

Project team

Teacher educators from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Auckland and two Auckland primary schools (Fairburn and New Lynn). Lexie Grudnoff (Principal Investigator), Carol Becroft, Hannah Cox, Fiona Ell, Mavis Haigh, Mary Hill, Claire Jackson, Julie Mana'o, Rachel Oliver, Paula Passfield, Natasha Pritchard, Kusum Singh, Marya Tanner, Kimai Tocker.

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Project description

This project focused on teaching for equity. Using face-to face engagement and Knowledge Building software, a fourteen-member collaborative inquiry community of university-based teacher educators and primary teachers developed rich explanations of teaching for equity and then conducted inquiries to determine how this enhanced knowledge might improve learning outcomes for priority learners. Our investigation into what it means to teach for equity was framed in two ways. First, by the concept of "Facets of Practice for Equity" (Facets), six interconnected patterns of practices consistently associated with positive learning outcomes for diverse students. The second frame for the research project was inquiry.

Aims

The overarching research question driving this project was: *How and to what extent can a cross-sector collaborative inquiry community build, utilise, and share knowledge of practice for the successful teaching of priority learners?* Within the framework of the research question we had three main aims:

1. To generate and share knowledge about what it means to teach for equity in the NZ context.
2. Determine how, and to what extent, knowledge about teaching for equity can be used to transform practice to improve learner outcomes.
3. To evaluate the utility of Knowledge Forum (Scardamalia, 2002) as a professional learning tool used for both face-to-face and at a distance discussions.

Why is this research important?

This project is strategically important because it has built shared knowledge for practice about powerful ways of addressing current disparities in educational outcomes for priority learner groups: Māori and Pasifika learners and those with special educational needs. It is also important as it has generated knowledge about how collaborative practitioner communities can use inquiry to build and share knowledge of equitable practice for the successful teaching of priority learners.

Key findings

Phase 1: The knowledge building processes identified during the discussions of Phase 1 were: *presenting; clarifying; adding; querying; reflecting; theorising; considering implications; and summarizing*. We built our understandings of how the Facets are applied in teaching-learning situations. Examples of how the Facets were put into practice included special consideration of provision for children with special needs, normalizing diversity and challenging marginalization. Notions of ako, with teachers as learners, and the collection and analysis of evidence were also important. Phase 1 discussions heightened our personal and professional awareness of the difference between equity and equality and how equitable/inequitable practices influenced the learning of diverse New Zealand students. Two of the Facets were refined (changed or elaborated) to capture the richness of practice of teaching for equity. We identified both positive (e.g. useful repository of ideas and additional artefacts, provision of alternative engagement style) and challenging (e.g. technical and isolating) aspects of using the Knowledge Forum platform.

Phase 2: Three collaborative inquiry teams, each with school and university members acting as critical friends for each other, undertook

research in relation to the Facets. Two were within-school inquiry teams and one was an across-school team.

Key aspects of the project that supported the application of knowledge for equity in practice are:

- Facets of Practice for Equity
- Teaching as inquiry
- Real problems of practice
- Being part of a collaborative inquiry community
- Critical friends
- Trust
- Research expertise
- Location of meetings (*rotation of sites*)

Implications for practice

- Engagement in cross-sector collaborative inquiry communities that include both pedagogical and research expertise provides rich opportunities for building knowledge and skills for equitable teaching practices.
- Teaching for equity requires practitioners to identify and challenge classroom and school practices that marginalise learners and their parents/whanau. A deep understanding of the difference between equity and equality in relation to teaching and learning is critical.
- Inquiry is a powerful process for investigating and changing practice. Collecting evidence from practice requires an investment of time to think about what to collect, how to collect it, and to work out what the data means for enhancing teaching and learning.
- Having time and space to work collaboratively outside of the everyday business of schools/classrooms is vital to building, sharing, and implementing practical knowledge for teaching for equity.
- Trust is critical to collaborative inquiry as people need to feel safe to identify and discuss issues arising from their inquiries and their learning. Working together over time on real problems of practice with the support of critical friends and honest collaborative inquiry discussions builds trust.
- While web-based systems can be used to build and share professional knowledge, stability and access issues must be addressed for this to be effective. The findings suggest that web-based systems need to be supplemented with face-to-face engagement in order to build trust and facilitate rich discussion and learning within a collaborative inquiry community.

Our partners:

The partners in this project were teachers from two Auckland primary schools – Fairburn Road and New Lynn Primary – and teacher educators from the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Auckland. Both schools are situated in low socio-economic communities, have a high proportion of Māori and Pasifika students and have a diverse teaching staff. The teacher educators are members of an established research team *Rethinking Initial Teacher Education for Equity*.

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