

Editorial Introduction

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In this issue of *the Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, we continue what we may safely term ‘the post-system perspectives’ of understanding and analyzing the world. Indeed, the learning and teaching terrains of life are continuously complex, and with the ever increasing relevance as well as the realities of globalization, even the way we create and attach generalist or specialized meaning to social phenomenon should continue evolving. Yet, for us at least, one thing and all the questions as well as the concerns that inform it, should not deviate that much from where we started the project of this publication, about six years ago. That is, researching, analyzing and understanding, as much as possible, the important, at times uni-directional, and many times, multi-directional relationship between education and social welfare. In speaking about these, both the descriptive and critical messages may not be sometimes clear.

Generally when we discuss ‘social development education’, our epistemic intentions should be so much more complex that any measurable local, national or global sketches that might give us a certain desirable answer. Indeed, that would be almost impossible in the socio-economic, politico-cultural and techno-informational complexities we are dealing with on quotidian basis. As I have discussed elsewhere over many years, the construction of educational outcomes in economic terms is almost untenable in any context you look at today, yesterday or all the coming tomorrows. What about using the lately popular cultural lens in understanding the role of education in the lives of people? That may not be purely bad as the economic, but it will still be incomplete. Or perhaps we could now give more credence to the explosions of citizenship education foci, and see if we can operationalize wholes or fragments (so to deliberately speak) of the civic and the political in explaining the effects of learning relationships in our midst. That will, of course, be good, but it will not suffice the counter-normalized livelihood understandings we seek to deploy in the debates on the effectiveness of education in positively interacting with the platforms we have to deal with in these highly fluid schooling temporalities and intentions. Which brings me to where I was going: no matter how you view it, conceptualize it, study-wise construct it, analyze it or critique it, and attempt to deduce policy perspectives from it, educational research is as complex, if not more complex, as any area of the social sciences, for it directly deals, indeed, attempts to understand successfully or unsuccessfully, human initiatives that are anything but stable in their original components, and are ever changing as demands of what it means to be educated shift in response to so much phenomena outside schooling that is as non-straight line as anything, and selectively, even problematically warped (no space-time ambitions intended here).

It is to this factuality of ever expanding complex life systems that, I submit, educational research, learning and teaching have to catch up with. By-and-large, therefore, one could depict educational research (although not completely) as reactive rather than proactive. Needless to add that such factuality may not be bad provided that the learning/research projects are historically rooted, socio-culturally inclusive and policy-wise pragmatic. No, none of these ambitions will be always achieved, but appreciating the story and its practicalities should be the main stable. It is with the described complexity in place that articles in this issue attempt to discuss and analyze, topics that range from the effectiveness of after school programs, the merits of merit pay in the lives of educators, and multicultural/diversity provisions in educational policy in Ethiopia. While the topics may sound greatly divergent from each other, the intentions of all contributors are directly linked to the role of education in assisting people to achieve their potential.

In the first article, *'Keeping Kids in School: A Study Examining the Long-Term Impact of Afterschool Enrichment Programs on Students' High School Dropout Rates'*, Denise Huang, Kyung Sung Kim, Jamie Cho, Anne Marshall, and Patricia Pérez note how, Despite the potential benefits of afterschool programs, much of the related research has been limited to an examination of only their immediate or short-term effects. They note that Los Angeles' BEST afterschool program has been in operation for more than 20 years, providing research. In this study, the authors examined the dropout rates of LA's BEST afterschool participants and compared them to a stratified random district sample that was matched to the characteristics of the afterschool students. The results indicated that students who had participated in the afterschool program for at least three years showed a significantly lower dropout rate than the district students overall. In the second article, *'Changing salaries, Changing Minds: The Merits of Merit Pay'*, Joshua Barnett and Roger Openshaw discuss how Policymakers across the globe are actively seeking reforms that lead to improved student performance. As they point out, one reform gaining momentum is the usage of merit pay for educators who are able to increase performance on standardized measures. In analyzing this, they note however, educators' voices are often missing from the discussion, as policies are put onto them rather than determined with them. In this paper, the authors examine the historical landscape in one country, infuse the growing international literature on merit pay into the conversation, and make recommendations for those considering the inclusion or creation of such pay for performance models and how educators can help shape the policies.

In the third article, *'An Investigation of Multicultural Provisions of the Ethiopian Education Policy'*, Belete Mebratu undertakes an investigation of the multicultural provisions in the Ethiopian education policy in light of promoting inclusive education. He uses content analysis, thematic categorization, and interpretive stance were used to analyze the data collected from the 1994 Ethiopian education policy document. His findings in this study indicate that the policy includes provisions that address the need to promote democratic cultures of equality, justice, unity and cooperation among peoples; equality and respect of diverse languages and linguistics groups; the promotion of gender awareness in the society; and the equality, tolerance and mutual coexistence among followers of different religions in the country. Together, the three articles bring out educational issues that are at the heart the global learning and teaching projects. When educational systems do not work in one way or another, remedial programs are designed and deployed to deal with the 'problem', and that itself introduces its own complexities. In ameliorating educational contexts, the situation of teachers should paramount, but how does

merit affect processes and relationships that are very complex, and represent so much more than can be captured by test scores and related numerical attachments that do not appreciate, again, the complexity of the case. In designing educational policy in Ethiopia, a country with many nationalities, languages and other important differences, policy makers taking into account people's diversities can enhance the both educational qualities and outcomes, thus perhaps, assisting learners to benefit from current instructional dispensations. Clearly, therefore, all three articles are responding to the needed criticalizations of education of education as either leading to social well-being, and via some of its projects, not helping such important cause. Besides the three articles, there are two book reviews in this issue, D. Goodwin's *Citizens of nowhere: From refugee camp to Canadian campus* (2010), reviewed by Derek Tannis; and Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (2007), reviewed by Berhanu Demeke.

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