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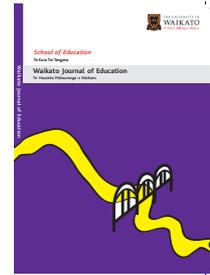
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Commentary: From Beeby to Parata—the continuing problem of inequality of school achievement

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Abstract

This commentary article explores one of the most important philosophical problems underlying the inequality of school achievement. If the inequality of school achievement is to be adequately addressed then it must begin with causes. The widely accepted conceptual framework within which the problem and its solutions are framed is the within/beyond school dualism. This commentary reviews New Zealand education policy historically and in recent times to argue for a proximal-distal continuum as a better way to conceptualise the inequality of school achievement.

Keywords

Inequality of school achievement; New Zealand education policy; within/beyond school dualism; proximal-distal continuum

Introduction

The inequality of school achievement is a problem which simply will not go away. Nearly 80 years ago the then Director of Education, C.E Beeby (with Peter Fraser's support), struggled with it and had little success; the recently retired Minister of Education, Hekia Parata, had no more luck. What has gone wrong that over the passage of time the problem of the inequality of school achievement remains stubbornly intractable?

This commentary article explores one of the most important philosophical problems underlying the inequality of school achievement and offers a way forward. If the inequality of school achievement is to be adequately addressed then it must begin with causes. The widely accepted conceptual framework within which the problem and its solutions are framed is the within/beyond school dualism. Beyond-school causes are seen as outside of the power of educational policy makers and schools and their staff to effectively change. On the other hand, within-school factors are those they can have an impact on. So within-school causes and solutions are attended to while beyond-school factors are not. But the



causes of the inequality of school achievement, nation-wide, are distributed across both sides of the dualism, indeed more so on the beyond-school side than within-school.

The effect of concentrating on the factors of lesser causal impact while ignoring those of far greater explanatory power located in the beyond-school direction is to ignore the very elements which if attended to would have a major impact on the inequality. While focusing on life in classrooms may improve the school achievement of some fortunate children, for the rest it will unfortunately leave things very much as they are with the consequences being no better than they are now. If the within/beyond school dualism is not capable of reversing the inequality of school achievement then some other theoretical approach will be required which has far greater explanatory power to effect change for the better of those children whose schooling will disadvantage them so disproportionately.

The problem in historical context

Inequality of school achievement is something which bedevils most, if not all, education systems. The inequality lies not in the fact that there are differences in school achievement, for as in most things some children do better at school than others. Some can run faster than others, some can play a musical instrument better than others, some can understand mathematics better than others. There is nothing unusual about differences in achievement in this or that because differences are part of the human condition, especially physical ones. Inequality of school achievement comes into play when the inequality is distributed in ways which seem to have more to do with social factors which, if they were otherwise, would have a significant causal effect on reducing the inequality hence lessening the discriminatory impact on students while at school and in their later lives. Social class, ethnicity and gender loom large.

The inequality of school achievement took root with the growth of the Provincial education systems and became firmly grounded in 1877 when the Education Act established a national education system. If anything epitomised the inequality it was Proficiency: a pass allowed a child to proceed on to secondary school; a fail meant a child's destiny was early entry to the labour market. Children from white, middle class, better off families tended to be more successful than those from Māori¹⁰, working class, poor families. The abolition of Proficiency in 1936 had a manifest effect of eliminating the inequality of access to secondary school but a latent effect of maintaining the inequality of school achievement by pushing it from the end of primary school up into the secondary school. At the time this consequence was not all that well understood but it soon became clear enough.

