NON-ENGLISH-SPEAKING BACKGROUND STUDENTS: A STUDY OF PROGRAMMES AND SUPPORT IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

Chapter 1
Background to the Study
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Introduction

In 1995 there were approximately 22,000 non-English-speaking background (NESB) students throughout New Zealand whose schools — 560 in all — were receiving English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) assistance in the form of either funding or teacher hours on their behalf.

At the time of the study, new entrant to form 2 NESB students were funded at the rate of $60 per annum and forms 3–7 students at the rate of $69 per annum. Schools with 20 or more NESB students (or 15% of their roll, whichever is the smallest) could apply for extra discretionary teacher hours. In 1995, 128 schools were in receipt of additional full-time equivalent (FTE) hours.

Schools were required to use five broad categories to classify NESB students’ competence in English when lodging applications with the Ministry of Education for ESOL assistance. At the time of the study, the five categories were defined as follows.

- **Category 1**: Cannot understand greetings, simple instructions, questions or statements in English.
- **Category 2**: Able to converse a little in English but has minimal reading and writing skills.
- **Category 3**: Adequate oral English, but needs reading and writing support.
- **Category 4**: Effective oral and written English, but needs subject specific support.
- **Category 5**: Reads, writes, and speaks English competently — needs no support.

In the allocation of funding, Categories 1 and 2 (above) applied at all levels of schooling — that is, new entrants through to form 7 — whereas Category 3 applied only at the forms 1

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1. A brief report by Jacqui Kerslake (1996), entitled *Background Information on Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB) Students who Attracted Discretionary ESOL Resourcing in 1995* provides a breakdown of data on these students according to their geographical location within New Zealand, the category of English language competency into which they were placed for funding application purposes, their school/class level, their country or region of birth, and first language spoken.

2. For an explanation of when the terms ‘ESOL’ and ‘NESB’ (and also ‘ESL’ and ‘NLOE’) apply, please refer to the Glossary of Terms in Appendix 2 of this report (page 300).

3. Discretionary ESOL resourcing has been the subject of review since the fieldwork for this study was carried out: increased ESOL funding (see footnote 1 on page 4 of this report) is expected to become available to schools with NESB students for the 1998 school year; some changes in how and when the funding is applied for and allocated are also expected. As well, there are also to be changes in the criteria used to assess NESB students’ eligibility for funding. For details, please contact the Liaison Officer (ESOL) in the Ministry of Education Management Centre nearest your school.

4. In November 1995 (in time for the February 1996 funding applications), in order to better assist schools in defining the category of need for each of their NESB students, descriptors for Categories 1 to 4 were provided. These descriptors are detailed in Appendix 1 (page 297 following) of this report. As noted in the preceding footnote, however, criteria to assess eligibility are to undergo changes for the 1998 school year.
to 7 levels. Also, schools could receive funding in respect of students who came under Categories 1, 2, and 3 but did not receive funding for students in Categories 4 and 5.

Schools could apply for discretionary ESOL resourcing in February and again in June each year. New students, who arrived in a school after allocations from each of these funding rounds were made, were funded from a reserve pool held by their school’s nearest Ministry of Education Management Centre.

Rationale for the Research

Although, as indicated above, there was some funding provision made for schools with NESB students on their rolls, there was little information available in the literature about what schools in New Zealand do for their NESB students — the sorts of programmes and support that they provide for them, and the resourcing requirements (staffing, materials, time) that are involved in the programmes that are run. It was also found that there was little formally documented material about NESB students in our schools: specifically, the factors which are likely to influence these students’ ability to learn English and to cope well in the New Zealand school system. The following research questions were therefore developed for the study.

The Research Questions

• What factors, in the school’s experience or opinion, influence students’ ability to learn English?
• What criteria do schools use in establishing the category of need for language skills of NESB students?
• How do schools support their NESB students: what programmes do they run and what resources do they use?
• What do schools see as the greatest areas of need for effectively supporting their NESB students?
• Other than the ESOL funding that they receive in the February and June funding rounds, what additional resourcing (whether funding or personnel) do schools direct towards the teaching and learning of NESB students?

How the Study was Conducted

Advice was sought from staff (with responsibility for ESOL) in Ministry of Education Management Centres in Auckland, Lower Hutt, and Christchurch, and in the Education Advisory Service, Auckland regarding possible schools to take part in the study. The decision
to restrict choice of schools to the three broad locations of Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch was made firstly because these are the areas with the highest numbers of NESB students and secondly because of logistical considerations (time and expense) in carrying out the study. Those consulted were asked to nominate schools to take part in the study primarily on the basis of the schools having considerable experience with NESB students and having in place ‘good’ programmes and systems of support for these students. Other criteria that we needed to consider in the final selection of a group of schools to include in the study were that there was a mix of primary, intermediate, and secondary schools, that the schools varied in size and decile ratings, that NESB students enrolled at the included schools made up varying percentages of the schools’ rolls, and that a range of ethnic groups were represented (Pacific Islands, Asian, other groups). Each Management Centre nominated a number of schools which they felt had good programmes and support in place for NESB students. The final selection of schools was made on the basis of getting as wide a spread as possible of the other criteria mentioned above. The final group of schools included six schools (three primary, two intermediate, one secondary) from Auckland, four from Wellington (three primary, one secondary) and four from Christchurch (three primary, one secondary).

