Equality in Education: Fairness and Inclusion

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Equality in Education: Fairness and Inclusion is a scholarly call to action. As the book reminds us, governments come and go and in doing so they busy themselves with policy to mark their patch. Inequality and exclusion remain stubborn foes that are proving to be somewhat impervious to glossy policy pronouncements. The change that Hugo Claus calls for requires careful analysis and bold actions. The editors have assembled a collection of insightful essays that assist in that project. Professor Roger Slee, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

This book attempts to consider the notion of fairness and inclusion in the context of education from different national perspectives, which is a laudable undertaking. The Editors have managed to put together a diverse, informative, and interesting account of equality and fairness that transcends international borders. The Editors are to be commended on their remarkable achievement in bringing together so many authors to discuss such an important subject, yet producing a cohesive collection of chapters that elucidate the diverse nature of equity in education. Professor Divya Jindal Snape, University of Dundee, UK

Cover image by Anne Suryani

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“I am a person who is unhappy with things as they stand. We cannot accept the world as it is. Each day we should wake up foaming at the mouth because of the injustice of things.”

Hugo Claus (1929-2008)
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We express our gratitude to all of those at Sense Publishers who contributed, in a professional and congenial way, to bringing this book to completion. We would like to thank all those colleagues and friends who, encouragingly, told us that they are looking forward to reading this book. We hope we do not disappoint them.
FOREWORD

The editors of this book have worked long and hard to bring together a quality product designed to push our thinking about Equality in Education through a consideration of the notions of fairness and inclusion. Not surprisingly, they have called on some very well regarded authors in the field to help pursue their objective. On reading the book, it readily becomes apparent that the ideas, issues, concerns and approaches suggested in the chapters certainly help us focus on the current situation in schools and why we should be paying more careful attention to influencing policy and practice.

Moving through the book – whether in a linear fashion or not – leads the mind to begin to map some of the dimensions of inclusive education and to, not only, reflect on current practice and policy but, also, to take seriously what it means to develop one’s own thinking around the theme of equality. In many ways, this book creates a sense of recursive thinking as the ideas being grappled with by each of the authors link to, as well as build upon, one another in constructive and meaningful ways. The editors have, clearly, thought carefully about what they intended from the structure and the manner in which the chapters tie together to create a coherent whole.

The make-up of this book has an important basis in the essence of equality that is, perhaps, not so immediately obvious. A deliberate choice to create mentoring, sharing and development opportunities for participants through support and collaboration is evident, not only in the range of authors involved but, also, through the ways in which they have been brought together for this project. That sense of equality and, indeed, inclusion extends from the editors themselves through to the chapter authors as well as across the spread of geographic regions represented through the contexts of the different projects. The value of inclusion is also illustrated through the linking of experienced academics with colleagues and students in productive ways across the chapters; something that enlivens the field and helps to extend the knowledge, expertise and overall learning emanating from the project as a whole.

There can be little doubt that the theme of the book highlights the productive tension between what is and what might be. For example, in their chapter Equity issues in China’s college entrance examination policy, Zhang and Wang note that, “The NCEE [National College Entrance Examination] policy is one of the most influential educational policies in the Chinese educational system. It is also one of the most disputable policies in the current development of Chinese education.” That certainly goes to the heart of what it means to take equity and inclusion in education seriously. As the chapters consistently demonstrate, the reality and the rhetoric in this field are not always congruent but it is through productive tension that thoughtful development emerges. In a similar vein, learning through difference also emerges when considered across nations as Marav and Espinoza illustrate in their work when comparing access and equity in higher education in Chile and Mongolia. These
FOREWORD

authors, like many other contributors to this book, attempt to better understand the ‘why’ of the current situation in order to better map the path for future change; a map that is more clearly formed when based on principles of fairness, inclusion and equity.

A key point made in many of the chapters is that greater access to education does not necessarily mean that there is greater equity. There is a need to create enhanced capacity to navigate the system – from all manner of perspectives – but such navigation needs to be informed, meaningful and useful in order to better address disadvantage in its myriad forms. The chapter authors most certainly illustrate their thoughtfulness with respect to such navigation as they outline arguments, ideas, issues and possibilities that not only challenge the status-quo but also offer ways of moving beyond the norm. Anderson, Boyle and Deppeler capture the essence of this movement in their discussion about inclusive education as an evolving construct; one that has moved from a “focus on students with disabilities to encompassing the delivery of education to all”. Understanding inclusive education as a dynamic construct is important and this book certainly brings that thinking to the forefront through each of the chapters in powerful ways.

The editors and authors have worked together to develop an informative and helpful study of equity in education. I found this book to be an interesting and engaging read, I trust the same occurs for you.

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OPENING PANDORA’S BOX

Exploring Inequalities In Education

INTRODUCTION

Equality in education is a complex and controversial issue that transcends the field of education and is subject to unique political, economic and cultural factors. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007) suggests that “a fair and inclusive system that makes the advantages of education available to all is one of the most powerful levers to make society more equitable” (p.10). This belief is generated from its mission, which is to “promote the policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world” (OECD, 2014, par 1). In 2007, the OECD put forward ten practical steps which, it was hoped, would reduce school failure and make society fairer. The report offers an important, comparative perspective on how different countries have handled equity in education. It identified three key areas essential to the delivery of equity in education: the design of education systems, classroom practices, and resourcing. All countries have unique features in their education system. It is important to explore equity issues from a ‘within country’ perspective as well as from a comparative perspective.

IN THE BEGINNING

Equality in education is not just the average amount of education provided but, also, its distribution across the population. Levin (2003) argues the aim of government policy “cannot and should not be equality in the sense that everyone is the same or achieves the same outcomes” (p. 5). In fact, a state does not have the capacity to ensure that every citizen will achieve the same level of outcome or satisfaction in education. It is, however, able to create reasonable opportunities for people to develop their capacities and to participate fully in society. In other words, a state has the potential to be equal, enabling and empowering for all individuals (Lynch & Baker, 2005). As yet, opportunity is not distributed fairly and therefore, individuals are not afforded an equal chance to compete in society.

Based on the idea of equality in education, a fruitful academic conference was held as part the annual Global Education Systems Day series at the Faculty of Education,
Monash University, in November 2012. It attracted experienced and emerging scholars from 15 countries and regions (Australia, Bangladesh, Belarus, Chile, China, Ethiopia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mongolia, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vietnam and Zanzibar) who presented work on education equality issues in their countries. The presentations covered various equity issues such as indigenous and minority groups, religion, equity as a concept, gifted students, social class, gender and rural students, in a range of research fields – mathematics education, education policy, teacher education, language learning and teaching and eLearning, at different levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary). This event provided a platform for in-depth, academic dialogue on equality in education, not only bringing out new ideas and information on current national events but also challenging existing and dated ideologies. The conference showed that equality in education varies depending on the national contexts examined and that diverse levels of equality exist at different developmental stages of the same national context. The success of this event led to the production of this book.

The OECD has defined term equity in education thus:

Equity in education has two dimensions. The first is fairness, which basically means making sure that personal and social circumstances – for example gender, socio-economic status or ethnic origin – should not be an obstacle to achieving educational potential. The second is inclusion, in other words ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all – for example that everyone should be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. The two dimensions are closely intertwined: tackling school failure helps to overcome the effects of social deprivation, which often causes school failure (2007, p. 10).

The dimension of fairness in educational equity refers to the issues of equal opportunities to education, including regional, urban-rural, social class, gender and ethnic equities. The dimension of inclusion in educational equity mainly discusses the issues of equal rights to education, which indicates that the design of the education system must ensure everyone has equal rights to access education. This book discusses these terms from new theoretical perspectives and explores the latest practices in the promotion of educational equity in different national and international contexts.

