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New Zealand: Inclusive education and children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties

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Chapter 6: Education in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific

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Introduction

This chapter considers the important and controversial issue of inclusive education for children special educational needs (SEN) in New Zealand, particularly those with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). The chapter provides a critique of policies and practices regarding inclusive education for children with SEN in New Zealand, and discusses the implications for children with SEBD.

Policy and practice of inclusive education for children with SEN in New Zealand

New Zealand has one of most inclusive education systems in the world with less than 1% of children educated in residential schools, special schools, classes or units in mainstream schools. The 1989 Education Act established a legal right for all children to attend their local mainstream school from age 5-19 years. In 1996 the Ministry of Education (MoE) introduced a policy called 'Special Education 2000' which was intended to bring about mainstreaming for all children, that is the inclusion of all children with SEN in mainstream schools.

The 1989 Education Act also set up self-managing schools, so that New Zealand now has one of the most devolved education systems in the world, with individual schools governed by Boards of Trustees made up mainly of parents. The MoE provides policy guidelines but in most cases these are not mandatory, so schools develop their own policies and practices, including those for children with SEN. The only requirement on schools from the MoE regarding children with SEN is a very

general one, that schools identify students with special needs and develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address these needs (MoE, 2009).

When policy and practice regarding inclusive education for children with SEN in New Zealand is compared with that from other countries, such as the USA and England, two differences are clear. First, New Zealand policy for inclusive education has been more radical than that in most countries, with an espoused goal of educating *all* children with SEN in mainstream schools. The impact of this policy is evidenced by the smaller percentage of children with SEN in special schools and classes than is the case in other countries. New Zealand's proportion of just less than one percent compares with England's of around 1.35 percent, and that in the USA of around 8%. The second difference is that when the actual practice of providing for children with SEN in mainstream schools is compared with that in England and the USA, glaring deficiencies in the New Zealand system become apparent. These are outlined in Hornby (2012) and discussed below in order to highlight the disparity between the rhetoric and reality of inclusive education in New Zealand.

No specific legislation for children with SEN

There is no specific education legislation in New Zealand regarding children with SEN. The 1989 Education Act which established self-managing schools, as well as the legal right for all children to attend their local mainstream schools from age 5-19 years, does provide that a child whose special needs cannot be met in a mainstream school should, with agreement of the parents, be enrolled in a special school, class or clinic. But this is as far as it goes (Varnham, 2002).

This is in stark contrast with the 1996 Education Act in England and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (US. Department of Education, 1997) in the USA. These are both examples of specific legislation on children with SEN that set out statutory responsibilities for schools regarding provision for children with SEN. For example, the IDEA specifies six principles for the education of children with SEN (Salend, 2011). First, *zero reject*, which requires that the education system cannot exclude students with special needs or disabilities and must provide special education services when needed. Second, *non-discriminatory evaluation*, which requires that children are evaluated fairly and that parents receive guidelines about special education and related services available. Third, *free and appropriate education*, which requires schools to put in place Individualized

Education Programs (IEPs) for all children identified as having special educational needs. Fourth, *least restrictive environment,* which requires schools to educate children with peers of the same age to the maximum extent appropriate. Fifth, *procedural due process,* which includes safeguards for children and their parents including the right to sue if the other principles are not carried out. Six, *family and student participation,* which requires that parents and students are fully involved in designing and delivering programs. These principles provide children with SEN and their families in the USA with a virtual guarantee of an appropriate education. Since legislation for SEN with statutory responsibilities is lacking in New Zealand and schools are self-governing, what schools provide for children with SEN varies widely between schools and ranges from the excellent to the woefully inadequate. However, there is no means of redress for parents who are not satisfied with what a school provides for their child with SEN, except to enrol the child at another school.

No Statutory Guidelines for Schools re SEN

In New Zealand there are no statutory guidelines for schools regarding children SEN that schools must follow. Guidelines on many SEN issues are provided by the MoE, but schools can choose whether or not to take heed of these. This is in stark contrast with the requirements specified in the IDEA in the USA, outlined above, and the detailed statutory guidance for schools provided within the Code of Practice for SEN (DfES, 2001) in England. The Code sets out detailed guidelines for the procedures that must be followed and the resources that must be provided for children with SEN and their families. This includes a three-stage process for assessing and planning interventions for addressing SEN. The third stage of this process requires that a 'statement' of SEN be produced that specifies the programmes and resources that are mandated to be provided for the child. Also mandated is the need the take into account the child's views and those of the parents throughout the three-stage process. In contrast, since statutory guidelines are absent in New Zealand, provision for children with SEN varies widely. In some cases it is excellent but in many cases it is inadequate.

