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Waikato Journal Of Education

Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato

Towards equity through initial teacher education

Dr Airini
The University of Auckland

Abstract

Initial teacher education (ITE) is critical to shaping New Zealand's education and social futures, and has the potential to do more. In particular there is a need for reflection on ways in which ITE might be restructured and reconceptualised to make a bigger contribution to participation, achievement and outcomes at higher levels by Māori and Pasifika learners. While a discourse of equity provides the theoretical underpinning for pursuing education outcomes that are more just and fair, the economics of 'parity' may provide the greater opportunity to accelerate the pace of change. Government funding for tertiary education now operates on the expectation that tertiary organisations (including ITE) will ensure that Māori and Pasifika students participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). Given the current context, what is the role of ITE? Is ITE part of the problem or the solution for equity? This paper offers ideas towards a contemporary model of equity through initial teacher education based on the interplay between structural and conceptual changes. From a critical theory base, a model for equity through ITE is explored, with four interdependent action areas: plan for impact, resource for parity, build equity concepts, and engage with high-quality research.

Key words

Initial teacher education, equity, parity, Māori, Pasifika, critical theory, agency

Introduction

We have an education system that is remarkably unequal. New Zealand is said to have the second highest rate of educational inequality in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), with Māori, Pasifika and students from low-income backgrounds showing the highest rates of educational under-achievement (OECD, 2010). Statistics show that one in five New Zealand students leave secondary school with no qualifications. For Pasifika students, it is one in four, and for Māori one in three. Government targets are working towards another 3650 18-year-olds achieving NCEA Level 2 by 2017, including about 2420 Māori and 950 Pasifika students (Fea,

2013). The challenge is that the New Zealand education system can be rated positively while having performance weaknesses:

> Overall [the New Zealand education] system results mask significant performance issues for our education system for particular groups of learners, namely Māori learners, Pasifika learners, learners with special education needs and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 8)

This challenge has been ongoing. Using McKinsey's criteria for identifying improving school systems internationally, New Zealand's performance is not improving over time (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010). Improving education outcomes for Māori and Pasifika people is a priority (Ministry of Education, 2012; Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). This is not simply a social imperative, but an economic one. Coming from population groups with high birth rates, young Māori and Pasifika people represent a key opportunity to grow New Zealand's economic circumstances.

Equity now features large on the landscape of teaching and teacher education. We need teachers who can be part of the turnaround to education improvement, reducing the disparity in outcomes through effective teaching in all schools and early childhood centres, with young Māori and Pasifika learners and with all learners. Given the current context, and challenges we face, what is the role of initial teacher education (ITE)? Is ITE part of the problem or the solution for equity?

The basic premises of this paper are twofold and interconnected. First, ITE is critical to shaping New Zealand's education and social futures, and has the potential to do more. In particular there is a need for reflection on ways in which ITE might be restructured and reconceptualised (Valli, Rinke, & Ringo, 2007) to make a bigger contribution to participation, achievement and outcomes at higher levels by Māori and Pasifika learners, where the biggest gains are to be made (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). Second, while a discourse of equity provides the theoretical underpinning for pursuing education outcomes that are more just and fair, it may be that the economics of 'parity' provide the greater opportunity to accelerate the pace of change. Government funding for tertiary education now operates on the expectation that tertiary organisations (including ITE) will ensure that Māori and Pasifika students participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). Performance targets (by student numbers and target year) have been set for parity, along with an associated consequences framework for strong or weak performance. The parity investment approach makes explicit and real, rather than undefined and theoretical, that high-performing ITE organisations are those in which Māori and Pasifika learners "achieve at least on a par with everyone else in a system that takes account of culture, language and identity" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012, p. 8). Even so, the pursuit of parity is also about how we see New Zealand as a society. If it is only about equal measure in performance then meeting the targets is sufficient. If however New Zealand society values equity, then parity targeting is one step towards a society that is fair and just. Structural changes to government funding for ITE are a catalyst for accelerating changes to how ITE is conceptualised. The two premises on which this paper is based (the critical role of ITE in shaping New Zealand's education and social futures, and the relationship between equity, parity and ITE) reflect a historic period of change for ITE.