**DESIGN OF THE BOOK**

This book takes an alternative approach to available publications on educational equity issues which differentiates it from them. The key feature of this book is the requirement for contributors to compare their findings with other contributors, thus creating close partnerships among this group of authors. Experienced scholars in the field interpret the major theoretical and conceptual issues, the latest research directions and new achievements in the practise of educational equity while the local standpoints of contributors provide diverse views on equity issues. Scholars with similar research
interests from different countries were encouraged to work together on specific topics to form comparative studies. Therefore, the book is structured into three sections: Theory and Practice, Local Perspectives, and Comparative Perspectives.

**Section One**, as its title indicates, focuses on some theoretical and practical issues with regard to equity and the development of inclusive education in various national and international contexts. This section begins with Gale’s *Reimagining Student Equity and Aspiration in a Global Higher Education Field*, which examines widening participation in Australian higher education during the period of the Rudd/Gillard Australian Labor Government (November 2007 – September 2013). Gale focuses on two key elements: ‘equity’ and ‘aspiration’ and presents some theoretical and conceptual issues of equity in the context of Australian higher education.

In Chapter 2, *The Ecology of Inclusive Education: Reconceptualising Bronfenbrenner*, Anderson, Deppeler and Boyle discuss an interesting theoretical account of Bronfenbrenner’s work as it pertains to equality and equity. This chapter offers an invaluable framework with which to organise environmental factors and understand their influence on inclusivity, whilst allowing for contextual differences within both the educational organisations themselves and the societies in which they exist.

In Chapter 3, entitled *Educational Equality, Equity and Sui Generis Rights in Australian Higher Education: Theorising the Tensions and Contradictions*, MaRhea undertakes an analysis of the concepts of, and theories underpinning, both educational equality and equity, using Australian higher education as the example. The author argues for the need for a fundamental reformulation of the engagement of the higher education system with Indigenous peoples through a remobilised concept of commensurability enshrined in a concept of ‘both ways’ educational choice for Indigenous students.

Considering school teachers through a philosophical and practical lens, Boyle and Heimans, in Chapter 4, *Take Action or Do Nothing: The Educational Dilemma of the Teacher*, suggest that teachers face dilemmas in deciding whether to take action in the interests of students or to implement policy without question. The authors propose that responses to the dilemmas should not be based on a narrowed set of predefined standards but should maintain a stance that works toward an educational conceptualisation of education. This places the responsibility to students and education before those of narrowing accountability - derived definitions of what it means to teach and to educate.

**Section Two** presents local perspectives, providing diversified views on equity issues from different countries and regions. As mentioned earlier, each country has distinctive features in its education system. Therefore, it is important to explore equity issues within these countries and regions.

Given a ‘chronic quality problem’ of education in many sub-Saharan African states, Outhred, Ngua-Dliwe, Stubberfield, Beavis, Wilkinson and Murphy detail the logic of ‘the workbook intervention’, describing the development process and implementation challenges in Chapter 5, entitled *Towards Quality as an Equity*
Imperative: Workbook Development, Supply, Utilisation and Quality in the Republic Of South Africa. They further explain the results of the independent, formative evaluation of the utilisation and quality of the workbook. Resonating with other workbook distribution projects within developing country contexts, they find that the major challenge to implementation was distribution. The authors present recommendations towards utilising the resources effectively.

By interpreting the historical development of China’s National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), Zhang and Wang discuss equity issues arising from the NCEE policy in Chapter 6, entitled Equity Issues in China’s College Entrance Examination Policy: From the Perspective of a Provincial-Based Enrolment Quota Allocation Policy. By taking one of the most controversial policies associated with the NCEE - the Province-based Enrolment Quota Allocation Policy as a case study, they find that the equity problems that exist in the current quota allocation policy go against the principle of equal opportunity and, consequently, result in obstacles preventing students obtaining equal chances to go to university.

In Chapter 7, Prospects and Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education Reform in SAARC countries, Mullick, Ahmmed and Sharma discuss the development of inclusive education in the eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Based on a critical analysis of research and policies from South Asian countries, the authors identify various challenges that children face in South Asia that impede their rights to quality education, and some of the possible strategies to address the challenges. This chapter has implications for policy makers and policy implementers who have vested interests in implementing inclusive education reform across the nations in South Asia.

Addressing inclusion, in particular the development of educational reforms in Bangladesh, in Chapter 8, Inclusive Education in Bangladesh: Are the Guiding Principles Aligned with Successful Practices?, Malak, Begum, Habib, Banu and Roshid analyse how the policies and legislations reflect the notion of inclusive education within the education context of Bangladesh. They identify the practical implications of these policy outlines and to what extent the policy statements are spelt out in practice.

Molla writes, in Chapter 9, Higher Education in Ethiopia: Widening Access and Persisting Inequalities, that, while access to higher education in Ethiopia has been widening, inequality persists along the lines of ethnicity, gender, rurality and socio-economic background. He argues that the persistence of inequality in access to and success in higher education is partly attributable to the superficial representation of the problem and subsequent inattentiveness to factors of structural inequalities.

Nguyen, Le, Tran and Nguyen provide insight into the inequality of access to English language education at the primary level between rural and urban areas in Vietnam in Chapter 10, entitled, Inequality of Access to English Language Learning in Primary Education in Vietnam: A Case Study. They find that inequality
of access comes from the teaching and learning conditions and methods, as well as the level of engagement of different stakeholders. Their suggestions are offered to help bring English to all learners, regardless of any social background or economic divide.

The last paper in this section is contributed by Chan and Haq Kabir, entitled *Education Across Borders in Hong Kong: Impacts and Solutions*, which focuses on cross-border students, known as ‘transfronterizos’, specifically those who cross the border between China and Hong Kong for their school or pre-school education. Chan and Haq Kabir describe the impacts that such a movement of students has on various stakeholders, including governments, schools and teachers, local parents/students, and Chinese parents and their children. Their discussions centre on the general issue of student mobility in countries other than the students’ home country that occurs under the impact of globalisation.

**Section Three** consists of three chapters. Each chapter is contributed by scholars who have similar research interests but are located in two different countries. This section is important because it brings these scholars’ work together as they apply a comparative approach to specific topics.

In Chapter 12, entitled *Equity and Access to Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective from Chile and Mongolia*, Marav and Espinoza provide a comparative analysis of trends in equity of access to higher education between two developing countries. These two countries share some similarities, such as a market-oriented economy, which have deeply influenced their education systems. The authors find that educational policies have been addressing inequities among students and improving the quality of higher education to meet not only labour market demands but, also, global standards in both countries. However, they question their countries’ ability to access quality education through a programme which has value in the labour market.

Chapter 13, *Foreign Language Anxiety in Relation to Gender Equity in Foreign Language Learning: A Comparative Study between Australia and Indonesia* is co-authored by Hasan and Fatimah. They examine gender differences in foreign language anxiety and compare foreign language anxiety experienced by Indonesian learners of English in Indonesia and Australia. The authors assess levels of anxiety (according to the three dimensions of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) and patterns of anxiety, and study the differences between the contexts of language learning, comparing anxiety of students who learnt English in Indonesia with that of student who studied English in Australia.

The final contribution in this section is Chapter 14, *e-Learning as a Mediating Tool for Equity in Education in Saudi Arabia and Zanzibar*. Mayan, Ismail and Al-Shahran provide an interesting account of how the use of e-Learning can address equity issues in the two countries discussed, especially for women who are otherwise less able to access education. This chapter explores how e-Learning can be a mediating tool to equalise higher education access and opportunities in Saudi
Arabia and Zanzibar and how, at the same time, it may help to overcome a particular male/female division of labour.

