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Higgledy-Piggledy Policy: Confusion about inclusion.

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In New Zealand, if a disabled child[1] or their family or whanau searches for the Ministry of Education's policy on inclusion, they will not find one. Instead a search for 'special' policies would be more successful and they would find some objectives, strategies and guidelines that mention inclusion. This may give the impression to the reader that the Ministry of Education is interested in including disabled children at their local schools. However, there is no leading, overriding, coordinating, or national policy about inclusion from which schools and teachers can develop their inclusive programmes and practice. This paper will argue, as others have in the UK (Barton, 2004; Armstrong, 2003; Florian & Rouse, 2005), America (Meyers, 1997; Ware, 2004), and Australia (Slee, 2001; Moss, 2003), that such a 'higgledy piggledy' approach to inclusion creates confusion and pedagogical inconsistencies in schools. By remaining silent about inclusion and instead locating children with 'special' needs in 'special' education, disabled children become 'different' and 'not like us' (Skrtic, 1991, Tomlinson, 1982).

However, our research suggests that there is a balancing act involved and regular schools should not complete ignore impairment-related differences, but instead attempt to understand, value and include them within their educational discourse so that inclusion can occur (Higgins, 2001; MacArthur et al, 2005; Rietveld, 2005). If children are passively or actively excluded on the basis of biological characteristics that they cannot change, then their self-esteem and learning are likely to be negatively affected (Higgins, 2001; MacArthur et al, 2005; Rietveld, 2002). Disabled children in 'regular' schools are thus at risk of becoming invisible, isolated and excluded through such silence in regards to inclusive policy and inclusive pedagogy.

[1] The term disabled child is used throughout this paper instead of 'child with a disability' because disabled people, themselves, have strongly advocated for this descriptor which emphasises that people are 'disabled' by social discourses and constructs. Disability is distinct from impairment in that it is the social, cultural and material barriers that exclude disabled people from mainstream life, and impairment is a physical, intellectual, or sensory limitation.

It is important to note that the meaning of 'special' education in the Ministry of Education is not considered synonymous with 'inclusion'. The Ministry defines special education as "extra" educational services, including additional learning environments:

> 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 (Ministry of Education, 2005a, unpaginated)

Inclusion has been defined by the Ministry of Education as supporting all children in their local school and reducing barriers to learning and participation:

> Inclusion in education is valuing all students and staff. It involves supporting all children and young people to participate in the cultures, curricula and communities of their local school. Barriers to learning and participation for all children, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, disability or any other factor, are actively reduced, so that children feel a sense of belonging and community in their educational context. (Ministry of Education, 2005a, unpaginated)

This definition is highly consistent with the most recent definitions cited in the literature (Ainscow, 1999) that describe inclusion as a process aimed at increasing disabled children's meaningful participation at their local schools. A focus on inclusion encourages schools to attend to the quality of children's participation to ensure that children are achieving in academic and social domains. New Zealand research has indicated that not all types of participation facilitate learning and development. Rietveld (2005a), for example, found that children with Down syndrome were actively participating in mathematics but the type of feedback they received was unlikely to facilitate more mature understandings because it focused on engagement rather than greater conceptual understanding of the curriculum content.

Mixed Messages

Despite the Ministry's current definition of inclusion, there appears to be significant inconsistencies between the definition and the applied use of the terms. Most significantly, the term, 'inclusion', has been subsumed in 'special' education. For example, inclusion is linked to special units in the Ministry of Education's magazine, the *Education Gazette.* Feltham (2004) reported about some research that indicated that students learned best in a school with a culture of inclusion. However, the examples of such schools included a school that had established a 'nurture' class for students with 'special' cognitive or social needs, and a 'behaviour' class for students with identified behaviour problems. A quote used in the article from one of the staff members of the school also sends mixed messages about inclusion because it

indicates that families need to 'include' the school, so that their children could then attend a regular class:

> The whole thing we are trying to do is make it [education] as holistic as possible, to make the families feel very inclusive of the school, and work together to get the children successfully back into mainstream. (Feltham, 2004, p. 1)

