The government has demonstrated a genuine commitment to the early childhood sector, as seen with commitments to raise the requirements for qualified staff, and offer them parity with teachers in the primary sector. Whilst the 20 Hours Free ECE policy is limited by the willingness and ability of centres to subscribe, particularly in the Auckland area, it is an encouraging further development within the sector.

CPAG key recommendations

- Improve access to quality ECE for tamariki Māori and Pasifika children in a way that recognises and affirms their culture.
- Extend the government-funded equivalent of 20 hours of free childcare to whānau-led services such as Playcentre and Te Kōhanga Reo. Monitor the pressure on families to pay 'optional' top-up fees, and ensure that the funding is adequate.
- Use the government's Discretionary Grants Scheme to address the lack of teacher-led ECE services in decile 1, 2, and 3 areas.

11. Some inconvenient truths about education in Aotearoa-New Zealand

Martin Thrupp[61]

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely: acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

(Dewey, 1902, p. 3)

Introduction

How does poverty affect New Zealand children's schooling? Answers to this question generally revolve around three perspectives. First, it is argued that the children of families in poverty in New Zealand are disadvantaged in schools because of the level and nature of their family resources. Such resources can be both material and cultural: ill health, poor nutrition, overcrowding and transience, fewer curriculum relevant experiences, limited literacy and little early childhood education all reduce the ability of children to progress at school (Biddulph, J, & Biddulph, 2003; Nash,

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1993). Second, it is argued that schools serving poorer areas are under-resourced. This applies more to places such as the USA, where school funding depends on the tax-base of local districts (Kozol, 1991), than to New Zealand, where schools are funded nationally and extra funding is provided for low socio-economic "low-decile" schools. Nevertheless underfunding, or the method of funding, of low-decile schools remains an issue in New Zealand, both because of relatively low parent and community contributions in such schools, and because of the sheer scale of their students' needs. A third perspective is that poor teaching and ineffective schools are the problem, rather than poverty. Yet quality teaching and school improvement cannot be divorced from the social context. Low socio-economic schools often find it difficult to recruit permanent, long-term teaching staff. Teachers at low-socio-economic schools struggle more to meet the learning needs of children and spend a lot more time on pastoral care than in those middle class settings (Thrupp, 1999).

These perspectives on how poverty affects New Zealand children's schooling are reflected later in this section in discussion of how schooling policy could be changed to better meet the needs of all children. Nevertheless, it would be quite wrong to assume that a level playing field in education could be achieved simply by providing extra resources to poor schools, or improving the quality of the teachers and schools to which they are exposed. These approaches distance the problem from the lives of the better off. In contrast, much of this section is devoted to a more unsettling perspective: that the problems of the poor in education often stem from the pursuit of educational advantage by the middle classes. The situation is akin to that in the housing sector (see Section 9), where many of the problems faced by poor families can be linked to middle class investment activity.

It is because the middle classes have considerable self-interest in maintaining the status quo that their advantage is rarely discussed: indeed, borrowing from Al Gore, it can be argued that middle class advantage is education's "inconvenient truth" (Thrupp, 2007a).

This makes it all the more important to discuss, and the focus here is on how middle class families access predominantly middle-class schools, the likely advantages that those schools confer, and the related disadvantages for children from poor families who increasingly are locked out of such schools. Even with the reintroduction of zoning, the New Zealand middle classes have been able to secure and even improve their access to schools with a predominantly middle class mix. Unfortunately, teachers, principals and policymakers are often implicated in helping the middle classes gain advantage in education.

After looking at the problem of middle class advantage in education, the section turns to how this problem and the more widely recognized resource and teacher quality problems mentioned above can best be addressed. The proposals do not assume as inevitable any of the reasons that the children of families in poverty are disadvantaged; instead they reflect what Gerald Grace has called "complex hope".

This is an optimism of the will in relation to social inequality, but one which, unlike naive hope, recognises the very real historical and structural difficulties which need to be overcome (Grace, 2004).

Middle class advantage in education

Socially advantaged schools (decile 8, 9, 10 schools) are popular with most parents, especially middle class parents. In part the preference for these schools reflects the assumption of a relationship between high social status and quality. It also results from the belief that predominantly middle class schooling is an important means of social reproduction or mobility. Socially advantaged schools, by keeping out children from poor families, assist parents seeking to advantage their own child's prospects as compared with others. In other words, middle class schooling is a positional good. A positional good in education "provide[s] students with relative advantage in the competition for jobs, income, social standing and prestige" (Marginson, 1997, p. 38).

