

THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR



THE ACE FORUM FOR POLICY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION

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Getting the balance right

Making equity in education a national issue

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CONNECTING FOR CHANGE: ACE PROJECTS



04

WIDENING THE PLAYING FIELD



14

BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF TEACHERS



18

PUTTING THE NEEDS OF ALL STUDENTS FIRST 21

The outcome of the federal government's Review of Funding for Schooling is a high stakes issue for the entire sector.

THE BEST START TO LIFE 25

Children's readiness and later success at school is not only influenced by their own abilities but also by the readiness of the school, family and community.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE 03

ACE EVENTS 11

ACE CONFERENCE 12

SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH 27

ACE DIRECTORY 31

Tackling the complex issues

Dr Lindsay Connors AM, FACE, ACE National President

The weeks are now racing by as we head towards the ACE 2011 National Conference on 13-15 July in Sydney on the theme of 'Equity in Education: Connecting for Change'. The ACE leadership is very busy with planning, which is now well advanced.

ACE members can be very gratified by the generosity shown by those, within and beyond the sphere of education, whom we have approached to be presenters or to write papers for the occasion.

We all know that taking on such public commitments entails a significant investment of time and effort. I am hoping that ACE members

will acknowledge this generosity in return, and that all those who are able to attend will do so and will invite colleagues to do likewise.

Several questions have been uppermost in the minds of the Conference planning group.

First, we want the Conference to attract those working on the front line

in education. Why should these busy people take time out to attend – the practitioners and leaders working in schools and classrooms in varied contexts, and in corresponding settings across the early childhood, vocational education and training and higher education sectors?

They will have an opportunity to think afresh about the larger context in which we are working, the broader forces that are affecting their own daily work and their responsibilities as professional educators. Understanding where pressures are coming from can make it easier to deal with them, or even to bear them. The Conference should provide time to discuss with colleagues new ways of configuring what are often old ideas.

Second, we want the Conference to assist the College itself to plan how best to achieve our goals of providing a strong national voice for the profession,

promoting high professional standards, fostering the professional learning of educators and advancing the status of the profession.

Educators are continually confronted by those who propose simplistic solutions to complex problems. No sooner does there emerge a healthy consensus that influencing the quality of teaching is a key means by which governments can improve educational outcomes, than along come those who would have us believe that the quality of the individual teacher is the only driver of educational outcomes and the sole determinant of equality or inequality of outcomes.

The evidence of persistent and unacceptable inequalities points to a far more complex picture. The ACE July Conference has been designed to help ACE ask the kinds of question that relate to such complexity.

What should educators be doing to get our own house in order? We need to examine whether, in our own practice or in the way we organise the delivery of education, we are committing sins of omission or commission that contribute to unequal education outcomes that cannot be rationally justified in a true democracy?

What partnerships are necessary among institutions and agencies within and beyond education to take concerted action against conditions that contribute to inequitable educational outcomes? And how can educators join with others to voice concerns about these conditions?

It may sound exaggerated, but in some ways trying to think about what makes a good conference leads to thinking about what makes a good society. The survival of an open and fair society requires us to foster opportunities for competition among differing views of significant ideas like equity.

Many years ago, as a newly appointed member of the Commonwealth Schools Commission and, later, of other representative education bodies, I had to learn the valuable discipline of being able to listen to those whose views were very different from, sometimes contrary to, my own. That experience has taught me that it is very rare to hear a viewpoint →

The evidence of persistent and unacceptable inequalities points to a far more complex picture.

The ACE July Conference has been designed to ask the kinds of question that relate to such complexity.

← which does not contain even the germ of an idea or a seed of truth that can enrich our own understanding of significant or contested issues.

We hope that the Conference will model the kind of teaching and learning going on in our schools, our vocational educational and higher education institutions - characterised by constructive inquiry, debate and deliberation, and by competition among ideas. It will be an open-ended Conference without any pre-determined outcomes. This will not be one of those conferences that end with a pre-concocted communiqué that relates tenuously to the stuff of the proceedings.

It is one thing to be open to new and different ideas, but it is quite another to be lacking in rigour and discipline. We will need to be mindful, for the forthcoming Conference to be successful, to avoid the pointless dualisms that infest educational discourse. While we will need to steer well clear of the false distinctions (between, for example, “leadership” and “management” or “content” and “process”) we will also need to ensure that necessary and real distinctions are carefully explored. Buzzwords like “autonomy” and “self-managing schools” can be so ill-defined as to enable undisclosed agendas and unstated potential effects to lead in directions away from social justice and equity.

But then the same can be said of the term ‘equity’. The ACE Conference will require participants to engage in exploration of the various meanings of this term.

Having organised and concluded a Conference designed to encourage competition among ideas and to allow for constructive forms of provocation, the College will be left with the responsibility for taking the fruits of the Conference deliberations and working out the best way to share these among and beyond the direct participants. Our aim will be to work in concert with other like-minded organisations to draw up an equity agenda to guide advocacy and action for the future.

More Conference details in this issue and at www.austcolled.com.au ■

Dr Lyndsay Connors AM, FACE, ACE National President.

ACE projects contribute to 2011 conference

Equity in Education: Connecting for change



The ACE Foundation commissioned two projects on equity in 2011 (*Professional Educator*, vol 10, no.2) The first is ‘Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice’, looking at what has been happening in Australia and overseas with a view to recognizing what is relevant to overcoming education inequality in Australia today. The second project, ‘Equity in Education: Drawing on perspectives and understandings outside education related disciplines’. To date this project has looked at health.

The completed project reports will be included in the ACE 2011 National Conference program, 14-15 July, Aerial Conference Centre, University of Technology Sydney. Project representatives will be members of the Expert Respondent Panel to support active engagement and the connecting of different experiences and perspectives in the conference. The final research project reports will be available to participants for reading before the conference. Pre-reading will also include a specially commissioned piece from Richard Teese, University of Melbourne. Professor Teese is a specialist in school systems – how well these work, for whom, and how they might be improved. These questions frame his research into inequalities in educational achievement and provision, and into policy and practice to raise achievement and create better opportunities for learning.

The projects are nearly half way to completion and an article from each team follows. Both recognise the key questions involved and have set a framework to develop their views. These frameworks have similarities but some startling differences. Both projects are revealing some interesting aspects that will contribute to the ACE conference intention to draw up an equity agenda to guide advocacy and action for the future. ■



Authors: Professor Rob Gilbert¹,
Dr Amanda Keddie², Professor Bob
Lingard¹, Professor Martin Mills¹,
Professor Peter Renshaw¹

Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice: An ACE research project

In a democratic society, people expect fair and rewarding access to and experiences of education. Internationally, education is recognised as a universal human right which needs to be available to all. It is also a material resource in the marketplace, so that its distribution implies obligations of social justice. Education contributes to a society's prosperity and general quality of life and wellbeing, and to the individual's intellectual, social, cultural and emotional development; it is integral to people's sense of themselves.

For all these reasons, citizens in a democracy hold high expectations of access to, and achievement in, education and large quantities of resources are devoted to satisfying them. It follows that, as a universal human need and want, education is subject to the democratic imperatives surrounding equity, equality and social justice.

However, once questions of social justice are raised, a host of complex issues come flooding in. How much education is it reasonable for citizens to expect? Is it equitable that some will be provided with more education than others? Does justice require that all should receive the same kind of education, or can some be justly given special treatment? Does equity apply only to opportunity and access, or does it extend to ensuring a certain level of outcome? Given unequal resources among families, does the sale of education in a market create unjust inequality? Does education influence, and is it influenced by other forms of social inequality? What level and kinds of

government policy and funding interventions are necessary to limit the effects of family and socio-economic background on students' educational opportunities and outcomes? How can teacher and school effects be maximised? Such questions are unavoidable in educational policy, practice and research. They pervade the entire enterprise.

In response to this, the Australian College of Education has funded a research project by the current authors, which has as its main focus a review of research, policy and practice relevant to overcoming education inequality in Australia today. Entitled 'Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice in Australia', the project traces the key ideas and frameworks for thinking about educational inequality which have given rise to the range of Australian equity projects and initiatives over recent decades. From this review, the research team aims to establish a position from which current policies might address educational inequality.

Developing views of equity and social justice

Ideas of equity and social justice are perennial human concerns. For Aristotle, for instance, justice meant being fair and lawful in one's relations with others. In particular, he argued that there should be no distinction between people who are equal in all respects relevant to the kind of treatment in question. However, Aristotle's concept developed within an aristocratic society, and a set of assumptions that →

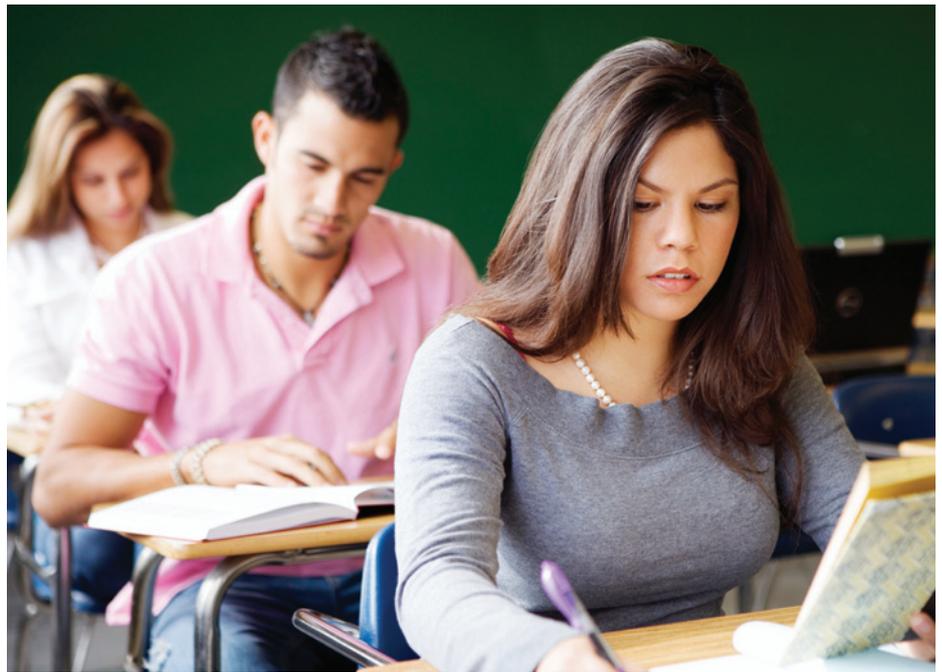
← only certain people were citizens and full members of the political class.

