<p style="text-align:center"><u>My narrative and subsequent conundrum</u></p>

<u>The Introduction</u>

This has to be the most uncomfortable process that I have undertaken in my career as a primary teacher. In hindsight, I was usually able to hide behind decisions that others have made, and use facts and figures from others to support my practice. This inquiry has had me both pulling my hair out and feeling like my head was exploding with celebratory revelations. I feel that by the end of this process there will be more questions than answers.

<u>The Build up</u>

It was Toby, Xenia and Christian's fifth birthday and so today was the day that they started primary school and joined my wonderful class of New Entrants. Apart from their names I knew nothing about these three children due to the lack of information shared from their respective kindergartens during this transition process. I had no idea of their likes, dislikes, strengths, weakness or characters. Only that as new members of our/my class, I would do everything I could to help these three students succeed.

All three children were shy at first, showing the anxiety they felt towards this change: a new environment, new teacher and new classmates. All three parents reacted differently to dropping their children off at school that day. Toby's were somewhat carefree having already gone through this process with an older child and perhaps showing clues towards how they felt about Toby's ability to settle well into school-life. Xenia's parents whilst they wanted to encourage her to meet others, did not want to let go of her hand and had many questions about her first day. Christian's on the other hand, walked in together but kept their distance from him, allowing him to explore whilst chatting with other parents but listening intently for their son's voice, displaying some anxiety from historical events (which I would become aware of at a later stage).

As a New Entrant class in a Primary School setting, I am expected by my school and lower school team, to almost ignore the fact that these children are New Entrants and to start planning the class learning with the Year 1 learning objectives as a guide. Whilst I feel that this seems a little unfair on the children and perhaps also on the children who do not get these extra terms at school, I agree that age as a socially constructed determinant, should not discriminate against these children. I do wonder whether these children, like every other five year old, are really ready to start learning the National Curriculum objectives and therefore whether this time could be utilised better to prepare them for this rather than push them into it. But as a new employee of the school, I do not want to "rock the boat" by questioning the "way things are done": because something has always been, does that make it right?

Toby does settle into the school and class routines well, but as the term goes on it becomes increasingly evidence that he struggles, and will further struggle with some aspects of the learning that is expected by the National Curriculum and Standards for his age. For example, as yet he does not have a firm grasp of phonemic awareness or knowledge. Considering the Standards set for a Year 1 child's reading and writing ability, Toby has a gap of knowledge which will have to be "caught up" before the gap increases over his school years. However, Toby is full of qualities of competence: he communicates well with others and even shows leadership skills; is able to problem solve situations, both using what we call "common sense" and thinking outside of the box; he displays independence, managing himself and being somewhat a risk-

taker; shows his curiosity and ability to form questions; and demonstrates emotional intelligence towards his peers (showing great development from the ego-centric characteristics of children). And yet, at the end of the year, he will be assessed against the National Curriculum for Year 1 (problematic in itself) but also because these Standards do not take into account the whole child. They are set, subject-related objectives that a committee deemed was important for a five year old, all five year olds, to be learning at school. But are they really appropriate? Will they help Toby to succeed in life? Do they value the diversity of children and the diversity which a 21st century world needs? I feel that Toby has a lot to give and succeeds in so many aspects that I feel is important for children to learn, however, this is not in line with the National Curriculum. So I am confused and torn: are these competencies that are mentioned in the Curriculum not deemed important? Toby generally seems happy at school, but I can already sense a feeling from him of understanding what failure is and the creeping in of negative feelings towards education, as it highlights his weaknesses and his peers begin to label him.

Xenia also settles into school well but in an opposite way to Toby. She is socially quiet and instead focuses on the learning, displaying a competence in reading and writing from having started to develop these skills in kindergarten. Xenia demonstrates a readiness for school, in terms of academic learning, including with her fine motor skills and her ability to participate in class. However, she lacks a lot of the skills that Toby possesses, and these skills I feel are just, if not more valuable than the academic ones. She has not developed her independence and is instead dependent on others, even in skills that she is strong in; she lacks social and emotional skills, not knowing how to communicate and work with others and is seen during free choice periods working along in tasks that she has past experience with; she does not demonstrate much creativity or curiosity, and looks to others to solve problems. Whilst Xenia sounds like she is on-task for her education and her end of year report will show good achievement against Year 1 Standards, which her parents will be happy about, I worry that she has missed out. Has she missed out on a childhood - a chance to play. We know that play is an important vessel for learning, and by not engaging in such Xenia has become isolated from her peers and disadvantaged in forming friendships. In this case, I am left wondering about the appropriateness of the learning for our children, are we asking them to learn too much at such a young age, and what does this "push down learning" cost, emotionally, socially and culturally? There are research projects that have found links between a lack of play and an increase in emotional and behavioural disorders. Xenia appears happy during formal schooling activities but her uneasiness and lack of confidence shows during other times, isolating her from her peers. What will she learn to value and prioritise, and what affect will that have on the rest of her education and life?