In 1939 came the Beeby/Fraser statement:

The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted, and to the fullest extent of his powers. So far is this from being a mere pious platitude that the full acceptance of the principle will involve the reorientation of the education system. (Beeby, 1992, p. xvi)

Beeby's (1992) autobiography is titled *The Biography of an Idea*. In the introduction he asked, "But what was the idea?" to which he responded, "Equality of opportunity" (p. xvii). Further on he identified four quartiles of students at the time of the abolition of primary school Proficiency which was up until then required for entry into secondary school: First—students who traditionally attended university, Second—students who expected to attend either university or senior institutes for technicians, Third—students who spent a year or two at secondary/technical school and then moved into skilled or semi-skilled trades, Fourth—students who never went on to secondary school, who were in unskilled employment or unemployed (pp. 195–98). In 1992, thirty years after he retired from

¹⁰ Native peoples of New Zealand

the position of Director of Education, Beeby acknowledged “the problem is still with us ... schools are failing badly with the lowest 20 per cent of school leavers. I doubt if it is a problem that can ever be solved within the school system alone” (p. 198). This is an insight of great moment.

Fast-forwarding to 2014, Minister of Education Hekia Parata wrote in a Cabinet document:

New Zealand has an achievement problem. Our top students are doing as well as students anywhere in the world, but there is a big gap between our top performing students and those who are not doing so well. International studies also tell us that we are not keeping pace with other high performing countries ... and are falling short of our own previous results. We must do better and raise the quality of learning and achievement across the board. Doing this requires whole of system improvement. (Parata 2014, p. 1)

As with Anne Tolley (the previous Minister), Parata has regularly drawn attention to student quintiles; for example, “Four out of five kids are successfully getting the qualifications they need from school and we must celebrate their success and the professionals in the education system who make that possible every day. But our education plan is about getting five out of five” (TV3 Newshub, 2012). Yet contrary to Beeby’s later thought, in Parata’s Cabinet document, the solution to the problem of the inequality of school achievement is posited to lie within the school: “Evidence demonstrates that investing in the profession by raising the quality of teaching and leadership provides the best opportunity to deliver the improved educational outcomes we seek” (Parata, 2014, p. 1).

Beeby and Parata: Who was right and who was wrong?

During his time as Director of Education, Beeby held a view on the inequality of school achievement very similar to that held by Parata. He thought the inequality could be reduced through within-school interventions such as reforming the curriculum, changing the examination structure and strengthening the role of the Department of Education. Likewise, with Parata but now through National Standards, Partnership (charter) Schools and Investing in Educational Success. There is also the power of the Ministry of Education which is no less now than that of the old Department even though one thrust of the Picot/Tomorrow’s Schools reforms was to reduce the power of central state agencies and enhance that of school Boards of Trustees.

Yet by the time he retired in 1960, Beeby began to see things very differently:

In 1960 I was aware that an undefined number of the students in the third quartile were not being catered for adequately. I attributed that, in part, to the failure of many schools to provide suitable courses for them, but I had only a layman’s idea of the socio-economic barriers that prevented some students from taking advantage of the opportunities we were offering them. My psychological training had prepared me to think of differences in native ability as the prime cause of differences in achievement, and to see the problems of individuals against that ... it was not until 1959 that the sociologists began to develop the skills that made it possible to look at the Fraser principle from the point of view of great blocks of students for whom the phrase ‘equality of opportunity’ could ring hollow. (Beeby, 1992, p. 198)

A few years later came a further revelation for Beeby: “I was at Harvard when the Coleman Report showed the overwhelming part socio-economic status played in determining educational success, and shook public confidence in the power of school systems to right social wrongs” (Beeby, 1992, pp. 296–297). Of the Coleman Report, Burbules (2016) had this to say:

The famous Coleman Report of 1966 shook up the educational establishment by suggesting the school influences were relatively ineffective in counterbalancing the far more powerful influences of home life, social and economic status, and other

environmental factors largely beyond the control of schools to alter ... This sobering conclusion that unequal educational outcomes are a complex social matter, and not just a matter of improving instruction, has been resisted by the educational profession ever since—the consequences of that conclusion are just too discouraging. (p. 205)

The puzzle is this. Why by 1966 did Beeby see that beyond-school causes and interventions were of the essence in explaining the causes of the inequality of school achievement and where causal interventions lie, yet some fifty years later Parata (and Ministry officials) is more deeply committed than ever to within-school causes and interventions despite Coleman and all of the sociological work in education since which points to beyond the school for explanation and intervention? It is surely relevant that because of the poverty of his early life and his wide reading of radical socialist literature, Peter Fraser had a deep understanding of the causes and possible interventions (Fraser, 1938). Not only was he also Deputy Prime Minister in a government which enacted a raft of reforms across the economy, health, housing, education and welfare to tackle the many post-depression inequalities which threaded through the fabric of New Zealand society, he also held the portfolios of education, health and police, which gave him a breadth of understanding on how the various pieces of the inequality puzzle fitted together and he worked closely with Savage and Nash on economic policy.

