

Editorial Introduction

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The location of education in human life is complex, expansive, descriptively and critically interconnected or disjointed, but always of discernible importance for the lives of those who have to survive and selectively ‘succeed’ in today’s multiple and, ipso facto, interconnected economic, political, cultural and technological contexts. The placing of some qualification on the word succeed, is important in that if one salient factor of learning programs is to constructively aid the livelihood possibilities of the public, as is so many times claimed by the adherents of schooling, than we need to have some perspective, as I have argued in the pages of this journal few times before this writing, on the meaning and de-meanings of this livelihood success, or as it may be officially known personal/social development. Such understanding, even if it is locationally disjointed or variously created, borrowed or co-opted, should help us enlarge the expanding educational boundaries we are dealing with in today’s still globalizing social and politico-economic contexts. In these intensively globalizing boundaries, therefore, the spaces of interpersonal relationships and intercultural understandings should be more crucial than ever. But the understandings should not subsume into their sphere of analysis, a monological perspective on types of education that can be universalized for all. Still, the issue of context in learning should be important, and to make a point on the world of success or lack thereof, some observational adherence to more than one way of doing things is crucial for educational and social development possibilities.

Here, it may be better to say it as I intend it: any learning project must be minimally aiming for either problematizing a pedagogical deficiency, or reporting upon educational policies and related dispensations that should be modified for the interests of the public or with respect to specific learners who could benefit from it. Hence, the importance of both temporal and spatial contexts, and the needed thickness between the two if we are to deploy learning possibilities that are capable of amelioratively re-locating people’s effective relationships with their social and natural ecologies. It is a propos this reality that educational research is more eclectic than may be usually recognized, deals with more multidisciplinary research contexts than perhaps, any other branch of the human sciences, contains more immediate practical items vis-à-vis many other scholarly works, and when undertaken with inclusive descriptive and analytical requirements, can greatly hasten its policy and programmatic implications, even outcomes, for those whose schooling contexts are not yielding some meaningful ‘things’ for themselves and for their

societies. As it has been presented, therefore, education should retool social contexts for political, economic and technological enfranchisements that transform the lives of people. That assumption should be at least subjectively right until one realizes that both in historical and actual terms, and undoubtedly in futuristic realities, education can also be an impressive agent of betrayal where more than expected, it has achieved (and continues to achieve) very discernible and highly clustered social development failures that expound both the mental and practical alienations of its recipients; as such, any blanket statement about the natural goodness of all education should be taken with a manageable dose of scepticism and should elicit some counter-observations.

Indeed, it is that complexity and the multi-actor locatedness of almost all educational contexts that behoves us to approach educational research with a sense of inclusive conceptualizations and criticisms that do some justice to the areas and subjects of our foci. It is also with this in mind that the never straight but still desired path of education leading to social well-being as containing many signposts and indeed, stop points that serve as guiding intersections which illuminate the directional emphasis that might be necessary in designing and establishing both topically and analytically representative platforms of research propositions and conclusions that situationally respond to desired societal contexts, should be appreciated. And it is indeed, in the spirit of such constructive intentions and attached scholarly efforts that contributors to this issue of the journal extensively and multi-topically attend to their projects of research, which should help us attain a higher and more systematic understanding of the relevant use of technological innovations in schooling contexts, the role of teachers in enhancing student learning, institutional-social relations and issues of educational equity, and critically ascertaining the diverse ways we learn and critically respond to educational relationships.

In the first article, 'Of Mice and Men: Educational Technology in Pakistan's Public School System', Adeela Arshad-Ayaz uses a critical lens to examine the introduction and adaptation of computer and information and communication technologies in Pakistan's educational system. As she notes, the introduction of technology in Pakistan's educational system is not conducive to the creation of a locally relevant knowledge system; instead the motivation is to create a market for foreign technology (hardware and software) and technological ideas. In addition, such an uncritical introduction of technology suits the needs of the undemocratic governments and hierarchical societies in the developing world and the neo-liberal economic forces abroad. The author argues that such introduction of technology in education does not prepare students to question unjust and inequitable social and political practices around them. It rather suits the type education that advances a market model which produces a global pool of semi-trained labourers that can process technological and scientific raw material without gaining the expertise required to produce knowledge that is socially relevant and of benefit to them. She adds that used in this way, technology becomes a source of hegemony and another tool of oppression rather than a vehicle for liberation or for the establishment of a just society. In the second article, 'Teacher

Support and Student's Self-efficacy Beliefs', Sidney Mitchell and Julie DellaMattera investigate the role of teacher support and its influence on middle school student's self-efficacy beliefs. They undertake a state-wide survey of 9,702 urban and rural middle school students, and find that teacher support declined across the middle school years and that this had negative effects on student self-efficacy beliefs. Their data does show that girls received more support than did boys and that girls also had generally higher self-efficacy beliefs than did boys. Overall, their results show that middle school teachers can do more in fostering self-efficacy, particularly in boys, and maintaining support throughout a student's middle school experience. They note that this study of student's perceptions of teacher support over the middle school years is an important step in our ability to understand the complex ways in which teachers influence student's self-efficacy beliefs.

In the third article, 'School Choice, School Culture and Social Justice: A Canadian Case Study', David Ball and Darren Lund reports their findings from a case study conducted in a public school offering multiple programs of choice. A guiding purpose of the study was to analyze the impact of operating multiple programs of choice in a single school setting on the organizational and lived culture of the school. The urban Alberta school under study offered alternative educational programs in science, Mandarin Immersion, special education and "regular" programs. The authors used multiple methods of data collection following an ethnographic approach that included document and policy analysis, field observations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with administrators, parents, teachers and students from each of the programs. Their results focus on related themes of equity and social justice related to analyses of school choice, attending specifically to participants' understandings of power and privilege, with policy and practice implications. Themes included social class stratifications, marginalization within advantage, perceptions of disempowerment, fragmented school identity, limitations of choice programs, and perceptions of teaching staff quality. In the fourth article, 'Critical Thinking and Chinese International Students: An East-West Dialogue', Michael O'Sullivan and Linyuan Guo discuss how the teaching of critical thinking, albeit differentially defined, is seen as the *core of work at a graduate level*. They note that, despite the fact that developing such critical skills is increasing as an expectation of schools in the West, the literature reflects concerns that Canadian educated students arrive at university unprepared to engage at the expected level of criticality. To achieve a deeper understanding of the case, they pose several questions. If this is true of domestic students, what is the situation facing those international students who were educated in intellectual traditions, such as China's, where critical thinking, at least as understood in the West, is rarely encouraged, and often actually discouraged? Do such students arrive prepared to work at a post-secondary level that involves critical thinking? Do such students embrace or resist critical thinking when these skills are taught to them? Is teaching critical thinking to these students a legitimate scholarly pursuit or is it, in effect, a neocolonial conceit? Can the Asian notion of harmony be reconciled with the Western notion of often-times sharp

engagement with ideas and debate with their classmates and instructors? The authors, one a Canadian born and raised professor of comparative and international education to Chinese students studying in Canada, the other, a Chinese scholar who recently completed her doctorate in Canada where she now teaches, engage in a dialogue on Western concepts of critical thinking and the reaction of one class of Chinese international students to this pedagogy. Besides the four articles, this issue also has a book report, S. Schramm-Pate and R.B. Jeffries's *Grappling with Diversity: Readings on Civil Rights Pedagogy and Critical Multiculturalism* (2008) reviewed by Dania Wattar.

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