CONCLUSION

We wish you well in using the rich content of this book for teaching and researching. It provides a multidimensional perspective, investigating various issues on equality in education in broad national and international arenas. We hope that this book will inspire your thinking of conceptual and theoretical issues of equality in education. We endeavour to broaden your understanding of equality in education with a number of practical cases located in more than 12 countries and regions.

As one of the distinguishing features of this book, we anticipate that scholars with similar research interests will benefit from the comparative approach. We hope that more scholars in the field of educational equity will work collaboratively in the future to enrich the current body of knowledge.

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SECTION ONE
THEORY AND PRACTICE
1. REIMAGINING STUDENT EQUITY AND ASPIRATION IN A GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION FIELD

INTRODUCTION

Widening participation in higher education (HE) is now a key ambition of government policy in many countries around the globe. For most OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations, expanding HE provision is the policy instrument for producing more knowledge workers, needed to gain a competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy, particularly in the wake of losing industrial economic dominance to China, India and other rapidly developing nations (Spence, 2011: xv). In addition, the World Bank and other transnational politico-economic organizations now tie their financial support for developing nations (e.g. in Africa and Asia) to the expansion of HE (Molla & Gale, in press), as a way of achieving poverty reduction and economic growth (World Bank, 2002). For nations with a social inclusion agenda, HE expansion is also justified in terms of increasing the participation of traditionally under-represented groups, although achieving expansion in OECD nations is itself increasingly reliant on being more socially inclusive. Universal participation (Trow, 1974; 2006) has become the new social imaginary for HE (Taylor, 2002; Gale & Hodge, in press), similar in scope and significance to the introduction of compulsory schooling in the mid 1800s.

Illustrative of this global phenomenon, this chapter examines widening participation in Australian HE during the period of the Rudd/Gillard Australian Labor Government (November 2007 – September 2013). The focus is on two key elements: ‘equity’ (the term used in Australia to denote a specific form of ‘social inclusion’) and ‘aspiration’ (a term used more generally in OECD HE systems). Support for equity was revived in Australian HE policy in 2009 by the Australian Government’s target to increase the participation of students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds to 20% of the undergraduate student population by 2020. At the same time, aspiration was introduced as an object of policy by the Government’s target to increase the bachelor degree attainment of 25-34 year olds to 40% by 2025 (Australian Government, 2009). In proclaiming these targets (known as the 20/40 targets) the Government named them as related, with the second reliant on the first. Yet neither is on track to being achieved (Sellar et al., 2011; Birrell et al., 2011; Gale & Parker, 2013) and both are now subject to review by the newly elected (September, 2013) conservative Australian Government.
Notwithstanding that review, the premise for this chapter is that failure to adequately progress towards the 20/40 targets in Australian HE is, in part, the result of a limited sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) informing government policy, producing narrow conceptions of equity and aspiration. Mills describes the sociological imagination in terms of relations between private troubles and public issues. This is not simply about recognizing the size differentials of micro and macro activity – the particular and the general, the local and the global, and so on – but understanding troubles and issues, private and public, as implied in each other. For Mills, this is the sociological imagination, the possibility that the same social reality can at once be a personal trouble of milieu (of one’s surroundings) and also a public issue of social structure, although not all personal troubles are indicative of public issues and not all public issues are personally troubling.

The absence or distortion of such imagination is evident in current Australian HE policy in at least three interrelated ways: widespread trouble is misrecognized or misrepresented (cf. Bourdieu, 1977); the elevation of personal troubles as public issues is not to scale or is out of proportion with the identified trouble; and policy makers, in the naming of public issues, have become trouble makers. For example, what seems evident from the second imagination distortion is that HE policy – now focused, at least in part, on addressing students’ educational disadvantages – elevates private troubles to the level of public issues, only insofar as the identification of private troubles for policy attention and not, as we might imagine, to consider how public institutions and systems produce these ‘troubles’ and how these institutions and systems could be differently configured so that they do not. Dean Burnett, a columnist for *The Guardian*, has made similar observations about the UK Government’s ‘aspiration raising’ agenda:

David Cameron has recently pointed out that the reason there are so few non-white, non-middle class people in top jobs is because they don’t have sufficiently high aspirations. Never mind crushing inequality, obvious prejudice and a stranglehold on well-paid jobs by the privately educated. All of this would be irrelevant if those from less affluent backgrounds just wanted to succeed more. (Burnett, 2013)

Burnett’s commentary is in response to Cameron’s solution to structural inequality, that: ‘You've got to get out there and find people, win them over, get them to raise aspirations, get them to think they can get all the way to the top’ (Cameron, 2013). In this account, the way to overcome structural inequality is to help people address their private troubles; that is the extent of the public issue.

The eviction of Beijing’s homeless people from the city in the lead up to the 2008 Olympic games is also illustrative of this distortion of private trouble / public issue relations. Before the games, homelessness was confined to the personal circumstances of individuals, a consequence of their own private troubles. But in the context of the games, homelessness ‘became’ a public issue. The homeless stood in the way of venue constructions but more importantly their presence challenged
the nation’s human rights credentials, revealing underlying structural issues. Mills has written similarly about the relationship between personal troubles and public issues evident in unemployment, war, divorce (and ‘unhappy’ marriages generally), and the metropolis or ‘megalopolis’. I could equally write about my own troubles on finishing school, of facing the prospect of missing out on accessing HE given my average academic results and near non-existent financial resources. Yet these troubles were reframed by an incoming Whitlam Government’s restructuring of 1970s Australian HE, including the creation of more university places – thereby redefining minimum entry requirements – the removal of tuition fees and the introduction of a means-tested allowance. Had I graduated from school the year before, I would have been ‘out in the cold’. Instead, HE access was transformed just at the moment I sought entry.

This sociological imagination informs the chapter’s analysis of definitions of equity and aspiration mobilized in the current HE widening participation movement. The first section provides an account of how equity has been defined in Australian HE policy and then considers the limitations of this definition in the context of an increasingly global field of HE. The interplay between personal trouble and public issue is a primary interest. Equity is at once conceived as a public response to the private troubles of individuals and specific groups, while also contributing to the private troubles of these individuals and groups through limited conceptions of social-structural issues. The argument is that HE is being restructured – globalized – raising new public issues and (potentially) renewed private troubles that challenge equity, although this is largely unacknowledged by current policy. The second section of the chapter considers definitions of aspiration. Similar to homelessness at the time of the Beijing Olympics, the aspiration troubles of individuals and specific groups are escalated to the level of public issue when they reveal problems with structural arrangements. That is, there are some who believe that the benefits of HE are not appreciated by everybody and – perhaps because – the benefits of HE are not equally (understood as) beneficial, although this too is based on a false assumption that students from under-represented groups lack aspiration for HE (cf. Gale et al., 2013).

