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The Personal and Contextual Factors Influencing Teacher Agency and Self-Efficacy when Planning and Implementing Individual Education Plans

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

There is an increasing amount of literature that examines how teacher agency and self-efficacy influence inclusive education. Research demonstrates that when teachers feel confident in their capabilities, they are capable of actions that allow them to teach in a more inclusive manner. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are one tool teachers can collaboratively use to support students with disabilities to access the curriculum. This study explores the personal and contextual factors that influence teacher agency and self-efficacy when planning and implementing IEPs by using a mixed-methods explanatory-sequential design. Participants were 42 primary school teachers without positions of senior responsibility, from the North Island of New Zealand. Each teacher had participated in at least one IEP in the last twelve months. Phase one employed an e-questionnaire, followed by four semi-structured interviews in phase two. The e-questionnaire measured participant's perceived self-efficacy, and examined their perceptions of the IEP process, and experiences of professional learning and development (PLD) related to the planning and implementation of IEPs. Face-to-face interviews explored and expanded on phase one themes. Results demonstrated that a number of personal and contextual factors influence teacher agency when planning and implementing IEPs. Strong pedagogical knowledge, teaching experience, the ability to form collaborative relationships, and understanding the teacher's role in an IEP team were required for teachers to experience enhanced self-efficacy and agency. Having collaborative relationships within the IEP team, time, and inclusive school policies were contextual factors that enabled and inhibited teacher agency and self-efficacy. While the majority of participants had not received PLD relating to planning and implementing IEPs, they

identified that efficacious PLD would need to be specific and needs-based, collaborative in approach, expert facilitated and readily available to enhance teacher self-efficacy and enable agency when planning and implementing IEPs. Primary teachers in New Zealand would benefit from school management providing teachers with increased PLD on the use of IEPs and inclusive education, if they are to experience high self-efficacy and achieve agency when planning and implementing IEPs for students with disabilities.

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