

# Addressing the Challenge of Equity in Education

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# An unnamed NZ Classroom



THE ENGINE  
OF THE NEW  
NEW ZEALAND







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# Christchurch Girls' High School

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THE ENGINE  
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If some of our grandparents and great grandparents were able to see New Zealand classrooms today, what do you think would be the greatest difference that they would notice?





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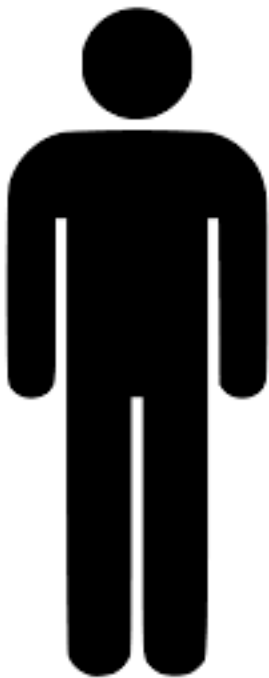
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- Diversity...the difference between people in relation to personal and social circumstances and/or identity for example:
  - gender,
  - ethnicity,
  - socio-economic background,
  - religion,
  - sexual orientation and so forth.

“A person is not ‘diverse’ – referring to people as diverse is a code for someone who is thought to be in a non-dominant group”.

Diversity is a relational concept

The notion of diversity is captured within the interrelationships between people and the way that they perceive themselves in relation to others

## What we are realising is that ...

- Schools were never designed for everyone...for diversity. They were originally designed for a particular group of students. The students for whom the construct of ‘school’ was not designed for are not doing so well...

Inequity



# Equity and Inequity

Our traditional education systems are considerably inequitable - student success is dependent on their inherited circumstances such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender disability etc...

# Educational Equity in Aotearoa

New Zealand has one of the most unequal education systems in the world. UNICEF's annual innocent Report Card (4) ranked New Zealand 33 and of 38 OECD countries in terms of educational equality (UNICEF, 2018)

- New Zealand's overall school dropout rate is one of the highest in the world. More than half early leavers are Maori and twice the number of boys leave early than girls (Duff, 2013)



- 75% of families and 70% of professionals said that classroom teachers do not have the confidence, skills knowledge or support to teach disabled students well
- 72% of professionals and 70% of families report difficulties accessing specialist supports such as speech language therapy
- 50% of professionals say they send disabled children home for part of the day because of insufficient teacher aide support
- 40% of families report their disabled child is excluded from participating in usual classroom

Source: <http://www.ihc.org.nz/campaigns/education-complaint/>





- “Compared with children whose families had incomes of at least twice the poverty-line level during their early childhood, children from poor backgrounds complete two fewer years of schooling...” (Duncan and Magnuson, 2013, p.16)



## Anecdotal evidence suggests poverty keeps children out of school:

- Girls not going to school when they are menstruating
- Children not going to school if there is no money or food for lunch
- Children not going to school because they are required to assist with child minding duties
- Children not going to school as they only have one uniform and it is dirty/wet



## A recent NZ Herald Investigation:

“An analysis of the opportunities at decile 1 and decile 10 show vast disparities - where at 1, only a quarter of children could afford a school camp, while at the other, large groups of children were taking overseas trips. Research showed high-decile schools were more likely to have quality buildings, a wide range of extra-curricular activities, a wealth of IT and experienced, stable, staffing. They have the ability to raise enough funds to have \$1000 more per child than low decile schools, despite targeted funding” (NZ Herald 2015)

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- The long term social and financial costs of educational failure are high – those without skills generate higher costs for health, income support, child welfare and security (OECD, 2012)
- Therefore, ensuring that all people have a quality education and are able to achieve their educational potential is critically important both socially and economically. It is also critically important from a social justice perspective

Of course, the elephant in the room is that we live in an unequal society and our education system is situated in that society



## Salvation Army “State of the Nation Report” (2021)

- General disparities between Māori and non-Māori have not improved
- Increased food insecurity
- Growing numbers on the social housing register
- Number of children in benefit households increased by more than 23,000 during 2020
- Financial hardship worsened

(Salvation Army, 2021)

And during this time the richest citizens in Aotearoa became richer and few people held more of the countries income

