Developing Equitable Education Systems

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Despite consistent improvements in the school systems of over recent years, there are still too many children who miss out. It is not only children from disadvantaged backgrounds attending hard-pressed urban schools that the system is failing - even in the most successful schools there are often groups of learners whose experience of schooling is less than equitable.

As a result of their close involvement with a group of schools serving a predominantly working-class community over five years, the authors of this book offer an analysis of how marginalisation within schools can arise, and provide suggestions for responding to this crucial policy agenda. They propose a teacher-led inquiry strategy that has proved to be effective in moving forward thinking and practice within individual schools. However, their research has shown that using the same strategy for system change is problematic within a policy context that emphasises competition and choice. Learning from this experience, the authors analyse the factors that inhibit the collaborative approach needed to reduce inequities that exist between the schools, in order to formulate proposals that can move the system as a whole towards more equitable provision.

In *Developing Equitable Education Systems*, the authors focus on the way teachers' sense of 'fairness' can become a powerful starting point, helping individual schools to inquire into and develop their own practice and provision. They provide practical suggestions for practitioners about ways of working that can create a greater sense of equity within particular school contexts, and highlight the barriers to a wider strategy for reducing system inequities that reside in local and national policies and traditions.

At a time when government policies in many countries move to extend the diversity of educational provision - for example, through the introduction of charter schools in the USA, free schools in Sweden and academies in England - the authors also include a set of recommendations that offer a timely warning against the fragmentation of school systems in the misguided belief that competition benefits all children. They suggest that a more sensible approach would be to avoid situations whereby the improvement of one school leads to a decline in the resources available to, and subsequently the performance of, others.

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