EQUITY: TARGETING PARTICIPATION

The need to pursue equity in Australian HE is often justified in Bourdieuan terms: to counteract the reproduction of advantage and disadvantage in education, society and culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Thus, Australia’s National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education was founded in 2008 on the belief that:

… social systems (including education systems) tend to produce unequal outcomes (advantage and disadvantage) and that in part this is because individuals’ starting positions and the processes involved in the production of social and economic outcomes are unfair. In this context, a commitment to
equity is a commitment to adjusting social systems for socially just means and ends. In short, equity is a strategy: (a) to achieve (more) socially just ends; and (b) is informed by a theory [or theories] about why and how a particular social system is not just. (National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education 2011: v; emphasis added)

Equity strategy has a long history in Australian HE (Gale & Tranter, 2011), with its most recent definition formalised in the 1990 Australian Government policy statement, *A Fair Chance for All*. The Government’s intention at the time was:

… to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the [university] student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole (1990: 8) … [with particular emphasis on] improving participation in higher education of people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. (DEET, 1990: 14)

Since 1990, equity – the identification, problematisation and redressing of under-representation – has become the strategy to advance the Government’s social inclusion agenda in HE. To this end, *A Fair Chance for All* identified six target or equity groups, which were believed to be under-represented in Australian HE: people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, Indigenous Australians, people from regional and remote areas, people with disabilities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), and women in non-traditional areas. The subsequent 1994 report, *Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education* (Martin, 1994), provided statistical definitions for these groups, which has allowed for their annual monitoring. Informed by these definitions, equity is now deemed to be achieved when the representation in HE of the target group is proportional to the group’s representation within the general population. For example, 25% of the Australian population are statistically defined as being from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Thus, their equitable representation within HE is achieved when they constitute 25% of the university student population. The Martin Report (1994) also defined equitable representation for each of the target groups in terms of student access, participation, success and retention, which have formed the basis of Australian Government reports on the HE sector since the 1990s.

Yet there are questions emerging about the usefulness of ‘equity’ as a concept and strategy in pursuing social inclusion in HE into the future. In a global HE field, governments cannot mandate the value ascribed to resources that are specific to the field of HE, namely its academic capital, because of the flows of finance, workers and ideas across borders. Maton (2005) has noted that the autonomy of HE as a field is far more resilient to influence from outside the field (i.e. challenges to ‘relational’ autonomy) than it is to installing outside actors into positions of power within the field (i.e. challenges to “positional” autonomy). However, on both fronts, the autonomy of HE is strengthened by the field’s globalization, particularly at the elite
end. As Marginson (2008, p. 305) observes in regard to the ‘Global Super-League’ of universities, ‘their agency freedom is enhanced by the globalization of knowledge.’ In such circumstances, current government policy would seem of limited value. The ways we currently define and attempt to realize equity are fast approaching their use-by dates.

These concerns with equity are with both its quantitative and qualitative aspects. In Mills’ terms, a quantitative account of equity has a reductive ‘quality’ that emphasizes the personal troubles of equity groups whereas a more qualitative account tends to create space for the public issues of equity to be included in policy and practice explanations. At the same time, quantitative indicators of equity in HE (e.g. expressed in enrolments, progression and completion rates) are easy to grasp and to channel into public policy narratives. Whereas, qualitative accounts of equity are more invisible, personal and difficult to measure and thus not easily taken up within public policy arenas. These are issues explored in the following sections, particularly in relation to equity and forms of HE: specifically, in relation to which qualifications, which institutions, which disciplines.

Troubling Equity’s Quantification

In the current Australian context, there is an explicit equity target for the participation of low SES students in HE, even if this target is pitched below what is technically equitable (i.e. at 20% rather than 25%; Australian Government 2009). There are also implicit equity targets with respect to the retention, success and completion of people from under-represented groups. This is the implied reasoning behind maintaining comparative performance data over the last two decades. The recent Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (Behrendt et al., 2012) made these implicit targets explicit, recommending parity (i.e. equity) targets for Indigenous student retention and completion. Because the current pursuit of equity generates a numerical accounting, it is an attractive concept for informing HE policy in the current ‘policy by numbers’ approach to governance (Lingard, 2011) and the audit society more generally (Power, 1997; 1999). Expressed as a proportion, it is relatively easy to determine whether equity is being achieved and it is useful in driving practice towards these ends. It is also useful for challenging policy and practice to expand the application of equity to other parts of the HE system: e.g. applied to target-group retention and completion ratios but also to fields of education, undergraduate and postgraduate study, and university types. For example, quite apart from their underrepresentation across the Australian HE system as a whole, there are also inequities in the concentration of low SES students in certain fields (e.g. Education, Nursing and Engineering), in undergraduate study, and in low status institutions (Gale & Parker, 2013).

However, it is important to recognize that equity means proportional representation within a bounded system; in this case, within Australia and its HE system or parts of that system (e.g. undergraduate study). These system boundaries are becoming
increasingly porous. Australian universities now operate in a global HE field, as do most universities in OECD nations, evident in their participation in global competition and their location within world rankings. It is Australia’s more elite universities – those in which target groups are most under-represented (see Gale & Parker, 2013) – which participate most fully and successfully in the global HE field. Similarly, it is students from high SES backgrounds who are most likely to seek HE beyond the nation.

A strategy is emerging among the world’s elite in the face of rising HE participation, illustrated in the following comments of a high SES student from England pursuing an undergraduate degree in the US:

There is so much talk in the newspaper of the devaluing of degrees, so I think that this is a way of making your CV stand out a little more. You didn’t just get a degree, you went half way round the world to get a degree. … I suppose I looked at the Ivy League universities in the US. If I was going to make the trek over here and give up Cambridge, it needed to be something that was equally enjoyable and taxing and look(ed) good on my CV. (Student in Findlay & King, 2010: 28)

The Institute of International Education’s Atlas of Student Mobility indicates that the number of HE students studying outside their country of origin increased from 2 million in 2001 to 3 million in 2008, with every indication that these numbers are continuing to rise (Institute of International Education, 2010). The flow is not simply from developing to developed nations. The exact number of Australians pursuing university degrees ‘outside’ the Australian HE system is unknown. However, they are most likely to be from high SES backgrounds. Aside from refugees, Bauman (1998) suggests that geographical mobility has now become the most significant marker of social distinction. Irrespective of the numbers involved, that high SES Australians are increasingly seeking to maintain their status by undertaking degrees elsewhere starts to undermine the strength of equity as a strategy for pursuing social inclusion in Australian HE. The system is no longer bounded by the nation state. Nation-bound proportional representation loses its equity potency when the Australian elite sends its youth to Harvard, Yale, Oxford and Cambridge.

Governments are not without influence in these matters. They can set targets for equity and link these to institutional funding, as per Rudd/Gillard Australian Government policy. And their influence can be extended through agreements with other governments and organisations. But the flows of people, ideas, information, institutions, capital, and so on, across (state and national) boundaries (cf. ‘space of flows’; Castells, 1989) are so rapid and widespread that the extent of this influence – as stand-alone states – is necessarily limited. At some point in the future equity may be achieved for target groups within Australian HE but it may not be achieved in relation to the HE of Australians as a whole. We need to explore new policy settings for equity in these emerging times, for governments, systems and universities. This includes but is not limited to Australia’s equity responsibilities. Other nations and transnational organisations have similar responsibilities to think globally with respect to equity.
Rethinking equity also requires some qualification. Social inclusion in HE is not simply about access, participation and completion; i.e. ‘bums on seats’ (Gale, 2012). It is also about access to, participation in and completion of particular forms of HE. That is, the question of equity needs to shift from just access, to include a consideration of what is being accessed. This qualitative dimension to equity tends to be under-explored in policy and practice, although there has been some gathering of pace in the development of: (1) university student support services (including course advice, student decision-making support and other co-curricular activities such as orientation activities) – i.e. first generation First Year in Higher Education (FYHE) approaches – and of (2) enhanced curricula activities (including collaborative institutional curricula) – i.e. second generation FYHE approaches (Wilson, 2009). These developments are important but they tend to leave untouched dominant (inequitable) conceptions of HE, and thus unexamined what under-represented groups potentially bring to HE (Gale, 2012) and how HE serves their interests. In Mills’ (1959) terms, the emphasis remains on private troubles – on how to ameliorate these – to the exclusion of public issues about the structuring of HE itself. Certainly there is the creation of more spaces in HE institutions for new kinds of ‘bodies’ but less consideration has been given to what these students ‘embody’.