The *Gazette* is widely read by New Zealand teachers and messages that link inclusion with ideas about 'special' only serve to generate confusion about the place of disabled children in schools. Slee (2001, 2001a) warned against misappropriating the term, inclusion, in 'special' education because 'special' education is rooted in "pathologies of defectiveness." (p. 168). He furthered argued that when initial units in 'special' education is mandated in teacher education, as in Australia, that an individualistic gaze on disabled children occurs and unacknowledged assumptions about syndromes and disorders dominate. Whereas, inclusion is about <u>all</u> children and asks questions like "who's in" and "who's out" (Slee, 2001, p. 116). 'Special' education also emphasizes difference through its gate keeping methods of eligibility applications for "extra" services. Other researchers argue as well that 'special' education is about stigma and segregative practice that maintains 'dis'ability in the identity of disabled students (Ypinazar & Pagliano, 2004; Higgins, 2001). Inclusion, on the other hand, challenges school communities to develop new cultures and new forms of education in which <u>all</u> children are 'special'. A parent in an Australian study by Ypinazar and Pagliano (2004) about the language in special education stated that

> I personally believe that there should be no 'special' education. It just should be called education. . . Special education to me almost makes it like non-education, a different sort of education (Ypinazar & Pagliano, 2004, p. 438)

In New Zealand, the Ministry of Education's policies that are relevant to disabled children are prefaced by the label 'special'. The Ministry of Education has a 'special education' section on its website that will lead the reader to a 'special' education policy page that includes a number of documents that together comprise New Zealand's 'special' education policy. Firstly, there is a link to the New Zealand Education Act (1989) that states that children with "special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enrol and receive education in state schools as people who do not." (New Zealand Government, 2004, section 1.8.1). However, research shows that some students are still rejected by their local schools or encouraged to attend another school (Higgins, 2001; Higgins & Ballard, 2000). In addition there is a concern that there is no accountability as to whether or not disabled children and their peers experience processes supportive of their education and the values underlying inclusive education. A number of studies have indicated that despite children's physical

presence in regular schools, there is often minimal educational (social and academic) inclusion (Cullen, 1999; Philips, 1997; Rietveld, 2002, 2005).

Some schools struggle to include and teach disabled children in the face of insufficient and inflexible resources. In a recent study by MacArthur et al. (2005) a secondary school faced considerable challenges when Sarah, a disabled student enrolled at year nine. Despite having very complex needs, including challenging behaviours, the school initially had limited support from the Ministry of Education for Sarah's transition. The challenges faced by teachers initially led to questions being asked about the appropriateness of Sarah's placement at school, and considerable advocacy on the part of the principal was required to ensure that Sarah and his teachers could begin working together in safe and productive ways. The principal later reflected that the school 'was set-up' because they initially had limited support from the Ministry to help teachers understand how to include Sarah.

The Ministry's rhetorical position though is that it is supportive of inclusive education in New Zealand. The Ministry's *Special Education Policy Guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 2003) state that the aim of *Special Education 2000* (the Ministry's service and policy framework for children with 'special' needs) is to "create a world class inclusive education system." (p. 1). However, at the same time, there does seem to be a way out, or a safety valve for schools (Skrtic, 1991; Thomlinson, 1982), if inclusion does not occur. The guidelines state that children who have 'special' needs may need to be taught in a range of settings and that 'special' schools and units will be retained if children are enrolled in them.

Given the mixed messages that these documents send to schools, it is thus not surprising that one of the objectives of *Special Education 2000* is to assist "schools to take ownership" in meeting the needs of all of its students. Within a recent action research project in a secondary school with a student support centre for disabled students, for example, it was noted that disabled students as well as their teachers were isolated and invisible within the school. There was little opportunity in the school for disabled students to be recognised for their achievements; disabled students participated less in after-school activities; the student support centre was not on the school's website; the centre was not visible from the main courtyard; and there were no sign posts to the Centre as there were to other departments in the school. (Higgins et al, 2005)

Competing strategies and action plans

In 2001, the New Zealand Minister of Disability Issues proclaimed that the government would take the lead to promote an inclusive society through guidance from the *New Zealand Disability Strategy*. The first and third objectives of the fifteen in this strategy are specifically relevant to inclusive education. They are:

> Objective 1: Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society: Encourage the emergence of a non-disabling society that respects and highly values the lives of disabled people and supports inclusive communities. (p. 11)
>
> Objectve 3: Provide the best education for disabled people: Improve education so that all children, youth and adult learners will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular educational centres. (p. 11)

The Ministry of Education provides the Minister of Disability Issues with an annual work plan in regards to meeting the objectives within this strategy. The most recent work plan stated that three areas had been identified in their research as making the biggest difference to all students, including disabled students. These include: effective teaching for all students, family and community engagement in education, and development of quality providers. (Ministry of Education, 2005c). However, there is a fourth item. A 2004 literature review, which was commissioned by the Ministry to look at effective education practice for children with high and moderate needs indicated that most importantly the inclusion of disabled children in their regular school made a positive difference to students' learning, social and cultural outcomes (MacArthur et al, 2004). The review stated that

