources and tools
Target settings
Share information and
Support schools

Let us remember
Our simple aim of
Helping teachers to help children
With special education needs
Let us join together
In teams
To use
A tailored approach
Target schools and
Provide in-depth support

Let us be helpful
Build knowledge
Build skills
Build confidence
Build capability
Build understanding
Progress
Support
Share
Make connections
Encourage
Enable
Empower
Enhance

Let us help
(Spread the word!)

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Be Champions and advocates of the Ministry/Project/Policy
Let us provide
Timely and useful feed-back and
Views to augment and complement the Ministry/Project/Policy
Let us
Promote / Progress / Provide / Facilitate / Speak confidently / Advocate
Support and encourage 'buy in'

Because, we're excited to
Improve the outcomes for children
With special education needs
Supporting everyone
Reaching out (outreach) with our special education services
We have a range and variety (smorgasbord/palette/rainbow?)
Of options and choices available for
Families to choose from
Regular schools
Special schools
Special units
Mainstreaming
Inclusive practices
Sometimes, but not always
And we certainly hope
At a school near you

Let us remember that:
Consensus of views is not critical to success
Consensus of views is not critical to success
Consensus of views is not critical to success
Consensus of views is not critical to success

Warm / fuzzy / soporific / suffocating / special

A fully inclusive education system for all.

SPECIALESE 2: WHAT IS SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Special education means the provision of extra assistance:
Adapted programmes or learning environments,
Specialised equipment or materials,
To support young children and school students with
Accessing the curriculum
In a range of settings

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No mention is made of the following notions.

Close all special schools and units
Dismantle deficit
Special education thinking and practices
Exclusion
Enforce compliance and expectations
Grow and bare teeth (grrrr!)

Te Tiriti o Waitangi
Te reo Māori
Tikanga Māori
Mana Māori
Kaupapa Māori

Define inclusive education
No special thinking, schools or units
Name and remove barriers to:
Presence
Participation
Learning and achievement

Listen to Students
Families
Disabled people
Uphold Human Rights
Social justice
Democracy

WATCH OUT FOR THE ELEPHANTS IN THE ROOM!

“One little elephant balancing, step-by-step on a piece of string, s/he thought it such a funny stunt that s/he called for another little el-eee-phant ...”
(Counting song).

It took a lot of effort to persist with reading and interpreting Specialese on the website. I found it hard to maintain my attention to the task and topic, to make real sense of things. In addition to the Ministry, there is a network of Specialese communities and speakers throughout the country. Engaging with Specialese does require a high level of fluency. I persisted and it didn't take long to start seeing special elephants!

These special elephants sometimes have trouble reconciling 'special' with 'inclusive' education. It sounds obvious to me that special and inclusive are not the same. This is because one is 'special' and the other is 'inclusive'. I would assume that governments and their officials would/should agree that 'special' and 'inclusive' are not the same and understand the differences between them. Perhaps

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they could look the words up in a dictionary or ask another person, maybe a friend. I actually discovered from persisting with my website reading that even though they don't *say so* most of the time, they actually *do* know that 'special' and 'inclusive' are not the same! This is because Specialese thinking, groups and institutions *like* and *benefit from* and want to *protect* and *grow* special education (Slee, 1997).

SPECIAL ELEPHANT 1

There are **special elephants** in the room
There are actually herds of them
Their presence is assumed
But is impolite to question them or their right to be there
Especially on occasions when they've been invited
The elephants are sometimes hard to spot
They don't like attention being drawn to them
They're there and as far as they're concerned, that's that.
In order to be polite
Or to go sneak the crumbs from under the table
Its best to try and pretend that the elephants aren't there,
Pretend that they are invisible.
But we all know they are there
Because
They're big, bloody, elephants!

SPECIAL ELEPHANT 2

The Ministry of Education's vision:
Special Education's vision is a fully inclusive education system.

Special education thinking and practices regularly use and co-opt inclusive terms and language in ways that reproduce deficit responses to students with 'special education needs' wherever they may be. Ellen Brantlinger (1997, 2004, 2006) and Roger Slee (1997, 2003) describe how the cultural linguistics of special education (Specialese) is used to deny and obscure its restricting effects on the education and life opportunities of disabled students and adults. The vision in the title of this paragraph is a beautiful example of special education employing cultural linguistics to express the belief that special education is somehow, in most ways, inclusive.

Applying deficit/special labels and segregating children on the grounds of those labels (special education) is currently supported by the Ministry of Education as part of the continuum of special-regular ('inclusive') education provision. Understanding or talking about special/regular and inclusive education as the same or interchangeable ignores the hooks, barriers and practices created and perpetuated by 'special', deficit thinking and approaches. Special education

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obstructs access for disabled-labelled students to basic human rights, and participation, and access to the New Zealand Curriculum. Disabled students and their families can tell you that.

