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## Neoliberalism and the barriers in inclusive education

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Tensions exist between providing inclusive education in mainstream classrooms and market-driven neoliberal values such as academic success and school ranking. These values impinge on teachers' responsibilities to teach students with disabilities. Schools are ranked based on students' performance in national examinations and schools sometimes use unscrupulous methods to achieve good results. In a culture that ranks schools based on test results, the schools themselves find it hard to embrace the idea of inclusion and some will use a variety of means to exclude students with disabilities to maintain their high rating. In this article we explore how some key tenets of neoliberalism in inclusive education, such as testing mechanisms to leverage accountability and improvement, inter-school competition, marketisation of education and parental choice, among others, affect the provision of education to students with disabilities in Kenya. We highlight how neoliberalism has affected inclusive education in Kenya and explain how hegemonic neoliberal culture has changed the way schools operate and how teachers teach. We also show how neoliberal culture in schools helps exclude students who are different from the norm.

**Keywords:** inclusive education; Kenya; marketised teacher; neoliberalism; performativity; standardised curriculum; testing regimes

### Introduction

Neoliberalism is not limited to the global North and has affected all areas of life in Kenya, as well as in the rest of the world, in education, health, Indigenous knowledges and practices, disability and welfare services. Its effect on education is widespread, from primary and high schools (Graham, 2016), early childhood education (Sims, 2017; Sims, Alexander, Nislin, Pedey, Tausere-Tiko & Sajaniemi, 2018; Sims & Waniganayake, 2015) and inclusive education (Stangvik, 2014) to colleges and universities (Connell, 2013, 2019; Johnson & Hirt, 2011; Sims, 2019). The global North is associated with colonising nations that are responsible for the "dominant economy of knowledge" (Connell, 2019:93). The global South, which is not necessarily or always geographically south, is associated with colonised groups (Connell, 2019:93). Some countries in the geographic North that are part of the global South include Haiti, Nepal and Afghanistan, while countries in the geographic South that are situated in the global North include South Africa and Chile.

Neoliberalism is defined as "a theory of political practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private properties, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005:2). Neoliberalism places the responsibility for the well-being of societies onto communities, even though these communities may not understand that they have these responsibilities. Again, according to Harvey (2005:3), neoliberalism "has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world."

Neoliberalism can be described as a discourse. Discourse combines power and knowledge, so that "those who have power have control of what is known and the way it is known, and those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not" (Ashcroft, 2000:72). Neoliberalism as a discourse is a way for the hegemonic North to maintain power over the South. Britzman (2003:251) points out that "discourses authorise what can and cannot be said; they produce relations of power and communities of consent and dissent." In the case of inclusive education in Kenya, power and control over inclusive education policy sits with the global North. The hegemonic project is to promote programmes and policies conceived in the global North to the global South.

The market strategy of neoliberalism is responsible for creating a web of groups that include philanthropies, think tanks, academic researchers, advocacy groups and policy entrepreneurs. "Policy entrepreneurs" (Ball, 2012:62) sell policies to countries like Kenya, investing time and effort to influence policy change for personal gain (Ball, 2012; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). Policies borrowed from the North are not easy to enact because those who promote or sell them want to create a dependency on resources and services. Ball (2012:62) concludes that policy entrepreneurs are "paternalistic, neo-colonialists dispensing Western ways of thinking, naming and solving the problems of post-colonial societies and ultimately opening up new forms of exploitation and dependency in the form of profit for multi-national edu-business." According to Ball (2012), some of the companies that are in the business of selling and sometimes writing policies for the countries of the South include Cambridge Education, Pearson Education, Nord Anglia and Price Waterhouse Coopers. Some of these companies, Pearson, for example, not only sell policies and expertise but are also the main suppliers of textbooks.

