

To investigate issues related to inclusive education in order to increase meaningful participation in reducing exclusion of diverse learners.

Author: Angela Funaki, Dawson Primary

Sabbatical: Term 2, 2015

Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge NZEI and the Ministry of Education for offering the sabbatical. It has given me the opportunity to investigate and research inclusive practice for diverse learners in more depth that would not have been possible when running a school.

Thank you to the Dawson Board of Trustees for supporting my application and to Robyn Harding for leading the school in my absence. To the Dawson staff, thank you for extra input during my absence and also the continued work you do with inclusive practice to ensure our students can achieve their potential.

I would like to acknowledge the principals who gave up their time to allow me to interview them about their understanding of inclusiveness for diverse learners- you all do a fantastic job with catering for your students needs.

Purpose

Inclusive education calls into question the broader aims of education, the purpose of schools, the nature of the curriculum, approaches to assessment and the schools accommodation to diversity. Schools traditionally build themselves on achievement; however successful schools have their foundations built on relationships. The purpose is to view how schools cater for inclusive education for diverse learners and how mainstream schools act in ways that enable them to respond to student diversity to facilitate participation by all students in the cultures, curricula and communities of the school.

I inquired into and examined the following questions:

1. What does inclusive education for diverse learners mean?
2. What are the principles of diverse inclusion?
3. Why is inclusion often only associated with special needs?
4. What are the characteristics of an inclusive school?
5. How important is the culture of a school in determining inclusiveness.
6. In what ways do you adapt the curriculum to change learning and encourage inclusion of all pupils
7. What are the difficulties and barriers to creating inclusive schools
8. What needs to happen to or for teachers to ensure they promote inclusiveness?
9. Does inclusive quality education lead to a more inclusive society?

Rationale and background

I have been privileged to be principal of Dawson, a decile 1 school of around 430 children in the Otara area. We have 23% Maori, 32% Samoan, 13% Tongan, 23% Cook Island, 3% Niuean, 2% European, 1% Middle Eastern, 2% Fijian and others.

Like most schools we have several ORs funded students, HLN students, students involved with the RTLB service, intensive wrap around service and ESOL, and many children who have learning needs and are not at national standard. I have been motivated to research these questions as we have had many staff attend the Inclusive Education seminars. Parents and teachers have completed the inclusive survey put out through Wellbeing@school, although we did change this to allow inclusiveness for our parents, as the questionnaire at the time was not appropriate for our community. Staff have worked with the RTLB and SE& S and other agencies to develop programmes within the class that cater for the needs of all students. We have also worked extensively on Ka Hikitia and The Pacific Education Plan.

As a school we have had boys only classes at the year 5/6 level for over 10 years to cater for boys learning, and in the last two years we have started a SWANS (Students with additional needs) or booster class at the Year 4 level. There are usually about 12 students in this class. We provide music, and science specialists, a reading specialist in the senior school and two teachers who work with ESOL students. We offer a varied programme with the Garden to Table initiative and many sports opportunities so that children can find their strengths.

As a school we need to continue our journey of catering for diverse learners and to look at the influence and implications of culture and language. We also need to look at the importance of school culture (the values and attitudes) held by staff. Leadership and decision making is the strongest predictor of effective teaching behaviour in inclusive education and I wanted to reflect on influences and changes to enhance the inclusiveness in the school setting.

Another aspect was developing school support networks, developing a community and working collaboratively with our parents. In designing programmes the school focus must shift from the individual impairments to the social context –providing education for all students.

I have been fortunate that my school has already sent me to Finland to look at how they cater for the needs of all students within a school setting. Small class numbers, collegiality and collaboration of staff, specialists and teacher aides within the class were some of the aspects along with equality for all. I also observed that there was not the same diversity of poverty and ethnicity as exists in my school. Parental engagement was another aspect that was of quality. We have this with out Mutukaroa and Reading Together programmes alongside all the other opportunities we have for parents to come to school. However like many schools this is an area that needs development.

