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

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<th>Year</th>
<th>NZ European/Pākehā and other European</th>
<th>Māori</th>
<th>Pasifika</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Other ethnic groups</th>
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<td>21.1</td>
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