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How can we understand educational leadership for equity and learning?[1]

Abstract: This article considers the challenges facing policymakers and school leaders who attempt to achieve greater equity for learners. Despite policy and structural change intended to achieve greater equity, the article suggests that beliefs about the nature of learning, the nature of fairness, the impact of personal characteristics such as first language, and the effect of 'disadvantaged' students on the learning of others undermine attempts at fundamental change. The article explores the persistent and powerful currents of beliefs and of self-interest that sustain inequity. It argues the necessity for change in both the will to increase equity and the capacity to do so. Reform may be needed in the preparation of school leaders. Policymakers may need to shift their focus from structural change to winning the political case, that is, convincing all that it is to everybody's advantage to achieve greater equity.

Keywords: equity, school leadership, education policy, discrimination, leader preparation

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Introduction

This article was originally written as a contribution to the work of the European Policy Network on School Leadership. The network brings together policymakers, practitioners and academics from all parts of Europe to consider how they might work together to achieve educational equity and learning. As the article makes clear, despite the best intentions of many, the challenges remain daunting. For millennia education has functioned as a societal sorting mechanism, preparing children and young people for differential pathways in society and the economy. Though this may have been far more explicit historically, evidence suggests that this function persists into the 21st-century (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). The article explores the challenges that remain, the attitudinal and behavioural barriers to improving equity and finally suggests some actions that might be taken in terms of the preparation and support of school leaders and the focus of policymakers, which might conceivably increase the speed of improvement.

Europe's policy aims

It would be hard to find any European Union policy makers and practitioners who did not view the cause of achieving greater equity through learning as fundamental. Debate about equality, equity, social justice, inclusion and many other related terms has been well rehearsed over an extended period of time and there is widespread understanding that the aim is more than securing equal opportunities or equal outcomes. Rather it is equity, that is, to ensure that all learners throughout Europe acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to live a life they value and that offers value to society, without encountering structural barriers or discrimination to the detriment of their progress. There is also widespread acceptance of the importance of the goal in both individual and wider societal terms (Levin 2003). There is a reasonably substantial research base suggesting policy and practice steps towards equity in schooling (Field et al. 2007). Related aims have featured in successive waves of national and European policy

and are embedded in benchmarks to be achieved by 2020 (European Commission 2013a). Yet this apparent progress is deceptive.

Progress to date

Gaps are widening (European Commission 2013b), for example, between the attainment of girls and boys, and between native born and immigrant students: "The relative odds of entering secondary and higher education for persons from different social origins remained essentially unchanged throughout much of the twentieth century" (Gamoran 2001) and are forecast to continue in the twenty--first. In two European countries with particularly low social mobility, the UK and Germany, "equal opportunity education policies were equally unsuccessful" (Heineck and Riphahn 2007). Nowhere is there room for complacency. Large disparities in the achievement of pupils feature in every nation and, indeed, the gaps between the test scores of different children in the same school year may be so large that some children are many school years' equivalence behind most of their classmates, even in countries that top international league tables for equity and attainment. Such gaps are not wholly explicable by differences in innate ability or by socio-economic status. Discrimination related to characteristics such as family background, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, language and religion, for example, is embedded so far in our schools that inequity is a daily experience for many students, to the detriment of their education and the shame of our society.

In a paper on equity and policy commissioned by the European Commission, Levin (2003) noted that equity policy related to two features: the quantity of education, that is, how many years schooling each child receives, and the quality of education. He states: "The barriers to improving equity are relatively simply to state but extremely difficult to overcome. They are essentially two – will and capacity. 'Will' speaks to public and individual willingness to take steps to improve equity. 'Capacity' speaks to our knowledge of what to do and our ability to do what is needed even if we know what it is. Neither is a simple matter." (Ibid., p. 9)

In this article, I want to suggest that we look at how leaders and policy makers, in concert, might view the challenges of will and capacity and so find renewed commitment to achieve equity and learning.

Where There's a Will...

There is a considerable literature from sociology that insists that education is primarily a transmitter of power and social relations between generations, and that the instinct for self-protection of advantaged families and classes is so profound that attempts to overcome inequity will always be overturned by new strategies devised by the privileged (Bernstein 1990). And yet, despite the apparent certainty that socio-economic background shapes the individual's educational trajectory, there is variation in the relationship between background and outcomes (Wilkinson

and Pickett 2009). It seems that some countries and some schools do better than others in breaking the chain of reproduction. Is it the will to change or capacity to do so, or both, that cause such differences? There is not space in one paper to do justice to the wisdom accrued over decades of research into the way education replicates advantage and disadvantage, but some key points can be made relevant to the actions that might be taken by policy makers and school leaders.