Positional goods are necessarily scarce in absolute terms, so that only some people can benefit from them. If they were available to all, the relative advantage they bring, and hence their value, would be lost. The fact that "better" schools are seen to offer positional advantage helps explain why such schools are nearly always more popular than low-socio-economic schools which offer little social advantage, no matter how capable they are.

Although the class presumption of parents about the social advantages offered by high-decile schools may be considered unfair to staff and students in low socio-economic schools, it is not necessarily without foundation. Predominantly middle class schools really may be advantageous, in that they provide their pupils with more assured pathways to tertiary institutions and better access to influential social networks and labour market information (the "old school tie"). As well, there may be compositional or "school mix" effects which improve student achievement because of peer group pressure, and instructional and organisational advantages which accrue to students who attend higher socio-economic schools (Thrupp, 1999; Thrupp, Lauder, & Robinson, 2002).

The key point is that these advantages are probably school-based but not school-caused; they may not reflect better teaching and management per se, but rather the influence of other students, and school policies and practices that are supported by high levels of student compliance and motivation. These, in turn, are class-related.

It is clear that middle class households typically cluster together residentially, and group their children together in predominantly middle-class schools to give them an advantaged education by excluding the poor. McCulloch (McCulloch, 1990, 1991) shows this happening in Auckland over many decades, with the imposition of the market model intensifying the process (see also Thrupp, 2007b).

So has anything been done to prevent or reverse this? In November 1998 the National-led government re-legislated geographical zoning for overcrowded schools. In 1999 Labour's pre-election statements expressed concern about intensifying inequalities between what it called winner and loser schools:

> *Disparities between schools' levels of resourcing are increasing as the "market model" is applied blindly. Because schools are expected to raise more and more of the funds needed locally, schools in poorer areas are penalised…Schools are being divided into winners and losers according to their ability to fund the technology and other resources needed to provide high quality education. High quality education also requires high quality teachers. Unfortunately the more schools become defined as winners or losers, the more difficulty some schools have attracting and retaining quality staff.*
>
> (New Zealand Labour Party, 1999, p. 4)

Through the Education Amendment Act (2000), which strengthened home zones and brought in balloting for out-of-zone enrolments, Labour seemed to move further away from the market model. Its policies seemed to provide more protection to lower socio-economic schools from having their high socio-economic students creamed off by more popular schools, and also to protect the right of students from poorer families to attend local schools, providing they lived within the school zone.

However, school zones are not what they used to be. They are now drawn up by schools rather than government, and the Ministry of Education has only limited control over them. The working definition used is simply that a school has to be "reasonably convenient" for its students, that is a school that, taking into account a range of factors, a reasonable person would judge to be reasonably convenient. It has yet to be tested in law and still allows schools to target preferred students. Research into primary school zoning in Christchurch has shown that in the absence of government control, many schools have been drawing up their zones in convoluted ways to "bypass more deprived but closer areas in favour of further but wealthier suburbs" (Pearce & Gordon, forthcoming). Moreover, unlike the school zones of old, zones can now overlap, making them "less the tidy product of the old system of regional planning…[and] far more reminiscent of the free market where businesses compete for customers and little or no co-operation exists" (Pearce & Gordon, forthcoming). So New Zealand may have zoning again, but it has a new fluidity which allows middle-class schools to cut out areas of low-decile housing. Such pseudo-zones do not protect low socio-economic schools from having students creamed off by more popular higher socio-economic schools. Nor do they protect the right of poor families to attend their local school.

With living in-zone now the only sure way for children to be enrolled in a popular school, pockets of low cost housing in the zones of popular schools will rarely stay that way for long. In New Zealand, debate about the effect of school zones on

housing affordability has tended to revolve around Auckland's "Grammar Zone", where houses on different sides of the same street can have a difference in value of $100,000, depending on whether they are in the zone or not (Richardson, 2006). Although there has been no New Zealand research on the relationship between school zones and housing prices, it seems likely from UK research (Cheshire, 2007) that only New Zealand's most popular schools would command such a significant premium. Nevertheless, in other parts of Auckland and other New Zealand cities it is not uncommon for school zones to make a difference to asking price, and to feature in advertising.

Education interacts with other sectors such as housing to contribute to the continuing growth of social inequalities in education. New Zealand has been going through a housing boom, in large part driven by baby boomers investing in rental properties for their retirements, as well as by high immigration. Schooling plays an important role in this investment activity because houses in the zones of popular schools are secure investments, and are one way for investors to maintain and improve their financial resources. Pearce and Gordon (forthcoming) note that the zones of Christchurch secondary schools serving wealthier areas of the city have not changed for many years (the schools all chose to retain geographic zones when they had oversubscribed status in the 1990s). This raises the question of whether these non-changing zones and the wealth of the communities have interacted to compound inequalities between suburbs.

