Editorial

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The third issue of ERPP for the year 2012 examines policy and practice issues in Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

In 2006, the Taiwan Government launched the Hand-in-Hand After-School Care Programme with the aims of providing disadvantaged students with supplemental learning opportunities, increased employment opportunities for substitute teachers and low-income college students and capitalising on retired teachers' experience. Evaluation of the programme suggested that its objectives were not met, primarily because of the lofty but unrealistic ideals in teacher recruitment. Ho and Lin's research examines the criteria that are used for recruiting teachers, calculating the relative weight of each criterion, and determining the instructional strengths of each of the five teacher sources. They also provide suggestions for improving the teacher recruitment process of the Hand-in-Hand Programme.

Baum's research is concerned with the implications of human rights in the provision of school access. He uses Philippines as a case study, where he addresses the guarantees for free secondary education in the Philippine legal and policy documents, and assesses the current government policy for secondary education expansion—the Education Service Contracting (ESC) Programme in his discussion of the impact of the country's human rights commitments on educational policy. He draws on Kingdon's multiple streams model of policy analysis to account for human rights laws within the ESC policymaking, and determines the drivers that have led the country to adopt its current model of private expansion. He concludes that the human right to a free education should be a guiding principle, not a trump card, placed within the problem, solution and political contexts, to assess the current state of education and adequately protect those who needed publicly funded schooling the most.

Given the importance of acquiring soft skills, particularly in the today's context, the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia, recommended in 2006 that all public institutions of higher learning in the country incorporate soft skills formation into their curricula. Nikitina and Furuoka's research seeks to explore Malaysian students' expectations of university education with a special focus on the acquisition of soft skills and to examine the students'

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perceptions of the effectiveness of their instructors and their courses in fulfilling the educational agenda. According to the findings of their qualitative study, the students' expectations were varied, and they considered the acquisition of soft skills an essential part of university education. The findings also suggested that the Ministry of Higher Education and the students might not share the same perspectives of what constituted soft skills; the students did not mention some of the soft skills identified by the Ministry. The implications of the findings for Malaysia's higher education policy are discussed.

The prevalence of social media platforms has spawned the use of mobile phones, wikis and other mobile learning approaches in the delivery of pedagogical experiences. This is so in an undergraduate course on Chinese Entrepreneurship and Asian Business Networks taught at a university in Singapore. Menkhoff and Bengtsson argued that the integration of podcasts, walking tours, mobile phones and wikis and other proven pedagogical methods such as mini lectures, and field visits can greatly enhance learners' experience and produce valuable learning outcomes on the basis of blended learning, provided their usage is easy and they can be easily incorporated into the respective instructional strategy.

Cheng and Ho's research focuses on reflective learning, and in this context, in a group of secondary school students who participated in an educational tour to Liannan, which is located in a rural area in Guangdong Province, Mainland China. The main objective is to develop a framework to describe the learning in such an educational tour. Using journals and end-of-trip sharing passages which were triangulated with participant observation and interviews, Cheng and Ho suggest that the type of student learning can be categorised in a Reflective Learning Taxonomy for an educational tour, which comprises seven levels which are developmental in nature, and this contributes to research on learning outside the classroom.

Whether it is an analysis of a programme or a policy, or the examination of pedagogical and learning experiences, the articles assembled in this issue, I believe, are going to initiate further dialogue and scholastic engagement, particularly in these fields. This is of course one of the most important objectives of the ERPP.