

It's who you are and who you get: The chosen curriculum

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Abstract

This article reports on a line of findings that explores how New Zealand secondary teachers teach about inequality as part of the official New Zealand curriculum (*NZC*) in their respective teaching subjects. This second phase of the study is part of a wider project about how inequality is positioned within *NZC*. In-service teachers at four large state secondary schools were invited to discuss their knowledge of how inequality is positioned within *NZC* and to comment on their decision making around its inclusion in their teaching practice. Teacher responses fell into three categories: 1) perceptions of stronger inequality and curriculum alignment within particular subject areas; 2) teachers' purposeful inclusion of inequality regardless of subject(s) taught; and 3) the hidden curriculum's central role in teaching and learning about inequality. These findings emphasise the need for further exploration of the tensions between the official and "chosen" curriculum. With curriculum viewed as the means of preparing students for future work and study, this research raises the importance of understanding teachers' curriculum-based decision making as they serve as critical enablers/gatekeepers to children and young people's knowledge and capacity building.

Introduction

Escalating levels of economic and social inequality are pressing global concerns. National and global inequality has elicited responses from economists, government policy makers, and global international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, World Economic Forum, and the Organization for Economic Development (International Monetary Fund, n.d.; OECD, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2019). While income and wealth inequality initially drove the reporting of these international organisations, their more recent work underscores the diversity of inequality and disparities. A more

comprehensive view of inequality acknowledging capitalism and economic policies such as taxation, health and gender gaps, and issues of access to resources, among others revealing geopolitics on a global scale (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Trends in global inequality are readily visible in Aotearoa New Zealand. The most recent child poverty statistics indicate how one in every eight or 12.5 % of Aotearoa New Zealand children experienced material hardship¹ in 2023 (Statistics New Zealand, 2024). Policy initiatives to address child poverty such as the introduction of the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018, as well as the former Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, taking up the role of Minister of Child Poverty, maintain the focus on the social and economic wellbeing of children and young people. Similar to other nations, the COVID-19 pandemic brought inequities in access to basic resources such as food, goods, and services, and connectivity into mainstream knowledge. These wider societal inequalities are interwoven into school life for educators and students across the country. Policy-wise, educational funding from the decile system to the new Equity Index seeks to “identify and respond to socioeconomic barriers in schools and kura” by providing additional funding to schools with higher populations of students experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Food programmes such as government sponsored school lunches, and Fruit in Schools (Health New Zealand—Te Whatu Ora, 2024), and private organisations like KidsCan (KidsCan, n.d.) that provides clothing and shoes to children and youth in need are evidence of socioeconomic inequalities visible in schools.

Numerous lines of research have explored the relationship between inequality and education identifying long-standing educational opportunity and achievement gaps (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2013) which serve as evidence of educational systems falling short for learners from lower socioeconomic and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Similar troubling and persistent educational disparities are part of Aotearoa New Zealand's educational landscape (OECD, 2023). Learners from lower socioeconomic backgrounds,

1 Material hardship is defined as the forced lacking of basic essentials such as adequate food, clothing, access to health care costs, and restrictions on heating and household items amongst others. See *Growing Up in New Zealand, Material Hardship* for further details <https://www.growingup.co.nz/growing-up-report/material-hardship>

as well as those from diverse cultural groups, including Māori and Pacific students, and those with special education needs, have disproportionately experienced less educational success. The outcome has been the naming of these groups as priority learners (Education Review Office, 2012), and the creation of the term of the “long brown tail” (Ell & Grudnoff, 2013) for Māori and Pacific learners. The potential for deficit theorising and negative perceptions about economic and ethnic achievement data is acknowledged. As authors, this is not our intention. Instead, we reference these lines of research as background context to existing national framing of inequality in education. Our position is firm—the issue we raise is a structural one. Aotearoa New Zealand’s priority learners are being underserved by the education system.

