

Amplifying the voices of students and teachers to address education equity

Pilot Summary

May 2023



Education Equity
Alliance



The Pilot

The Education Equity Alliance has been established by a group of teachers, school and system leaders to provide the space for those passionate about seeing a more equitable education system to come together and work passionately towards systems change.

To commence its work, the Alliance undertook a Pilot including:

- **Equity Workshops** with students and teachers from across a range of education settings
- An **Education Equity Social Lab** held on Friday 26 May at University College, University of Melbourne

In this summary, we share an overview of the Pilot, its key outcomes and the Alliance's next steps.

It is the start of a conversation and of greater collaboration. We encourage all those passionate about a more equitable education system to get involved.

Tim Warwick, Alliance Founder

Objectives



To build and enhance understanding about education inequity across stakeholders



To begin to develop a collective understanding of root causes to education inequity and possible leverage points for change



To begin to establish a community of students, teachers and other stakeholders passionate about pursuing change



To begin to identify high-leverage seed initiatives that may shift the inequity in the system

Outcomes

- **New insights** into the current reality of education inequity, as a result of the sharing of lived experiences and dialogue between stakeholders.
- An **emerging system map** that makes explicit some of the structures and mental models underpinning inequity and a set of possible leverage points for change.
- A **high-level of engagement** across stakeholders with significant appetite – and demand – for ongoing dialogue and collaboration to address education inequity.
- An **emerging suite of seed innovations** that act upon the leverage points for system change.



Workshops

Workshops were held with both students and teachers to provide them the opportunity to explore their individual and collective experiences of equity and inequity in education.

Student workshops were held across three different contexts, including:

- A state-wide student leadership group
- A public secondary school
- An independent alternate education setting

Two workshops were conducted with each group of students and 30 students were engaged across the sessions.

The teacher workshop was held online and included teachers with experience across a significant range of settings (e.g. public, private, primary, secondary, low-SES, alternate specialist).

As a part of the workshops, students considered 1) what contributes to their success in the classroom and 2) possible barriers to their success.

They then reflected on a range of case studies and data to consider the question – **what barriers do students from some backgrounds/contexts experience more than others?**

Students identified a range of different backgrounds/contexts that experience these **'unfair' barriers** to success (see opposite) – low-SES, multicultural, neurodivergent, Indigenous, LGBTIQ+ students and more.

In the teacher workshop, these barriers were reflected upon, and additional barriers were identified from their perspective.

Unfair barriers to success

The following examples are a cross-section of the barriers identified by students and teachers across the workshops.

'Not having the money for school events. You can feel shunned by peers.'

'They say they understand but they don't really understand.'

'Not having the cultural context to understand lessons.'

'Being kept in a mainstream box.'

'These students are constantly being punished because they are not ready to learn.'

'If I didn't feel like I belonged, I wouldn't come and participate in school.'

'I've been put on the spot, suspended, been given detention and misunderstood. It can feel lonely and it can feel like you have got no hope.'

'The student you see infrequently who is parenting, providing medical care and cannot attend school.'

'Not feeling comfortable around your peers or teachers.'