Proportional representation is not all that can be said about equity in HE, or indeed in any field. Numerical accounts of population groups do not fully or adequately represent the ‘spaces of capabilities’ such as freedom and agency (Sen, 1992). It is not just that they do not; they cannot.

That is, to be equitable, the expansion agenda in HE also needs to expand current conceptions of the capabilities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. All students come to university with particular and important understandings of the world and not as empty vessels (Freire, 1996). Acknowledging this involves engaging with who people are, in particular with how they themselves name who they are and in recognizing the value of what they bring to their interactions with others (Gale, 2009; Gale & Tranter, 2011). Dei (2010) has argued this in terms of ‘epistemological equity’; Marginson (2009) in terms of “equality of respect”. Both target the specific resources of the HE field, its academic capital. As Dei explains:

The question of how to create spaces where multiple knowledges can co-exist in the Western academy is central; especially so, since Eurocentric knowledge subsumes and appropriates other knowledges without crediting sources. At issue is the search for epistemological equity. (Dei, 2008, p. 8)

Epistemological equity thus calls into question the nature of HE itself. It challenges the exclusionary practices of disciplines and disciplinary fields in the production and legitimation of certain knowledge forms and ways of knowing, to the exclusion of or superiority to others (which are often the preserve of under-represented groups). It suggests that excellence without equity is a questionable excellence (Milem,
2003). In the absence of such equity, ‘the quality and texture of the education we [universities] provide will be significantly diminished’ (Association of American Universities, 1997).

Connell (2007) makes a similar argument for ‘southern theory’, arguing for a repositioning of centre and peripheral relations in the realm of knowledge. A southern theory of HE (Gale, 2012) would suggest that HE needs to be refashioned to serve the interests of those who access it, informed by students’ own aspirations for their futures rather than simply the aspirations of governments. Sen (2009) refers to this imperative as the opportunity aspect of freedom: the freedom to pursue one’s own objectives, to ‘decide to live as we would like and to promote the ends that we may want to advance’ (2009: 228). Opportunity that goes beyond “culmination outcomes” (what a person ends up with [e.g. a degree, a job, etc.]) … [to include] “comprehensive outcomes” … the way the person reaches the culmination situation (for example, whether through his own choice or through the dictates of others)’ (Sen, 2009: 230).

ASPIRATION: TARGETING ATTAINMENT

Aspiration, a second key concept in widening participation policy, is a relatively recent inclusion in Australian HE. While recognized in the late 1970s as an important condition for university entry (Anderson et al., 1980), it was seen to be outside the purview of HE policy until the recent Bradley Review (2008) and the Australian Government’s policy response (2009).

In current policy speak, the primary reason that student aspiration for HE is of concern is because of its potential impact on the nation’s economic aspirations. Australia’s economy is the envy of the developed world, one of the few that did not go into recession at the time of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, largely due to the nation’s robust export mining industry. At the same time, the Government was concerned that the nation’s economic future should not simply rely on the mining industry, instead putting its faith in its competitive participation in a global knowledge economy. Compared with other OECD nations, the proportion of Australians with bachelor degrees is quite low (Bradley et al., 2008). Thus, in order to be competitive in this economy the proportion of Australians (particularly 25-34 year olds) holding a bachelor degree needs to increase, which will require greater participation in HE by people from disadvantaged backgrounds who are currently represented as having low aspirations for HE.

In this account, aspiration is a relatively simple and individual issue. The current policy solution is to raise, increase or build the aspirations for university study of people from low SES backgrounds. For example, two of the current competitive grants funded by the Australian Government’s Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) – both named ‘Aspire’ and borrowed from the UK context – seek to ‘motivate students from low SES backgrounds’, ‘challenging the traditional attitudes of people from low SES backgrounds towards higher education’
Similar programs have sprung up in disadvantaged schools throughout Australia, sponsored by government funds. But as Spohrer (2011: 58) notes:

... the policies of ‘raising aspiration’ have a strong tendency to promote cultural and psychological explanations and solutions to persisting inequalities. Although reference is made to the material conditions in which young people grow up, these circumstances are not addressed by the proposed measures. Instead, they include guidance, information, and behaviour change – solutions that are targeted mainly at individuals or their families.

Apart from the individualisation of aspiration, the trouble with this approach is that the concerns of government have been elevated to the level of public issue by making trouble for those who currently do not share the government’s agenda. The troubles of low socioeconomic status now include their perceived low aspirations for HE. What was once not possible (i.e. going to university) is now possible, and being possible is to be desired; desire is held in check by the ‘right’ values (Butler, 1987: 21). Yet the distinction between desire and possibility remains important: for the advantaged, possibility is mediated by desire but for the disadvantaged, desire is mediated by possibility.

However, research is emerging that suggests aspiration might not be the problem for students from low SES backgrounds (and other target groups) that the Australian Government and Australian universities imagine it to be. A significant body of research is now emerging, which suggests that a large proportion of students from low SES schools – whether in city or regional/remote areas – do aspire to HE. For example, a recent survey of over 2000 students from secondary schools in Melbourne’s low SES western suburbs found that around 75% of students from these schools already aspire to go to university (Bowden & Doughney, 2010; see also Prosser et al., 2008). Data from The Australian Survey of Student Aspirations (TASSA) – implemented in 2012/13 in Central Queensland secondary schools with over 200 low SES students in Years 9 and 10 – show similar results, with over 67% recording aspirations to attend university in the future (Gale, et al. 2013). Although the differences are small, regional/remote areas appear to contract students’ aspirations for HE, particularly regional/remote males. Even so, these levels of aspiration for HE remain high; much higher than the policy rhetoric suggests.

High levels of aspiration for HE by low SES students, combined with their below-parity participation in HE, imply that the problem is something other than a lack of aspiration for university study. Considerable international research on student aspiration is now in progress (e.g. in the UK, see Archer et al., 2007; Burke, 2012; Watts & Bridges, 2006), to which several Australian researchers have contributed (e.g. Bok, 2010; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Smith, 2011; Sellar et al., 2011; Sellar, 2013; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan & Gale, in press). One line of inquiry suggests that aspiration is a ‘navigational capacity’ (Appadurai, 2004; Sellar & Gale, 2011). Students from low SES backgrounds typically have diminished navigational capacities – the result
of their limited archives of experience – with which to negotiate their way towards their aspirations. They are informed by a ‘tour’ knowledge of HE pathways – reliant on the ‘hot’ (Ball & Vincent, 1998) and sometimes errant knowledge and direction of others – rather than the ‘map’ knowledge of their high SES peers (de Certeau, 1984; Gale et al., 2013) who are ‘in the know’ and know the right people. Appadurai (2004) similarly describes the poor as having more brittle aspirations and sparse aspirational nodes – subject to long distance journeys between where they are now and where they want to go, and with ‘extremely weak resources where the terms of recognition are concerned’ (2004: 66). This different understanding of aspiration has implications for the objectives and activities of university outreach programs, to resource students’ navigational capacities and to recognise the value of the socio-cultural resources for aspiring they have at hand.

A further problem with how aspiration is conceived within Australian policy and much practice is that it tends to confine students to populist and ideological conceptions of the good life. These are the out-workings of beliefs and assumptions of the dominant that circulate as natural and common sense. They are the aspirations with which students often respond when asked ‘what do you want to be when you grow up?’ They are the responses that students know they should give to such inquiry, the responses deemed to carry the most value. Drawing on Bourdieu, Zipin et al. (in press) refer to these as doxic aspirations. In the context of HE, less legitimate aspirations by people from low SES backgrounds are derived from their biographical and historical conditions. These are informed by and re-assert individuals’ social-structural positions in society, particularly their assumed deficits in relation to and by the dominant. Zipin et al. (in press) refer to these as habituated aspirations. University outreach programs that reinforce doxic aspirations and demonize habituated aspirations fail to recognise the value and legitimacy of other aspirations for the ‘good life’ and that HE itself contributes to the aspirational ‘problem’ by assuming that it offers the best possible route or destination.