> researchers have suggested that regular classrooms are the most appropriate setting for students with disabilities as they produce improved short-term and long-term outcomes for all students. . . . Findings from research invite educators and policymakers to reallocate fairer resources toward regular education settings, promote collaborative partnerships, provide adequate teacher training and develop appropriate curricula to enable students with disabilities to access successful inclusive settings. (MacArthur et al, 2004, p. xi)

However, the Ministry of Education's appears to be not committed to these findings as it includes the following disclaimer in the footer on every page of the document:

> The literature review was commissioned and funded by the Ministry of Education. However, this funding in no way implies endorsement of or agreement with any statement in this review by the Ministry of Education.

This seems contradictory to the Ministry's most recent *Statement of Intent: 2005-2010* that maintained that " research shows that not only is it possible to teach learners with special education needs together with their age peers, but also that doing so can lead to improved learning for all." (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 74).

A reader attempting to decipher the Ministry's position about inclusion may be further confused by one of the actions within its *Disability Strategy Implementation Work Plan, 1 july 2005- 30 June, 2006* stating that the Ministry will develop assessment exemplars that will

> support inclusive teaching practice through a focus on students accessing the curriculum alongside their age peers in regular and special schools. (emphasis author's) (Ministry of Education, 2005c, p. 5).

Thus inclusive teaching practice is again associated with special schools, and is therefore contradictory to the Ministry's own definition of inclusion as located in local schools. In addition, some actions in their work plans remain inactions. For example, it was reported in 2004 that in order to help teachers understand the learning needs of disabled children research about the perspectives of students with physical impairments would be published that year (Ministry of Education, 2004). However, this research has not yet been released.

Perhaps, what would be most worrying though to a disabled child and her family or whanau, and perhaps the Minister of Disability Issues as they read this *Work Plan* is that a five-year Action Plan focusing on 'special' education is to be developed based on current policy. This was due to be completed in March 2005 but is now delayed until December. (Ministry of Education, 2005b; Ministry of Education, 2005c) The desired outcomes in this plan are also grounded in ideas about 'special' education, as indicated in the Ministry's text below:

> The key outcomes sought for children and young people with special education needs who access specialist services and funding through the Ministry will be identified. The role of the Ministry, particularly Special Education, to both provide and influence the provision of special education support, will be clarified. The development of the Action Plan will stimulate the exploration of ideas, and will strengthen internal integration, alignment and understanding about special education. (Ministry of Education, 2005c, p. 8)

This statement does fit with the Labour Party's 2005 Education policy, which does not mention inclusion but uses the word 'special,' and says that it will make 'special needs teaching' a requirement for teacher training programmes (New Zealand Labour Party, 2005, p. 2). It also has a 'Special' education policy that emphasizes funding, local need, and establishing a network of learning support needs. It stated that it will

> ensure services and resources are driven by local needs, but kept consistent through a national policy framework. This includes

> making sure the mix of mainstream, unit 'nodes' and special school facilities matches the needs of local communities. (Labour Party of New Zealand, 2005a, p. 2.)

Labour's Party's coalition partner, the Progressive Party also sends a mixed message in that it states that it will extend the "principle of inclusivity. . . to extend the range of special education and its support systems" (Progressive Party, 2005, p. 1.) The other political parties, which are now providing confidence and supply to the present Labour Party's government, emphasize increasing funding to the present 'special' education initiatives in their education or disability policies (New Zealand First, 2005; New Zealand First, 2005a; United Future New Zealand, 2005). The only political party that does emphasize the development of an inclusion policy, the Green Party, is sitting in the opposition benches of parliament. (Green Party of Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2005).

Given that it is responsible to the Labour Party's Minister of Education it is not surprising that the Ministry of Education has maintained a dominant discourse of 'special' education in its most recent *Statement of Intent.* Despite a statement about improved educational outcomes in regular schools, the Ministry's main output is "providing <u>special</u> education services" with a "wide range of services and support." Mixed messages are sent about inclusion in that these services are to assist children with 'special' needs to be "included in their education facility." These facilities are undefined and could include special schools and units. (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.136)

Similarly, in the United States, there is no overarching policy about inclusion, but policy and prescriptive legislation about placing disabled children in the least restrictive environment possible (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). Special education clearly takes on a 'safety valve' role in USA policy. The Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act states that disabled students must be educated with their mainstream peers, but it qualifies this by prefacing this with "to the maximum extent possible" and finishes with the statement that placement in 'special' classes or separate school

