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### Introduction to the special issue - making inclusive education happen: Ideas for sustainable change

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## EDITORIAL

### Introduction to the special issue – making inclusive education happen: Ideas for sustainable change\*

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#### Introduction

The articles in this special issue are based on papers presented at an international conference entitled, *Making inclusive education happen: Ideas for sustainable change*, which was held in Wellington, New Zealand in September 2009. The conference was the work of a group in New Zealand called the *Inclusive Education Action Group* (IEAG). In this introduction to the special issue, we describe the IEAG, the context for our work and the aims of the conference. We also provide a brief overview of the papers.

New Zealand has often been identified as an example of a nation where neoliberal policies have been implemented both quickly and widely. These policies focus on outputs rather than outcomes, stressing the need for efficiency and cost effectiveness (e.g. Apple 2002; Lather 2009; Whitty and Power 1998). Lather (2009) described the resulting climate in schools as an ‘audit culture’ that requires teachers to continuously demonstrate their effectiveness through simplistic and instrumentalist approaches to assessment.

Critiques of the implementation of neoliberal policies in education in New Zealand have come from a wide range of educationists within New Zealand, which is evident in the following statement by Peters et al. (2000, 1):

From being the so-called ‘social laboratory’ of the Western world in the 1930s in terms of social welfare provision, New Zealand has become the ‘neo-liberal experiment’ in the 1980s and the 1990s. This historical reversal of social principles and philosophy has singled out New Zealand as a ‘successful’ experiment pointed to by a number of powerful world policy institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the OECD. New Zealand with a ‘thin’ democracy (that is, one house and a strong executive) and a small population, geographically confined, makes New Zealand an ideal country for social experiment. In New Zealand a distinctive strand of neo-liberalism has emerged as the dominant paradigm of public policy: citizens have been redefined as individual consumers of newly competitive public services, and citizen rights have been re-defined as consumer rights; the public sector, itself, has undergone considerable downsizing as successive governments have pursued the privatization agenda; and

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\*Note the co-editors for this special issue were Nancy Higgins (corresponding editor), Jude MacArthur, Missy Morton and Hazel Phillips.

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management has been delegated or devolved while executive power has been concentrated even more at the centre. Nowhere is this shift more evident than in social welfare and education.

Academics in New Zealand, with a specific interest in inclusive education, have also commented on the implementation of these managerialist policies and the consequent deleterious impact on opportunities for inclusive education for disabled students (Ballard 2007; Gordon and Morton 2008; Higgins, MacArthur, and Rietveld 2006; Higgins, MacArthur, and Morton 2008; Kearney and Kane 2006; Millar and Morton 2007; Wills 2006; Wills and McLean 2008).

In the months between the formation of IEAG and the *Making Inclusive Education Happen* conference, New Zealand had a general election (November 2008). The resulting coalition government was even more committed to education policies emphasising the individual benefits of education and education as a private good, rather than education as a social good (Gordon and Morton 2008). The newly formed coalition produced an inter-party working report that promoted ‘personalised learning’ because ‘[its] goal is to motivate children and parents to become active investors in their own education’ (Act Party, National Party, and Maori Party 2009, 7). One of their first actions as a new government was to call for a *Review of Special Education* (Ministry of Education 2010). The discussion document for this review had a heavy and repeated emphasis on *value for money*. Question 5a invited readers to respond to the question ‘how can individually targeted services and supports be made more efficient?’

Another element to consider is how we weigh up the investments made in the different types of programmes. For example, how do we balance the investment in early intervention programmes with that for services for school students, assistive technology or specialist services? How much should be invested in new and innovative services compared to those that have a well-established evidence base? Also, what is the balance of investment in students with the greatest potential versus all students with special education needs? (Ministry of Education 2010, 33)

The question thus invites responders to look beyond the outcomes of individual students and to consider which ‘groups’ of students might be the better investment.

### **The IEAG**

The IEAG is composed of disabled people, parents, academics, education practitioners, and staff working with non-government organisations (NGOs), who are committed to ensuring that disabled students can participate fully in their local, regular educational setting alongside others of their own age. The group’s genesis was a series of workshops on children’s rights, which were organised in 2006 throughout New Zealand by an NGO, IHC Advocacy Services (<http://www.ihc.org.nz/Advocacy/tabid/1118/Default.aspx>). The workshops included presentations on children’s rights by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, as well as research findings on disabled children’s experiences in schools by MacArthur and colleagues (MacArthur and Gaffney 2001; MacArthur and Kelly 2005; MacArthur, Kelly, and Higgins 2005) and inclusive education in teacher education (Morton and Gordon 2006). The research on teacher education had been commissioned by a second NGO, CCS Disability Action (<http://www.>

ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/). Participants at the workshops included many families, teachers, teacher educators and human rights advocates.