The Kenyan education system is experiencing neoliberal practices that disproportionately affect students with disabilities than those without disabilities. Public and private schools are reluctant to enrol students with disabilities because they may affect the school's ranking if they do not perform well in state examinations. Private schools want to remain competitive in their private school league tables and, therefore, discourage parents from enrolling their children with disabilities in their schools. Kenya advertises national examination results in local newspapers (*Newsblaze*, 2018), which inadvertently serve as a form of advertisement for private schools. As a result, unscrupulous methods are sometimes used to cheat in exams to lift schools' rankings (Iraxi, 2014).

School rankings have led to performativity in schools in Kenya which Ball (2017:57) defines as a "culture or a system of terror that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change." Teachers' performance is used to measure their value and their quality. Their worth is measured by the students' performance in standardised examinations. Teachers are pushed to produce good results and, therefore, do not spend time using differentiation to support students with disabilities.

#### Literature Review

With the literature review we aim to present existing information on the effect of neoliberalism on inclusive education globally and more specifically, in Kenya. Neoliberalism is defined as "a theory of political practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private properties, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey, 2005:2). The effects of Neoliberalism are felt in all levels of education, from primary and high schools (Graham, 2016) to colleges and universities (Connell, 2013, 2019; Johnson & Hirt, 2011); and early childhood education (Sims, 2019). Some key tenets of neoliberalism in education are the use of testing mechanisms to leverage accountability and improvement, professional development of teachers usually provided by consultancy companies, inter-school competition, marketisation of education and parental choice. They are present in the Kenyan context and influence inclusive education.

While the aim of inclusion is to ensure the enrolment and participation of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms regardless of their level of participation, the goals and values of neoliberalism are guided by accountability and testing and only the best are valued (Connell, 2013). Stakeholders, teachers, principals and parents agree that implementing an inclusive education policy is complex, but neoliberalism

promotes exclusion of students who are different, as Slee and Allan (2001:179) point out:

There is the tendency to speak in one breath about inclusive education but fail to acknowledge the policy context that presses us relentlessly towards educational exclusion in the other. Here we refer to marketization of schooling, national curriculum, ... standardized testing; published league tables [and] a pernicious regime of inspection.

To maintain the façade of excellent schools, students with disabilities are excluded from mainstream classrooms in various ways. Below I discuss some neoliberal practices and their effects on students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

#### Testing regimes

A neoliberal culture favours testing regimes for all students, including students with disabilities, for school ranking purposes. Consequently, schools find it increasingly difficult to negotiate the tensions between neoliberal policies and the inclusion of students with disabilities. In neoliberal structures, "schools and colleges are redefined as firms and forced to compete; students are defined as competitive individuals" (Connell, 2012:681). Neoliberalism shapes students' and teachers' lived experiences in schools and schools find it hard to embrace the idea of inclusion in a culture that promotes ranking of schools based on students' test results. Schools thus resort to unorthodox ways of excluding students with disabilities. According to Razer, Friedman and Warshofsky (2013:1153), "[t]he emphasis on standardised testing generated exclusionary teaching practices such as ability grouping, a competitive atmosphere, and a uniform standard for judging the worthiness of a particular child."

In a neoliberal culture, students are pitched against each other as competitors and successful students are rewarded for high examination scores. At a prize giving ceremony in a Western Kenya school, Elder and Foley (2015) noticed the emphasis on passing standardised tests, an achievement perceived to result in a well-paying job and a successful life. In this way, neoliberalism has shifted the focus of Kenyan inclusive education from the Indigenous perspective which supports the child to be a better member of society to passing examinations.

Neoliberalism positions education as a private good over a public good (Harvey, 2005) and students are made "to compete against each other on a curriculum that is largely Western" (Elder & Foley, 2015:742). Students who perform well in examinations are, therefore, the ones who have the best chance of success in a market economy dictated by neoliberal culture.

However, testing regimes have many unintended consequences. In a US study, Styron and Styron (2012) found that testing regimes

fostered unethical practices, superficial teaching of disconnected skills and blatant cheating. Providing students with exam answers is an issue that the Kenyan government has been trying to manage for many years. Stealing examinations to give a school an advantage (Wachiuri, Shisha, Nonglait & Kimathi, 2017) is another product of the performativity and testing regimes created by neoliberal culture.

