

Editorial

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As I sit to consider this issue of the journal, I am hot off the heels of an interview with one of our Young Global City Leaders study participants. The research engages cohorts of Generation X, under-40-year-old school principals and deputies in London, New York City and Toronto. Our goal is to learn more about their experience and practice of leadership and school improvement.

An early emerging trend is that our Generation X leader colleagues demonstrate a seemingly consistent attitude vis-à-vis accountability. For most, across all three cities, accountability systems and the pervasive drive to gather and utilize evidence are simply the educational norm. Within this cohort, accountability is not something new or to be rallied against but purely a defining feature of the context within which they gained their professional credentials and early expertise as teachers and leaders.

Our participants often discuss accountability in relation to school-level inspection (where applicable), teacher observation and capacity building and student testing. However, they seem acutely aware that, as the young leader in my recent interview reiterated several times, education remains about people. Our young leader participants consistently highlight the centrality and importance of caring for the people—be they the students, teachers, parents or leaders—within the process of gathering and using of the evidence to improve teaching and learning.

The three papers in this issue of EAEA reflect the abovementioned triumvirate of issues discussed by our young leaders, broadly: inspection, teacher knowledge and student testing. While serendipitously European focused, the presented evidence sheds light on contemporary issues of international interest. The papers, to different extents, exemplify the oft-prevailing tensions between the design and intended use of inspection-generated versus research evidence. They also highlight the tensions between using accountability metrics and evidence for school improvement versus public or media purposes.

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First, Ehren, Altrichter, McNamara and O'Hara, in their paper 'Impact of school inspections on improvement of schools—describing assumptions on causal mechanisms in six European countries', present a model for examining national- or state-level inspection systems. Their descriptive take on how different jurisdictions design and implement inspection systems draws from evidence including detailed document reviews and small-scale interview data with high-level leaders in each jurisdiction. The authors provide a thought-provoking discussion of the specific inspection-driven mechanisms to set expectations, create feedback loops, inspire/require improvement actions and engage stakeholders.

Second, Juttner, Boone, Park and Nuehaus examine the dual importance of subject-specific theory and practice knowledge in 'Development and use of a test instrument to measure biology teachers' content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)'. The authors outline a stepwise progression of development and testing of both CK and PCK instruments. Based on the analysis of data from approximately 160 participating German biology teachers, the authors demonstrate an interaction between the two examined knowledge categories but argue for retaining separate measurements based on their findings.

Finally, from a more national-level perspective, Gustafsson and Erickson provide a rather unique take on research related to student testing. In 'To trust or not to trust?—teacher marking versus external marking of national tests', the authors build on a political and public discussion of trustworthiness of teacher-led assessment of a specific subset of student tests in Sweden. Exploring publically available instruments and data, the paper examines the underlying methodological process used to gather the original evidence presented in the media. They present their own insightful analysis of the data and marked difference and similarities with the original published results. The authors also highlight the tensions between inspection and academic research 'logics'.

Evidence generated in the name of accountability can be used to create incentives and/or punitive measures for those who do or do not meet established 'targets'. And, these actions can take place privately—or very publically—depending on your jurisdiction.

Even with the best of evidence-based intentions, making the most of what the various accountability mechanisms have to offer requires constant and careful consideration of the intended and unintended influences of evidence and its use at all levels of the system. In this issue, authors present various perspectives that with careful consideration may ensure that accountability mechanisms support the people working in education to make positive continuous change.

As we enter 2013 and with a new volume of EAEA, may the words of our young leader echo throughout the journal during the upcoming year: education is about people. In accountability, assessment and evaluation terms: How can we move forward in an evidenced-based, accountability-driven fashion while maintaining a focus on the people with whom we work, research, teach and support?

From our team at EAEA, we wish you the best for 2013 in your continued research, scholarship, teaching and practice.