The standard within/beyond-school dualism

The standard conceptual framework within which the causes of the inequality of school achievement are examined and interventions proposed is a simple dichotomy of within-school and beyond-school. On the surface it has some initial plausibility for a rough and ready line between within-school and beyond-school which can be drawn at the school gate. What happens within the boundaries of the school, such as learning and teaching in the classroom, can be demarcated from those things which lie beyond the school, particularly family circumstances. Here is a list of factors which have been grouped in this dualistic way:

External to school. Factors to educational disadvantage that are external to schools include variations in how well families prepare children to interact with school, in family income and wealth, effectiveness of public health measures, access to health care and, hence, health states, level of parental stress and parental health, types of parental employment, family structure, levels of neighbourhood crime, quality of policing in the neighbourhood, concentration of disadvantage or advantage in the neighbourhood, quality of physical environment (especially as it affects health), frequency of moving homes, and the peer group within the neighbourhood.

Internal to school. Factors to educational disadvantage that are internal to schools include variations in spending within and among schools, teacher quality, principal quality, curriculum and instruction, disciplinary regime, peer group within the school, and the physical environment of the school, especially as relating to health. (Brighouse & Schouten, 2011, p. 510)

The Brighouse and Schouten list of within-school factors is reasonably extensive while the beyond-school list is not, these being primarily socioeconomic conditions relevant to families. They seek to remedy this by looking further afield, drawing upon Rothstein (2004):

Background Institutions. These include such measures as reducing income inequality by, for example, increasing the minimum wage, using collective bargaining, expanding the earned-income tax credit, and establishing a commitment to full employment as a central part of economic policy; stabilizing low-income housing by mechanisms that make it easier for low-income renters to stay in their homes; integrating housing by socioeconomic class through inclusionary zoning ordinances;

and improving public health measures affecting disadvantaged neighbourhoods and health-care access for low-income families.

Support to Schools. These include such measures as school integration by socioeconomic status; establishing school-community clinics that would serve both parents and children; improving prenatal and postnatal care through visiting nurse programs and improved health-care access; expanding high-quality early childhood education for low-income and minority children that emphasizes social skills as well as literacy, mirroring middle-class early childhood experiences; establishing stable and high-quality after-school and summer programs. (Brighouse & Schouten, 2011, p. 511)

Now, the problem with simple dualisms such as this one between within-school and beyond-school factors is that they tend to come conceptually unstuck. First, they become a bit messy around the edges. What counts as being solely within-school? Well, what about what teachers teach and children learn? Yes, teaching and learning do take place largely within the school but not exclusively so. Much of what is taught and learned comes from beyond the school such as material accessed from the internet. Much of what is taught and learned is accommodated by and assimilated with children's prior learning gained beyond the school which they bring in through the school gates every time they come to school. How strictly is within-school to be defined? Is it to be defined very broadly to include the activities of various state agencies such as the Ministry of Education (curriculum), NZQA (NCEA), ERO (quality assurance) and the like? Or is it to be defined in the strictest of senses to mean, literally, just that which actually takes place within the physical boundaries of the school? Second, problems arise when items cannot be neatly classified as either within-school or beyond-school because they fall into both. Unlike logical negation with the excluded middle, dualisms have a tendency to allow exceptions which are neither one nor the other but both, in which case the dualism starts to look decidedly untenable. Here is an example:

What is wrong with the dichotomous taxonomy of 'internal' and 'external' reforms? The first problem is obvious ... One prominent item—increasing the length of the school day or the school year—appears on both. In the most obvious sense it seems school-based. But it is also a neighborhood-changing reform, because when children spend more time in school, several features of the neighborhood change. Their parents are less limited in the hours they can engage in the labor force: they can spend more hours working, more flexibly. The period between the end of the school day and the arrival home of working parents is the time when teenagers are most at risk of involvement with drugs, crime, and early sexual experiences: reducing that period reduces their risks. It also reduces the risk to neighborhood residents of becoming victims of juvenile crime. (Brighouse & Schouten, 2011, p. 514)

If there are items which fall into neither one category nor the other but both, then the dualism unravels into a tripartite classification which begins to take on more of the character of a continuum. An analogy is that the seven colours of the rainbow can be reasonably distinguished, but when presented with the full colour spectrum in all its fine detail then it is an impossible task to draw a line which clearly demarcates one primary colour from another as the seven categories collapse into a merged continuum of a myriad of colours with one colour shading ever so slightly into the next.

The standard dualism is not, philosophically speaking, all that powerful as a tool for explaining matters in a way which can make possible plausible causal interventions capable of significantly reducing the inequality of school achievement even if it cannot eradicate it completely. It fails for several reasons.

First, the dualism makes it all too easy to focus on one side of the dualism to the detriment, even exclusion, of the other. This is particularly the case with those who, committed to the within-school side of the divide, look no further than the school itself for interventions. It is pragmatically and

politically easier to place the problem in an education box and quarantine it off from other boxes than grapple with the far more difficult possibility that the issue is less about discrete boxes and more like threads woven through the fabric of society. Beeby and Parata both took a narrow view of something far more complex than either of them seemed willing to entertain at the time.

Second, on the other side of the divide the beyond-school factors are often reduced to the socio-economic conditions of families and their surrounding environments. The effect of this limited focus on the socioeconomic circumstances of families and their local communities is to exclude the many larger and more powerful forces which impact so significantly on the lives of school children and their parents. It pushes to the background matters which should be to the fore such as government economic and social policies and the financial and human resources directed to implement them, business practices relating to expansion and retrenchment along with hiring and firing decisions and the use of technology to replace labour, the power of the media in its social and public forms to shape how people understand and live their lives, and the impact of globalisation on their general personal wellbeing. The socioeconomic is a useful umbrella concept which in one sphere of human existence captures a number of significant causal factors but is itself very limited indeed as a causal explanation of school achievement. To do any useful work, the general concept has to be reduced to the particulars which it encompasses.

Third, dualisms have an unhappy knack of reinforcing separatism rather than promoting dialogue. In this case, proponents of a within-school way of seeing things give little or no regard to that which lies beyond the school and even when they do it is either grudgingly or dismissive. Things are not much better on the other side of the divide, although there is a slight difference and it is this: those who give greater causal weight to beyond-school factors do not deny the importance of within-school ones, they just give them less prominence (after all, who would seriously banish the influence of the teacher from the equation when it is so obvious that it has a significant part to play, just not an over-riding one). The dialogue should take account of all those causal factors which come into play and accord them their causal due in both explanation and intervention.

The picture the National-led Government portrays of the whole business surrounding the inequality of school achievement is one constrained by a very limited within-school notion of explanatory power. Of the set of within-school factors identified above by Brighouse and Schouten, for example—‘variations in spending within and among schools, teacher quality, principal quality, curriculum and instruction, disciplinary regime, peer group within the school, and the physical environment of the school, especially as relating to health’—only two of the seven are considered to be of any lasting consequence—teacher quality and principal quality. “Evidence demonstrates that investing in the profession by raising the quality of teaching and leadership provides the best opportunity to deliver the improved educational outcomes we seek,” says Hekia Parata (Parata, 2014, p. 1). What the empirical evidence is, which supports this policy focus, is never revealed. Will the interventions introduced to address the inequality of school achievement achieve what is required of them? Let us consider them, briefly.