The discussions at these workshops invariably turned to how difficult it was proving to make inclusive education available for all students, and the effects these experiences of exclusion were having on children and their families. Despite the change in New Zealand's legislation (Government of New Zealand, 1989), making it the right of all children to go to their local school, and the implementation of generic and individually targeted funding, many parents continued to experience being turned away from their local school. Audience members at the presentations, with the help of IHC Advocacy Services, thus decided to start a group called 'The Lobby for Inclusion'. A steering group met and began to develop a list of actions and a timeframe.

The group first met in March 2007 with 27 members, with an agenda of nine action areas, including

- legislation and enforcement of existing acts;
- education policy;
- political lobbying;
- research;
- community awareness;
- school awareness;
- parents support;
- children and young people (voices, experiences);
- other bright ideas.

It quickly became clear that lobbying for inclusion needed to be part of a coordinated set of actions and to establish a long-standing organisation or charitable trust in order to avoid being 'picked off' as individuals or overwhelmed by the enormity of the tasks that had been set. Working groups were identified for specific actions. An email network was established to share 'every snippet' of media attention, comments from government officials, and reports and reviews from government departments. Designated spokespersons were selected to respond to issues in the media and the group worked to ensure that its aims, values and analyses of issues were regularly featuring in the media. By August 2007, the IEAG was formally launched in the New Zealand Parliament.

In his speech at the launch, Ian Armstrong, IEAG's co-convenor and a parent, set out why the action group was formed:

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.<sup>1</sup>

My son Duncan was born in 1989. He has Down Syndrome. In the same year the Education Act was amended, giving disabled students the right to attend their local state school.

Duncan started primary school in the mid-1990s – around the time that *Special Education 2000* was launched promising to build a "world-class inclusive education system" in New Zealand.

And in 2001 he attended the launch of the *NZ Disability Strategy*, which includes an objective to "improve education so that all (students) will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular, educational centres"

But the promise of such legislation and policy has not been fulfilled by the performance of our education system:

- Too many of our kids are still denied access to education in pre-schools, schools and tertiary institutions. Meanwhile enrolments of disabled students in special schools and Correspondence School have been increasing.
- Too many of our kids are taxied daily past their local school to attend schools far away from their communities.
- Too many of our parents are distressed and exhausted dealing with an unresponsive and sometimes hostile education system.
- Too many of our schools have no disabled students while others have disproportionately high numbers.
- Too many schools and teachers with negative attitudes to diversity are ring-fencing our kids for professional convenience, while constructing this neglect and segregation as 'special' treatment in a 'safe' environment.
- Too many teachers have inadequate training and support to include our kids and meet their social and educational needs. . . .

The Inclusive Education Action Group has been set up to raise awareness about these problems and to do something about it.

Ian then presented the agenda for IEAG:

We believe the sky won't fall . . . if disabled and non-disabled students learn together.

We support the *Ministry of Education Statement of Intent*, which pledges to incorporate the *NZ Disability Strategy* throughout the education system and which recognises that significant changes across the system will need to occur so that people with impairments can say they live in a society that highly values their lives and continually enhances their full participation.

Our work is based on respect for human rights, and sound research and evidence.

Inclusive education is based on the principle that all people are equal and should be respected and valued.

Inclusive education involves supporting all students to participate in the valued cultures, curricula and communities of their local educational setting by actively reducing barriers to participation and learning.

Inclusive education meets the needs of all children – it will not occur alongside special education and must replace the current dual system of mainstream and special education.

Inclusive education works, as demonstrated by local and international evidence which shows that inclusive education produces students who are better educated and better able to participate and contribute as members of their communities.

If our schools are not inclusive, we have little hope of building an inclusive society.

Subsequent activities of IEAG have included supporting IHC Advocacy Services in their 2008 complaint to the Human Rights Commission. The basis of this complaint was that children with an intellectual disability were being systemically discriminated against in local schools. The complaint was not made about individuals or against individual schools; rather, the complaint targeted the policies and practices, and the actions of the government that created the barriers to inclusive education (McGurk 2009). IHC Advocacy commissioned a new book for parents and teachers entitled,

*Learning better together* (MacArthur 2009). CCS Disability Action commissioned research on the choices that families made when trying to enrol their children at school (Morton and McMenemy 2009). IEAG also prepared submissions on the *Review of Initial Teacher Education* (2009) and the *Review of Special Education* (2010).