#### *Performativity*

Added to testing regimes is the performativity pressure on teachers and schools, that is, evidence-based reporting to measure and judge the performance of both teachers and schools. Ball (2017:57) defines performativity as a “culture or a system of terror that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change.” Outcome measures include exam and test results and student retention while teacher performance is used to measure their quality or value. Schools’ performances are compared in league tables, results are published in newspapers, and appraisals and quality assurance are conducted to measure outcomes.

In her research in Kenya, Maina (1998) found that teachers were so scared of not performing as required that they did not question teaching to the test. The teachers said, “If we don’t teach what the examination council wants us to teach, our students will fail. And then we cannot explain such failure to the community, administration and even to ourselves” (Maina, 1998:81).

A performativity culture encourages teachers to teach “to the middle” and spend little or no time differentiating the curriculum because they have to complete the syllabus and get students to a position where they can pass the standardised tests. According to Ball (2003:224), teachers use “fabrications” to show that they are meeting performance criteria or the intended outcomes or, as Dworkin (2005:171) said, they “game the system” and use the language of accountability to demonstrate that they are meeting the performative standards. Booher-Jennings (2006) explains a strategy used by teachers referred to as rationing education or education triage, where teachers focus their attention on students who are just below the pass score to help them pass the examinations.

Students with disabilities are also excluded through being kept in a lower grade before testing, prevented from sitting examinations or being forced to repeat a grade, all to avoid being counted in the examination cohort (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Darling-Hammond adds that students who were unlikely to pass examinations would be kept back several times and then encouraged to drop out. Situations where students with disabilities drop out and are not followed up by the school can be seen as another form of exclusion. Despite primary

schooling being compulsory in Kenya, students can and do drop out without completing that level and there is little follow-up (Inoue, Gropello, Taylor & Gresham, 2015). Inoue et al. (2015) add that poorly performing students drop out through a lack of academic remedial support, which encourages dropping-out and is a clear example of excluding those who are different.

#### *Standardised curriculum*

In a neoliberal education culture, testing regimes are closely linked to the curriculum. However, the curriculum usually promotes testing regimes that are unsuited to students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. It promotes the teaching of core subjects, such as mathematics and English, rather than areas that are not tested, such as music, art and physical education (Styron & Styron, 2012), which may be subjects in which students with disabilities excel. The curriculum also does not allow for differentiation, because teachers have to teach to the test (Connell, 2013), hence the negative effect on students with disabilities. Graham (2016:570) says that “[t]he concept of the ‘average’ student informs curriculum development and planning” because teachers are under pressure to teach the prescribed curriculum and have little or no time to respond to the educational needs of students with disabilities. Connell (2012:682) argues that for large-scale testing to occur, the curriculum needs to be standardised and this “hoists curricular decision making out of local settings and locates it in centres of social power.”

Narrowing the curriculum to only what is tested is another form of exclusion of students with disabilities. Stangvik (2014) found in New Zealand that although parents wanted their children with disabilities included in mainstream classrooms, they felt that the curriculum did not suit them.

The standardised curriculum of neoliberal education culture does not suit children with disabilities, and diversity in the classroom is given little consideration. Giroux (2013:462) states that “[t]he notion that students come from different histories and embody different experiences, linguistic practices, cultures, and talents is strategically ignored within the logic and accountability of management pedagogy theory.”

#### *Language*

Neoliberal language has infiltrated all spheres of schooling, much of it borrowed from finance and economics. Giroux (Sardoč, 2018:102) argues that neoliberalism appropriates words from economics and commerce such that “freedom” means “freedom to consume” while “equity of opportunity” means “engaging in ruthless forms of competition” and concludes that “neoliberalism has become one of the most pervasive and dangerous ideologies of the twenty-first century.” Business

terms, for example, audit, accountability and performance, have also been adopted by education institutions (Ball, 2012; Connell, 2013), while MacDonald-Vemic and Portelli (2020) found teachers using words such as maximising student success and spoke of education as human business.

