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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Transformed Understanding or Enlightened Ableism? The Gap Between Policy and Practice for Children with Disabilities in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract The concept of inclusion in the New Zealand legislative and policy environment is articulated in a liberal human rights discourse intended to redress past practices of segregation and exclusion. Such discourse has provided the early childhood sector with new ways to speak about disability and inclusion. There is, however, a growing body of evidence to show that *how* teachers speak about inclusion is frequently not reflected in *practices* in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. The emerging evidence reported in this article is drawn from an ongoing research project which, in part, examines the views of inclusion elicited through semi-structured interviews with teachers, owners and managers in long-day ECEC—the facilities designed to accommodate adults' usual working hours. The larger study aims to examine tensions and complexities for teachers, owners and managers in long-day ECEC alongside the views and experiences of parents of children with disabilities. The concept of 'enlightened ableism' is introduced to frame an argument that teacher-speak, while overtly liberal, may be combining with a nervousness about disability and inclusion that raises challenges for progressing inclusive practice. Furthermore, current discursive contradictions between liberalism and neoliberalism in the sector appear to be contributing to some teachers' uncertainty about ways to progress beyond the rhetoric of inclusion. The study is embedded in the Disability Studies literature and informed by Foucauldian theorising about discourse and power. This paper responds to the question: Has legislation and policy transformed understandings about disability and inclusion or merely provided an enlightened rhetoric, which serves to mask the continuation of ableist practices and thinking in the sector?

Keywords Enlightened ableism · Inclusion · Early childhood practice and policy · Long-day ECEC · Neoliberalism

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Résumé Le concept de l'inclusion dans la législation et politique en Nouvelle-Zélande s'inscrit dans un discours libéral sur les droits humains dans l'intention de redresser les pratiques passées d'exclusion et de ségrégation. Ce discours a donné au secteur de l'éducation préscolaire de nouvelles façons de parler de handicap et d'inclusion. Cependant, de plus en plus de résultats de recherche indiquent que la façon dont les enseignants parlent de l'inclusion des enfants handicapés ne se reflète souvent pas dans les pratiques observées dans les milieux d'éducation et de garde préscolaires. Les résultats émergents rapportés dans cet article proviennent d'un projet de recherche en cours qui examine en partie les perspectives sur l'inclusion obtenues par entrevues semi structurées d'éducateurs, directeurs, propriétaires ainsi que de parents de centres préscolaires conçus pour s'accommoder aux heures de travail habituelles des adultes. L'étude plus large vise à étudier les tensions et la situation complexe vécues par les enseignants, les directeurs et les propriétaires de tels centres par rapport aux points de vue et expériences des parents d'enfants handicapés. Le concept de «capacité éclairée» (enlightened ableism) est introduit pour soutenir l'argumentaire selon lequel, bien qu'ouvertement libéral, le discours des enseignants pourrait se combiner à une nervosité relative au handicap et à l'inclusion qui crée des défis au progrès des pratiques inclusives. De plus, les contradictions discursives actuelles entre libéralisme et néolibéralisme dans le secteur semblent contribuer à une certaine incertitude des enseignants sur les façons de progresser au-delà de la rhétorique de l'inclusion. Cette étude fait partie de la littérature sur les handicaps et suit l'approche théorique de Foucault sur le discours et le pouvoir. Cet article répond à la question suivante: La législation et les politiques ont-elles transformé la compréhension du handicap et de l'inclusion, ou ont-elles tout simplement fourni une rhétorique éclairée qui sert à masquer la poursuite des pratiques et des idées de «capacité» dans le secteur.

