

**“Where is \_\_\_\_\_?”: Culture and the Process of Change  
in the Development of Inclusive Schools**

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**Abstract**

The modern school is a multi-layered and complex institution. For inclusive values and practices to embed in educational systems the nature of school culture and the change process must be considered. Qualitative data was gathered during a year-long ethnographic study of inclusive change in a co-educational high school. This paper applies a model of culture to demonstrate that the development of inclusion within a whole school culture is a process of continued personal and collective reflection, re-negotiation, and experience carried out over a sustained period of time. In order to foster the sustained development of inclusive cultures in schools it is vital to understand the nature of change within school culture, and to provide the time to reflect on deeply held beliefs.

**Key words:** Inclusion, school culture, education, cultural change, professional learning, special needs

## Introduction

Zollers, Ramanathan and Yu (1999) linked inclusion to school culture. Entering the field expecting to find educational practices contributing to successful inclusion, the researchers instead discovered that such practices were only one part of a cultural context that supported inclusive values. The original intent behind the work of Zollers, et al was to identify specific practices that contributed to what was considered a 'successful model' of inclusion. While in the field they found that practice was only one aspect of a larger school culture "that was wholly supportive of inclusion" (p. 157). The school in which they conducted their research was multi-ethnic and acted as a 'magnet' in attracting students with disabilities. The principal was described as having a significant visual impairment that earlier research found acted as a model and daily reminder of the values he, as a school leader, promoted (Zollers & Yu, 1998). But perhaps more than his impairment, his democratic leadership style, the collaboration fostered between community and school, the shared language around inclusion and belonging all contributed to a school culture that was 'inclusive'.

Corbett (1999) similarly drew a correlation between cultural values of inclusion and the extent to which a programme of inclusion can be successful. Corbett recognised that changing the culture of an institution may be a necessary step in making it more responsive to difference. Corbett was looking at the influence and exclusionary pressures that neoliberal values and educational reforms had on the development of inclusive education in 1990s Britain. Her research focussed on the values underpinning any efforts to create inclusive schools, such as equity and respect. Prior to her work with the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) in Queensland schools, Carrington (1999) echoed this when she argued that schools needed to reflect on their values and beliefs in order to develop inclusive cultures. Culture, Carrington points out, is constructed by the beliefs and attitudes of people in a community. What is considered ability or disability and how difference is understood is influenced by social judgements. If culture is socially constructed, Carrington (1999) reminds us, the culture can be influenced concluding that reflection on current beliefs and practices is necessary to develop inclusive education.

This paper will highlight that for inclusion to develop in schools in a sustained way, an understanding of not just what culture is but how change takes place is necessary. For inclusion to take root in school cultures the appropriate amount of time must be given to personal reflection and exploration of deeply held beliefs and their expression through artefact and practice within the individual school (Agbenyega & Klibthong, 2014; Carrington & MacArthur, 2012). As 'culture' has traditionally been difficult to define, a theoretical construct, or model will be offered that reflects the complex and multi-layered nature of the institution. This model will be instrumental in understanding the place of the individual in the sustaining and developing of inclusive culture, and the renegotiation of the expression of cultural values in the school setting. In the subject school this was reflected in changing expectations of teacher practice and a restructuring of service delivery model for students who were outside what was commonly referred to as 'the mainstream', such as students with 'special needs', and those from ethnic minorities. Data for this paper is taken from a yearlong qualitative ethnographic study of inclusive school development conducted as part of doctoral research. The data on the subject school was gathered using participant observation, semi-formal and informal interviews. Through applying the model of culture this paper aims to demonstrate that the sustainable development of inclusion, and inclusive practices, within a whole school culture is a process of continued personal and collective reflection, renegotiation, and experience carried out over a sustained period of time.

## **Inclusion and social justice**

In this paper I acknowledge that inclusive education is informed by a social model of disability and that disability and difference are socially constructed and influenced by cultural values (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). In a social model of disability the focus of attention shifts from the individual to the barriers that the individual faces in their community, work place or school. By shifting focus outside the individual, diversity can be recognised as an asset rather than as pathology. Oliver (1990) draws a distinction between impairment and disability. Disability is caused by social, economic or political reasons; in much the same way that poverty and standards of health are not randomly spread in society but are rather the deliberate effect of unequal distribution of resources, economic policies and practices, and ideology (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). The important implication of this argument is that it affords the human participant the agency to create change.