No requirement to have SENCOs or SEN Committees

Establishment of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in all New Zealand Schools, with a time allocation of least 0.2 in primary schools and 0.4 in secondary schools, was recommended in the Wylie Report (2000) on special education, but was never implemented by the MoE. As a result, schools may have

staff assigned to this role but typically limited time allocation is made for them to carry out the requirements of this job. Typically, the SENCO role is added to the responsibilities of school principals, deputy principals, or other senior staff, with either limited or no time allocation to carry out the necessary tasks. Furthermore, most of these named SENCOs do not have any training in the SEN field.

No requirement for SENCO training

For New Zealand schools that do have SENCOs identified there is no requirement for them to have qualifications on SEN or to undergo training once they are assigned this role. This is in contrast to England where training is compulsory for SENCOs. Relevant training on SEN is available at most New Zealand universities but this needs to be undertaken at the teachers' own expense and in their own time, so currently, few of them take up these opportunities. Therefore, many of the staff named as SENCOs in schools do not have the training or experience with SEN to effectively carry out the SENCO role.

No requirement for Individual Education Plans

While comprehensive guidance on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) is provided to schools (MoE, 2011), individual schools decide which children will have IEPs, the format and content of IEPs, and the extent to which parents are involved. Therefore, whether students with SEN have IEPs or not varies widely between schools and IEP procedures are often inadequate, particularly with regard to the effective involvement of parents (Hornby and Witte, 2010).

No statutory training for mainstream teachers on SEN

Until 2011 there was no requirement on institutions offering teacher education to include training on teaching students with SEN. Recently the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC, 2011) has specified the SEN content of teacher education by providing an appendix to the graduating teacher standards that sets out the knowledge and skills on SEN that teachers need to become competent in. This is a major step forward, but will take several years to implement. A small-scale survey of school principals has found that they are keen to see the new SEN content included in teacher education programmes, but philosophical and implementation issues raised by the academics who are supposed to deliver this content suggest that it will not be a straightforward task (Hornby and Sutherland, 2013). Meanwhile, the vast majority of practicing mainstream school teachers have had minimal or no training on teaching students with SEN. Also, there is no requirement for NZ teachers, once qualified, to

undertake continuing professional development, like there is in other countries such as England and Australia, so it is only a minority of teachers who take up opportunities for professional development regarding SEN that are available.

No statutory school/educational psychologist involvement

In New Zealand, educational psychologists are based in MoE Special Education Services, with other staff such as speech/language therapists, and typically operate on a case allocation model. That is, they work in mainly a reactive rather than a proactive model of service provision (Hornby, 2010). This means that, rather than helping schools develop effective practices for all children, including those with SEN, they are constrained to work with the 2% of children with the most severe learning and behavioural difficulties. They may be involved in IEPs if invited by schools or parents but have no mandated involvement. In contrast, in England and the USA psychologist input is mandated in assessment and programme planning for children identified as having moderate to severe levels of SEN.

No school counsellors or social workers in elementary and middle schools

New Zealand schools do not have counsellors in primary or middle schools, but there are guidance counsellors in high schools. Social workers are not based in schools, but schools have access to social workers who serve several schools. Thus, although the majority of SEN and mental health issues emerge during the primary and middle school years, children in New Zealand have limited access to professionals who can provide specialist help with these until they reach secondary schools, by which time problems have become entrenched.

No coherent policy about inclusive education

Although 99% of children are educated in mainstream schools, New Zealand still has seven residential special schools and 28 day special schools. Many of the special schools have satellite classes in mainstream schools and some have these classes in several mainstream schools. A few mainstream schools still have special units or classes, including around six special units in Auckland and three in Christchurch. However, many special classes have been shut down in the last twenty years, and special schools have also been under threat due to MoE policy on inclusion. Interestingly, in the recent national Review of Special Education (MoE, 2010) consultation was around four options for the future of special schools, one of which was closure of all special schools. Only 1% of submissions agreed with closing special schools. 99% were in favour of keeping special schools. However, this has not

stopped a vocal minority calling for their closure. For example, a group calling themselves the ‘Inclusive Education Action Group’ has been lobbying the government to further the inclusion agenda and close special schools.