In his view, since the most virtuous people were those who made the most significant contributions to the life of the city, they had the right to the greatest honours. In other words, virtue was the 'relevant respect', and since not all people were virtuous in Aristotle's terms, it was not necessary to treat them all the same. To Aristotle, male aristocrats were therefore more worthy of rewards and respect than women, working men or slaves. To Aristotle this was not injustice, but simply a way of producing the best society he could envisage – a 'just' aristocracy.

The modern democratic impulse finds this view unacceptable, since it envisages a different society, one where all people have equal rights. In this case, the 'relevant respect' is simply the fact of being human, leading, in the current case, to the conclusion that all people have a right to education without qualification. Yet, as illustrated in the questions above, contemporary societies continue to struggle to form a consensus around exactly what this assumption of democratic equality means.

One current interpretation can be found in the *United Kingdom Equalities Review* (2007, p. 6, in Burchardt, 2008, p. 207):

An equal society protects and promotes equal real freedom and substantive opportunity to live in the ways people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish. An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit



what people can do and can be.

Theories of equity and social justice have interpreted these ideas with different emphases, criteria and benchmarks, and the history of equity policies in Australian education can be viewed from these different perspectives. The current project will provide an historical overview of equity policies in Australia and internationally through the use of a framework proposed by American philosopher Nancy Fraser (1997, 2008). These frames will enable a discussion about the purposes of schooling, curriculum and pedagogy in the context of equity policy.

A series of case studies will be used to exemplify the various frames, including the Disadvantaged Schools Project of the 1970s, the Australian Gender Equity program of the 1980s, Indigenous, multicultural and national language programs of the 1990s. This discussion will demonstrate the ways in which the

concepts of equity and social justice have been rearticulated in different macro policy settings and in the context of globalization.

Each of Fraser's frames highlights an important but distinctive way of thinking about socially just aims, processes and outcomes. The first frame focuses on redistribution of aspects of human experience like material welfare and standard of living, wealth and income and employment/career opportunities. Redistribution policies originally dominated equity policy by addressing the material inequalities experienced at the societal level. In education, the focus was on educational inputs including resources (human and material) and funding, as well as outputs such as various types of credentials, capabilities and dispositions of students related to employment and income opportunities. A weak version of this frame was the equality of opportunity approach, while a strong version promoted equality of outcome.

While important, neither of these approaches was adequate to the task. Equality of opportunity tended to underestimate the disadvantage experienced by deprived groups, focusing, for instance, on participation in education irrespective of considerations of the appropriateness of curriculum, or the cultural affinity between school and home. Furthermore, it is difficult to claim equality of opportunity when outcomes remain unequal. Equality of outcome

Once questions of social justice are raised, a host of complex issues come flooding in. How much education is it reasonable for citizens to expect?

In other words, great inequalities of outcome are acceptable as long as they are experienced by all groups equally.

is an even more elusive ideal, which has usually been applied to comparing the participation and performance of identified groups identified on the basis of race, class, gender, ability, ethnicity, etc. (sometimes referred to as horizontal equity).

However, this approach leaves untouched overall inequality, since it is satisfied if all groups are equally stratified. In other words, great inequalities of outcome are acceptable as long as they are experienced by all groups equally, a view reflected in the meritocratic account of equality in and through education. Excluded from this approach are attempts to reduce overall inequality by reducing differences between the top and the bottom of whatever outcome is being addressed (or vertical equity). The question remains regarding the relationship between the degree of vertical inequality and that of horizontal inequality. We would note that societies such as Finland that do very well on equity measures on PISA have a low degree of vertical inequality.

The redistribution focus on material and measurable variables was driven by visions of an equitable social system in the aggregate. It glossed over the more subtle processes by which social distinctions are sustained and people's relations reproduced, and downplayed aspects of people's well-being associated with their cultural origins and milieus. Fraser proposes a frame of recognition to acknowledge the significance of such cultural aspects of people's experience, and their connections to justice.

The recognition frame focuses on how the cultures of students and their communities (their life-worlds) are valued in relation to schooling, as well as how these are incorporated in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Interwoven

cultural relations of class, gender, race and ethnicity are important influences on the quality of students' school experience, and imply obligations of social justice.

Fraser's final frame is representation, focusing on power and decision-making. This frame focuses on the opportunities for teachers, parents and students to influence educational policy and procedures through participation in decision making about resource allocation, policy implementation and curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Allied with the redistribution and recognition frames, representation addresses the means by which participants can promote their access to equitable processes and outcomes.

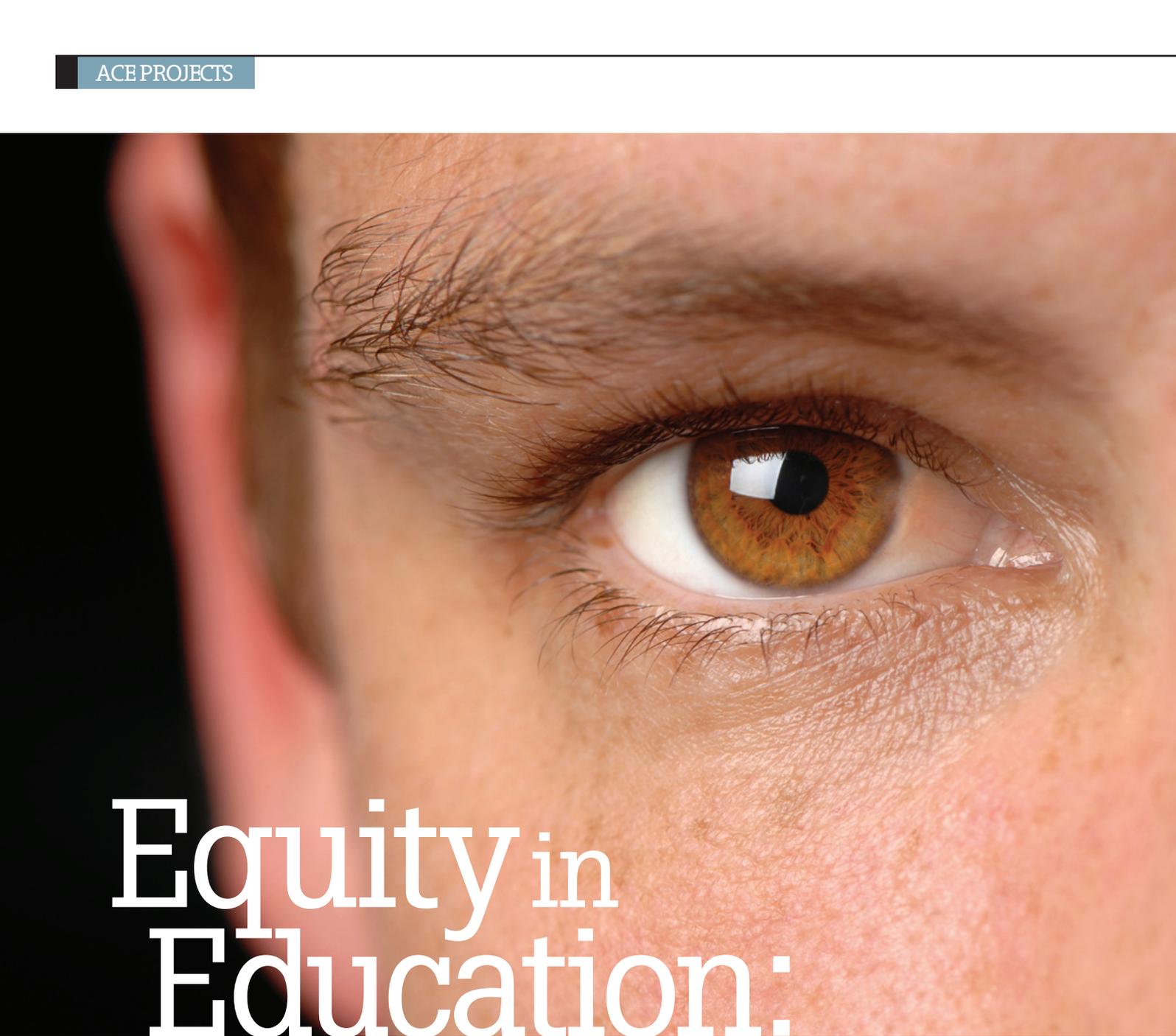
Concepts such as redistribution, recognition and representation assist in making sense of the complexity of social justice and equity policy and practice in education. Understanding and deciding on equity issues involves considerations of the purposes of schooling, and decisions on priorities among economic, citizenship, cultural and other capabilities and agendas. It requires a critical scrutiny of hierarchical assumptions arising from education as a positional good and a mechanism for social selection. Policies can be affirmative or transformational, and can reflect a neoliberal agenda and backlash politics, or a participatory approach involving the profession and community in fundamental change which makes a difference. Ideas of accountability range across bureaucratic, performance and professional forms, and can be narrowly instrumental or rich and enhancing, with implications for equity in the way they determine what is valued. Accountability linked to test results can be reductive in relation to Fraser's concepts of recognition and representation.

Equity policy also raises certain essentially contestable dilemmas which need to be confronted by educators. The research will explore ideas that might serve as touchstones for resolving these matters in policy terms and in a critically reflective professional practice. For instance, debates are often framed around binaries of equality vs. individual excellence, vocational vs. academic learning, cultural vs. economic goals of schooling, success for all vs. elite standards, equity vs. quality, cooperative vs. competitive schooling, and the like. These binaries are implicated in a range of contemporary educational debates, such as those around Indigenous education, national testing, school accountability, participation in higher education and school funding. The culmination of the project will be to show how a concept of social justice for education can guide the intricacies of educational policy, practice and research. ■

1 School of Education, The University of Queensland. 2 Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University

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A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a person's eye, showing the iris, pupil, and surrounding skin texture. The eye is looking slightly to the right of the frame. The lighting is soft, highlighting the natural colors and textures of the eye and skin.