Whilst inclusive education is discussed in educational circles often it only refers to the children with special needs and abilities. Very rarely do you hear how schools are catering for their diverse learners including gender, ethnicity, religion, language and socio economic.

Activities undertaken:

My sabbatical research can be broken into areas.

1. Literature review of Inclusiveness-its purpose and meaning
2. Visits /interviews to investigate understandings of inclusiveness and best practice
3. Reflection on what is already happening at Dawson and what our next steps might need to be.

Findings

Often when we think about inclusiveness we look at exclusion .We usually identify the excluded as those who are not at school for some reason and we look at strategies to get them back to school and this can be a challenge for some. Policies and practices help to overcome this exclusion but at the same time we need to know that exclusion can occur for those children who are attending school and we need as practitioners to address and respond to the diverse needs of learners so they don't feel excluded. We need to know what is happening in their homes and communities, what they are learning and in what situations.

The Government had a vision of a fully inclusive education system by 2014. Ka Hikitia, the Pasifika Education Plan, Tataiako, Success for All-Every School, Every Child and now the Inclusive schools initiative with the Wellbeing @school tools has helped schools along the journey. ERO have written reviews including: Inclusive Practices for Students with Special Needs in Schools (March 2015), Wellbeing for Children's Success at Primary School (February 2015) and there is a new tool called HAUTU: Maori Cultural Responsiveness Self Review tool for Boards of Trustees that support schools with inclusive practice. There is also the book Inclusive Education: Perspectives on Professional Practice that discusses policies and practices relating to inclusive education.

Inclusion can mean different things. After interviewing I found that many thought that inclusion was mainly around a mainstream school now taking and providing for special needs students and also providing programmes for students with special abilities. Inclusive education for diverse learners encompasses characteristics including home language, ethnicity, socio economic background, gender, special needs, disability and giftedness. Inclusion means valuing students and removing their barriers to learning. Inclusion extends beyond education to society. It embraces differences and values the uniqueness that each child brings to the class.

All teachers can expect to have a diversity of students in their classes. One principal pointed out that diversity implied 'different', and who are they different from. Do we mean they are different from mainstream New Zealand 'norms'. So what then is normal? Diverse is the label based on colour, gender, ethnicity learning ability, able bodied, economic status and others. For classrooms to be successful learning hubs teachers need to understand the needs of the students and provide programmes and learning conditions that cater to this. Whanau is a term used by one school for inclusiveness .In a whanau you don't exclude people,

you don't separate family members into age groups and you don't kick members out if they don't reach your expectation. It means including everyone and supporting and scaffolding them to reach their potential.

Mainstreaming in a school asks the question "Can we provide for the need of the student" whereas inclusion is "How will we..."

"To include is not necessarily to be inclusive "(Graham & Slee 20070). Education in a regular school should be available for all students, and schools and their teachers are expected to cater for their communities. This includes those with disabilities, those who learn easily and those who don't, and those from all backgrounds.

Meeting diversity of needs in a classroom is a challenge. Demands of teaching mixed abilities, changing instruction to meet individual needs, teaching to reduce prejudice, working with support people in the room, and meeting with agencies or people outside the class is considerable but the focus should be on providing good teaching .The teaching practice should benefit all the students in the class.

Inclusive schools will all look and feel different but will have similar characteristics including good leadership, a supportive culture, reflective teachers, democratic classrooms and a curriculum that is responsive and relevant using good teaching practice.

There needs to be a vision in the school based around inclusion and the leaders and Board of Trustees should articulate this and help to build understanding in the school community. Student voice and those of the teaching and support staff and the parent community need to contribute to and participate in the learning and teaching.

