Chapter 12
Searching for Equity and Social Justice: Diverse Learners in Aotearoa New Zealand

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The structure, forms and practices of modern schools have remained relatively unchanged since their emergence as sites of mass instruction, established to meet the needs of burgeoning industrialized economies. However, schools have also traditionally sat in contest between economic necessity and more intransitive public good (Ramirez & Boli, 1994). The progressive impulses evident throughout the twentieth century were expressive of widely held beliefs that schooling could create a more democratic society. In a shift away from conservative and authoritarian schooling practices, New Zealand progressive educational ideas were enacted through egalitarian policies, legislating for broader definitions of "good citizenship" through a wider curriculum, greater autonomy for teachers and rhetoric on fostering the development of individual potentials through education. These initiatives took root in the mid-twentieth century, a period defined by the country's economic prosperity and commitment to social equity. However, national social policies enacted for the public good served to reinforce social norms, and obscured diversities such as gender and ethnicity (Novitz & Wilmott, 1990) or excluded and segregated others as in the case of disabilities (Rata, O'Brien, Murray, Mara, Gray & Rawlinson, 2001).

Current education policies in New Zealand can be counted among the most progressive and inclusive in its history as far as their intention of addressing the needs of diverse student population and ensuring the widest possible participation of all interest groups in schooling are concerned. Two recent policy initiatives, *Schooling Strategy 2005–2010 – Making a Bigger Difference for all Students* and *Special Education Action Plan: Better Outcomes for Children (2006–2011)*, taken together highlight the centrality of concerns regarding diversity in New Zealand education policy (Ministry of Education, 2005a, 2006a). These strategies sit within the framework of a structurally devolved educational system, that was made possible through a radical policy initiative in the late 1980s, *Tomorrow's Schools* (Department of Education, 1989a).

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The current policy focus on diversity is significant, given that in recent times, the population within New Zealand schools has continued to diversify along several dimensions. For example,

- A report by the New Zealand government's statistical agency found the gap between high and low income households had grown significantly between 1982 and 1996 (Statistics New Zealand, 1999).
- Increasing migration – in the year to September 2006, there has been a net inflow of 4,500 school-age migrants to NZ. Approximately similar increase is projected for 2007 by Statistics New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2006b), and increased ethnic diversity (see Table 12.1).
- However, in a period of unprecedented national population growth, rural communities have been facing continual cycles of school closures or amalgamation, as a result of government cutbacks and urban drift. Total number of schools reduced by 145 from 2,722 to 2,577 between 2001 and 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006c)

In this chapter, we invite you, the readers, into a discussion by setting out the recent policies and supporting initiatives that frame issues of social justice and diversity in New Zealand schooling, interrogating our research cases, for their politics of the everyday (Gitlin, 2005), and asking you to think about the resonances and dissonances between our examples and your own educational, socio-cultural and political contexts.

We argue that whilst state schooling is inevitably shaped by political contestation at the level of policy, classrooms are also politically charged spaces, evident in the contests between individuals who are invested with varied positionalities and motivations. Policy initiatives despite their explicit intent to address issues related to diversity, while necessary, are not sufficient to create contexts of equity or equality for historically marginalized learners (Raudenbush, 2005). While policy initiatives can create some possibilities within the micro-settings of schools, what happens within those sites largely depends on the ways in which wider historical and social discourses constitute the role of teachers, their students, and the ways in which a range of participants, including researchers, engage with the purposes of policy initiatives and teaching and learning practices. Wider participation and social justice are influenced by the extent to which intentions can be acted upon and realized.

Ethnographic studies undertaken to explore issues of teacher and student learning in relation to student diversity within the micro sites of school contexts have the

Table 12.1 Percentage of students enrolled in New Zealand schools by ethnicity (Ministry of Education, 2006d)

	NZ European/Pākehā and other European	Māori	Pasifika	Asian	Other ethnic groups
2006	59.0	21.6	9.1	8.2	2.0
2005	59.6	21.6	8.8	8.0	1.9
2004	60.5	21.4	8.5	7.8	1.7
2003	61.3	21.1	8.4	7.5	1.7

potential to engage critically with both the intended and unintended outcomes that can arise in the research process. We will use case studies undertaken in three public schools – two elementary and one secondary – to highlight the affordances and limitations of acting within the contexts of particular policy initiatives. We suggest that critical attention must be paid to understanding the implications of what happens when initiatives to address diversity as part of teaching and learning are played out within the micro contexts of schools.

Further, it is our position that as economies have globalized towards the end of last century and the beginning of this one, and discourses of competitive individualism taken hold within our public institutions, the expression of hope for greater social justice in schooling continues to be played out through public school policy. In this context, discourses of neo-liberal economic rationalism work against impulses of social democracy with global solutions to educational dilemmas traded across national boundaries coming into conflict with policies and initiatives representative of national interests and cultural specificity. Placing the policy initiatives within the larger socio-political-economic context of this historical time reveals alternative ways in which they can be and have been interpreted to serve intended and unintended interests.

Charting the Policy Terrain in New Zealand

Tomorrow's Schools (1989)

The New Zealand Education Act of 1989 was a radical experiment designed to shift the authority of school governance and management from the centralized government control to individual school boards comprised of 3–7 community members (usually parents), the school principal and a teacher representative. The policy initiative known as *Tomorrow's Schools* is unique to New Zealand in that it officially devolved the administrative control to individual school communities for the entire country. It was promoted as a means of ensuring community involvement in educational decision-making, enabling parents/caregivers to participate in schooling in ways that were socially and culturally appropriate to local communities. The schools, at least theoretically, were thus situated to be accountable to the communities rather than to the government bureaucracy. Whilst administrative accountability was devolved to local communities, the most critical aspects of educational decision-making have remained under the centralized control of the then newly established Ministry of Education, and its policy frameworks for curriculum and assessment (O'Neill, 1996/97). Following the implementation of this Act, some New Zealand education writers have criticized it vociferously. There have also been concerns that all communities are subject to the same accountabilities under the Act despite having unequal capacities to effectively negotiate the administrative demands of running a school.