At first it is not apparent as to why Christian's parents seemed apprehensive, he demonstrates good knowledge in his subjects and shows insightful curiosity in subjects that are of interest to him. However, after the initial few weeks of settling in and getting to know school and class routines, Christian starts to test all the boundaries. After contacting his previous teacher, it became clear that whilst academically he was doing well, he needed something else, something different. Christian was young. He was still exploring his body, relationships and the world that we live in. Yes, this is similar for other children, but for Christian it was a reaction to pedagogies and content that he was not ready for. Whilst I made the effort, despite the disapproval from colleagues and questioning eyes of my students' parents, to keep our classroom as child-friendly and child-engaging as possible, the environment and formality of school was too constrictive for Christian. Interestingly, I got to observe Christian when a relief teacher was in covering some Professional development time and his reaction to her "sit down at a desk and do

this worksheet" format scared me. Christian retracted into himself, keeping himself amused throughout the day with the teacher not appreciating his unique needs. She did not even seem worried when giving me feedback at the end of the day that he was observed as the lowest ability level of the class and his segregation from the rest of the class. In later classes, would Christian end up being left to fail because of the inappropriate methods teachers used and lack of child-centred planning? I believe that when you become a teacher, whilst you are taught to plan with the guidelines of a curriculum, it is not until you start to think about the child as a whole, understanding where they have come from, where they are and how to help them develop, that you really become a teacher. Christian was a curious learner and enjoyed school, but I could see how he might get left behind, be labelled as failing, or shut out because our definition in education of diversity and understanding of appropriateness is too narrowly constructed.

The Problem

In six years time Toby, Xenia and Christian will be graduating primary school for secondary school, having done their "time". After that they might continue education or go into employment. Will they be prepared for it? Will I, as their New Entrant teacher have helped them to be the best that they can be? And here, I am torn because I do not necessarily see that the National Curriculum and Standards, the backbone of our education system, paves a way for every child to be the best that they can be. There is a disjuncture between what I believe and what I am having to do. Contemporary academics discuss how our world has entered the 'Knowledge Age' and how 21st century skills are needed; they talk about the lack of creativity in the classroom and how schools are decreasing children's ability to be creative; they point out the changing face of childhood and parental responsibility to educate their children, and the importance of developmentally appropriate education, such as the need for play in schools; they highlight the need to understand the "how" of learning but rarely is this put into action.

I know many teachers in my position who are not worried about this and do not question the knowledge that we are advocating in schools. They just do their job. Some do not even see that there is a problem. So am I crazy for thinking like this? But I am not happy to sit by the sidelines if for one second I believe that I am not helping children through a positive journey to be the best that they can be. Maybe this is not part of my job, after all, who am I to believe that it is? Where has this responsibility come from? Maybe its a view of the world and society that I have lived in, in the 'Western World' where so many children are experiencing serious medical disorders that they never used to in the old days; that society seems to be jagged at times with unharmonious people making divides even bigger; I feel we are letting them down. We should be rejoicing at the differences between us but instead I feel that through education and society we are highlighting them as undesirable. I believe that our educational systems are fundamentally flawed because of their lack of diversity and flexibility. What is the knowledge that schools should be nurturing?

The Resolution

What primary teacher hasn't experienced a diverse range of students. No two students are the same. Some have strengths in literacy, numeracy, thinking skills, organisation, memory, sports, the arts and seem to succeed at school; whilst others, unfortunately are the ones that keep you awake at night. The students who you worry that they will fail. But what will they fail? Standards and learning objectives set out by a committee stuck by conventions and conceptualisations of a

narrow-minded, production-line educational system? I'm troubled. How can children as young as five fail in education? This sentence and concept makes them out to be the deficit ones, whereas really, isn't it the education system that is failing them?