Teachers now use what Luks (2017:87) refers to as “grandiose phrasings, plastic words and misplaced metaphors” that are empty and that lead to a “perversion of the truth.” These neoliberal terms are detached from the reality in the classrooms, a situation that teachers understand all too well and inhibit a good understanding of the inclusive education policy, the classroom realities and the solutions to the problems.

#### *School choice*

In the neoliberal education market, school choice is closely linked to examination results and school league tables. As stated above, some parents whose children have no disabilities (and some teachers) consider students with disabilities a liability because their performance negatively affects the school ranking. Ranking is also used to advertise private schools, which I argue matches the neoliberal aim of outsourcing education to private providers. In Kenya, as in many other countries, schools are ranked based on students’ performance in national or state examinations and, as mentioned earlier, schools use unscrupulous methods, such as cheating in examinations, to lift their rankings (Iraxi, 2014). The advertising of national examination results in Kenya (*Newsblaze*, 2018) is targeted at parents who, in a neoliberal world, are regarded as consumers with the power to choose their children’s schools. Since parents want a school that will give their children the best outcome, they buy the argument presented by the league tables that the top schools are the best.

Due to the competition among schools, private schools are reluctant to enrol students with disabilities and sometimes advise parents to enrol them in public schools. Clark, Dyson, Millward and Robson (1999) found schools in England that were committed to inclusive education principles but felt that including students with disabilities made them less attractive in the marketplace.

#### *Funding*

Neoliberal policies have impacted funding of students with disabilities in mainstream schools. Resource allocation for inclusive education in neoliberal policies is generally based on diagnosis (Stangvik, 2014). For example, in New South Wales, Australia, students in special education schools and units receive more funding than students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms (Graham, 2016) while Stangvik (2014) found that parents of children with disabilities in New Zealand thought that their educational funding was not

adequate. Giroux and Giroux (2006:27) explain that to improve under-funded schools in the United States of America (USA), the *No Child Left Behind* policy “places high priority on accountability, tying what little federal monies schools receive to improved test performance” and thus indicating that funding is linked to student performance, an approach likely to disadvantage students with disabilities. These schools have, therefore, had to find other sources of income to support these students.

Another issue is how agencies from the global North provide funding to countries of the global South to influence in which way services are developed and implemented there. Funding bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, from which many of these development and implementation policies originate, enforce their own agendas (Slee, 2013). They place conditions on their loans to the recipient countries to effect neoliberal changes in the targeted sector, be it education, health or the economy. These conditions address ways of life that reflect Western values but do not necessarily improve peoples’ lives. One example is the Structural Adjustment Program that forced countries including Kenya to reduce public sector spending and encourage private investment (Slee, 2013). Funding bodies spend most of the funds they give in aid on expatriates and international consultants while only a small proportion goes to the intended project, a practice aptly known in Papua New Guinea as “boomerang aid” (Slee, 2013:898). They fail to understand the complexity of imposing policies conceived in the global North on the global South where the context is very different from their own and of which they have no lived experience. They fail to consult with the local community that will implement the policies and, therefore, do not prioritise Indigenous people, their knowledges, values, practices and relationships; nor do they understand the effect that colonisation has had and continues to have on the people. The funding bodies and expatriates ignore how their actions can perpetuate the hegemonic neo-colonial oppression of the global South and, in pursuit of neoliberal policies of globalisation, discard Indigenous people’s values and practices which, if facilitated, would help meet some of the shortfalls in school resourcing, such as family support.

#### *Marketised teachers in the global education business*

Teachers worldwide are part of the neoliberal education market economy. They are consumers of professional development (PD) workshops and materials. As neoliberal subjects, they are regularly pushed (generally through requirements for ongoing PD) to improve their professional performance (Ball, 2015) to be marketable to their

employers. Sims (2019:26) explains this as “the discourse of continuous improvement [that] positions staff as though they never perform their jobs correctly, always needing to improve something about their performance, thus creating an image of imperfection.”