This article’s examination of teachers’ engagement with the topic of inequality contributes to discussions of access to curriculum-based opportunities. The data presented in this piece of work sit within the second phase of a wider curriculum project about how inequality is framed within *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2023) (NZC). The two study phases represent different paths of inquiry that are sequential in nature. Phase one encompassed a systematic review of the NZC document, and associated Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) online teaching resources developed and supported by the Ministry of Education. Three key findings emerged from this detailed review of official curriculum resources: a minimal, surface-level acknowledgement of inequality; the concentration of direct references to inequality in certain subjects—notably the social sciences and business studies; and an emphasis on personal fiscal responsibility (Tatebe et al., 2019). The second line of inquiry complements the first. Building upon the NZC and TKI review, the study’s second phase examines teachers’ engagement with the curriculum’s framing of inequality. This second phase of the study responds to the following research question: How are NZC achievement objectives about inequality put into everyday practice in schools? This study subquestion emphasises the centrality of teachers in debates about what students learn by raising questions about teachers’ role and influence on how curriculum is interpreted and delivered. In this regard the following review of the literature delves into the tensions between the official, hidden, and taught curricula.

Literature review

The official curriculum

NZC is the national framework for state and state-integrated schools² and *kura* (Māori-medium schools) in Aotearoa New Zealand. It comprises two documents—*NZC*, used by English-medium schools; and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, used by *kura*—that outline key educational priorities with the aim of fostering the skills necessary for further study, employment, and life, thereby enabling students to achieve their full potential (TKI, 2023). Schools and educators draw on *NZC* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* to design teaching programmes that cater to their students' needs. This flexibility within *NZC* allows educators to align learning with students' interests and resources of the local school communities, enhancing the potential for relevant and meaningful learning.

NZC is composed of five key competencies: *thinking; using language, symbols and texts; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing*. Students engage with eight learning areas: English; the Arts; Health and Physical Education; Learning Languages; Mathematics and Statistics; Science; Social Sciences; and Technology. The writing of this article comes at a pivotal time. *NZC* has been undergoing a refresh while *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* is being redesigned, with both embracing a strong focus on equity and inclusion for all ākonga or learners (Te Poutāhū, 2023). Key changes include a shift from outcomes to a progression-focused curriculum, a transition from curriculum levels and achievement objectives to five phases of learning, and the centrality of mātauranga Māori—Māori knowledge across all learning areas. While the teacher focus groups that form the basis of this article occurred before the curriculum refresh, the study findings that are the basis of this article respond to the enduring question of how curriculum is delivered. We acknowledge that in doing so we enter into highly contested discussions about what and how children learn which are debated within education, policy, and public circles. To add further complexities to the questions of what and how students learn is the topic of the hidden curriculum discussed next.

2 State-integrated schools teach *NZC* but maintain a special character (e.g., religious belief) as part of their school programme.

Hidden curriculum

The “hidden curriculum” refers to the implicit values, beliefs, and norms that are transmitted through the ethos and practices of a school or educational system (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jackson, 1966). These things are not expressly taught in the formal curriculum but are conveyed to students through their everyday school experiences. It refers to the implicit, unofficial, and frequently unacknowledged messages communicated to students through the educational system. These implicit and unintended messages hidden in school curricula have long been discussed as having a significant impact on students’ beliefs, values, and attitudes (Dewey, 1916). In more recent educational research, critical scholars such as Anyon (2013) contend that the hidden curriculum is a covert socialisation mechanism that prepares students for their future societal roles. Smith (2013) has further argued how social, institutional, and cultural capital significantly influence the hidden curriculum.

In New Zealand, Biddulph et al. (2000) emphasise the political influences on curriculum development. More specifically, their work identifies the curriculum as a “cultural construct” in which the hidden curriculum or the “things that children learn from the teaching process itself and things that they construct from the experiences” is an integral layer of curriculum and learning (p. 29). Continued interest in how the hidden curriculum can be utilised for positive purposes, such as nurturing social and emotional learning and civic engagement, has been explored (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). International studies conducted in secondary schools describe the hidden curriculum as comprising social norms and expectations (Knowles & Castro, 2019; McLoyd, 2019), values related to citizenship and community engagement (Crowley & Swan, 2018; Parkhouse & Arnold, 2019), and the influence upon the attitudes and behaviours towards issues of class, gender, and ethnicity in society (Lappalainen et al., 2019). This has prompted new research into the potential of non-traditional approaches to education, such as project-based learning and experiential education, to promote the development of skills and values that extend beyond the formal curriculum (Johansen & Solli, 2022).