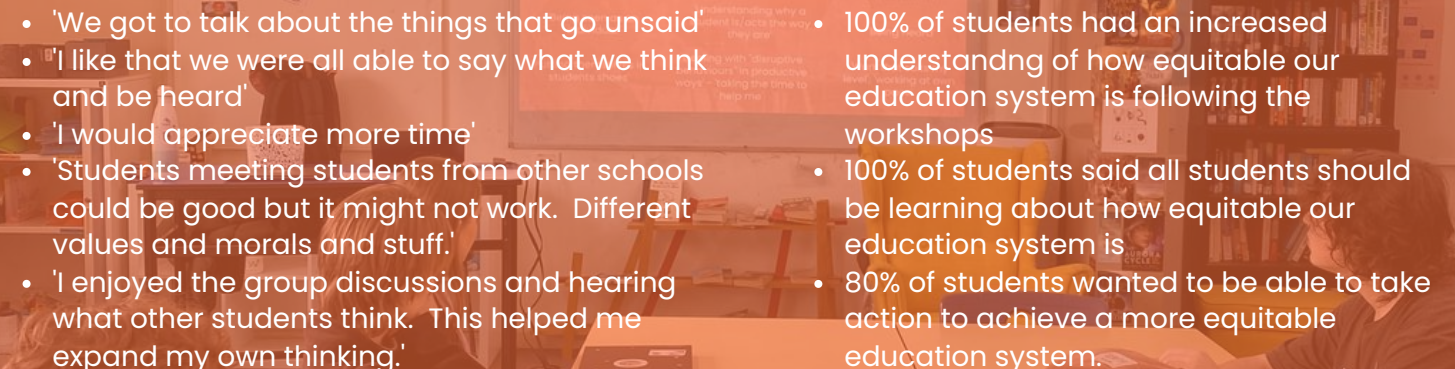
'Some schools running on the smell of an oily rag while others have state of the art performing arts centres.'

'Some students need 1:1 adult support or small group support for curriculum or social engagement but can't access this.'

'[Students who] face barriers feel that they are in some ways deserving of this unfairness.'

'Students being unfairly tracked and punished.'

Student Workshop Reflections

- 
- 'We got to talk about the things that go unsaid'
 - 'I like that we were all able to say what we think and be heard'
 - 'I would appreciate more time'
 - 'Students meeting students from other schools could be good but it might not work. Different values and morals and stuff.'
 - 'I enjoyed the group discussions and hearing what other students think. This helped me expand my own thinking.'
 - 100% of students had an increased understanding of how equitable our education system is following the workshops
 - 100% of students said all students should be learning about how equitable our education system is
 - 80% of students wanted to be able to take action to achieve a more equitable education system.



Social Lab

The Equity Social Lab was held on Friday 26 May at University College, University of Melbourne.

There were 30 participants representing a cross-section of the education system – students, teachers, school leaders, and a range of education stakeholders (Department of Education, research organisations, academics, education not-for-profits and child and family welfare organisations).

The Social Lab was facilitated by Steve Atkinson and Russell Fisher of Reos Partners.

The Social Lab's convening question was **how can we together create the conditions in classrooms so inequity can't exist?**

To explore this, participants undertook a range of activities, including:

- A gallery walk exploring student and teacher experiences of inequity as well as key data and research
- An analysis of the root causes of education inequity and possible leverage points for change utilising Senge's iceberg model for system thinking
- A design studio to consider possible innovations to shift the inequity

Insights into the current reality of education inequity

About students...

'The students on the edges often don't get captured. At some point we take a utilitarian approach.'

'I'm shocked to begin to realise how our system 'hides' students in different ways. On the surface making it seem equitable. But it isn't.'

'School priorities aligning with the needs of the student body. Being honest about who the school serves.'

About teachers...

'Teachers not being able to provide for their students due to systemic issues.'

'Students putting so much onto teachers to fix this, but teachers feel so limited in their powers because of expectations/policies on them.'

'Schools need to recognise the capacity of teachers and need for support to create a culture of equity.'

About 'the system'...

'Inequity can look different in every school, year level, classroom.'

'You shouldn't have to choose a specific school just to make sure your kids are supported.'

'Who is creating a system that is not working? Those with the least power have the least say?.'

'Many quotes point to a feeling of breach of trust.'

'The [underlying] mental models are things we don't want to be told. They go against our narrative.'

Possible leverage points for change

After identifying some of the structures and mental models underlying education inequity, participants reflected on possible leverage points for system change. While a range of leverage points were identified, the vast majority fell within three clear themes:

Working together as a system

How can we remove barriers to students, teachers and families being part of the design of the education system?

One-size-fits-all

How can we shift the limiting mental models that underly our curriculum, assessment and student behaviour expectations?

School Choice & System Design

How can we shift community attitudes and resourcing structures to address entrenched disadvantage?



Social Lab cont.