CONCLUSION

The above limitations to how ‘equity’ and ‘aspirations’ are conceived and enacted within widening participation policy in Australian HE provide considerable challenges to achieving social justice. Addressing them requires their reconception along lines outlined above and new policy and practice commitments: to expand the application of equity to other parts of the HE system, including and centrally to the nature of HE itself, and to recognize and resource the aspirations of low SES students (and other target groups) for HE without these aspirations being confined to or by HE. But in social justice terms these commitments provide little more than affirmation. Whereas Fraser (1997) has noted that transformative remedies for inequitable arrangements require disturbing and restructuring the underlying framework that generates them. I have argued in this chapter that such transformation
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requires a sociological imagination and that, in the absence of this, the limits we place on public-private relations limits policy responses to structural inequalities in education.

One limitation is in how policy ‘problems’ are represented in order to match particular ‘solutions’. For example, education systems produce inequalities; even a narrow focus on large-scale numerical data sets demonstrates this. Hence, focusing on the disadvantaged at the pointy end of these arrangements, as a way of redressing the problem, seems an odd thing to do. Oddly too, people from advantaged backgrounds are not considered as part of the problem, even though advantage and disadvantage are relational concepts. As well as limiting policy responses, limited sociological imaginations also exclude matters from policy focus. In this case, excluded from the Government’s concerted effort to increase the number of HE graduates – of the disadvantaged and for the nation – is an account of students’ capabilities. Excluding the ‘space of capabilities,’ as Sen (1992) refers to it, limits the capacity of policy to support quality-of-life decision variations.

These two limitations hide from view that aspirations for HE are not to everyone’s taste. As Taylor (1985: 255) puts it, ‘we can experience them as not ours because we see them as incorporating a quite erroneous appreciation of our situation and of what matters to us.’ Bourdieu et al. reads the same sentiment into observations by the disadvantaged that ‘this isn’t for the likes of us’ (1990: 17), which is an assessment of what is desirable as much as of what is possible. For example, greater capacities for mobility tend to translate into advantage in education contexts. However, students not only vary in their capacities for mobility; their differences are also measured in how mobility is valued. Different patterns of mobility signal different cultural tastes, although mobility is not simply the taste of the advantaged and immobility the taste of the disadvantaged. It can be just as advantageous to be in a position that requires everyone to come to you. The best place to be, in relation to others, might be exactly where you are. It is these tastes for im/mobility, the aesthetic judgments made about them, which differently position students as advantaged and disadvantaged, rather than simply the im/mobility itself.

Increasing the capacities of the disadvantaged to navigate education systems – to be mobile – including enabling access to the required social, cultural, financial resources and experiences, is an important consideration. But its limited view of desirable futures leaves unimagined students’ capacities to imagine and pursue different futures, in keeping with their own ‘archives’ of experience (Appadurai, 2004) and aesthetic judgments. The possibility of HE for the disadvantaged is now open to policy intervention. Not so variation on what is desirable, what is tasteful. The conditional character of current policy, constrained by economic and social norms of the dominant, ‘exclude[s] the possibility of desiring the impossible’ (Bourdieu et al., 1990: 16). It is this desirability of HE and what kind of HE is desirable, that now needs to be subjected to the rigours of a sociological imagination of equity and aspiration.
NOTES

2. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24936416
3. The qualification here is that ‘under-representation’ in and of itself is not a sufficient condition for receiving ‘special treatment’ (e.g. the under-representation of males in teacher education courses is not usually seen to be an equity issue for males). For a group to be designated an equity group, it also needs to be socially, economically and/or educationally disadvantaged in one way or another.
4. The first three of these were re-affirmed as target groups in the 2009 Australian Government policy statement, Transforming Australia’s Higher Education System.
6. Central Queensland is one of the most concentrated low SES areas in the nation.

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2. THE ECOLOGY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Reconceptualising Bronfenbrenner

INTRODUCTION

Globally, student populations in government-run schools are becoming increasingly diverse (see Gonski, 2011; Rashid & Tikly, 2010; Voltz, Sims & Nelson, 2010). Simultaneously, students are being excluded from schools, or placed into segregated educational settings in increasing numbers. Both the social and economic costs of disengagement and exclusion from, and inequalities within, education systems have been well documented (see OECD, 2010; Snow & Powell, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). The causes of these issues are complex and many sit beyond the boundaries of the school fence. Despite this, governments place much of the responsibility for delivering an equitable education with schools (Wrigley, Thomson & Lingard, 2012). While this may, in many ways, seem an impossible task, “just because schools can’t do everything doesn’t mean they cannot achieve something” (Thomson, Lingard & Wrigley, 2012, p. 20). Thomson et al. (2012) maintain schools’ efforts towards equity can only be enacted through change reform, with an equitable redistribution of resources, and through recognition and valuing of difference. This task is challenging as schools work in tightly controlled education systems with high levels of accountability and expectations for continued improvement. However, the consequences of not providing an equitable education system are far reaching (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). So, the question no longer is should a quality education be provided to all, but rather, how this change reform can be enacted (Jackson, 2008).

EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE: MOVING TOWARDS A FAIRER SOCIETY

More than 300 years BC, in his Socratic dialogue The Republic, Plato argued the importance of a formalised system of education for the development of a fair and just society. He recognised the valuable benefaction of a society providing an apposite education to its citizens and noted the influence it had in determining the direction one’s life would take. In the more than 2,300 years since Plato’s dialogue, many infamous works have been published contesting the importance of education in the development of socially just and fair societies (More’s Utopia, 1516 and Rousseau’s Emile, 1762 are just two examples). Despite this, today’s
educationalists, philosophers and others are still arguing the case for education and its role in promoting fairness and social justice; an increasingly important argument as the gap between the 'haves' and ‘have nots’ continues to grow, globally (OECD, 2010; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

Recently, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2012) established that “an equitable education system can redress the effect of broader social and economic inequalities” (p. 15). In an earlier paper prepared for the OECD, Field, Kuczera and Pont (2007) identified and described two dimensions of an ‘equitable education’; the first, fairness, stipulates that personal and social circumstances (such as gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status) should not present obstacles to educational achievement, while the second dimension, inclusion, ensures that all individuals reach a basic minimum standard of education. The assumption may then be drawn that if a society can provide an equitable educational system, it is on its way towards a fairer and more socially just existence. This is supported by Gonski (2011), in his final report into school funding in Australia, where he states, “As many researchers have found, higher levels of education are associated with almost every positive life outcome – not only improved employment and earnings, but also health, longevity, successful parenting, civic participation and social cohesion” (p. 19). Taking it further, The World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) concluded that “education can help ensure a safer, healthier, more prosperous and environmentally sound world, while simultaneously contributing to social, economic, and cultural progress, tolerance, and international cooperation” (p. 2). Education systems have a responsibility to promote social justice through the equitable distribution of quality education to all children, a system based on fairness and inclusion – known as inclusive education (IE).

DEFINING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

An Evolving Construct

_Inclusion_ and IE are terms used frequently within education research, policy and programs globally, creating “competing discourses through which meaning and understandings differ” (Graham & Slee, 2008, p. 277). There is general agreement that IE should be understood as a dynamic, rather than a static, process: it is “a journey, not a destination” (Topping, 2012, p. 9). Recently, the term has moved from a focus on students with disabilities to encompassing the delivery of education to all (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Nevertheless, there is much discourse debating the semantics of IE and, while it should be acknowledged this has created and continues to create confusion for those responsible for its delivery (Graham & Slee, 2008), Wrigley _et al._ (2012) and Slee (2011) attest it is time to shift the focus from defining IE to that of challenging educational exclusion. Even so, when writing about IE, a definition of the construct is necessary and, for the purpose of this chapter, IE will refer to “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all
learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 13).