In countries like Kenya, teachers themselves have to pay for retraining, to attend PD workshops to meet professional standards or to improve their skills (Freeman, O'Malley & Eveleigh, 2014:79). This is in contrast to an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study in which “Australian teachers reported that 75 per cent of PD activities undertaken were not self-funded” (Freeman et al., 2014:79).

Another effect of neoliberal culture is that teachers are de-professionalised. They are expected to uphold the neoliberal values and practices of teaching to the test and to abide by the set standards and curriculum without critiquing them or making changes. However, this, according to Giroux (2013:461), makes them “objects of educational reforms that reduce them to the status of high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life.”

Teachers are further de-professionalised by the competitive neoliberal work culture that makes them compete against each other to produce better results. This competitiveness negates the teachers' ethics of autonomy, collegiality and public service that have traditionally governed their sense of professionalism (Ball, 2003; Holloway & Brass, 2018) and tends to reduce collegiality, so that they focus more on their own achievements than on supporting and learning from each other.

Teachers are not only buyers in the education market economy, they are also expected to be part of the sales team. Giroux (2013) argues that teachers have become salespeople who sell knowledge and skills. They are required to be team players in selling their school's product, education and knowledge, and the result of their efforts as salespeople is judged on good exam results. Everyone in the education world is selling or buying. There are big players and small players; the OECD, for example, “derives a significant income stream from its testing services – countries have to pay to participate” (Ball, 2015:300). Both small and large players aim to reach bigger markets.

### Research Problem

In this article I explore how performativity is experienced by teachers working in inclusive classrooms in Kenya. I aim to answer the following question: What is the effect of performativity on inclusive education in Kenya?

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework employed in the study reported on here was performativity. According to Ball (2003:216), performativity is a form of regulation used to measure teachers' productivity and teaching quality. Performativity is based on “the premise that high-performing teachers will produce high-performing students and therefore a globally competitive economy” (Appel, 2020:302). Performativity, therefore, determines what teachers teach and how they teach. Schools are ranked based on the performance of students in standardised examinations and the results are published in league tables. As a result, performativity results in teachers losing control of their autonomy (Sachs, 2016), stifling creativity (Appel, 2020) and lacking the will and time to differentiate learning for students with disabilities because the bureaucratic school managers want good examination results.

### Methodology

This article is drawn from a larger study in which teachers' use of inclusive education strategies in mainstream schools in Kenya were explored. A case study format was adopted for this study and the schools and teachers were purposefully sampled. Purposeful sampling, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), allows the researcher to select a sample that can provide the most information. The study took place in four schools in central Kenya and was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 was conducted in 2016. On returning to Australia, and discussing my results with my supervisors, they suggested that it would be prudent to investigate Indigenous methodologies and go back to the field and re-interview the same participants as were interviewed in Phase 1 to identify any differences in responses when interviewed using different lenses. Phase 2 was conducted in 2018 and the interviews were conducted using a Gikūyū framework. The Gikūyū framework is conversational and takes the form of storytelling.

Two schools were in an urban neighbourhood while the other two were in a rural area. In Phase 1, two teachers and one school principal were selected from each of the four schools making a total of eight teachers and four principals. The teachers were selected because they had students with disabilities in their classrooms. The teachers and principals were invited to participate in the research and were interviewed. Observations of two lessons per teacher were also carried out in Phase 1.

In Phase 2, I collected data in the same schools as in Phase 1. Of the original eight teachers interviewed in Phase 1, only five teachers were available for Phase 2 interviews as some had left their stations. These teachers were again

“interviewed”, but using Gīkūyū discussion protocols which included allowing the teachers to tell their stories about the effect of neoliberal practices on inclusive education.

