

OPINION:



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“...I think we should interrogate the idea that the curriculum is for everyone.”

A curriculum is the culturally valued knowledge and skills that a society says its children and young people should learn and understand.

As we might expect in a democracy, the New Zealand curriculum states that it is for “all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity... ability or disability...”. Nevertheless, access to the curriculum is denied to some children and young people. This occurs, for instance, where students with disabilities are not allowed into ordinary classrooms.

In March 1999, the new Minister of Education included among his first comments on his portfolio his view that “mainstreaming” had gone “too far”. In this way is one form of discrimination and exclusion endorsed.

The history of education records instances where women, and people of certain ethnic backgrounds and skin colour, have been denied access to schools in various countries.

“...the market system of education in New Zealand, as elsewhere, shows evidence of increasing selectivity in terms of who has access to those schools deemed more desirable than others.”

The Minister’s statement continues the idea that segregation in publicly funded education is appropriate. It is also the case that the market system of education in New Zealand, as elsewhere, shows evidence of increasing selectivity in terms of who has access to those schools deemed more desirable than others. The poverty engendered in communities by New Right fundamentalist economic and social policies further threatens educational opportunities for some, from early childhood through to tertiary education in New Zealand.

Having defined education as a commodity, our policymakers and administrators analyse schooling with an industrial model of inputs and outputs, and their managerialist obsession with counting, monitoring, auditing and technology is imposed on teachers. The teacher’s role becomes that of a “provider”, and concern for an ethic of care, for equity, and for justice is said to be not relevant to the “core business” of teaching.

In this social, political, and ideological context, I think we should interrogate the idea that the curriculum is for everyone.

We might then examine the implications of a situation where some are denied access to what a society deems it important to know and to know about.