First, National Standards. The reasonably subjective professional judgments of teachers form the basis of assessments on how well students are achieving in reading, writing and numeracy. Whether standardised national tests in these areas would provide better data remains an open question, but either way the result is much the same: the causes of the inequality of school achievement are not addressed and any improvement in the reporting of achievement to parents will not have any causal impact on inequality. As a mechanism for dealing with inequality of school achievement, National Standards is not a particularly powerful causal mechanism at all.

Second, Partnership or charter schools. Accepted by National as the price to be paid for including the ACT party as a coalition partner, charter schools have had a mixed fortune. Hekia Parata disestablished one and the overall results are less than encouraging to date although promoters and supporters are not discouraged. Their continued existence appears to rely more on the neo-liberal call for greater parental choice than any demonstrated evidence that they can succeed in bringing about a

reduction in the inequality of school achievement in ways that public schools purportedly cannot (see Courtney, this issue). Again, a mechanism which falls well short of addressing the causes of the inequality of school achievement.

‘Investing in Educational Success’ is the third intervention. Proposing an initial four-year funding of \$NZ359 million, the original proposal advocated the establishment of two new teaching and two new leadership positions: expert and lead teachers and executive and change principals, each with designated levels of additional remuneration. Subsequent negotiations between the Ministry of Education and teacher organisations led to substantial revision of the initial proposal and greater emphasis placed on teacher/institutional collaboration within a new arrangement—Communities of Learning.

The Cabinet document contained two important and connected constraints which remain as central now as they did when formulated. First, “We expect to see measurable gains in student achievement evidenced by robust data collection, use and reporting” (Parata, 2014, p. 11) but no specifics were given on what level of measurable gain was expected, by what means the data was to be gathered and by when. Second,

Critical to all of these investments is to bring about measurable gains in learning and student achievement, to shift and lift a system-wide performance for all students ... Delivering and capturing improvement over time is itself a key characteristic of successful education systems that sustain success over time, and are reducing or eliminating the gap between our highest and lowest performing students—a long standing challenge in our education system and student achievement profile. (Parata, 2014, p. 9)

On this, the later Beeby would probably be in agreement; he would, however, probably be less convinced by the solution.

Neither the original proposal nor its current instantiation gets to the cause of the problem nor offers an intervention to do the job demanded of it. Here is a problem of contradictory proportions: while the NCEA results over recent years reveal an upward trend of hitting a government-set target of 85 percent of students passing at Level Two, the results of the 3-yearly PISA study and the less frequent PIRLS and TIMSS reports indicate no change to the trigger for IES—the achievement challenge where there is a ‘big gap between our top performing students and those who are not doing so well’. Whatever benefits accrue to the \$359m being spent on the initiative, and given the amount of money involved then there should be some benefits even if it is not clear what these might be, ‘reducing or eliminating the gap’ will not be one of them.

Given that schools do not causally generate the inequality of school achievement (although they may maintain it, reproduce it, and even add to it) then expecting schools to generate causal remedies to significantly reduce such inequality is a forlorn and misplaced hope. When will Coleman be taken seriously? Causes and solutions are to be found elsewhere than within schools. In the meantime, children at school suffer and are seriously harmed.

The proximal/distal continuum

If the within-school/beyond-school dualism is to be abandoned there needs to be a replacing concept which is an improvement on that which it replaces, and there is. That alternative is the proximal-distal continuum. At one end of the causal range are those factors closest to the action (proximal) and at the other end are the factors which are furthest out (distal). Between, all factors which contribute or might plausibly contribute to the inequality of school achievement are allocated a place on the continuum and weighted accordingly. It makes no difference whether the causes are within the school or beyond since the within/beyond distinction falls out of contention. Now causes lie side by side wherever they may fall and their position may move along the continuum from one occasion to the next. At the

proximal end might be found a bundle of causes which jostle for importance (their causal weighting): What a teacher says to those in a classroom lesson to the rewards parents give to their children for successful achievement through to the decision of the Education Council to deregister a classroom teacher to the Minister of Education closing a small rural school. All of these impact directly on the children affected. At the other end consider these factors: broad policy enacted by legislation which shapes employment relations, economic activity, taxation rules and the like, which determine the wide structural arrangements all citizens live within and prosper or suffer from; government budget decisions about the allocation of funding to health, education, housing, welfare and the like; decisions made by employers about rates of pay, hours of work, flexibility of employment, hiring and firing, and so on, these all being critical elements which flow through the social fabric of society as a whole and communities more particularly until their effects are felt most keenly on families, parents and children alike.