Equity in Education:

Drawing on perspectives and understandings outside education related disciplines, an ACE research project.

Authors: Elaine Sharplin,
Wayne McGowan, Colleen
Fisher, Martin Forsey, Tess Lea

This project, together with the other ACE Foundation Project, 'Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice' provides a view of equity from within and outside of education as well as from both an Australian and international perspective, While both projects are still in early stages of development, this article on progress to date in Project 2 – equity and health – offers an opportunity to inform and stimulate dialogue prior to the ACE 2011 National Conference "Equity in Education- Connecting for Change".

The interdisciplinary team working on Project 2 brings together knowledge and expertise from education, health, sociology, anthropology and policy development. The outcomes of the literature review seek to inform the ACE of any insights for education policy and practice gleaned from past, present and future approaches to overcoming inequality in health. It is important to note, however, that both terms 'equity' and 'inequality' are used in the

project. At the outset, the project has sought to establish definitional clarity of these and other key terms to help guide the review.

Often the terms 'equity' and 'equality' are used synonymously. Strictly speaking, however, this is not the case. Equity and equality in health are different concepts. That is to say, equity in health is about fairness not sameness. In fact, fairness may demand inequality rather than equality in the interest of achieving equity in health.

The issue of equity is a vexed question in both health and education. Similarly the term 'health' is also contested. How 'health' is understood shapes assumptions that inform researchers, policy-makers and practitioners about what equity entails, what decisions it requires and what needs to be measured.

Originally, epidemiology has defined health in terms of the diseases and illnesses impacting on the mortality and morbidity of aggregations of individuals. As a deficit-based model, it sees health as a biomedical problem in need of protection strategies such as changing the behaviours as well as screening and immunising vulnerable individuals. Health, from this perspective, is achieved through the diagnosis and treatment of disease and illness.

In contrast, epidemiology now includes a social model of health, where attention shifts to changing social, political

and economic structures as well as the physical environment.

Health, in this sense, is linked to social forces such as poverty, discrimination, literacy, education, housing conditions and so on that act as barriers to the health of different population groups. The latter of these perspectives offers this ACE Project a broader sociological understanding of health as the state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

From this population perspective of public health, the question of equity is still problematic for health researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. Discussions of what would constitute a valid definition, however, have been

Towards the end of the last century, Eaves (1998), writing in the context of the National Health Service within the United Kingdom, added to the discussion by proposing a framework for equity in health and health services based on the themes of 'resource distribution,' 'access and uptake,' 'standards and outcomes' and 'health status.'

For Eaves, equity questions the distribution of resources in terms of fairness in response to health needs. Traditionally, the funding of hospitals and community services in the UK was piecemeal. In the 1970s, however, policy recommendations saw the development of funding formulas that took factors such as population size and composition (age and sex)

Often the terms 'equity' and 'equality' are used synonymously. Strictly speaking, however, this is not the case.

influenced by a number of key commentators since the early 1990s.

In 1992, Whitehead sparked interest when she linked equity to questions of fairness and justice over avoidable disparities in the social conditions impacting on the health of a population.

and levels of morbidity into account. However, further policy changes in the 1990s have resulted in different formulas leaving the question as to what constitutes the equitable distribution of resources unresolved.

The debate over equity of access looks at individual →

← choice versus social barriers as the reason for the degree of uptake of available health services. Declining a health service can be seen as a matter of choice rather than determined by factors such as poverty, cultural insensitivities, language problems, poor communication and so on acting as obstacles to access.

As a matter of equity, standards and outcomes focuses on the uniformity of the care and treatment aimed at producing health gains. This is equity that sees standards as a means to health outcomes rather than an end in itself.

The pursuit of standards that are effective in achieving health outcomes is an equity issue. In other words, there is little point, from an equity perspective, of rigid application of access standards if they make no difference to the status of health experienced by different population groups.

The issue of health status, in effect, underscores the vexed nature of equity in health. We can never be certain of the extent to which health services impact upon the achievement of equity: if the causes of inequities in health sit outside the health service such as inadequate housing and poverty, then it stands to reason that equity is not solely a health service problem.

While health services may not be the only determinant of health status, there is the moral argument that this position is simply 'sticking one's head in the sand.' Here, it is maintained that the

capacity of the health service to influence the direction of social policy in relation to overcoming health disparities cannot be ignored.

Influenced by these thoughts, Braveman and Gruskin (2003) characterise equity in health as a matter of justice, fairness and human rights. In terms of social justice, equity calls for the elimination of systematic disparities between social groups who have different

other rights such as education as a social condition that promotes participation in society.

Equity in health concentrates on the need to fully participate in society. It takes us beyond individual disease and illness to social and economic determinants of health such as health care and living conditions in households and communities as well as the research, policies and practices that affect these

Health, in this sense, is linked to social forces such as poverty, discrimination, literacy, education, housing conditions and so on that act as barriers to the health of different population groups.

levels of social advantage/disadvantage (wealth, power and/or prestige) in health (or its major social determinants). In relation to fairness, equity does not look at the distribution of resources in terms of equality (sameness) but questions the extent to which there is a fair distribution in response to the health needs of different population groups.

Here, equity in health is also seen as a human right. Equal rights to health are considered indispensable to the operationalisation of health equity: creation of social conditions free from oppression, domination and discrimination are necessary for full participation in society. In this way, health cannot be separated from

conditions. In this way, attention is drawn to equity as effective interventions that address disparities in health that, in turn, places equity in health in a political debate over the state's legitimacy to intervene in the daily lives of people.

The ascendancy of neo-liberalism as a force within New Right political ideology in the 1980s saw a dramatic shift away from State intervention as a public policy strategy.

This political perspective, which draws its strength from classical liberal economic theory and its fundamental belief in the efficiency and effectiveness of market-based institutions and policies, rues State intervention as a form of social engineering

that only achieves economic decline, while undermining the rights and enterprise of individuals. In short, neo-liberalism resists collectivism in favour of an individualised approach to social problems that sees good government as less government. In this political context, equity in health is seen as an individual responsibility rather than addressing broader social determinants of health.

It is within this political context that the move to equity in health, that sees intervention as more than the responsibility of individuals, presents a number of challenges. In response, the review and synthesis of the literature addresses the role of the State in achieving equity in health, the promotion of equity in health and the achievement of equity in health in relation to the activities of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners. ■

The authors are from The University of Western Australia.

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ACE EVENTS

12 May

INDUCTION PROGRAM FOR NEW EDUCATORS-EARLY CAREER/NEW SCHEME TEACHERS

ACE NSW Branch

A workshop with practical tips and guides to accomplish the daily practice of teaching whilst responding to the needs of students and engaging in critical examination of what teachers do in the classroom

5.00-7.30 pm

Sydney Girls High School

Members \$30 Non-members \$40

12 May

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION AGENDA FOR SCHOOLING – DOES IT REALLY FOSTER OR INHIBIT INEQUALITY

ACE Tasmania Branch

Richard Selby Smith Oration delivered by Professor Alan Reid FACE, ACE President-Elect
Lecture 6.00-7.15 pm Followed by dinner 7.30-9.30pm

Stanley Burbury Theatre, University of Tasmania

Members (dinner) \$60

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586 for further information and bookings

14 May

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF EDUCATORS

9.00-10.00 am

Scarth Room, University House, Australian National University, ACT

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586 for further information

25 May

TEACHING EXTENSION II MATHEMATICS

ACE NSW Branch

5.00-6.30 pm

Gynea Trade Union Club, Cnr Manchester & The Kingsway

Members \$20 Non-members \$25

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586 for further information and bookings

6 June

'HIGHER EDUCATION SHOULD BE A MORAL ENTERPRISE' – A PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR STEVEN SCHWARTZ, VICE CHANCELLOR, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

ACE Sydney Metro regions

5.30 pm

Waterview Convention Centre, Bicentennial Park, Sydney

Members \$65 Non-members \$80

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586 for further information and bookings

7 June

21ST CENTURY SCHOOLING – GREG WHITBY PRESENTS THE AW JONES ORATION

ACE SA State Branch

7.45-10.20 am

Adelaide Pavilion Conference and Function Rooms, South Terrace, Adelaide

Members \$50 Non-members \$65

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586

for further information and bookings

13 July

ACE NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S DINNER

Pre-conference event, Guest Speaker – Mr Ross Gittins

7.00 for 7.30 pm

Aerial Function Centre, University of Technology

Sydney

Members \$88 Non-members \$110

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586

14-15 July

ACE 2011 NATIONAL CONFERENCE**EQUITY IN EDUCATION: CONNECTING FOR CHANGE****AUSTRALIA COLLEGE OF EDUCATORS CONFERENCE**

A conference for teachers, educators, researchers, policy developers interested in equity in Australia

The Conference will bring together practitioner experience, policy, philosophy, and research.

It will draw on two research projects commissioned by ACE. The conference aims to identifying strategic policy priorities for ACE to pursue in its research and advocacy role; as well new ways to enhance democratic engagement by ACE members in policy analysis, development and advocacy.

