Inclusive Education: How do New Zealand Secondary Teachers Understand Inclusion and how does this Understanding Influence their Practice?

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive education expects that all students are welcome and that teachers focus on adapting environments so every student can be present, participate, learn and belong. This article summarises a mixed methods, small-scale inquiry which investigated how a sample of 44 New Zealand secondary school teachers understand inclusion and how this understanding influences their practice.

While most participants responding to the online survey reportedly agree with the values underpinning inclusive education, most participants also felt that students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers. Participants identified numerous barriers which influenced student achievement in inclusive schools and reported feeling inadequately prepared to teach in inclusive schools. Furthermore, consistent and clear inclusionary practices were not evident.

While further investigation is required, the findings from this small-scale inquiry serves as a starting point into investigating how New Zealand secondary teachers can be supported towards becoming confident, inclusive educators.

Research paper

Keywords:
inclusive education, teacher attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a human right, where every learner has the right to receive a quality education at their local school, irrespective of disability or difference. In an inclusive school, each student is treated fairly, with respect and without discrimination (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; United Nations, 2016). Booth and Ainscow (2016) define inclusion as inclusive values in action, "connecting a shared framework of values in everything that happens in, and around, the setting" (p. 9). As such, inclusion should be embedded in school policies, culture and practices where all learners are present, participate, learn and belong (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). Inclusive schools welcome all, embrace diversity, ensuring no student is marginalised. Inclusive education seeks to reduce barriers to learning through effective resourcing and support, where individual achievement is expected and valued (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Ministry of Education, n.d.-a).

The following definition forms the basis for this inquiry. Inclusive education is embedded in inclusive values and is a social justice and human rights issue. Inclusive education sees all students as capable learners and supports all learners by adapting the environment, intentionally removing barriers to learning so that all students can be present, participate, learn and belong (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Ministry of Education, n.d.-a).

Internationally, the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education* (UNESCO, 1994) brought inclusive education into focus internationally. More recently, the *United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 24 - Right to inclusive education*, outlined the expectation that those with disabilities, at all levels, have the right to inclusive education, where every learner can access quality education which is equal for all and which is free from discrimination (United Nations, 2016). In New Zealand, the *1989 New Zealand Education Act* states that every young person has the right to attend their local school, irrespective of disability or learning need (Ministry of Education, 1989). Ministry of Education (MOE) *Success for All* document outlines an expectation for all NZ schools to demonstrate "inclusive practices by 2014 and beyond" (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b, p. 1).

Research consistently shows that student achievement is influenced by teachers' expectations and attitudes (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Hattie, 2012; Rubie-Davies, 2018) especially for students with diverse learning needs (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). However, international studies show that

while teachers report feeling positive about the philosophy of inclusive education (Boyle, Topping & Jindal-Snape, 2013; Scanlon & Baker, 2012), teachers also feel under-prepared and under-trained to teach in inclusive schools (Boyle et al., 2013; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Gray, Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2017; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Scanlon & Baker, 2012). Furthermore, teachers feel that there are numerous barriers to inclusion, including their own level of expertise and training (Goodman & Burton, 2010). Additionally, 'best practice' models for successful inclusion, which include teaching and learning strategies, can be difficult to define and can be inconsistent and misunderstood (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Maciver et al., 2018; Scanlon & Baker, 2012).

This paper reviews current literature on inclusive education and teachers' perceptions of inclusion and how this influences practice. Thereafter, it details the inquiry undertaken to investigate how a sample of Auckland secondary teachers understand inclusion and how this influences their practice, including a summary of methodologies used, outcomes and results. A discussions of the findings follows.

The language used in this inquiry merits comment. Using terms such as 'learners with diverse needs', 'special need students' or 'students with severe needs' may perpetuate bell-curve thinking which this article is challenging, however they are terms commonly-used and understood by New Zealand teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While inclusion has been widely adopted internationally, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, *Article 24 - Right to inclusive education* identifies concerns which prevents those with disabilities from accessing inclusive education. These include ongoing discrimination, misplaced fears, low expectations, lack of funding, support and knowledge, as well as minimal education for teaching staff (United Nations, 2016). International research shows many teachers feel under-prepared to teach diverse learners in inclusive education (Florian, 2006; Gray et al., 2017; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). Furthermore, internationally, teachers feel that there are many barriers to inclusion including training and their own knowledge (Goodman & Burton, 2010).

