There is a strong view in the international literature that an effective initial teacher education (ITE) is a necessary condition for high quality inclusive education. Some believe that far too little attention has been paid to preparing teachers for the inclusive school. Booth et al (2003) argue that there are some basic questions that need to be asked in developing teacher education courses that support inclusion:

- To what extent does the curriculum of teacher education encourage the development of inclusive schools?
- What preparation and support do teachers need to implement inclusion?
- What are the policy and cultural contexts for the development of inclusion?
- How are barriers to learning and participation overcome in teacher education? (Booth, Nes, & Stromstad, 2003).

The current study provides a multi-faceted approach to answering these (and other) questions in the New Zealand context. The starting point of our work is the phenomenon of the production of exclusionary practices within inclusive programmes. In the US and some other countries, the separation of ‘general’ from ‘special’ teacher education formalises a two system approach (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997b). In New Zealand, an inclusionary legislative framework, a generalist system of teacher education, and a school framework that specifically demands ‘diversity’ should generate the conditions for
inclusion. That it does not uniformly do so is due to a range of factors, including the historical legacy of the homogenous and exclusionary classroom and the normative teacher education programmes that this model implies. There are also policy issues, especially the framework of school ‘choice’ that privileges the ‘academic’ classroom, not the ‘democratic’ one, which makes inclusion difficult to achieve. In essence, then, New Zealand’s schooling system demands inclusionary practices, but there are numerous barriers to achieving them.

This study emerged from the expressed needs of parents and people with disabilities for a good quality, inclusive schooling. Specifically, parents reported to a community advocacy agency, CCS, that teachers stated they were not trained in inclusive practices. CCS, in turn, commissioned this research project to find out why a formally inclusive system did not produce inclusive educators.

This paper provides a preliminary analysis of the study’s findings. It is a large and complex study, that engages in depth with a number of ITE courses taught in universities and colleges of education in New Zealand. It became clear early on that it was not possible to apply a simple input/output model to this study. Teacher education is a multi-layered process incorporating multiple engagements, institutional exigencies, competing theoretical and practical models and imbued with significant and contested cultural meanings. While ITE is concerned with the ‘production’ of the teacher, the process is much more complex than such language implies.

The paper is structured into four parts. Because our search of the literature has not found any similar studies, we first outline the various elements of the research process, explaining the reason for the specific approaches taken and the relationship between the parts. The remainder of the paper picks up on three central themes that have emerged from the study. The first is the slippage that occurs between the various levels of the system when talking about inclusion. This is due, in part, to the contested nature of the term, and in part to
the way it has been subsumed, in New Zealand, to a discourse of diversity. The second section is devoted to the issue of where inclusion can be found (and not found) in initial teacher education, and how the discursive practices of ITE constrain and shape students’ understandings of inclusion. One such discourse relates to notions of professionalism and teachers as professionals. While at a formal level in New Zealand, being a ‘professional’ teacher requires one to be an inclusive educator, in practice this relationship is by no means clear. The final section considers, in broad terms, what this study has found to be the barriers to an inclusive teacher education, as articulated by participants. We also pay attention to the silences and gaps in their discussions.

The scope of the study

The study had six inter-related research elements. The first two were contextual, examining the literature and policy documents that considered ITE and inclusion. The literature search around the terms inclusion and initial teacher education generated some 280 items, which have been organised into the themes of policy, programmes, research studies, quality, strategies and professional development. This literature database has been updated twice since the project began, to ensure latest publications are included.

An analysis of policy documents was undertaken. New Zealand’s Education Act (1989) declares that “people who have special needs have the same rights to enrol and receive education at state schools as people who do not” (s.8(1)). The team was interested in what this meant in practice, especially in terms of teacher education. In particular, if children with special needs have the right to an education, how does that translate into the competencies, expectations and work of teachers who have these children in their classrooms? We examined documents from the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Teachers Council.
The main research focus was on ITE courses, professional development and the skills and approach of beginning teachers. The first part examines the content of primary and secondary ITE courses. We were interested in how much students were taught about inclusion, how it was contextualised, the extent to which the philosophy of inclusion permeated teacher education courses and how successful the institutions were in producing inclusive teachers. The focus of this part of the study was on primary and secondary teacher education, and six teacher education sites participated in the study.