Neilson (2005) reminds us that attitudes have been shown to be one of the biggest barriers to inclusion. Creating inclusive education systems would then necessitate the identification and removal of barriers and the examining of attitudes and values in our school communities. It is in this way that inclusion is seen as an ethical project (Allan, 2005). “The success of the ethical project of inclusion will depend on how far all of the people involved allow themselves to hope, accept their responsibilities, and are prepared to do the necessary work, which starts, of course, with oneself” (p. 293). Inclusion is seen as a process of cultural review and social construction (Carrington, 1999). The Index for Inclusion encourages communities to explore the values and examine the theories on which practice and assumptions are based.

## **Research context**

An implicit assumption within this paper is that inclusion is value based (Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Ballard, 2004; Booth, 1999; Slee & Allan, 2001; G. Thomas, 1997) and not an issue about measuring or auditing practice (McMaster, 2013b). Inclusion has increasingly been seen to be an ethical issue (Allan, 2005) and as an issue of social justice (Ballard, 1999; Booth & Ainscow, 2002) relating to all students facing exclusion from full and meaningful participation in the life of the school. Values embedded in this interpretation of inclusion include supporting everyone to feel that they belong; reducing exclusion, discrimination and barriers to learning and participation; emphasising the development of school communities and values as well as achievements; and “restructuring cultures, policies and practices to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally” (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 11).

This research takes place in the cultural context of New Zealand and the tensions between neoliberal economic and social policies and social democratic impulses (McMaster, 2013d). New Zealand is a bi-cultural society constituted by Tangata Whenua (or indigenous) peoples known as Maori and those referred to as Pakeha, or those of European descent (and increasingly also of other ethnicities). The inter-relationship of these ethnic groups create what is referred to in this paper as the ‘cultural context’ of New Zealand. Neoliberalism is a historical and political construct and the extent to which it becomes the ‘common sense’ way of interpreting life and understanding the world will vary from culture to culture. It has been the dominant discourse in New Zealand for the last quarter century and the effects of that ideology have been well researched (Alison, 2006; Court & O’Neill, 2011; Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Ladd & Fiske, 2003; Nash, 2007; Openshaw, 2009; Peters & Marshall, 1996; Robertson & Dale, 2002; Thrupp & Irwin, 2010; Thrupp & White, 2013; Watson, Hughes, & Lauder, 2003). In essence, the adherents of neoliberal economic policies believe that the state should reduce its role in society. Pointing to the cultural and ideological features Giroux

characterised neoliberalism as “a broad based rhetorical and cultural movement designed to obliterate public concerns and liquidate the welfare state” (Giroux, 2008, p. 9). It is the market, and not the state, that is best equipped to meet society’s needs. Through competition the market will sort out the efficient from the inefficient, the weak from the strong, and the winners from the losers. It will allocate all resources, whether physical, natural, human or financial with the greatest possible efficiency (George, 1999). This is to be achieved largely through privatizing public resources, today euphemistically called ‘asset sales’, as part of downsizing the public sector.

Resource allocation for special education provision is shaped by the 1996 Act, Special Education 2000 (SE2000), and the numerous reforms and additions to that legislation. The stated aspiration at the launch of SE2000 was the creation of a “world class inclusive education system” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.5). Recent initiatives have reiterated that aspiration (Ministry of Education, 2012), however, Ministry strategy includes measuring inclusion through auditing school practice towards a select (‘high needs’) student population (McMaster, 2013c). This apparent limiting of the conceptual understanding of inclusion contrasts with definitions that aligns more closely with international declarations, such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (United Nations General Assembly, 1994) as well as domestic aspirations, such as those expressed in the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Disability Issues, 2001).

### **The school**

The school upon which this research is based is a co-educational high school of over 600 students. Within the school is a special education unit catering for students considered ‘high needs’. This unit has traditionally been isolated and marginalised from the ‘mainstream’ of school life. Staff from the special needs unit, consisting of one fulltime teacher and four teacher’s aides (TA), were not expected to participate in daily staff briefings, nor were the students expected to participate in whole school activities such as sports days or assemblies. While priding themselves on creating a place for every learner (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*) the school created a place that was isolated and segregated from the ‘mainstream’ of the school. Students of the ‘unit’ had no meaningful contact with their peers, nor did the unit teacher and unit staff have opportunities to interact collaboratively with the staff of the ‘mainstream’ school. Another significant part of the school was the learning support area catering for students who might experience difficulty socially or academically with the demands of ‘mainstream’ subjects. This area comprises four classrooms and made up of a team of four teachers and three teacher aides. Set apart as a separate department, the learning support area provided subject specific assistance, however, students of the learning support area were largely integrated into mainstream option classes.