Resumen El concepto de la inclusión en el ámbito legislativo y político de Nueva Zelanda se contextualiza en un discurso sobre derechos humanos que intenta re-direccionar prácticas pasadas de exclusión y segregación. Este discurso ha proporcionado al sector de la educación preescolar nuevos recursos para hablar sobre discapacidad e inclusión. Sin embargo, hay cada vez más evidencia de que la *manera* en como los docentes hablan de inclusión de los niños con discapacidades no se refleja en las *prácticas* vistas en la educación preescolar. La evidencia emergente y reportada en este artículo sale de un proyecto de investigación en curso en el que se examinan las perspectivas sobre la inclusión a través de entrevistas informales con docentes, directores y dueños de establecimientos de educación preescolar que dan servicios a padres que trabajan. La investigación vista de un modo más amplio, está dirigida a estudiar las tensiones y complejidades de los docentes, directores y dueños de la educación preescolar al igual que las perspectivas y experiencias de los padres de los niños con discapacidades. El concepto de 'enlightened ableism' se introduce para dar un marco al argumento de que aunque lo que dicen los docentes puede ser entendido como 'demasiado liberal', lo cierto es que evidencia nerviosismo al hablar sobre las discapacidades y el concepto de inclusión. Esta disyunción crea tensiones al querer avanzar una práctica inclusiva. Además, las contradicciones discursivas presentes que existen entre el liberalismo y

el neoliberalismo en la educación parecen contribuir a la incertidumbre de algunos docentes sobre cómo superar la retórica oficial. Este estudio se enmarca en la literatura sobre discapacidades y, en particular, sigue un enfoque teórico a partir del trabajo de Foucault sobre discurso y poder. Este artículo trata de dilucidar si las leyes y políticas han transformado nuestra comprensión de discapacidad e inclusión, o si simplemente han ampliado la retórica existente lo que cubriría la continuación de prácticas e ideas ableistas en el sector.

Introduction

The study explores the complexities for teachers, owners and managers in turning discourses of inclusion for children with disabilities into practices. The study is situated in the long-day sector of ECEC. Long-day early childhood centres operate for up to 11 h per day, and provide education and care for infants, toddlers and young children. In recent years private, for-profit ownership in New Zealand's long-day ECEC sector has burgeoned, with current statistics indicating an almost 2:1 majority over community (non-profit) centres (Ministry of Education 2011). As opportunities for private investment in ECEC have been taken up, concerns have been raised both in New Zealand and Australia (Grace et al. 2008; Lyons 2011; Purdue et al. 2011) about the possible implications for inclusion for children with disabilities. The rights of children with disabilities to access and participate fully in ECEC are enshrined in key international legislation including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 1989), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2006). Aotearoa New Zealand legislation includes the Human Rights Act (1989) and The New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Health 2001). The legislation and its policy offspring clearly place responsibility for inclusion with teachers, managers and owners in the early childhood sector.

The guiding document specific to the inclusion of children with disabilities in ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand is titled *Including Everyone: Te Reo Tātaki* (Ministry of Education 2000). This is a substantial document/resource comprising a 100 page portfolio, three accompanying videos and a 47 page handbook. 'Te Reo Tātaki' presents inclusion as an educational ideal, asserts inclusion as 'a human right, as good education and as good sense' (Ministry of Education 2000, p. 7), and underlines the desired teacher qualities of caring, empathy and respect for children with disabilities and their families. While Te Reo Tātaki, provides teachers with practical suggestions for working with families, supporting children's participation with peers and working with professionals and paraprofessionals, it also recognizes that many barriers to inclusion are attitudinal. In the accompanying handbook it is suggested that a successful inclusive programme depends on an underlying belief in, and acceptance of, every child as a unique and special person with the potential to grow and develop: 'The educator's feelings about diversity and the process of inclusion will affect outcomes' (Ministry of Education, p10). Te Reo Tātaki (Ministry of Education 2000) draws strongly on a social model of disability, which

asserts that disability is constructed by society's failure to provide for the needs of disabled people in social organisation (Barton 1996), and asserts the need for a similar attitudinal shift in society.