Equality and equity were characteristic that I saw very clearly while in Finland. At Dawson we have worked on respecting all students and staff and valuing their contributions. We have also worked hard at developing a collaborative and collegial environment where we all work for the same good. Students are encouraged to make rules through their treaties, have input into what happens in the school through the student council, garden to table, travel wise and health and safety committees and through suggesting what they would like to investigate in their class programmes. We also offer a variety of programmes, not all academic, so that diverse students may find a strength or giftedness in another area. It may also be an area that engages them and the skills can then be applied into other areas as they feel some sense of achievement. Many schools are now offering a variety of curriculum programmes to cater for interests of pupils. Funding often needs to be sought as these programmes cost and school budget does not always extend to this.

An inclusive pedagogy involves understanding what a student can achieve and designing a programme that engages that student. Strengths and interests of the students need to be used and success should be celebrated.

Knowledge and relationships are key to inclusiveness. Schools develop these through different ways, some ensuring that teachers are in their rooms when children arrive at school and personal conversations can occur. Many schools spend the first weeks of the year with a study focused around their student's life, culture, and interests. Getting to know the students is a common focus. Parent meetings and nights where conversations about the families and their interests also promoted inclusiveness. Schools were all working on developing positive relationships with parents. Most schools gave certificates or awards to recognize success in an area of schooling. At Dawson we also send out postcards and have asked teachers to ring at least two parents a week to give good news stories as too often we only ring when there is an issue. Inclusive schools work with the parents with open communication. In many schools this started at the enrolment stage, as it is easier to set goals and have an understanding of what parents want for their child. Our school has an open door policy to welcome parents to the school whenever they would like to visit.

Parents and caregivers must be able to take an active role in the life of the school. The partnerships between home and school can make or break inclusive practice. Schools used many different approaches to develop parental engagement but many found this was an area they were continually seeking new ways to interact. Those parents they most wanted to come were the very ones that usually didn't. Perhaps it is looking more at the ethnicities and cultural practices and tapping into these to develop the relationships and the connections. Schools in rural areas with mainly Maori parents found better engagement than some of the urban schools with a large Maori community. Some school principals talked about whanau being the culture of the school. Maori and Pasifika values were embedded in their policy, procedures and practice.

Adapting a global perspective allows us to view culturally and linguistically diverse students and their parents as resources who can provide enrichment and support within the school. However inclusion is a never-ending process and is based on increasing participation in learning opportunities.

ERO in Including Students with High Needs (June 2010) Education Evaluation Reports says "The most inclusive schools operated under three key principles

- having ethical standards and leadership that built the culture of an inclusive school
- having well organized systems, effective teamwork and constructive relationships that identified and supported the inclusion of all students
- using innovative and flexible practices that managed the complex and unique challenges related to including all students.

The culture of the school is one of the most important aspects of developing an inclusive school. Cultivating a safe, positive school can be one of the more difficult aspects of creating an inclusive school. All those interviewed were developing a caring culture where students had a strong sense of belonging, they learnt to interact respectfully with others and they understood and were learning to appreciate diversity especially with the mix of cultures. Equity is

about inclusion but also has another dimension, that of fairness. This includes ethnicity, gender and socio economic, which are ensuring that personal and social circumstances do not impact on educational potential. That of fairness needs to be addressed more.

Teachers are pivotal in inclusive schools. It may mean that schools need to choose staffing with beliefs and values that align with inclusive practice. They need to have a strong sense of their own ethnic and cultural identity. Teachers need to teach the culture of the school to their pupils. They should develop a relationship with their students where they have high expectations and a belief that they can have success. They need to have learning tasks that are meaningful where they provide scaffolding and the curricula covers perspectives of differing cultural groups within society. They should be engaging students in a range of learning styles and suitable for learners with various talents and interests. The programme should be personally and culturally appropriate.

Students self esteem and motivation can be enhanced when they are able to bring their own experiences and knowledge to the lessons. Quality teaching is a key influence on high quality outcomes for diverse learners and in the best cases they are able to adapt lessons, furniture, materials goals, outcomes and a range of teaching techniques to meet both the academic and social needs of their students.

