

Submission on the Discussion Document of the Education Workforce Advisory Group June 2010

The Inclusive Education Action Group (IEAG)
5 August, 2010

Feedback form

- To help us review and summarise all feedback received, please indicate if you are a:

Teacher trainee
Board member
Teacher
Parent
Principal
Member of a tertiary education organisation
Member of the public

You may wish to indicate your name/organisation: IEAG (Inclusive Education Action Group). The Inclusive Education Action Group is a group of people committed to ensuring that all disabled children, young people and adults participate fully in their local, regular educational setting. Our membership includes people from all of the above groups. www.ieag.org.nz

Initial teacher education and induction

1. Provide comment on the Advisory Group's proposals for initial teacher education/induction:

a. IEAG supports the Education Workforce Advisory Group's (EWAG) goal of improving teacher training so that "all involved students have the chance to succeed in schools" (p. 8). This is consistent with **The New Zealand Disability Strategy (Dalziel, 2001)**, which aims for a society that highly values disabled people's lives and continually enhances their full participation. In education, Objective 3 is "*Provide the best education for disabled people*" (p.16). Actions include:

- 3.1 Ensure that no child is denied access to their local regular school because of their impairment.
- 3.2 Support the development of effective communication by providing access to education in New Zealand Sign Language, communication technologies.

- 3.3 Ensure that teachers and other educators understand the learning needs of disabled people.
- 3.4 Ensure that disabled students, families, teachers and other educators have equitable access to the resources available to meet their needs.
- 3.5 Facilitate opportunities for disabled students to make contact with their disabled peers in other schools.
- 3.6 Improve schools' responsiveness to and accountability for the needs of disabled students.
- **3.7 Promote appropriate and effective inclusive educational settings that will meet individual educational needs.**
- 3.8 improve post-compulsory education for disabled people, including: promoting best practice, providing career guidance, increasing lifelong opportunities for learning and better aligning financial support with educational opportunities.

Disabled students continue to be seen as 'other' and therefore as problematic for the education system, the school, and the individual teacher. Teacher training programmes need to prepare teachers to work in schools and classrooms where diversity is a fact of life. This does not mean that teachers should learn about 'special education needs' as referred to in the EWAG report on page 22, because 'special education' thinking and approaches have a deficit focus that marginalises disabled students; treats students as if they are problems that require 'interventions' to 'fix' them; promotes low expectations for student learning; and excludes students from the regular curriculum and experiences of ordinary schools and communities (Ballard, 2004b; Slee, 2005; Slee & Allen, 2005).

These ideas are powerful and can influence everything teachers and other staff in education do. If teachers believe that disabled students are deficient and need to be 'fixed,' in some way, they will not be effective teachers. At the level of the education system, as long as 'special education' is seen as the way to teach disabled students, attention is taken away from the important question of why regular schools so often fail to teach disabled students successfully (MacArthur, 2009). This question is particularly important in light of the recent finding that approximately 50% of New Zealand schools are not providing disabled students with the quality education they are entitled to (Education Review Office, 2010).

The Associate Minister of Education recently suggested that mandatory courses in 'special education' be included in teacher education. IEAG disagrees with this focus as the international research on inclusion supports a shift right away from ideas about 'special education'. IEAG supports developments in teacher education that enhance the capacity of teachers to value and expect student diversity in their classrooms. Teacher education therefore needs to ensure that teachers are prepared to ensure all students in their classrooms and schools are:

- present;
- fully participating; and
- achieving well (Ainscow & Booth, 2002; Ainscow, 2008).

b. The workforce report refers to a problematic perception of the teaching profession in which teachers are viewed as ‘isolated practitioners’. (page 2). We note that this statement is not supported by evidence, however, we are also aware that teachers are often blamed for systemic problems and issues within our Education System by the media, and, occasionally, by the Government. EWAG could take an alternative approach by considering *ways to create an education system and professional development opportunities that support teachers in their work*.

Consistent with international research; the New Zealand Education Act (1989); the New Zealand Disability Strategy; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989); and the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (United Nations, 2006), IEAG acknowledges that teachers have a responsibility to teach and provide a quality education to all children, including disabled children. The UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People sets out the responsibilities of governments (including the New Zealand government) to provide an inclusive education for disabled people at all levels of the education system. These important rights and associated ideas about inclusion in schools and communities must underpin and be a critical foundation in teacher training.

It is equally important that teachers are able to train in tertiary institutions that have, themselves, changed to overcome barriers to inclusive education (Booth, Nes & Stromstadt, 2003). Student teachers learn from the cultures of their institutions, therefore these institutions need impart to their students knowledge about inclusive education, and prepare them to challenge the barriers to inclusion they may encounter as they enter the teaching profession.

c. In relation to the point above, IEAG believes that any teacher training programme must be scholarly, and encourage students to think critically about the process of teaching and learning. We therefore support EWAG’s suggestion that teaching needs to be evidence based and challenge prevailing discourses.

