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***Pre-Service Education in Teaching
Children With Special Abilities at
Primary School Level***

***A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
at
Massey University***

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Abstract

This study explored a variety of ways in which student teachers were being educated to teach children with special abilities (CWSA) in primary schools. It also considered factors and rationales which guided or limited the provision of courses in regard to these children.

A survey of current provisions in New Zealand was carried out. Questionnaires were sent to six Colleges/Schools of Education and follow-up interviews were conducted at three of them. A search of the literature combined with personal correspondence sought specific examples of provisions overseas. Information was gathered on :

- New Zealand courses which educated students about CWSA
- rationales guiding these courses
- factors limiting the provision of courses on CWSA
- specific examples of overseas courses

The study found that individual Colleges/Schools of Education in New Zealand teach students about children with special abilities in differing ways. Some staff considered it appropriate that students learn about this topic in the context of discussing individual differences. Others believed in the need to focus more specifically on children with special abilities. Rationales guiding the provision of courses mainly centred on the need for student teachers to learn how to cater for children with special abilities in mixed ability classrooms. Limitations to how much time could be devoted to doing this were mainly attributed to ever-increasing demands to include new areas of content, in primary pre-service programmes.

CWSA courses in New Zealand had much in common with courses provided overseas. They were generally short-term and optional, were similar in content and placed near the end of training programmes. Practical teaching components featured more in the overseas courses.

Information from this study was combined with information from the literature review in order to critically evaluate how, and to what degree, pre-service education on children with special abilities could be delivered to students.

Principles of sound practice were formulated. These principles related to programme structure, course content and delivery and the importance of including a consideration of the needs of children with special abilities in pre-service programmes.

Based on these principles, recommendations were made for future practice and further research. They included ongoing professional development, evaluation of the effects of differing pre-service provisions on classroom practice, and the need for research to ascertain how teachers can best be trained in recognising and catering for Maori children with special abilities.

The conclusion drawn from the research was that all students should receive education about teaching children with special abilities. Presently in New Zealand the amount they receive is small. In particular, emphasis on practical experience with children with special abilities is limited. However, there are encouraging signs such as increasing interest shown by students in undertaking CWSA courses and enthusiasm of some staff members within Colleges/Schools of Education to provide further courses on the topic.

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