### **School culture as temporal**

What is a unique feature to all schools (as well as many other institutional settings) is that at a certain time of day it ceases to exist below the surface level. The school is a time limited culture. Individuals come together for a set period of time—the school day—which lasts from when the first teacher unlocks the doors to when the school is once again abandoned at the end of the day. During the time in between the location is a vibrant hub of activity, of rich interactions and exuding a collective personality of its own. While each individual in the community has their own belief system what is spoken of here are those beliefs and assumptions that are shared. The ability of the culture to reconstitute itself on a daily basis highlights the aspect of a shared value system. New students and new staff are

inducted into this system and in turn express similar values or find it too difficult to remain within that culture (Peterson & Deal, 2002; Edgar H. Schein, 2010).

However, although being a reflection of a wider culture, place and time, the school culture remains its own unique expression of that wider culture within the confines of the school grounds. This unique expression is the product of those wider social values, the tension expressed by conflicting paradigms interpreted by individuals and negotiated and re-negotiated collectively. As it is composed of individuals it is in essence a vibrant sphere and arena of change. Being based on shared values, the exploration of changing values makes up a re-negotiation process. Language use, for example, may change—what was once considered a humorous comment may later be considered inappropriate, racist, misogynist or disabilist. Similarly, behaviours previously ignored may later be considered wrong, such as excluding a group from shared activities. This recognition is what fuels the change process, allowing a culture to grow.

### Culture

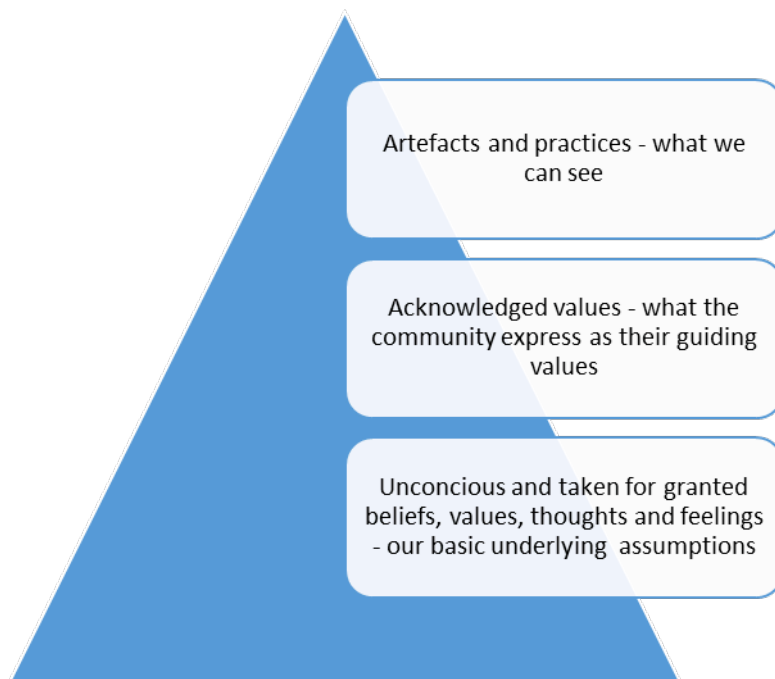
Culture, as a concept, has been difficult to define. It has been described in so many ways that a coherent understanding is made difficult (Geertz, 1973). Geertz humorously notes that Kluckholm (1950) used over one dozen definitions in a single chapter. Culture was “the total way of life of a people.” It was “a way of thinking, feeling and believing.” Culture was “learned behaviour.” It was a map, a sieve, a matrix (Geertz, 1973, p. 4-5). Culture is, of course, all of those things, but Kluckholm’s grasping does not bring understanding nearer. The fact that culture is largely unseen is why a clear definition of culture has been so elusive. (Hall, 1990). Despite no clear and definitive definition emerging since the first attempt in 1871 (Tylor, 1924), what has developed is the understanding that culture, like human psychology, is something that is multi-layered and complex, with deep underlying assumptions and beliefs influencing behaviour and expression in ways that are often unspoken and taken for granted. There is a surface level that is observable--the way buildings are constructed, the way people speak and act towards one another, even the way tea is served. While these surface features may be easy to notice, they too often mask the foundations upon which those ‘artefacts’ are built (Hall, 1989). While the intricate motions of the Japanese tea ceremony, for example, can be observed, the deeper and profound aspects of that ceremony are much more difficult for the outsider to easily grasp (Edgar H. Schein, 2010).

### A model of culture

A theoretical construct, or model of culture, rather than an encompassing definition, is used in this paper. The model employed is adapted from the writings of the anthropologist Edward Hall (1966, 1983, 1989, 1990). To handle the complexity of culture Hall explored three levels, or dimensions, ranging from the observable to the hidden (see Figure 1). Within these dimensions are the areas where values and beliefs are internalised, where collective negotiation takes place and where culture is expressed. While dividing a concept as complex as culture into three neat layers is a simplistic device, the exercise adds clarity and provides a framework so that data from the field of my research can be framed and interpreted.