Recent government policy in New Zealand has focused on ensuring that all schools are ‘fully inclusive’ (MoE, 2010). It also notes that special schools will continue to exist but does not clarify what their role will be. It therefore appears to be supporting a continuum of provision for SEN but exactly what this involves is not made clear. Because New Zealand has no specific legislation on provision for children with SEN and therefore no statutory guidance for schools, the lack of a coherent policy on inclusive education for children with SEN leaves schools to develop practices based on their interpretation of the non-statutory guidance provided by the MoE. Thus, the wide variation in the type and quality of the procedures and practices employed by schools, to cater for students with SEN, is likely to be the case for some time to come.

Another consequence of the lack of specific legislation on the education of children with SEN is that there is no protection for the special education facilities that have been established. So when new Ministers of Education are looking for areas in which to make cuts in their budgets, such facilities are particularly vulnerable. One area that has come under the spotlight in New Zealand in recent times is provision for children with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). This is a very challenging area of special education that has been the subject of two research studies that I have conducted over the past few years (Hornby and Witte, 2008 a and b; Hornby and Evans, 2013). But it has recently become very topical with the closure of one of only four residential schools for children with SEBD and the threatened closure of another. In the following section the findings of the two studies are summarized and the debate about the wraparound service that is to replace them is discussed.

Studies of Graduates of a Residential School For Children With SEBD

Study One

A follow-up study was conducted with ex-students of a residential special school (RSS) for children with SEBD (Hornby and Witte, 2008a). The RSS enrolled children from a wide geographical area within New Zealand and catered for up to 32 children.

Participants

Data were obtained on 29 out of a possible 49 (59.2%) ex-students from a cohort that had attended the RSS approximately 14 years earlier. Of the 29 ex-students, 22 were male and 7 female and ages ranged from 21 to 27 years with a mean of 24 years. Their ages when they began attending the school ranged from 8.0 to 12.9 years with a mean of 10.6 years. The length of time they attended the RSS ranged from ten to 30 months with a mean of 18 months.

Procedure

Interviews conducted with ex-students and/or their caregivers focused on quality of life indicators including educational achievement, employment, community adjustment, and ex-students' views of their education. A summary of the findings is presented below.

Educational achievement

27 out of 29 participants (93%) had left school with no qualifications whatsoever. Over half of the sample (17 /29) left school before reaching the official school leaving age of 16 years and a further ten did not complete high school.

Employment

At the time of the survey nine out of 29 (31%) of the ex-students were working full-time and six (21%) were working part-time. Four ex-students (14%) were in prison and the remaining ten were on either unemployment, sickness, disability or other benefits. Since leaving school only three of the 29 ex-students had never had a full-time job. The types of jobs that ex-students had held were ones that required minimal training or qualifications, were low paid and had minimal job security or prospects.

Community adjustment

At the time of the survey none of the 29 ex-students were married. However, eleven were in de facto marital relationships, two were engaged to be married and another two had been married but were by then divorced. Fourteen of them were still single. Also, almost half (14/29) of them had already produced children. Nineteen of the ex-students (66%) reported that they had a criminal record.

Views of their education

An analysis of comments made by ex-students in the interviews (Hornby and Witte, 2008b) showed that nearly all of the ex-students (18 out of 21) had positive things to say about their time at the residential special school. A major finding was that many ex-students commented on how time at the RSS had helped them address their learning difficulties and achieve more academically, as well as helping them to gain

better control over their behavior. Other positive aspects of the special school commented on by ex-students in this study included: smaller class sizes; more one to one attention; a clear disciplinary structure; a safe school environment; the high quality of relationships between students, teachers and residential staff; and, the wide range of activities available to participate in. In contrast, all of the ex-students had negative things to say about the mainstream schools they attended after they left the RSS. Examples of this were the labeling and stereotyping they had experienced from mainstream teachers.

Conclusions from study one

Despite their positive views about the help they had received at the RSS the majority of ex-students had been unable to complete high school and had gained no educational qualifications. The majority had poor employment prospects and had a high level of involvement with the criminal justice system.

Study Two

The aim of the second study was to further investigate the main findings of the previous study of a residential special school (RSS) cohort. It aimed to address concerns about why, for the majority of ex-students, the advances made at the RSS had not been maintained sufficiently to sustain them through their time at mainstream secondary schools.

The goal of the second study was to identify key factors in ensuring educational success for ex-students from the RSS. A cohort of children who attended the special school five to seven years earlier and who should have been attending mainstream secondary schools at the time of this study were identified by the RSS principal. Mainstream schools were surveyed by questionnaires and follow-up telephone calls to enable the identification of ex-students who were being successfully maintained at the schools.