<u>The End</u>

Conundrum:
To what extent does today's primary school education adequately cater for our learners?

Research Project
The knowledge learnt in today's primary classroom.

Research question
To what extent does today's primary school education adequately cater for our learners?

Rationale

Through centuries, education has become a fundamental human right for children as it "promotes individual freedom and empowerment and yields important development benefits" (UNESCO, n.d.). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that it is a child's right to be protected and helped to ensure their full development, physically, spiritually, morally and socially (Unicef, 2014). In our modern world, education is changing: not just with the increase in utilising technology in education; but there is increasing discussion and noise surrounding the idea that education systems are not fulfilling these rights of children and therefore sparking an interest in the need for a revolution in education. If education is going to change, we need to understand its deficiencies and how a transformation can effectively rectify this. After all, not only are these children individuals in their own right, but they are the future generation.

Sir Ken Robinson (2013) pointedly starts his lecture about education by reminding his audience that "human beings are naturally different and diverse" - no two children are the same. Yet, our education system, with its narrow focus, seems to be based on conformity and uniformity, reinforcing social and cultural practices through Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theory (Sullivan, 2002). Therefore it is arguable that our education and educational systems are not sufficient in today's world for the individual student. Instead education systems, through their curricula, should be valuing and supporting the diversity of its students, not only as a human right but also for a better performing world. My experiences as a primary teacher have led me to morally, socially and culturally question the knowledge that schools promote as that which is worth knowing. Therefore my question is: To what extent does todays' primary school education adequately cater for our learners?

This conundrum includes looking not just at the explicit curriculum that schools are guided by, but the implicit and often hidden curricula, that are highly impacted by the individual teacher, school and culture's discourses. It therefore also involves an intrinsic analysis of the discourses of a specific incident as an exemplar: myself, through an auto-ethnographic approach; and the dilemma that it unveils.

Theoretical approaches

Conceptualising curriculum:

I shall conceptualise the curriculum that primary students receive by drawing parallels with various theoretical frameworks, namely Eisner, Pinar and Bourdieu. Eisner (Joseph, 2011; McGee, 1997) identified multiple curricula that students receive: the explicit, implicit and null curricula. In order to answer a question on the adequacy of education for our young learners, we have to look at not only the explicit curriculum (that written by the Government, the intended

and operational) the unintended (aka the 'hidden' curriculum (Portelli, cited in McGee, 1997, p. 22), which can be both positive and negative) but also look at the null (what has not been included). Another way to classify a child's education is by utilising Cuban's (Joseph, 2011) categories: the official, the taught, the learned and the tested curricula. Both of these conceptualisations of 'curriculum' will help in this research by identifying which curricula is being referred to, when evaluations of the different curricula are made for the adequacy of a child's primary school education. School structures have changed throughout the centuries so that the explicit, taught and operational curriculum seem to emphasise the importance of qualifications over socialisation and subjectification (Biesta, 2010), and these changes are evidence that education has been subjected to personal, cultural and societal influence.

In both the *intended and operational* curricula, it is important to understand the assumptions, beliefs and values that those who create and implement such curricula hold, as it is inevitable that these discourses will be influential, both consciously and unconsciously in this "heavily values-laden" (McGee, 1997, p.10) work. Therefore, for this research it will be useful to consider Pinar's (Joseph, 2011) conceptualisation of 'curriculum as a text' because it illustrates the social impact, through social constructionism, that society has on education and what society heralds as the knowledge worth knowing for our primary students. In addition, the proposed research will draw on the theory that curriculum, from its social constructionist background, is biased in its creation and implementation. Highlighting that it serves a narrow group of learners, predominantly white and wealthy (Pennington, 2007; Penetito, 2010; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), and does not take into account a diverse population, although the developers of the NZ curriculum tried to. This may be symptomatic of the task at hand here, where working in a neoliberal context can contradict some egalitarian impulses, with growing social inequalities, and of the unconscious values of those who design curricula but serves to highlight the power imbalance and struggle at work here. Thus reflecting a tradeoff, as can often be in the case of policy.

This conceptualisation leads to a call for discourse analysis (Foucault, cited in Burr, 1996) to be undertaken, so that an understanding of the foundations of society and what society perceives the objectives of education to be (Goodlad, cited in Joseph, 2011), is to be understood alongside the evaluation of whether the proclaimed knowledge is adequate. After all, in deciding whether the education that students receive is adequate, one needs to acknowledge and understand the underlying power recorded within it. This raises the important question about who is qualified to make the foundational decisions when creating and examining curricula?