Literature confirms a connection between teachers' attitudes and expectations, and students educational outcomes (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Hattie, 2018; Rubie-Davies, 2018). Furthermore, literature confirms that teachers' understanding of inclusion is critical for inclusive education to be successful (Boyle

et al., 2013; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Teachers' Expectations and Educational Outcomes

Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis, aimed to identify factors contributing to effective teaching and learning, found that teachers' estimates of achievement are essential factors in learning. Rubie-Davies (2018) concurs, stating that when teachers have high expectations, "all students can benefit in substantial and meaningful ways" (p. 143). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) confirm that this correlation between learning outcomes and teachers' expectations is especially true for learners with diverse needs. Furthermore, it is widely reported that teachers' attitudes influence the success of inclusive education (Boyle et al., 2013; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Numerous factors shape teachers' expectations and attitudes, and include how teachers understand disability, special education and inclusion. Additional factors include teachers' past experiences, beliefs, values, judgements and pre-existing knowledge.

Slee (2001) argues that, in the past, teachers have accepted psycho-medical approaches to special education, which expects the educator to assess, diagnose and then 'fix' the child. Slee (2001) contends that these deficit models have been transplanted from special schools into inclusive education, where the teacher sees the disability before the learner. However, disability should not be seen as a medical problem, but instead seen as a social construct which arises from barriers caused by inequality in education (Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). Inclusive education expects teachers to adopt social mental models, focusing on changing the environment and minimising barriers to learning rather than 'fixing' the learner (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Maciver et al., 2018; Ministry of Education, n.d.-a).

Additionally, inclusive education expects that all students are seen as capable learners. Dweck (2012) compares teachers with fixed mindsets - those who believe students abilities are innate and limited - to teachers with a growth mindset - those who believes that all children are capable learners and expect all learners to progress.

Barriers to Inclusion

Inclusive education focuses on teachers reducing barriers to learning, rather than 'fixing' the student (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Slee, 2001). Barriers identified in the literature include school

policy, culture and practice alignment, teachers' experience, perceived severity of disability, time, workloads, resourcing, lack of training and support, lack of knowledge and skills (Gray et al., 2017; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Odongo & Davidson, 2016).

In secondary schools, barriers additionally include curriculum and content knowledge. Scanlon and Baker (2012) found that, while accommodations for assessments may be used by secondary teachers, instructional accommodations were not made as often. Furthermore, Maciver et al. (2018) identifies concerns over inclusive practices when schools and teachers are rated on academic results rather than inclusionary practices. League tables comparing schools' *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* (NCEA) results are published in New Zealand. Haque (2014) and Boereboom (2017) discuss how parents use this data to "make judgements about the quality of a school" (Haque, 2014, p. 1). Haque argues that this can result in principals feeling pressure to focus on higher pass rates rather than focusing on individuals or inclusive education and, in turn, puts pressure on teachers. Boereboom agrees: "schools face the temptation of concentrating their efforts on those students considered capable of improving their NCEA scores, while giving less attention to those perceived less likely to improve" (p. 1).

Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that when teachers think that specially trained teachers are needed to teach special needs students, this perpetuates the "assumptions of bell-curve thinking about ability" (p. 813). This deterministic thinking, which adheres to developmental norms and set ability levels, can result in negative outcomes for diverse learners who are considered especially vulnerable to the negative effects of bell-curve thinking.

Inclusive Education in Practice

Teachers' mindsets can influence their understanding of inclusion in practice. Boyle et al. (2013) found that although many teachers support inclusion as a philosophy, concerns are often raised over the practicalities of teaching in inclusive classrooms. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) argue that inclusive pedagogy is not consistently practised or well-defined in the literature. Furthermore, literature reports that inclusive practices can be difficult to implement (Boyle et al., 2013; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Maciver et al., 2018; Scanlon & Baker, 2012).

This inquiry aimed to examine a sample of secondary teachers' and their mindsets regarding learners with diverse needs and their understanding of inclusion in order to gather information on how to better-support secondary teachers in an inclusive setting seeking ways to improve education outcomes for all students.

METHODOLOGY

An online, self-administered survey was used to collect data from 44 New Zealand secondary school teachers. Likert-scale and open-ended questions were designed after examining current research and literature, and the survey was piloted. Table 1 gives examples of variables and design rationale.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and participants had the right to refuse to answer any questions. Participants were required to be currently registered teachers, teaching in Auckland state secondary schools (Years 9 to 13). Twelve randomly-selected schools were sent invitations to participate. Three principals agreed to participate and all teachers at these schools were sent email invitations to participate in the survey. Forty-four teachers, approximately 10 percent of teachers who received invitations, responded.