Aerial Function Centre, University of Technology Sydney

Early bird Members \$429 Non-members \$649 (ends 1 July)

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586

5 August

SIR HAROLD WYNDHAM MEDAL DINNER

ACE NSW State Branch

Waterview Convention Centre, Homebush, Sydney NSW

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586

6 August

AGM AND STATE BRANCH MEETING

10.00 am

ACE NSW State Branch

Catholic Education Office, Renwick Street, Leichardt, NSW

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586

19 August

DIRECTIONS FOR EDUCATION GLOBALLY – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Presented by Keith Bartley, DECS Chief Executive

ACE SA Branch

7.45-10.20 am

Adelaide Pavilion Conference and Function Rooms, South Terrace, Adelaide

Members \$50 Non-members \$65

www.austcolled.edu.au or call 1800 208 586 for further information and bookings

OTHER EVENTS

7 May

CONFRONTING 21ST CENTURY INEQUALITIES: TOWARDS MORE JUST SCHOOLS AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Faculty of Education and Social Work University of Sydney, Camperdown

ACE CEO, Margaret Clark is presenting

http://www.sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/professional_learning

13-14 May

ITL MASTERCLASS**IWBNET – LEADERS IN INTERACTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Maroochydore, Qld

<http://www.iwbnet/conferences/masterclass>

10-12 May

NAPLAN

For Years 3, 5, 7 and 9

16 May

THE DISCIPLINED MIND: EDUCATIONAL VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

ACER Institute seminar

16 May – Brisbane

17 May – Sydney

19 May – Melbourne

20 May – Adelaide

23 May – Perth

www.acerinstitute.edu.au

21-24 May

HAWKER BROWNLOW EDUCATION'S EIGHTH ANNUAL THINKING AND LEARNING CONFERENCE: TEACHING FOR LEARNING-WHERE THE EXPERTS SPEAK TO YOUThe Heath, Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne
www.hbe.com.au

EVENT COMING UP?

Please send details to:

Deborah Crossing

deborahc@austcolled.com.au



Education Equity
Connecting for Change

Australian College of Educators

National Conference 2011

Sydney, 13–15 July

Aerial Function Centre,
University of Technology Sydney

Be part of the conversation

T

here have been many and varied theories about the causes of inequality in educational outcomes. In recent times there are those who would have us believe that inequity in education is all about the quality of the individual teacher. Yet evidence of the persistent influence of social determinants of inequality in educational participation, performance and outcomes suggest a much more complex picture. Where does this leave educators both individually and collectively?

There is clear evidence of inequalities in our education system of the kinds that cannot be rationally or morally justified in a true democracy.

This conference is an opportunity to be part of the conversation about what the Australian College of Educators can do, in concert with like minded organisations, to draw up a reform agenda to guide advocacy and action for achieving greater equity as well as excellence in education.

- **Getting our own house in order:** Even if inequity cannot be solved from within education alone, what are the ways in which

education policies and practices contribute to inequitable outcomes, fail to respond appropriately to student needs or create barriers to effective action

- **Forming alliances:** How can educators join with those beyond the education sector to support social conditions that foster and oppose those that detract from greater equity in education.

- **Creating partnerships** are there opportunities for educators to collaborate with other services and agencies to overcome countervailing and incoherent policies that are ineffectual in overcoming persistent inequalities?

Conference Structure – Four Broad Interrelated Themes

Theme One: Equity in the current education context introduces the big picture – the equity challenges and opportunities for Australia in the context of current policies, practices and planned reforms.

- **Keynote speakers** will be Tom Alegounarias, President of the Board of Studies



of NSW and Professor Trevor Gale, Faculty of Education at Deakin University.

Theme Two: Equity and the curriculum investigates the equity dimensions of curriculum, where curriculum is broadly defined to encompass all that influences what and how students learn in the course of their educational experience.

- **Keynote speaker** will be Professor Rob Gilbert, Faculty of Education at the University of Queensland
- There will also be a special presentation from the Hon Catherine Branson QC who will speak on Strengthening human rights in the Australian National Curriculum.

Theme Three: Structuring, governing and managing the system for equity investigates the equity implications of the resourcing, accountability and governance arrangements for Australian education – the barriers, challenges and opportunities.

- **Keynote speaker** will be Professor Bob Lingard, University of Queensland
- There will also be a special lunch time seminar where new research based on MySchool 2.0 will be presented for the first time by Brian Croke, Executive Director of NSW Catholic Education Commission, Chris Bonnor, ex principal and author and Bernie Shepherd, education consultant.

Theme Two: Making change happen looks at how ideas

spread in an age where policy thoughts are going viral and debate is based on spin and twitter. Can tipping points be created without dangerous oversimplification?

- This will include a panel presentation from social change and policy experts Amanda Tattersall, Chair of Get UP, James Whelan, Research Director for the Centre for policy Development and Eric Sidoti, Director of the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney.

David McRae, a widely known educator and consultant, will act as conference convenor. He will provide the conference with continuity and coherence across the four themes and will track developments and proposals emerging throughout.

An Expert Respondent Panel will lead and support active engagement by those with diverse histories, experiences and perspectives, by responding to presentations across all themes. The panel to date includes: **Dorothy Hoddinott** an inspiring principal of a high needs secondary school, **Professor Lester Irrabinna Rigney**, one of the most influential Indigenous educationalists, **Professor Martin Mills** from the ACE Foundation funded equity in research program #1, and **Dr Elaine Sharplin** a co- author of the ACE Foundation funded equity research project #2.

National President's Dinner

Wednesday 13 July, Aerial Function Centre, University of Technology Sydney

This stand alone event hosted by **Lyndsay Connors AM, FACE** is an opportunity for all ACE Members and non members alike to network, socialise, recognise outstanding achievement in education (the 2011 ACE medal award) and hear **Ross Gittins AM**, one of Australia's leading economic journalists. His talk is almost certain to be provocative, bold and insightful, given his reputation for taking on areas where few economists dare to tread.

Register before 1 June to receive early Bird Rates

Conference 14-15 July 2011

ACE Members \$429.00 (GST inc)*

Non Members \$649.00 (GST inc)*

Dinner 13 July

ACE Members \$88.00 (GST inc)

Non Members \$110.00 (GST inc)



Go to <https://austcolled.com.au/announcement/2011-australian-college-educators-national-conference> ■

Widening the playing field

Meeting diversity targets won't be achieved unless universities expand their selection strategies, writes [Annie May](#).

Australian universities must expand their selection criteria beyond tertiary entrance rank if the sector is to improve student diversity and correct school disadvantage.

In a report on the nation's admission strategies commissioned by the Group of Eight, released in April, it was found that while tertiary entrance rank (ATAR) is a good indicator of likely success at university, employing supplementary criteria is needed to support social inclusion in higher education.

Efforts to improve this inclusion have been made since the 80s, but results have so far been mixed. However, expanding participation and promoting equity has been given a significant boost recently as a result of recommendations made in the Bradley Review on Australian higher education.

In particular, the recommendation that a national target be set for 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level to be comprised of people from low socio-economic backgrounds by 2020.

But with research continually finding a link between scores such as ATAR and socio-economic status – leaning in favour of high SES students – meeting this target will only be achievable if universities further expand their selection strategies.

Lead author of the report and research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, Nigel Palmer, said there were a number of other ways of selecting students – some in combination with ATAR – that universities should consider. These include

a 'class rank' system, entry based on portfolios and assessment of prior academic achievement including VET and foundation programs.

"It is unfortunate that people are summed up purely on their ATAR – it is an imperfect measure of their ability," Palmer said.

"If you are just relying on ATAR, you are selecting on socio-economic status. It has been shown time and time again that high SES students are more likely to attain high ATARs, and therefore go on to university."

According to Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations figures, in 2008-2009, low SES applicants for undergraduate study were underrepresented at 18 per cent, while high SES applicants were over-represented relative to their population share at 31.6 per cent.

As well as opening the doors to disadvantaged students, expanding selection criteria will improve education opportunities for "middle band" students.

"Evidence shows that ATAR is a good predictor of success at university. If you get a high ATAR, you will do well in university," Palmer said.

"However this correlation becomes looser when it comes to middle and low entrance rank. Many students with average or comparatively low senior secondary results also do well once at university.

"Students who get 90 and above are safe bets, but relying solely on these ranks excludes many students who have the potential to do just as well once at university. Universities are in effect selecting for students that are already doing well, rather than those that are likely to do well."



School rank strategies

One strategy that Palmer believes universities should consider in their efforts to increase diversity is a ‘class rank’ selection criterion – or more appropriately defined as a ‘school rank’.

This strategy addresses the imbalance between schools in high SES and low SES areas by ranking students on their performance relative to peers from the same school, rather than the broader secondary graduating cohort for that year

– as is the case with the ATAR.

Class rank models have become a prominent feature of university admissions in the US, many which are variations of the strategy used in Texas, commonly referred to as the “Top 10 Per Cent Law”.

In use since 1997, the law states that all high school seniors who graduate in the top 10 per cent of their school’s class will be guaranteed admission to a state university.

“As is the case in Australia, schools in

Texas have different progression rates.

Giving admission to the top 10 per cent of each school, rather than those students in the top percentile across the state, means you are getting a greater diversity of students,” Palmer said.

“Outcomes from using this model, both in terms of graduation rates and increased diversity, have been positive.”

The Texas rule has also been adopted with success by California and Florida.

Under California’s Eligibility in



← Local Context plan, first used in 2001, the top 4 per cent of high school seniors are guaranteed admission to any University of California campus.

Under Florida's Talented 20 plan, passed in 2000, Florida high school students who graduate in the top 20 per cent of their class are guaranteed admission to any of the 11 public universities within the Florida State University System.

"There is evidence that a similar approach would be effective in the Australian context in improving school effects, as individual student performance is partly determined by the context of the school," Palmer said.

"It is still a measure of academic performance; you are just measuring it in a different way."

While effective in promoting diversity, there has also been criticism of class rank models.

This includes that such a strategy is often "window-dressing" as most of the students accepted would have gotten into university in the first place.

Another is that students in elite schools, where competition may be more fierce, will miss out on a place even if they performed better compared to students in the top 10 per cent of other, less competitive, schools. This also prompted concern that the quality of a university would be jeopardised.

While acknowledging that with a limited number of university places someone would always miss out, Palmer said if improving diversity was the aim,



changing 'who' wouldn't get a place was an inevitable consequence. He did however challenge the notion that changing the selection criteria would lower the "supposed quality", referring back to a previous point that students with lower high school results also do well at university.

These concerns, however, led to a change in legislation in 2009, allowing the University of Texas Austin (but no other state universities) to trim the number of students it accepts under the 10 per cent rule to 75 per cent of entering freshman from Texas. In 2009, 81 per cent of the undergraduate cohort at UT-Austin were selected on the basis of high school class rank.