The continuum, while conceptually linear in many respects, is complicated by the welding on of another metaphor, that of a web. All the bits hang together, incomplete but none standing in isolation. The economic relates to other spheres such as employment, education, health, welfare, leisure, and so on, in a holistic way, such that what strikes one part of the web reverberates across the network as a whole, leaving consequences in its train. Parents made redundant due to a management decision to close a factory, poor parents dying of a particular illness because the cost of a life-saving treatment is so expensive that the government will not fund it, a government budget decision to significantly reduce welfare payments to the unemployed which includes many parents and makes them harder to receive and shorter to have: these and many more elements in a causal set ripple down to impact on student achievement.

Governments of whatever stripe cannot be held responsible for some of the things which befall parents and children. Parents and children may be afflicted by diseases and have accidents which may be fatal or inflict a lifetime of suffering or acute disadvantage. Sadly, some businesses just do collapse for one reason or another which leaves the employed and the self-employed in difficult predicaments about how to pay the mortgage, feed the family and just survive. But all too often what befalls one person (individual redundancy), or class of persons (massive industry layoffs) are the consequence of decisions made by others whose own position is protected and assured. Politicians rarely suffer from bad budget decisions, although Nordmeyer's 1958 'black budget' had a devastating electoral impact on the second Labour government in 1960. CEOs and senior managers rarely, if ever, suffer that which they inflict on those they fire or make redundant: sometimes they get big bonuses and/or salary increases even when profits plummet and workers are given short notice. They can depart under a cloud with handsome buy-outs of contracts while the poor worker exits with no redundancy or severance pay. Quality teachers and quality leadership will count for little in doing anything to raise the achievement of children whose parents are so deeply traumatised in these and myriad other ways, even more so when the parents constantly move from one place to another in search of employment and cheaper accommodation, dragging their children from one school to another every few weeks or months.

Is this notion of a policy web shorn of any practicality? In one sense, the answer has to be 'Yes', for it does not feature in current policy settings, at least at an official central government level. The various pieces of the puzzle, so to speak, remain scattered on the table rather than being brought together in any systematic and coherent manner to give some holistic order to what is otherwise a somewhat fractured and slightly disorganised pattern of political decision-making.

Nevertheless, there are glimpses of a way forward, generated at local government level which might provide pointers for central government to adopt and expand on. In early February 2017, the *New Zealand Herald* reported the following: "Mayors in three of New Zealand's poorest districts—the Far North, Rotorua and Gisborne—want to take over central Government agencies in their areas to eradicate 'entrenched poverty'. The three mayors have written to Prime Minister Bill English proposing 'demarcation zones' in their districts to try new ideas in welfare, health, education,

employment and policing” (Collins, 2017). Suppose we start with the idea of the child, which is certainly not new, and place children at the centre of the policy web. From there we move out along the various radial strands which, for convenience, might retain their conventional labels such as economy, education, health, justice, police, welfare and the like connected in their various criss-cross ways by the concentric strands to form a seamless web of policy designed to educate children to become educated adults who can participate in and contribute to an educated society.

Given the complexity of modern societies in a globalised world then it can no longer just be left to chance, if it ever was, of how we raise our children and educate them. The current set of uncoordinated policy directions needs to be replaced by a coherent policy framework which brings together and coordinates the various elements as they bear directly on the numerous inequalities, including educational ones, which thread through the fabric of New Zealand society. Then, and only then, will initiatives to address the inequality of school achievement have a fair chance of significantly reducing this particular inequality of school achievement and others too. It may be remembered that the First Labour Government 1935–1949 had numerous policy achievements across industry, foreign affairs and military, economics, health, welfare, education, constitutional and Māori.