The tensions between hidden and official curricula exposes the challenges of *NZC*’s role as a curriculum guide, and the flexibility it offers schools and educators. The variation in school and teachers’ enactment of *NZC* is the outcome of *NZC*’s flexibility which, in turn, can lead to variability in students’

access to learning opportunities and associated learning resources. Differential access to learning opportunities is one key reason for pursuing this research. As authors, we recognise how differential access to learning as the result of curriculum enactment is part of wider conversations about educational equity. By delving into teachers' interpretation and enactment of *NZC* in relation to the concept of inequality, this article continues the examination of the challenges and nuances of curriculum studies.

Methodology

This article presents findings from within a wider qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) that explored how inequality is positioned within *NZC*. The first phase of the study focused on the analysis of *NZC* and related Ministry of Education-sponsored TKI teacher resources about financial capability for references to economic inequality and its framing within these documents (Tatebe et al., 2019). The focus-group insights from phase two of the research form the basis of this article. Focus groups were selected as the data collection method for several reasons, including: the potential to include more teachers in the study; to allow for a free exchange of ideas between learning areas; the potential to observe social interactions that might provide valuable insights into the norms, values, and beliefs of individuals, departments, and schools about how curriculum-based choices influence opportunities to learn about inequality.

A total of 30 teachers participated in five focus groups at four large state secondary schools. A high level of interest from teachers at one school led to two separate focus groups to accommodate all participants. Teachers from all eight curriculum learning areas at each school participated in the research. The four selected schools reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of schools across Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. They include those located in Central, West, East, and South Auckland that draw on students from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnic and culturally diverse student and community groups.

The following research subquestion guided the focus groups: How is inequality as featured in *NZC* put into everyday practice in schools? Multiple open-ended questions probing aspects of teachers' curriculum decisions and enactment of the curriculum allowed for insightful conversations between teachers between and across the curriculum learning areas. An iterative coding cycle

was conducted to systematically organise teachers' responses to the guiding questions into key themes and recurring patterns from the diverse range of teacher study participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial codes and themes closely aligned with the research questions yet became further refined with each iterative coding cycle. Subthemes emerged demonstrating some of the nuances and complexities involved in the ways in which teachers engaged with the topic of inequality and how they implemented it within their teaching practice.

Results

Teachers from all focus groups consistently noted that inequality is only marginally addressed within *NZC*. For example, one teacher commented how "in my reading of the curriculum ... I don't know if I've seen the word inequality. So, I don't think it's in the social sciences achievement objectives." Another teacher at a different school stated how:

it would depend on the topic that you taught so that the standard or the achievement objective allows for that to be a topic [to be examined] but it's not prescribed ... or stated that it must be part of the conversation.

A third teacher provided a distinction between the official curriculum and a school curriculum approach in her statement that "it wouldn't have been a curriculum topic, it's a curriculum led activity". These quotes are indications of *NZC*'s limited engagement with inequality. Further analysis of the data led to the emergence of three key study findings consistent across all five secondary-teacher focus groups. First, there was widespread acknowledgement of *NZC*'s limited emphasis on inequality with a clear perception of some curriculum areas being more predisposed to teaching about inequality. Regardless of this perception, the second finding was that teachers across all curriculum learning areas purposefully made choices to include teaching about inequality. The third key finding that emerged demonstrates the power of the hidden curriculum with teachers identifying alternative methods to teach about inequality. While each finding illustrates various ways in which inequality is put into everyday practice in schools, when considered together they tell an important narrative about the critical role of teachers' curriculum decision making in creating opportunities to learn about inequality.

