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SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' TALK ABOUT MAINSTREAMING
- A STUDY IN DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master in Educational
Administration at Massey University

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Abstract

The interview accounts of nine urban, regular school principals are examined to identify the different positions held by these principals on the issue of the mainstreaming or inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs in regular schools. Applying the methodology discourse analysis, the different positions are investigated, and their implications explored, in terms of the ways they are justified in the context of wider beliefs and conceptions about the nature of education and the nature of disability.

The literature review describes the development of special education in New Zealand, the growing practice of mainstreaming, and the significance of the emergence of the Regular Education Initiative to the mainstreaming debate. The conflict in the debate is seen to lie in the differing conceptions people hold about the nature of education and the nature of disability. These conceptions are fully explored and applied as discourses within the debate.

Discourse analysis as a methodology is described in detail and the results of the analysis are reported in reference to the seven main discourses identified. Four of the discourses - the pro status quo, the medical, the lay and the charity discourses - are described as divisive discourses in that they in effect deny the equal rights of students with special needs to attend regular schools. Two other discourses - the rights and the proactive discourses - are described as inclusive, in that they argue for the rights of students with disabilities or special needs to be included in their neighbourhood schools and classes. A seventh discourse, the critical discourse, can be employed as a divisive or as an inclusive discourse.

It is claimed that this study has increased the potential for critical analysis of the mainstreaming debate in two main ways: firstly, by applying Fulcher's four identified discourses of disability to accounts by school leaders in the New Zealand setting (Fulcher, 1989); and, secondly, by identifying from the literature and the data three further discourses and applying these to the debate.

These three discourses provide further tools that enable educators and others to critically analyze their positions in the debate. It is hoped that critical analysis of discourses will lead to the challenging of current segregating practices in the education of students with special needs, and to more support and acceptance of their inclusion in regular classes and schools.

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Where a lot of people come from, where a lot of teachers come from, is that because [students with disabilities] are special or because they are *deemed* special, we have the notion that they have to be *treated* special and ... until we can get over that notion, we will continue to treat them as special and expect them to have the extra resources, to have the extra assistance because of their special nature. But... on the other hand, where they are *not* regarded as special, then perhaps it works better... - for the *student* anyway.

(School principal - research participant)