What can be considered the first level of culture are *artefacts*. Artefacts can be considered to be what is seen, heard and felt. Artefacts include physical objects, such as buildings and works of art, but also the visible and verbal displays of interaction—how individuals speak and relate with one another, the language they use and the processes of routine behaviour. What occurs on this level can be observed by insiders as well as outsiders.

In the school setting these overt examples include how a group structures itself, from the scheduling of the day to the provision of services and supports. What is seen on this level is the manifestation and expression of the deeply held values, beliefs and assumptions shared by members of the group. However, it is difficult to make sense of these 'artefacts' without an understanding of deeper motivators such as values and beliefs (Hall, 1989).



**Figure 1:** Levels of Culture (Source: adapted from Hall (1989))

The middle layer of this model relates to those expressed values of the culture, or in this discussion, of the whole school community. While displaying their culture at a surface level—what is on ‘display’, what is openly expressed—this middle level can be loosely described as how people talk in the staff room. Here group values and beliefs can be shared amongst each other a trusted environment. This layer, lying just below the surface, is where real consensus is achieved and maintained among the many individual members of the community. Ricoeur (1965) describe a tension within the individual psyche—an inner conflict that leads to creativity. This intermediary layer is where the conflict or tension within the group is negotiated and renegotiated and where consensus is achieved. It is where identity is collectively explored and created.

At the deepest level of this model of culture are found the assumptions on which culture is based. These assumptions are often not clearly expressed or articulated. It is the realm of what Gramsci and Rosengarten (1994) refer to as ‘common sense’, or what Hall (1966) calls the ‘hidden dimension’ on which a culture is based. The organisational psychologist Schein (1992) observes that these basic assumptions “are so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is taken as a ‘foreigner’ or as crazy” (p. 25). The sharing of these underlying assumptions is what nourishes a cultural identity, forming the roots that sustain and hold it together. As the culture of the institution is made up of many individuals, on a deep level these individuals share core values. It is that sharing that creates the collective culture. At the individual level, at the deepest layer of culture, the individual interprets these core values, beliefs and assumptions in an individual way. These individual interpretations are negotiated and re-negotiated as the various individuals in a culture interact,

and these negotiations and re-negotiations, as they manifest at surface layers, are expressed in ways that even an outsider can sometimes see (Fullan, 2007; Levin, 2008; Edgar H. Schein, 2010).

### **The individual in the change process**

The three layered model of culture can provide a useful tool to look at the process of change undergone by an individual during a period of institutional change. The deepest level of culture is that place where often unconscious and un-articulated beliefs and assumptions guide not only behaviour but also how the world (or institution such as the school) is seen by the individual. At a deep level there are core or essential values with which each individual will identify with to some extent. Regarding a larger culture, these core values can be said to be what makes a Japanese person 'Japanese', or what might be called 'Kiwi' in New Zealand. At the focus school of this project this was referred to as, "The [school] Way." As the year progressed staff were encouraged (through the Index for Inclusion process (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) and the role of the researcher as critical ethnographer as discussed below), to express what it was that made their school unique among the other schools in the community. "What are our points of difference?" they were asked (*Fieldnotes: Participant observations*). Staff responses reflected the core values of the school being 'heart and choice', where there was a place for all learners, a caring place, where relationships were based on mutual respect.

This deep level should not be seen as a solid zone, but rather as one that is dynamic, filled with individuals expressing those core values in their own ways. In the model, the spaces provided by inter-personal relationships can be considered areas of negotiation. As the interpretations of core values change, even as the core values themselves may alter, there is a vibrant interaction in this deeper level between each of the individual members of the community, as well as *within* each member. Tension is created as values evolve and as members begin to question and examine the underlying assumptions that shape the community. Even if an individual's core values do not significantly change there still arises the need to negotiate within the larger consensus, especially if that consensus is shifting.

While each individual in the community has their own belief system, what is spoken of here are those beliefs and assumptions that are shared. The secondary layer of culture, the area where the consensus is expressed among community members, becomes an arena of change while newer interpretations of values are explored. What also becomes contestable is how those values are expressed--what jokes are acceptable, what words are used, even what can and cannot be discussed. These boundaries shift with the shifting consensus. These shifts are more obvious from the distance of time. In the shared area of the work place where the consensus is played out, the school community member has to adapt to this changing consensus in order to continue to fit in with the community, with the 'culture of the staff room,' and with how the shifting consensus is expressed on the surface level as practice and artefact.