New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001)

> "Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments.… Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.… Disability relates to the interaction between the person with the impairment and the environment. It has a lot to do with discrimination, and has a lot in common with other attitudes and behaviors such as racism and sexism that are not acceptable in our society." (Ministry of Health, 2001, p. 3)

New Zealand's special education policy affirms the right of every student to learn in accordance with the principles and values of the Education Act 1989. In particular, Section 8 of the Education Act legislates for equal rights, freedoms and responsibilities for primary and secondary education for all learners – 'People who have special educational needs (whether because of disability or otherwise) have the same rights to enroll and receive education in state schools as people who do not.' (Department of Education, 1989b) Using a Human Rights argument, the New Zealand Disability Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2001) holds a "vision of a fully inclusive society" and aims to remove the barriers that prevent disabled people from participating fully in society.

The policy in itself is an emancipatory document, and has been instrumental in challenging and changing a wide range of beliefs and practices within and beyond educational institutions. Yet, as evident in the national consultation process undertaken in 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2004), its influence in the daily lives of students with disabilities remains highly variable, depending on the micro level contestations for resources and access in specific schools and class rooms.

Schooling Strategy (2005)

New Zealand Government's oft-reiterated goal of "… the transformation of New Zealand into a knowledge-based economy and society" through a high quality education for all is reflected in the Minister of Education Hon Steve Maharey's comments that,

> "Education is at the heart of this transformation. We have an education system to be proud of. But we can't rest on our laurels. We need to build an education system for the 21st century; a system where every child and student is stimulated to learn. We need to improve the system's ability and the ability of all those within the system to respond to the diversity of our learners of all ages" (Ministry of Education, 2005b).

The statement mirrors a widely accepted official and society's view of the high value placed on egalitarianism in this country. However, alongside this view rests the uncomfortable reality of the persistent and still significantly wide gap "… between our highest and lowest achievers" in various international comparison studies of selected educational outcomes, for instance PISA results (Ministry of Education, 2003).

In response to this dilemma, the focus of state educational policy has recently shifted to evidence-based practice in ensuring high 'academic and social outcomes' for all learners (Alton-Lee, 2003, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2005b). The Schooling Strategy (2005) is indicative of the case being built for developing iterative evidence-based frameworks for teacher competency and professionalism in relation to their effects on student learning. The Strategy reveals the extent to which evidence-based frames are embedded in current conceptions of educational policy, with research and evaluation underpinning all initiatives linked to schooling, such as curriculum, leadership, initial teacher education and school improvement.

With its basis in meta-analyses and syntheses of extant research, this strategy can be situated within the ongoing international contestation of the nature and comprehensiveness of empirical educational research (Egan, 2002). While only the most extreme positions would today dismiss the significance of empiricism entirely, many contributors to the debate have argued that a broader range of intellectual practices be brought to bear on the conceptualization of educational issues (Atkinson, 2000; Phillips, 2005). Within the New Zealand context, the recent conceptualization or implementation efforts, by and large, have scarcely drawn on this debate so far.

Addressing Diversity Issues in Schools – Three Case Studies

It is hard to disagree with the notion that addressing schooling inequalities is important and that addressing diversity as part of teaching and learning should inform the ways in which students and teachers work together. In fact as Atkinson (2000) suggests, raising critical questions about such notions can appear to be engaging in a form of heresy, seen to be resistant to both progress and democracy. However, as researchers working at the micro level of schooling contexts to address issues of student diversity and teaching and learning, our experience has been that notions of diversity and teaching and learning, taken both separately and together pose considerable challenges for teachers and researchers (Quinlivan, 2005). We turn to our empirical studies to highlight some of these challenges.

Case Study 1: Home School Relationships with Reference to Diversity

Our first case study is based on a longitudinal school-wide project that I (Baljit Kaur) initiated in 1999 in a primary (elementary) school situated in a low-income area (Referred to as a low decile school in New Zealand – Decile 3, rated on a scale of 1–10). The school roll of 5- to 11-year olds in 2000 was 225, with ethnic composition of Pakeha (NZ European) 65%; Mäori 25%; Others (including Somali, Ethiopian, Chinese and Fijian) 10% (Education Review Office, 2000). The study

aimed to investigate the complexity of the relationships among parents, teachers and children with focus on diversity, and explored issues of power, voice, authority and knowledge. A consideration of children's voices in what has traditionally been seen as contestations of the relative roles and perceptions of teachers and parents was a significant dimension of the project. Children positioned 'outside the mainstream' had views and experiences that often contradicted the views of teachers and parents as well as the findings of extant research on home school relationships.

We will focus here on three questions. First, as already pointed out the New Zealand Education Act of 1989 significantly altered the relative positions of parents and teachers in the administration of schools. To what extent has this policy change opened spaces for parents from diverse, usually disadvantaged and minority groups in this case study school, to participate in schooling? Second, the Disability strategy with its base in human rights advocates for an inclusive education system. However, given the wider instrumental and accountability discourses prevalent in New Zealand, the teacher education and special education professional development continue to draw much more significantly on deficit theories of disabilities. How does such professional preparation interface with and influence the lived experiences of children with disabilities in schools? Third, children's voices are virtually missing from research on home school relationships; from policy informed by such research, and in turn, from the policy driven practice. What, if anything, can young children, positioned variously in the school system, according to perceived dis/ability, culture or class background, add to our understandings of how they experience and manage home-school relationships?

Parents and Schools – Partners?

Home school relationship as a plank for social and educational reforms to deal with society's problems or with individual students seen to be 'at risk' for failure in schools has a long history (Cutler, 2000). Research in home school relationships has traditionally been driven by deficit thinking largely informed by developmental-psychological/medical assumptions about difference and diversity. Although this still remains a dominant approach, increasingly it has come under criticism by those studying the broader socio-cultural context of schooling and school's function of social reproduction of inequities (Lareau, 2000, 2003; May, 1994). Alternative frames to understand home school relationships that stemmed out of such criticism underline the significance of visiting the question of home school relationship from the situated perspectives of parents from 'disadvantaged' groups in society such as the lower class, ethnic minorities, or parents of children with disabilities.

The Education Act was promoted as a means of ensuring schools' accountability to their local communities, encouraging community involvement in educational decision-making, and enabling parents/caregivers to participate in schooling. Thus, it was seen as a mechanism through which diverse members of the population will be able to participate and have a voice in educational decision-making, thus creating more inclusive schools.