An example of the issues is the experience in South Africa. If at any time and place in the world there was a will to change, it would surely be at the demise of *Apartheid* in South Africa in 1994. Decades of the most iniquitous oppression had used education to confer privilege on a minority and to oppress the majority. At this time of profound change Jansen (2009), a previous school principal and then the first black Dean of Education at the formerly white-only Afrikaans University of Pretoria, writes autobiographically of trying to achieve greater equity. Despite the goodwill and support of many to bring about change, the task was draining: "This was hard emotional work and my soul felt it. It was also difficult political work. An endless confrontation with power" (ibid., p. 21). One challenge was the myriad ways in which the former power relations were embedded in existing educational practice. As the Vice-Chancellor of the University put it to Jansen when he took up his post: "I have turned the ship around. The trouble is it is still floating in the same direction" (ibid., p. 5). Despite an apparent powerful will to change, after nearly two decades of educational reform extreme inequity persists (Van der Berg 2008).

European and national policy has also turned the education ship around into the direction of equity, but it may still be sailing in the previous direction of differential education and inequitable outcomes. Policy makers and principals often adopt a rational technical approach to change, believing that restructuring the system or the organisation can achieve the required change. To follow the metaphor, they believe that adjusting the rudder or resetting the sails will be sufficient. However, the underlying currents and tides are strong enough to ensure that the ship makes limited headway in the new direction. These currents include beliefs about the nature of learning, the nature of fairness, the impact of personal characteristics such as first language, and the effect of "disadvantaged" students on the learning of others. Each of these will be explored.

Innate ability

The degree to which educational attainment is seen to relate to innate intellectual ability or intelligence is culturally shaped. "Americans tend to attribute academic success more to innate ability" (Dimmock and Walker 2005, p. 109). The result is that, in teaching and learning, "teachers and parents usually refrain from encouraging children to exert intense, sustained effort in the absence of talent or affinity of a subject" (Peak 1996, p. 362). By contrast, rather than diverting students onto subjects perceived to match an individual's abilities, Asian cultures are more likely to see an appropriate response to lack of attainment as additional support and, in particular, additional effort on the part of the learner. In many parts of

Europe, curricular changes for students deemed uninterested or not able in core academic areas reflect cultural assumptions about learning. When judgements are formed by assumptions linking ability to socio-economic status, learners are doubly disadvantaged in being perceived as unable in the first place, and being moved onto a less testing curriculum in the second.

The nature of fairness

Students and parents exert a powerful pressure on the culture of a school and in turn the culture places boundaries on what is permissible or transgressive. In research undertaken in high schools in England (Lumby 2012), strong opinions were held about the support offered to struggling students. Some students and parents objected strongly to a system of rewards given not for the best achievement, but for effort and improvement. This resulted in their view, in rewards not going to the highest achievers and they saw this as deeply unfair. High achievers were, in most cases, from a socioeconomically advantaged background. The relationship between support for disadvantaged students in whatever form and notions of fairness reflects differing understandings of what is fair or equitable. Figures taken from a survey of students' views in Belgium, Spain, France, Italy and the UK (Smith and Gorard 2006) show how culturally shaped is learners' tolerance for additional support for struggling students (table 1). In this case fairness was related to the amount of attention from teachers received by each student:

Students' views	Percentage of responses per country				
	Belgium	**Spain**	**France**	**Italy**	**UK**
For a secondary school to be fair, its teachers must give the same attention to all pupils	54	65	59	53	81
For a secondary school to be fair, its teachers must give more attention to the least able	44	31	38	46	13

Table 1: Student's views on the nature of fairness (adapted from Smith and Gorard 2006, p. 46)

Figures were slightly higher for giving more attention to the least able in the primary sector, but in all cases the percentage was around third to a half in favour. In the countries surveyed, the majority, and sometimes the large majority, were not in favour of giving extra help to students perceived as least able. The only exception was Italy, where the percentage was 51 per cent. Most students clearly adhere to an equal opportunities approach, where all should experience an identical service. The result of this approach is likely to be that those who start in front, stay in front, while those at the back remain there. It is inequitable.