### **Methods**

This paper is based on a qualitative research project carried out during one full academic year as part of doctoral thesis research. The problem at the centre of that research, and of this paper, was how to create a world class inclusive education system. The primary research question was: How is the concept of a world class inclusive education system understood, enacted and negotiated within the parameters set by Special Education 2000? During this year I acted as ethnographic researcher in the school. I spent every school day in the school and volunteered in a variety of roles as I became a part of the school community.



These roles included, for example, soccer coaching, co-teaching, assisting in school activities, etc. as well as acting as ‘critical friend’ and facilitator while the school utilised the *Index for Inclusion* as a framework for change. A critical ethnographic methodology (Jordan & Yeomans, 1995; Madison, 2005; J. Thomas, 1993) also permitted scope for me to act as advocate and advisor in the process of change. Whereas the objective of traditional ethnography is to describe a culture, the aim of critical ethnography is to participate in changing it. The critical ethnographer feels it her or his obligation to use knowledge from research to challenge the existing structures, values, and practices that oppress or *exclude* members of the community.

The role of the researcher in this process has aptly been described by Giroux (2007): “...academics should combine the mutually interdependent roles of critical educator and active citizen” (p. 198). Gramsci (1971) saw the intellectual as an agent of social change, participating in a cultural offensive to reform values that are deeply rooted in popular consciousness. Gramsci used the term ‘organic’ to describe the intellectuals that every social class creates who give a voice and awareness to that social group. As research was conducted for such an extended time I endeavoured, as researcher, to embed myself in the life of the school community as much as possible and maintained a variety of roles, such as reliever teacher, soccer coach, and literacy tutor. To become a part of the school involved developing and fostering reciprocal relationships (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001) which also enabled observations to be ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973; Ryle, 1949) of the school experience.

Data collection methods involved participant observation, semi-formal and informal interviews. As the researcher was based in the school for the duration of the school year observations and interviews took place on a daily bases. Participants were made up of the school staff, including administration, classroom teachers and auxiliary staff. Field notes from daily participant observation were themed and analysed in an iterative manner. These notes provided a rich source of data that reflected the collation of information and also the evolution of ideas. During the year over one hundred interviews were conducted. Semi-formal interviews took the form of guided conversations, where I encouraged the participants to talk, for example, in an area of interest, a method supported by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Such areas of interest included, for example, school history and present circumstances, particular departmental aspirations, or thoughts about inclusion. Informal interviews consisted of discussions and explorations of the change process (Kvale, 1996). These interviews took the form of what Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) term ‘opportunistic’ discussions. ‘Opportunistic’ discussions with participants occurred in a variety of contexts. These discussions were later transcribed as field notes. The majority (70 percent) of interviews were conducted in this manner. Interviews were followed up with a review or ‘member checking’ (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007), of transcripts or summarised field notes, during which time participants were invited to add or clarify information. Ethical approval was granted by university Educational Research Human Ethics Committee and each of the sixty participants were given consent forms outlining project aims and objectives and participant rights of confidentiality, anonymity and withdrawal.

Transcripts and notes were analyzed in a continuous iterative process throughout the year of study in the form of analytical memos (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007) to allow important organizational themes to emerge. The analytical procedure I utilise is a threefold process which Ricoeur (1991) calls ‘Mimesis’. Mimesis (1) is *prefiguration*. Prefiguration is the pre-understanding that I as the reader or researcher bring to a text/the data. It is the practical understand gained through my own life experience that enables me to understand what is happening. It is *how* I make sense of the text. Mimesis(2) is *configuration*, which is a form of emplotment, organising the various elements of a narrative into relation with each other, or

into “an intelligible whole” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 65). Configuration is what stops the text from merely being a series of incidents stuck together. As Simms (2003) points out, meaning is attached to a story because it is going somewhere, the incidents are related in some way. Mimesis(3) refers to *re-figuration*, which is “the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader” (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 71). A hermeneutic circle emerges, what Ricoeur considers a ‘healthy circle’: we bring understanding to a text and the text deepens our understanding, which we then bring back to the text. The writings in field notes can be analogous to a ‘naive grasping’, based on what I have brought to the context (pre-figuration). My analytical memos attempt to explain, or find the meaning (configuration) of the evolving narrative. Finally, a ‘more sophisticated mode of understanding’, (a re-configuration) emerges as the academic paper.