The policy change enabled a few parents, mostly women in this study, to participate actively in the school in roles that gave them unprecedented prestige and authority. It provided them with opportunities to handle what to them was a big budget and huge responsibilities as employers of the staff. These women felt grateful to the school for providing them with the opportunity to feel important and useful. Many noticed significant changes in their self-confidence.

Several mothers volunteered long hours in the school, providing much valued help in the traditionally accepted roles of parents as helpers in junior classes. The school attempted to make them feel welcome by opening the staff room to them. They in turn reciprocated by regularly volunteering more time, doing anything that needed to be done.

The home school relationship seemed very positive to all concerned. It is clear from the interviews with these mothers that school's uptake of the policy created a legitimate space for them to engage actively with the school, giving them opportunities to be recognized for their efficiency, allowing several of them to act on a scale much bigger than that offered to them by their lives outside of the school. They deeply appreciated these opportunities. However, the obverse side of this grateful acknowledgement was that they were highly compliant to the ideas of the principal and the teaching staff. In fact in all the observations of the board meetings in one year, I did not note a single disagreement or question from the board members about anything that the principal or the teacher representative proposed. The effect was that the principal ended up with most of the governance work. Most of the decision making power too rested with the principal rather than with the board members. The board more often than not served as a ratifying rather than as a decision making body.

Further, there was no mechanism for the board members to seek the views of other parents were they so inclined. Migrant or refugee parents often did not understand the role of the board members or the administrative structure of the school. Not a single respondent from immigrant or refugee families had considered becoming a member of the board despite several of them having high education levels. Many of them did assume the traditional roles of parents in school relative to their own children's education. For Maori whanau and Pacific Island mothers, the reasons for poor participation were often related to their negative association with schooling, frustration about the lack of genuine cultural responsiveness, and financial and time constraints. Children and families, who were positioned outside the school norm, whether based on dis/ability, culture, ethnicity or class, had no public space or mechanism through which their concerns or needs could be aired or addressed.

Thus, while the policy positioned the board members, acting on behalf of the school community, in the powerful role of employers of school staff, in this low decile school they felt beholden to the principal and the staff not only for their children's education but also for opening new opportunities for themselves. The extent to which then they can be expected to exert any decision-making independence to represent the interests of the community that they purportedly represent is questionable. The 'private' gains for the concerned mothers and their children might at times be significant and positive. Whether such parent participation has brought much 'public' benefit to the wider community of parents is doubtful at best.

Children with Special Needs, Their Families and Inclusive Schooling – A Mirage?

The Disability Strategy had not come into force when this project started, but public consultations about it were well underway and it was in the process of being implemented by the time the fieldwork was completed. The school had a large number of children seen to have learning and/or behavioral problems. To deal with them, some innovative initiatives, such as a pull out program called Academy where these children were engaged in interesting activities such as art, were put into place. An elaborate system of rewards and punishments was implemented rigorously. The staff sought active involvement of the concerned parents. The school hired a counselor, an uncommon practice in New Zealand primary schools, who in addition to working with individual children was charged to run a parent education and support group on a regular basis. "At risk" children, identified by teachers, were pulled out of their classrooms twice a week for half day for the 'Academy' activities on the condition that their parents, mostly mothers, must attend the parent education program to learn effective parenting skills in order to support their children's learning and behavior outside the school. Thus while the school was proactive in supporting the children, it did so from a deficit perspective where the children and their families were positioned as dysfunctional and in need of interventions. Unlike children, the adults, teachers and parents alike, saw the disciplining system as transparent, largely fair and effective in managing children's behavior. Children participating in the Academy program mostly saw it as a positive experience. On the other hand, several mothers attended the parenting program because they were required to do so, thus minimizing the benefits they were expected to derive from it.

The school had only three children with noticeable sensorial, physical or intellectual impairments. None of the teachers felt confident to teach these children. A boy with profound hearing impairments was already in the school when the project started. While the school received funding to support his learning, it was not able to find an adequately trained person to take up such a role. One of the mothers was given the responsibility of helping him in a common sense manner off and on during most days and periodically a trained person visited the school from a local school for the hearing impaired.

A boy with Down syndrome and a girl with impaired mobility were admitted during the duration of the project. In both cases, the school tried quite hard to refuse the admission diplomatically, largely because the staff felt that they did not have the expertise to deal with such children. In the end, both children were accepted largely without any interventions from the Ministry of Education. The initial apprehension on the part of the teacher as well as several parents about admitting the child with impaired mobility soon dissipated as everyone came to appreciate the sharp intellect and warm disposition of this child. The child with Down syndrome had a full time teacher aide and was left alone in her care with little attempt at inclusion of any kind. Given the emphasis on standards, achievement and efficiency, it is no wonder that there was little concern or space in this school for a child seen to have intellectual disabilities.

Children from other countries were regularly pulled out of classrooms to teach them English, however, interviews with the children and their parents suggest that this was not the kind of support they considered relevant. Many of them wanted the school to provide increased opportunities for the children to participate alongside 'kiwi kids' so that the other children could learn to accept them as equals and desirable mates instead of pulling them out of the whole class activities that reiterated their differences. But they had not found a way to inform the school of their wishes, since most of them felt such a 'demand' on their part might seem signal that they were ungrateful for the good life and new opportunities that being in New Zealand had offered to them.

In all these cases, the parents/caregivers felt overwhelmingly indebted to the school for admitting them, accepting whatever the school was able to offer and had little further expectations about better inclusion or more appropriate instructional support.

Children in Home School Relationship – The Silent Beneficiaries of Adult Benevolence?

As noted earlier, children's voices are virtually missing from research, policy and practice related to home school relationships. Children and their learning is assumed to be at the center of this relationship and it is taken for granted that parents and teachers should and do work collaboratively to ensure best learning outcomes for all children. There are very few studies of home school relationships undertaken from the perspective of children, in New Zealand or elsewhere. When children's views are included, these have been restricted to relatively older children and at best form an incidental part of the study.

This state of affairs is contrary to the participation rights of children. According to the UNCORC to which New Zealand is a signatory, children should be able to participate in decisions that impact their lives significantly. Research in the area of home school relationships continues to treat children as silent or passive beneficiaries of adult benevolence, and yet, there is plenty of evidence that all adults do not work in the best interest of all children. Once I moved to question this assumed benevolence of adults and the forced silence of children, it became evident that children often were not at the center of decision-making priorities in the school under study. Only some of them became visible to the adults engaged in shaping their lives, and not always for the right reasons or with positive consequences.