This paper offers ideas towards a contemporary model of equity through initial teacher education. The interplay between structural and conceptual changes features large in these ideas. Part one of the paper lays the groundwork for a model in terms of structural and conceptual characteristics of ITE. Structural approaches relate to system-level (such as the government investment approaches) and programme arrangements (as in ITE programme design). Conceptual approaches include our understanding of ITE and the role of teacher educators (see Kane, 2005), along with curriculum content developed for those learning to teach. According to Kane (2005) some concepts may be technical, and others may be personal, critical, or sociological. In this paper the suggested conceptual changes relevant to ITE delivering on equity are understanding ITE critically, and understanding pedagogical choices critically. The second part of the paper introduces a model for equity through ITE, with four interdependent action areas: plan for impact, resource for parity, build equity concepts, and engage with high-quality research.

Structural changes towards equity through ITE

Equity goals are not new to ITE. The task of ITE has been described as preparing prospective teachers to enter a profession "which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of **all** children" (Florian & Rouse, 2009, p. 596 [emphasis in original]). This is a time when prospective teachers learn that their profession has both "the potential to be a site for educational change" and democratic skills at its core, including respect for differences (Cochran-Smith, 2008, p. 4). ITE graduates entering the profession understand the critical role teachers play in enabling the educational achievement of all learners (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007).

Structural change refers to a long-term shift in the fundamental structure of ITE, which is often linked to social and economic development. These changes can be initiated by policy decisions (government or organisational) or permanent changes in resources, population or the society. Three areas of structural change are raised as particularly relevant to equity through ITE: investment, programme, and evidence.

Investment-based change

Government agencies have created system changes aimed at influencing ITE's contribution to better education outcomes. The Ministry's Statement of Intent includes a focus on improvement in teaching practice (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 22). The intention is to strengthen initial teacher education to ensure it is producing high-quality, culturally intelligent teachers and to see Māori and Pasifika learners achieving at higher levels.

From 2013 ITE exists within a tertiary investment approach geared to "outcomes and raising performance—especially for Māori and Pasifika learners" (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012, p. 7). In addition to ensuring Māori and Pasifika students participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners, to retain government investment ITE providers are expected to

- equip teachers with the necessary skills to perform better for Māori and Pasifika school-leavers seeking to enter tertiary education, including at higher levels;

- explain how they are taking account of the changing demographics of Māori and Pasifika people in planning;
- use and contribute to research about what works for Māori and Pasifika tertiary learners; and
- explain how they are contributing to the economic development of Auckland.

The agenda is one of system-level, structural, and actual change. The Tertiary Education Commission states: "Most TEOs cannot significantly lift their performance by doing more of what they do now" (2012, p. 15).

Programme-based change

It is unclear how effective this approach to structural change will be. A contributing factor is that New Zealand is yet to develop an ITE system that fully delivers on bicultural education needs necessary for Māori education achievement. ITE programmes that aim to prepare high-quality teachers effective with all New Zealand learners would have core values and practices around bicultural education and diversity. Such programmes would not be subverted by the development of multicultural education (Simon, 1989; Smith, 1990).

OECD research into teacher preparation has identified principles for change, relevant to ITE programmes (Schleicher, 2012). First: clear and concise profiles of what counts as accomplished teaching are needed in order to inform ITE programmes. This may mean amending existing profiling. For example, while New Zealand has created the Graduating Teacher Standards (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007), greater coherence would be achieved with explicit expectations for graduates to effectively teach Māori learners and Pasifika learners for higher levels of achievement. Second, changes for equity through ITE could be advanced through flexible models for teacher education programmes. One possibility is a model based less on academic preparation and more on preparing professionals in school settings, with an appropriate balance between theory and practice and collaboration among teachers as a key aspect. In these programmes prospective teachers get into classrooms earlier than generally occurs in New Zealand ITE, spend more time there and get more support in the process (Education Workforce Advisory Group, 2010). In New Zealand this approach could support sustained practicum experience in urban schools with high populations of students from priority groups. Finally, the OECD has recognised the importance of sustained skill development of teachers for equity outcomes. The stages of ITE and professional development can be interconnected to create a lifelong learning framework for teachers through developing the skills for reflective practice and on-the-job research. Increasingly, ITE tends to emphasise developing the capacity of teachers in training to diagnose student problems swiftly and accurately and to draw from a wide repertoire of possible solutions to find those that are appropriate to the diagnosis. In New Zealand ITE this could mean providing prospective teachers with research skills needed to enable them to improve their practice by being innovative in systematic ways to lift Māori and Pasifika achievement and to share practices with others. A move over time to postgraduate ITE, particularly in the university sector, could provide programme architecture for developing the research skills of prospective teachers.