Asked about the quality of education received, in all countries about three-
-quarters of respondents felt that the same quality of education was offered to all. However, the respondents also noted inequalities (table 2).

Students' views	Percentage of responses per country				
	Belgium	**Spain**	**France**	**Italy**	**UK**
The school offers the same quality of education for all pupils	79	76	73	76	77
Some pupils are punished more for the same offence	69	71	76	51	70
Certain pupils get praised or rewarded more than others	58	56	64	47	74
The teachers treat the most able pupils the best	42	49	56	34	38

Table 2: Students' views on fair treatment by teachers (adapted from Smith and Gorard 2006, p. 52)

There are differences between countries, but across the board there is awareness of differential treatment. The large majority of students retain a belief that all enjoy the same quality of education while being aware of how differently some students are treated to others. The evidence suggests that the large majority's belief that the same quality of education is offered to all is misplaced.

There is a very substantial literature suggesting that school curricula, pedagogy and assessment are skewed in favour of middle-class learners. Brown (2004) reminds us that "we do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears but through our beliefs" (ibid., p. 88). Evidence to the contrary is no bar to believing what is most comforting to self-esteem. Staff, learners and parents believe they are fair and that the roots of inequity lie in the attitudes and the action of others or in structural factors, despite any evidence to the contrary, because to recognise complicity in inequity is too uncomfortable for most.

The impact of personal characteristics

A 2012 review for the European Commission (Münich et al. 2012) documented the inequity experienced by school pupils in relation to four categories of characteristics:

– gender
– immigration, racial or ethnic differences
– sexual orientation
– family background

Education attainment within these categories is a complex picture, with some groups outperforming others and some nations reducing differentials in attainment. However, the overall evidence leads to the inescapable conclusion that those with stigmatised characteristics are at risk within schools. For example: "As the PISA studies have consistently shown, there are significant *performance* gaps between native and migrant students in most OECD countries, with first--generation migrants lagging on average about 1.5 school years behind their native counterparts." (Nusche 2009, p. 5)

Such differences are often assumed to be caused by language issues or socio--economic background, but they are not inevitable. The same report points out that: "In Australia, Canada and New Zealand, there are virtually no performance differences between migrant students and their native peers. Migrant students perform better in these countries than in the rest of the OECD, even when socio--economic background is controlled for." (Ibid.)

Within Europe, performance of migrant students in different nations again indicates that the school context is significant.

There is not space to elaborate the mechanisms by which all of the four groups bulleted above experience inequity, but focusing momentarily on minority ethnic and migrant learners, it is clear that principals and teachers are implicated. The growing diversity of learners has not been matched by changes in school staffing, which has remained far more homogeneous and white in most cases. (Lumby and Heystek 2012) Discrimination in the staff appointment process persists. Those appointed are likely to be discriminatory in relation to learners. Teachers are more likely to perceive learners seen as 'other': as less able or as having special needs, and tend to prefer posts in schools with high levels of socio-economically advantaged learners. (Field et al. 2007) Overall research has 'documented widespread racism and discrimination' (Heath et al. 2008, p. 225) from both teachers and students. In summary, both policy and practice are predicated on notions of a norm, and on those who deviate from the norm as being in deficit: "Social justice is impossibility if it rests on notions of deficit – that some individuals and groups have less than others and that in some way the social, economic, cultural and political conditions in which they live are less desirable and, accordingly, invoke disadvantage.... How might we redefine social justice if the values, beliefs and economic, social and cultural capital of those individuals and groups that are labelled as 'other' or a 'minority' are seen to be desirable?" (Fitzgerald 2009, p. 157)

Psychology has much to offer in understanding the challenges for leadership, suggesting that naive invocations of, for example, celebrating diversity are not likely to be effective. Research repeatedly uncovers the degree of self-deception of those who sincerely believe they are in favour of equity, and the ways in which self-interest prevails over equity in schools: "self-interest is automatic, viscerally compelling, and typically unconscious" (Bazerman and Banaji 2004, p. 114). Indications of status are unconsciously transmitted in "an almost uncountable number of micro-behaviours (*which*) may affect the actual fairness of how an individual is treated" (Chugh 2004, p. 209). More overt phenomena such as 'white flight' from schools with a large percentage of ethnic minority learners and "bright flight" from schools where a cluster of students of disadvantaged socio-economic status leads to assumptions that attainment in the school will be low, indicate the power of self-interest in the behaviour of families, even those who loudly proclaim their commitment to equity.