> can only occur when the nature of the or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1412 (5) (B) (1990) cited in Yell & Yatsiyannis, 2004, p. 30)

This has resulted in parents needing to advocate for their disabled child and their family through legal battles (Katsiyannis & Herbst, 2004). Ramos (2003) encourages parents to "think like a lawyer" (Ramos, 2003, p. 48), to remember that the system is dispassionate about a parent's concerns, and to become professional and organised when dealing with schools (Ramos, 2003). The most recent amendments

to IDEA, however, attempts to reduce litigation and, unfortunately, makes it more difficult for parents to advocate for their child's rights (Lewis, 2005) because parents must now go to mediation first and if they do go to court and their case is considered "frivolous" then they must pay additional legal fees (Lewis, 2005, p. 69).

Cole (1999) noted that supporters that emphasize continuums of services presume that disabled children are best placed in a segregated setting of some form. He argued that the state also tends to turn to economic efficiency when making policy decisions, which usually supports inclusion policies, but government decisions tend to be cautious and mostly offer more inclusion than previously offered, along with a continuum of services. Cole also noted that progress towards inclusion or continuum of services is dependent on commitment and advocacy from parents of disabled children. Others have indicated though that policy is made at many levels and through many arenas (Barton, 2004; Fulcher, 1989).

Getting an inclusion policy

In New Zealand, the adoption of market based policies, the disestablishment of the national Parent Advocacy Group, and the devolving of decisions about schools to the local level with the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools initiatives in the 1980s makes systemic change towards inclusion difficult (Ballard, 2004; Sullivan, 2005). Ballard (2004a) argued that market based policies have created an education system that does not take into consideration the whole child, but instead focused on teachers somehow producing 'learner' outcomes in the school factory. Within such a system, policies about caring for children, the daily life of the child, and the inclusion of disabled 'learners' whose outcomes may not be valued would not be high priorities (Ballard, 1999, 2004, 2005). Sullivan (2005) has further noted that Tomorrow's Schools has created black holes in national policy about children's rights, and argued that schools thus need to, and have, taken a "number 8 fencing wire approach" to the development of programmes.

Policy-making has been described as occurring in a social context through a dynamic process that involves contestation, tactics, alliances, and negotiation (Barton, 2004). Barton (2004) suggested that policy-making was a messy process and not necessarily linear. However, he explained that policy, itself, does mark out what is significant and establishes boundaries and a framework in which schools act. Policy informs practice and what happens for disabled children at school. In our own research with disabled children and teachers, we have been faced with some of the consequences of higgledy-piggledy policy around inclusion as teachers learn to accommodate diversity in their classrooms, often without adequate support and guidance (Higgins et al, 2005; MacArthur et al, 2005; Rietveld, 2005).

Many disabled children in our research still experience feelings of differentiation and segregation despite being at regular schools. Teachers need to deal with a wide

range of abilities in the classroom without overall guidance from policy, and while some teachers work hard to engage all their students in learning, we have observed some disabled children becoming invisible in the classroom. Teachers' actions in this regard can send powerful messages to other students in the classroom about disability, difference, and disabled children's membership and belonging at school. For example, James' teacher held low expectations for his learning at secondary school, and essentially ignored him in class:

> James potters on and I let him. He doesn't have a teacher aide in this class… He just puddles… He can't do anything here. (MacArthur et al, 2005a, p. 27)

Similarly, Rietveld (2005) described some teachers ignoring non-disabled five-year-olds when they commented on perceived impairments in their classmates with Down Syndrome. Ignoring the impact of children's impairment-related differences, Rietveld argued, is problematic, because it impacts in negative ways on their sense of belonging and on their opportunities for learning:

> …children with identifiable impairments such as Down Syndrome cannot become integral members of classrooms, develop healthy self-esteem, and maximise their learning potential if they must ignore aspects of their identity and subscribe to a majority culture that devalues their appearance and ways of thinking, being and moving. (p. 18).

When teachers ignore the impact of children's impairment-related differences, peers are also deprived of constructive ways of learning how to relate to the child and of learning to accept, respond to and see beyond the differences to other aspects they may have in common. These are complex issues for teachers and some teachers need well-informed support and guidance to foster children's belonging and opportunities for learning.