### **Making inclusive education happen: ideas for sustainable change**

An important aim of IEAG's research agenda was to share the research that was being undertaken in New Zealand and internationally. IEAG wanted a broader audience for research findings, and also wanted to have a forum in which researchers could hear from teachers, disabled people (currently in the school system and those who had left) and families. IEAG also wanted a forum to share examples of inclusive education in practice. Our invitations to the keynote speakers emphasized that we did not wish to discuss 'why inclusive education?' We were interested in ideas about how to make inclusive education happen. We were interested in ideas and changes that could be sustained over time and place, and political changes and practices that were resilient because they were embedded in the values and culture of the school and the wider community.

IEAG began working with conference organisers 'Imagine Better: Standards Plus'. Standards Plus is a not-for-profit agency formed to promote social values, support families and people, who are socially devalued, to take charge, and to work alongside communities to imagine better (<http://www.imaginebetter.co.nz/purpose.php>).<sup>2</sup>

In the call for papers for this conference, IEAG set out the conference aims as follows:

The conference is seeking to promote a deeper understanding of inclusive education by exploring:

- personal perspectives;
- current research and practice;
- inclusive school communities;
- policy, society and human rights.

It will explore the issues that contribute to inclusive schools and communities including:

- what we mean when we talk about inclusive education;
- the values that underlie inclusive policies and practices in education;
- children's rights, human rights and social justice foundations for inclusive education;
- the development of inclusive education.

There were 240 conference attendees. The final conference programme included 50 presentations from parents, students and educators as well as researchers. Presenters could choose to have their proposals peer reviewed for acceptance in the conference programme. These presenters could then submit their full papers for peer review for consideration for publication on the conference website or for publication in this special issue of *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (IJIE). There are 10 papers in this issue. A further seven papers and the opening address are available on the conference website at [http://www.imaginebetter.co.nz/resources/presentation\\_list.php](http://www.imaginebetter.co.nz/resources/presentation_list.php)

**Overview of the special issue**

This special issue of the *IJIE* presents three of the keynotes (by Keith Ballard, Jude MacArthur, and Roger Slee) and seven papers from this conference. Together, these papers speak about sustainable change being underpinned through examining our cultural beliefs and values and by listening to the voices of disabled children, young people and adults, and their families. These papers are from Australia, New Zealand and the UK, with many describing policies, experiences and outcomes from around the world. We see these papers as relevant to an international audience because they offer a critical analysis of exclusion, inclusion, policy at state and global level, children's experiences, and teaching pedagogy.

We open this special issue with Keith Ballard's keynote address. Ballard expresses the view that we need to understand the powerful ideas and 'ideological fogs' that become ordinary and contribute to exclusion. He argues that inclusion will be sustained through the establishment of a critical analysis that moves us, along with our societies, towards inclusion where values and beliefs rooted in individualism and self-interest are foreign. Then, Macartney and Morton's (2011) paper exemplifies how teachers can hold exclusive values that preclude children from fully participating in their early childhood and primary school settings. They argue for a 'pedagogy of listening' that invites and celebrates diversity, ambiguity, uncertainty and engagement.

Several authors in this volume suggest that sustained change towards inclusion must include a focus on children and young people's perspective about their school life. MacArthur (2012) uses a rights-based framework and discussion to explore the social experiences of disabled students at school. She highlights children's and young people's perspectives and identifies the foundation of social exclusion in the sociocultural context of schools. Sustainable change, she suggests, comes from a critique of exclusion and from a recognition of the importance of inclusive values and practices that enhance students' social lives. Higgins, Phillips, and Cowan (2011) present the experiences of *kāpo* (blind and vision impaired) Māori (the indigenous people of New Zealand), whose voices and experiences have not previously been heard. They argue that the invisibility of disabled people and indigenous culture in education systems and policies contributes to marginalisation and lost identities. Inclusion is sustained when *kāpo* Māori can be educated in their own communities with their *whānau* (family), where they are valued as Māori who happen to also be *kāpo*.