Where to from here?

There needs to be a considerable change in political thinking if the inequality of school achievement is to be dealt the blow it deserves. So where do the two main political parties stand on this? At the time of writing, the National and Labour parties had not released their manifestos for the 2017 general election, so it remains unclear whether there will be any changes in policy and mechanisms directed towards reducing the inequality of school achievement. But policy directions to date give some pointers.

National’s 2014 election manifesto set out the party’s position in a fairly straightforward way:

We know the single most important thing we can do to lift student achievement is improve teaching quality and leadership. That’s why our next step is to implement a \$359m initiative to keep the best teachers teaching, encourage schools to work together and strengthen school leadership. (New Zealand National Party, 2014, p. 1)

In short, the National government is committed to the within/beyond school dualism and is firmly wedded to the within-school side. On 2 May 2017, Hekia Parata resigned as Minister of Education and a new Minister, Nikki Kaye, was appointed to see the parliamentary term out until the general election to be held on 23 September 2017. Although the new Minister has, to date, made no policy announcements on the problem of the inequality of school achievement, the new Secretary for Education, Iona Holsted is reported as saying,

However, it remains a fact that achieving excellence and equity in student outcomes is the major challenge facing the New Zealand education system.

Doing more of the same will not address these issues. Our systems need to step up and respond to the challenge by changing what we do and how we do it.

So what objectives have been set for the next four years?

The future of an excellent and equitable education system lies in creating learning pathways that meet each child’s needs from 0–18 and beyond.

Communities of Learning (CoL) are the organisational and resourcing model to support a responsive local curriculum centred on learner needs. They provide the framework and opportunity to share knowledge and expertise, stimulate improvement and innovation, and improve teaching and learning through collaboration. (Leading the Change, 2017)

If the National-led Government is returned to office for a fourth term in late 2017 then it is predictable that nothing much will change. National Standards, charter schools and the Investing in Educational Success initiative will be retained, with further legislated changes on the horizon. The dualism will not be abandoned, nor will the preference for the within-school side of things be given away.

If there should be a change of government later in the year, with a Labour-led coalition being elected, what then? Labour has signalled the abolition of National Standards and the abandonment of charter schools as such (although they may well remain as schools in an alternative form such as becoming integrated schools); the future of IES is less clear. However, if the 2017 Labour manifesto retains the education provisions of its 2014 version, then there is scope for new directions being taken along the lines suggested in this chapter. Item 6.6 states:

Labour recognises the essential links between social and economic policy. Many factors can hold people back in educational achievement—poor housing, inequalities, poverty, and complex cultural factors. No one should have their options limited because of the part of society they are born into. (New Zealand Labour Party, 2014, p. 32)

Then this:

Labour will provide educators with every possible resource to help them deliver the best quality education and achieve the highest standard in their work. We will rebuild the high-quality, inclusive, public education system that New Zealand needs. Our approach to education will rest on the fundamental belief that everyone has a right to a high-quality education and a fair go. (New Zealand Labour Party, 2014, p. 33).

Like National, Labour also seems to accept the within/beyond school dualism but with one major difference: unlike National, Labour gives considerable weight to beyond-school factors, but what is missing is the specific mechanisms which would give the policy causal effect.

A final thought

One may well ask who is advising the government on the causes of and solutions to the inequality of school achievement. Why is it that the only advice Ministers of Education seem to receive (e.g., Ministry of Education, Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Achievement) is framed by the within-school/beyond school dualism, with recommendations falling neatly in the within-school camp? Why is it that the message advanced by the Coleman Report, and repeated endlessly since (especially by academic researchers), gets no traction? Why is it that an extremely limited explanatory theory is preferred to a rich and powerful one? Why is it that ...? And on it goes. Nearly 80 years ago Beeby saw the light as have others since. Who turned the light off, leaving present-day Minister and Ministry officials in the dark? In the meantime, students continue to suffer from the inequality of school achievement through no fault of their own and will continue to do so until someone in a position of power is brave enough to 'put the world to rights'.

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