Both *Te Reo Tātaki* and Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education 1996), afford teachers access to philosophical arguments for inclusion. Te Whāriki cites the importance of providing equitable opportunities for learning regardless of ability and asserts that learning needs of children with disabilities will be met within the diverse range of services provided in the sector (Ministry of Education 1996). It is reasonable to assume that children with disabilities will be present and participating. However, a recent New Zealand study revealed that families of children with disabilities are still experiencing difficulties with equitable enrolment and participation in long day ECEC (Purdue et al. 2011). In other words, while understandings of inclusion may appear to be transformed, the sector is having difficulty moving beyond the rhetoric towards truly inclusive practices. This disjuncture between policy intentions and lived experiences of children with disabilities and their families led me to ask the question: Why does there appear to be such a gap between policy and practice? In the remainder of this paper, I introduce a discourse I have termed *enlightened ableism* to explain this disjuncture.

Enlightened Ableism

Ableism is defined by Campbell (2001) as a network of beliefs and practices that produce a particular corporeal standard, and subsequently cast disability as a diminished form of corporeality. The able-bodied state is preferred and privileged in the organisation of society (Campbell 2001; Hehir 2002). In the same way that *racism* privileges ethnocentric belief systems and structures, *ableism* privileges ability over disability in organisational, structural and individual practices. Enlightened *racism* is identifiable when people use the rhetoric of inclusiveness and equality and speak against racist practices, yet do not socialise across ethnicities or form authentic personal relationships with people of diverse ethnic groups (Jhally and Lewis 1992). In the same ways that enlightened racism masks the broader cultural failure to recognise the effects of institutionalised racism (Bruce and Wensing 2012), I argue that enlightened ableism allows one to side-step, or even fail to recognise the effects of an ableist paradigm. The rhetoric of enlightened ableism presents a rational, modern, well-informed and humanitarian world view yet allows the continuation of practices that marginalise persons with disabilities.

It is neither accurate nor useful to suggest that ECEC teachers, owners and managers in Aotearoa New Zealand are deliberately electing to exclude children with disabilities, and their families from accessing the right to quality education. However, there is evidence to suggest that the sector is operating in a context of strong discursive contradiction which needs to be acknowledged and fully understood before it can be challenged. The use of inclusive language by teachers is highly misleading if parents of children with disabilities are encouraged to believe (by way of legislation and policy) that there may be a welcome for their child only

to discover that this is not the case. Acceptance is likely to come with terms and conditions attached. An Australian study by Grace et al. (2008) reported cases of children being denied access until funding for support was in place, and access being limited. In a recent New Zealand study Purdue et al. (2011) interviewed a number of parents who reported their child would be accepted for enrolment only under specific conditions, such as additional charges and limited hours/days of attendance, and others who reported difficulties in finding a centre willing to accept their child at all.

The Intersection of Liberalism and Neoliberalism

The liberal, rights-focused stance of Aotearoa New Zealand's legislation and policy for inclusion is clearly contradicted by the neoliberal business (profit-focused) environment in which this legislation is expected to play out. Policy documents guiding inclusion in New Zealand are replete with liberal terms and phrases such as 'equity', 'diversity', 'participation in social contexts', 'equally valued members of society' (Ministry of Education 2000), and 'equitable opportunities', 'awareness of their own rights and the rights of others' and 'the ability to recognise discriminatory practices and behaviours' (Ministry of Education 1996). On one hand, adults in the ECEC sector are charged with the responsibility of meeting the rights and needs of all children, on the other hand, there is an expectation that this provision will take place in a cost-effective, efficient and, in many cases, profitable manner (Lyons 2011). There is much to suggest that the liberal intent of the human rights legislation cannot be easily acted upon when juxtaposed against dominant economic values in wider society (Ballard 2004; Davis 2007; Lyons 2005). This position is supported by Barton (1998) and Fulcher (1999) who refer to education as a quasi-market that has created a potentially hostile climate for the development of policies of inclusion. The tension between the neoliberalising of the early childhood sector and liberal social goals has been raised frequently by researchers in Australia and New Zealand over the past decade (Goodfellow 2005; Kilderry 2006; Lyons 2011; Sumsion 2006).