Of key importance to such transformation is programme coherence (Cochran-Smith, Davis, & Fries, 2004). This may lead to changes to institutional missions, policies,

funding, and programmes, and ITE that models teaching for social justice. Coherence would come from both the institution and its programmes enacting culturally relevant practices and pedagogies, having high expectations of all prospective teachers, and a critical commitment to social justice. It may also suggest new programme approaches, such as ITE in urban education. Māori and Pasifika participation and achievement in the education system would be the core business of ITE organisations, with accountability for results being spread across management teams and not solely with Māori and Pasifika specialists.

Evidence-informed change

A barrier to change in ITE is the weak links between research, policy and teaching practice, and the low level of research, assessment, and evaluation of ITE policies and practices (Burns & Schuller, 2007). Empirical evaluations of ITE programmes and courses to assist teachers to be effective in classrooms with diverse students are minimal (Kane, 2005; Parker-Jenkins, Hewitt, Brownhill, & Saunders, 2004). Little is known of the impact of these programmes on learner achievement. For example, Parker-Jenkins et al. (2004) conducted a systematic review of strategies for training pre-service teachers how to teach and increase achievement levels of children from diverse backgrounds, finding only five from 1,795 potentially relevant citations bearing robust evidence. Much of the research includes post hoc interviews and self-evaluations of what the teachers felt they learned during training and whether it would influence their practice (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008).

The limited empirical research into the impact of New Zealand ITE in general and for Māori and Pasifika learners is noteworthy. Research would both improve the accountability of policy implementation and provide feedback for the development of future government policies and ITE practices. Without the systematic production of evidence to inform our ITE practices for the reduction of disparities, teacher educators will be without "a means of addressing the status quo, [resulting in] maintaining the disparities they say they want to reduce" (Bishop, 2010, p. 132).

Conceptual changes towards equity through ITE

How we understand ITE and the role of teacher educators affects how we understand the possibilities for ITE to contribute to equity in education. Some concepts may be practical, and others may be personal or sociological (Kane, 2005). To explore how conceptual changes might advance equity through ITE, two conceptual approaches are discussed: understanding ITE critically and understanding pedagogical choices critically.

Critical ITE

The current performance of the education system places Māori students, Pasifika students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds at greater risk of poor outcomes. Researchers suggest that contributing factors have been a lack of shared intent in ITE or commitment to developing prospective teachers as learned professionals (Jesson, 2007; Snook, 2007). In the absence of a shared philosophy of what is and should be possible through ITE in New Zealand, the contemporary model has become largely concerned with teaching practice and immediacy. Snook (2007)

describes this as an ITE model of learning to teach as "a practical craft" (p. 145), one that is focused on activity within schools and centres, and meeting children's needs. Organisationally, under this model the focus is on capturing and retaining funding, maintaining reputation, and acting "mainly like [a] small business competing for students" (Jesson, 2007, p. 55). ITE remains 'light' on political, economic and philosophical concerns about education, the need to ensure our education system supports all students to succeed, and New Zealand's economic and social future. This approach has served New Zealand poorly in the face of demographic changes and priorities. New models are needed if ITE is to contribute to unprecedented levels of Māori and Pasifika success.