Schools felt that the government was investing in special education ensuring services for learners with special education needs/disabilities and helping the schools build capability. However they also felt the support was not always forthcoming and many children with needs missed out. There is no extra funding to help ensure inclusive education for diverse learners but it is a school issue, which needs to start with the school vision. The main cost to schools is in providing quality professional development, release for teachers to attend appropriate professional development, support to help children with diverse needs through either support people, help in planning programmes or developing understanding of culture and linguistics. It is also the schools responsibility to ensure that the teachers have a sound understanding of their local community and the issues within it.

An inclusive education includes learning to know, to do, to be and to live together. It starts in the classroom. Many schools use the child's mother tongue to teach in. Others encourage the students to use their mother tongue but the curriculum is taught in English. Language is an integral part of a child's culture. Teachers have also had to learn

There are barriers to inclusion and this is a challenge that every school faces. These include pedagogy that is based around inclusion. Recruiting staff that have beliefs and good practice to be inclusive is also very important. Teacher time and energy also impacts on inclusiveness. Other aspects are not just reliant on the school but include funding for specialists, teacher aides, support, and development of property and buildings and specialist equipment. We have tried not to have the deficit model at Dawson and to tackle each of these issues in the

best way we know. We have had lots of work based around the Ka Hikitia, Pacific Education Plan and Taitiako documents, the latter of which is embedded in appraisal. There has been further professional development in areas such as dyslexia, the autism spectrum, applying for support, ESOL and more recently Maori language and culture. We have two SENCO people within the school and have employed many teacher aides to support staff. We have had professional development based on forming relationships – knowing your child, talking to your child with the right language and learning to listen to your child.

Schools find getting agency support difficult apart from observations and telling the teachers what to do. Experts do not often engage with the students. Challenging behaviours are also a big issue facing schools. Some of this can be attributed to not having good teaching practice and inclusive education but some behaviours are beyond a teacher's capability and with all the other diverse learners in a class the teacher's energy and motivation is lost. Kauffman (2001) provided a list of the major ways in which teachers contribute to the development of inappropriate behaviour. Included in the list were actions such as being insensitive to the individuality of the students, having inappropriate expectations, being inconsistent, giving inappropriate reinforcement, teaching irrelevant skills, and providing undesirable models of behavior. This includes the way teachers dress, the way they speak to pupils and the way they present work to them. Knowledge of students, inclusive practice and support areas is essential

Exclusion is not about a child being excluded from a school but excluded from being able to participate in the teaching and learning programme that should cater for their needs. Some students with additional needs attending the mainstream setting do not guarantee they will establish and maintain social contacts or develop support networks. They often remain socially isolated. Social inclusion factors include peer acceptance, friendships and participation in group activities. Social inclusion is all part of inclusiveness.

The world is changing and our communities and schools are becoming more diverse than ever before. This has implications for educators with the differences in cultural worldviews, beliefs, values, customs and traditions. Schools are a reflection of society. Attitudes do not change quickly but outcomes arising from successful inclusive initiatives will influence school communities. Every school is on its journey and they are starting to look more at diverse learners rather than just the special needs. All pupils have needs and teacher's knowledge, relationships and understanding will enhance the learning for each and everyone in their room.

Inclusive education leads to an inclusive society. Schools mirror society and society mirrors schooling system. The whole school, pupils, teachers and community need to be involved in making the school inclusive, allowing children to develop belief in themselves, have expectations and to move forward in their journey of learning.

Conclusion for Dawson

As a school we have made huge inroads in developing inclusive education but we still need to continue our journey.

Some of the areas we will continue to work on or develop include:

- The employment process of teachers is pivotal
- Quality teaching and what this means
- Relationship building with our Maori and Pasifika children and whanau
- Reviewing our policies and procedures ensuring they relate to inclusiveness.
- Have children complete the wellbeing at school survey.