High housing prices and zoning also interact to recast the value of private schooling as a positional good. Private schooling is increasingly being taken up by middle-income parents who want a "top education", but are locked out of the zones of the most popular state schools by high housing costs (Grunwell, 2007). For example, it is more attractive financially to live in mid-decile Titirangi, with annual mortgage repayments of $20,000 and school fees of $14,000, than in high-decile Remuera, with annual mortgage repayments of over $40,000 (unless a family has more than one child). Thus, while the take-up of private provision has increased from 3.5 percent of the school population in 2000 to 4 percent in 2007, its value as a positional good is being eroded by public school zoning policies. The more children attend private schools, the less of an advantage it is to attend one.

Decreases in housing affordability mean that 30 percent of New Zealand's poorest households are now dependent on rental accommodation – that is, excluding state and council housing, on others' property investments – and the number of people renting is projected to continue to rise. In addition, the sale of over 13,000 state houses in the 1990s has reduced the stock of available low-cost housing, leading to long waiting lists, especially after income-related rents were reintroduced in 1999. Overcrowded and insecure housing creates educational disadvantages for the poor, with transience between schools associated with "househopping" and absence from school due to health and other issues (Gilbert, 2005). Housing is a key area where financially advantaged (older) New Zealanders are securing their futures at the

expense of poor (usually younger) New Zealanders. Also, it illustrates how inequalities generated in other sectors affect education in important ways, but are unrecognised by many in education circles.

Those working in the education sector play a crucial role in helping to perpetuate the advantage for children from well-off families. In the case of teachers and principals, a key issue is simply their choice of workplace. In the 1950s Howard Becker (1952) showed that the career paths of Chicago teachers tended to take them from schools in working class areas to those in leafier suburbs where they were likely to stay. The effect of this was that middle class schools were likely to have more experienced teachers. Fifty years later, Garth Ritchie (2004) showed a similar pattern in New Zealand. Teachers tend to move to higher socio-economic schools in the first few years of their teaching lives and, except when they are getting close to retirement, their subsequent moves are also more likely to be to higher than lower socio-economic schools. Meanwhile the lowest decile schools are those with the greatest turnover of teachers. This is exacerbated by low job security in low socio-economic schools with declining rolls. As well, principals of large schools get paid more. Large schools tend to be high-decile schools.

Also, there is evidence that teachers and principals try to maximise the intake of middle-class students while minimising the proportion of students from lower deciles by drawing up zones so as to exclude low socio-economic areas. The “Smithfield” research on educational markets in New Zealand in the 1990s showed that the probability of being accepted by a high-decile school was much greater for students of high socio-economic status, even after controlling for achievement (Lauder et al., 1999). The zones of high status schools are also rigorously policed. In 2006 Auckland Grammar employed a full-time enrolments registrar and cancelled the enrolments of 51 students it deemed to be “zone cheats” because their families had moved out of the school zone whilst their child was attending (Trevett, 2006). It then came to light that a number of other high-decile Auckland schools had been carrying out early morning doorknocks to flush out “zone cheats” by checking to see if families really were living at the addresses claimed on enrolment forms (Woullfe, 2006). In taking such actions, it appears that schools are being over-zealous in interpreting the zoning legislation, as evidenced by the fact that the Ministry of Education upheld 20 out of 45 appeals against Auckland Grammar’s action. More importantly, it is a signal that high-decile schools are prepared to actively exclude students who cannot afford to live in the zone – that is, by socio-economic status.

Catholic and private schools do not market themselves as bastions of privilege. In fact, somewhat disingenuously, the celebratory websites of the New Zealand Catholic Education Office and the Independent Schools of New Zealand, and the equally celebratory utterances of their key spokespeople (CEO Brother Pat Lynch and Joy Quigley respectively), imply that people choose their schools over state schools because of their religious or private character. While private schools are, by their very nature, unlikely to be working class, schemes such as the “Assisted

Places" scheme in the UK or the "Targeted Individual Entitlement" scheme here in New Zealand, which were supposed to provide free places at private schools for working class children, were often taken up by children from cash-strapped middle class families, for instance families where the parents have separated (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Within the Catholic school system, the popular schools with enrolment schemes are again high-decile schools. For example, St Bernard's College in Lower Hutt is a decile 5 school with more than 50 percent Maori and Pasifika students. In reality, no matter how much religious character that school had, it would be unlikely to be sought after by middle class Catholic families. Instead these families would prefer their boys to attend decile 9, predominantly Pakeha St Patrick's College further up the Hutt Valley. The website describes it as "the premier Catholic boys boarding and day school of New Zealand", and a school where the staff are "always very happy to talk…about how you can improve your young man's chances of attending."