All ethical principles were adhered to and data kept private and confidential. Categorical data was used to describe the sample and aggregated to reveal relationships between particular groups. Data were analysed using qualitative and quantitative data analysis methods. Likert responses were analysed using descriptive statistics; data was organised, summarised and linked to the research question. Open-ended questions were analysed using thematic data analysis in order to find common themes linked to the inquiry question and was done manually.

RESULTS

Demographic data showed:

- 56.8% (n=25) were female and 43.2% (n=19) were male

- An equal number of participants fell into the 26-36 and the 36-45 age bracket with the minority being under 25 years

- The majority of participants reported having over 16 years teaching experience (47.7%).

Philosophies of Inclusive Education

Overall, participants reported having a positive attitude towards inclusive schools. Figure 1 shows frequency responses on this themes, confirming that most

Table 1
Survey design: Examples of Main Sources Consulted and Reason for Inclusion

| Question	Variable	Reason for inclusion	Main sources
1	All students are welcome to attend their local schools irrespective of their learning needs.	Assesses participants philosophical standpoint	Booth & Ainscow (2016) Boyle et al. (2013) Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus (2017)
6	Students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers.	Deterministic beliefs, bell-curve thinking	Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011)
17	Describe what "best practice" looks like in an inclusive school.	Assesses teachers' understanding of inclusive practices	Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011)
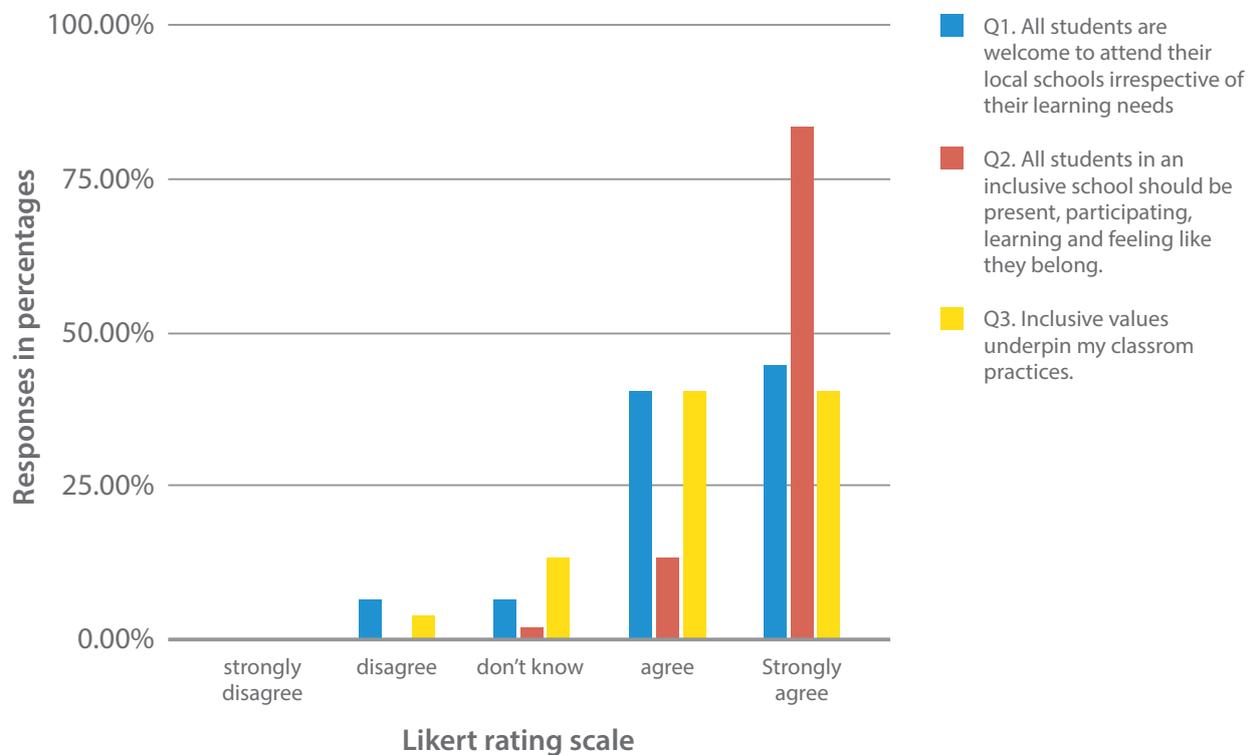
Figure 1. Rights to be at school and adoption of inclusive values.

participants agreed with the philosophies and values of inclusive education.