### **Utilising the Index for Inclusion**

During the year the school utilised the framework for change known as the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The *Index for Inclusion* was originally created for use in the United Kingdom but has, since its first edition in 2001, been translated into 37 languages and used in 35 countries. Now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (and most accessible and flexible form) the *Index for Inclusion* is designed to be used by individual schools. The *Index* encourages a cyclical review process of review, planning and implementation that introduces sustainability to teacher professional development and encourages wide participation. The *Index* process is designed to be a planning cycle of five phases: “getting started” (initiating the process in the school); “finding out together” (reviewing school culture and practice); “producing a plan” (creating action plans around prioritised areas); “taking action” (implementing the plan/s); and “reviewing developments” (which also feed into further reflection and planning). The indicators and questions found in the *Index for Inclusion* assist the school community in examining how their values are reflected in their practice and encourages the development of a common language, or understanding, of what inclusion means in their school’s culture.

While the focus of the *Index for Inclusion* is not solely directed at the inclusion of students with disabilities, this paper will look at students with disabilities in the school to illustrate the changes in attitude and in practice within the school culture. Students with disabilities provided a starting point for staff to consider the wider implications of inclusion, which were increasingly applied to any ‘minoritised’ group (Berryman, O’Sullivan, & Bishop, 2010). During the research year I acted as ‘critical friend’ (Carrington, Bourke, & Dharan, 2012) to the school in regards the *Index* process. Initial activities included introducing the *Index for Inclusion* to the staff team and building a planning group to organise *Index* related activities within the school. Facilitation of these groups was handled by the school principal and I assisted him with the planning of the content of each meeting.

### **Discussion of emerging findings: Re-negotiation in the zone of culture**

Findings arrived at are explored below and are themed as follows: the re-examining of expectations; the role of dissonance in the change process; the re-assessment of values; and the re-interpretation of meaning of key concepts.

#### **Re-examining expectations**

During the change process expectations altered as school community members became more aware of the relationship between values and practices. One way this manifested itself was the expectation that all staff, including the previously isolated unit

teacher, would be required to attend morning staff briefings. Traditionally this teacher's attendance would not have been an issue. Another area also revolved around the participation of the special needs unit students in shared experiences, such as whole school assemblies. Similarly, the absence of these students would previously not be noted. As the year progressed it became a collective expectation that they should attend. Their absence would increasingly be noticed by staff and if the students were not present other staff members would go to the special needs unit to collect them.

Timperley, et al. (2007) note that when teachers discuss practice amongst themselves and underlying values are not explored, there can be a tendency to reinforce each other's deficit thinking (e.g., see pp. xxxvii, 6-15, and 120-122) Learning is characterised as involving cycles of one or more of the following processes: Cueing and retrieving prior knowledge—resulting in that prior knowledge being examined or consolidated; becoming aware of new information and integrating them into existing values and beliefs systems—resulting in new knowledge being adopted or adapted; and creating dissonance with current values and beliefs—with that dissonance being resolved through rejection or acceptance, and current values and belief systems being repositioned or reconstructed (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 8). Resolving the dissonance that arises when older values and beliefs are challenged requires inquiry to occur on three inter-related and parallel levels: student, teacher and school. Teachers and schools that have created more inclusive practices and cultures have explored the often uncomfortable feelings associated with that dissonance.

Also, language was increasingly used that reflected the new consensus. The use of the term 'inclusion' became more rooted in staff discourse in relation not only to students with special educational needs but also from varied groups, such as those belonging to ethnic minorities (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). By the end of the year staff would describe a situation and even turn to me if I was participating in the conversation, and challenge more than ask: "Now, is *that* inclusion?" (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). The topics would be diverse, from the 'whanau' form class (made up of students entering the school from a Kura Kaupapa, or Maori language immersion setting) (Cooper, Arago-Kemp, Wylie, & Hodgen, 2004) not participating in the final week of school 'intensives' (where students would sign up and participate in a variety of onsite and offsite activities) and instead take an annual trip to a large city on the island. Or it could be about the ethnic makeup of those on stage during the senior prize giving, including who had been chosen as key note speaker. The question or comment was directed at me as 'inclusion' was the reason I was in their school. What was significant was that these staff members were thinking about the concept, exploring and negotiating what it meant in their school in a variety of situations and in relation to a variety of student or adult groups.

At the surface level of culture inclusive practice became more obvious and apparent. At a deeper level, the expectations regarding participation changed on a collective level and as a result more students were expected at key events and places in the school. A visitor to the school would now see students of all abilities taking part in shared experiences, including representing the unit in a newly formed student council, because wider participation became a *shared* value. In the case of the student council the original belief of the deputy principal spear heading the council's development was that the unit's participation was not even a matter for consideration. All form classes were asked to elect two representatives, however, the unit was not included as, "it is a special unit, not a form class" (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). As the deputy principal's values altered over the ensuing months so too did her expectations that students from the unit would participate. Through reflection on her attitudes about difference and separateness the deputy principal became an advocate for unit participation in the student council and ensured that accommodations were arranged (a note taker) so that the student could bring information back to his classmates.