Conceptualising diversity:

When thinking about diversity in education, I have found it interesting that the majority of people want to categorise which groups of people are being included as diverse, those who: are disabled students; have special educational needs; have English as their second oral language; are of other cultures, such as the maori population in New Zealand; come from a low socio-economic background. But I feel that this is not enough and when defining diversity in education, we need to include all the small, micro elements that make our students the unique beings that they are. We need to be truly inclusive in education. I believe in this from several perspectives, namely: equality, social justice (Ahmed, 2012) and in humanistic terms. The concept of diversity is socially constructed, with a multitude of discourses (Burr, 1996), therefore I believe that through inquiries we can change what it means to be a 'diverse' learner

The UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that education should be accessible "without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity" (2006, p. 8). I believe that children have a right to an education that is centred around them, however, there are theories that curricula are set with a select people in mind, such as the power of 'whiteness' (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Pennington, 2007; Penetito, 2010), suggesting inequality at school. Hegemonic values of the the dominant class have been internalised in curricula, in part, creating a fear of the unknown and of that which is different. Through critical inquiry into one's own habits and subconscious, along with an understanding that fears of differences are produced socially through relationships, individuals then can hope to change these fears. In the case of education and creating curricula, educators' increased awareness can lead to a change in celebrating differences and thus a decrease in the constraining nature of curricula (Pennington, 2007), which would increase opportunities for change and create diversity in the classroom and the world. After all, children are naturally diverse, so shouldn't their education be reflective of this?

Looking at diversity through these lenses will help me to answer the question as to whether education is adequate, by questioning what education should be for each of these children, not just a few, and what is meant by the term 'adequate'. For this I will be using social discourse to unpack the critical terms, from not just an academic or scientific view, but also from an anthropologist and humanist lens. The use of narratives will also be useful here as it allows the sharing of critical incidences that I have experienced that relate to the conceptualisation of diversity.

Methodological approaches

In order to research this question of whether the current knowledge in our education system is adequate for our students, I will be drawing on four main methodological frameworks: pedagogy of discomfort; discourse analysis; writing as a method inquiry; and narrative writing through auto-ethnography.

As educators, we play an important role in shaping our students through education. Whether this be through explicit/implicit or overt/hidden curricula, or by the choices that we make and values we hold, both consciously and unconsciously. When it comes to critically evaluating our education systems, we need to engage in our own inquiry of ourselves and of the world, in order to understand where our ideas of norms and differences, our habits, and knowledge has stemmed from. This is not a comfortable undertaking   and can often be accompanied by "feelings of anger, grief, disappointment, and resistance" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111). The labour that goes into a pedagogy of discomfort is not only cognitive but it is highly emotional, however, the gains of opening new windows of the world, is a highly-valuable lifelong tool and should be sought. It can liberate individuals from the pressures of dominant ideologies and how they gain a greater understanding of their unconscious privileges (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Pennington, 2007).

If we are to re-evaluate diversity and knowledge in educational curricula, we need to understand the powers, our background, values and experiences, that have influenced ourselves and our thinking. A useful methodology for this is discourse analysis (Turunen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014; Davies, et al, 2004; MacLure, 2003). Discourses are the different voices or language that are intertwined in everything we say, do and believe (Joseph, 2011). In oder to understand our

educational system and decide whether it is adequate for our students in a 21st century world, we need to analyse the 'voices' that can be heard within the institution, framework and text, in order to deconstruct both the language that is used, its purpose and the beliefs contained within it. Discourses are the way that knowledge is created and are socially constructed (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), therefore calling for a deconstruction of the knowledges that underpin education and are seen as 'truth', will help to evaluate our institution's adequacy.

In order to conduct this research, qualitative evidence will be utilised in the form of narratives and presented through an auto-ethnographical framework. This will allow for an analysis both at the micro- and macro-level of education (Pennington, 2007). It will be used to analyse material in order to reflect critically on curriculum and diversity issues. Narratives are valuable methods for this as they can be written from multiple perspectives to highlight the multifaceted characteristics of an experience (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The historical experiences that will be shared will support this research in understanding our educational system in the present with an empowering, postmodernist result (Miller, 2004).