Not all relevant questions could be answered merely through a content analysis. The context, the intentions of the course designers and teachers and issues around the practicum placements also needed to be examined. Teacher education courses are hardly a theoretical and pedagogical unity, being made up of a range of academic disciplines that often conflict both within and between themselves. The second part of the study involved a series of structured interviews with a range of lecturers, programme leaders and others (including some teachers of inclusive education courses) at the six sites. We often heard during our interviews that some subject areas and lecturers had a greater commitment to inclusion than others. In such an eclectic setting, then, understanding the forces that produce (or not) inclusive teachers is quite complex.

The literature also points out that post-ITE learning is important in shaping teachers’ practice in inclusive education (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; McLeskey, 2004; Robinson & Carrington, 2002). In New Zealand, professional development (PD) is purchased at the level of the school, and the team was interested in finding out how much teacher PD focused on inclusive education, who provided the training, who defined the need and who received the programmes. The third part of the study involved a survey of five percent (130) of New Zealand primary and secondary schools. The surveys were targeted to the PD co-ordinators in those schools. Both quantitative and qualitative responses were sought, and the findings, especially the qualitative aspects, reveal key themes around inclusion and diversity; disability;
mainstreaming and special needs; teacher skills; teaching and learning goals; and school culture.

The final aspect of the research involved asking beginning teachers how well prepared they considered themselves to be to run an inclusive classroom. At the beginning of each school year, School Support Services run PD courses for beginning teachers. This year, we have used those sessions as an opportunity to undertake a short survey on the extent to which new teachers consider their ITE prepared them to be inclusive educators. The survey form mainly required quantifiable responses, with some small opportunities for written comment.

Divergent meanings

The research process has underlined problems with how the concept of inclusion is defined and used in the education sector. In this study, we found that it was a contested term at the levels of policy, within particular programmes, in school practicum placements and among both teacher educators and new teachers. This has been noted by others:

Familiarity with the terminology of inclusive education has grown considerably, however, there are various, competing discourses through which meanings and understandings differ (Graham & Slee, 2005).

It is our view that these competing discourses permeate every ‘level’ of inclusion, from government policy making to individual schools and classrooms. The findings of our study indicate a sector rife with differing definitions and meanings, disparate policies and practices, highly uneven descriptions of what inclusion means in teacher education, courses that uphold the theory of inclusion but not its practice, and resistant discourses at the level of the school. It is therefore not surprising that the emerging teacher may not always have a clear view of what inclusion means in New Zealand schools.
The policy level is problematic, despite the clear articulations of rights to education contained in the Education Act. The main question here is how the ‘right’ to education gets translated into an inclusive education. From 2000 on, New Zealand has had a mandatory Disability Strategy. Objective three of that strategy is to ‘provide the best education for disabled people’. The strategy is intended to be a whole of government approach, integrated into each portfolio. However, the most recent update on the strategy from the Office of Disability Issues provides no clear direction or approach in relation to inclusion:

The debate over what are the best settings for education continues, with views divided on whether special schools, units or regular class settings best meet children’s needs. However, we can be sure that all disabled children need at least some time in mainstream settings that are inclusive and accessible. This ensures that all children have opportunities to interact with their peers. This idea is supported by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, which recommended, in October 2003, that New Zealand better integrate disabled children into mainstream education and other aspects of society (Office of Disability Issues, 2005).