Perhaps fearing stigma, some disabled children also make themselves invisible at school by remaining quiet and not drawing attention to themselves or to their differences in class. Teachers are observed to respond in a variety if ways, from not noticing through to being very aware and intervening to ensure all students are actively engaged in the curriculum. (MacArthur et al., 2005a). Twelve year old

Emma, for example, resisted doing things that emphasized her differences (MacArthur et al., 2005). She would not use her computer in class because it made too much noise, and she was "scared" to answer questions in class because it was difficult for her to speak and her voice sounded different. Thirteen-year old Luke also said that he wanted to be able to "talk like the other kids". Children emphasise their similarities with their peers, and work hard to be included at school as part of the group of all children. Within this context, they generally view disability as a negative attribute. Children play down their differences, and in some cases, masquerade through the school day as "normal", a position that some teachers recognize is both demanding and stressful for children.

These examples lead us to consider the difficulties faced by teachers who are working in contexts that appear to be so full of complexities and contradictions. Why is being different at school so unpleasant, and should it be necessary for disabled children to change to be accepted? How should teachers explain disability and their teaching approaches to questioning children? How do teachers provide the necessary support to disabled students in non-stigmatising ways that respect children's desire to be part of the group, while still ensuring they are learning? Some teachers in our research have talked with some curiosity about this dilemma of difference (MacArthur, 2005, Minnow, 1990).

Inflexible resourcing structures and unresponsive funding regimes based on deficit models of disability also impact in negative ways on disabled children at school. *Special Education 2000* has been criticized for its deficit oriented and categorical approaches to resourcing (Ballard, 1998). In our research, we have observed the impacts on disabled students of inflexible and inadequate funding systems that do not take into consideration the broader socio-cultural context of the classroom and school, or the children's unique experiences. Emma, at age 12 had her ORRS funding reduced following a review, and she said, "It was hard. I had no one to help me. I was too tired to do things… I need somebody to help me and not by myself." (MacArthur et al, 2005a, p. 32).

Disabled children also experience social invisibility at school. MacArthur & Kelly (2004) and Rietveld (2002) highlight the social isolation of disabled children and note that the success of children in this area is reliant on the broader school context, and particularly on the extent to which teachers take responsibility for children's social lives and prioritise these in their teaching. MacArthur et al (2005) noted that children and parents worry about this aspect of school life, and teachers find it a particularly difficult area to address, with considerable variation evident in

teachers' understanding of their role. Some are unaware of disabled children's social difficulties, some do not see it as their responsibility (as in the case of a second year teacher who said that, "friendships are not really my responsibility"), and others want to support their students to develop friendships but are very unsure about how to intervene effectively.

Bullying is identified by disabled children as a major concern (Higgins et al, 2005), and Kate at age 12 said that the thing she hated most about school was that, "People make fun of me" (MacArthur et al, 2005a, p. 18). Students describe feeling angry, anxious and upset about being bullied, and there is evidence of its enduring negative impact on children's lives. Teachers struggle to find effective ways to understand disabled children's experiences of bullying and to address the problem, and several teachers have highlighted a need for good support and advice in this area.

Some teachers also have a very limited understanding of the impact of disability on children's school life and this can contribute to disabled children experiencing additional challenges at school. For example, Francis, in year nine, was tired of being chastised by her teachers for being late to class, and wrote a letter to them explaining how her disability made it difficult for her to move quickly between classes:

> … I was born with a few disabilities... This does not stop me from trying my best and I give most things a go. I do have pain in my hands after long periods of writing, so I do try and use my PC for much of my written work. More embarrassing is I have to have help with going to the bathroom and getting dressed and undressed. So if I am a bit late for class I may have been to the toilet or getting changed from PE. I hope this letter is of some help for you to understand my disabilities, but always feel free to ask me if you have any problems… (MacArthur et al., 2005a, p. 35).

This example illustrates an interesting reversal of roles whereby Francis is educating her teachers, and it raises questions about the capacity of existing "special needs" frameworks to meet teachers' needs as they are played out in the day-to-day life of the classroom and school. For example, Francis's teachers (and many other teachers in our research) would benefit from some classroom release time to learn about their students, and to explore inclusive approaches to teaching and learning in their classrooms.