#### Data Collection

Teachers were interviewed in Phase 1 using Western protocols and in Phase 2 using Gīkūyū discussion protocols. The purpose of Phase 1 was to determine how teachers were implementing the inclusive education policy and which inclusive instructional strategies they were using to support students with disabilities in the classroom. The purpose of Phase 2 was to determine which Gīkūyū knowledges, values and practices were used to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom and how they were used. In Gīkūyū culture, as in many other Indigenous cultures, the interview method is a foreign concept and is not used in either group or one-on-one communication. Instead, people hold discussions, conversations or tell stories (Kovach, 2009). Often, people sit in a circle to discuss matters. Considering this, I guided the discussion by asking questions and allowed the participants to tell their stories. I avoided interrupting the flow of the story to ask the next question on the storytelling checklist.

#### Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of New England, New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Before the interview sessions, each teacher was provided with an information sheet about the study and was requested to sign the consent form. They were advised that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

#### Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify themes. Braun and Clarke (2006:86) explain that a “thematic analysis involves the searching across a data set, be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts to find repeated patterns of meaning.” Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed and translated. Notes made after the interview sessions were used to make sense of the context and content. After transcribing and translating, I re-read the interviews and coded them manually. Reading through interviews, transcribing and translating them provided deeper insight into teachers’ lived experiences of neoliberal practices in inclusive education. Names of participants used in this article are pseudonyms.

#### Results and Discussion

The findings of the study show that teachers and principals faced accountability pressures from the Ministry of Education to produce good results. They also felt that their performance as teachers

was measured by how students performed in examination results. The themes that emerged from the study include:

- 1) Standardised testing resulting in exclusion of students with disabilities
- 2) Lack of differentiation: teaching to the middle
- 3) Dropping out and keeping students with disabilities back
- 4) Top-down management
- 5) Professional Development

#### Standardised Testing Resulting in Exclusion of Students with Disabilities

Standardised testing results in practices that exclude some students, such as students with disabilities. The teachers said that by including students with disabilities in their classrooms their schools were disadvantaged because the performance of these students affected school ranking. As a result, schools would often prevent students with disabilities from participating in these examinations, hence excluding them. Principal Maina said that students who were struggling were advised to repeat classes: “*Teachers were advising that the child should go back or repeat*” (Principal Maina, 7/7/2019). She said this happened often.

Another form of exclusion was to enrol students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms into a special education unit. Maina explained that although students with disabilities might receive instruction in the mainstream classroom in the name of inclusion, their reports were produced in the special education class, a way of making them not count in the test scores. She said, “*They normally get reports. There is a file for them in the special unit*” (Principal Maina, 7/7/2015).

Teachers also said that national exam results were compared in league tables and students with disabilities affected the performance of the school negatively. Wangūi said that she would like to see all students with disabilities kept in special education classes, because her performance was affected by having such students in her class. She said: “*I have five who have disabilities also. I find that this affects my teaching performance*” (Teacher Wangūi, 14/7/2015).

#### Lack of Differentiation: Teaching to the Middle

Teachers interviewed for this study said they were teaching “to the middle”, meaning that they applied their focus to those students who did not need much help. As Wambūi explained, “*I put them in ability groups, there is no need to group them together with those who do not have the disability*” (Teacher Wambūi, 14/7/2015). In a sense, the teachers were allocating their attention to those students who were likely to demonstrate a return on investment by passing the tests. Students who were least likely to pass the tests were thus regarded by the teachers as an unfair impost.

### Dropping Out and Keeping Students with Disabilities Back

Keeping students back and then allowing them to drop out was, according to the teachers, a common practice and stemmed from the requirement for all students, including those with disabilities, to sit for the same examination. The teachers said that some students dropped out or repeated a class several times. Teacher Wangarī described how some students would repeat classes (to keep them from sitting for the examinations) and then drop out just before the examinations.