A critical approach to ITE suggests the development of "a learned profession" readied for agency through contextual knowledge (Snook, 2007, p. 145). In addition to advancing prospective teachers' rigorous, deep disciplinary and content knowledge, ITE could develop critical understanding of the social, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts in which teachers and institutions operate. To do so requires an intentional shift in the ITE curriculum, away from a dominant focus on questions of what and how to teach, to greater attention to questions of why (Nieto, 2003; Snook, 2007). Earlier studies have found that the social background of learners accounts for up to ninety per cent of achievement (Nash & Harker, 1998). This suggests a real need for study in education disciplines that specialise in context—sociology of education, educational philosophy, history of education, comparative education, economics of education. Through such liberal arts education, prospective teachers advance an understanding of the connections between systemic social inequities and disparities in education. Teaching is understood as a form of agency. Such criticality ensures that ITE and prospective teachers are not silent about the need to advocate for social conditions necessary for equality in education to be achieved, in areas such as housing, health, living standards and nutrition (Zeichner, 2003).

Discussing ITE for social justice, Cochran-Smith (2008) says that several interpretive frames are key, including an understanding of teachers as potential agents of social change and a related understanding that all people have multiple identities and life histories structured by race, class, culture and other aspects of existing societal systems of privilege and oppression. Teacher educators and prospective teachers are urged to question assumptions, and pose and research problems. Teaching practice, when consistent with the aims of social justice, always takes a stand on society's current distribution of resources and outcomes, and current respect/disrespect for social groups.

Critical ITE is relevant to teacher educators. Crucial to overcoming disparities in the education system is a critical examination of the discourses within which teacher educators position themselves (Bishop, 2010). Commonly, these discourses promote deficit notions that pathologise the lives and experiences of Māori students and Pasifika students, together with schooling systems (Bishop, 2010). The agency of initial teacher educators is thereby limited, and along with it their expectation to enable greater equity. Teacher educators who locate themselves within change-agent discourses take responsibility for the learning of their prospective teachers and critically reflect upon evidence of their positioning and revise their teaching approaches (Bishop, 2010). This positioning can be structural and thereby reflected in quality assurance of programmes and system investment approaches.

Critical pedagogical choices

It is taking some time for ITE to gain a positive profile for preparing new teachers for improved learning and participation by all children. At the turn of the century it was suggested that one of the reasons why prospective teachers are under-prepared for diversity is the lack of knowledge, experience, commitment and understanding of faculty members who teach teachers (Merryfield, 2000). A decade later, and the OECD project Educating Teachers for Diversity found little knowledge on how teacher educators themselves are prepared for diversity in education (OECD, 2010). Reasons for the slow rate of change are diffuse. Many teacher educators may not have had the transformative learning experiences necessary to challenge the assumptions underlying teacher education programmes (Cochran-Smith, 2004). In the absence of experiences with diverse students, many may rely on the most common form of ITE practice, that is: "that which has been observed and experienced personally" (Burns & Shadoian-Gersing, 2010, p. 30). What we are coming to understand is that teaching prospective teachers is a different skill to teaching in schools and centres. Readying the prospective teacher for working effectively with all children requires "deep understanding of teaching and of oneself as a teacher educator" (Swennen & van der Klink, 2008, p. 221).

Teacher educators have critical pedagogical choices to make if they are to assist and educate prospective teachers to produce equitable outcomes for children of different ethnic, racial, cultural, class and language groups when they become practicing teachers. Bishop (2010) contends that the first step is to examine their own 'discursive positioning' as teacher educators and that of their student teachers and the impact that this might be having on learner achievement:

> Discursive positioning refers to how teachers construe the complex historical phenomena experienced by Māori youth and where they stand as educators in the situation. In other words which sets of ideas and actions, i.e. discourses, do teacher educators draw upon to explain Māori experience? (Bishop, 2010, p. 124)

Studies suggest that the quality of the teacher contributes more to diverse learner achievement than any other school-based factor (Alton-Lee, 2003). The knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that are brought to bear in creating an effective learning environment for pupils make the teacher a critical influence (Reynolds, 2001). As a way forward ITE could design programmes that "help prospective teachers understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts and teaching—and allow them to enact these understandings in complex classrooms serving increasingly diverse students" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 199). These could be described as preconditions for the creation of a new generation of effective teachers (Cardona, 2009).

