Editorial

Changing Contexts in Comparative and International Education: Geopolitical Shifts and Research in Australia

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The collection of articles in this Special Issue makes a substantial contribution to existing comparative and international education (CIE) research through the range of methodologies, topics, and sub-sectors of CIE work in Australian higher education institutions. Bringing these aspects together, it contributes to the shifts in thinking and work in CIE that have come to be globally debated and documented in recent years (Phillips and Sweisfurth 2014; McCowan and Unterhalter 2015). This Special Issue presents the research of authors who have, together, been based within Australian institutions, even as they each have conducted their work from diverse locations, perspectives and situations. While these authors have shared a common experience in space and time, they bring significantly different engagement and relationships within and beyond the nation-state of Australia, as it is currently called and known to the world. At this point, I acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are the traditional ancestors, custodians, and owners of the land on which this Editor and the Authors have undertaken our work and contribute this knowledge. In doing so, we recognise the necessarily partial coverage of this Special Issue. It is a regret that, due to unforeseeable constraints, we have not been able to include, as planned, contributions to education research work being done in areas of Aboriginal, Indigenous research, or in the near Pacific. Needless to say, much (if, arguably, not yet sufficient) important work is being conducted in, and outside of, Australian institutions with and by Indigenous and Pacific peoples on shared sub-regional issues in education (too many to recognise here, but see McLaughlin and Whatman 2007; McCormick 2015; McLaughlin and Ma Rhea 2013). Research in these areas has been the focus of recent Special Issues of this journal (see Coxon and Cassity 2011; McLaughlin and Ma Rhea 2013). Work in Oceania and the Pacific will also be the more extensive focus of a Special Issue to be published later this year (Coxon, forthcoming), and which will also mark the official renaming of our regional CIE society to the Oceania Comparative and International Education Society (OCIES).

This Special Issue emerged from an inaugural seminar that marked the founding of the Comparative and International Education Research network (CoInEd) at the University of Sydney's Faculty of Education and Social Work in October 2014. The seminar was the first in a series that have since expanded in participation and increased in frequency, with the aim of drawing together educators, 'practitioners' and scholars at all stages from the many reaches of CIE activities (Phillips and Schweisfurth 2014). Nested within our regional CIE society, a collective aim of the CoInEd research network is:

> *… to advance research and collaborations addressing contemporary education issues within Australia that are influenced by a range of external drivers. In times of shifting domestic politics, how are the principles of equity and social justice in education shaped within Australian social policy? CoInEd scholars are committed to understanding issues of diversity and disadvantage that focus on ethnicity, gender, geographic isolation, poverty and Aboriginality (CoInEd Webpage 2014).*

The geopolitical reach of our network members' combined research experience and publications represent national and sub-national contexts across East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific, Africa and South America. These include: Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Vanuatu, as well as Afghanistan, Brazil, Canada, England, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In addition to cultivating institutionally-supported collegial discussion between higher degree research students, early career, advanced and senior researchers, a central aim in forming the network was to extend conversations between institutions around the nation and, ultimately, to link with work being done regionally and globally in CIE.

In what is, therefore, a fitting opening article for this Special Issue, Anthony Welch weighs the potential for strengthened regional knowledge collaboration against the panoramic backdrop of a generation of evolving Australian-ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) relations. Based on this informative analytical survey of three key areas of activity, Welch makes compelling arguments for a new stage in geo-political relations for education in proposing the formation of a regional knowledge network. According to this conception, such a network could see bridges between Australia, ASEAN and China in terms of multi-sectoral academic, business and government collaborations. In our 'era of network science', Welch laments that the current tendency for Australian entrepreneurial approaches is to focus on South East Asia as a source of international students is 'at best myopic, and at worst a vestige of colonialism'. Even in acknowledging regional complexity and periods of political escalation, Welch invites us to explore the rich terrain for deeper and extended Australian–ASEAN relations that have the potential to extend to a wider conception of the region that includes China, as Australia's leading knowledge partner.

M. Obaidul Hamid and Hoa Thi Mai Nguyen remain with the ASEAN nations in the second article in our Special Issue, and consider aspects of globalization and language form the perspectives of policy and pedagogy. Hamid and Nguyen explore these phenomena in relation to education policies vis-à-vis their implementation, and ways that they relate, on the one hand, to an idea of 'policy dumping' and, on the other hand, to expectations and manifestations of teacher agency. The authors examine examples of such agency, framing their own work in Bangladesh and Vietnam through lenses of globalization of English and its still-growing use in Asia. In so doing, they sketch implications for teachers' professional development and practice, and also draw on work done in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia and Japan.

Returning in the realm of higher education, Rose Amazan and colleagues offer particular insights from their research into tertiary scholarships as a form of Australian official development aid in two African nations. Drawing on detailed, qualitative interviews undertaken in Uganda and Mozambique, Amazan and colleagues identify some of the important experiences and perspectives of scholarship recipients on their return to life and work after undertaking studies in Australia. The research poses a number of difficult and important questions for aid and education in changing and decolonizing times, and considers the implications for future relations that are not limited to those in Africa and the Australian scholarship program.

In the fourth article, Virandi Wettewa's article on research conducted in Sri Lanka contributes to elucidating the problematic place of international schools in the island nation. It is based on mixed-methods research that was carried out in case study schools in four districts. Wettewa canvassed the views of administrators, parents, teachers and students, and situates them within a range of historical and social consequences and perceptions - some unanticipated and unintended. Wettewa's analysis of the 'post-colonial emotionalism' that underlies tensions identifies them as being locally and globally provoked and situated. Among such tensions, Wettewa cautions, is a concern as to whether cross cultural, and 'truly international', education is deployed as more of a 'business tactic' than a deeper possibility for education in a context where schooling has been affected by histories of colonization, conflict and neoliberal globalisation.

Based on comparative interviews and document analysis that contrast Australian and Indian national contexts, Archana Voola's article discusses research in which she explored relationships between education, gendered poverty and lifelong-learning through interviews with participants in two microfinance programs. Voola employs a 'capabilities' approach to argue for a move from conceptualizing education and microfinance in terms of 'access' for women, to realizing its potential for expanding freedoms for men *and* women. To that end, Voola critiques the economically orientated approaches that have tended to support neoliberal and patriarchal social structures and understandings of education, microfinance and poverty.

In our concluding article, Steve Georgakis and Jess Graham address and, appropriately, begin to redress recent critiques of CIE in offering a strong argument for an extension of the field to embrace comparative pedagogies and physical education, both of which they show to have had extremely limited, or no, consideration to date. Georgakis and Graham demonstrate one of many possibilities through their comparison of two case studies and methods of teaching physical education in Australian contexts. In doing so, the authors offer a 'roadmap' for future initiatives and thinking in CIE.

The contributions in this Special Issue offer compelling examples of just a few of the conversations in research that are occurring in Australian institutions at a time when there is clear need, and strong potential, for those working in CIE to help shape conceptions of the place and purpose of education in societies as we negotiate changes at multiple levels, different paces and in distinctive ways. While this volume does not, and could not, claim to be close to an exhaustive representation of the work being done in Australian institutions, what it does offer is a range of insights into a breadth of approaches, situations

and topics. These articles offer examples of research that address issues of equitable provision, that continue to contribute to a long process of decolonizing and shaping more inclusive Australian relations within our borders and in the region, and that challenge the roles of education in addressing – or sustaining - poverty and broader social justice principles in our lives and work. We look forward to extending and supporting these diverse and important conversations through the work of the CoInEd with other research networks, in OCIES work in the region, and with other national and regional societies in the wider World Congress for Comparative and International Education Societies (WCCES).

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