

Equal opportunities in education

How can curriculum contribute?



CIDREE Conference
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How are
'equal opportunities in education'
and
'curriculum'
related?

Use chat



Agenda

1. Inequality in education
2. What can be done?
 - Avoid fixed ability grouping
 - High teacher expectations
 - Curriculum: a focus on basic skills?
3. What else can be done?
 - Building on students' funds of knowledge
 - Using students' home languages
4. Why more needs to be done
 - The meritocratic ideal is not ideal
 - Curriculum: a focus on agency

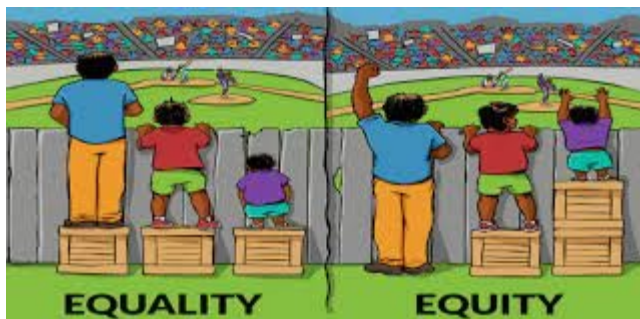




1. Inequality in education

(in the Netherlands – higher on the agenda)

- Children from lower-SES families have less successful school careers
- More students follow education at higher levels, but inequality has remained
- Inspectorate of Education: Inequality of opportunities has increased over the past 10 years
- Covid-19 has increased inequalities
- Differences between schools have increased
- Teacher shortages affect schools with relatively many children with a migration background and with lower educated parents most



Onderwijs Alliantie

Samen voor ieder kind



Kenniscentrum
Ongelijkheid

KLASSEN

Gelijke kansen voor elk kind?
Zeker wel!

Meld je nu aan voor de Klassen meetup in jouw provincie en breed met andere betrokkenen in gesprek voor doelgerichte oplossingen voor kansenongelijkheid in het onderwijs.

Ga naar: human.nl/klassen/meetups



Can we solve this in the classroom / at school?



Why are people (always) looking at the classroom / the school for solutions?



Are equal educational opportunities the solution?



This problem needs to be addressed in schools and classrooms:

- some inequalities can be compensated in education
- some inequalities are reinforced in schools



This can be addressed in schools and classrooms:

- 50 years of educational research



You don't have to reinvent the wheel.



WERK MAKEN VAN GELIJKE KANSEN

PRAKTISCHE INZICHTEN UIT ONDERZOEK
VOOR LERAREN BASISONDERWIJS

LINDA VAN DEN BERGH, EDDIE DENESSEN & MONIQUE VOLMAN (RED.)



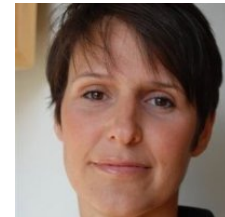
Insights from educational research – what can be done?

2 examples:

- Avoid fixed ability grouping
- High teacher expectations



Avoid fixed ability grouping



Becky Francis

- Fixed ability groups or classes are widely used but contested
- Negative effects for students labelled as ‘low ability’ (esp. self confidence and self image)

“They ruin your self respect”

- Labels function as self-fulfilling prophecy

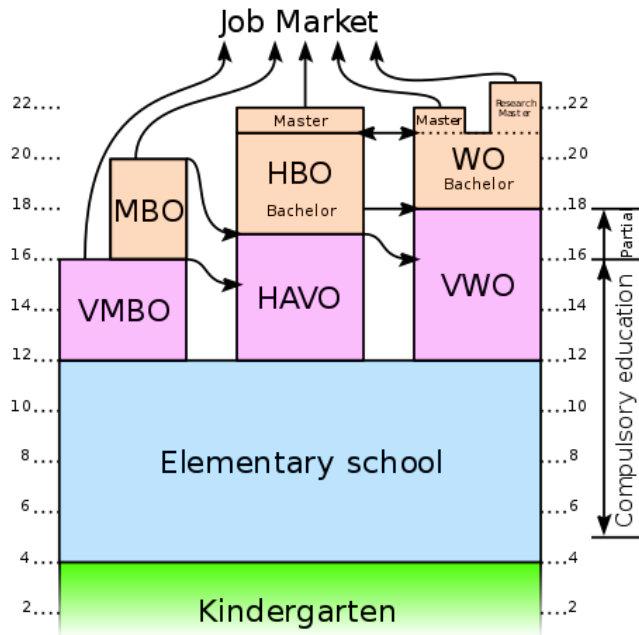


Teachers and schools can:

- Avoid fixed ability groups (setting)
- Let all students experience that they can improve - at every level



Avoid fixed ability grouping: tracking



Educational system / schools can:

- postpone selection

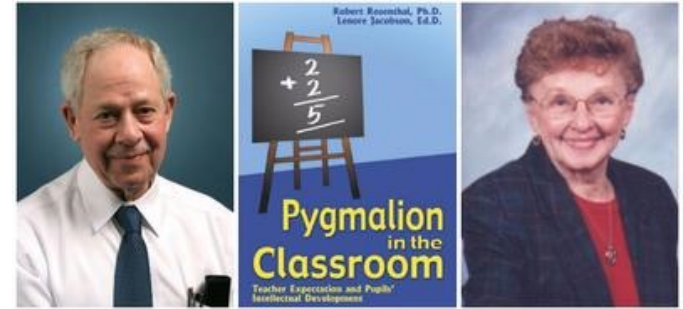
→ offer students more time to develop and find out which type of education fits them best

Curriculum materials that support teachers in mixed-ability classrooms?