Politicians and policymakers do not dwell on the kinds of persistent pressures towards middle-class advantage in education raised here. On zoning, for instance, the former Minister of Education stated that, "No one, including the National Party, has been able to improve on the current school zoning system" (Grunwell, 2007). This is hardly a rigorous defence of the current zoning policy.

It appears that education policy is shaped and bounded by electoral pressures, and doing anything to assist children from low-income families and neighbourhoods is regarded as politically risky. While there is little New Zealand research on this, the point comes through clearly in analyses of English education policy (e.g. Hatcher, 1998; McCaig, 2000). Although the policymaking process is complex, politicians and policymakers are sensitive to public opinion, including that which is class-related.

Nevertheless, by failing to raise middle class advantage in education as an issue, politicians and policymakers imply that it is a natural part of the world order, over which they have no control. And so we have a society where most people see putting their child into a high socio-economic school as value-free. In class-conscious England there is debate around the ethical dilemmas of school choice, and howls of protest whenever prominent Labour politicians put their children in private schools.

What policymakers and politicians much prefer to talk about is how schools can pull up the low achievement associated with child poverty through better teaching and leadership. In New Zealand, this has led to discussion around effective or quality teaching and "quality providers," but also significantly around family and community engagement in education. While most educators would agree that how well teachers and principals teach and lead, and how well they relate to the communities their schools serve, makes a difference, problems arise when school-based solutions are overplayed, and turned from "small victories" into "large victories" (Anyon, 1997), which then are seen to provide all the answers to educational and social inequalities.

So how might we start to do things differently? The following sections consider

responses to the problem of middle class advantage as well as the problems of family and school resources and teacher quality and school improvement discussed in the introduction.

Reorienting education

Dealing with middle class advantage

Teachers and principals serving the middle class in high-decile schools have a significant role in addressing the effects of middle class advantage in education. First, they can be honest in their public statements about the way in which their schools gain advantage from their high socio-economic intakes. It is always refreshing to hear the principals of middle-class schools publicly comment, as they occasionally do, that "yes, our students did do well, but you would expect that with our intake." In this way teachers and school leaders at advantaged schools can refuse to buy into the view that less popular schools are "bad" schools. They can help by building co-operative rather than competitive relationships with other schools, and by ensuring that their own practices are the least selective or exclusionary possible, as well as by supporting moves to provide additional resources to schools which need them most.

As for policy, the Ministry of Education should not delay in taking more direct control of zoning to at least prevent schools from drawing zones up to deliberately exclude low socio-economic neighbourhoods. This will be an unpopular move with some schools, but will probably be more in line with the public perception of how zoning works. Second, the government carefully should open up public debate about the social costs of a segregated education system. It should also be more honest with teachers and acknowledge the limits of school-based interventions to address social disadvantage. The aim would be to create a climate of public and professional opinion which would eventually support government intervention to draw up enrolment schemes with an explicit view to preventing school segregation compounding residential segregation.

Family and school resources

The issue of less advantageous resources amongst families in poverty interrelates with many of the concerns raised in other sections of this book – health, housing, welfare and taxation, food insecurity and so on. Schools have a role in helping to provide students from families in poverty with some of their health and social needs. "Full service" facilities could be established in schools in low socio-economic areas. Properly funded, equipped and staffed, these schools could provide services onsite, such as social workers, health workers and counsellors. There is some New Zealand precedent as the AIMHI school initiative of the mid-1990s enabled certain New Zealand schools to provide extra services. The interventions proved beneficial, but

unfortunately ongoing resourcing has not been reliable. AIMHI demonstrated that appropriate policy designed to address simultaneously a whole series of factors, using a “whole of student” approach, can effect significant positive change, including improved levels of achievement.

Another key issue is the continuing allocation of funding by socio-economic decile, with low-decile schools getting much more funding than high-decile schools. The kind of compensatory funding decile funding represents is indispensable and has to be at the heart of any fair school funding system (Thrupp, 2008). Nevertheless, policymakers need to continue to refine and improve the decile funding system, basing it on a more realistic understanding of the effects of poverty on families and schools. Some of the current problems are (1) the approximately $250 million funding distributed by decile is very limited compensation for the poverty-related issues low-decile schools face; (2) the fact that decile funding occurs against a background of government funding decreasing as a percentage of school income over recent years; (3) concerns the decile funding has a stigmatizing effect on schools (Carpenter, 2008); and (4) concerns about the way the decile is calculated, both the extent to which it is an accurate representation of socio-economic differences, and the way the funding is allocated across deciles. For instance, instead of the current very general approach to calculating deciles based on census mesh block data, deciles determined by the proportion of parents who are in receipt of a benefit would be a better indicator of poverty and need.