Similar results were found when comparing Likert responses to open-ended responses. One third of respondents defined inclusion using words such as, 'welcoming', a place where everyone is valued, accepted and respected. Examples include, "every student feeling accepted and welcome within an environment" (Respondent 42) and "where everyone is welcome and has a place without having to be homogenous" (Respondent 34).

Two participants identified strength through diversity, for example:

> *Including and valuing people from different backgrounds, cultures, ethnicity, gender and/or sexual orientation instead of forcing them to submit to a single hegemonic viewpoint or culture. Being open to the fact that our worldview is not the only one and understanding that our differences are not a point of division but rather are something to be celebrated since, while our similarities brings us together, diversity is our strength* (Respondent 14 answering Question 16).

However, one participant noted that, while their understanding of inclusion included being welcoming and catering for individual needs, inclusive practices can be challenging:

… meeting individual learning needs through differentiation is different from teaching students with specific learning needs or disabilities. Often, inclusion is forced and we face a lose - lose situation; special needs students do not get taught as they deserve and the mainstream students lose valuable teaching time. Teachers get overworked and eventually, careless (Respondent 7).

Teacher Expectations and Student Capabilities

There were mixed responses to teachers' understanding and expectations of students' ability to learn. Table 2 shows 63.7% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that all students can learn and find success in inclusive schools, however, 31.8% of teachers responded "I don't know".

Table 2
Everyone can Learn and find Success in an Inclusive School Environment

Likert rating scale	%	Count (n)
Strongly disagree	0.0%	0
Disagree	4.5%	2
Don't know	31.8%	14
Agree	22.7%	10
Strongly agree	41.0%	18

Responses to open-ended questions on student capability and expectations included:

Inclusion means that all students can participate in learning and find success (Respondent 3).

… treating all students as potential learners… (Respondent 12).

Every student irrespective of learning needs and cultural background has the right to achieve success at any school (Respondent 40).

One respondent defines inclusion as successful class placements, according to ability and expectations:

All students are in all classes that are appropriate for them, maybe higher year level, maybe lower. they all have the tools they need to be successful (Respondent 32).

Table 3 reports on teachers' expectations for students, responding to the statement, "Some students have difficulties that mean that they should not be educated in inclusive schools". The majority of respondents disagreed with the statement, while one third agreed.

Table 3
Some students have Difficulties that mean that they should not be Educated in Inclusive Schools

Likert rating scale	%	Count (n)
Strongly disagree	16.3%	7
Disagree	37.2%	16
Don't know	11.6%	5
Agree	25.6%	11
Strongly agree	9.3%	4

Numerous participants felt that students with severe needs should be educated separately, indicating that these participants have different expectations for those with diverse learning needs, for example:

Everyone can come into any school whether or not the school is prepared for them. I believe it is unfair to students and schools to have some very needy students. If we got support to have suitable facilities it would be fine. But we don't (Respondent 28).

No students or teachers should be impacted negatively by inclusion (Respondent 3) .

Reporting on barriers to inclusion, one respondent reported:

Students with severe social and developmental problems can be hard to involve - they do need to be in special schools where they get the specialist support that they require (constant 1-1 teaching, which is not possible or fair to other students in a normal classroom) (Respondent 17).

Investigating teachers' perception of whether students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers, the vast majority of participants strongly agreed (Figure 2).

In identifying barriers to inclusion, one participant responded:

