

Quality and Equity Agendas: Dichotomy or Harmony?

Bill Atweh

Curtin University of Technology
Perth Australia

This presentation ...

argues that equity and quality are intrinsically related based on

- Common sense argument
 - Values argument
 - Ethical argument
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Concerns about quality are about ...

- Doing “better” mathematics or
 - Increase the “achievement” of students in that mathematics
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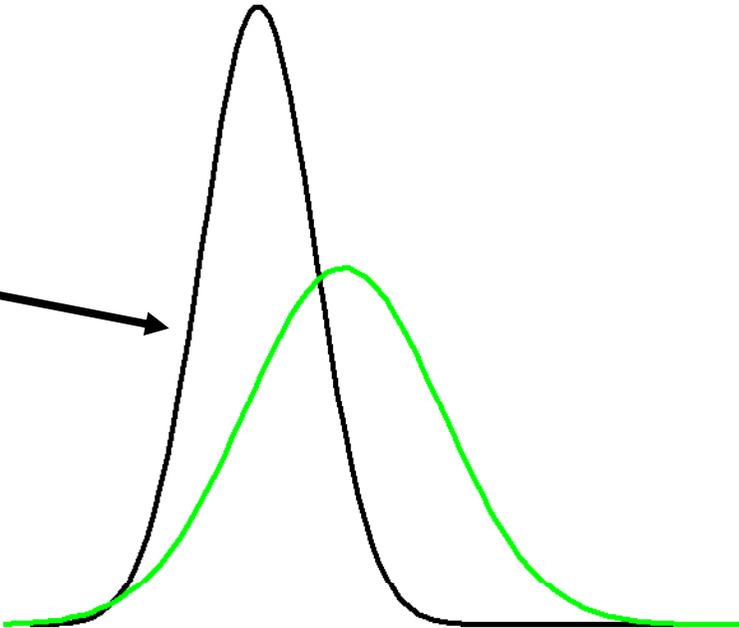
Concerns about equity are about ...

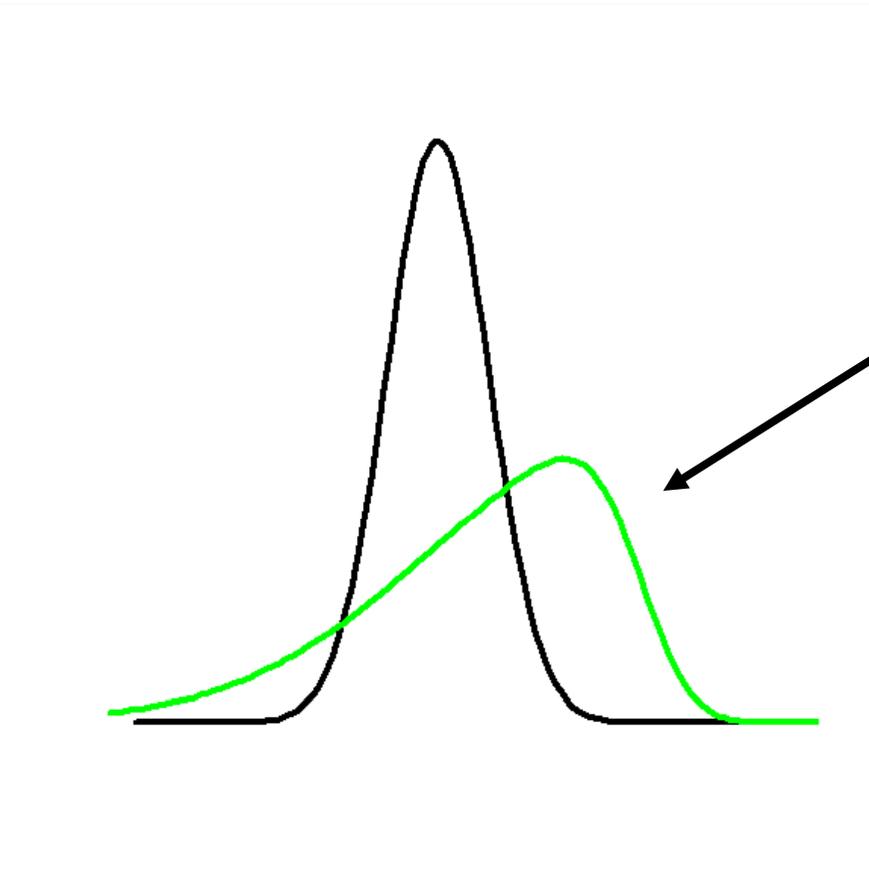
- Who is learning or achieving
- Who is being excluded