Under the changes, the University would admit the top 1 per cent, top 2 per cent and so on, until the cap was reached, beginning with the 2011 entering class.

Portfolios

The use of portfolio entrance has a high relation to good university performance the report said. And according to Palmer, where viable, should be adopted more widely in Australia.

Portfolios allow students an opportunity to demonstrate aptitude and achievement through examples of both prior academic and non-academic work.

Portfolio entry is commonly employed in admissions for creative disciplines, journalism and where additional information may be compiled as evidence of aptitude and experience relevant to particular disciplines.

"While it can be resource intensive, academic departments are able to get a feel for a student's ability – beyond their ATAR rank," Palmer said.

Portfolio evidence has also been employed as a supplementary means of identifying potential among students from under-represented groups.

TAFE and VET qualifications

While the final year of high school attracts much of the attention when looking at academic achievement, it can also be demonstrated through previous technical or vocational education.

TAFE or VET qualifications often form the basis for university admission, and articulation and credit transfer arrangements may facilitate admission to university degree programs either during or following completion of a VET award.

In 2009, 14.5 per cent of applicants for undergraduate degree programs had

There is evidence that a similar approach would be effective in the Australian context in improving school effects, as individual student performance is partly determined by the context of the school.

undertaken at least some prior VET study, with 5.9 per cent of offers for admission made on the basis of a completed VET award, according to DEEWR figures

Some universities' pathway strategies include setting aside places for entrants from TAFE and VET. Effective pathways can also be achieved through recognising qualifications of Certificate 3 or higher as an entry qualification, or through offering course credit for TAFE or VET awards of Certificate 4 and above, the report said.

Research has shown, Palmer points out, that students admitted on the basis of TAFE results perform academically on a par with other members of their cohort. This is particularly the case where measures are in place to support the transition to university study during the first year.

Setting a foundation

Academic preparedness for university study can also be demonstrated through completion of university foundation, pathway or bridging programs – offered by a number of universities in Australia.

The aim of most university foundation programs is to provide a “supportive environment where students have the opportunity to develop their academic confidence and the broad-based skills to assist their progress in university study”.

Generally, participants in foundation or bridging programs are able to apply for admission to degree courses on the basis of the academic potential they demonstrate during such programs. In a study on the effectiveness of foundation programs, undertaken in 2002-2003, 87 per cent of students were offered a university place on completion of such programs. Seventy-three per cent of the students who commenced the program ultimately received an offer of a university place.

“Outcomes of such programs clearly suggest there are large numbers of students with low entrance rank who are capable of success in tertiary study with the appropriate preparation and support,” Palmer said.

While often targeted to non-school leavers, Palmer said the benefits of foundation programs might also be made

Key findings

- Inequalities in higher education participation are inevitable as long as selection procedures are based predominantly on criteria that are also correlated with socio-economic status, such as rankings derived from secondary school results
- There is evidence to suggest there are significant numbers of students with low and middle entrance rank who are capable of success in tertiary study with appropriate preparation and support
- Prior university study is among the best predictors of success for future study, its capacity as a very good predictor of student success should also be of interest for high

- demand courses for which there is also a high cost per place
- Students from State and Catholic schools, while overall often achieving lower tertiary entrance rank than their peers from the more selective or “elite” schools actually tend to out-perform those students with comparable entrance rank once at university
- Aptitude tests have only moderate predictive power for university success
- School rank programs (such as the Texas model) provide a means for evaluating and comparing student characteristic in student cohorts within schools and may go some way to mitigating uneven progression rates to university between schools.

available to first year undergraduate students. This could be in the form of semester-long topics covering generic competencies associated with university study. “These might also incorporate discipline-specific competencies to allow students to test their aptitude for various fields of study, while also providing academic departments an additional means of selecting for talented students subsequent to their commencing university studies.”

The right support

The challenge of improving equity of participation in higher education is directly linked with the process of selecting for admission, and with efforts to improve prospects for student success, Palmer said.

The report, *Selection and Participation in Higher Education*, highlights the shortcomings of a continuing reliance on ranked results from the final year of high school in university selection and puts forward a number of strategies to improve equity of participation.

As well as those discussed previously there are many more including expanding aptitude and achievement tests and putting more focus on discipline-specific abilities.

But, and this isn't new, any effort to increase diversity through the expansion of selection criteria will fail if not matched with the right support.

“It's very important not to lose sight of this. It's not just good enough to get them through the doors. Once in we need to provide the support so they can achieve,” Palmer said.

The full report is available at www.go8.edu.au ■

Selection criteria beyond ATAR

Expanding the use of aptitude and achievement tests in university tests in university admissions, in particular for ‘middle band’ entrance ranks

Developing strategies for the evaluation of, and selection for, student characteristics associated with success in particular fields of study, including through discipline-specific tests of aptitude and achievement

Continuing to develop pathways from TAFE and VET courses

Increasing opportunities for participation in foundation studies and other forms of preliminary university study, as a pathway for undergraduate admissions

Consider the incorporation of aspects of foundation programs as undergraduate topics, as part of either broad-based or conditional admissions initiatives

Consider expanding the practice of offering credit for certificate and diploma level study toward undergraduate degrees

Expanding the use of portfolio entry in admissions where appropriate to the discipline and intended course of study

Broadening the range of selection criteria used in assessing non-school leaver applications

Developing alternative school-based criteria through the adoption of ‘school rank’ selection strategies



Beyond the capacity of teachers

Equity for students and teachers needs to be based on absolute honesty about the challenges that professionals face, writes [Adam Croser](#) and [Fiona Mueller](#) MACE.

In the last edition of *Professional Educator*, (vol 10, no. 2) Dr Jim Cumming identified the two critical questions to be asked in regard to the implementation of national standards for teachers. He asked ‘Who should judge teachers?’ and ‘By what means should they do so?’ As he has rightly stated, these questions are much more complex because of the changing educational context, in which ‘parallel national initiatives’ such as an Australian Curriculum, national standards for assessment and reporting, and the NAPLAN testing regime are all in play. On top of that, it is essential to ensure that any future National Professional

Standard for Principals complements the goals that apply to their staff.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers use generic competency-based standards as evidence of teacher value and worth. They do not – perhaps cannot – reflect the reality that teaching practice comprises rich and complex activities, the nuances of which consistently elude professional policy-makers, defy standardized categorisation and remain difficult to articulate, even for many of the most gifted teachers. There is a real danger that the Standards will satisfy bureaucratic and procedural imperatives, but that they will do little if anything to ensure equity as we



make the journey towards the goal that underpins current Australian educational reforms – improving educational outcomes for all students.

We express this concern because the Standards do not acknowledge the unavoidable reality that the workplace of any teacher, as in any other profession, either promotes and supports good practitioners, or it limits and inhibits good practice. Professional practice is situated geographically and culturally. Many extraneous factors, often far beyond the capacity of teachers to control them, will affect a teacher's performance. For example, in public school systems, teachers are subject to a variety of transfer policies, some of which support teacher professional development, but most of which do not make the teacher's professional strengths and needs a priority.

There is a fundamental issue of equity here, because those who work in schools with a supportive, engaged community will inevitably be able to point to strategies that work. Those who work in more challenging educational environments, where attracting and

retaining teachers may be a constant problem, and where success with a student is sometimes measured in nanosteps, will not find it so easy to hone and demonstrate their skills.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers do not take account of this. For example, if principals are expected to focus on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, how will teachers be recognised for the work that will inevitably end up as their daily responsibility? How will teachers be supported when they identify the factors that challenge their students, and which must unequivocally be addressed in order to achieve any improvements in educational outcomes? To use the words of Professor Margaret Wu of the University of Melbourne, these are all of the other 'student level factors' that cannot necessarily be quantified.

An honest, reflective and highly practical approach is required to describe the context in which the teacher works, well before any assessment of the teacher can begin. Who will do this? In theory, at least, the principal should be best placed to provide such a description. This is particularly important in light of Focus 3.7, Focus 7.3 and Focus 7.4, which appear to reflect the Preamble's statement that "the new National Professional Standards for Teachers present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public".

Standard 3 will measure teachers on their capacity to "plan for and implement effective teaching and learning". Focus 3.7, highlights the necessity of engaging parents and carers in "the educative process", a Lead Teacher being able to "initiate contextually relevant processes to establish programs that involve parents/carers in the education of their children and broader school priorities and activities."

Standard 7 highlights the importance of "[engaging] professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community". Focus 7.3 requires that graduate teachers "understand strategies for working effectively, sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers." A

teacher assessed as Proficient shows the ability to "establish and maintain respectful collaborative relationships with parents/carers regarding their children's learning and well-being."

The Highly Accomplished teacher will "demonstrate responsiveness in all communications with parents/carers about their children's learning and well-being". The Lead Teacher is able to demonstrate the capacity to 'Identify, initiate and build on opportunities that engage parents/cares in both the progress of their children's learning and in the educational priorities of the school.'

Such statements are axiomatic, even anodyne. However, the relationship between teacher, student and parent/carer is so demanding, so crucial and so predictive of student improvement and

Many extraneous factors, often far beyond the capacity of teachers to control them, will affect a teacher's performance.

success, that no descriptor could possibly address it adequately. This is, therefore, one of the greatest challenges not simply for teachers who seek accreditation at the various levels, but for all of us who genuinely strive to make a difference in our students' lives.

Further, if the teacher is the most important cog in the wheel, and the Standards are meant to improve professional practices, what is the next step after an assessment is completed? Will all teachers be able to apply for professional development in any areas in which they may be found wanting? This costs money; will every principal in every school provide the appropriate support?

There is a real equity issue here, which has implications for both teachers and students.

The following illustrates the →

← complexity of the situation. We can cite a metropolitan example which we believe reflects the challenges that face many teachers who may wish to be assessed against the National Professional Standards. The three secondary schools (7-12) described here are located within 15 kilometres of each other and of a major city centre. We ask every reader to consider the extent to which teachers at each school are likely to be able to demonstrate their engagement with the wider school community, the skills the teachers might need, and what kind of support their school executives can or should provide.