So, widely held cultural beliefs in the importance of innate ability and in what constitutes fairness and a deficit view of those deemed 'other' are some of the currents that ensure the ship of equity makes little headway, whatever direction is steered. Trying to change the situation is perceived to carry great risks,

for example in parents fleeing the school, teachers leaving or students objecting. In the face of such deterrents it is hardly surprising that, whatever the rhetoric of being committed to equity, there may in fact be very limited will to change. Pursuing the good for others will generally cease if it is perceived to be at a cost to the self. To pursue equity, policy makers and school leaders currently focus on students they perceive as needing additional support. This is a convenient stance, seeing the issue as deficit in the learners: "As with most embedded problems, the first step—recognizing and accepting the problem—is often the most difficult" (Tenbrunsel and Messick 2004, p. 235). The problem indicated by the evidence presented is that the will to effect real change to achieve equity is weak in many schools, whatever the rhetoric to the contrary. As one governor of an English school recognised: "It wasn't the students, it was the adults who had to change" (Lumby and Maringe 2008, p. 16)

Building Will and Capacity

If, as this paper has argued, there are persistent and powerful currents of beliefs and of self-interest that sustain inequity and keep the ship sailing in the direction as previously, how then can leaders and policy makers begin to make inroads, to build will and capacity towards educational leadership for equity and learning? Guidance on managing change is usually predicated on building the agreement and participation of school community members, most importantly staff. However, if it is the case that students, staff and parents may resist change which they believe may jeopardise their current advantage, then the usual participatory change management processes may not be effective. When support cannot be assumed and resistance is likely, how might will and capacity be built for leadership for equity in initial preparation and ongoing support for leaders in schools, and by policy makers?

Initial preparation

There is considerable evidence that preparation programmes for leaders in many parts of the world give scant attention to leading for equity. For example, a 2002 US survey found only 14.3 per cent of the respondents "perceive social justice to be given the 'most emphasis' in their preparation" (Lyman and Villani 2002, p. 80). A review of the development of leadership skills in OECD countries contains no mention of gender or ethnicity (Pont et al. 2008): in 155 pages there is just one reference to equity. The absence of significant assessment of the effectiveness of leadership preparation in preparing leaders to lead for equity suggests it is not high on the agenda. On the contrary, there is considerable evidence that many development programmes adopt a functionalist approach, aiming to strengthen performance of the existing system rather than to transform it.

A set of standards or competences are often the basis of programme design and usually contains references to equity. For example, the Leadership Standards for

Social Justice in Scotland (General Teaching Council for Scotland 2012) describe leaders: "Committing to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in relation to: age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and belief and sexual orientation." (Ibid., p. 6)

As yet, there is little rigorous evidence on whether standards are an effective basis for improving leaders and, in particular, whether standards related to equity actually result in principals achieving greater equity in schools. In the UK, research within the Education Policy Network on School Leadership asked Scottish principals about the national standards for social justice. In answer to most questions, each relating to a standard, over 90 per cent (of a very small return) felt that they were already fulfilling the standard in their leadership. This result suggests that the standards are not generating revised values or actions in schools, and that principals believe they are already enacting the principles and practice that the standards outline. This belief can be viewed in the context of an OECD report on the performance of Scottish education (OECD 2007) which, although generally strong, is described as still producing inequity: "Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to underachieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide." (Ibid., p. 15)

Scottish principals reflect the attitudes of principals in many nations, that they hold and enact values related to equity despite evidence of continuing inequity, implying that they believe that the cause is something other than their leadership. While there is no suggestion that leadership is the only cause, to count it out of the system of ongoing inequity appears complacent. It would seem that establishing standards related to equity does not of itself address equity issues.

An article outlining research on leadership programmes in the International Study of the Preparation of Principals (Cowie and Crawford 2007) explains that the question from which the project begins is: "To what extent do principal preparation programmes prepare candidates for the reality of life as a school principal?" (Ibid., p. 140) and that there is, as yet, not a wholly convincing answer. The implied aim of preparation, whether written or not, may be to equip principals to survive. To prepare to lead for equity, the question might more appropriately be: To what extent to do principal preparation programmes prepare leaders to transform schools?

Capacity building in preparation and development programmes needs to challenge leaders seriously to reflect more deeply and critically on their own position and the issues they are likely to face in attempting to lead for equity. In particular, they need to consider how to understand and review the culturally constructed beliefs about learners and learning that inhibit progress. In order to do so, preparation would need to question received beliefs, for example about the significance of innate ability and attitudes to learners who they or others may deem 'other', that is, different from a norm.