Perceived learning area alignment

Upon further inquiry, teachers across all five focus groups and curriculum subject areas consistently expressed the view that certain subjects are more closely aligned with the theme of inequality. These subjects included economics, business, and the social sciences— particularly in history. Responses such as: “I’m in Business, [and] because of the nature of our topic, whether it’s accounting or business studies, what comes out is income inequality.” Similar replies pointing to the prevalence of inequality being located within the economics subject area are found in the following comment: “there is stuff about economic ways people pursue economic gains”. In the related subject of accounting, one teacher remarked how “in our field we make students aware of how to redress you know, whatever sort of inequalities exist in our field ... and [we] bring in guest speakers from banks to talk about the profession”. The underlying perception or association of inequality with finance and business was a clear perception among teacher focus-group participants.

Teachers also perceived the social sciences as another curriculum area most commonly associated with the topic of inequality. As one teacher explained, the social science curriculum is “very content driven, so in terms of content and topics it covers inequalities quite a lot”. She went on to offer feminism and the American civil rights movement as examples. Another social sciences teacher at the same school cited the “social action” assessment standard as evidence of the subject area’s inclusion of inequality. This standard requires students to “describe a social action that they have undertaken to support or challenge a system” (Ministry of Education, 2024). In this case, the system being referenced was the economic system in which “themes of inequality” were identified. When prompted for examples of inequality themes, she discussed LGBTQIA rights and homelessness concluding that “the senior Social Sciences curriculum is really interesting”. At a different school, the social sciences teachers discussed human rights—particularly the UN Rights of the Child, and child poverty—as ways in which the curriculum addresses inequality. The same perceived positioning of inequality within the social sciences with comments such as “it [inequality] is in the Social Sciences”. They cited history and geography as specific areas that tackle inequality, yet made the distinction that much of the inequality content is “mostly in the junior curriculum”. Other teachers at this same school noted their thoughts on the prevalence of economic inequality’s presence within the social sciences curriculum with emphasis on money and

financial management. The perception of inequality being more closely aligned with specific curriculum learning areas including economics, business studies, and the Social Sciences was consistent across teachers in all five focus groups who represented a diverse range of curriculum subject areas. The next section outlines findings indicating ways in which teachers found ways to present, discuss, and analyse inequality regardless of their taught subjects.

The purposeful inclusion of inequality

A second key finding that emerged from the focus-group data is that teachers deliberately integrated knowledge of inequality into their teaching practices, regardless of the subjects they taught. The examples in this section illustrate how teachers purposefully chose and integrated topics related to inequality into their teaching practice. Physical education (PE) and health teachers offered numerous examples of purposeful decision making to discuss inequality relevant to their subject area. As one PE and health teacher explained:

We incorporated a case study on Auckland and we're working on diabetes in New Zealand to see why from some ethnic groups while we have a high rate of obesity and diabetes and skin disease and high blood pressure ... or don't know how to eat healthy because of generational income problems that [lead to] limited choice of food.

This ethnic and cultural lens resonates with another teacher from a different school who stated that:

I wouldn't say [inequality] is outlined explicitly in the curriculum, but in senior health we have, we look at what's the determinants of health, which underpin everything that we study. And so you have one of the determinants is the economic determinants ... cultural, social, political, and environmental. And every pretty much every senior standard ... at level two and three anyway, refers back to those different determinants. So you do end up looking at economic inequality a lot, even though it's not explicitly stated [as] that.

Another teacher at the same school explained how she teaches “a lot on gender inequality in both Health and PE”. Although her response focused on gender, with further prompting she indicated an intersectional approach by introducing the concept of social construction. She offered the following example: “We

always use a Google image search, a baby girl, and then a baby boy ... and of course the girls will come up pink and the boys will come up blue.”

Moving from gender to sexuality in PE and health, a teacher at another school described how:

I've been working on a lot with that with students over the last couple of years ... I'm so proud of them, they now correct other people when they say something that's inappropriate or offensive to somebody who's either in the LGBT community, or I get lots of comments on things like, oh, but that's assuming that that person is really a girl, you know, you don't want to make that assumption.