School A

This co-educational high school loses many local students to government and non-government schools in other suburbs. It draws from a diverse community and has a high proportion of non-native speakers of English and students from lower socio-economic status backgrounds. Truancy and behaviour problems are challenging. The school finds it difficult to attract and to retain teachers, including relief teachers. The campus is quite large and it looks its age. Over the past few years, various academic strategies have been introduced to broaden its appeal. Textbooks are not issued to students in Years 7-10 because the school budget is stretched and students are frequently resistant to homework. Attendance at parent-teacher sessions is low. Year 12 consists of fewer than 50 students, but the proportion of school leavers choosing tertiary education is steadily increasing. A school uniform is available but not compulsory.

School B

This school draws mainly from families with low to middle incomes. It is a Catholic, single-sex high school, with approximately 100 students in Year 12, of whom over half will achieve an ATAR that will qualify them for tertiary places. About one quarter of the cohort is enrolled in vocational courses. Around 40 per cent of parents and carers attend parent/teacher sessions. All students are issued with textbooks, but there is evidence of a broader community belief

that homework is not a key factor in academic progress. The school has a large campus with plenty of green spaces and several very well-maintained ovals, as well as many high-quality buildings. There is a strict uniform policy.

School C

Enrolments at this single-sex Anglican secondary school tend to be from middle and high socio-economic status families. There is a high number of students who are not native speakers of English. There are well over 100 students in Year 12, of whom over 80 per cent normally achieve an ATAR that will enable them to enter university. Attendance at Parent/Teacher

sessions is very high. The campus is large and includes several ovals, new and older buildings and a range of high-quality facilities. The school has very active parent groups dedicated to sport, music, drama and other activities. Homework is a key component of the academic program. There is a strict uniform policy.

some students to move through the secondary years without their parents ever entering the school grounds. If the teacher is unable to develop and sustain a relationship with the families and carers of the student who are in greatest need of support, how will this be acknowledged as part of the daily demands and stresses of the workplace? What sort of professional development can compensate for the inability to establish an effective school-parent partnership?

The MySchool website attempts to establish a nexus between students, teachers and parents/carers by publishing the results of national literacy and numeracy tests and by including

How can the community be educated to appreciate the breadth and depth of the work done by professionals, which so often takes place against mighty odds?

sessions is very high. The campus is large and includes several ovals, new and older buildings and a range of high-quality facilities. The school has very active parent groups dedicated to sport, music, drama and other activities. Homework is a key component of the academic program. There is a strict uniform policy.

It is self-evident that teachers at Schools B and C will find it easier both to engage with parents and carers and the wider school community, and, in line with the National Standards, to demonstrate how they do this.

How much harder is it (and we speak from experience) when the teacher makes every effort to contact parents and carers, but there is no response to telephone calls, no reply to a note in a child's diary or homework book, and no attendance at parent/teacher meetings? We know that in some school contexts, even where conversations with parents do take place, it is almost impossible to find common ground on academic and behavioural expectations. We also know that it is entirely possible for

ICSEA data and other details about each school community. This is an implicit acknowledgment of the vital importance of the school context, but where is the relationship between these factors and the teaching and learning outcomes explicitly acknowledged in the parallel documents that will now be used to judge teachers? How can the community be educated to appreciate the breadth and depth of the work done by professionals, which so often takes place against mighty odds?

Equity for students and teachers needs to be based on absolute honesty about the challenges that professionals face. This must be part of any assessment of teacher performance, particularly in regard to that teacher's capacity to influence student outcomes. ■

Adam Croser teaches at a secondary school in Tasmania. Fiona Mueller taught in high schools for twenty years and is now at the Australian National University. She is part of a federal government initiative to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of higher education.

Putting the needs of all students first

The first comprehensive review on how private and public schools are funded undertaken by the government since 1973 has all systems wanting their piece of the funding pie.

Money – how much or how little – may not be the only thing that determines what level of education a school can provide its students, but it is a major factor. As such, the outcome of the federal government’s Review of Funding for Schooling is a high stakes issue for the entire sector.

What all systems, whether it be government, independent or Catholic, agree on is that any changes to government funding arrangements should leave no student worse off. However, recommendations on how to achieve this equity differ.

There is also a consensus that current arrangements for school funding falls short of what Australian’s are entitled to expect. How to fix these arrangements have resulted in a long-standing and enthusiastic debate – one that became livelier after the release of school funding data on My School 2.0.

On releasing the Australian Education Union’s submission to the review, AEU federal president Angelo Gavrielatos said the current level of government funding was neither adequate to meet the needs of students in public schools nor distributed equitably, efficiently and sustainably.

“We must get rid of a federal funding system which is blind to the real needs of students and where half the private schools get more than they are entitled to.

“The current system is fueling a resources

gap between our schools. It is exacerbating disadvantage within our community rather than helping children and families overcome it.

“It is clear that public schools teach the vast majority of students with higher educational needs and yet the federal government’s current funding system fails to recognise that.”

On the other side, the Independent Schools Council of Australia said any change in funding arrangements must not diminish the opportunity for parents to make a choice about their child’s education, especially those parents of students with special needs.

“Any model for funding of non-government schools should be equitable, transparent and treat all schools and systems in the non-government sector consistently,” Bill Daniels, executive director of ISCA, said. “Funding arrangements should encourage, not discourage, parental investment in their child’s schooling.”

“Inadequate government support for these students in independent schools is a major constraint on the enrolment growth in the independent school sector. Parents should not be disadvantaged if they choose to send their child with special needs, to an independent school.”

While much of the private sectors campaign to the review has focused →



← on not limiting parents' choice, it has been argued that this 'choice' creates inequality.

In *More than Luck*, a book of policy ideas by the Centre for Policy Development, Chris Bonnor said as a result of the current schools funding system, when it comes to school choice, many don't have any.

"The main idea driving schools policy in Australia is the increasingly discredited belief that it is school competition and choice which creates quality for all. We promote this choice mainly by subsidising private schooling. But regardless of the merits of any individual schools, choice remains elusive for most people," he said.

"We are allocating scarce public resources – in many cases well above entitlement – to children whose level of achievement and access to quality learning is already well-supported. We increase the advantages for some while increasing the concentration of lower achieving children in disadvantaged schools. It is simply harder for all children to achieve in these circumstances."

However, Bonnor remains optimistic, saying the funding review gives cause for hope that attention will be turned to the deep equity problems in Australian schooling.

In the book, Bonnor looks to the year 2020 and the hypothetical situation a mother is facing when trying to find a school for her son Jahred, who is entering Year 7.

Their closest school is a church school, but they aren't churchgoers. Even if they were, they couldn't afford the fees. The closest public school closed years before, while another was made selective. An independent school in the next suburb turned him down. Then there is the comprehensive school "near the shops". The mother describes the students who go there as the "wrong sort".

"He wouldn't have any choice: he would go to the increasingly marginalised school near the shops. His classmates would be the socio-economically deprived, the strugglers; the only role models within sight will be the teachers trying to do the very best for Jahred against the odds. He may join that persistent and growing tail of underachievers," Bonnor said.

While hypothetical and set close to a decade away, Bonnor said for many Australians this is their situation today.

Like Bonnor's Jahred, many students are attending schools

The argument that increased funding alone will improve equity flies in the face of the research evidence and long term experience in this area.



where the majority of students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds as a result of changes in enrolment shares.

These changes, argues Barbara Preston in her submission to the funding review, are hurting the nation's public schools – and its students.

Up until the early 80s, school enrolments were about 80 per cent of all Australian school enrolments. Now public school enrolments are less than 66 per cent.

"Not only have enrolment shares changed, but so has the social composition of the respective sectors, with students from lower socio-economic backgrounds increasingly concentrated in public schools, and students with higher socio-economic backgrounds increasingly concentrated in Catholic and independent schools," Preston said in the submission.

She said the impact this change has on public schools is seen in areas with selective schools. The public school will have lower test scores (such as NAPLAN) as they have lost high ability potential students to selective schools, and accepted lower ability students who would have attended selective schools if they were not selective. Also, selection schools rarely initially enrol difficult or disruptive students, but if they did, would expel them. As a result, unselected public schools are left with the difficult and disruptive students excluded from selective public schools, as well as from private schools.

"The larger the proportion of all enrolments in selective schools and in private schools, the greater the negative impact on unselected public schools, and on all non-selective public schools generally," Preston said.

Yet, she said, these impacts are rarely recognised.

According to Professor Jack Keating from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, the debate around funding arrangements has focused on comparing funding levels between Australia's three school systems, which was "illegitimate" because they are so different. Instead, he advocates a funding model based on student need.

The response to the release of the My School 2.0 data was

a comparison of the funding levels for the different systems. While predictable, Keating said these comparisons were disappointing.

“There is no basis for comparisons because the three systems are all different,” he said.

“What we should be trying to move to is a basis where we start talking about students, at the cost of educating a student, rather than doing a system level comparison, which is unhelpful.”

There are three issues, he said, that need to be looked at: what are all students entitled to; what are the needs of all students; and how to get a funding system where there unequal responsibility of different schools and different school systems are recognised.

What is needed is a funding system that takes into account all three issues.

“On that basis, you need to layer it with some sort of funding guarantee. You say to all schools and all students, no matter what school you go to, you will get an adequate level of resourcing to meet your educational needs,” Keating said.

“Then you need to say with another funding stream, we recognise there are highly unequal needs across school systems. We can show this from government school systems in particular, where there is a huge amount of funding that goes to needs – mainly disability and small communities. That is the second factor.

“Then we need to look at a funding system that gives incentives to schools to take on that public responsibility of educating all kids.”

With the first comprehensive government review of school funding in almost 40 years taking place, there are going to be many and varied opinions and solutions put forward. Following are key points made in submissions to the review by the three systems.

Government school system.