Those who lead and participate in preparation and development programmes may be quite comfortable with the prevalent lip-service to diversity and equity

issues (Henze et al. 2002). Moving beyond such cursory engagement may be difficult for programme leaders who themselves may have inadequate education in equity, and for many participants who would be asked to move out of their comfort zone. Some may respond by requests or demands to move to other more important or relevant content. Some may counter attack, insisting current beliefs and practices are appropriate and that the source of inequity lies elsewhere and beyond their control. Others opt out psychologically or physically: "When social justice topics are raised in leadership classrooms, defensive behaviours do arrive without warning.... Some are overt, appearing as downcast eyes or furtive glances. Some are far less visible, only gaining the light of day in the parking lot after class or in emails exchanged among trusted classmates. Some students are just desperate to avoid embarrassment or threat to long-held viewpoints." (Rusch and Douglass Horsford 2008, p. 362)

Finding the means to break this silence and to help leaders learn in ways that hold them together and empower them cannot draw for guidance on extensive practice or research, but there is some. There are detailed suggestions on how to use (adapted from Brown 2004, pp. 99–102):

– life histories
– prejudice reduction workshops
– cross-cultural interviews
– educational plunges
– diversity panels
– reflective analysis journals
– activist assignments (micro, meso, and macro levels)

There are other commentators who provide frameworks to approach the design of preparation programmes that give primacy to leading for equity (Furman 2012), mostly originating in the US. Within Europe there is also guidance on tackling the various grounds of inequity, ethnicity, migrant status, gender and sexuality. There can be no consensus on a single way of acting to resolve inequity, but preparation programmes could model the will to change by providing a safe space in which people can be encouraged to engage deeply and so to develop capacity.

Ongoing support

If it is accepted that there may be a good deal of self-interest fuelling resistance to change, then presenting a moral argument for teachers, learners and parents to change may be ineffective. An instrumental approach may work better, that is, convincing leaders that achieving greater equity is not just a moral good, or work undertaken to aid the disadvantaged. It is not about the intellectually or economically superior aiding those who are their inferiors on either ground. Rather, failure to achieve greater equity will ultimately disadvantage everyone.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) suggest a direct relationship between equity and criminality, mental health and national economic success.   The instrumental argument persuades all that "if we want to live in safety and security – locally, nationally, and globally – a more just social fabric will help prevent the ravages of war, economic downturn, poverty conditions, ideological conflict, and so forth. We can assert instrumentally that if we do not create a more equitable playing field... the ultimate social impact of students' lack of success is increased economic costs and loss of economic benefits to society as a whole." (Shields and Mohan 2008, p. 294)

If most can be persuaded that greater equity is in the interests of everyone, then the leader will need ongoing support to challenge teachers in the ways in which the leaders themselves may have been challenged in their preparation programme: to understand the ways in which school structures, curricula and pedagogy embed inequity. Teachers may be absolutely certain that they are committed to and enact equity. Leaders may benefit from support to assemble evidence to the contrary. For example, in the 2006 European survey referred to earlier, although economic background is not perceived by learners to result in advantage, academic ability is:

In my school….	Percentage of responses				
	Belgium	Spain	France	Italy	UK
teachers don't have pupils who are their favourites	44	40	33	38	34
the teachers treat the girls better than the boys	20	30	24	17	35
the teachers treat the pupils with rich parents better than the other pupils	14	7	11	4	9
the teachers treat pupils who come from [country] better than those who have come from abroad	14	11	19	6	8
the teachers treat the most able pupils the best	42	49	56	34	38
the teachers treat the hardworking pupils the best.	70	78	76	53	62

Table 3: Students' views on causes of differential treatment (Smith and Gorard 2006, p. 52)

These are subjective perceptions, of course, but they reflect the reality for many learners. In an English baseline survey, many pupils spoke movingly of the negative spiral they experienced, where, unable to cope with the mainstream academic curricula, they cease to try and are increasingly written off by staff and other pupils as not justifying additional staff time or resources to help them (Lumby 2012).

Leaders will have an unremitting and emotionally draining task of persuading the whole school community that all learners can learn and achieve. They need to create belief that adjusting current structures, curricula and pedagogy to be inclusive, so far as is within the school's control, does not jeopardise standards but rather secures a social and economic future for all. Should a different path be chosen, one that continues to produce current disparities, those who appear

advantaged and secure in their future may in fact be facing a bleak European context where nobody is secure.