High teacher expectations

- Pygmalion-effect (self-fulfilling prophecy)
- Teachers behave differently towards students they have high expectations of
- Teacher expectations become true



Robert Rosenthal

Leonore Jacobson



Elisha Babad



High teacher expectations

Meta-analysis 35 years of research:

- Effects of incorrect expectations are small
- Teachers adjust their expectations
- ... but not for children for lower-educated parents and ethnic minority groups
- Positive expectations are stronger

Teachers can:

Learn to be high expectations teachers



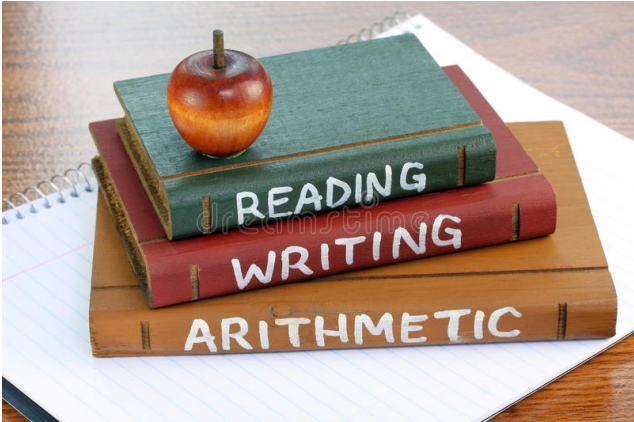
Lee Jussim Kent Harber



Christine Rubie Davies



Curriculum: a focus on basic skills?



- basic skills can be learned in context of projects, themes etc.

lack of meaning



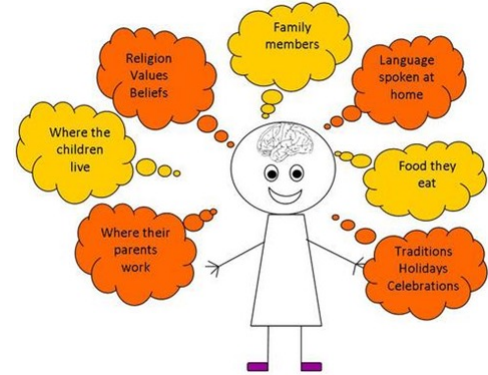
- basic skills and learning goals in other domains are not competitors

deficit thinking



What else can be done ?

- avoid a deficit approach and still reach good educational results
- value the knowledge and skills that students bring from their homes and communities



➔ meaning and self-esteem / self-confidence



Building on students' funds of knowledge



Luis Moll

- Discontinuity family – school → deficit approach
- Reinforced by a focus on basic skills
- Moll: children are competent
- But teachers know little about the experiences of their students out of school
- As a consequence they underestimate their students' knowledge and abilities, and
 - do not build on their knowledge and skills
 - deliver the message that their experiences to not matter



Building on students' funds of knowledge

- Interviews with parents: which knowledge and skills are available in the community?
- Projects that build on students' knowledge
- Active, inquiry-based and meaningful learning (for all students)
- Better collaboration with parents



We found (reported by students and teachers):

- perseverance, self-confidence, engagement, pride, new skills, responsibility, well-being
- better relationships in the classroom, openness towards others





Using students' home languages



- including multilingual students' home languages in education increases their cognitive performance and their socio-affective engagement with school
- teachers do not always have the expertise to use students' linguistic diversity in an appropriate way

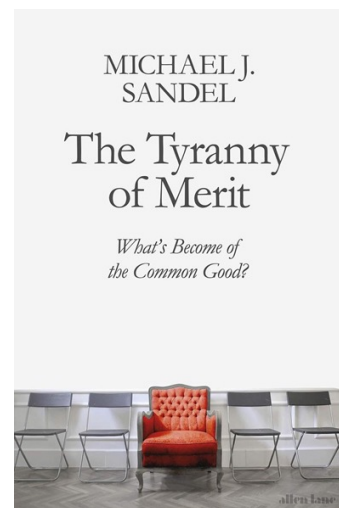


Why more needs to be done?

“Equality of opportunity is a morally necessary corrective to injustice.
But it is a remedial principle, not an adequate ideal for a good society”

(Michael Sandel. *The Tyranny of the Merit*, 2020, p. 224)

→ Acknowledge the limitations of meritocracy ideal





Why more needs to be done?

There are mechanisms of inequality that teachers and schools can do little about (e.g. society does not value all talents equally)

But teachers / schools can:

- be aware of this
- teach awareness of this
- Help students develop agency







Summarizing:

Meritocratic ideal of equal opportunities → risks

- over-emphasis on basic skills
- disregarding students' 'funds of knowledge'
- disheartening students with less academic abilities
- Teachers should still aim at offering equal opportunities
 - ≠ practicing basic skills in isolated / meaningless ways
- Meritocratic ideal of equal education opportunities is not a solution for inequality in society



Curriculum?

Need of

- concepts, models, materials that support teachers in mixed-ability classrooms
- conceptualizations of equal opportunity that integrate basic skills and building on students' funds of knowledge
- materials that make use of funds of knowledge (and teachers who can do so)
- attention to inequality and injustice in society in curriculum
- how to make students with fewer academic abilities feel valued members of society and develop their agency?



