



NZNO CONFERENCE

'Look for potential in everyone'

BY KAI TIAKI EDITORS

October 1, 2021

Initially rejected as “dumb” and a “coconut” when seeking higher education at Massey University in the '80s, scientist and professor Palatasa Havea is urging education providers to look for potential in everyone.



Palatasa Havea

“Do not ask how many seeds in the apple, but how many apples there are in the seeds,” he told nurses at the NZNO conference. “If I take the seeds and throw them in the rubbish, I won’t get

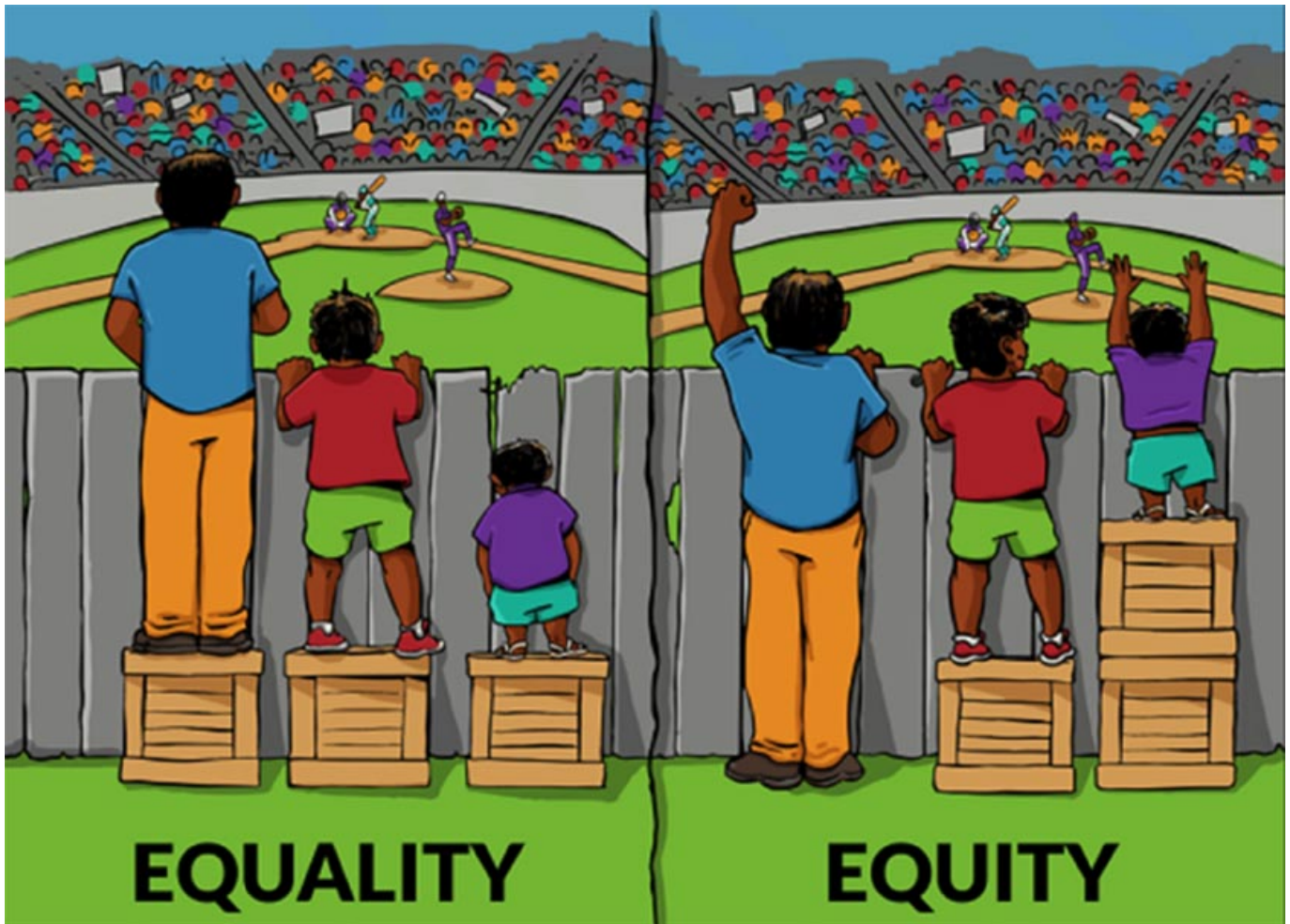
any apples. Whereas if I plant the seed and fertilise and water it, I will get thousands and thousands of apples from those seeds."

Havea went on to become a successful scientist and researcher, patenting a number of technologies and bringing millions into the New Zealand economy over a 26-year career in the dairy industry.

Havea says he does not blame Massey University – where he now works as dean of Pacific students' success – and urges Pacific people not to focus on racist experiences but look ahead. "There were a lot of things that could be interpreted as racist in coming my way, but I chose to focus on my own journey. Success should be defined by our determination today – not by negative things of the past."

But ultimately, a more equitable education system would lead to better health and outcomes for all. "To achieve this, we must develop leaders to transform our institution but eliminate inequitable practices and cultivate the unique gifts, talents and interests of every child." In this way, success and failure would no longer be predictable by student identity – racial, cultural, economic or any other social factor.

The education system was based on equality, where the offerings are the same for everyone and equal benefit is assumed. "But that is also assuming that we start from the same point," Havea said. "But the reality is, is that society is varied and we don't start from the same point. And that's where equality is not very helpful for our people."



Quoting Albert Einstein, he said: "Everybody is a genius but if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid".

So it was with the education system – measuring people only one way was unfair.

There was much "unexplored potential" in Pacific people in many areas, but institutions needed to provide them a nurturing environment to grow.

Everyone had the potential to be a genius – and nursing was something Pacific people excelled at. "In 10 years, what if nurses were dominated by Pacific people?"

The Pacific people are the best nurses as they don't do it just with their head, they do the nursing with their heart and approaching the patient with an understanding of how they feel and we are the best people to do that."

Havea tells students there is power in being different. "You need to see what everybody else sees but think what nobody else thinks."

He advises Pacific students to aspire to high things, despite challenges. "So, the ingredients for making a good pearl – rough edges, suffering and pain and time.

Watch the conference online

Professor Palatasa Havea

EQUITY IN EDUCATION: THE PATHWAY TO BETTER HEALTH FOR PACIFICANS

[Full set of 2021 NZNO Conference videos on YouTube \(https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUw2YayYode9UKJBBjvYypzG3ZFX4m480\)](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUw2YayYode9UKJBBjvYypzG3ZFX4m480)

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