Preparation programmes often draw on an apprenticeship model where current principals/headteachers or those who have recently left this role provide input or leadership academics provide training. Though this has some pragmatic value, it is unlikely to be truly transformative. It is more likely that current wisdom will be recycled with existing limiting beliefs and attitudes relayed to the next generation of leaders. Leaders require greater challenge; for example, to be presented with theory and evidence from psychology about how discrimination is unconsciously embedded in behaviour, from comparative education specialists to increase self-awareness about the cultural influence on beliefs about learning and pedagogy or from education historians or critical theorists who can chart how engines of inequity reappear each generation in different forms. Leadership preparation is currently complacent about the degree to which it remains within the limited bounds of leadership theory and ignores the rich seams of relevant and deep knowledge from other disciplines. Only when leaders themselves have a richer education will they be placed to cascade this kind of curriculum down to teachers in their school.

The role of policymakers

The specific education legislation and policy adopted in each European nation state varies considerably, of course. However, there is a general trend reflecting two foundational beliefs: first, that there are groups of learners who are in deficit and who require remediation, and second, that tightening accountability will raise school performance and reduce attainment disparities. This paper has argued that, ultimately, this equates to tweaking the rudder and changing the set of the sails while the ship is carried inexorably in its existing direction by strong underlying currents.

There is much that Europe and each nation state can do structurally in terms of establishing the categories of school, the rules about children's allocation to schools, distribution of resources, curricula, assessment and so on. Both Levin (2003) and Field et al. (2007) provide detailed suggestions about structural policy shifts to achieve greater equity, but these are not the focus here. Rather, the concern is what policy makers might do to support leaders in their efforts to achieve equity and learning. In some national cultures, leaders are habituated to carrying out directives from the top and are therefore ill-equipped to take the initiative in establishing a culture of new beliefs and new practice. Even were they willing and able to do so, in most states the accountability context deters risk. The greatest help that might be offered therefore is simple to state but difficult to achieve. It is that principals and middle leaders in schools should be supported and encouraged; that they should be enabled to make adjustments within their own school to structure, curricula and pedagogy within wide national parameters. The presumption should be that, with so difficult a goal as greater equity in

schooling, leaders will have to take risks, make mistakes and ride the waves of resistance from various groups whose approbation politicians court. To support school leaders to achieve equity and learning therefore requires the same kind of moral rather than technical effort from policymakers as is demanded of principals.

A vociferous middle class will always object to anything that appears to dismantle its advantage. In the face of resistance, policy makers might consider moving from the current strategy, which is essentially to act as educators and make educational judgements in relation to policy, and act instead as politicians. In other words, they might act to win the political case, that it is in everybody's best interests to make fundamental changes to the education system. The narrative will need to change from locating the cause of inequity within the deficit of various groups and moving it to the attitudes, structures and actions reflected in current education systems. If policymakers can lead in changing the narrative, school leaders may be empowered to change actions and outcomes within schools. This may not be so popular, and certainly is not so easy a suggestion as a clear, bulleted list of actions. However, most policymakers genuinely want to change the world for the better and to do so they may need to lead, that is to change the way people think and speak and provide a different vision of education that is genuinely inclusive and offers the hope of a more promising future for all (Lumby 2014).

Conclusion

Those intending to develop education face a dilemma. On the one hand is considerable evidence which suggests that the embedded interests of the dominant groups make it unlikely that greater equity can be achieved (Bernstein 1990; Gamoran 2001). At best small changes in the advantage or disadvantage experienced by particular groups might be anticipated. Suggestions for actions to achieve greater equity may therefore appear at best naive and at worst futile. On the other hand are commentators who believe education to be an engine of social justice, in fact the most significant engine of social justice, and though acknowledging that change may be long-term, believe that policy and practice reform can make a real impact on individuals' lives. This article steers a middle way. It does not offer short-term actions designed to overcome the barriers to equity and learning that it has explored. Nor does it assume that there is nothing to be done. Rather it argues that significant change would only follow shifts in attitude and belief, rather than just policy and structure. Such a path is difficult because it is not easily measurable, not necessarily unidirectional, involving steps forward and steps back, and because it challenges every individual to strive to make changes in themselves rather than just in people and organisations external to themselves. Above all, it demands leadership at national and organisational level. No amount of policy busyness will substitute for this.

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