In our experience as researchers working in schools, disabled children are feeling the effects of teachers grappling with these complex issues relating to inclusion, difference, disability and belonging in their classrooms. Teachers are asking for practical advice and support that is responsive to all their students and to their own particular circumstances. They are requesting support with questions such as how to adapt their approach to reflect the needs of all students; how to explain disability, difference, equity and social justice to their students; how to understand and respond to the impact of impairment on disabled children's learning; how to use teacher aide support well in their classroom; and how to keep children meaningfully engaged in the curriculum when one-to-one assistance is not available. Such support needs to position disabled children firmly within the group of all children and not differentiate them in stigmatizing ways from their peer group. It also needs to be premised on ordinary understandings about teaching and learning, and curriculum. This implies a rejection of the discursive binary of regular/special that "works to functionally erase ambiguities of membership and stigmatize one half of the set" (Ypinazar & Pagliano, 2004, p. 434).

Conclusion

In order for disabled students to be fully included at their local schools, New Zealand policy needs to clearly emphasize inclusion and not 'special' education. It is also important, as Vlachou (2004) has pointed out, for all levels of existing education policy and practice to be examined systemically through an inclusive lens. Inclusion applies to efforts to meet the diverse needs of *all* students within an equitable and accepting education system and involves overcoming exclusive and segregationist practices throughout the education system (Ballard, 2004; Slee, 2001). Inclusive schools work to ensure that all students take a full and active part in school life, and are valued and integral members of the school community (Nakken & Pijl, 2002). School systems working to achieve this goal focus on change at a number of levels, including at the level of educational policy; school organization, structure, and ecology; and pedagogy (Booth, 2002).

However, we maintain that educational policies in this country are "higgledy-piggledy" and maintain a dichotomous understanding of some learners as 'special' and others as 'normal'. This lack of clarity, coherence and cohesion in policy has been identified by New Zealand (Ballard, 2004) and international researchers (Slee & Allan, 2001, Ypinazar & Paglioni, 2004) as a fundamental hindrance to inclusive education. There is evidence in the data presented here as well that this dichotomy negatively impacts on the daily lives of disabled children at school. The barriers to learning and participation faced by disabled children are interpreted by some researchers as also coming from deep and pervasive structures and attitudes that define some students as 'special' and as not belonging in the regular classroom

(Ballard, 2004; Slee, 2001; McDonnell, 2003). As indicated in this paper, disabled children are at risk of becoming invisible and socially isolated.

The Ministry of Education's mission statement is to "raise achievement and reduce disparity" and they acknowledge that disabled children are under-achieving (Ministry of Education, 2005). It seems to us that it is time for the Ministry to over-hall their policies because focusing on 'special' education does not seem to be working. We advocate, therefore, for a move beyond the rhetoric of inclusion to the development of inclusive education policies, whole-school approaches, and teaching practices that effectively respond to the perspectives and experiences of diverse groups of students, including disabled students, and their teachers. The Ministry is currently working on their five-year action plan for 'special' education, and we see this as a timely opportunity to develop a plan for inclusion, instead. This would be in keeping with the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, where UNESCO identified its first priority in Education as being "Education for All" and stated that

> inclusion, as a crosscutting issue in UNESCO's Programme, needs to be the fundamental philosophy throughout the different EFA (Education for All) follow-up efforts, so that the goal of "Education for All" can be achieved. Inclusion should be the guiding principle for the development work with Governments towards Education for all. (UNESCO, 2004)

UNESCO has clearly stated that it believes that "inclusive education provides the best solution for a school system which can meet the needs of all learners" (UNESCO, 2004a), so that all children are respected, learn together, and receive a good education (UNESCO, 2004a).

Similarly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), of which New Zealand is a signatory, provides a useful context for thinking about inclusion. Article 2 emphasises the principle of non-discrimination, and article 12 is concerned with the rights of children to be heard and to have their views taken seriously. Article 23 relates specifically to disabled children and states that disabled children shall enjoy "a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community". This includes rights to access to education. Article 3 is particularly relevant to the present discussion because it supports the <u>best interests of the child</u> as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. The interests of parents or the state, then, should not be the primary consideration. However, as we have indicated in this paper, policy developments in "special" education, rather than inclusive education in New Zealand have been largely driven by adult and political agendas, with little regard given to disabled children's day-to-day school experiences, perspectives and rights.

Inclusion is a complex and evolving concept based on educational structures, policy, processes, and practices grounded in key principles of social justice and human rights (Ballard, 2004; Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Slee, 2001; Ware, 2004). Inclusion recognises the responsibility of schools in democratic societies to address the needs of diverse students, and not simply to focus on majority wishes and aspirations, because as one non-disabled student commented after participating in a drama production with disabled students:

> Just don't expect, like I'd tell people, 'Don't, like expect them to be any different from us.' (Higgins et al, 2005, p. 38)

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