In our research, not a single interviewee mentioned the Disability Strategy as a key tool for promoting the rights of people with disabilities to education (although the Disability Strategy does appear in the course content of a number of the very few courses that examine inclusion). In particular, people with disabilities – and the parents who initiated this project, for example – are unable to rely on the Disability Strategy to deliver inclusive education. Further, the Disability Strategy has had little or no impact on ITE for inclusion. This possibly indicates the lack of leadership and clear direction evident in the strategy.

The New Zealand Teachers’ Council (NZTC) is the government agency responsible both for defining the qualities of a competent teacher and for reviewing the curriculum and pedagogy of teacher education courses. The NZTC does not use the term inclusion or inclusive teacher/classroom. The
term used is ‘diversity’, and the definition of that comes from a 2003 Ministry of Education Best Evidence Synthesis:

Diversity encompasses many characteristics including ethnicity, socio-economic background, home language, gender, special needs, disability, and giftedness. Teaching needs to be responsive to diversity within ethnic groups, for example, diversity within Pakeha, Mäori, Pasifika and Asian students. We also need to recognise the diversity within individual students influenced by intersections of gender, cultural heritage(s), socio-economic background, and talent (Alton-Lee, 2003).

The main effect of the use of diversity is to subsume the inclusion of people with disabilities to a need for ‘responsiveness’ to a whole range of groups defined in several ways. While the teacher who is responsive to all the diversities cited above could be called inclusive, in practice diversity is taught and learned by students in ITE in fragmented ways. Some of the interviewees for this study specifically picked up on this point:

I think perhaps if I refer to the word diversity, one of the concerns that we have at times is that diversity is taken to mean those people who are different from the majority rather than a term that is about the growing complexity and diversity of our society and the need to find ways of ensuring that everyone is seen to be equal and included in all of the things that we do.

There are courses on Maori language and culture, on sociology and inequality, on teaching other languages and on ‘inclusion’. Thus the competing diversities form a jumble of pieces, out of which the student (and their teacher) is supposed to assemble the complete picture.

Many elements of our study demonstrate a slippage in terms. We were frequently asked what we ‘meant’ by inclusion. There is significant contestation within courses over what it, in fact, means. This was best demonstrated by our
analysis of the data generated by Ruth Kane and her colleagues (Kane, 2005), which included self descriptions of teacher education programmes in relation to inclusion. A number of these demonstrated the discourse of ‘diversity’ that permeated downwards from the Ministry’s work:

No specific policy on inclusive education, though it is acknowledged within care outcomes for all courses within the diploma. Issues related to diversity are integrated into the Professional Studies paper. Students may undertake an optional paper on students with special learning needs (from Ruth Kane data, analysed March 2006).

This can be contrasted with the approach taken by another ITE provider to the same question about preparation for inclusive teaching practices:

Every graduating student: has a clear understanding of their responsibilities to teach all children well, and has developed a positive, respectful attitude and effective teaching strategies; has a sound understanding of current thinking about disability, as informed by people with disabilities; is familiar with current legislation and policy regarding disability and education; is prepared to work respectively with parents and support personnel for the benefit of each students; is aware of school/community resources that can be utilised to support students education. Is taught in [a specific course] (ibid).

While these appear to offer two extremes in terms of the focus on inclusion, we also found that provision in practice did not necessarily match up to the rhetoric. One programme in particular, which was considered to offer cutting-edge inclusive education in ITE courses, no longer did so due to retirements and other cutbacks. The inclusive education course, which was the fulcrum of the programme, was now being taught by a part-time, temporary lecturer, and was scheduled against compulsory courses for ITE.
While many programmes had a course called ‘inclusion’, and usually a compulsory one, very few of the programmes had an approach that one interviewee called ‘infusion’:

Yeah, infusion, that is what we do here, it is infused in everything. If you read the literature it is certainly not an added on approach here. I think the added on approach does more disturbance to things than good because it gets portrayed as being other, other than normal, tacked on. Everything is infused here…

