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Approaching equity through school language policy

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

Links between language and equity are well established in educational thinking, and the policy that a school adopts towards language may be important in either confirming or countering educational disadvantage. This thesis considers case studies of the ways in which six New Zealand schools sought to address equity issues through Language Policy Across the Curriculum (LPAC).

The thesis is based on a case study research project which looked more generally at school-based LPAC development (McPherson and Corson, 1989). The research aimed to describe the ways in which schools used Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) to respond to particular language contexts, and the processes of policy development that they followed.

Overall, policy development was marked by teachers' willingness to participate in debate, discussion and self-reflection. However, during the research, equity, its relationship with language, and the implications of this for practice, emerged as perhaps the most contentious and difficult areas of policy concern. Work on language policy highlighted the gap between the language expectations and practices of the school and the language experiences and practices of students. However, the policies themselves tended to give implicit support to the standard language practices of the school. It is suggested that this severely limited the potential of the policies to contribute to establishing a basis for more equitable schooling.

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