All selected schools were contacted by telephone and invited to take part in the study. All of those contacted agreed to participate. Subsequent contact with the schools included advising who we would like to interview during the visit to their school (ie, the principal and/or his or her deputy or other nominee, the ESOL coordinator, one or more teachers with NESB students in their class, a BOT representative, and anyone else — such as a teacher aide or special needs or Reading Recovery teacher — that the school felt was appropriate) and asking them to advise the names of those we would meet with and what times would be most convenient. The visits to schools to carry out the interviews took place in November 1995; a maximum of one day was spent in any one school.

The Schools which Took Part in the Study

A total of 14 schools, located in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, participated in the study. There were nine primary schools, two intermediate, and three secondary schools. The number of NESB students for whom ESOL funding was being received at a particular school ranged from 11 to 208; the proportion of these students on participating schools’ rolls varied from around 15% to around 80%. Some of the schools had mostly Pacific Islands NESB students on their rolls, while other schools’ NESB students were mostly from Asian countries; the remaining schools were catering for NESB students from diverse backgrounds (eg, from Somalia, Iran, Sri Lanka, and from one or more Pacific Island and/or Asian country). Schools in the study were located in communities representing a wide range of socio-economic levels — from those with a high incidence of families on low incomes to those who were reasonably well-off; some schools served ‘mixed’ communities.
Those who Took Part in the Interviews
There were 54 people who were interviewed in the course of the study. They included 15 principals or deputy principals, 13 ESOL coordinators, 18 teachers of classes which included NESB students, two board of trustees representatives, and six who held other positions within the school — for example, Reading Recovery teacher, special needs teacher or coordinator, teacher aide.

The Interview Schedules
Four separate interview schedules were developed for the study: one for principals, one for ESOL coordinators, one for teachers with NESB students in their class (the same interview schedule was also used for teacher aides who worked with NESB students), and one for board of trustees representatives. Although many of the questions included were common to all interview schedules, there were a number of questions specific to particular schedules, depending on the role that the person to be interviewed held in the school in relation to NESB students. The questions included in the interview schedules were compiled after consultation with Ministry of Education staff in National Office and in the Auckland Management Centre and after consulting or meeting with staff (with responsibility for ESOL) of the Education Advisory Service (Auckland), Teacher Advisory Services (Wellington), and the Correspondence School.

The schedule for principals (and/or their deputies or nominees) included questions about whether their school had a statement in its policy document or charter regarding NESB students, what the role of the board of trustees was in determining policy or practice concerning NESB students, what criteria were used to assess students’ competence in English, what factors they considered influence an NESB student’s ability to learn English, what they saw as the role of the school’s ESOL coordinator/teacher, and whether there had been training for teachers working with NESB students in their school during the last five years. There were also questions relating to the estimated cost of providing programmes and support for NESB students, whether the school used voluntary assistance for supporting NESB students, whether additional programmes and support were considered necessary for NESB students at the school and whether additional support was necessary for the teachers of these students, what they considered to be the strengths of their school’s programmes and support for NESB students and why, and what had not worked particularly well, and how this might be addressed.

The questions asked of ESOL coordinators included what they did in their role as ESOL coordinator/teacher, what training they had received in relation to working with NESB students, what background information they gathered on NESB students who were new arrivals at the school, what programmes and support the
The study was an exploratory one, involving a small sample of schools.

The researchers ensured that participants were clear about the purpose of the study by reading the following as part of the introduction to the interview:

‘The main objective is to find out more about the implementation of ESOL programmes and support in schools, and how this is supported administratively and resource-wise. We are visiting 14 schools in total, in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch, carrying out interviews with key people in the school. Your school has been selected as it was named as offering good support to NESB students. The [purpose] of this research is to provide information for policy development and to provide to other schools examples of good practices.’
Using this Report

Note
It is important to keep in mind that this is a small-scale, exploratory study, involving a very small sample of schools. However, it is considered that the information provided by those who participated in the interviews gives a valuable insight into the needs of NESB students and the challenges for schools in addressing and catering for those needs.

As the study is small in scope, it seemed neither useful nor valid to discuss results in terms of the number of respondents who raised particular issues or concerns, described particular programme characteristics that they felt worked well or not so well, and so on. Instead, extensive use of quotes5 — participants’ actual comments — has been made throughout the report to illustrate the main points and issues that we felt emerged from the information provided during visits to the participating schools. Some documents outlining particular schools’ overall philosophy and/or specific policies in relation to NESB students, as well as some course outlines and ideas for working with NESB students, have also been included in various places in the report to illustrate some of the points made.

Before presenting results from the schools visited, a brief review of some relevant literature on aspects of the teaching and learning of NESB students is presented in the section which follows. The review of literature is followed by a brief discussion of ‘Who are NESB students?’

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5 Technical note: Use of square brackets – [ ... ] – within quotes indicate that the words contained within the brackets have been added by us, the authors of the report, either to complete the sentence (a characteristic of conversational speech is that, often, the speaker does not fully complete what he/she is saying, leaving it to the listener to ‘fill in the blanks’) or to clarify the meaning (from information supplied in the course of the interview as a whole), as appropriate. The use of round brackets – ( ...) – within the quotes indicates that the speaker (i.e., the person interviewed) has added something parenthetically. Other than the text added in square brackets for clarification purposes/ease of reading, the quotes represent verbatim responses from those who took part in the study.