### Dissonance in change

The Head of Department (HOD) for the learning support area of the school was initially confronted with challenging ideas and different models of learning support. What the change process created and encouraged for the HOD was dissonance (Timperley et al., 2007). Her interpretation of her practice was challenged and fed any existing doubts that she held. Her personal interpretation or core community or school values were experiencing tension. She was not, during this process, simply trying to adjust to a shifting consensus, she was using the dissonance created from dialogue, and the change process initiated by the *Index* process, to contribute to that changing shared consensus. Throughout the year she continued to explore her practice, the model of support provided by her department, and interpretation and expression of inclusion in the school. She was creatively working with the principal to alter her department's provision of services and actively exploring alternative models. Later in the school year the HOD related an experience she had with students from the 'mainstream' coming to the learning support area for help in a specific subject area, her meeting those needs after several tutorials, and the students leaving elated at their success. She was likewise elated at their, and her, experience. According to the HOD, the students were, "buzzing about it" (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). While continuing to look at alternative models of support, this experience helped clarify what she was envisioning for her department: a resource for the whole school, fully a part of the school which students could access when the need arose.

Where this staff member was faced with the discomfort associated with dissonance and challenge she reflected on her underlying values and assumptions and actively participated in changing the shared consensus within the school. She not only sought ways to adapt her practice and that of her department, she saw the change process as an opportunity to improve the quality of experience of her students and staff. The building in which her department was situated was identified for a rationalisation of property within the school. A reduced student role in the previous three years meant that the Ministry of Education was going to remove the building in which her department was situated. Rather than simply reproduce the current model in a new location she was pro-actively exploring ways to re-create that department reflecting emerging interpretations of her core values and those of the wider school community.

Working with the *Index for Inclusion* created some dissonance in the school, and the school principal recognised the value of this in the learning process. Some staff were challenged, and when that sort of challenge happened there was discomfort when previous beliefs or values were brought into question and newer ideas may have contained some essential truth (Fullan, 2007; Timperley et al., 2007). "Those times, those uncomfortable feelings, are the seed that has been planted and after some mulling over teachers have come back and are in different places now," related the school principal (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). One specific area staff began to feel more strongly about was the level of participation of students with 'special needs.'

### Re-assessing values

The process of change encouraged teachers, individually and collectively, to re-assess and re-negotiate school practices and the place of the unit within it. By highlighting inclusion, teachers were encouraged to become more aware of the presence and participation of students with special needs. Examples were evidenced throughout the research year. During a training day on employing the South Pacific Education Curriculum (SPEC, a programme adapted from ASDAN to reflect South Pacific culture and context) for students in the learning support

area, the absence of the unit teacher was noticed. “Where is [teacher]? Her students would get so much out of this!” was one participant’s remark (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). Absence was also noted during whole school assemblies. “Where are the students from the unit?” I asked a nearby teacher while a guest speaker addressed the students on the topic of healthy life choices. “How can they be a part of the school if they are kept separate in their classroom?” This type of interaction between staff, and the researcher and participants, fostered a personal and collective reflection of not only school systems and practices, but what values meant and how they were expressed (Carrington, Deppeler, & Moss, 2010).

For the staff of the special needs unit, the definition of ‘caring’ similarly faced tension with the wider interpretation of that core value. When the unit was originally designed in the 1980s, the unit was set apart from the mainstream school, and this reflected the urge on the part of the school, at that time, to provide a nurturing environment and to ‘protect’ students with disabilities. This conception of ‘caring’ was strong among unit staff. When the idea of more individualised scheduling was brought up with one TA and the willingness of a teacher to take one of the unit students in her mainstream class, the response was one of concern, “What, so he could be isolated and embarrassed?” (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). Her view was that the special needs unit protected the students from possible teasing and shame. The participation during sports day that I facilitated early in the year similarly caused upset to another aide. This was the first time ever that students with special needs would participate in this shared experience. She saw my encouraging of an older student to ‘give it a go’ in the social sports as stigmatising to the student, as potentially publically embarrassing him, as highlighting his differences not only to his peers but to himself (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). Though based on a desire to ‘protect’, this interpretation held student difference to be something needing protection, rather than something to be celebrated. Later in the year the principal expressed how the school’s interpretation had moved on. “We segregated students thinking we were protecting them, it was done with good intentions but produced wrong results,” (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). The consensus about how the school interpreted ‘caring’ was being renegotiated; it was potentially no longer meaning what the staff in the special needs unit held it to mean (McMaster, 2014).