Recognising and responding to indigenous cultures are viewed by some authors as central to sustainable change towards inclusion. In New Zealand, Berryman and Woller (2011) illustrate the importance of acknowledging and listening to the beliefs, values and preferred practices of Māori. They propose that when teachers and schools move towards pedagogies, which are founded upon relationships that are inclusive of cultural differences, schools will progress towards inclusion. Working in the Northern Territories in Australia, Maher (2011) describes a teacher education programme, focusing on engaging indigenous students and their communities. Mahler's paper makes an equally compelling case for the importance of relationships that are based on respect for and understanding of indigenous beliefs and knowledge.

Bourke and Mentis (2011), as well as Hill and Brown (2011), argue that inclusive education is sustained when there is active student involvement in the classrooms. Focusing on the process of assessment, Bourke and Mentis (2011) explore the use of self-assessment in classrooms that foster students' participation in their own learning, that validates their perspectives, and that strengthens a positive self-identity. Hill and

Brown (2011) report on the successful establishment of a positive behaviour support system in a secondary school that directly involves students. They describe an approach in which collaborative problem-solving between students and teachers promote and sustain student engagement. Thomson's (2011) paper continues the theme of collaboration, describing a successful model of teacher collaboration that supports and sustains inclusive education.

The special issue closes with the paper based on Roger Slee's keynote address. Slee (2012) provides a cogent and provocative analysis of the ideas that become ordinary and contribute to exclusion. He provides numerous examples, at the level of the personal, local, national and international, of the ways in which ideas about exclusion permeate and pervade the ways we talk to each other and about what it means to exclude, to be excluded.

As noted above, in 2009, Lather called for educational researchers to reclaim the grounds of the debates about what is valued in education, to interrupt 'the technicist policy-making that is over-rationalised and out of touch' (48) with the real world's uncertainty, messiness and complexity that characterises the relationships between teachers and students, students and students, teaching and learning, schools and families, schools and communities. She argued that *accountability* has been reduced to *auditability* and 'rituals of verification' with resources 'funnelled into monitoring compliance' (47). We agree with Lather that accountability needs to be reconnected to *responsibility* in ways that are democratic and which call upon multiple voices to provide evidence. This special issue explores a range of critiques, policies and practices, from high-level policy through to classroom practice. Ballard (2011) reminds us to be sustainable, and changes have to be made at deep levels, not just at the level of 'technical adjustments'. We think these papers provide examples of sustainable practices that challenge the ideas of simplistic technicist approaches to 'doing inclusion' and offer the reader some insights into ways of thinking and acting that can sustain inclusion.

## Notes

1. This is a traditional Maori greeting used in welcome. Maori and non-Maori use Maori greetings at formal gatherings.
2. The IHC Foundation and the University of Canterbury were also sponsors of the conference.

## Notes on contributors

Dr Nancy Higgins is the corresponding editor for this Special Issue. She is presently a part-time lecturer in inclusive education at Massey University and a freelance independent researcher, who is presently working for Ngāti Kāpo O Aotearoa, Inc. She is leading a New Zealand Health Research Council funded project for Ngāti Kāpo, which is a follow-up study about kāpo Māori children's access to ophthalmology services. She has also been a lecturer at the University of Otago in inclusive education and qualitative research methods, and has published in these areas. Her passion is social justice. [n.higgins@massey.ac.nz](mailto:n.higgins@massey.ac.nz)

Dr Jude MacArthur is also a part-time lecturer in inclusive education at Massey University and a freelance independent researcher. She is currently a Co-Convenor of IEAG. Her background is in teaching and teacher education at the University of Otago, and, until recently, she worked at the Donald Beasley Institute as a senior researcher. Presently, Dr MacArthur is holding evidence-based professional development workshops around the country for IEAG and other organisations to promote inclusive education in schools and is also writing a history of inclusive education in the Otago area. [j.a.macarthur@massey.ac.nz](mailto:j.a.macarthur@massey.ac.nz)

Dr Missy Morton is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Educational Studies and Human Development at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her research and teaching include qualitative research and disability studies in education. Her recent work focuses on the ways policies and practices in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment can support inclusive education. missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz

Dr. Hazel Phillips is of Ngāti Mutunga descent and is an indigenous researcher. She is a Senior Research Fellow at Lincoln University and is currently working with Ngāti Kāpo O Aotearoa, Inc. on a Health Research Council funded project looking at kāpo tamariki/rangatahi (blind and vision impaired Māori children and young people) access to ophthalmological services as well as a project on the linkages between education and employment for taitamariki/rangatahi (Māori youth). Hazel's background is in Māori education and kaupapa Māori research methodologies, and she believes with a passion in mana Māori motuhake (Māori self-determination). titahigirl@gmail.com

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