Children, when given a chance to share their views of home school relationship, revealed thoughtful and strategic responses to their specific situatedness within the school. It was clear that depending on how a child perceived his/her position within the school and the home, he/she actively engaged at times to facilitate and at others to subvert the adult plans and actions meant to enhance relationships between the two settings. Most children made a clear distinction between the 'private' world of home and the 'public' world of school. It was fine to share what happened at school

with family members, but what happened outside the school was their private life, none of school's business; unless of course, they trusted to tell about it to a friend or a teacher. 'Trust' featured prominently in many responses from children.

Children, as young as nine, actively and successfully managed the relationship between their home and the school. The continuity between the two settings, home visits by teachers or parent teacher meetings at school were all fine in the eyes of those children who were from Pakeha, middle class families, were doing fine in sport and/or achieving well at school, or were considered to be well behaved, "no problem" children. For children who felt that the school disapproved of them or their family, or saw them as disruptive or their parents as troublemakers or different, and a few who felt that adults in their lives neither at school nor at home cared about them, did not want close connections between their home and the school. They did not think continuity or a close connection between their home and the school was to their advantage. To some it was not acceptable that contact between their parents and teachers that excluded them, should occur at all unless they trusted the teacher concerned.

Research and policy strongly advocate that a close connection between home and school acts to the benefit of children's learning. I would agree that, it does indeed for some children, most of whom already do have a relatively closer match between their home and school values and practices. But the applicability of this research and the policy recommendations based on it for the children at whom the 'closing the gaps' initiatives are usually aimed is questionable at best. The children in this study indicate that they, and sometimes their families, feel alienated in the school system and are fearful of 'them' – the state agencies like social welfare or police, and including school. However, they were not passive recipients, instead they were managing the perceived or real threats to their life worlds quite well by dodging or manipulating the system and its mandates to the extent possible, and/or by complying with it to the extent necessary.

Case Study 2: Drawing on Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling Evidence to Interrogate Constructions of Sexual Diversity and Gender – Possibilities and Problematics

In the second case study, two contextual issues that explore the gap between intentions and enactments in policies and practices will be explored within the context of a the research partnership that I (Kathleen Quinlivan) built with a year 12 Health teacher, Emma, and her students in order to widen understandings of gender and sexual diversity (Quinlivan, 2006). The first issue relates to the challenges and complexities of what it means to work against normalizing constructions of gender and sexuality with secondary school students. The second issue pertains to the affordances and challenges of working with best evidence teaching pedagogies to address learner diversity in a secondary school classroom.

The Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling – Iterative Best Evidence Syntheses (IBES) program, underpinning the Schooling Strategy (2005),

provides an officially sanctioned and supported venue for undertaking work with teachers and students to explore the ways in which a range of student diversities can be addressed within the classroom. While issues of sexual and gender diversity are not addressed specifically, Alton-Lee (2005) has developed a "responsiveness to diversity framework" (p. 3) which draws attention to the role that notions of normalisation play in constructing a sense of 'otherness' for diverse students, and rejects binary frameworks.

> "Our approach is to put difference (original emphasis) at the centre of this work through a 'responsiveness to diversity' framework. Because difference is a characteristic that all learners share, the approach allows for a universalizing discourse of difference (Britzman, 1995; Town, 1998). This approach moves away from 'norm' and 'other' thinking that can constrain mainstream educational thinking to focus on the homogenous and the 'mean' and seeks to strengthen our evidence base about what works for all learners." (Alton-Lee, 2005, p. 3)

A 'responsiveness to diversity' framework that emphasizes universalizing as opposed to minoritizing constructions of sexual diversity (Sedgwick, 1990) is concerned with the possibilities inherent in 'working against' normalisation (Kumashiro, 2002). Within the context of my own research such frameworks provide an opportunity to undertake ethnographic work in classrooms to explore what might be possible in terms of 'working against' heteronormativity and gender norms. This can begin to widen understandings of sexual diversity and gender, and to address the material effects these constructions have on students, both academically and socially. Emma was aware that in the past her strategies for addressing homophobic student comments mostly had the effect of shutting down rather than opening up dialogue about diverse sexualities (Sedgwick, 1990). She was interested in working with students to problematise constructions of heteronormalcy in ways that would facilitate, rather than foreclose the work of thinking about thinking (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004). Acutely aware about the centrality of gender and sexuality in the ongoing self constructions of young adults on the one hand, and the usual silence around these topics in the formal curriculum on the other, students too recognized the importance of creating a venue to explore the wide range of ways in which gender and sexuality are construed. The willingness of all the participants to engage in this critical initiative, however, did not prepare us for the challenging responses that this work produced. Paradoxically, at certain crucial moments, that will become evident below, the dangers inherent in interrogating the highly emotive constructs of gender and sexuality with young adults forced Emma and me to step back into the safety of competency based affirmations of our roles as a teacher and a researcher.

Dangerous Learning – Interrogating Hetero and Gender Normalcy in the Classroom

Several researchers note the high level of emotionality that surrounds pedagogical work undertaken in relation to the interrogation of gender and sexuality issues in classroom contexts (Berlak, 2004; Britzman, 2003; Quinlivan, 2005). Given such

dynamics, it is not surprising that working to interrogate and critically analyze the heteronormative constructions of masculinity and femininity produced in popular culture resulted in strong reactions. Peer policing and re-inscribing of hegemonic forms of gender and sexuality emerged as pervasive features of the hidden peer curriculum in classroom interactions during the research project. For instance, during a discussion analyzing desirable representations of femininity across historical contexts one male student made derogatory comments about female size, reinforcing hegemonic constructions of femininity in relation to thinness (Harris, 2004). In a later interview two female students recalled the negative effects that the comments had on their female peers who were size 14 and above.