Teachers thinking that they can't teach lower ability learners; teachers thinking that teaching the lower ability learners is not their responsibility; teachers thinking that they don't have the time to adapt the curriculum; teachers thinking that
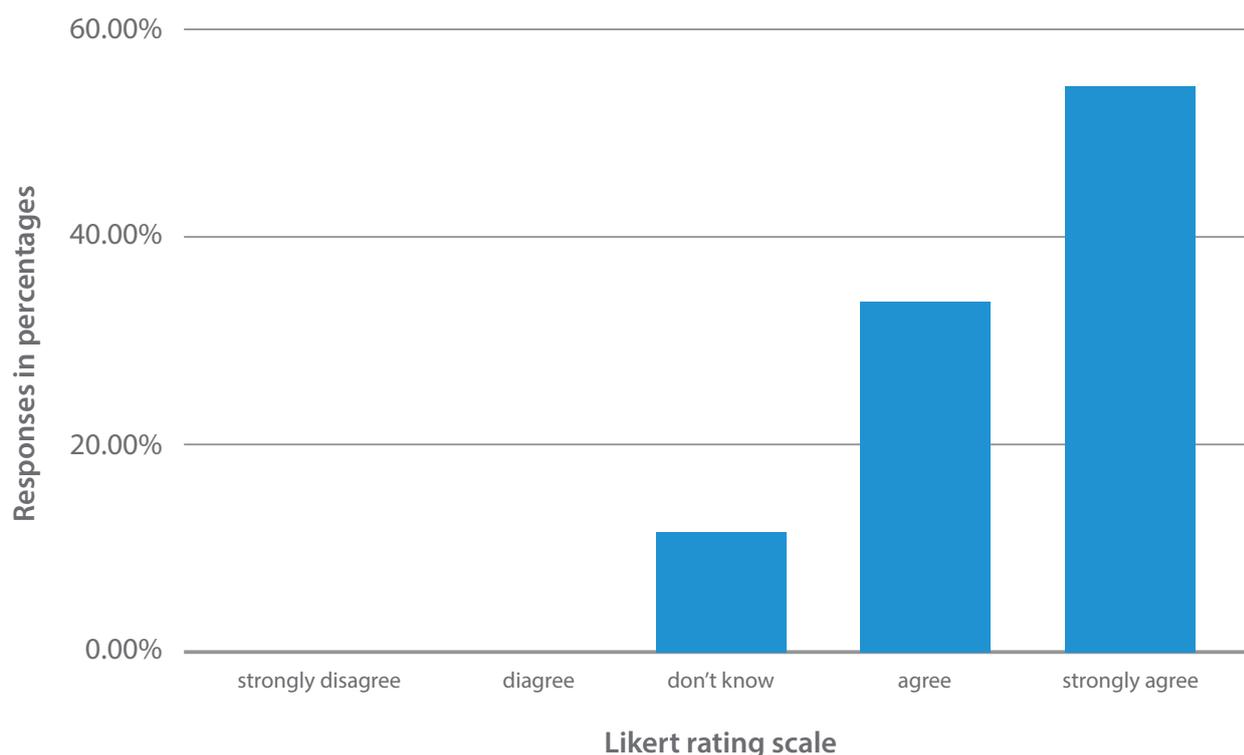
Figure 2. Students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers.

they can't get the lower ability learners through NCEA and that they will adversely impact on their statistics (Respondent 43).

The majority of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed (see Table 4) responding to the statement, "Educating children with additional support needs in inclusive schools has a detrimental effect on the other students in the class".

Table 4
Educating Children with Additional Support Needs in Inclusive Schools has a Detrimental Effect on the other Students in the Class

Likert rating scale	%	Count (n)
Strongly disagree	27.3%	12
Disagree	43.2%	19
Don't know	15.8%	7
Agree	11.4%	5
Strongly agree	2.3%	1

Teachers' Confidence

Most participants reported feeling confident teaching in inclusive schools, including confidence modifying classrooms to include all, and employing inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, on average, 23% of participants responded they "didn't know". When comparing teachers' ages and confidence levels, Table 5 shows small differences between confidence levels and age groups. The majority of participants in the over-56 years age group reported feeling very confident.

Table 5
Comparison of Participants Confidence and Age Groupings

Likert rating scale	% under 25	% age 26-35	% age 36-45	% age 46-55	% over 56
Strongly disagree	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Disagree	0.00	8.33	0.00	22.22	0.00
Don't know	33.33	16.67	16.67	22.22	12.50
Agree	66.67	66.67	66.66	55.56	50.00

NCEA

Considering NCEA curriculum modification, mixed responses were given. The majority of participants "didn't know" when asked if they felt able to adapt the curriculum to meet individual learning needs. Additionally, the majority of participants noted increased workloads and NCEA pressure as barriers to inclusion to meeting individual needs of students with diverse learning needs (Table 6). Respondents identified NCEA as a barrier to inclusion and their comments include, "Teachers under pressure to gain NCEA passes within one academic year rather than being allowed to feel comfortable about NCEA levels taking longer for some students" (Participant 24); "NCEA demands, achievement targets and an assessment driven curriculum" (Participant 21); "The expectation of the school with regard to NCEA outcomes. The focus on assessment rather than learning" (Participant 26); "The whole NCEA system is a straightjacket" (Participant 28), and "Teachers thinking that they can't get the lower ability learners through NCEA and that they will adversely impact on their statistics (Participant 43).

