Overview of the Study
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The study involved five researchers visiting a small number (14) of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools in November 1995 and interviewing staff and others who had some role in the teaching and support of non-English-speaking background (NESB) students in their school. The schools, located in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch served communities representing a range of socio-economic levels. Some schools in the study catered predominantly for Pacific Islands NESB students (both New Zealand-born and recent immigrants) and others catered predominantly for Asian NESB students. Still other schools catered for NESB students from diverse backgrounds — for example, from Somalia, Iran, and Bosnia, as well as from Asian and Pacific Island countries. The proportion of NESB students for whom English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding was being received on the participating schools’ rolls ranged from approximately 15% to approximately 80%. The schools were selected to participate in the study on the basis of their having ‘good practices’ in place in relation to programmes and support for NESB students. The study was intended to be a small-scale ‘exploratory’ project to collect some information about the reality for New Zealand schools of providing programmes for NESB students.

Fifty-four individuals were interviewed: of those interviewed, 15 were principals or deputy principals, 13 were ESOL coordinators, 18 were teachers of classes which included NESB students, and two were board of trustees representatives. The remaining six interviewees held other positions within the school (eg, teacher aide, Reading Recovery teacher).

Some of the participating schools had programmes for NESB students in place which had evolved over some years. Other schools had had to quickly establish programmes in order to respond to a situation that they had not experienced before — for example, having to cater unexpectedly for students from newly arrived immigrant or refugee families. Catering for NESB students is a steadily growing and changing area for New Zealand and all schools in the study were aware of the need to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate the programmes they provided. Staff of participating schools were able to identify a range of characteristics of the programmes that they ran which they felt were successful; they were also able to provide considerable insight into the factors which appear to either enhance or inhibit NESB students’ ability to learn English. At the same time, however, no participants in the study felt that their school was able to fully provide the level of support they considered desirable for their NESB students. Sometimes this was due to circumstances within the school which they were working to overcome but, more often, inability to provide sufficient support was attributed to insufficient (government-allocated) resources. Despite
this, schools in the study had made and were continuing to make considerable progress in providing good programmes for NESB students and their families. It is hoped that the experiences described and ideas put forward by those interviewed over the course of the study will go some way towards helping other schools who are working on ways to best meet the needs of their NESB students. It is also hoped that the experiences described will highlight the importance of ongoing consideration by policy-makers and others of the factors which contribute to schools being able to offer programmes for NESB students that will provide these students with the means to cope well in our schools and in our society.

Summary of Key Issues Evident from the Study

From the material obtained during the study, it was evident that, for schools to provide as effective programmes and support as possible for their NESB students (taking into account financial and other constraints), there needs to be:

- an overall school policy of inclusiveness and of meeting the needs of all students;
- a commitment by the school to ensuring that NESB students and their families are welcomed to the school from the outset;
- philosophical and administrative back-up and support for teachers of NESB students from the principal and other senior staff;
- a person (or persons) appointed to the role of ESOL coordinator/teacher, whose job it is to liaise with other staff in the school, work with NESB students and, often, their families, and generally coordinate all programmes and support for NESB students within the school;
- teachers committed to meeting the needs of NESB students;
- teachers who have had specific training and experience in working with NESB students;
- staff who have knowledge about support services outside the school and a readiness to seek help from those services;
- a policy of enlisting the help of interpreters and/or support people (eg, when enrolling students and seeking initial background information);
- practical (eg, in-class) support for teachers;
- a policy of providing, when required, as much support as possible for NESB students through out-of-class support (‘withdrawal’) time and one-to-one instruction;
- a commitment to helping students maintain or foster their first language;
• a commitment to employing, where possible, bilingual or multilingual teachers and teacher aides;
• access to appropriate and sufficient materials (e.g., books);
• a commitment by the school to sharing resources, ideas, and experiences with other schools;
• a policy of fully integrating NESB students into the regular classroom as soon as possible;
• a commitment on the part of all staff to learning about NESB students’ backgrounds and promoting cultural understanding among different groups within the school;
• a commitment to achieving open, ongoing communication between the school and NESB families (through home visits, school events, etc);
• a commitment to involving parents/the community in the school and in their children’s education.

It was also evident from the material obtained that there was often a shortfall in the resources\(^1\) required to fully realise aims. According to participants there was therefore a need for:
• more funding to employ staff to take ‘withdrawal’ classes and provide in-class support for both teachers and students;
• more funding to employ ESOL staff for a greater number of hours to enable students longer periods of support;
• more bilingual staff in schools;
• more materials (and/or assistance to produce necessary materials);
• more access to outside support agencies (e.g., teacher support services) which, while found to be very helpful, were said to be overstretched.

\(^1\) Information from this study relating to participants’ (mainly principals’) estimates of the cost of providing programmes and support for NESB students was provided to those within the Ministry of Education with responsibility for overseeing the development of ESOL policy early in 1996 and was part of a range of data which contributed to the decision by Government to raise the level of ESOL funding from the 1997 financial year. In the June 1997 Budget it was announced that there would be $5.739 million over three years for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). This was: ‘To increase the maximum per student rate of ESOL funding over time, potentially up to a maximum of $1,500 (GST inclusive) per student over three years by 2000/2001. Students will attract ESOL funding for a maximum of three years only.’ The rationale for the initiative was stated as: ‘Increased immigration has placed significant pressure on existing ESOL funding. This initiative will provide a significant increase in per student funding.’ [From a Ministry of Education document, June 1997.]
Other Key Findings from the Study

Many of the following points reiterate those stated under ‘Summary of Key Issues’ above.

