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**Using a community of practice lens  
to examine interaction  
in inclusive early intervention programmes in  
New Zealand**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Educational Psychology

Massey University, Albany Campus, Auckland  
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2011

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work except where the acknowledgement is made, and that this material has not been included in a thesis or report submitted to Massey University or any other university for a degree or other qualification.



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## **ABSTRACT**

In New Zealand, the parent(s), teachers, early intervention specialists and education support worker, who support a child with a disability in a regular early childhood centre, decide together on the child's individual plan (IP). They are referred to throughout this thesis as an 'IP group'. This study examined the way members of three IP groups interacted during their planning process.

The quality of collaboration among professionals from diverse disciplines and parents involved in inclusive early intervention has raised concerns here and overseas. Using communities of practice to support closer understandings has been advocated, although this approach does not appear to have been applied in an inclusive early intervention context. In this study, the model of community of practice was used as a tool with which to analyse the way in which the IP groups worked together. The IP groups, while not themselves communities of practice, were conceptualised as social systems, which allowed for a holistic view to be taken of how the groups planned their interventions.

Data taken from planning meetings and interviews was analysed per group using dimensions from a community of practice model. Common themes relating to the ways participants in each group interacted with one another were identified and discussed. These issues comprised the effects of an uneven knowledge base on power within the groups, the influence of beliefs about inclusion and the teaching process on what the groups chose to do, the groups' communication repertoires, evidence of situated learning for individuals through participation in the groups, and limitations to the way the groups evaluated their work.

The use of the model of community of practice as a tool for analysis not only drew attention to these interactions within the IP groups, but demonstrated the interdependence of the elements that supported or hindered those interactions. The use of the model in this way is a contribution of this study, as are the insights into the complex and interdependent issues affecting the successful delivery of programmes by early intervention groups in New Zealand.

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