SPECIAL ELEPHANT 3: IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCE INSTEAD OF A FOCUS ON THE WHOLE ELEPHANT

The idea that there are two different groups of elephants is very stubborn, tenacious and focused on the survival and growth of systems that support the detection and disciplining of difference. Specialise is remarkable for its apparent confused contention that ‘special’ and ‘inclusive’ education are the same or that they can happily co-exist, or maybe even merge. Segregating people according to whether they are judged to be normal or not normal contravenes human rights, government laws, strategies and international agreements, best educational practice, research evidence and disabled people’s aspirations for a full and ordinary life. The New Zealand government critiqued and closed segregated institutions twenty years ago. They supported disabled people’s inclusion within local communities and neighbourhoods and their rights to participate as full and equal citizens. Living *and* being educated in the local community are basic human rights.

SPECIAL ELEPHANT 4: RENOVATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE ELEPHANT HOUSE

Not every government official, teacher, school or parent has felt confused about special and/or inclusive education. Enlightened thinking underpins the Education Act (1989), the New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001), the signing of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children, and Persons with Disabilities and the critical and socio-cultural approaches to early childhood and school pedagogy and curriculum. The special elephants are not confused when it comes to protecting their habitat and environments, securing their futures and progeny. Sometimes they feel a need to ask for and receive reassurance about their place. When the special elephants need to protect their habitat they make sure they do it very clearly and without leaving any room for confusion or retreat. The 2010 *Success for All* policy made a space for special elephant herds *and* promised that they can grow and expand their population and habitats.

A SPECIAL SANDWICH

The Ministry of Education will continue to work with *regular* and *special* schools to build on the *success of specialist* teachers resourced through ORRS providing an itinerant *specialist* teacher service for ORRS-funded students in *regular* schools. This is a service that has been provided from some *special* schools and some *regular* schools to *other* [emphasis added] schools in their communities (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Riddles

- Q. How many 'specials' can you get into a special/inclusive education policy statement?
- A. 4 *specials*, 3 *regulars* and 1 *other*.
- Q. How many 'inclusive/s' can you get into a special/inclusive education policy statement?
- A. None.

The *Success for All* policy clearly aims to protect and grow segregated special education provision. Special units, classrooms and schools and special education enrolments are increasing in numbers under this government policy. Unlike most Specialese, the policy statement stands out as not fuzzy or confused at all. It protects *and* maps out space in which to grow and advance special education provision. *Success for All* clearly shelters, protects and feeds its herds of special elephants. Sanctioning special schools, units and staff secures a place for the continuing segregation and differential treatment of disabled-labelled students. The one certainty is that the Specialese construction of creating a fully inclusive education system does not involve dismantling special education language, thinking, structures, practices or settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT: 'SPECIAL/REGULAR'
OR 'INCLUSIVE' EDUCATION?

This assignment provides a possible framework for understanding and progressing the development of a fully inclusive education system in Aotearoa New Zealand. The idea of setting an assignment for New Zealand governments came about as a consequence of my involvement in lots of areas of education as a disability advocate and family member. It was when I was marking and giving feedback on post graduate research proposals in education, and school counselling that I began ruminating about what I would assign Members of Parliament and their officials to get their heads around and do if I were setting them an assignment. At the same time I was being Maggie's mum and dealing with school, as well as sitting on education advisory groups and committees, doing professional development with teachers, setting up parent networks at my girls' schools, having nervous breakdowns on the side. It really started making sense to me that disabled people and their allies should be setting and leading the agenda for and with themselves and the government and its agencies. This section is my response to this call for agenda setting amongst the disability community.

Background

There have been several governments since disabled children's right to an inclusive education at their local school was legislated for in 1989. This assignment task was informed by the Ministry of Education's 2013-2014 'Inclusion Taskforce' and 'inclusive education capability building' work programme. The government and its

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agencies' thinking and processes could do with a little scaffolding and a thorough going over from a disability rights perspective. This message is not new. The key strategy of the Ministry of Education for advancing inclusive education is to convince, nudge and cajole schools/principals/teachers/parents/people into it, one at a time. This approach is piecemeal, slow and time consuming. When you add up each of the teachers, policy makers, politicians, principals, Board trustees, friends, the local café owner, the taxi driver! In total a lot of people and a lot of individual energy to expend on the part of disabled people, their families and allies. There must be a fairer and quicker way!