The quotes above illustrate how PE and health teachers include different interpretations of inequality into their teaching practice. These teacher reflections also demonstrate some of the complexities of teaching about inequality that can involve social, economic, environmental, and diversity domains inherent within particular aspects of inequality.

English was another subject in which teachers regularly and openly addressed inequality in connection to their teaching practice, despite its absence from the official English secondary NZC. One teacher explained how:

One way I will teach specifically about inequality is through my themes I teach. So this year, the whole thing was around gender and race because the class was 90% girls so we looked at systems of oppression. So words like systemic racism, institutional racism, and sexism.

This teacher went on to describe her interrogation of social and cultural inequality through films like *Hidden Figures*, Black British poetry, and challenging inequality by examining the legal system. English teachers in all focus groups supported the selection of texts and related learning resources and thematic exploration as key teaching strategies of including inequality in their teaching practice. What slightly differed is the type of inequality that the teachers chose to examine using these key teaching strategies. Some English teachers focused on economic inequality and power illustrated in this comment:

I taught *To Kill a Mockingbird* at Year 11 but I wanted to shake the experience home a bit more so I chose the outdated Edwardian [book] *The Inspector Calls*. By the end of it, we did a survey about this scenario of how this young woman

seems to be at the complete mercy of powerful interests? And so I presented them with various newspaper stories, and said, based in New Zealand let's look at economic access, and personal power and society. And it was very intriguing to see how their understanding of their own New Zealand society changed.

Another teacher described focusing on poverty as a visible form of social and economic inequality relevant to her students' lives. She recounted how they "taught films like *Boy* in New Zealand—they've looked at rural poverty and rural inequality from a lack of access".

The third commonly used teaching method to examine inequality among English teachers was an ethnic or cultural lens. Teachers across all focus groups reference the Treaty of Waitangi. This explanation illustrates English teachers' ethnic or cultural inequality analysis:

I think that also ties in with the Treaty of Waitangi and our commitment to bicultural teaching. We're not in an area where we necessarily have a lot of Māori students, but we have a responsibility to increase their awareness. That kind of goes hand in hand ... as you know, the Treaty and the outcomes of colonisation, and what are the root causes of some of these things.

Many other well-known texts were identified as entry points into discussions of inequality from economic, social, and power perspectives. They frequently identified how textual analysis of inequality opened up students' thinking about the parallel inequalities in their own lives and communities.

The hidden curriculum

The final key study finding highlights the significant influence of the hidden curriculum in shaping how teachers incorporate inequality into their everyday practice. The following discussion of findings highlights examples of how the hidden curriculum or more informal teaching about inequality occurred. Firm evidence of teachers' use of informal ways of teaching about inequality extended across all curriculum subjects and focus groups. Department- or team-based curriculum delivery models were common pedagogical methods of teaching about inequality. This phenomenon was teacher-led often by department heads or whānau leaders. As one PE and health department head declared, "We do a lot on gender inequality in Health and PE, and that's probably because I'm a raging feminist." Another teacher described how "our entire health programme

is underpinned entirely by inclusion and diversity". Student-led or student-initiated interest in inequality was another more generative means of advancing teachers' delivery of inequality-based learning. A wide variety of examples were woven throughout the focus groups. Common exemplars included interests in housing inequality and unhoused people, personal lived experience of poverty among the student body and their respective communities, social media posts that sparked impromptu inequality discussions, and observed interactions such as watching "window washers at the traffic lights". Another repetitive example of student-led interest that informed teaching about inequality was observed health concerns within school communities. Teachers identified various health conditions, including skin disease, obesity, and poor health as consequences of poor dietary habits stemming from income inequality. Similarly, hygiene and access to "resources that make us lead a dignified life" were raised as student-led concerns that initiated impromptu discussions across subject areas, with more prevalence in health and PE.