In regards to the staff of the special needs unit, their interpretation of school values meant that they were increasingly out of sync with the evolving interpretation of core school values. This new interpretation ultimately found the expression of school values as evidenced through the practice of the special needs unit incompatible with what was now “the [school] way.” It was decided by administration that beginning in the next academic year the students of the special needs unit would be members of the learning support area and the special needs unit itself would only be used as an educational resource. Furthermore, the Head of Department for learning support would design a department that provided service to any students in the school requiring assistance. Her vision was as the students from the special needs unit would become more integrated in to the ‘mainstream’, so too would the learning support department.

### **Re-interpreting meaning**

Indeed, following a sustained period of reflection and experience in the school the meaning of the word ‘mainstream’ was undergoing continued exploration, and the nature of what constituted the ‘mainstream’ in practice was similarly evolving. The Head of the Maori Department, for example, negotiated with the teachers of the ‘mainstream’ to explore the concept of ‘infusion’, that is, infusing mainstream subjects such as science and math, with Tikanga Maori (culture, custom, ethics). Although meeting with initial (and some continued) resistance, her interpretation of inclusion meant changing the interpretation of what is

‘mainstream’, pulling at the boundaries of that concept to incorporate her department and students more meaningfully. “Maori have been assimilating for 150 years, they have been really good at it and you can see how far that has gotten them,” she maintained. “Nah, it’s time they came to us as well” (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). During the process of change at the subject school staff undertook an examination of the assumptions and beliefs shaping the school identity. Chief among these was the interpretation of ‘caring’ and ‘a place for all’. Although assumptions and beliefs are very individual by nature (Cologon, 2013), the coming together of many individuals that constitute a shared culture is a dynamic zone of negotiation and re-negotiation (Jones, 2013; Edgar H. Schein, 2010; Slee, 2011). Tension is created as values evolve and as members begin to question and examine the underlying assumptions that shape the community.

### Conclusion

Throughout the year, *how* deeply held beliefs were expressed by staff through their practice were undergoing a process of re-negotiation. Utilising a framework for change (McMaster, 2013a), such as the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), staff were able to reflect on how core values, assumptions and beliefs were understood and enacted in the school culture. Deeper values, such as the meaning of ‘caring’ and of having ‘a place for every student’ that lie at the ‘lower layers’ of a model of culture, were explored (and continue to be explored) under the ‘surface’ of school artefacts. It is this tension created through the examining of deeper values and the interaction between individual interpretations of shared values that makes creativity within culture, and the development of cultural values, possible. Findings emerged and were presented in this paper in four themes:

- the re-examining of expectations regarding staff performance, which was reflected in both practice and language;
- navigating the dissonance created during the change process;
- the re-assessment of existing values and the reflection of those values in the school culture (such as through practice);
- and the re-interpretation and critical assessment of the meaning of terms used to identify students, such as ‘mainstream’.

A culture of inclusion is not simply created; it is based on core values beliefs and assumptions, rooted in the individual (which reflect wider societal values, beliefs and assumptions) (Carrington & MacArthur, 2012; Gruenberg & Miller, 2011). As the school is part of a wider society the culture of the school will reflect those wider societal values. The school, being a temporal culture in the sense that its members enter and exit at specific times in the day, and being spatially limited or focussed around the school buildings and grounds, is an arena of negotiation and renegotiation as to how those values, assumptions and beliefs are collectively articulated and demonstrated in practice. In this sense, the key to improving the inclusive nature of schools is to reflect on the core values of a school culture and collectively explore, negotiate, and experiment with the expression of those values within the school (Higgins, MacArthur, & Kelly, 2009; Jones, 2013; MacArthur, 2009).

In order to foster the sustained development of inclusive cultures in schools, this paper has argued that it is vital to understand the nature of change within school culture. The model of culture provided in this paper illustrates how changes in perceptions can lead to changes in practice and offers example to other schools in their development of inclusive cultures. The model also highlights the need to provide the time to reflect on deeply held beliefs. These deeply held beliefs are what make each school an expression of those in it. The

tension created through reflection, through negotiation and re-negotiation, represents a 'development' of culture, emphasising what is best within that culture. Through doing so, the *artefacts* of the school, including practice and behaviour that can be observed as 'inclusive', will be a reflection of those deeply held beliefs. In this way inclusion in schools will not only continue to develop but become embedded within the culture of the whole school and the values of the individual.

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