The floundering of education in deficit structures is due more to a lack of social and political leadership, direction and will than a lack in capability to create systemic change. The recent professional development, implementation and enforcement of National Standards for English language literacy and numeracy provides evidence of the ability of the Ministry of Education to roll out systemic, comprehensive changes, at least within the Primary school sector. Currently messages from on high become more diffuse and change as they pass from a myriad of contracted professional development providers, Boards of Trustees, school principals and teachers (who might tell those overseeing or providing support for learners with disabilities) and sometimes families. Students are often left out all together. Inclusive education can be difficult to understand or translate into action, especially when much of what is communicated is in *Specialese*.

Even though this assignment task is focused on implementing an inclusive education system, the major challenge isn't about *how* to transform education. A small group of disabled people, whānau, researchers and educationalists could nut out a good process for transforming, monitoring and improving education in a jiffy. This work has and is being done locally and internationally. We know what needs doing and how (Inclusion International, 2009; MacArthur, 2009). Meaningful change takes engagement with the key legal, policy, research documents, people and directions. There are quite a lot of people in New Zealand and internationally who do this work well.

The Task

Imagine that you are working on behalf of the Government and New Zealand children, students and their families-whānau to uphold and advance the commitments and direction that has been set in Aotearoa-New Zealand laws (New Zealand Government, 1989, 1993), policies (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2007, 2008, 2010), strategies (Ministry of Health, 2001), national (Ministry of Education, 2009; 2012) and international agreements (United Nations General Assembly, 1990, 2007a, 2007b) to create a "world class fully inclusive education system" (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Transforming New Zealand from a disabling to an inclusive society is part of the government's cross-Ministry commitment (Ministry of Health, 2001). It will require widespread and systemic changes including robust government mechanisms and processes for accountability and enforcement of inclusive

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education and outcomes for marginalised groups (Human Rights Commission, 2012). You will share leadership, planning, implementation, facilitation, accountability and enforcement roles in creating a world-class fully inclusive education system for Aotearoa-New Zealand.

A big part of your job will be identifying and removing attitudinal and structural barriers to a fully inclusive education system. You are required to negotiate and maintain a clear vision based on the binding legal and ethical commitments made by consecutive New Zealand governments in partnership with disabled people and other key social and cultural groups.

The foundation for change lies in the key statutory documents, and commitments that Aotearoa-New Zealand has made in the area of human rights and education, particularly related to the rights of disabled, and indigenous children and people, to equitable access to inclusive education through out all phases of life. These texts and the voices of disabled people through disability, inclusive education networks and disability studies in education research, will be your starting places and touchstones for understanding, approaching, and communicating your topic and task. Whilst the key texts below are not exhaustive they capture the government’s central obligations and commitments and should be used as guiding documents. You will also be able to use them as critical reflective tools to evaluate progress and direction as you plan and implement the changes.

FINAL TIPS FOR THE ASSIGNMENT: KEEP ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The following are some tips for how you can avoid repeating the same mistakes/misdeeds falling down the holes of past and present government initiatives that failed to deliver on their vision, promises and commitments to disabled New Zealanders and their families and to a guarantee inclusive education at local early childhood centres, schools and tertiary education settings.

- *Use* (don’t just reference and forget) current laws, agreements, strategies, curriculum documents, disability community and research-based consensus on inclusive education to develop clear requirements and mechanisms for accountability, compliance and enforcement.
- Acknowledge that you can’t and *shouldn’t* be trying to please everybody, particularly groups who have a vested interest in maintaining and growing deficit, medicalised, segregating thinking and education. Government agreements are clear about the need to dismantle ‘special education’. Past, present and future generations of disabled students and their families need action on and evidence of their rights to equal participation in New Zealand early childhood education, schools, tertiary institutions and wider society.
- Base your definitions of and approach to ‘disability’ and ‘inclusive education’ on the disability and human rights perspectives contained within the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the following documents (HRC, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2012; Ministry of Health, 2001; The Education Act 1989;

The Human Rights Act 1993; United Nations General Assembly, 1990, 2007a, 2007b).

- When defining inclusive education think beyond disabled-labelled students. Inclusive education is not about dividing students up into special/regular or normal/abnormal. Inclusive education is about all learners having equal, meaningful access to the curriculum and educational opportunities. Consider Māori, and Pasifika students and their whānau and other groups who are prone to experiencing marginalisation in our schools. For example, children and families-whānau who move schools and communities frequently; families living in poverty; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and families; refugee, and migrant families who are learning the English language and about New Zealand society. Remember that inclusive education is about *all* students and families- being present, participating, learning and contributing with and alongside each other within a fully inclusive education system.
- Families of disabled students have been and are constantly trying to change teachers and schools one by one as we move through the education system with our children. This process has been repeating itself for decades. Change needs to be structural, systemic, far-reaching, fast and enforceable. Move beyond a student-by-student, family-by-family, teacher-by-teacher, school-by-school, board of trustees by board of trustee approach to action and change.
- Whole early childhood care and education centre/school/tertiary setting, ongoing professional development and mentoring is important.
- Alongside professional development, structural barriers must be removed and replaced with structural supports for inclusive education that are planned, monitored and embedded throughout the system.