A third area that needs to be improved is the supply of teachers to low socio-economic schools. This may require financial incentives and/or career redesign (Lupton, 2004). It may also require more specific preparation for teachers in dealing with the challenges of low socio-economic schools. This can be seen as part of a more contextualized approach to teaching more generally, as evidenced in the AIMHI initiative.

Teacher quality

Complaints about the quality of teaching too rarely acknowledge a key quality issue: that most approaches to teaching and leading schools (including neo-liberal approaches to improving school ”outcomes” such as target-setting, standard-setting and performance pay) are too generic, i.e. they are seen to apply equally in all school settings (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006). They tend to adopt a view that schools are populated by students who are all white, middle class, of average prior attainment, speakers and readers of English, keen on or at least compliant with the goals of their schools, ready to learn, and well-equipped to do so. This is unhelpful when it comes to dealing with the children of families in poverty. Rather, quality teaching needs to involve models of good practice which really engage with differing school communities and student characteristics.

Such models require teacher education and school improvement research to provide sufficiently differentiated information about good practice in different contexts, enabling teachers and leaders to make decisions that will improve their effectiveness. A better understanding of local situations and community needs will also allow policymakers to design policies which have a better chance of fitting into the school environments they are intended for, while avoiding policies which will unnecessarily constrain useful changes (Thrupp & Lupton, 2006).

Those concerned about "deficit discourses" (notions that cultures and languages other than those of the mainstream represent a deficiency) might suggest that highlighting the constraints imposed by poverty, in order that schools can be equipped and enabled to deal with them, will allow those constraints to become the excuse for low expectations and inequitable provision based on stereotypes (Bishop, 2005). However, generic discussions that neutralise the characteristics of students are also unhelpful. They make it less likely that school funding or organisation, or actual teaching, will be geared towards the needs of the poor, and more likely that they will be treated as not worthy of support in a system geared to the needs of middle class students. Providing there is vigilance against taking up a deficit perspective, drawing attention to pupil differences is essential to avoid the dangers of treating schools and students as being all the same.

Conclusion

Over the last three decades New Zealand's middle classes have been able to secure and in some ways improve their access to schools with a predominantly high socio-economic mix. This may be unsurprising when the available evidence from earlier times also shows that New Zealand's middle classes successfully found ways to educate their children in socially advantaged schools, despite vastly different policy environments (Thrupp, 2007b).

It has been argued here that such advantage has an unwelcome counterpart: the relative disadvantage for children in less desirable schools. These inequalities have been reinforced over time, compounding rather than ameliorating the other educational disadvantages many children already face. Yet neither theory nor the historical record makes such middle class advantage in education, at the expense of the poor, acceptable.

It is also an uncomfortable problem – an inconvenient truth – for the many parents, teachers, principals or policymakers who benefit from the status quo. As social inequalities within New Zealand society become starker, middle class advantage in education is becoming obvious. Middle class advantage may well be a difficult issue to address, but we need education policy and practice to pursue a fairer deal for all children.

CPAG key recommendations

- The Ministry of Education take more control of school enrolment schemes to ensure schools' "zoning" cannot be used to exclude lower socio-economic neighbourhoods.
- School staff acknowledge publicly the many advantages enjoyed by children in high-decile schools, and seek to share those advantages as much as possible with children in low-decile schools.
- Full-service schools provided in low socio-economic areas.
- Continue to refine and improve the decile funding system, basing it on a more realistic understanding of the effects of poverty on families and schools.
- Improve the supply of teachers to low socio-economic schools by providing financial and resource incentives.
- Apply differing approaches to teacher education, teacher practice and school improvement appropriate to individual schools and their communities.

12. Social hazards

M. Claire Dale and Donna Wynd

Gambling promises the poor what property performs for the rich –

something for nothing.

George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)

Introduction

Legal social hazards, including gambling, tobacco, alcohol, and high priced debt, are strongly associated with family poverty. However, stereotypes of low-income householders as heavy drinkers and gamblers are simply not accurate. A study of 400 low-income households found that although 54 percent smoked cigarettes, confirming the strong correlation between smoking and low socio-economic status, less than 12 percent gambled (other than buying a Lotto ticket), and 75 percent had not had a glass of alcohol in the previous week (Waldegrave, King, & Stuart, 1999).