Instances of some male students subtly policing hegemonic constructions of masculinity and heterosexuality through underhand comments (Nayak & Kehily, 1996) also occurred when representations of gender and sexuality in magazine advertisements were being analyzed. Several male students appeared to be uncomfortable when looking at images of desirable men in the ads designed to sell underwear, as evident in the excerpt below:

> Interestingly when we were giving out copies of the advertisements, especially the one of the spunky guy with the tiger tattoo on his abdomen, one of the male students [Justin] who appears to have a deep investment in hegemonic masculinities commented to one of the other male students [Guy], who enacts a less normative form of masculinity, "Oh I bet you think he's really hot!" He appeared to insinuate Guy was gay and was putting him down for that, and in so doing reiterating his own heterosexuality in front of his peers. (Researcher Fieldnotes 20/5/04)

Justin in a later interview explained that he felt obliged to counteract discourses that legitimated same sex desire in order to establish his own heteronormative masculinity in the situation. For Justin and his friends, the danger of being perceived as gay by their peers within what they understood to be a profoundly heteronormative school culture was too overwhelming to risk. Their fears accurately reflected the power of dominant heteronormative discourses that circulated amongst the students, especially amongst young men. One of the male students whom I had observed being harassed for his lack of conformity to masculine gendered norms informed me that he had been physically hit in the school yard for challenging the heteronormative assumptions of his peers by talking about the high incidence of bisexuality in society generally. We had previously discussed notions of bisexuality in class in order to disrupt and problematise dominant heteronormative discourses.

Further, the gendered and heteronormative policing incidents that emerged within the class had the material effect of silencing the non-normative male students. The silence, in effect, reinforced the students' otherness in relation to the masculine norm that was dominant in their peer culture.

Such incidents produced a great deal of anxiety and distress amongst the students as well as for Emma and me. They resulted in Justin being excluded from the class on a number of occasions. Ongoing debates between Emma and the students concerned the fairness of this action. While Emma's actions were well intentioned in terms of sending a message to the students that Justin's harassment was unacceptable, his absence shut down the opportunity for us to explore the influential role

that understandings of gender and sexuality play in crafting a sense of self for the students, and in finding ways to negotiate such complexities. In practice it proved challenging for us to acknowledge and work productively with the high emotionality that emerges when working against repeating heteronormalising and gender normalising discourses (Kumashiro, 2002).

Thus, our attempts to create a venue in the classroom to problematise normalising constructions of masculinity, femininity and sexual diversity proved paradoxical and much more complex than we had expected. In some instances students challenged the attitudes and behaviors of their parents and peers in unexpected ways, and demonstrated an openness and respect for sexual diversity amongst their peers. While at the same time a small group of male students covertly policed the masculinities of their non-normative male classmates, out of a fear of being labeled as gay themselves.

During the project, Emma and I became aware that while the students could readily engage in critical dialogue in terms of analyzing and challenging heteronormative sexual diversity and gendered discourses, they were not as facile when faced with the task of communicating their understandings in writing. We turned to the Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling Best Evidence Synthesis (Alton-Lee, 2003) in order to develop their metacognitive and writing skills. We had intended to use the Synthesis to help us integrate our ongoing conceptual work on sexual and gender diversity with developing their metacognitive and writing skills.

Pleasures and Dangers of 'Quality Teaching' Frameworks for Teachers and Researchers

Current constructions of teacher professionalism are increasingly influenced in New Zealand by discourses of teaching excellence and mastery in relation to learning outcomes for diverse students (Alton-Lee, 2003). Emma and I experienced both enjoyment and tensions over the course of the research project in endeavoring to move beyond ways of working with 'Best evidence' frameworks for 'quality teaching' in an instrumental fashion. 'Best evidence' frameworks for 'quality teaching' appear both unsettling and alluring for secondary school teachers and researchers such as me who have secondary school teaching backgrounds. Given the traditional construction of secondary school teachers as subject specialists, encountering more generic pedagogical knowledge related to learning processes to address student diversity might be both deeply exciting and also terrifying for them. As explained later, the instrumental frameworks in which the research is couched also fit rather worryingly well with other nationally driven instrumental student assessment procedures that teachers have had to adjust to within the increasingly practice driven instrumental cultures of schools (McWilliam, 2000).

The process of learning about, and developing and practicing our understandings of pedagogical processes to build students' metacognitive skills proved to be pleasurable for both of us. Emma reported that she enjoyed the extent to which the best

evidence synthesis affirmed her competence as a teacher, in making explicit strategies such as scaffolding, which, as a subject specialist, she had not encountered before. She noted the pleasure she felt over time as she was able to draw on the strategies more readily and comfortably when working with students. Within the context of our work, the ten teaching features that the synthesis identifies and describes provided a way to value the pedagogical practices that Emma was already drawing on to inform student learning. As a keen and highly motivated teacher she independently obtained a copy of the synthesis for herself, and really enjoyed learning about, not only what was working well in her class, but also wider research findings related to teaching and learning for diverse students.

It is not surprising that 'best evidence' frameworks are alluring to ambitious teachers (and researchers) such as Emma and myself. There was an understandable desire on both our parts to examine our own teaching in the light of 'best evidence' in order to evaluate the extent to which our teaching practices reflected 'best practice'. Emma also acknowledged, as an ambitious and successful teacher, her desire to be able to 'tick all the boxes' of the best evidence synthesis and in so doing achieve pedagogical mastery:

> [I]…. at some level got a little bit annoyed because I'm an achiever, but I didn't get all the tick boxes…(laughs) oh, bloody overachiever … laughs … but you know, it didn't put me off enough to worry about that. (Emma, Health teacher, 40 years old, Final Interview, 9/7/05)

McWilliam (1999) draws on Lacanian frameworks to suggest the pleasures of mastery and excellence are something of a double edged sword. She proposes that the notion of achieving excellence and mastery can be problematic because achieving excellence is an end in itself, and that at that moment nothing more is required. Within this illusory triumph of reason over emotion, she explains, there is literally nothing more to know. Felman (1982) suggests that such fantasies mitigate against authentic learning, which occurs instead from the acknowledgement that human knowledge in reality is untotaliable.