Through a design studio, participants conceptualised a suite of innovation that could act upon the **leverage points** for system change:

Working together as a system

Even Larger Equity Alliance (ELEA)

What is the initiative?

An independent body to give everyone an equal voice to contribute to the solution (with the aim of being loud enough for the government to listen and take action).

Who needs to be involved or collaborated with?

All stakeholders/anyone who is interested/who is impacted.

Structures/Mental Models it helps address

One size fits all/students and families having no voice (teachers too).

Outcomes/Impact

Equitable education for all (flexible learning environments, culturally safe spaces, differentiated outcomes, better funding and resources)

One-size-fits-all

Talking Trauma

What is the initiative?

Deliver trauma informed practice training to all pre-service teachers and existing educators.

Who needs to be involved or collaborated with?

Schools, early years education providers, universities, mental health profession, trauma-informed providers.

Structures/Mental Models it helps address...

One size fits all/students all learning in the same way.

Outcomes/Impact

Students who are more supported and engaged, more confident teachers, better teaching experience for all students, students are empowered and will have access to the smartest part of their brain.

BEAM – Banning exclusionary assessments and methodologies

What is the initiative?

Separating education from competition. Building and recognising a holistic person. Changing university requirements..

Who needs to be involved or collaborated with?

Universities, VCAA, families and students, government and education department.

Structures/Mental Models it helps address...

One size fits all/standardisation/assessment ranking





Outcomes/Impact

Forming a level playing field and removing education inequity in the ranking system.



Next Steps

Overall, the Pilot demonstrated that there is an urgent need for system change to achieve education equity. In particular, there was a strong desire – demand even – for all layers of the education system to be able to work together to achieve this. The consistent message was that this is not currently occurring even though it is critical to achieving change.

Outcomes	Participant Reflections	The Alliance's Next Steps
 <p>New insights into the current reality of education inequity, as a result of the sharing of lived experiences and dialogue between stakeholders.</p>	<p><i>'It's everyone's problem – encourage everyone to get involved.'</i></p> <p><i>'We are all a bit limited by our perspectives and lived experiences. That's why dialogue is important.'</i></p>	<p>Continue to build awareness of education equity through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More workshops with more stakeholders – including families and community. • Bringing together stakeholders from different contexts to learn from one another. • Sharing lived experiences and insights through different forms of media.
 <p>An emerging system map that makes explicit some of the structures and mental models underpinning inequity and a set of possible leverage points for change.</p>	<p><i>'Working on a shared language that very explicitly names the mental models that lead to educational inequity would be helpful.'</i></p> <p><i>'We need to identify the structures and mindsets that are creating patterns of inequity and then tackle those structures/systems through the Alliance's future work.'</i></p>	<p>Increase our shared understanding of 'the problem' through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further Social Labs that engage a broader range of stakeholders (e.g. families, private education, primary students) • Workshops and Social Labs that focus on specific mental models/leverage points that are emerging (e.g. one-size-fits-all curriculum) • Overseeing development of a comprehensive system map
 <p>A high-level of engagement across stakeholders with significant appetite – and demand – for ongoing dialogue and collaboration to address education inequity.</p>	<p><i>'The education system can have greater student engagement and more space for youth-led units to help address education equity.'</i></p> <p><i>'More sessions that go in depth into how we can change the way equity works in the school system.'</i></p>	<p>Facilitate ongoing engagement of participants by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a Student Working Group • Exploring additional opportunities for Alliance participants to collaborate (e.g. communities of practice)
 <p>An emerging suite of seed innovations that act upon the leverage points for system change.</p>	<p><i>'There needs to be coordination of effort. Clear prioritisation and leadership are necessary.'</i></p> <p><i>'A diverse range of stakeholders is required to address the issues because all will bring different experiences and perspectives to the table.'</i></p>	<p>Establish a clear, coherent set of priorities and accompanying actions through further Social Labs that test and refine.</p> <p>Facilitate collaboration to pursue these priorities, actions and innovations (e.g. pilot projects, participatory action research).</p>