Table 6
Comparison of Participants Confidence and Age Groupings

Likert rating scale	Increased workloads (%)	Increased workloads (n)	NCEA curriculum pressure (%)	NCEA curriculum pressure (n)
Strongly disagree	0.0.0%	0	2.3%	1
Disagree	9.1%	4	20.5%	9
Don't know	9.1%	4	13.6%	6
Agree	50%	22	40.9%	18
	31.8%	14	22.7%	10

Barriers to Inclusive Education

Themes emerged when analysing narrative responses where participants were asked to list perceived barriers to inclusive education include time (36% of respondents), recourses - including professional development (39% of respondents), ideas and knowledge (14% of respondents), class sizes (14% of respondents), school culture (11% of respondents), and understanding of staff and other students (11% of respondents). One participant commented:

There is just not enough Ministry support (money and PLD). We don't have enough teacher-aides to meet the needs of all our students who need additional support and our SENCO, Teacher-aides and teachers do not get the required time to work together to ensure that all students are able to be included in classrooms effectively. SACs are another issue and most of our additional support is being used to run SACs rather than support students and teachers in the classroom. The model really needs to change (Respondent 3).

Two participants reported they had not found any barriers to inclusion (5.6%).

Professional Learning and Development and Teacher-Training

When considering participants perceptions of training to successfully teach students with diverse learning needs, approximately one third of participants felt adequately trained (36.3%; n=16 agreed and strongly agreed), approximately one third of participants didn't know (29.5%; n=13), and approximately one third of participants did not feel adequately trained (34.1%; n=15 disagreed and strongly disagreed). When analysing years of experience and perceptions of training, most teachers with under five years' experience reported feeling under-trained (see Figure 3).

- The majority of teachers with under 5 years' experience disagreed, indicating feeling under-trained (44.4%)

- The majority of teachers with 6-10 years' experience responded they didn't know (50%)

- The majority of teachers with 11-15 years' experience agreed, indicating feeling adequately trained (66.7%)

- The majority of teachers with over 16 years' experience responded they didn't know (33.3%)

Respondents were asked to respond using a Likert-scale to the statement that professional learning and development has helped them effectively teach all students including those with diverse learning needs. Results revealed the majority of respondents felt professional learning and development had not helped (20.5% strongly disagreed, 25% disagreed, 20.5% agreed, 2.3% strongly agreed and 31.8% didn't know).

Narrative responses were consistent with findings, for example:

Professional development of teachers in differentiated learning and knowledge of teaching strategies to support learning needs (Respondent 16).
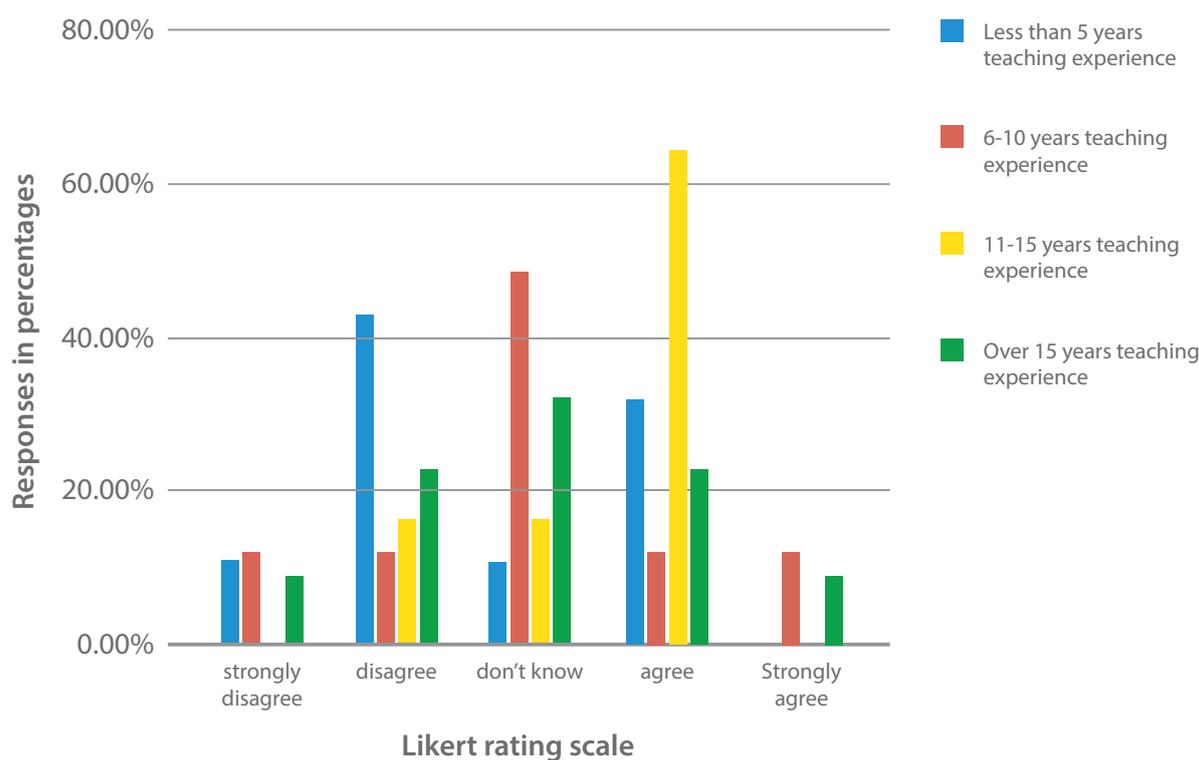
Figure 3. Adequate training to successfully teach diverse learners according to years of teaching experience.