An auto-ethnographical framework for methodology can also be viewed as an example of Richardson and St. Pierre's (2005), writing as a method of inquiry. This is said to be a viable method in which to understand oneself and a research topic. "No textual staging is ever innocent" (Richardson $ St, Pierre, 2005, p.960) therefore, the value that I as the writer put upon what I include in my research will itself be a form of research, especially if coupled with deconstruction and the methodology of discourse analysis. My inquiry will be a an example of postmodernism as it will recognise the situational and historical limitations of the knower, in this case, the writer. More specifically, the research will be poststructuralism, looking at the relationships between language, subjectivity, social organisation and power, and will therefore be especially helpful as an inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) as it will bring to the forefront the values and preconceptions that I as a researcher hold to be true.

New understandings and insights

When I began this research I had in mind that I would find the answer for the knowledge worth children learning at primary school, but instead through this process of inquiry I have found that there is no simple data to conclude from. Every word, text, action and thought is conflicted and dependent on both our inner beings and the environment that we enact within. But this is not to say that I have failed. Instead through this auto-ethnographical research, I have discovered a greater understanding of education, the society that we live in and my own values and beliefs, which directly affect what is to be considered the knowledge worth knowing at primary schools.

### Education was never meant to be egalitarian and struggles to be diversifiable
Teaching and learning have always been important, from the first animals and homo-sapiens to inhabit Earth, helping each other to survive (Wikipedia: Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, 2015) and sharing knowledge, through the generations (See: Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice). The importance of educational institutions in society comes from the Ancient Greek society who then established formal institutions for educational purpose. They used it as a tool to ensure a "stable, secure and just society" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 116), though the meaning of the phrase 'just society' has changed over time, where slavery is now condemned and civil rights have been fought for. Therefore, from its inception, educational systems have paradoxically highlighted and nurtured society's class system.

It has only been in the last 150 years that everybody has had the right to an education, driven by egalitarianism and economics from the Industrial Age (Gilbert, 2007) and religious organisations. Whilst the introduction of public educational institutions can be seen as an effort to overcome the hierarchical characteristic of education, their being and the curricula they adhere to are also further evidence of the intimate relationship between education and social structure (Talbert, 1971). This relationship continues in today's "one-size-fits-all" systems, which has evolved from the various reorganisations of school into a standardised system (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), whereby it can be argued that our educational systems are favourable to a particular set of people (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Bishop, 2012; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Educational institutions have created the need for the "right sort" of education, knowledge that is deemed worth knowing, but it has to be questioned as to how and by whom this knowledge has been labelled as the right knowledge for schools.

The purpose of the western world's traditional, 'academic' educational systems can be viewed as: training people's minds for the best development, through *qualification;* establishing political orders, through *socialisation;* and developing individual's independence, through *subjectification* (Biesta, 2010). However, Biesta (2010) argues that these roles are not equally weighted as there is too much emphasis on qualification. It can be viewed that the lack of exclusivity of educational establishments has "forced" education to become a competitive market in its own right, thus decreasing educational systems' ability to be egalitarian (Ball, 2003). Yet, I believe that educational institutions, through their liberal market-based foundations and competitive nature (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), were never set up to cater for diversity. It is only through recent changes in civilisations' need, to be seen at least, to be equalitarian, that has led to the assumption and need for our educational institutions to be fair and equal. As increasingly global citizens, we do not want to acknowledge that we might not actually be a fair and egalitarian society. So this makes questioning the ability of schools to meet the needs of their students at the individual micro level difficult and uncomfortable, but we also need to engage in examining how the structure and foundations of schools as formal places of education, affects its ability to be fair as well. This means understanding the ways in which schools reproduce social and cultural capital, a discomforting inquiry, in order to negotiate it within research.

The fight for equality has overlooked the need for equity

Through decades of reorganisation, the structure and governance of schools has been amended to, through the eyes of human rights activists, give all children the right to an
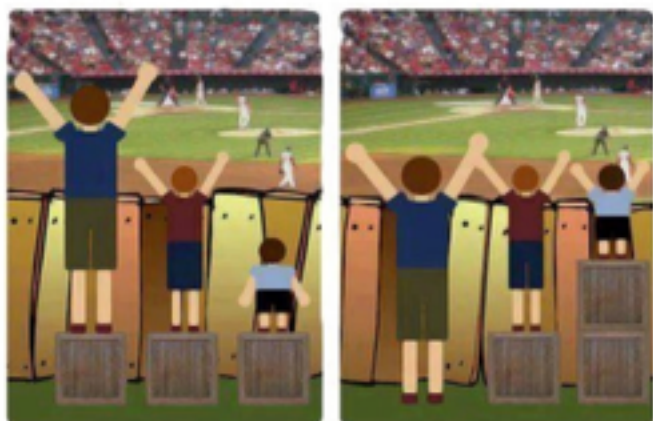
education: to make life more fair. However, in doing so, the process has forgotten or erased the importance of the individual: The individual has been "pushed to the background" (Mondal, n.d.). So whilst children are all given the same, it is not necessarily fair because they all have different needs.