Given that teacher educators have great impact on both prospective teachers and the learners they as graduates will teach, it is critical for them to develop a self-awareness of culture, bias and discriminatory practices as well as to examine the effects of their beliefs, attitudes and expectations on prospective teachers (Killoran et al., 2004). It is

important that teacher educators model critically reflective practice (Hudson-Ross & Graham, 2000).

Reflection on ITE could be stimulated through listening to the diverse voices of young people. Bishop (2010) describes these metaphors as holistic, flexible and determined by or understood within cultural contexts to which young people of diverse backgrounds can relate. From the metaphors flow teaching and learning strategies, in mutual story-telling and re-storying (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This approach to ITE pedagogy addresses Māori people's concerns that current traditional pedagogic practices are monocultural and epistemologically racist. Teacher educators have agency to construct contexts where "learners are able to bring their cultural experiences to the learning conversation, even when these experiences and ways of making sense of the world are unfamiliar to the teacher" (Bishop, 2010, p. 128).

Towards a model for equity through ITE

We have an education system that needs to be more equitable for all students. This is especially so for supporting Māori and Pasifika learners' success. ITE plays a key role in equipping teachers with the necessary skills to perform better for Māori and Pasifika school-leavers seeking to enter tertiary education, including at higher levels. Prospective teachers need to readied to be part of improvement in education results and reduced disparities for Māori and Pasifika and other learners. ITE can be part of the solution. As a contribution to understanding how ITE might contribute to equity outcomes, a four-part model for equity in education through ITE is described below. This comprises the following action areas: plan for impact, resource for parity, build equity concepts, and engage with high-quality research (see Figure 1). Each area is distinct, yet interdependent.

The model is based on commitments to

- educational progress and parity through high-quality ITE that improves the participation and achievement of **all** children;
- holistic conception of ITE contributing to education systems that are integrated wholes;
- a combination of structural and conceptual changes to ITE; and
- developing relevant, targeted, sustainable solutions informed by critical thinking, evidence and scholarship.
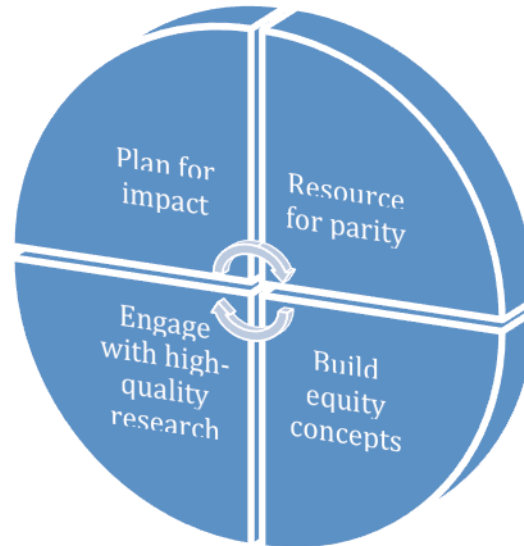
Figure 1. **A model for equity through initial teacher education**

Action one: Plan for impact

To support a focus on impact and return on investment from ITE activities, the Ministry of Education could conduct a formative evaluation to build a consensus about the needs and priorities in ITE and to set targets that address concern areas. Goals and actions aligned to the Ministry of Education's Statement of Intent (2012), *Ka Hikitia* (2008), the *Pasifika Education Plan* (2013), and the *Tertiary Education Strategy* (2010) would be described within an ITE Sector Plan (2013–2018). This plan would establish targets to be used to evaluate the impact of ITE on participation and achievement in the education system by Māori, Pasifika and other students:

- Was the money spent as planned?
- Was there value for money, in terms of learner outcomes, particularly Māori learners and Pasifika learners?
- Did the proposed actions called for occur?
- What results were obtained? Were goals and targets achieved? What unanticipated outcomes occurred?
- Could better results be obtained using a different approach or at a lower cost?

Action two: Resource for parity

As a step towards equity, ITE would be resourced for parity in outcomes. In particular:

- ITE aims to prepare prospective teachers to ensure that Māori students and Pasifika students participate and achieve at all levels in schooling at least on a par with other learners;

- Māori students and Pasifika students in teacher education participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other learners; and

- Māori and Pasifika teacher educators participate and achieve at all levels at least on a par with other teacher educators.