- Schools in the study had a strong philosophy of ‘inclusiveness’ — of aiming to meet the needs of not only their NESB students but all students. Apart from providing specific programmes for NESB students, school policies applied equally to all students.

- The NESB students most likely to be successful in learning English and in coping well in a New Zealand school were said to be characterised by some or all of the following:
  - support in the home leading to motivation to achieve and a belief that they can and will achieve;
  - a good grasp of their first language and/or good basic grounding in education in the country where they have come from;
  - an outgoing personality which allows them the confidence to speak in English in front of their teachers and peers; and
  - those with teachers committed to meeting their particular needs and with helpful and friendly classmates.

- The NESB students less likely to be successful in learning English and in coping well in a New Zealand school were said to be characterised by some or all of the following:
  - a home environment which does not encourage learning and achievement;
  - a poor grasp of their first language and/or little or no previous schooling (this was particularly important in the case of older students);
  - those who, either through personality or culture, or both, were too shy to speak or interact much;
  - those (usually children of refugee families) who had suffered trauma as a result of war and other deprivations;
  - those in poor physical health; and
  - those in classroom situations not well suited to their particular needs.

- The age of NESB students is a significant factor to take into account: older students have different ‘problems’ to cope with than younger students in that, as well as ‘social’ English, they need to have a good grasp of ‘academic’ or subject-specific English in order to cope adequately with subject material. Also, if students are older when they first arrive in New Zealand, they may be at a significant disadvantage if even their social English is not well developed.
• Teachers have particular concerns about NESB students who do not have a good grasp of their first language; their first-hand experience supports research evidence which strongly suggests that lack of knowledge of their first language makes it more difficult for NESB students to learn any other language.

• The chief ingredient of programmes run for NESB students is the commitment, resourcefulness, and hard work of the staff involved in those programmes.

• Chief obstacles to running effective programmes for NESB students were said to include:
  • lack of teacher hours to spend with students;
  • insufficient material resources;
  • insufficient support from ‘outside’ agencies;
  • class sizes which are too big to allow for individualised, or even small group, programmes; and,
  • staff who are unwilling (eg, because of an already heavy workload), or who lack confidence in their ability, to teach NESB students.

• Schools use a variety of assessment methods and procedures to gauge NESB students’ progress — some developed by the school, or individual teachers within the school, and others derived from national tools (eg, the ‘six-year net’) used for all students.

• Assessment can be a problematic area — for example, because it is time-consuming, because of communication difficulties, and/or because of lack of suitable assessment procedures.

• Schools generally found that, for recently arrived NESB students, one-to-one instruction and small group work (either in a ‘withdrawal’ situation and/or within the classroom) worked best and gave a good basis from which to fully integrate the student into the regular classroom situation as soon as possible.

• Strategies for teaching and learning such as peer tutoring and ‘buddying’ were found to be valuable.

• It was agreed that having an ‘ESOL coordinator’ within the school — whose role included: [a] liaising with the principal and senior staff, classroom teachers, NESB students’ families and other community members, and with support agencies outside the school; [b] working directly (including as a mentor) with NESB students; and [c] obtaining appropriate materials — was invaluable.

• Participants in the study stressed the importance of including NESB students’ families in the life of the school because of the positive outcomes this can have on student learning; they also advocated the provision, where possible, of English
language support for NESB parents as this also has positive educational — and social — outcomes for both students and the community.

• Although all respondents were able to identify more strengths than weaknesses of the programmes they ran for their NESB students, they were unanimous in their view that they needed to provide more support for these students in order to better ensure their success in the New Zealand education system.

• Most schools in the study indicated that, due to lack of funding, they were unable to employ staff for a sufficient number of hours each week to cater adequately (as they saw it) for their NESB students.

• Teachers felt that the availability of [an adequate number of] suitable materials for NESB students is an area of ongoing concern.

• Because of resourcing limitations, schools said they often had to make ‘choices’ about who to give extra assistance to. As they could not cater for all NESB students in need, they had to work with the ‘most needy’ and replace those who had made some [but not, in their view, sufficient] progress with newcomers with less facility in English.

• Although teachers with NESB students in their classroom have considerable skills and knowledge to bring to their teaching of these students, they seldom start out with training specifically aimed at meeting the needs of NESB students; most learn this by ‘trial and error’.

• Teachers often feel, at least initially, that they would benefit from specific training in the teaching of NESB students.

• Teachers of NESB students often value support from ‘experts’ from outside the school.

• Support available from ‘outside agencies’ (eg, teacher support services) was highly regarded; however, it was also noted that those who provide the support are too few in number to meet the steadily increasing demand from schools.

• Participation [especially whole school participation] in a professional development contract for assisting NESB students was strongly recommended for staff in any school which caters for NESB students.

• Participants stressed that a reality for New Zealand schools is that of an ongoing and steadily increasing need to provide for NESB students; they felt that this reality needs to be a consideration in the short- and long-term development of policy, training, and resourcing formulas throughout the education sector.
“I think we can all learn to appreciate each other. We don’t necessarily appreciate the other people who live in our world.”

(Reading Recovery teacher, primary school.)