Study Design and Methodology

ECEC centres were selected purposively in order to recruit three New Zealand qualified and registered teachers employed in corporate (for-profit) structured centres, and three employed in community-operated (non-profit) centres. All teachers were employed in ECEC centres located in the urban Auckland area. The decision to interview teachers employed in both for-profit and community operated (non-profit) ECEC centres was to investigate whether, there may be differences in how inclusion is viewed and practiced between the two types of context. Teachers and owners/managers were recruited from different centres to ensure that neither was inhibited from openly sharing openly their views about structural or professional [teacher] influences on inclusion within their own teaching environment. This was achieved by

drawing participants from organisations operating several centres. The four managers/owners were also recruited purposively, and comprised of one private owner operating several centres in urban Auckland, an Auckland manager from one of the larger corporate organisations operating nationwide, and two managers from the non-profit sector in Auckland. None of the owners or managers had a teaching role, and none of the teachers in the study held management roles. One manager held additional responsibility for policy development and compliance across a number of centres.

The data were gathered via semi-structured interviews with teachers, owners and managers and loosely organised around key dimensions of successful inclusive practice identified in current research in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gordon-Burns et al. 2012). Questions focused on prior learning and experiences of disability, children's rights, understandings about inclusion, ideas to support inclusion and perceived barriers to achieving inclusive practices in ECEC. My personal experience as a teacher, a former owner of a for-profit ECEC centre, and as the parent of a son with 'diverse abilities' (his preferred terminology), has informed the collection and interpretation of the data. This experience was disclosed to all participants. The study is therefore not socially or politically neutral, but is underpinned by my values and beliefs about disability, inclusion and human rights. Marshall and Rossman (2011) assert that the researcher must systematically reflect on who she is in the inquiry and be sensitive to her own personal biography and how it shapes the study. As a result I used a self-reflective journal to mitigate possible bias.

Analysis

The data analysis combines thematic content analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic content analysis as offering an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to identifying, analysing and reporting themes and patterns emerging from the data. Thematic analysis has a number of overlapping or alternate purposes. It can be used as a lens for making sense out of seemingly unrelated material and as a way of analysing material (Boyatzis 1998). As this study is designed to expose different *knowledges* and understandings about a particular issue, a thematic approach is suitable and, in the case of this study, further strengthened by the use of Foucault's (1972) theories about discourse and power relations.

Examination of discourse is a key aspect of this study, and I have selected Foucauldian discourse analysis because it provides strategies for analysing the flow of understandings and their impacts on identities and power relations. Foucault espouses that discourses shape understandings, knowledge and subsequently practices in society. Foucault (1972) asserted that discourses do not merely reflect or represent social entities or relations, but actively constitute them. As Walshaw (2007) explains, in Foucault's terms, a discourse functions as a set of rules providing people with the knowledge about what is possible to speak and do at a given moment—discourses perform the role of conceptual schemes or relatively

well-bounded areas of social knowledge. In essence the discourse provides a *truth* that is self-reinforcing.

The influence of dominant discourses in disability studies is widely discussed (Barton 1996; Fulcher 1999; Gordon-Burns et al. 2012) and the resulting ways in which, discourses manifest as subjective experience sit well with Foucault's assertions about the power of discourse. Working with Foucault's definition of discourse broadens the scope of the data analysis, revealing that there are powerful *truths* emerging in the ECEC context with regard to: (1) discourses of disability that do not consistently reflect the intent of the legislation; (2) the nature and purpose of early childhood education for future contribution to society; and (3) the appropriateness of a free-market model of ECEC.