**not due to natural ability or
interest, but due to background
or opportunity**

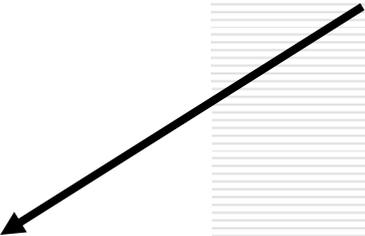


Reform A





Reform B



A concern about quality with no concern about equity may lead, as an extreme case, to “elitism”

A concern about equity with no consideration to quality runs the risk of “dumbing” down the curriculum

Productive Pedagogies reform in Australia

- Quality concerns can be combined with equity concerns within the same framework for teaching
 - Quality teaching improves the educational achievements of all students, however **the least advantaged benefit the most**
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To pursue one without the other ...

- Is not only **misguided** (by failing to deal with significant determinants of participation and achievement)
 - but also **counterproductive** (in leading to results contrary to what we are aiming to achieve)
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Values Argument

Values behind quality mathematics education...

- Intrinsically, achievement is valued for achievement's sake
 - Extrinsically, quality mathematics leads to some high status jobs and to the technological developments in society
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Challenge from critical mathematics

Useful mathematics allows students
not only to read their world but also
to write the world

Values behind equitable mathematics education...

- Intrinsically, we value equitable outcomes for social justice sake
- Extrinsically, equity leads to social cohesion, and harmony, peace and even economic argument

If a society considers that achieving equity is costly, they should realise that the cost of inequality is exponentially more serious.

Why discussion about values is not enough?

- Values are socially constructed and can vary - they do not lend themselves to a criteria for evaluation and critique.
 - We live in times of uncertainty. "Most of the time I know **what** I do. Sometimes I know **why** I do it. But only rarely do I know **what I do does**".
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Ethics Argument

Problems with discourse on ethics ...

- Associated with questions of morality, dogma, codes of behaviour and legal imperatives
 - Is often seen as belonging to the domain of metaphysics rather than philosophy proper
 - Western postmodern philosophy avoids being normative and essentialist, and more concerned with ontology than meaning
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Levinas contribution to ethics

- Re-introduction of ethics within philosophy by establishing ethics as the **First Philosophy**
 - Ethics is based on a relation to the other that precedes understanding - the "original relation"
 - To be human is to be in a relation **with the other** - a relation **for the other**
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Concept of responsibility is central to ethics

- Etymologically responsibility as response-ability
 - act of teaching as primarily an action towards increasing the response-ability of the students for meeting the demands of life now and the future
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Quality and equity from ethical perspective ...

- From a response-ability perspective the discourses of quality and equity are necessarily united. To meet our response-ability to the students we can not differentiate between one and the other
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- This focus on response-ability establishes social justice concerns as a moral obligation, rather than charity, good will or convenient politics. In other words, adopting a social justices approach places knowledge as a servant to justice; while an ethical approach places justice at the service of the moral
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- Consideration of response-ability widens the agenda of quality mathematics education. From this ethical response-ability, intellectual quality is not simply measured from within mathematics as a discipline, and its use in technology and quality of life; but by its ability to develop powerful mathematics that enables the student, and adults to both *read* and *write* the world
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To sum up ...

- Working towards quality and equity go hand in hand and should be the focus of everybody.
 - This ethical stance is not normative criteria which dictates one line of actions in all situations - it establishes a means to reflect on action and policy towards more equitable access to high quality mathematics education
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