Projects and extracurricular activities were a clear third hidden curriculum strategy used to engage with different forms of inequality. Fine dining was an example discussed by one food technology teacher. This fine-dining project required students to gain knowledge by watching videos and conducting online research about high-end restaurant meals to deliver this particular kind of restaurant service. Teachers at all the schools involved in this study encouraged their students to engage in project-based learning on inequality topics of their interest. Teachers spoke about students making documentaries about the clothing industry, interviewing unhoused people in downtown Auckland, and creating school-wide food drives and food-delivery volunteer opportunities.

Leaning into visible forms of students' income inequality is the final key hidden curriculum theme. Although teachers described some level of discomfort, they drew on students' inequitable financial experiences to demonstrate the everyday effects of inequality in schools. The varying levels of access to technology devices like laptops, iPads, and mobiles were the most common example. A digital technology teacher relays how:

The evidence is quite obvious of those who have and have not, it's a resource dependent curriculum area. The school does provide the majority of the resources, but then you can observe the kids who come in with the latest equipment, and then you see there is no school [laptops], and the ones who

don't have any. And that they, that that's really a critical part about a part, in terms of being aware of our community, in terms of how effectively can the curriculum service that community, and it's also a consideration for next year when the school is going to BYOD.

Bring your own device (or BYOD) was discussed by teachers across all subject areas illustrating the centrality of technology in curriculum delivery. Meanwhile, field trips and camps (curriculum-specific and school-wide activities) were the second most identified activities that created informal opportunities to explore inequality. Science teachers discussed the impact of inequality on their students, and subsequent curriculum decisions. As one teacher explained “opportunities for our senior students to get out in the real world and experience science is limited. So, as it stands there would be zero Year 12s who could [afford] a trip to Maraetai.” Considering these student financial access concerns, the science teachers at this school decided to discuss income inequality and include the students in their alternative solutions to learning the curriculum material. The teachers in this study described different ways to work within the flexibility of *NZC* to teach about inequality. In this regard, informal learning via the hidden curriculum was a consistent teaching strategy employed to include inequality into everyday school and classroom practice.

Discussion

The analysis of the teacher focus-group data is guided by the question of how *NZC*'s engagement with inequality is operationalised in schools. Study findings offer insight into teachers' curriculum decision-making processes at school and individual levels. The study's rationale of understanding how inequality is taught and subsequently how students learn about the topic underpin the following discussion of study findings. The critical perspectives presented in this discussion of findings lay the foundation for future arguments in favour of a clear, strong, and more cohesive approach to teaching about inequality relevant to all *NZC* secondary subject areas.

Plurality and complexity

Teachers' focus-group insights highlight the diverse ways in which teachers engage with the topic of inequality within *NZC*. The absence and/or minimal reference to inequality within their respective curriculum areas was consistently

identified by all teachers in the study. This finding aligns with findings from phase one of this research where the authors' document analysis of *NZC* and related Ministry of Education-sponsored curriculum resources revealed very few instances of direct engagement with inequality (Tatebe et al., 2019). During the focus groups, some teachers were hesitant to discuss the absence of inequality within their curriculum areas until other colleagues articulated this point. The conversation notably stalled until questions prompting teachers to reflect on specific subject areas that might address issues of inequality were introduced. A full spectrum of responses was received, indicating both the plurality and complexity of teaching and learning about inequality from a curriculum perspective. Business and economics were consistently offered as curriculum areas more closely associated with inequality which reflects traditional economic interpretations of inequality. At first glance, this initial teacher response is cursory in nature yet further analysis suggests that the focus on economic inequality is part of the national political and economic landscape influencing the education sector's focus on work and employment (Ministry of Education, 2023; Tatebe et al., 2019). This finding is also understandable from a visibility perspective. Economic inequality is evident in public and school environments. Teachers discussed their students' lived experiences with limited financial access and opportunities. Recurring examples of students' interest in poverty and unhoused people as visible forms of economic inequality were identified across teachers in all schools.