Central to Foucault's theorising are questions about what is considered valid knowledge at a certain place and time. Questioning how certain knowledge arises, how it is passed on, what function it has in constituting subjective experiences and in shaping society is highly relevant to this study. The study aims to achieve a deeper understanding of the effects of the intersection and interaction of discourses of disability, economics and social justice in the early childhood sector, and the *truths* about children with disabilities that emerge within this discursive engagement. The interview questions were developed within a framework of Foucauldian theorising and designed to investigate what teachers, owners and managers *know* about disability and inclusion and what they *think* is important to know. It is intended that the study uncover how this *knowledge* might be constructing the experiences of children with disabilities and their families, and how this may be contributing to the ongoing shaping of societal structures and practices.

Discussion

While the study is ongoing, one clear emerging theme points to a discourse of enlightened ableism and its effect on inclusive practices. Discourses of liberalism and neoliberalism intersected and contradicted each other throughout the data, indicating a gap between policy and practice, articulated through a discourse of enlightened ableism. Liberal rhetoric, especially with regard to the right to form relationships, was evident in the responses of all but one participant. Interviewees claimed the virtues of inclusion by noting the positive benefits for the children, their peers, the family and the community. One participant commented on the benefits for peers: '*Children need to work alongside children with a variety of needs because they are the future parents…. and the parents of children with special needs, so if they don't have any contact*'. This rhetoric was clearly present in the comments of most of the participants who indicated willingness, as individuals, to include children with disabilities as the following quote demonstrates: '*Children must be integrated with a variety of people in the community…I'm passionate about it*'. Interestingly, however, none of the teacher participants were working in a centre where a child with disabilities was currently enrolled. One participant actually questioned this phenomenon, asking: '*I'm all set to go, but where are the children?*' This absence of children with disabilities was also highlighted in a recently

published Education Review Office (2012) report on inclusiveness in the sector. Of the 268 ECEC centres evaluated, only a third had children with disabilities currently enrolled. Non-profit kindergartens were over-represented in the group of services including children with moderate to severe disabilities, while (long-day) Education and Care centres were under-represented. Education and care centres made up 59 % of the sample, with 62 % of these having no children with disabilities enrolled. The structure (for-profit/non-profit) of the centres is not stated in the report.

In my study, neoliberal imperatives emerged immediately when participant ideas about 'practicing' inclusion were sought.The view that liberal discourses are contradicted by neoliberal principles currently predominating in ECEC (Duhn 2010; Goodfellow 2005; Press and Woodrow 2005) was clearly affirmed. It is clear in the data that the 'business' of ECEC is viewed as complex and tension-ridden by teacher, owner and manager participants and, most importantly, must remain economically viable. A pattern that I have termed *yes-but* is evident in the data whereby liberal, inclusive comments are followed up with an operational or budgetary hurdle that affects practice. I argue that this is a clear indicator of the discourse of enlightened ableism. The following excerpts demonstrate the yes-but pattern. A for-profit manager initially espoused the discourse of inclusion stating: '*I fully support it, I'm passionate about it*'. The 'but' was revealed in her next comment: '*Some staff struggle, not enough in the early education side for teachers when they're training…the biggest challenge is not enough support from GSE [Group Special Education]…we [the company] could put in extra support, but only for a limited time*'. In response to the same question, a manager from the non-profit sector commented: '*If we accepted a child we would have to look at the physicality of the centre and have a look at the needs of the child but I don't believe you can make a blanket decision*'. More *buts* emerged as participants reported factors, such as the 1: 5 staffing ratio for under 2-year-olds and the 1:10 ratio for over two's, strict age-group divisions dictated by ratios and government funding, limited resource funding for supporting children with disability, and inflexible routines as barriers to inclusion. Stable staffing was identified as important for inclusion, *but* affordable staffing was raised, by a for-profit owner, as problematic for financial reasons. The balance between salary costs and maintaining suitable ratios for supporting inclusion raised problems for owners/managers in the study when other companies were prepared to pay higher wages, but run at the minimum staffing requirements. Knowledge of, and access to government agencies and support personnel willing to work collaboratively was raised as important for inclusion *but* opportunities to network with teachers in other centres and learn from their experiences, and to undertake professional development were limited because of staffing and schedules. Overall, responses are a mix of liberal vision and neoliberal pragmatics. Furthermore, a sense that teachers view the *but* factors as non-negotiable characteristics of long-day ECEC comes through strongly in the data as one teacher participant commented: '*It comes down to management being able to source resources but you know everything has a financial connotation*'. In a study in the United Kingdom, Croll and Moses (2000) noted a similar 'yes/but' phenomenon whereby participants expressed a 'moral or principled' preference for inclusion, but claimed pragmatic barriers within the structure of schools.