In its submission to the review, the AEU argues for a model which funds public and non-government schools separately. For public schools, a new resources standard needs to be established, which would take into account key areas such as class sizes, teacher training, ICT and the school learning environment. As well as all public schools being funded to this standard, additional funding would be provided to meet disadvantage and specific needs such as students with disabilities.

For the funding of private schools, there should be no pre-existing, pre-determined entitlement to public funding. Where governments choose to provide funding, the level should be determined by taking into account the wealth and resources of the school, enrolment practices, student profiles and levels of fees.

The submission was particularly critical of the role of the Average Government School Recurrent Costs index.

“At the heart of our submission is the inequity of school funding arrangements which contain

mechanisms such as the Average Government School Recurrent Costs index (AGSRC) which transfers

the higher average costs of educating a child in public schools to private schools which educate fewer children with complex needs, and the discredited SES funding model which delivers billions of dollars in over formula entitlements to Australia’s private schools.”

“Through the AGSRC, funding levels for private schools are indexed to reflect the increase in costs incurred by government to educate students in public schools. Because public schools enrol the great majority of students with resource intensive high educational needs from the five most common categories of educational disadvantage lack of English language proficiency (including refugees and migrants), Indigeneity, remoteness, disability and low SES the average cost of the provision of public education is higher than in private schools. To automatically link this funding to private schools is therefore clearly inappropriate.

“The nexus inherent in the AGSRC is the fundamental mechanism of inequity between public and private school funding. It allows many private schools to benefit from the high demand characteristics of the student population in public schools which cannot be justified on the grounds of educational need.

“The achievement of equity as defined by the panel cannot be attained whilst the AGSRC remains central to the funding of private schools in Australia.”

Independent school system

While deciding not to put alternative funding models forward, in its submission to the national review the Independent Schools Council of Australia did support the concept of base grant →

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← funding – a concept raised in an emerging issues paper released last year by the review’s board.

This would see all students, regardless of where they go to school, receiving the same base grant paid by the government. Additional funding beyond that should be allocated on a needs basis.

For independent schools, the combined basic grant from state and federal governments should be equivalent to at least 25 per cent of government school funding.

“This is a reasonable recognition of the contribution of parents as taxpayers as well as the community’s obligation to all young people and an incentive to parents to continue to make an after tax contribution to their children’s education. Recognition of a basic entitlement to government funding is particularly important given the increasing cost of quality school provision, with parents having to contribute to school costs which are generally increasing faster than their incomes.

“It would be reasonable, however, to argue that the basic grant should be set higher than this, to recognise adequately the contribution of parents as taxpayers as well as the community’s obligation to all young people.”

The submission also calls for students with disabilities to be funded according to their educational needs, regardless of the type of school they attend.

“The independent sector is not arguing that any school or sector should receive less support, rather that the needs of all students with disabilities be appropriately funded by the community through government expenditure, regardless of the type of school in which they are educated. Students with disabilities should be funded according their educational needs and this funding should follow the student regardless of the type of school they attend.”

The Catholic system

The National Catholic Education Commission’s submission called for maintaining block funding to state and territory Catholic Education Commissions so Catholic school systems can continue to distribute funds to schools on a needs basis.

It also supported the concept of base funding in addition to equity funding. At a minimum, the NCEC said it wants no reduction in overall funding in real terms. In fact, they are asking for more – about 62.5 per cent of the average cost of



educating a child in a state school. Currently it is about 58 per cent.

“Given the scope and similarities of certain roles, NCEC considers that Catholic systems (and other non-government school systems that distribute funding internally according to need), should receive base funding in a manner comparable to government schools. Such system funding would involve negotiation around and inclusion of the resource availability and socio-economic indicators in the funding agreement with the Australian government.

“Under these arrangements, NCEC believes that base funding should equate to 62.8 per cent of the current AGSRC in real terms. Base funding from state and territory governments should be 25 per cent of the resource standard calculated for that state/territory. The funding from individual state/territory governments should be at least the same in real terms as current funding levels.” ■

The breakdown

In 2007–08, all governments provided at total of \$36.4 billion dollars to all schools. Of this, \$28.8 billion was provided to government schools (Report on Government Services, 2010).

The Australian Government provided a total of \$2.5 billion to government schools and \$5.5 billion to non-government schools in 2007–08.

State and territory governments provided a total of \$26.3 billion to government schools and \$2.1 billion to non-government schools in 2007–08.

The Australian Government provides funding to government and non-government schools as part of a funding partnership involving state and territory governments and parent communities.

Under current funding arrangements, government schools are primarily resourced by state and territory governments with the Australian Government providing supplementary funding.

In 2009, more than 3.4 million full time equivalent (FTE) students were enrolled in Australian schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4221.0 Schools, Preliminary Australia 2009).

Nearly 2 million of these students attended primary schools and almost 1.5 million attended secondary schools.

A total of 2.29 million students attended government schools and nearly 1.2 million attended non-government schools.

2009 ABS data show there were a total of 155,541 Indigenous students attending school in Australia. The majority of these students (85.7 per cent) attended government schools, 9 per cent attended Catholic schools and 5 per cent attended independent schools.

What we should be trying to move to is a basis where we start talking about students, at the cost of educating a student, rather than doing a system level comparison.



The **best** start to life

Children's readiness and later success at school is not only influenced by their own abilities but also by the readiness of the school, family and community.

Authors: Sue Dockett,
Bob Perry, Emma Kearney

Lack of readiness is not a problem of children being insufficiently skilled to learn at school, but instead the lack of ability and resources of the school to engage appropriately with the attributes of individual children and families.

This is especially the case when it comes to indigenous children, their families and communities, according to an issue paper produced for Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

In many cases indigenous children are already behind their non-indigenous peers when it comes to school readiness. There are many different definitions of school readiness. Early ideas focused on the characteristics of individual children – their age, maturity and academic skills.

From this, children were labelled as 'ready' or 'unready' for school.

Over the past years, the definition has grown, and along with the individual child's readiness for school, assessment of readiness also includes schools' readiness for children and the capacity of families and communities to provide the necessary opportunities and support to optimise children's development and learning.

Assessments of the skills and knowledge of individual children have consistently indicated that indigenous children in Australia perform at lower levels on cognitive and language tasks than their non-indigenous peers at school entry, said the authors of the paper. When looking at past research they found much of this →

← gap was attributed to socioeconomic status, low preschool participation rates for indigenous children, the presence of risk factors in home and community environments and differences between home and school environment, particularly in terms of language and culture.

All these factors combine to impact negatively on their learning and engagement with school. Schools that are 'ready' have shown to lessen this impact through a range of practices including:

- creating a welcoming climate for indigenous students and families, and promoting a sense of belonging within the school.
- employing and valuing indigenous staff.
- promoting cultural competence among non-indigenous staff.
- recognising differences between home and school and the value of each, particularly the role and place of indigenous knowledge.
- employing culturally appropriate approaches to teaching and learning, offering individualised instruction – or at least teaching approaches that are responsive to individual differences – and having high expectations of all children.
- promoting positive relationships between teachers and families, based on confidence and respect.
- recognising the critical importance of positive relationships between children and teachers.
- implementing transition to school programs that have multiple opportunities for the involvement of children, families, community members and educators.

It has been well established that access to high-quality early childhood education programs can enhance children's readiness for school. It is also well known that many indigenous children don't access centre-based preschool education in the year before they start school. While the federal government has introduced policies to achieve universal access to preschools, access is only one issue.

In its feedback to MCEECDYA's draft Indigenous Education Action Plan, the Stronger Smarter Institute said not only is there a low participation rate of indigenous students in preschool, the "real" participation is much lower than



There can be no school readiness without community readiness

the 46 per cent quoted in figures, as many indigenous students attend fewer sessions per week than non-indigenous children.

It said readiness cannot be regarded as "primarily a systems issue" where instituting early childhood education and increasing the participation in early childhood education of indigenous children will solve the problem. Arguing that there "can be no school readiness without community readiness" it said community needs to be proactively engaged to train and provide ECE services within remote and Aboriginal communities.

"There needs to be an investment in training and career development schemes within these communities to ensure that members of the community are actively engaged in service delivery," it said.

Another strong consideration of readiness is the success of the transition process – which also has to involve not just children, families and educators, but community members.

Indigenous children's transition to school is promoted, according to the paper, when educators understand that while there is a diversity of indigenous cultures and languages in Australia, indigenous people "share ways of being, knowing communicating and learning that differ from those of non-indigenous cultures."

Programs to support indigenous children and families – whether they are

What works

- Schools that employ and value Indigenous staff provide 'ready' links between school, families and communities which can enhance the transition to school for Indigenous children.
- Positive professional links and regular communication between prior-to-school educators and school educators support children's transition to school.
- Positive involvement of families and engagement with other community members in Indigenous children's transition to school are important components of making a school 'ready'.
- High-quality early childhood education helps prepare children for school.

What doesn't work

- 'Lack of readiness' is not a problem of children being insufficiently skilled to learn at school, but instead it is where there is a mismatch between the attributes of individual children and families, and the ability and resources of the school and/or system to engage and respond appropriately.
- Assessment of Indigenous children through tests based in non-Indigenous culture can reinforce 'gaps' in knowledge and skills, rather than building positive images of Indigenous children as learners.
- Approaches to readiness and transition to school that focus only on developing Indigenous children's skills and not on broader factors such as schools, families and communities do not necessarily lead to improved school success.

focused on education, health or family support – need to be grounded in local indigenous community knowledge. "Curriculum and pedagogy that uses culturally appropriate approaches – including children's home languages – and recognises cultural ways of knowing can promote engagement with school for indigenous children and families," the authors said. ■

The report, *School readiness: what does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* is available at www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap.



Educating for diversity and social justice

By Amanda Keddie, Griffith
Institute for Educational
Research at Griffith
University.

Equity doesn't mean treating all the kids the same... it's an expectation that their background and everything about their past life doesn't equal being a barrier, you know, everybody's job is to remove all those barriers ... there's a full range of abilities and so on but what we would be against is having any of those barriers prevent them being all they can be (Anna).