It means educating yourself as a teacher (Respondent 14).

Plenty of PD opportunities for staff to improve their practice (Respondent 11).

Similarly, lack of professional learning and development emerges as a theme when considering teachers' perceptions of barriers to inclusive education, for example:

Lack of knowledge about how to include, lack of knowledge about how to manage students with differing needs… I find it very stressful because I do not know what to do, and through trial and error I find the right way most of the time, but there has to be a better solution (Respondent 32).

Inclusive Education in Practice

While most responses to the Likert-scale questions showed respondents felt confident teaching in inclusive schools including teaching diverse learners, using inclusive pedagogical approaches and modifying the environment to include all, a different trend was found when examining narrative responses. When asked to describe 'best practice' in inclusive schools, few common themes or consistent approaches could be identified. A few identified adequate resourcing,

support and professional development as best practice, and a few identified differentiation and individualised programmes, collaboration and strengths-based teaching. However, when identifying 'best practices' for inclusive education, responses were not clear, nor consistent, for example:

Exam success. Table topping stats (Respondent 2).

Teachers supported to adapt curriculum and teaching methods to include all students and ensure they achieve. Lots of one-on-one teaching time (Respondent 4).

The incorporation of inclusive pedagogies, such as drawing on a student's background outside of school as contexts for different topics, but also extensive use of differentiation (Respondent 42).

No idea. I think best practice in any school is to teach the students in front of you. To support every learner and to avoid one-size-fits-all activities as far as possible. Every student has different needs, it's always important to teach individually as much as possible (Respondent 28).

Best practice looks like a classroom where all students are happy, engaged and learning. A successfully inclusive classroom looks to the outside like any other 'average' class. What is

not seen is the hours of work behind the scenes planning for several different learning and social needs (Respondent 9).

DISCUSSION

This inquiry aimed to investigate how a sample of secondary teachers understand inclusion and how this understanding influences their practice. Oxford University Press defines *understanding* as an amalgamation of many concepts including a way of thinking, comprehension, knowledge, insight into, skills in, judgements, perceptions, beliefs, convictions, feelings (2018). Thus, this inquiry investigated a sample of teachers' mental models regarding inclusive education, as well as their knowledge, skills and insight into 'best practice' for inclusion, Additionally, it investigated teacher confidence, asking participants to list any barriers to inclusion, and feelings on how training and professional learning and development has influenced them.

Teachers' Mindsets and Expectations

This inquiry shows that, generally, participants align their thinking and beliefs with inclusive philosophies, mainly believing that all students can learn and find success in inclusive education. However, it was strongly reported that students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers (reported by 88.6% of participants). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) discuss how this thinking perpetuates "deterministic beliefs associated with bell-curve thinking about ability" (p. 813). Furthermore, Florian and Black-Hawkins caution that this bell-curve thinking, which makes assumptions about students' capacity to learn, has become the expected norm in education which can negatively impact students' educational outcomes, especially for students with diverse learning needs.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2016) identified that having low expectations for those with diverse needs is a challenge which prevents those with diverse needs from accessing inclusive education. Furthermore, the literature shows that teachers' estimates of achievement are essential factors in learning (Hattie, 2018; Rubie-Davies, 2018) and that teachers' attitudes can influence the success of inclusive education (Boyle et al., 2013; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Additionally, there is concern that deterministic thinking negatively impacts successful inclusive education and educational outcomes for all learners

(Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Inclusive education prompts teachers to adopt growth mindsets, have high expectations for all, avoid labelling, and to expect every student to learn (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Dweck, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2015a). Thus, it is essential to challenge deterministic thinking in order to achieve successful inclusive education.