A privileging of neoliberal discourse, manifest in particular *truths* about working in a long-day ECEC centre and how such centres operate is clear in the data. Such truths, as Foucault (1972) asserted, do more than give knowledge or meaning, they produce particular kinds of subjects as effects of discursive relations. The New Zealand ECEC long-day sector is structured in a way that has embraced a business model of delivery that is now seen as *the* way of doing things. Hence, the 'subjects', in this case teachers, owners and managers, have become a force in perpetuating the very operational practices and structures that they view as problematic. The legislation and policy for inclusion appear to be being overshadowed by the perceived structural obstacles and economic imperatives of long-day ECEC. As a result, those responsible for ensuring the intent of the legislation are struggling to see a fit for children with disabilities as the following comment of a non-profit manager attests: '*Under the law they have a right to access….there isn't enough [government] funding… then the cost has to be built into the [overall] fee structure because you can't charge a parent more because they have a child with a disability*'.

Truths about the purpose of education have also emerged from the study as teacher, owner and manager participants raise issues about the presence of children with disability detracting teacher time from 'able' children's learning and achievement. As the neoliberal position on education promotes personal agency as key to national prosperity, those who are less able to act for their own 'survival' are, by default, seen as of lesser value in society (Peters 2001).The perception that parents of typically-developing children might be concerned about the presence of children with disabilities is clearly articulated in this non-profit manager's comment: '*We haven't grown up as country yet. You still hear, don't you, parents saying we've got this problem kid in my children's class? And the problem child disrupts everything and my kids aren't getting a fair go*'.

In an earlier paper (Lyons 2011), I suggested that the discourse of education for future contribution appears to have created a renaissance of medical definitions of disability. This is nascent in the data by way of participant comments citing lack of knowledge of the pathological (deficit) characteristics of specific disabilities. The data collected via teacher, owner and manager interviews indicates that, for most participants, learning about disability has been gained via personal life experiences and observations in participants' own schooling (e.g. proximity to special needs units). For several of the mature participants, learning about disability came from being involved in, or exposed to, part-time integration programmes whereby small groups of children with disabilities and their supporting staff attended the mainstream early childhood services, where a participant was employed. Several of the younger participants noted some learning about disability in teacher education programmes, largely in subsections of other courses. Few teacher participants had any recent experiences of spending time with a child with disabilities. Furthermore, within the data there is evidence of participants of having gained *truths* about disability by *label*—the information that comes from learning about the pathology of the disability itself—or by *stereotype*, whereby all persons with the same pathology are attributed the same characteristics and traits. The use of stereotype is clear in the following participant contribution in reference to a child with Down

syndrome: '*They're gorgeous and got all that love but they can sort of bombard other children*'. Only one teacher participant specifically reported any specific, formal learning about inclusive practice and one other participant had knowledge of the current guiding document *Including Everyone: Te Reo Tātaki* (Ministry of Education 2000). While, many of the participants employ the rhetoric of a rights discourse of disability when speaking of inclusion as a vision, there are indicators of medical discourse when speaking of children with disabilities generally. The medical discourse of disability is described as locating disability within pathology and normative differences (Fulcher 1999; Lyons 2005).