Nineteen students were located who were under 16 years of age and therefore should still have been at school. Of these nineteen, eight had already left school, two were being home-schooled, and one had moved to tertiary education. Of the remaining eight still attending secondary schools, one refused to be interviewed, one was experiencing severe family issues, and another lived too far away to be included. So the remaining five students were the study participants.

Ages of the five students ranged from 14.7 years to 15.11 years. All were in

mainstream classes at state secondary schools, two at boys high schools, three at co-educational schools. One boy lived with his grandparents, two with their mothers and two with their mother and a step-father.

Each of the students, plus a parent or guardian, as well as a key person from the school staff was interviewed using face-to-face interviews. Examples of questions were, ‘What individual coping behaviours have hindered or helped success in mainstream schools’. Also, ‘While at mainstream school what agencies have been helpful or a hindrance?’ Completed interview pro-formas from the five groups of participants were analyzed to identify themes that emerged from responses to the questions addressed in the interviews. The four themes that emerged focused on: schools, parents and families, outside agencies, and personal factors.

Schools

The schools that the five students attended varied from doing nothing special to assist the student, to being extremely flexible in order to maintain them at school. For example, one school allowed a student to spend most of a school year with the school caretaker while gradually being integrated into lessons with specially selected teachers. Whereas, another school did not even realize that the student had previously been at a RSS, so did nothing special at all.

Most schools did little to investigate students’ abilities and special needs. Regular behavior management procedures such as daily report forms and time-out rooms were widely used as part of schools’ general procedures for behavior management, but individualized educational programmes (IEPs) and individualized behaviour plans (IBPs) were rarely used. All schools had guidance counselors (GC), form teachers and deans for each year group who were involved with the ex-students, but none of these had made home-visits. However, GCs were pivotal for four out of the five students. Home-school links were generally tenuous with most contacts made when prompted by students’ behavioral difficulties.

Parents and families

Families with whom the five participants were living varied from being disengaged from them, to being totally committed to ensuring they finish school. None of the five students came from homes with two natural parents living with them. Grandparents were carers for one child and were involved with two others. It was notable that each student had one person who took a personal interest in or had a close relationship with him. For two it was their mothers, for one a stepfather, for another it was a

grandparent and for another it was the school caretaker, who was also a family friend.

Outside agencies

Involvement varied from no agencies outside school being involved with the student, to multi-agency involvement with staff from seven different agencies involved with one student. None of the participants reported positive involvement of educational professionals from outside the school such as educational psychologists or special educational needs resource teachers. In most cases the children's carers reported that support from outside agencies was inadequate to meet their needs.

Personal factors

One student reported that he was going to school because he wanted to do better than his siblings, who he saw as 'losers'; one wanted to 'better himself'; one had a goal of becoming a pilot; and the other two reported going to school because their carers said they had to. All five said friends were an important reason for them wanting to be at school. Three of the students were affected by bullying at school and one of these had been in hospital twice after being beaten-up at school.

Conclusions from study two

All five participants were facing challenging issues and were considered to be at risk of not completing high school. The main factor keeping them on track was support from the mentors that each child had. Four out of five schools lacked coherent plans to cater for these students' needs and seemed unable or unwilling to make adaptations to their standard procedures to do this. The guidance and support that the RSS had provided on transition to the mainstream schools appeared long forgotten.

Findings from this study support the view that, in order for students with significant SEBD to successfully complete their schooling, procedures need to be put in place for ongoing assistance and support throughout their time in secondary schools, both at school and in their homes.

Conclusions on finding from both studies

Conclusions are that students with significant SEBDs appear to be very positive about the RSS they attended, but when transferred back to mainstream schools this placement subsequently breaks down for the majority of them. The implications is that mainstream schools need to be much better prepared for these students if they are to provide effectively for them. This involves consideration of the following factors: implementation of strategies used in residential special schools; the professional

development of mainstream teachers; transition planning for the return to mainstream schools; support from residential special schools; ongoing support from organizations outside the school for mainstream school teachers as well as parents and families; and, the development of school organization for meeting the special needs of students with SEBD.

Closure of SEBD residential schools

Given the positive feedback on RSS reported above and the resulting concerns about the ability of mainstream schools to provide effectively for students with SEBD, it was surprising that rather than working to strengthen mainstream school provision for addressing SEBD, the New Zealand MoE has moved to close two of the four RSS for children with SEBD. At the end of 2012 one school was closed and another is under threat of closure at the end of 2013.

