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**SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICIES OF  
THE FOURTH LABOUR GOVERNMENT,  
1984 - 1990 : AN INTERPRETIVE  
ANALYSIS**

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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at Massey University

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"Impairment is a medical term for anatomical loss or a loss of bodily function. Disability is a measureable functional loss resulting from an impairment. Handicap is the social consequence caused by environmental and social conditions which prevent a person achieving the maximum potential a person seeks. Disabilities are what people cannot do."

*Marle (1986 : 2)*  
*as cited by Fulcher (1989, 22)*

## Abstract

In the period 1984 - 1990 significant changes occurred in education in New Zealand due to a broad mix of political, social and economic influences. Within the field of special education, although the influence 'mix' was different, due to the particular characteristics of this field.

This thesis examines special education as a 'case study' within the wider educational reform which occurred in this period. It draws its conclusions from current educational and political research, and is informed by first hand opinions from a number of the key players in policy development from those years.

The role of the state in the educational development process is reviewed, and exclusionary traditions and practices which have informed special education legislation since 1867 are described. The various disability discourses that have informed regulations on special education policy in New Zealand for 130 years are discussed, and the effect of the emergence in the 1970's of the rights discourse is analysed in terms of its impact on legislation and policy development up to 1990.

Up until 1987, education stood aside from the wider state sector reforms. However, government restructuring between 1987 - 1990 targeted educational administration, and sought to introduce market ideology to it. Central to this restructuring was the re-classifying of educational outputs as a 'private good' in the hands of all New Zealanders. This case study reviews the impact of the neo-liberal ideologies on the educational reform in the period is reviewed, with particular reference to special education policy development.

Finally, special educational policy is examined in terms of the prevalent management theories applied to education, and the changing role of the state. Particular trends emerging in the period 1984 - 1990 are identified:

- the devolution of some decision making processes to community level during this period meant that those informed by the more restrictive disability discourses were left to interpret special education policy at the community level often without sufficient training to understand the emancipatory legislation to apply it as it was intended. Any conflict with the state was now transported down to a local level.

- the passage of emancipatory policies has meant more money was put into special education at a time when fiscal controls were being sought in education.
- the change towards a more managed consultative process for education policy making did not apply to special education.
- the most far reaching neo-liberal special education policies advocated for in the period 1987 - 1990 eg. full contestability of funding were not implemented.

The reforms in special education which were undertaken in the 1984 - 1990 period provide a platform for further development of this topic. This is for the future.

*C B Brown*

## Preface and Acknowledgments

For this thesis I wanted to explore how special education policy was created during the 1980's under the fourth Labour Government because, as a parent of a child with special needs and the chairperson of a national parent support group during this period, I was involved with lobbying government for change in legislation and promoting mainstreaming in education. I therefore wanted to discover what factors were taken into consideration during the many policy changes which occurred in special education between 1984-1990. I also wanted to use the voices of the policy-shapers I had met in the course of the six years of the Labour term of office, to clarify what had emerged in the policy documents.

World-wide, a large number of people are involved in shaping special education. Many have intimate involvement with people with disabilities, having been drawn into the field through their having a child, a sibling, a relation, with special needs. Many inequities and areas of discrimination exist in our society, and many of these are in the area of disability. Where a person possesses special knowledge, and the intellect to provide credible advocacy, there becomes an overwhelming, almost compulsory commitment, to contribute.

The objective of this research is not to pass judgement, but to add knowledge and understanding. Ballard argues that the idea that researchers can be objective is now rejected by many involved in research,

"All of us, researchers included, see interpret and understand our world through lens coloured by our culture, gender, values, beliefs, prejudices, passions and experiences."

(1994,22)

Ballard asserts that groups such as women, the disabled and Maori disagree with much that has been researched about them because the researchers have had vastly different experiences from themselves. This study of policy development in special education therefore comes from a viewpoint enriched by personal experience, day by day, over more than a decade.

I would like to especially acknowledge the assistance I received from my Massey University supervisors - to John Codd for his overall vision and clarity of direction in helping me shape the thesis and to Anne-Marie O'Neill, never more than a phone call

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This thesis is dedicated to my son Travers without whom it would never have been written.

*Colleen Brown*  
*February 1994.*

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