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**Isolating Students with Mathematical Learning Difficulties for
Teaching Purposes: The New Zealand Experience**

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

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ABSTRACT

A survey, by questionnaire, was carried out in seventeen school districts in three regions of North Island, New Zealand, to collect data on the extent of ability grouping for mathematics classes and the experiences of students in mathematics classes. Quantitative data were collected on schools' rationales for or against grouping, selection processes and the teaching programmes used for the lowest achieving students. Qualitative data were collected with respect to teachers' opinions about teaching the lowest achieving students and about the possible reasons for those students' low achievements.

The responses from Heads of Mathematics Departments indicate keen interest in best practice for low achieving students. A surprising 99% of respondents reveal that some form of ability grouping for mathematics is implemented in their schools. It is clear that ability grouping is seen as the best approach to meeting the learning needs of all students, whatever their level of achievement.

These results incorporated a wide range of schools including all year levels, state and private, large and small and all decile ratings from 1 – 10. Consensus on ability grouping within the wide range of schools in the three geographical regions suggests that schools throughout New Zealand also consider ability grouping as best practice for their low achieving students.

The research raises concerns about student self-esteem, motivation and maths anxiety. The need to address *those* issues as well as mathematical teaching and learning issues is imperative.

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