Teachers' identification of the social sciences and English as curriculum areas in which inequality is more commonly explored contributes to the plurality and complexity of the study findings. From a curriculum lens, *NZC's* flexibility was the enabling factor allowing the provision of teaching about inequality in these two subjects. Curriculum flexibility is a significant point—without the broad scope to align curriculum decisions with the learning and achievement objectives, engagement with inequality would be further diminished leading to even poorer engagement with the topic. Shifting from the prior focus on economic inequality in business and economics, teachers' examples of addressing inequality in social sciences and English reflect significant national and local narratives of social inequality. Teaching about feminism, gender inequality, human and civil rights, and examining social class disparities experienced by their students offers insight into some of the social and wellbeing concerns in local school communities. Similar social commentary

is relevant at the national level in teachers' bicultural framing of inequality in their discussion of the Treaty of Waitangi obligations, and selection of texts and resources by Māori scholars.

Issues of power embedded in the teaching of colonisation in subject history serve as further examples of national narratives conveyed through *NZC*. The capacity of individuals to perceive varied images and patterns in a work of art serves as a useful metaphor for understanding teachers' diverse interpretations of inequality and their approaches to addressing it in their daily practice.

Teachers' influence on learning

The title of this article, "It's who you are and who you get" encapsulates the authors' key argument. Teachers hold immense influence on students' access to learning about inequality.

This argument gains strength when considering the key study findings collectively. Similar to stacking blocks, the issue of *NZC*'s absence and/or minimal references to inequality compounds with knowledge of teachers' curriculum choices that can gatekeep or empower learning about inequality. Teachers' use of the hidden curriculum is of critical importance to curriculum access to inequality. Drawing on the data, English teachers had clear awareness of their own power and influence via their text selection. In all focus groups, they clearly articulated the names of their selected texts and learning resources and explained the type of inequality within them as a rationale for their selection. Teachers in this study also allowed student-led interests in inequality to direct their teaching via curriculum choices in project-based learning and extracurricular activities and school camps. To this end, the following teacher reflection embodies the authors' core argument:

You've got quite a bit of flexibility with regards to the topics and how you take it. I think what it means is that every single teacher's personal ideologies and beliefs actually do come out quite strongly in their teaching.

Citing flexibility of curriculum topic selection, this quote indicates that a certain level of personal orientation towards justice is likely. It also supports the key claim regarding the significant role of teachers as a factor in shaping students' access to knowledge about inequality. Mediating this potential bias was the recurring statement about the impact of school- and department-led curriculum decision making. Conversely, a teacher's personal ideology

and beliefs are acknowledged as a potential study limitation in a couple of ways. First, in participant recruitment, teachers self-identified and chose to participate in the focus groups. Secondly, as described in the quote above, individual backgrounds and ideologies and beliefs are part of the human experience.

Conclusion

This article presents findings about how inequality, as featured in *NZC*, is enacted in everyday school practice. Focus groups conducted with teachers confirmed prior study findings about *NZC*'s minimal engagement with inequality across subject areas. The critical role of teachers in curriculum decision making and thus access to knowledge about inequality was a second key finding. The inclusion of teacher voice in this second phase of the study provides evidence to formulate the core argument that “who you get” as a teacher has immense influence on if, what, and how students learn about inequality. In turn, this finding underscores the immense influence of teacher selection on the delivery of the official and hidden curricula. It also suggests the potential for a third curriculum—the *chosen curriculum*, as coined by the authors of this article. In this study, the chosen curriculum refers to teachers' purposeful inclusion of inequality as a “chosen” curriculum topic despite minimal official *NZC* directives to do so. The “chosen” curriculum includes the wide range of engagement with inequality from cursive references to texts and resource selection, through to full teaching units. At the other end of the spectrum, school- and department-wide thematic approaches that extend across learning subjects (e.g., geography and history) as part of the social sciences, are also part of the “chosen” curriculum. Findings from the second phase of this study are relevant to pre- and in-service teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and the Ministry of Education. It is hoped that the study's findings provide the necessary evidence to officially change *NZC* to include content about inequality. With national changes to the curriculum part of the current educational landscape, the potential for the inclusion of teaching and learning about inequality is more possible than even a few years ago. The authors remain hopeful that this study may contribute to the updated curriculum to include social, economic, and political inequality as it relates to the social wellbeing and shifting the needle towards a more equitable society.

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