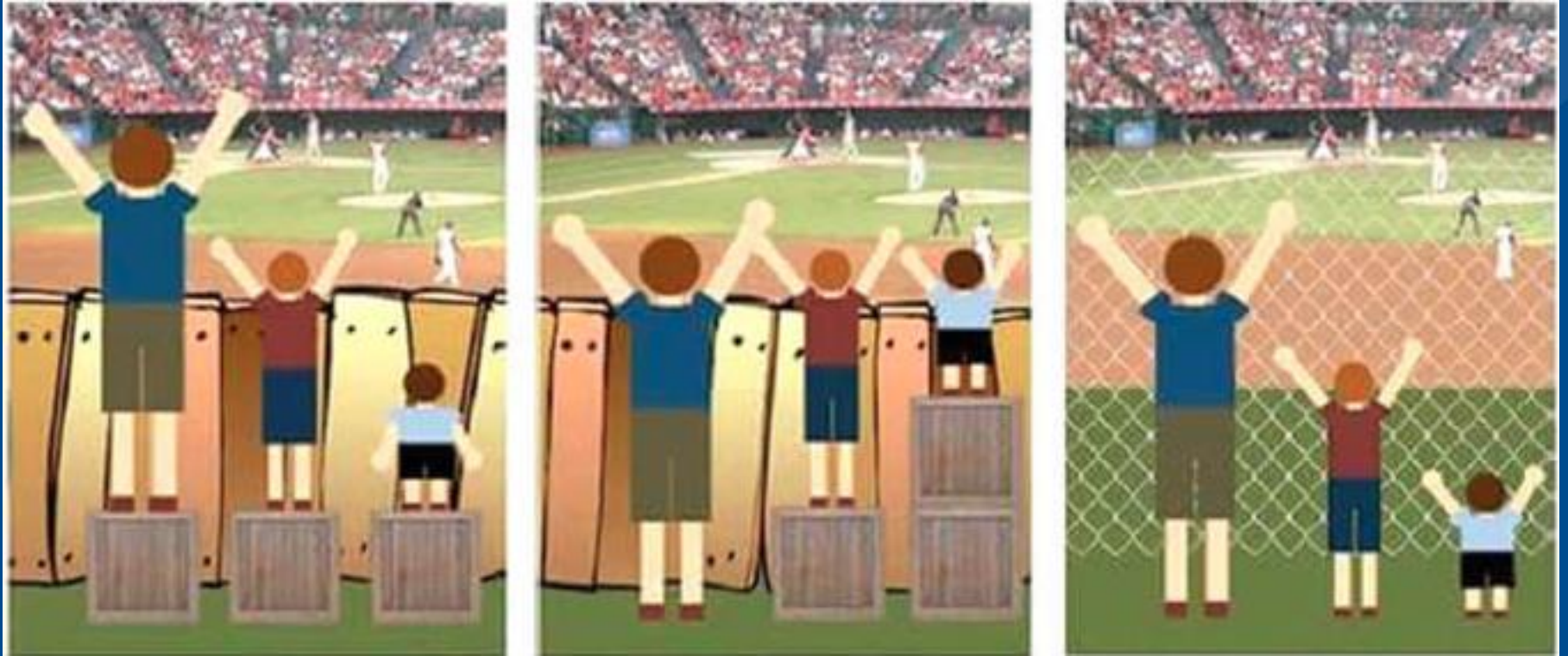


## Why are unequal societies so destructive?

- *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always do Better*
- Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZ7LzE3u7Bw>



Equity in education can be understood as education systems where there are no obstacles for a learner based on their personal and social circumstances, identities abilities/disabilities, sexuality, religion or ethnic origin and socio-economic background and where there is an emphasis on fairness and the equal importance and worth of all learners (UNESCO, 2017)





- Reform of the education system AND changing ourselves as teachers, and school leaders (Slee, 2011).

LEO TOLSTOY

Everyone thinks of  
changing the world,  
but no one thinks of  
changing himself...

To achieve equitable education systems, we  
need to understand inequity – what supports  
inequity in education?

# What supports inequity in education?

**Deficising and pathologising paradigms  
associated with diversity and unique  
differences**

- Historically particularly in relation to those students who have historically (and still are) been marginalised or excluded from and within education, we have tended to focus on deficits...

# Deficit-based Approach

- Focus on what is wrong

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- Leads to labelling
- Ignores potential
- Looks for blame



"What we focus on becomes our reality. If we focus on what is wrong or what is missing, we tend to see everything through that filter or frame"

Anon

# TEST YOUR AWARENESS



- There is an extensive body of research that shows how teachers expectations can influence student performance.
  - Added to this is that students can internalise teachers' expectations overtime and this internalisation determines the student's self concept and motivation (Bamburg, 1994)

An alternative to.....

**deficising and pathologising paradigms  
associated with diversity and unique  
differences**

**STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACHES**

- A strength-based approach emphasises an individuals existing strengths, capabilities and resources.
- Those who work from a strength-based approach believe all students have strengths and resources



- Take a moment to remember and think about a time when someone really believed in you and saw your strengths (a teacher, a friend, a family member). How did this affect you?
- Take a moment to remember and think about a time when someone did not believe in you and saw only your weaknesses (a teacher, a friend, a family member). How did this affect you?

# What supports inequity in education?

- Deficising and pathologising paradigms associated with diversity and unique differences
- **Indifference to inequity and exclusion**

An alternative to.....

- **Indifference to inequity and exclusion**

# What supports inequity in education?

- Deficising and pathologising paradigms associated with diversity and unique differences
- Indifference to inequity
- **Silencing of student and their whanau voice**

An alternative to.....

- **Silencing of student and their whanau voice**

# What supports inequity in education?

- Deficising and pathologising paradigms associated with diversity and unique differences
- Indifference to inequity
- Silencing of student voice
- **Bias and Stereotypes (leading to discrimination)**



# Bias

- “...a tendency, inclination or prejudice toward or against something or someone...it is often characterised as stereotypes about people based on the group wot which they belong and/or based on an immutable physical characteristic they possess such as their gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation”. ( Psychology Today, 2022. p.1)

## Effects of stereotyping and unconscious bias...

- Many studies have shown the negative effects of unconscious bias on outcomes for groups of people.....

An alternative to.....

- **Bias and Stereotypes (leading to discrimination)**

# Unconscious Bias - Stereotypes

- Librarians are...

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- Librarians are...
- Australians are...
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- Rugby players are...
- Prostitutes are...

# Unconscious Bias - Stereotypes

- Librarians are...
- University Professors are...
- Old people are...
- Accountants are...
- Rugby players are...
- Prostitutes are...
- Teenage boys are...

# What supports inequity in education?

- Deficising and pathologising paradigms associated with diversity and unique differences
- Indifference to inequity
- Silencing of student voice
- Bias and Stereotypes (leading to discrimination)
- **Some political decisions and policies**

An alternative to.....

- **Some Political decisions and policies**

- What is our understanding of equity and inequity in education?
- What are those factors that are reinforcing inequitable education systems and how can we work to eliminate these?
- Have we examined ourselves? What bias do we hold and how does this affect our work as teachers and educational professionals?
- Do I understand the idea of ‘rights’ and ‘children’s rights? How do I work to ensure that children’s rights are an integral part of my e.g. Children’s voice