Parity is not about aiming for 'more', but rather, equality. In an education system in tight economic conditions, aiming for more than parity puts the focus where the real inequities in a system are and where efforts should best be concentrated to address those inequities. Obtaining parity in participation and achievement for Māori students and Pasifika students, with other (non-Māori and non-Pasifika) students, is fundamental to New Zealand's future.

A parity focus creates a framework for organisational culture, resourcing and targets. The onus is on the organisations to be enabling and accountable for how effective they have been in so doing. For example, as Pākehā teacher educator academics achieve promotions to higher ranks, the organisation should be ensuring that at least the same proportion of Māori academics and Pasifika academics is enabled to meet performance criteria to be promoted.

There would be an expectation that information is provided on the impact of the ITE provider in equipping teachers with the necessary skills to perform better for Māori and Pasifika school-leavers seeking to enter tertiary education, including at higher levels. Information could form a resource of good practice shared with other ITE providers.

Action three: Build equity concepts into ITE

A new model for ITE would come from forging a shared, demanding agreement of the purpose of New Zealand's ITE. This becomes the basis for a willingness to work together for broader national and professional goals based on a "new and critical concept of what it means to be a teacher in a new century" (Jesson, 2007, p. 70).

This new model could place greater emphasis on action for equity in teacher education. Two connected areas could be focused upon: ITE curriculum, and professional development.

The curriculum of ITE qualifications would be developed with greater inclusion of disciplines that specialise in context; and this would continue at all levels of teacher education qualifications.

Induction for new teacher educators and ongoing professional development should include a critical examination of the discourses within which teacher educators position themselves, and their capacity and capability as change agents to overcome disparity in education. Awareness of and skills in cultural intelligence could also be integrated.

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is a person's capability to function effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity (Van Dyne, Ang, & Nielsen, 2007). While objections have been raised to CQ (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2006), a number of positive outcomes have been identified including enhanced task performance, cultural judgment and decision-making (Ang et al., 2007).

Action four: Engage with high-quality research that helps to drive equity through ITE

This action area would foster partnerships among universities and other research-active ITE providers, building regional networks and dialogue, and perhaps a virtual think tank that would lead national debate on equity in ITE policy and priorities. Universities represent a potentially cost-effective means of informing evidence-based ITE policy development.

The aim would be to facilitate greater dialogue, development and uptake of evidence-informed ITE education policy in government, to encourage funding through providing evidence of benefits from investment in ITE and ITE research, and to promote critical, innovative thinking about ongoing challenges. This network would promote collaboration between government, academia and private sector institutions. It could also be a mechanism for national advocacy and the development of strategic partnerships, as well as regional actions for promoting ITE responsive to localised needs such as Auckland.

Conclusion

A discussion of equity in ITE is both within and on the borderline of debates over social justice as a theme in teacher education. Within this contested area viewpoints range from those who are explicit about philosophical and political roots of social justice education (e.g. North, 2006), to those who assert this is a "conceptually ambiguous" theme with inadequate theoretical grounding (Cochran-Smith, 2008, p. 1). This paper does not seek to directly expand the theoretical discourse on the relationship between equity and ITE. However, by exploring the possible components of a model for equity through ITE this paper contributes to the discourse by linking theory to action. In so doing, it has adopted a critical theory lens. ITE is understood to exist within political, social and economic contexts and aspirations. The commentary and modelling in this paper assume there is no position of neutrality in ITE (Cochran-Smith, 2008). The critical stance therefore is one of seeing ITE as contributing to changes to society for greater equity. This is the core challenge for ITE: how to take (further) action to be (a greater) part of the solution for equity.

How we go about organising for and preparing our incoming teachers is important to resolving inequality and disparity in education outcomes and for New Zealand's social and economic future. We have an education system that is high in quality yet low in equity. And it need not be so. Structurally and conceptually we have reached a point where changes are needed if ITE is to contribute more to the advancement of an education system that is notable for being remarkably equitable. A model towards equity through ITE been suggested as a way forward. Will ITE accept a role of critical agency in a time of critical changes?

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