**Inclusive Education and the Individual Learner**

The past two decades have seen the publication of much research examining what constitutes effective IE for the individual (see Black-Hawkins, 2010; Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Three factors consistently appear across much of the literature, though in varying forms and under the guise of differing terminology. It should be noted these are presented in no particular order and one does not hold greater value or weighting than another. The first is participation. Booth and Ainscow (2002) define this concisely in the Index for Inclusion as “learning alongside others and collaborating with them in shared learning experiences. It requires active engagement with learning and having a say in how education is experienced” (p. 3). The second is achievement, not in terms of standardised scores but, rather, against articulated, learning goals. A student must achieve 12 months’ worth of learning for 12 months’ worth of schooling (Hattie, 2012). It is important to note here, as pointed out by Guskey (2013), that achievement in education should be seen as a “multifaceted construct” (p. 29): different learning or curriculum areas require different sets of knowledge and skills to be demonstrated. The final factor is value or rather, value of person. Aspin (2007) describes value of person as being when one is accepted, respected and seen as important and capable of doing. It is demonstrated through action and relationships with others.

All students within an IE environment must be participating, achieving and valued. This will (and should) look different for different students in different classrooms, in different schools, across different educational jurisdictions. While it is acknowledged that this presents a challenge for teachers, schools and policy makers alike, the consequences of not including all students are significant.

**THE OUTS AND INS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

**A Focus on Exclusion**

Exclusion can present itself directly, through exclusion within schools (from particular lessons, peers groups, and/or other school day activities) or segregation from the local school into a separate school setting (such as those still existing in many countries for students with a disability), as well as more subtly through practices such as labelling (see Boyle, 2014; Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007, for a discussion on the impact of labelling). Slee (2011) describes exclusion as an opportunity to “separate and sort children into their allotted tracks, into the streams that assign them to unequal destinations” (p. 151). The ramifications of these unequal destinations are far reaching. They impact on both the excluded individual and on society as a whole, through lower rates of employment, lower incomes, poorer housing, higher
crime rates, poorer health, increased family breakdowns (Topping, 2012), increased substance abuse, increased teenage pregnancy, increased mental health issues and lower life expectancy (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Along with the ethical issues surrounding these inequalities, comes a high economic cost (OECD, 2010). The evidence is damning and exclusion from education is not the answer to advancing towards a fairer and more just society but, maybe, its antithesis, IE, is.

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Like exclusion, IE has widespread ramifications. Unlike exclusion however, the consequences are almost always positive. Most research has found in favour of IE over exclusion for individual students, both in terms of academic and social outcomes (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2011). In his study into the withdrawal of students for ‘support’, Jackson (2008) found students achieved neutral or negative gains whereas the positive results occurred when IE was enacted effectively. Additionally, in a 2009 paper, Allan concluded, from a number of studies, that a majority of school students advocated for IE as they viewed “themselves as needing exposure to the diversity they are expected to live with as adults” (p. 246). IE has shown to increase the employability of school leavers and reduce inequalities in both economic (OECD, 2010) and social outcomes (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) for adults.

The benefit to schools is also great. IE assists children and teachers alike to increase their tolerance, understanding and value of difference (Boyle, Scriven, Durnin & Downes, 2011), perpetuating the continued development and improvement of the IE school culture. Within this environment, teachers are encouraged and challenged to use a variety of pedagogies and strategies to cater for the different learning needs and this can have a positive impact on all students (Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape & Norwich, 2012; Loreman et al, 2011).

Finally, Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) argue that “reducing (educational) inequality leads to a very much better society” (p. 197) as greater equality benefits not only those who are considered the have not’s but all members of society. IE has the potential to break cycles of disadvantage (Snow & Powell, 2012), as well as to increase the skills of people, leading to increased innovation and productivity and, subsequently, to long-term economic viability (OECD, 2010).

A Necessary Reform

With so much at stake, the need for IE is clear and many governments have recognised this. Nevertheless, much of the responsibility for this change reform has been laid at the feet of schools (Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick & West, 2012; Thomson, Lingard & Wrigley, 2012), with an expectation that educators work together and “share responsibility, decision making and accountability for the progress of all students” (Deppeler, 2012). However, schools do not sit in isolation from the communities and the wider state, national, global and historical contexts within which they
operate. These external factors, along with internal school and classroom factors, will determine the success (or not) of IE. To enable schools to enact this change reform, they (along with those setting the education agenda) need “an understanding of the various drivers, (and) established cultures” that influence IE, “as well as the interplay between these at local, state and national levels” (Deppeler, 2013, p.188). In addition, there needs to be an understanding of how IE can ultimately influence the participation, achievement and value of all students.

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND BRONFENBRENNER

IE is a social construct; it relies on relationships between people and societal systems to be formed into what can be observed and called IE. By definition, it is the process whereby people are included into a socially constructed environment, or alternatively excluded from it (Mac Ruairc, 2013; Slee, 2012). Given the social nature of IE, any attempt to study either the construct as a whole, or aspects of it, must consider the relationships between various people and societal systems involved in its creation, from the individuals being ‘included’ to the national and global contexts within which it is situated. Social ecological theory, developed in the early 1900s by academics at the University of Chicago (see Park, 1936), recognised that individuals sit within larger societal systems and provided a loose framework to describe and study the factors that sit within these various systems.

In his 1976 seminal publication, The experimental ecology of education, Urie Bronfenbrenner adapted the social ecological theory to the field of education. He identified two determinants of student learning: the first being the characteristics of the learner and the environments in which they exist, and the second the relationships and interconnections between them. Bronfenbrenner’s ensuing framework, known as ecological systems theory, provided a structure to identify and organise the influencing factors that sit within different environments, and to study the relationships and interconnections between them. In a later paper, Bronfenbrenner reconceptualised his theory to become the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), where the focus shifted from studying environmental influences on human development to the developmental processes one experiences through the course of time. He noted that the use of the ecological systems theory model had “provided far more knowledge about the nature of developmentally relevant environments, than about the characteristics of developing individuals” (p. 795).

This distinction between Bronfenbrenner’s two theories is interesting when the construct of IE is considered, as it is precisely the characteristics of the learner that should not influence whether or not a student is delivered an effective IE. It is, however, the environments and factors that sit within these, along with the relationships and interconnections between them, that influence the success (or not) of IE.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1993) ecological systems theory has been utilised as a “conceptual and operational framework” (p. 38) in other educative and social
science fields (see Daro & Dodge, 2009; De Wet, 2010), though, up until now, it has not been reconceptualised to build knowledge and increase understanding of IE. Despite this, the theory offers an invaluable framework with which to organise the environmental factors and understand their influence on inclusivity by placing the learner at the centre and each contributory factor is located in relation to the learner’s educational ecosystem – resulting in the ecology of inclusive education (see Figure 1, below).

