

Editorial

Context perhaps is one of the most critical aspects of education. Context frames the pace and process of education reform, pedagogical practice, and student engagement with systems of education. Ultimately, it is the stakeholders in education who determine whether or not change will happen. These stakeholders include teachers, learners, administrators and local governments.

Each one of the articles included in this issue of *IEJ: Comparative Perspectives* engages actively with different education contexts. The authors of these articles examine education settings in Australia, India, Trinidad & Tobago, China, and the global experiences of international teachers. Many of these articles specifically explore teachers and their engagement with schools, classrooms and the state. Yet equally important, these authors note, is how students interact with and experience learning and what impact that has on their future life chances.

This issue begins with Thomas & Whitten's comparative study of support for students with learning difficulties in classrooms in Australia and India. As a comparative, mixed methods study, their research explores how the variables of availability and quality of learning support impacts the outcomes for students with learning difficulties. The study finds that both Australian and India share a commitment to education for all children, but finds stark differences in the ability of teachers to respond to and engage with students with learning difficulties.

Indeed, this theme of classroom engagement is also explored by Yates & Nguyen as they explore the meaning of silence in an international classroom. They find that the cultures of learning in Vietnam and Australia are very different, and these contrasting philosophies frame what the authors call communicative cultures. Difficulties in language learning emerge from a range of complex issues. Yates & Nguyen in turn explore the implications for students and staff and the possibilities of developing a multi-level approach to learning that is sensitive to student learning background.

Ma Rhea examines a new philosophy and approach to teaching in a mainstream school Australia. She explores how 'mindful teaching' impacts the ways teachers approach conflict management and embrace a practice that creates a peaceful school culture of belonging. She asks how Buddhist education might influence pedagogical practice and the development of curriculum materials. Of course, central to this context is that teachers themselves are willing to be adaptive and willing to develop their understanding of Buddhism and its impact on 'mindful teaching'.

In thinking about teacher views of the world, Shiveley & Misco explore how the international experiences of pre-service teachers impact hiring decisions of schools. The authors surveyed and later interviewed school administrators to examine whether pre-service teacher background influenced the administrators' hiring decisions. While they found international experience did in fact influence decision-making by administrators, this played out in different ways given the context. These findings lead the reader to consider how administrators might perceive the need for a more globally prepared teacher. They also suggest it might be an important moment for national teacher training programs to consider potential for pre-service teachers to experience placements in international educational settings.

In explicitly addressing the theme of the state and reform, Steinbach examines the process of teacher education reform in Trinidad & Tobago. Change in education is always contested, and Steinbach found that traditions within society, the spectre of neo-colonialism, and politics were three significant factors in blocking the pace of teacher education reform in Trinidad & Tobago. She found that while there was a national consensus for change, the number of stakeholders and their varying visions of teacher education clouded the possibilities for reform.

Finally, Wang & Vongalis-Macrow explore how the state develops training programs as part of a process of labour restructuring in China. How can education play a proactive role when workers lose jobs? This presents challenges for local governments in China through the Start Your Own Business (SYB) project. While laid-off workers had successfully completed the SYB retraining course, they found there were several barriers preventing their economic re-emergence into the labour force. This presents questions for government in planning education programs.

We hope you engage with the ideas and complexities presented by the authors included in the issue of *IEJ: Comparative Perspectives*. They have contributed innovative research and findings to the field of international and comparative education.

Elizabeth Cassity

Laura Perry