The left image (Reddy, n.d.) depicts three different children who are all given the same, because that is what society interpreted 'fairness' and 'just' to mean. However,

because all three children were given the same numbers of blocks to stand on, it actually just continues the portrayal of hierarchy. Education is not a one-size-fits-all panacea. It elevates the clever, rich, white wealthy males (Pennington, 2007; Boler & Zembylas, 2003), maintaining their superiority to the other two children. Whilst the child who needs the most help and support, something different: those that need the most education, receive the least. Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggest that these are traditionally, blacks, immigrants, disabled, female, minority groups. Those who have fought for equality and civil rights have been given an education that was set up and works for a few, so that schools continue to be an example of unfairness. However, if the children in the picture were given the support and education that they need, as in the right-hand side picture, they all get the opportunity to achieve: it is equitable.

There are those that would argue that education and the curricula, such as New Zealand's National Curriculum and Standards (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2007 & 2010), are attempts to be equitable. To understand how one person can think that school's education is equitable and another person believe that it is not, you must think about the discourses that individuals hold and also about changing semantics for educational linguistics. Where once literacy was considered to be the ability to read and write (Moats, 2000), in today's world it has been amended to mean a multi-modal tool to participate in a 21st century society (Tompkins, Campbell & Green, 2002). But when I see children whisked through areas of weakness because they should be being taught (according to the curricula) more progressive objectives, or children being forced to engage in subjects of pedagogy that are of no interest to them and then graded on these rather than other strengths the children might have, or children being expected to learn knowledge that is not appropriate for their age and/or development (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 2014; Cano, Nuqui & Cruz, 2013): I can see that the system is failing our children. They are not failures but we as educators are failing them. It is of course easier for some people to target the teachers as being inadequate, as they are easier to improve rather than having to rethink education as a whole.

What should children of school-age be learning? What is 'fair' or 'appropriate' or 'adequate' for them to be learning? All these words have values and understanding behind them. For example, the word adequate can be interpreted with differing amounts of clarity and measure based on an individual interpreting it. One teacher's understanding and utilisation of the word adequate can be quite different to another teacher's. This disparity can be clearly experienced when teachers partake in moderation, for example of writing using a rubric. Words are ambiguous and need to be clearly defined for use, but our backgrounds and experiences will always affect our discourses and therefore need to be analysed as well (Joseph, 2011).

<u>Teachers are important, but they are limited</u>
According to research (Hattie, 2003), teachers are the greatest source of variance which makes a difference in the classroom. Many educators feel that this is where this research should be focusing, this is due to their discourses, such as believing that the system of education is without fault, or being ignorant to its need to change. I have met with arguments that the only problem here with the examples of Toby, Xenia and Christian, is the teacher's inability to teach the students effectively to achieve the standards form the curriculum. Some people do not want to look at the underlying faults of our education system that limit the teacher to do the best for their students. As such, teachers are reproducing the status quo in society and the social discourses that are innately intwined within themselves, without question.

Increasingly in education we use the phrase 'individualising the learning' and schools, especially those that are run as businesses, proudly proclaim this as a selling point. A further example of the competitive society in which we live, where teachers are unable and dissuaded from collaborating due to intellectual property issues and suggestions of performance-related pay. However, the policies and objectives underlying the teaching are still those that are standard throughout countries with national curricula. The learning is not individualised, only the pedagogies used in teaching might be. This in part is due to the requirement of standardised assessment, maintaining an outline of the knowledge that should be learnt. It can be seen that teachers are just one cog in a giant wheel, where their shifting of practices does not necessarily result in the change of the structure and and system of the school. There are some influences and events that teachers have no control over, such as the home environment, learning outside of the classroom and the knowledge detailed in curricula. Yet policies and governments find it easier to target teachers as being wholly responsible rather than enquire and restructure schools that actually have the ability to be individualised and meet the needs of diverse learners. Whilst teachers are a great influence of the knowledge learnt within the classroom (McGee, 1997; Pardy-Comber, Walker & Moore, 2004), they are unable to attend to increasing social inequalities.