Perceptions of 'Best Practice' for Inclusive Education

'Best practice' is a complex term and includes why educators teach and students learn as well as how and what teachers teach and students learn, encompassing school systems, cultures, pedagogy, strategies, tasks, programmes, assessments, and activities which lead to learning (Education Review Office, n.d.; Ministry of Education, 2015b). Diverse, varied and inconsistent narrative responses - where participants defined best practice for inclusion in this inquiry - aligns with international research which concurs that inclusive practices can be difficult to define, inconsistent and often difficult to implement (Boyle et al., 2013; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Maciver et al., 2018; Scanlon & Baker, 2012).

Barriers to Inclusive Education

Participants listed numerous barriers to inclusion and were consistent with research. The literature agrees that when school policy, culture and practice are aligned, successful inclusive education can result (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Boyle et al., 2013; Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2017; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Goodman & Burton, 2010; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; McMaster, 2015). Participants listed school policies, culture and practices as barriers to inclusion. For example:

> *Schools being inflexible on assessment and individual learning pathways. Student attitudes towards diversity, which is compounded by not having functioning inclusion in classrooms* (Respondent 4).

Additionally, lack of training and support are commonly identified as barriers to inclusion in the literature (Gray et al., 2017; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Odongo & Davidson, 2016), and research agrees that improving teachers' understanding of inclusion and understanding of inclusive practices will improve inclusive education (Boyle et al., 2013; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018; Maciver et al., 2018). Similarly, the finding from this inquiry showed that teachers saw professional learning, development and support

as a barrier to inclusive education. Furthermore, the majority of participants felt neither training nor professional learning and development had assisted them in effectively teaching diverse learners.

 In line with the literature, most participants felt workloads, time, large class sizes and curriculum were barriers to inclusion (Gray et al., 2017; Hauerwas & Mahon, 2018). A further barrier identified in the inquiry was NCEA pressure, where one participant described the NCEA system as being a "straightjacket" (Respondent 28). Literature confirms that principals are feeling external pressure to meet pass rate expectations which in turn increases teachers' feeling this pressure due to schools often rating academic results as more important than individual learning needs (Boereboom, 2017; Haque, 2014; Maciver et al., 2018).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Inclusive education is a complex concept. This professional inquiry aimed to investigate New Zealand secondary teachers' understanding of inclusion and how this understanding influences their practices. There are numerous implications to these findings. Firstly, while it found that this sample of teachers mainly agree with the philosophies of inclusive education and report feeling confident teaching in inclusive education, there appears to be a lack of clear and consistent understanding regarding the practise of inclusion in secondary schools. Secondly, this inquiry highlights numerous barriers to inclusive education, including time, support, staffing, class sizes, school culture, resourcing, appropriate training, professional learning and development, and NCEA pressure. A goal of inclusive education is to intentionally remove barriers to learning, so how can teachers be better-supported to overcome these barriers?

Further findings show that most participants in this sample reported feeling that students with severe needs should be taught by specially trained teachers. International literature shows that student outcomes are linked to teachers' attitudes and expectations and that teachers should have high expectations for all learners (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Hattie, 2018; Rubie-Davies, 2018), thereby prompting teachers to move away from deterministic, bell-curve thinking about ability and achievement.

This inquiry has highlighted that in order for inclusive education to be successful in secondary schools in New Zealand, teachers need support. This support includes addressing barriers which make it challenging for teachers to change the environment for a successful inclusive outcome. More resourcing, time and support may be required

by secondary teachers as well as addressing issues such as class sizes, school policies, cultures and practices. Furthermore, addressing appropriate training and professional learning and development should include the how, what and why of inclusive education. Slee (2001) implores teachers to dismiss ideas that assume inclusive education is merely a new context for special education, and that professional learning should not simply be a raft of definitions of types of disabilities which would reduce students to disorders and syndromes, thus adding to the idea of deterministic thinking about ability.

By continuing this journey towards a fully inclusive education system in New Zealand and aiming towards positive educational outcome for all students, educators can promote a free, just and democratic society which celebrates diversity.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

While further research is required to reach more diverse and extensive audiences and language use may have affected responses, this inquiry uncovers some important findings. These findings challenge educators to examine their mindsets and explore how secondary teachers can be better-supported to move towards a fully inclusive system and better outcomes for all.

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