Participants in my study referred to children with disabilities as blind, deaf, Down syndrome, 'dietary' disabilities, 'not developing as she should be', not normal, IHC, and autistic. Most participants put the disability before the child in their descriptions and the term 'special needs children' resonates throughout the data. It is important to acknowledge here that the use of medical or diagnostic terms may not necessarily indicate an unwillingness to be inclusive; however, the terminology needs to be considered in the context of each interview and in the broader context of the study. As Fulcher (1999) asserts, because discourse contains a theory which informs practice, we act on the basis of our ideas about how something works. In searching the data for discursive themes, the presence of a flow of understandings between the use of medical terminology and structures and practices that present children with disability as problematic is likely attributable to medical discourse. Furthermore, medically informed assumptions appear to present some children as easier to include than others as is clearly articulated by one manager participant: '*A child with a physical disability or a slight mental disability will be easier to handle than one with an emotional or social disability*'. Goodley (2007) asserts that such categorising of learners with disability perpetuates a deficit model whereby teachers focus on what learners cannot do by making referential comparisons with the non-disabled majority.

All participants demonstrated some awareness of the legal rights of children with disabilities to access and participate in ECEC, yet few spoke of specific items of legislation. Inclusion was articulated as important and rights-related by most participants. *Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum* emerged in the data as the important guiding document for inclusion largely because it states that the sector must be inclusive: 'The care and education of children who have special needs is provided within the diverse range of early childhood services' (Ministry of Education 1996, p 11). Only one participant reported that her centre had a centre-specific policy document to guide practices for inclusion, while a manager stated that she had removed all policies to guide teacher practices for inclusion in the centres for which she is responsible because they single out children with disabilities: '*I absolutely refuse (to have a policy) because I believe that Te Whāriki and the, um, actual licensing criteria is open enough because especially now with the change in regulations and licensing criteria it actually talks about having a programme for individual children's needs*'. Rivalland and Nuttall (2010), in their work regarding inclusive practices for migrant children, refer to the prevalence of a discourse they have termed 'sameness as fairness'. Embedded in the discourse is a view of difference as challenging to equality. Difference is seen as a point of

potential conflict, sameness is seen as fairness. In Rivalland and Nutall's research, many teachers viewed practices that focused on cultural relevance for specific migrant groups as accentuating the differences between children and therefore unfair. The refusal to develop policy to guide inclusive practices for children with disabilities is likely linked to a similar paradigm. Just as 'sameness' in the treatment of migrant children can be equated with a white middle class understanding of the world (Rivalland and Nuttall 2010), 'sameness' practices for inclusion reinforce an ableist view of disability.

In summary, the data indicate teachers, owners and managers are largely aware of a requirement to include children with disabilities, are able to speak in inclusive terms, and are unsure of ways to progress practices in their contexts. Structural barriers such as budgets, funding and resources are impacting inclusion in both for-profit and non-profit centres. Pathological knowledge about disability is viewed as important *knowledge*.

Conclusion

The data reported in this paper indicates that it is unlikely that the legislation and policy for including children with disabilities has transformed the understanding or practices of adults in the long-day sector of ECEC regarding disability and inclusion. The concept of inclusion itself has been largely diluted, as Armstrong et al. (2010) assert: 'It has struggled to spell out a clear set of principles and practices in the face of a rhetoric of convenience which embraces the feel-good aspects of inclusive discourse without serious engagement with the issues' (p 29). It is an unenviable position in which many teachers, owners and managers in ECEC find themselves in. They are required by legislation and policy to be inclusive of children with disabilities, and via this legislation and policy they have been given the language to speak about inclusion, yet making inclusion a reality appears problematic and confusing. This reveals itself in my study in participants' stated beliefs about inclusion that are not aligned with their practices. Inclusive rhetoric provides some absolution, but works to disguise the influence of neoliberal discourse, mask the continuation of ableist practices, and widen a gap between policy and practice in the sector.

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