The mastery that Emma and I enjoyed over the pedagogical skills, and the increasing success that students showed in metacognitive skills as a result of our pedagogical focus were pleasurable. But at some point I realized that we were moving away from the focus on addressing the challenging issues of sexual and gender diversity, and from the implications of engaging with the dangerous knowledge of legitimating same sex desire and gender diversity (Britzman, 1998). It was as if the pedagogies and learning skills became an end in themselves, seemingly disconnected from the intentions with which we had decided to focus on these in the first instance. Looking back now, the rush of success we experienced from our expertise with developing students' metacognitive skills felt in many ways like ticking a box in comparison to the much more demanding pedagogical and challenging questions that were raised when Emma and I, along with the students, had to come to terms with the enormity of the fact that the hidden peer culture was actively subverting our intentions to widen student understandings of sexual and gender diversity. The ways in which we dealt with the policing of masculinities and sexualities within the peer culture was inadequate at best, and ended up shutting down the very dialogue

that we had set out to promote. Perhaps it would have been more transformative, had we, despite our fears, persisted with interrogating that issue more fully instead of shifting our focus to metacognitive skills.

Talking about these tensions later, Emma drew my attention to the extent to which best evidence frameworks sit comfortably within the current climate of evaluation and standards that strongly inform student assessment in schools (Hipkins & Vaughan, 2002). On one hand she suggested that teachers could benefit from meeting standards that best evidence frameworks had identified as facilitating diverse students' learning. On the other hand, she was wary of the dangers of using the best evidence syntheses in an instrumental fashion, recognizing from our work together that facilitating diverse students' learning is a complex process. The questions concerning the understandable disjuncture between policies and practices (Raudenbush, 2005), especially within a pragmatic and practice orientated culture such as New Zealand (Quinlivan, Boyask & Carswell, 2006), remain. Can approaches underpinned by instrumental frameworks and framed as a series of ten interconnected strategies that could also be interpreted as standards, be used in thoughtful and considered ways towards addressing issues of diversity in relation to student learning within the increasingly instrumental cultures of schools? To what extent are we in danger of losing rich conceptual and content knowledge through a narrow emphasis on learning skills and strategies for both students and teachers? Is it possible for researchers and teachers to 'stretch' quality teaching and best evidence synthesis frameworks to accommodate and explore the tensions that arise as part of the research process? Or is that just too tall an ask, given that rich and nuanced understandings of diversity, and their relationship to student learning pose a challenge to the traditional constructs of secondary school teachers as subject specialists within the profoundly instrumental cultures of the schools? Perhaps it may be worth considering the potential of wading into the dark and murky waters of fear, uncertainty, high emotionality and failure as sites of learning. (Felman, 1982; Britzman, 2003; Ellsworth, 2005) Open and thoughtful dialogue between New Zealand policymakers and educational researchers that engages with the complexities of the gap between the 'hope' of educational policies, and the 'happening' of their enactment on the ground', as Kenway and Willis (1997) describe it, would be helpful in negotiating the challenges.

Case Study 3: Practice Meets Policy – Encountering Undemocratic Practices in an Intended Democratic Educational Context

In turning to our third case study, we begin with a discussion of the dilemmas drawn from our unexpected, encounters with undemocratic the nature of the everyday politics in a neo-progressive experimental school for children between the ages of 5 and 12 in New Zealand. This school emerged as a state funded primary school under Section 156 of the Education Act that permits, with sufficient public interest

and support, the development of special character schools. The designated special character status of this school rests on its philosophy of "discovery learning" captured in the school's mission statement as, "Free to discover, to uncover, and create your own path". My colleagues who are co-authors of this Chapter, and those who are not, Kane O'Connell and John Clough, and I (Jean McPhail) chose to engage in a participant-observation action study of this experimental school during its first 4 years because its broad vision overlapped with key aspects of progressive schooling that reflected our long-term research interests. We were, therefore, drawn to this opportunity to study the ways that this neo-progressive school implemented quality-learning programs in a distinctly different socio-cultural political context from the origins of progressive thought.

Through our work at this school, we were pressed to raise numerous questions that bear on the intersection of educational policy and macro-politics, and educational policy and school practice. What, we wondered, were the possibilities inherent in the intersections of end of the twentieth century neo-liberal educational policy and practices with progressive thought espoused almost 100 years before? What did it mean that, like Dewey, members of the Foundational Board of Trustees of this experimental school viewed their school as having a significant role to play in the shaping of democratic character and the creation of a mini-democratic community with impact extending to traditional schooling? Could the democratic social engineering efforts on the ground of this neo-progressive school ultimately lead to more equitable and communitarian principles and practices both within this school and in traditional schooling? Would the numerous practice changes be enough to meet the democratic-educational ideals or would they be compromised or co-opted by more traditional and hierarchical educational discourses and/or neo-liberal socio-political discourses circulating both inside and outside the school?

The Design of the School

The founding body of this experimental school was composed of six individuals – three education professionals and three parents with deep commitments to alternative education. They believed that significant changes on the ground of the school would lead to young children becoming new kinds of learners better prepared to confront the opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century. While these six individuals shared a general neo-progressive vision that became the bedrock of this school, each of them also had specific interests that they worked to instantiate in the practices of the school. So the administrative and teaching staffs were hired because of their general enthusiasm about the general progressive, pedagogical vision articulated by the founding members in pubic forums, newspaper articles, and publicity, but they also represented a collection of people who initially ensured that the interests of the individual members of the foundational board would be served. Thus, among the staff were individuals with disparate interests and expertise authorized to develop practices consonant with the general pedagogical vision.

To work towards the development of twenty-first century democratic learners the members of the foundational board of trustees transformed educational beliefs and practices associated with the primary content of children's learning, the practices associated with that learning, and the role ascriptions of children, parents and teachers. The school building was architecturally designed to provide an environment in which these changes in schooling practices could be supported.

Drawing on the general pedagogical progressive idea of bringing the curriculum to the child through his or her genuine interests in learning, each child's primary learning was designed to capitalize on his or her individual interests. After identification of each child's interests, children were to undertake study of their interests in a self-managed context that emphasised experimentation, entrepreneurship and risk-taking, with effective learning necessarily extending outside the school walls to contexts in the community.

The foundational board members were committed to a participatory democratic community flourishing on the ground of this school in which the children, parents, teachers and members of the board were fully engaged in the pedagogical aspects of the school. They instantiated this democratic ideal through changes in the traditional relationships between children, parents and teachers in public schools. First, teachers were reconceptualized as facilitators and renamed as 'learning advisors,' positioned to facilitate and monitor children in their subject areas of interest, but not to serve as central sources of information nor as direct guides. Instead, children were authorized and expected to manage their daily interactions with their interest-based learning programs without direct, hands-on adult supervision.