Through this inquiry and pedagogy of discomfort (Boler & Zembylas, 2003), I have been able to reflect on my own experiences as a teacher. Whilst in the shelter of my own classroom I am able to influence the learning and individualise the curricula (to an extent), I have not been encouraged by colleagues or the system to speak openly in order to suggest change. Our society with its competitive nature, also holds individuals to account and is not accepting of diverse people or viewpoints. By speaking out against 'the system', one would be fearful for loss of employment, being labelled as 'trouble maker' or being deemed a failure as a teacher. However, some academics believe that we should be involving teachers more in the system of schooling, listening to teachers and letting them make educational decision (Tyack & Cuban, 1995; McGee, 1997; Boler & Zembylas, 2003), at least in collaboration.

Society is constantly evolving
Our world is forever changing and academics agree that today we are in the 'Knowledge Age' (Gilbert, 2007). This was not a sudden change but one which has evolved through time. As with Bandura's social cognitive theory, learning is a "continuous reciprocal interaction between behavioural, cognitive and environmental influences" (Bandura, 1978, p.345). Language is constantly evolving too (Biesta, 2010) so that semantics evolve, discourses altered and new words are born (Turunen, Uusiauttu & Määttä, 2014). For example, part of the argument for the materialisation of this research is that surrounding the word 'childhood'. Changes in society to see mothers as "warm, nurturing care-givers" (Elkind, 1994, p.31) occurred in the 19th century which valued childhood as a prerequisite for producing healthy children (Goldson, 1997).

Today there are numerous interpretations of the word 'childhood', dependent on the discourses of the individuals. A committee of these individuals are the ones who make important decisions regarding our educational system and its curricula, including issues surrounding the age of starting formal education, what and at what age knowledge should be learnt (Turunen, Uusiauttu & Määttä, 2014) and the rise of a culture of performativity and measurement through assessment of outcomes (Biesta, 2010; Blaiklock, 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ball, 2003). It is a complex job to decide on what knowledge is appropriate for our primary-aged children due to the constantly evolving nature of society, but there are now scientists and researchers trying to find out and publishing their results. However because society is constantly evolving, it suggests

that educational systems and their curricula need to be flexible and agile, two characteristics which are not inherent in a standardised educational system but could be, for example, if more power was given locally to teachers and schools (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Diverse learners are ostracised
In a neoliberal society and with a system of encouraging performativity, it is very easy to deem that those who are different and do not fit the mould as the ones who have a problem. In education, whilst teachers try to adapt teaching and learning for their students this only goes up to a point. When a student causes bigger concerns and teachers are fearful of their failing to meet standards, individual plans are made for the student. The mindset of the teacher is categorise the student as the one with a problem but their mindsets are misinformed. This is evidence that education is not a one-size-fits-all. Sometimes it is the fault of the teacher, a lack of knowledge or effort to adequately make the knowledge accessible for all their students. But at a more macro and deeper level, it is the system and curricula's fault as they are unable to cater for a diverse population (Pennington, 2007). What voices have influenced my thoughts on this? Why are some educators happy to be ignorant of the system's influence in this? Here I can see that I am a humanist and believe in every child deserving the right to education. Why should those who are influenced by economy, politics and the status quo be in charge of making decisions surrounding the knowledge to be taught at schools? Every child is different (Robinson, 2013) so we should not be treating them like robots on a production line. No child deserves to come to schools and be made to feel like a failure. That is the easy way to account for low education rates (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) but it is not the right way.

Education is ambiguous
Education is an issue that different advocates have been able to put their own spin on, including myself. I believe that education in schools today is not diverse enough to adequately cater for individual's needs. For example, some the discourses that can affect education are: the political lens to gain voters, the economic spin to create a capable work force, the humanist and ethical views to protect people's rights, the religious voice to make a specific community, the societal pressure to create a community, the global factor to show competitive competence, the child's need to have fun, or the employee viewpoint to fulfil job attributes. Some of these discourses can be seen in the examples of America during the Cold War, education shifting to compete against the Soviets, and in the 1980's the Japanese education fulfilling its need for economic success in the global market (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). But these viewpoints, like society, are constantly changing and shifting which is in part explained by Dewey's understanding regarding the nature of experiences: "(1) all past experiences influence future ones (continuity), (2) Experiences in the present are borne out of the individual's relationship and events that happened in the individuals past (interaction)" (Green, 2013).