From this perspective, a course-based approach to inclusion denies the notion of inclusion as inclusive. Despite the legislative requirement for inclusion, it is not a philosophical platform upon which initial teacher education rests. It is a course, one among others. However, some argue for the effectiveness of such a structure:

Put it this way, I am reasonably convinced that what we do has some effect. I am less convinced that by including inclusion in other papers we would be more effective. I think the notion of highlighting the inclusion is necessary, important and it becomes effective. When you put …an inclusion paper alongside working with cultural and linguistic diversity, I think you highlight two particular areas that may not receive appropriate attention any other way. I am not saying we are perfect… but I do think that it is necessary to structure it in this way and I don’t see any great disadvantage to our students.

The prevailing attitude towards inclusion as a subject led to us refining the language we used in interviews and the document search, from ‘inclusion’ to ‘including children with disabilities in the regular classroom’. There are significant differences between the two, but this approach allowed us to bring in a clear focus on children with disabilities, which was in line with the overall research brief. In summary, difficulties of language, definition and practice all
act as barriers to the teaching and learning of (and research into) inclusive practices.

**Where is inclusion found, and where is it not found, in ITE?**

We have already noted that some programmes have specific courses on inclusive education, and others (although not many) ‘infuse’ inclusion across the curriculum. For the latter, courses on professional studies provide the heart of inclusion courses:

So we want our graduates to be able to educate all of their students within their classrooms, within their schools, within their services in an inclusive manner, paying attention to the particular needs of each but not treating some of them as if they are other people, and needing to be brought in because they are different. I think that might be a generalisation that is helpful to start, it’s a bit loose but maybe we can start with that.

A number of providers pointed out to us that teachers are legally required to teach all the students that turn up in their classrooms, hence the focus on professional responsibility. However, while few of those interviewed would disagree with this, there are a number of caveats caused by perceptions of competing views of professionalism:

Always the secondary teacher will feel ‘I am going to be judged by how well my students perform academically and by what academic work they put up’. Accountability and ... the NCEA and all the measurement assessment nightmare just reinforces it. I am going to be judged according to measurable academic growth in my students.

There are fewer courses, and especially compulsory courses, on inclusion or special needs education in secondary than in primary programmes. Most primary programmes are multi-year and most secondary ones a single year
graduate diploma, which probably accounts for the absence of these courses (among others). But the effect of this is that secondary students may be reinforced in the view that ‘teaching the subject’ is the most important role of the secondary teacher. It is therefore unlikely that most secondary teachers hold ‘inclusion’ of people with disabilities as part of their professional self-concept, or that they have been taught the skills to mediate the inclusive classroom in an academic setting.

One point that came through very strongly in the interviews with ITE providers was that ITE staff, and students, who had strong relationships with people with disabilities tended to be strong advocates for inclusion. The influence of teachers, or families and of students with disabilities is clearly demonstrated in the following extract:

We have three [lecturers] with obvious disabilities, who give lectures not necessarily about their disability, about disability in general and various other topics… Our first assignment gets them look at disability issues within their own family/whanau/extended group. It makes them take a fresh look at some things they took for granted. Also we have had parents of children with special needs come and talk; sometimes they bring their children. Sometimes the course members they also talk about their sister or brother or themselves, their special needs because of the environment that we create of trust, this is the human condition it is not something to be fearful about, it is something if you want to talk about, is the space to do it. It seems a very powerful yet natural way where everyone starts to realise about the variety that constitutes humanity.

The survey responses from new teachers will provide very rich data on where inclusion is and is not found in teacher education, but this has yet to be fully collected or analysed. But even before new teachers come up against the presumed ‘barriers’ to inclusion outlined below, their knowledge and understanding of it is partial and contested, often based on individual relationships or encounters that may or may not occur during the teacher
education, and on teacher education courses of variable quality in terms of the provision of teaching relating to inclusion.