Second, each child and his or her parents/caregivers were conceptualised as equal partners with the child's learning advisor in the design of each child's interest-based learning program. Periodic meetings between this team occurred to insure that each child was pursuing his or her interests in learning and meeting his or her learning goals. As well, the parents/caregivers were expected to be as actively involved as possible in assisting not only his or her child but other children as well in their interest-based learning in the school, community and at home. Thus, interest-based learning design and facilitation was the responsibility of the learning advisors and the parents/caregivers, with active participation of children.

Two Examples of Undemocratic Practices Spawned from Democratic Educational Policies

While this experimental school emerged through a state educational policy that empowered citizens and educational professionals in unprecedented ways to design, govern and manage schools, this was operationalized at the level of 'practice' and not theory. Several issues are paramount here. First, in the face of only a general, progressive vision not grounded in the theory and history of progressive education, this experimental school did not develop a coherent and specific curriculum and set of practices. This theoretical and historical vacuum created the context

for the interests of individual members of the foundational trust, the teaching staff and the parents/caregivers to emerge as significant sources of contestation and ultimately develop into powerful vested interest groups. For example, some members of the foundational trust board, learning advisors and parents believed that each individual child's interests in learning should be elevated above the social concerns of the school community. This meant that if the shared curriculum of the school did not dovetail with an individual child's interest then the rights of the child to pursue his or her interest-based learning should prevail. Given that this school was committed to social-democratic ideals, but at the general, non-theoretical political level, it was unprepared for the volatility created by the social conflicts within the school and the impact of the neo-liberal individualistic discourse outside of the school. Without recognition of the inevitable social conflict that would emerge in any experimental school committed to participatory democratic principles and, in particular, in one that was under-theorized relative to progressive educational ideas, there were no systems or processes in place which could work steadily to advance democratic, community processes.

Second, this experimental school as a self-governing and managing unit experienced the same problems as reported by the traditional schools in New Zealand since the Education Act of 1989. However, in addition, there were unique and significant difficulties at this experimental school. While in all schools the board members who were parents or community members were in charge of governance and the principal/director responsible for school management issues, a blurring of boundaries of the functions of 'governance' and 'management' emerged in this school since parents/caregivers were assigned a significant pedagogical role. This was exacerbated by the fact that most of the parent/caregiver members of the first elected Board of Trustees were among the most active participants, facilitating interest-based learning for groups of children at the school and in the community and regularly assisting the learning advisors in numerous ways. Additionally, these parents/caregivers engaged in pedagogical discussions with the learning advisors sometimes on a daily basis. As a consequence, these parents/caregivers and others who were regular, pedagogical contributors believed that they were authorized to speak on behalf of issues related to teaching and learning through their 'teaching' and 'leadership' status in the school community. Further, as almost all of the most active parents were well-educated and from middle class, they were not only eager to share their ideas and perceptions about educational practices but, also, believed it was their responsibility to do so as members of the participatory democratic community of the school.

This breakdown in the clear role ascriptions attributed to parents/caregivers and teachers relative to governance and management created unanticipated social challenges. Whereas the structure of traditional schools afforded the principal and teachers a higher and therefore certain status relative to the management of the educational affairs in their school and classrooms respectively, in this experimental school the director and learning advisors experienced daily threats to their higher professional status as educators while the most active of the parents/caregivers felt a concomitant lowering of their presumed elevated teaching-learning status. This concern over the respective status of the significant stake holders at this school thrust a wedge into the

community idea; it became difficult for the director/learning advisors and a growing number of parents to trust that the members of the school community did, indeed, share beliefs in the general democratic-progressive ideals. Over time, the social-democratic vision of this school was compromised through an increasing balkanisation of professional teachers-learning advisors and non-professional teacher-active parents.

Everyday Politics and Educational Policy

In thinking about this unexpected undemocratic meeting of practice and policy, we draw on a range of political and educational theorists who have exposed the tensions that exist in any culture between the interests of the state and those of the citizens. Like Tyack and Cuban (1995) in their book on a century of school reform, we, too, have come to appreciate that educational reform efforts have their origin in political ideas, and in this case study we inquire about the role of the state relative to that of its citizens through an examination of the ways The Education Act of 1989 was enacted in a neo-progressive experimental school. While this Act and its vision of Tomorrow's Schools was promoted as a way to make schools more responsive to community needs and interests through greater parental involvement, Wolin (2006) alerts us to the fact that democratic ideas do not in and of themselves lead to democratic purposes and ends, and that anti-democratic power can arise in institutions and be used to develop and reinforce anti-liberal policies. In fact, he sees this as a limitation of Deweyan progressive educational thinking in that the embryonic democratic, school communities that he envisioned as directly influencing political thought were, in fact, too weak to confront the larger macro-political anti-democratic politics. From his twenty-first century perspective, Wolin (2006) sees Dewey's ideas as being limited because he could not appreciate

> … where the conditions of democracy have become precarious: public education, corporate power and the dominance of the economic, the engulfing of the public – not by its supposed opposite, the "private" – but by the pacifying culture marketed by the media. (p. 519)

In a similar vein, it appears to us that the democratic vision of the policy of Tomorrow's Schools is also compromised by its limitation in recognizing the impact of late twentieth century neo-liberal macro-politics in creating the precarious conditions of democracy in the public school. As Apple (2005) argues, the orthodoxy of neo-liberalism shifts democracy to an economic rather than a political concept, an individual good rather than a collective good, therefore undermining the democratic values inherent in collective deliberation and mobilization about the common good on the part of citizenry. In examining the impact of this political turn on education practices, Robertson (2000) argues that neo-liberalism centers the new morality on the values of individual teachers and individual students and away from the collective good. Further, Ryan (1998) suggests that in emphasizing individual goals, the concept of liberty in the democratic contract has supreme status over the values of fraternity and equality.

This neo-liberal emphasis on the supreme rights of individual interests and tastes in the practices of this neo-progressive experimental school was gradually grafted onto its general participatory-democratic vision, creating deep tensions in its everyday politics, in spite of the best intentions. The general non-theoretical, political-educational vision of this experimental school in interaction with neo-liberal political thought was not robust enough to work against the neo-liberal, individual grain and towards the progressive, communitarian ideals of the founding members. As Wolin (2006) argues Deweyan progressive thought floundered because his assertion in a general belief in humanistic culture did not provide clear links to the exercise of power in public education. While some of this power results in the resistance to change on behalf of individuals who benefited from the social status quo (Westbrook, 1991), other resistances are the consequences of non-participatory democratic values in the macro-political discourses of neoliberalism. Taken together these kinds of powers, without clear understandings of their potential undemocratic impulses, can work against the best of educational dreams and ideals.