It is only by looking through all these different lenses that we can see the complexity of the question as the heart of this research: What is the knowledge that schools should be teaching that is worth knowing? This therefore makes engaging with any question that evaluates education and schooling a composite question, whereby acknowledgements need to be made about the the function and purpose of education (Biesta, 2010) and the affect of social discourses analysed (Bishop, 2012; MaClure, 2003; Turunen, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2014).

In answering this research conundrum I must analyse my own discourses that lead me to believe that the curricula (Joseph, 2011) of primary schools is to adequate for all of my students. My

questioning of the education that students receive at primary schools is an example of the reflecting changing climate of public opinion and education (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Conclusion

Academics agree that society has now entered the "Knowledge Age" (Gilbert, 2007) and there is increasing consensus that our old, industrial-aged educational systems need to be re-examined (Gilbert, 2005a; 2007; TedTalk, 2013; Bolstad & Gilbert, 2012; Turunen, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2014). But knowing what is the right knowledge for the future generation is a guessing game and leads directly to question whether primary schools' education adequately serve our learners.

With the increased focus on performance (Blaiklock, 2010; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ball, 2003) and status being linked to achievement (Talbert, 1971), there have been increased use of performance-related assessments and standards. Whether these assessments actually measure what they are supposed to is questionable (Biesta, 2010). These assessments are based on the learning outcomes of explicit curricula, such as the National Curriculum (MoE, 2007) and National Standards (MoE, 2010) in New Zealand. I believe that due to these assessments, the knowledge in these curricula documents are the sole focus of education, and the increased pressure they cause to the children and their teachers, can be detrimental in the ability of educators to provide an "adequate" and an individually appropriate education.

Ahmed (2012) suggests how "…diversity can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and inequalities to be overlooked" (p. 14). This means that whether we choose to try to revolutionise our educational systems or maintain the status quo, as concerned citizens, or protective parents, or controlling government officials, or competitive employers, we need to understand how society and individuals are affected by the educational institution in this country. So that whether we believe that education needs to change to cater better for our diverse students, we are able to 'read' the landscape and work for whatever goals we individually have. As teachers, we need to all decide what we believe education is for so that we can then decide how we can foster this mindset within the limitations we are given, or indeed, try to increase awareness of its limitations and instigate change. There are no "magic bullets" in education, but I believe in schools being a place for children to safely discover both who they are and what their abilities and enjoyments are. This belief comes from my argument that children have rights too. It is their right to be loved, looked after, respected and educated to be the best that they can be in a world that works together without negatively impacting each other's right. School is not a place where children should feel that they are failures, but instead a place where a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) fosters learners ,of all ages', development.

The move into the 'Knowledge Age' does not only affect education, but it has made it possible, through science and technology, for researchers and academics to gain a greater understanding of the mechanics of learning. This is knowledge that we should be utilising in our educational systems, through curricula, to support decisions made surrounding what children at primary schools should be learning. No longer is the industrial-inspired curricula and their implementation, adequate in our educational systems as they do not cater for the diverse needs and abilities of future generations. An open and clear re-examination of our educational practice and understanding is needed (Biesta, 2010; Pardy-Comber et al, 2004). As long as homo

sapiens are surviving in this world, education will continue to exist, but it is the formal and mandatory education which needs to be made accountable for our diverse population of learners. The more people who question what is the status quo, the more discussions (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) on education will unfold. Whilst these discussions will burrow down to the deep make-up of our individual beings and will be uncomfortable (Boler & Zembylas, 20030, some would say that to continue without questioning and analysing is a crime: "to sin by silence when we should protest makes cowards out of men" (Wheeler Wilcox, 1914, 154–55*). But by engaging in this type of pedagogy, we will encourage discussions to make sure that we are truly a fair and just society.

I do not believe that this will be easy and history cautions us, but I feel that we must engage in these discussions so that no child will be made to feel a failure, or be rejected, or be held-back, or not be able to follow their passions, or be unsupported in their development. Teachers are a good start to these discussions, but they cannot do it alone and should not be excluded from the real decisions of education.

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