Anna has been the principal of 'Peppermint Grove' High School for around 25 years. She is committed to just and equitable schooling. The view of equity that she expresses – to remove the barriers in students' lives that prevent them being all they can be – has been a central focus of my research fellowship at Griffith University.

My research has involved examining issues of culture, equity and diversity at three schools: Peppermint Grove (a secondary school catering to immigrant and refugee students), 'Gamarada' High School (a secondary school catering predominantly to indigenous girls) and 'Blackberry' Primary School (a multicultural school where 30 per cent of students are from refugee or immigrant backgrounds).

All of these schools (located in urban/suburban Queensland) are recognised as exemplary in supporting equity for marginalised students. The research has taken an ethnographic approach to the investigation of school-based practice that seeks to remove the barriers to which Anna refers. At →



← Peppermint Grove, for example, there was particular concern with the barriers impeding the educational experiences and success of refugee students especially those students from countries of war or political unrest with limited or no schooling experience.

Consistent with much Australian and international research in this area, removing these barriers at all of these schools was a necessary holistic task in responding to the economic, cultural and political injustices confronting these students. The key focus here was providing an inclusive and culturally respectful space that enabled students' autonomy and self-determination and positioned them

the globe, multiculturalist policies and ideas have been criticised as producing racial and ethnic division. Amid such contention, schools have been a primary focus. In particular, their inclusive agendas have been under attack as uncritical and overly accommodating of cultural difference.

Against the charge that these agendas are failing, there has been increased scrutiny of schools' citizenship programs and heightened surveillance around what is taught in schools and how it is taught. In Australia, and other Western contexts, these circumstances have been framed by broader public and policy debate around issues of



Despite unprecedented diversity in schools, classroom practice continues to reinforce and perpetuate highly inequitable and exclusionary understandings about difference and diversity.

with capacity to achieve.

Creating this space is an imperative given the unprecedented levels of multicultural diversity and rapid social change characterising the present era. While such diversity and change have enabled the production of cosmopolitan identities where a generative blend of cultures enhances community relations, more commonly these trends have seen rises in social disharmony, discrimination and inequity particularly in urban communities.

In western liberal democracies, the racial, religious and cultural dimensions of this polarisation have become increasingly palpable. Particularly in public discourse such polarisation has reflected reductionist understandings of culture where a privileging of western ways of knowing and being has inferiorised minority cultures as the less enlightened 'other'.

Against this backdrop, especially following the events of 9/11 and the subsequent terrorist attacks across

nationalism and identity - raising contention around what educating for equity and justice might mean for liberal democracies in an era of unprecedented social change and diversity.

Such issues have generated significant challenges for schools and teachers in relation to their important role in nurturing an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity. However, it remains that while policy discourse positions schools as central to building socially cohesive societies through environments that reflect and explicitly teach about the values of democracy, equity and justice, schools continue to reify the global flows that perpetuate inequitable social relations.

As is well established, schooling practices generally do not value and work with student difference in productive ways. Despite unprecedented diversity in schools, classroom practice continues to reinforce and perpetuate



highly inequitable and exclusionary understandings about difference and diversity.

Westernised, classed and gendered versions of autonomy and success continue to be privileged in schools and continue to circumscribe the ways in which students are constructed and supported by teachers. Teachers remain ill-equipped for addressing issues of diversity and justice. Indeed, current practice homogenises and inferiorises group difference and distorts genuine equity concerns. As important research continues to indicate, many teachers tend to either stereotype group difference uncritically or they avoid addressing issues of difference altogether out of fear of getting it wrong (Hayes et al. 2006; Doherty & Singh, 2007).

Amid this negative picture of schools and schooling, the research sought to present a positive thesis. As such it foregrounded the personal stories of educators productively and justly working with student difference and diversity. Undergirded by the central premise that schools and teachers can make a difference towards realising the goals of social equity and cohesion, the research provided comprehensive insight into important frames of reference and understanding for supporting cultural diversity and social justice through schooling.

The research highlighted the micro-political in relation to how the dynamics within each school shaped equity priorities and approaches differently (for example, in relation to a focus on issues such as gender, race, religion and socio-economic status). However, its main emphasis was to draw out the key frames of reference and understanding about equity and justice that were consistent across each school and generalisable to broader education contexts. These frames of reference and understanding were theorised in relation to their capacity to transform the social arrangements that impede marginalised students' 'parity of participation'.

Along similar lines to Anna's remarks above, Fraser (2007, p. 17) explains this view of justice as follows:

...justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. On the view of justice as participatory parity, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized

obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction.

This view of equity was reflected in each of the study's three schools. There were particular student groups who were identified as equity priorities on the basis of being subject to obstacles preventing their participation 'on par' with others. At Peppermint Grove, as it was at Blackberry Primary School, it was refugee students, while at Gamarada High School it was indigenous girls. The identification of these groups arose in each school from a centring of students' experiences of marginality and disadvantage. Such centring highlighted the different injustices confronting students.

For the educators at Gamarada, it drew attention to multiple injustices in relation to students' social location as Indigenous and female; for example, the girls experienced racist and gender discrimination as well as suffering significant levels of material deprivation (Fraser, 1997). Along these lines, the equity priorities within each of the schools reflected cognisance that injustice can arise from different dimensions. In making sense of this, I found the work of American philosopher Nancy Fraser (1997; 2007) helpful. She theorises injustice as arising from three dimensions: political, cultural and socio-economic.

social actors.

Consistent with Anna's opening comments, the identification of the equity priority groups in each of the schools was based on these group's experiences of injustice on one or more of these dimensions. At each of the schools there were concerns with the political injustices impeding students' educational success.

At Gamarada and Peppermint Grove, for instance, these concerns related to the ways in which traditional or mainstream education contexts can compromise or misrepresent the political voice of marginalised students. This was a particular concern for the principal at Gamarada who challenged the absence of Indigenous input in programs designed to support Indigenous students. In each of the schools there were also concerns about cultural injustices – associated with the patterns of non-recognition and disrespect within dominant paradigms (generally western-informed) that position minority culture as deficit and lack.

At Peppermint Grove, for example, such patterns were associated with an essentialising and inferiorising of student culture and the disempowerment of particular groups of refugee students. Injustices relating to economic maldistribution were particularly salient at Gamarada. In this context, broader patterns of class inequality for Indigenous

There were particular student groups who were identified as equity priorities on the basis of being subject to obstacles preventing their participation 'on par' with others.

For Fraser (2007), political injustices occur when some individuals or groups are not accorded equal voice in decision making about justice claims; cultural injustices are generated when institutionalized or hierarchical patterns of cultural value generate misrecognition or status inequality for particular social groups; and socio-economic injustices are produced when the structures of society generate maldistribution or class inequality for particular categories of

Australians – made manifest in students' high levels of financial hardship – constrained students' capacities to fully participate in their education.

Such were some of the barriers associated with political representation, cultural recognition and economic distribution seen as impeding equity for marginalised students at these schools (Fraser, 1997; 2007). In all three schools supporting greater equity for these students involved challenging and →

← seeking to transform these barriers. In line with the notion of participatory parity outlined above, these efforts reflected Fraser's premise that justice for all is possible when the constitution of political space ensures equitable representation (i.e. all social actors are accorded roughly equal political voice); when the status order reflects equitable patterns of cultural recognition (i.e. equal respect and esteem are expressed for all social actors); and when the structures of the economy reflect an equitable distribution of material resources (i.e. the distribution of material resources ensures all social actors independence).

In relation to the dimension of political representation, there were efforts within each of the schools to represent the voices of marginalised students. Significant here was a focus on creating a positive and socially supportive schooling environment where minority voices were included and respected. Creating this environment in all of the schools involved educators' awareness and problematising of the ways in which schooling processes (and in particular white/western-driven advocacy) can silence the voices of marginalised students. In relation to the dimension of cultural recognition, efforts to support justice for the schools' marginalised students involved dismantling some of the social patterns that malign and trivialise these students' cultures.

In all of the schools, there was a key emphasis on explicitly recognising and valuing these cultures. At Gamarada, for example, more equitable patterns of cultural recognition were generated through the school fostering students' connections with, and appreciation of their place within, their Indigenous histories. Informed by an anti-racist politics, the focus here was on re-building cultural integrity and pride in Aboriginality. In relation to the dimension of economic redistribution, efforts to support students were associated with the provision of appropriate material and human resources. This was reflected in the 'holistic' model of schooling adopted especially at Gamarada and Peppermint Grove where, for example, liaising and working with appropriate government and community agencies supported students' housing, social,

health and economic needs.

In each of the case study schools, such efforts were supported by a whole school commitment to equity for marginalised students. At Peppermint Grove, the school's Justice Equity and Peace group comprising many of the school's staff members, was created to ensure that equity issues were never off the agenda and that the school 'walked the talk' in terms of equity. At Blackberry, there was a whole school vision and values framework around supporting students to learn to live and learn to be together; while at Gamarada an ethos of 'positive regard' embedded equity principles throughout the school.

Drawing on Fraser's work and post-colonial theories of identity and culture, these schools' ways of understanding and approaching diversity were theorised as highly productive. The research was about highlighting the potential of specific approaches to address issues of diversity and social justice in sustainable and contextual ways. The equity issues and concerns raised are not new – indeed they resonate within most western schooling contexts. However, the theoretical lenses of the research offer new ways of seeing these issues – and are presented as useful in capturing the broad scope and multidimensionality of justice issues in schools in ways that support a nuanced and critical analysis of these issues. In an era of unprecedented diversity and social change where new equity challenges are an ever-present daily reality for schools, this research articulates possible ways forward.

Amanda Keddie is currently a Research Fellow within the Griffith Institute for Educational Research at Griffith University. Her book *Educating for Diversity and Social Justice* which features this research is due to be published by Routledge at the end of 2011. ■

Amanda Keddie is Convenor of the Social Justice Special Interest Group of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE). She is also a member of the team for the ACE Equity Project "Equity and Education Research, Policy and Practice in Australia" that will be explored at the ACE 2011 National Conference "Equity in Education: Connecting for Change" 14-15 July, Sydney.

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