According to both teachers and principals, there was also parental pressure to withdraw students with disabilities from mainstream classrooms. Principal Wamūyū explained that sometimes parents of students without disabilities demanded that the school exclude a child with disabilities because they were disruptive in the classroom. She explained that some parents would come to her and say, “*We don’t want our children going to Standard 2 with that boy [with disability], call the mother and let the mother withdraw this child*” (Principal Wamūyū, 15/7/2015).

The teachers and principals who were interviewed confirmed that private schools were reluctant to enrol students with disabilities and encouraged parents to seek enrolment for their children with disabilities in public schools. Principal Wanjiku explained that a student came to her school because a private school refused to accept her because of her disability. She said: “*She came from a private school. They couldn’t have her because she had a disability*” (Teacher Wanjiku, 7/7/2019).

### Top-down Management Style

Another factor mentioned by teachers was that the curriculum was administered top-down. They received it from the policy makers and were expected not to alter it. As teacher Wanjikū said: “*The curriculum ... is the work of curriculum developers*” (Teacher Wanjikū, 7/7/2015). Teachers expressed feeling helpless in the face of neoliberal, market-driven standards and powerless to make any adjustments to the curriculum. Principal Wambura was frustrated that neither teachers nor principals had input in curriculum implementation, saying that “[t]he policy makers just make policies and they do not include implementers, the people at the grassroots” (Principal Wambura, 8/7/2015). The teachers and principals did talk about accountability and meeting targets, which showed they had accepted the language of neoliberalism. For example: “*We have records of these integrated ones, records of their performance*” (Principal Wamūyū, 15/7/2015).

### Funding for Students with Disabilities

Government funding for students in inclusive classrooms as well as in special education units and

schools was minimal and this was confirmed when the participants in this research said that funding for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms was inadequate. They did not understand the neoliberal agenda in schools and blamed the lack of funding on the *Free Primary Education* policy that caused enrolments to increase to unmanageable levels. For example, principal Mwai said: “*Our enrolment is high ... we lack funds to implement inclusive education.*”

### Professional Development

Participants said that teachers were expected to attend PD courses to improve their performance, but PD funding was not available for mainstream teachers expected to include students with disabilities in their classes. Principal Mwai explained that the PD provided by the Ministry of Education was only for teachers working in special education units while principal Maina explained that those who wanted to acquire special education qualifications had to meet their own costs for professional learning, a diploma or degree. Principal Maina said: “*We normally have in-service education training (IN-SET) conducted by the Autism Society of Kenya*” (Principal Maina, 7/7/2015). None of the mainstream teachers I interviewed admitted to attending the seminars/workshops to improve their inclusive education strategies. Thus, it appears that while PD was available for some teachers in relation to some elements of inclusion, it was not universally available for teachers in mainstream settings. The mainstream teachers who wished to upskill through online services had to pay for their own internet services.

### Conclusion

In this article I explore the tensions that exist in including students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms in the face of neoliberal policies whose tenets act against the goals of inclusion.

Neoliberal discourse claims that every child should be educated so that they can be responsible for their own well-being. However, teachers find it hard to practice inclusion because of conflicting neoliberal demands. As discussed above, neoliberal practices make it difficult for teachers to teach to the strengths of each individual child, particularly those students with disabilities who require additional and/or different support to enable their participation in classroom activities. The teacher’s role in neoliberal cultures is reduced to managing and enacting a set curriculum rather than adjusting that curriculum to meet the needs of the diverse students in the classroom (Giroux, 2013:461). Thus, teachers are operating more as technicians, implementing pre-determined learning opportunities, rather than structuring learning

around the knowledge brought into the classroom by each student (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005).

Instead of the current system of measuring success only by the passing of examinations, a more appropriate way of measuring success for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms would be to provide them with an education that was just, included Indigenous knowledge and prepared them for life, not just for the labour market. The current system based on neoliberal ways produces only the “Matthew effect” (Connell, 2019:111): “For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away” (Matthew 13:12). In other words, those students who are doing well in class receive most of the teacher’s attention while the students with disabilities continue to be disadvantaged.

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- i. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
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