Awareness of the Context: Socio-Cultural Views of Disability and (Inclusive) Education

In line with the New Zealand Disability Strategy you should use a social model approach to disability, inclusive education and societal transformation. From a social model view disability is understood as a social and cultural construction, not something that individuals have. “Disability is a process that happens when one group of people creates barriers by designing a world only for their way of living” (Ministry of Health, 2001, p. 1). The emphasis for the strategy and this assignment is on identifying and removing barriers to the learning, participation, contributions and achievements of disabled and other marginalised students and their families in education.

Inclusive education is a human right

Remember that inclusive education is a legal right and that human rights violations are happening for disabled/labelled and other marginalised students within the education system everyday. The government has long agreed that disability rights and inclusive education are important concerns and priorities for New Zealand society (IHC, 2008; Success for All, 2010; Ministry of Health, 2001; Education

Act, 1989; Human Rights Act, 1993; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1994), United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (2007); United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Dismantling special education

The New Zealand government has a clear mandate for dismantling our dual special/regular education system and creating one fully inclusive system. Dismantling the barriers of special, segregated education of disabled-labelled students and their families is twenty-four years overdue (Education Act, 1989).

Both special education *and* regular (special/regular) schools are major benefactors of the conceptual and physical separation of children with and without 'special educational needs' (Danforth, et al., 2006; Slee, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). Special and regular education rely on each other for their existence. The development of the 'helping' and 'special education' professions has historically let regular schools off the hook through the expansion of special education personnel and responses to difference. Regular schools and the regular teaching profession are saved from taking full responsibility for meeting the educational needs and aspirations of *all* children and their families (Danforth, et al., 2006; Slee, 2001, 2003; Stromstad, 2003; Thomas & Loxley, 2001). The relegation of groups of children and their families to special education provision and knowledge reproduces and maintains the normalised social order of regular schooling.

In June 1994, 92 governments and 25 international organisations gathered umbrella of UNESCO for the World Conference on 'Special Needs Education: Access and Quality' in Salamanca, Spain. They developed the *Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. The Salamanca Statement sets out four assumptions that form the basis of the inclusive education philosophy and practices:

- All students come to school with diverse needs and abilities, so no students are fundamentally different.
- It is the responsibility of the general education system to be responsive to all students.
- A responsive education system provides high expectations and standards, a quality curriculum and instruction, an accessible environment and teachers who are well prepared to address the educational needs of all students.
- Progress in general education is a process evidenced by schools and communities working together to create citizens for an inclusive society. (UNESCO, 1994)

Of course, the language and the intentions of the Salamanca Statement, and many others can quite easily be translated into Specialese language and understandings losing or obscuring their intended meaning.

In 2007, Vernon Munoz, the United Nations Human Right's Council's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education's laid out expectations of States Parties that have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to

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“ensure an inclusive education system.” He based his recommendations on article 15, paragraph 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; articles 23 and 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the Salamanca Statement; and the 2007 Disability Convention. The most recent report (HRC, 2012) highlighted Vernon Munoz’s recommendation that “countries develop a transition strategy to transform segregated or partly segregated systems to a fully inclusive education system.” (Article 24 n.p.) This recommendation includes closing all special schools. The reasons Munoz gives for the global dismantling of special education systems to make way for countries to establish one inclusive education system, is special education’s reinforcement of exclusion, prejudice and discrimination towards disabled people worldwide. Special education segregates disabled-labelled students and this limits their access to school curriculum, relationships, participation, learning and qualifications. One of the key recommendations of the Independent Monitoring Mechanism of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2012) in regards to the New Zealand Government’s commitments to inclusive education (CRPD, Article 24) is: “That the Ministry of Education *establishes an enforceable right* to inclusive education” (emphasis added).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to invite you to contact the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand government who are always open to hearing any questions or comments you have regarding their job of creating a fully inclusive education system which they plan to have sorted by December this year (2014). If you do have any feedback or would like to “provide views and information” to support their work in this area, your input is important to them.

It is important
For us to know you
How we’re doing
Please let us know
What’s going well
What we can improve
If we don’t live up
To Our Promise (s)

(Please) refer to the [Making a complaint](#) page

Kind regards...

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