![Figure 1. The Ecology of Inclusive Education.](image)

**SYSTEMS OF INFLUENCE**

Bronfenbrenner (1976) describes the environments within which a learner exists as a “nested arrangement of structures” (p. 5), which he labelled as five systems. The innermost system, the **micro-system**, holds the learner at its centre with the immediate setting or settings surrounding them. The next system, known as the **meso-system**, acknowledges the interrelations between the major settings in the micro-system. Encircling this is the **exo-system**, described as containing the formal and informal structures that “impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings containing the learner” (p. 6). The final environmental system is the **macro-system** and is the culture that encompasses all preceding systems. The fifth system, known as the **chrono-system**, represents the movement of time. Each of these systems has a relationship and connectedness with the system or systems placed either side of it. Relationships and connections also exist between the factors sitting within each system.
Five Systems of Inclusive Education

Sitting at the centre of the ecology of inclusive education framework is the learner. All that occurs within and between each of the five systems, all the decisions and actions that are taken, are done so on the premise that it will benefit the learner. As described earlier, there are three determinants of IE for the learner - participation, achievement and value. Participation requires the learner to be actively engaged in all aspects of schooling, both academically and socially. They must be working collaboratively with their peers and involved in rich and meaningful learning experiences developed from a relevant curriculum (Evans, 2012). Additionally, learners must have a voice in the aspects of schooling that impact them (Portela, 2013) and have the opportunity to take part in whatever elements of school life interest them. Yet, participation is not enough: learners must also be achieving. This dictates access to learning goals that meet individual needs within the bounds of the curriculum, and assessment that is offered in meaningful and attainable ways (Slee, 2012). Lastly, learners must be valued for who they are and what they have to offer, to others and to the school itself. The learner must be accepted and respected as themselves, feel they hold a place of value within the school and know that others believe in their ability to ‘do’ (Aspin, 2007). Whilst easily described, participation, achievement and value do not transpire in an educational vacuum. There are many factors that sit within various systems of the ecology of inclusive education that influence and, at times, put pressure on the three determinants of IE. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Micro-system. This system sits directly around the learner and contains all the factors that exist within the environments in which the learner directly experiences both formal and informal learning, as well as the social aspects of schooling. It includes the teacher or teachers, non-teaching staff, peers, physical learning spaces, classroom cultures and routines, resources and the playground.

Meso-system. This system is different from the others in that it promotes the notion that the factors sitting within the micro-system are not in isolation from one another. Relationships and connections between them are continuously occurring, changing and evolving; they are never static but rather dynamic influences on the learner sitting at the centre of the framework.

Exo-system. The factors that sit here do not exist directly within the learner’s immediate environment yet still maintain influence over the learner’s experience of schooling. They include school leadership structures, teaching and non-teaching staff, school culture, values and ideology, authority and collaborative patterns (leaders, staff, students, parents, community), support structures, resource allocation, school rituals, school policies and procedures and the student cohort.

Macro-system. Here sit the factors that exist outside the physical environment of the school but, nevertheless, influence the inner systems within the framework
and, consequently, the learner at its centre. It encompasses the varying contexts in which the school exists – social, political, historical and global – as well as other factors such as the education system or systems, current agendas (standardisation of student achievement and professional performance; increased accountability), and, if applicable, a mandated curriculum.

**Chrono-system.** Like the meso-system, this system is different from the others. It considers the movement of time and the impact or influence of this on the learner. As the ecology of inclusive education framework has been designed with the learner at its centre, the timeframe for this system is that of the learner’s enrolment within formal school education – the years of primary and secondary schooling.

**Relationships and Interconnectedness: Influence and Responsibility**

Each factor sitting within the systems of the ecology of inclusive education is influenced by other factors within the same and other systems. The amount of influence a factor has on the experience of IE for the learner will depend on where the systems are positioned within which a factor sits, as well as by the importance attached to a factor by those responsible for the system. The largest of the systems, the macro-system, does not have a singular body responsible for the factors that sit within it. These factors are determined by global and national contexts. Factors within the macro-system may have influence attached to them by one or more of these contexts (for example, systemic influence such as mandated curriculum, improvement targets and professional standards, or political influence such as funding models), while, for others, the level of influence will be determined by those holding account for the exo- and micro-systems. Responsibility for these two systems is reasonably self-evident. Factors sitting within the exo-system are concerned with school-wide practices and are the domain of school leadership. Decisions made at this level influence the micro-system – the domain of the teacher. Again, levels of influence may be determined by school leadership (for example, mandates may exist concerning school-wide processes such as timetabling and resource allocation), however the teacher will directly influence other factors that may include, for example, the setup of the physical space and pedagogical practices. The chrono-system sits outside the other systems and represents the constant and consistent movement of time. It provides opportunity for reflection, change, reform and evolution of the factors that sit within each system; an essential component of the framework as IE is a dynamic and evolving process. Thus, the ecology of inclusive education assumes multiple levels of influence that are invariably interactive, while reinforcing either IE or exclusionary practices.

Globally, there are very few, if any, education systems or schools providing a fully inclusive education (Inclusion International, 2009). Actualising IE has proven difficult, most notably for those countries that have been pursuing the agenda for a long time (Allan, 2011). For this reason, renowned academics in the field, such
as Roger Slee (2011) and Mel Ainscow (with Miles, 2011), are vocal advocates of further research into IE. The ecology of inclusive education provides a framework with which researchers are able to better understand not only the factors that influence IE, but also the relationships and connections they have with one another and the environments in which they sit.

RESEARCH AND THE ECOLOGY OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Almost four decades ago, Bronfenbrenner (1976) established a convincing argument in his ecology of education theory for the need to shift educational research away from the traditionally adopted scientific methods towards a contextually perceptive and flexible approach. Today, this is a given. Since that time, Bronfenbrenner’s theory has provided researchers across many fields a framework with which to make sense of and manage studies that are situated in societal environments (Daro & Dodge, 2009) while the exploration of constructs with multiple effects takes place (De Wet, 2010). Nevertheless, the examination of education environments and IE still present researchers with many challenges. It is widely acknowledged that schools are complicated, messy and changeable environments (Ainscow et al, 2012). On top of this, IE is a complex construct that has yet to receive a globally recognised definition (Topping, 2012: Slee, 2011). The re-conception of Bronfenbrenner’s theory as the ecology of inclusive education extends to researchers an operational, theoretical framework within which to situate their work, one that supports the contextually diverse environments educational researchers access, while affording the flexibility to focus on individual or combinations of varying aspects of IE. Other advantages are afforded to researchers adopting this framework. The ecology of inclusive education allows for studies adopting either quantitative or qualitative approaches and can be used for small studies taking a snapshot of a single point in time or large-scale in-depth studies conducted over many years, across any number and type of school settings. The framework supports comparative studies and the focus of the research may be on systemic, institutional or ideological aspects of IE. Within this, single factors, groups of factors or whole systems can be studied and the relationships and connections between them investigated. Most notably, the ecology of inclusive education does not attempt to neaten the messes that are school environments. Rather, it provides a framework with which to explore the messiness, in all its forms, through the lens of IE, increasing current knowledge and understanding of how IE is constructed in different environments and the consequences of this for all learners.

CONCLUSION

In 2010, the OECD reported that in a small number of countries, including Canada and South Korea, student achievement was increasing regardless of the school attended or personal and social circumstances of individuals. Nevertheless, this is not a global trend. In many countries, the gap between the academic achievements of students
from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers is growing, as many education systems continue, perhaps not intentionally, to encourage inequity through the delivery of exclusionary practices. Along with others in the field, Ainscow, Dyson, Goldrick and West (2012) argue this inequity must be challenged and proffer the question “What needs to be done to move policy and practice forward?” (p. 150). To know what must be done, current systems and practices need to be better understood, through the undertaking of quality, in-depth research into IE (Ainscow & Miles, 2011). This must not only encompass schools and the environments within which they operate but, also, work to understand the relationships between the factors that influence IE. The ecology of inclusive education delivers a framework with which to do this. With increased understanding, policy and practice can move forward and “make the physical, social, cultural and educational arrangement of schooling better for all” (Slee, 2011, p. 13).

REFERENCES


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