**What are the barriers to inclusive teacher education?**

In the quotation that begins this paper, Booth et al (2003) suggest, implicitly, that ITE institutions should be encouraging the development of inclusive schools, which entails (in many cases) a significant pedagogical and philosophical shift in schools. Many of the academic staff members who work in ITE are certainly committed to changing schools through their research studies. But one question is how they mediate the relationships that develop with schools through the ITE process, and especially the practicum.

We had a particular interest in the practicum, as a source of potential modelling of high quality inclusive settings, but also of other models. We were aware that some teacher education programmes in the United States were working with school partners who “were selected for the quality… of inclusive programs for people with disabilities” (Meyer, Mager, Yarger-Kane, Sarno, & Hext-Contreras, 1997)(p. 31).

There is no such selection here. There would be difficulties in selecting in that way, due to lack of schools, and perceived major relationship difficulties in rejecting a school on the grounds that they are not adequately inclusive. As one inclusion course co-ordinator noted, after a comment that schools in New Zealand are required by law to include all students:

… sometimes a whole school may be exclusionary. So I mean I don’t say that our students always go to an inclusionary setting. What I’m saying is that the government says that any child can come to their local school but … some schools says “oh well unfortunately there’s stairs and we can’t have the wheelchair here we don’t think we can serve your child as well as that school over there” so they try and direct children with disabilities away. If we put our student teachers in that school, then they
are probably going to meet more exclusionary attitudes … And I would hope that, by the end, they would also have been in schools where there are children with disabilities and they can see it working perfectly.

In effect, this means that ITE providers are not using their influence to encourage inclusion in schools. If there were, for example, an expectation placed on schools that students would learn about inclusive practices while on placement, would this influence practice, over time, in those schools? The situation is, of course, not nearly as clear-cut as that. Teachers make a range of judgements about students, and, in practice, often the philosophy of inclusion contains a cut-off mark: these can be included, those cannot. In the following extract, two contributors to a group session held at one ITE provider reflect on the effects of selectivity:

Person A: It’s a threshold. People say, “I am quite happy with this disability but don’t give me this disability”
Interviewer: So severity is an issue.
Person A: Severity and type. Give me physical but don’t give me intellectual, give me sensory but don’t give me behavioural. It’s quite complex in that regard.
Person B: So that throws philosophical views right out that window sometimes doesn’t it?
Person A: Yes.
Person B: In one instance they say we have to recognise and respond to diversity and in the next instance they want to be selective about who they want to be working with.

This kind of ‘partial’ inclusion approach is found more often among teachers and schools. We found echoes of that in responses to the professional development survey. Some responses are quite judgmental, such as the person who noted: “obviously disabled children who have a will to learn will be managed differently to children who disrupt the learning of the general class”. One PD response strongly delimited inclusion according to child age, its effects
on the other children and the amount of time that was appropriate to be included:

Disabled learners included in mainstream classrooms is not a fair choice to any stakeholders except parents hoping to normalise the disability. The children do not integrate well after the age of 8 or 9. Mainstream children are becoming carers in classroom and playground - hardly fair on their learning and development. There are parts of a school day that inclusion is appropriate but not all day long.

**Does an integrated teacher education course deliver inclusion?**

In the United States, one significant aspect of inclusion has been the developing trend towards teacher education courses that eliminate the special education teacher (Blanton, Griffin, Winn, & Pugach, 1997a; Heston, Raschke, Kliewer, Fitzgerald, & Edmiaston, 1998; Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2003; Rainforth, 2000; Shade, 2001).

This literature has established that integrated teacher education is a necessary condition for inclusive education. But it is not, obviously, sufficient condition. In this study, we have worked at identifying those factors that provide a good education (and a poor one) in inclusion. In comparing courses, we were struck by the unevenness of content between them, which carried through from their philosophy and self-description. That is, while during our interviews staff from all programs professed their commitment to inclusion, there was significant difference between institutions and courses in both form and content.

**References**