This implies that any work relating to assessment, teaching and learning, student social experiences and achievement, needs to be understood within a critical theoretical framework of social justice. Teachers need to learn to appreciate and value diversity in the community and in schools, and understand what such diversity means in terms of teaching practice and school culture. Equally, the

research on inclusion points to the critical foundations of inclusive education in a commitment to *key values* that apply to all students, and to all the policies, plans and approaches used to teach in a school (Ainscow et al., 2006; Ballard, 2004a; Booth, Nes & Stromstadt, 2003). These values shape what teachers think and do; the way they view their students; their community; their school and its purpose; their work in the classroom; and the overall aims of education within the community and wider society. It is important for teachers to interrogate values; consider their place in schools and communities; and think critically about the ways in which inclusive values can be implemented in the day-to-day life of a school. These ideas are complex and it is vital that pre-service teachers have opportunities and the time needed to explore them in depth.

It is incomprehensible that this complex and necessary undertaking could be achieved in a one year programme, as suggested by EWAG, on top of all other material that must be studied and understood in relation to teaching and learning.

d. IEAG supports the development of a four-year teacher education degree for primary and a two-year degree for secondary. This has been recently promoted in New Zealand by NZEI and PPTA, and is recognized as international best practice. A post-graduate degree in New Zealand builds on an undergraduate degree in the same field, and it is therefore inappropriate for EWAG to refer to the proposed one-year teacher education degree as ‘post-graduate’ when it follows another degree.

This proposed one-year degree is, in fact, a one-year *undergraduate* qualification. It would not be possible to develop a degree in teaching that has the depth and integrity that IEAG is looking for in the space of one year. It is this depth of training that will produce teachers who are serious, critical thinking, reflexive, and well-trained practitioners.

e. There are approximately 30 agencies offering teacher training in New Zealand at present, yet the EWAG report makes no mention of this point. Quality teacher training, which we support and as described above, needs to take place in a University/College of Education/Wananga where there is access to University libraries, research and related resources. These places and resources are vital in supporting a sound, progressive, critical, evidence-based degree with integrity that is consistent with current research and thinking in education.

f. EWAG proposes that a “*post-graduate teaching qualification-part two*” (p. 13) be introduced, in which a teacher undertakes part time study in their first two years of teaching.

IEAG is opposed to this idea. We believe that new teachers need to be prepared

to teach in classrooms with diverse groups of students, including disabled students. Firstly, we would argue that teachers working with diverse student groups require a high standard of training and preparation in the pre-service years that prepares them well for their first year of teaching in the classroom. This training should take place *before* they take up their first teaching position.

Secondly, first year teachers have a very heavy workload. To add further to this workload would be detrimental not only to their current work, but also to their future development and commitment as a teacher. Retaining high-quality teachers in the profession beyond their first years should be high priority. Young teachers bring to the teaching profession knowledge and vitality that is integral to the profession's growth. It is therefore important that teacher training programmes provide their students with a safe place to learn and with a supportive environment in which new ideas can be explored and practiced. Clearly, this takes time. IEAG believes that the proposal for teachers to undertake additional study while teaching in their first year is inconsistent with ideas about safe and supportive learning environments for new teachers.

g. We support NZEI's suggestion that an independent body for the profession, led 'for teachers by teachers' is needed. Such an organization should be representative of teachers and their major organizations (including NZEI)

h. We believe that NZEI and PPTA do focus on professional matters, and should definitely be part of the revised New Zealand Teachers Council. Such involvement is essential to the maintenance of professional teacher organisations that are concerned with all aspects of teachers' and teacher aides' work and career development. The existence of such groups such as NZEI and PPTA and their representation on the Teachers Council are also needed to support the high level professional 'debate' in education that EWAG wishes to encourage.

Leadership within a school

7. Provide comment on the proposals outlined for leadership within school:

a. IEAG supports EWAG's proposals for school leadership. We view these proposals as important in strengthening the capacity of principals to provide their staff with supportive *educational* leadership. Consistent with the New Zealand Education Act (1989); the New Zealand Disability Strategy; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, this leadership would include that relating to a pedagogy for diverse students in schools.

b. In the area of inclusive education, we note the Education Review Office's recent finding that approximately 50% of schools are not providing students with high needs with the quality education they are entitled to (ERO, 2010). We note also their conclusion that these schools lacked principal leadership in relation to an ethical and committed approach to the teaching of students with disabilities. Principal leadership is critical in the development of inclusive schools, as is leadership at all levels of the education system, including leadership from the Ministry of Education (Ainscow et al, 2006).

Principals who are effective leaders in schools that are working towards inclusion (i.e. schools that welcome and teach all students in a school's community well), need leadership from the Ministry of Education. Such leadership would establish inclusion as government policy (consistent with the inclusive values in the New Zealand curriculum, and with the curriculum's key underlying principle of inclusion). IEAG would like to see the recommendations include some recognition of this point, by, for example, linking effective principal leadership with policy support by the Ministry of Education.

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