The alternative provision suggested by the Ministry of Education is an expansion of the wraparound service for children with severe behavioural difficulties, which has been developed in the USA. However, research carried out to date on wraparound in the USA has reported limited evidence of its effectiveness. Studies have found high drop-out rates, and for the children who remain in wraparound its impact on outcomes has typically been small. The only meta-analysis of research on wraparound published to date could find only seven studies considered rigorous enough to be included (Suter and Bruns, 2009). Of these seven, four studies used nonequivalent comparison groups and three used randomized control groups, which are considered to be more rigorous. For the four comparison group studies the drop-out rate ranged from 15 to 35 percent and the effect sizes ranged from 0.5 to 0.67. For the three randomized control studies, only one reported a drop-out rate and this was 35 percent, while effect sizes ranged from 0.11 to 0.22. These are not very convincing findings, particularly when compared with the much larger effect sizes found for other educational interventions for children with behavioural difficulties (Cooper and Jacobs, 2011; Hattie, 2009). Hence, the authors of the meta-analysis concluded that wraparound cannot, at this time, be considered to be a practice with a sound base of research evidence (Suter and Bruns, 2009).

This conclusion is supported by the findings of a recent survey in New Zealand conducted by the Principals' Federation. This found that, of the schools which had accessed the MoE intensive wraparound service, 53% reported that it did

not bring about sustainable positive behaviour change, compared with 19% which considered that it had, and 26% which considered that it was too early to tell.

The findings above are not surprising because the Wraparound approach depends on support services such as itinerant teachers, educational psychologists, social workers, and health service personnel working in effective partnerships with schools and families. International research conducted over many years on multi-agency working such as this, has found that, despite good intentions, it is in practice very difficult to carry out effectively (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott, Doherty and Kinder, 2002).

In addition, the research studies reported above, have shown that it is sometime after children return to mainstream schools following intensive intervention that things go badly wrong, resulting in most cases of these children leaving the school system before they are 16. The MoE have specified that wraparound funding will only be available for children only for two years, which for most will not see them through to age 16. As stated above, the finding from our two studies suggests that ongoing support is needed throughout all their years of schooling in order for these children to successfully complete secondary school.

So it is clear that the effectiveness of any service for children with severe behavioural difficulties is dependent on the ability of mainstream schools to cater effectively for them when they complete intensive intervention. This needs to be the major focus of attention if the education of these children is to be improved and needs to be addressed before any consideration of reducing current provision by closing residential schools.

This will require the training of all mainstream school teachers and the development of school organization, so that they all have clear structures for identifying and providing appropriate programs for pupils with special educational needs, including those with behavioural difficulties. For example, it is essential to have trained Special Educational Needs Coordinators in all mainstream schools, as was recommended in the Wylie Review (2000), but has not yet been implemented.

Until these changes are brought about in mainstream schools it is essential to have the residential schools available to cater for children with severe behavioural difficulties. When children are enrolled in one of the residential schools it is because their families, local schools and support services have been unable to provide adequately for their educational and social needs. For these children being taken out

of their local environment into a residential school is what saves them from a complete meltdown. Not having these schools as a last resort option for these very vulnerable children will put enormous stresses on the mainstream schools they will attend, and on their families in trying to cope with them at home. So closing these schools, which appears to be de facto MoE policy, despite this not being its espoused policy, is damaging to the New Zealand education system.

Despite lack of convincing international research evidence for the effectiveness of wraparound and considering the negative reports from principals on its implementation in New Zealand schools, as well as the findings of follow–up research on young people who attended the RSS, the move to close residential schools in favour of wraparound provision cannot be justified on educational grounds and appears to be motivated by financial concerns.

CONCLUSION

The main issue is that, without specific legislation and detailed policy on children with SEN, including those with SEBD, provision for these children is always vulnerable to cuts or closure. New Zealand has legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities but no legislation to protect the rights of children with special needs, including those with SEBD. New Zealand has a code of practice for international students studying here, to ensure that effective procedures are in place in schools to provide for their needs. But it does not have a code of practice for SEN to make sure that children with special needs are supported and effectively educated in New Zealand schools. Without specific legislation on SEN and statutory guidance for schools, children with special needs, including those with SEBD, will continue to be at risk of not gaining the education that they need to become happy and productive citizens.

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