Policy, Practice and Research Interface – Some Concerns and Hopes

It is commendable that the New Zealand government is explicitly setting out to use research as a base for informing policy with an aim to make a bigger difference for all children. However, reflexivity is critical within a policy context where schooling practice is increasingly framed by the "evidence" produced by researchers. The authority invested in research, through government initiatives such as the *Schooling Strategy* (Ministry of Education, 2005a) and the Iterative Best-Evidence Synthesis Programmed that underpins it, has potential to destabilize democratic processes in schools if not employed carefully and strategically. The salience of positioning 'evidence based practice' at the center of policy initiatives makes it imperative for researchers and policy makers alike to be constantly aware of what gets excluded when 'research' is equated with 'best evidence for what works', irrespective of how that might be construed. And to what extent does the available 'research evidence' shut down alternative perspectives, which albeit less fashionable might be equally important?

As we search for instances of democratic potential in educational policy and practice, we are aware that as researchers our own vision will be clouded. Researchers become immersed in the everyday politics of their sites of investigation, bound by the power invested in them through expert knowledge and institutional authority. Bringing this with them into the political arena of the classroom, it is of special importance for those concerned with democratic schooling to acknowledge the political nature of research.

Without a strategic, deliberative and contemplative exercise of power, researchers themselves are at risk of subjection to discursive frames that work in opposition to

their aims. For example, without cognizance of the political interests operating on research practice, can we ensure that by making teachers' pedagogies accountable to our available evidence of best practice, we are not contributing to the construction of a culture ruled by economic imperatives?

The Schooling Strategy (2005) reiterates the ideas based on the available research evidence on best practice for diverse learners in an unproblematic and uncritical manner, urging educators to take action based on the identified focus points. Although the intent of the syntheses is clearly to continue to modify the understandings of 'what works', the authority and legitimacy of schooling strategy, both in the perceptions and the practices of the school personnel as well as the quality assurance agencies like the Education Review Office (ERO), would most likely not allow for much iteration to occur. Given the increasingly instrumental cultures of schools, and the ways in which teachers work has been driven by notions of standards and accountability over the last short while (Atkinson, 2000; McWilliam, 2000), it is more likely to be utilized in a similar instrumental fashion, as standards that teachers are measured against rather than as a discussion to be engaged with. So a significant question remains, how to position research evidence as 'subject to work on' rather than as an 'object of uncritical consumption and compliance'?

What Possibilities Do Public Policies Offer Diverse Individuals in Attaining Personal Liberty?

The extent to which state policies and initiatives enable liberty and wider participation is a question of great significance given their incomparable authority in the construction of public schooling. Obviously, some policies are constructed with greater concern for issues of social justice and wider participation than others. Focusing on the expression of hope for democratic transformation, it was not our intention to question policies that have non-democratic ideals at their centre. We contend that examining the possibilities inherent within policies that do address issues of equity is likely to be much more fruitful in furthering a discourse of hope. Yet, our work suggests that given their general nature, even the most democratic of social policies are too broadly defined to unproblematically improve educational outcomes for all. Policies are blunt instruments, and it is not until they are enacted within specific locations that the blunt instrument becomes refined enough to give a precise effect on the lives of individuals. However, there is rarely a direct line between policies and their implementation in practice, so that the precise effect of a policy is often clouded by commitment to previous educational policies, ritualized professional knowledge or the influences of other social discourses. Making explicit the process of enactment through its close investigation reveals strengths and limitations of a policy by demonstrating how it serves the purposes either of its democratic intentions or alternative social discourses. But perhaps most crucially,

demonstration of the complexities of achieving desired ends through implementation alerts us to the possibility that the nature of policy as a closed or all encompassing framework is itself problematic.

Following Andrew Gitlin, we undertook to search amongst our inquiries into schooling for a deeper politic, and to question the policy frames applied to schooling that "… limits our ability to be human and to imagine…." (Gitlin, 2005, p. 18). However, despite recognition of the limitations within policy frameworks, we maintain that to continue the discourse of hope is to look for the instances of potential within them, in order that they may be strengthened and reconfigured in response to wider and more diverse interests. Through interrogating our own descriptions of the politics of the everyday within schools, we can identify conditions under which current New Zealand state schooling policies, such as the administrative and curricular reform in the Education Act 1989 and initiatives that are associated with its implementation in the first decade of this century, intersect with democratic possibilities for schooling. We suggest that this can further dialogue both in terms of understanding the nature of ground level practice and how it intersects with policy initiatives, as well as opening agentic possibilities for school practitioners to give shape and definition to macro-policies.

Whilst we have already proposed that research should interrogate the micropolitics of the classroom, this position behooves us to open our own practice and political situation to interrogation. We advocate for extending dialogue on educational research to researchers and thinkers from different cultural settings, to help us to "see" our own situation more clearly. We would argue for intercultural dialogue to make visible assumptions hidden within our contexts of practice. This advocacy comes in the face of global generalizations of educational dilemmas and their solutions, such as disparities in the achievement of literacy evident through international studies like PISA (OECD, 2001, 2004). New Zealand's recent political responses to these global dilemmas make claims of sensitivity to national interests (Alton-Lee, 2004, 2005). However, if the dilemma arises from evidence that reflects global interests, as in the case of the OECD studies, there may be some mismatch between a globally constructed dilemma and the significance of that dilemma to national identity and aspirations. For example, in the PISA study, against whose epistemologies are learning and achievement measured? In this respect it is worthwhile to converse across the cultural boundaries of nations, institutions and disciplines so that we, as researchers, can work against reductionism and expand our understandings of what counts as research, its role and use in the construction of subjectivities through public education.

In closing, it is our hope that our sharing of this micro-examination of the everyday politics of specific school contexts can help us as social scientists to carry out Popper's (1945) role of coming to understandings of "the unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions" so that we can learn "what we cannot do." Too much of democracy is at risk in early twenty first century schooling not to heed Popper's call.

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