Editorial

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This week, I am attending the annual American Educational Research Conference in California where 10,000+ academics, professionals and policy makers are exploring the intersections of education and poverty. Retreating briefly, I have indulged in what is quickly becoming my Educational Assessment Evaluation and Accountability (EAEA) editorial writing ritual: a local writing (and reflecting) expedition.

I often receive the papers for an upcoming EAEA issue while on the road due to our research schedule. Laptop and papers in hand, I seek out an interesting venue of ‘literary’ significance for the final read of the issue, several powerful coffees and some inspiration. In foreign cities, the expedition starts with a quick Google of ‘best places to write in <insert city>’. Today’s search: best places to write in San Francisco. It takes mere seconds to generate hundreds of recommended webpages, commentaries and ‘likes.’ In quick time, I sift through the top 20-or-so posts by applying my own conscious (and not!) evaluation criteria for the relative credibility and potential merit of the recommendation. My own personal ‘great places’ criteria, which I am refining over time, includes: great coffee, wireless, friendly staff, a historical or modern literary connection, and proximity to my hotel. In the age of Google, Mapquest, and Yelp this takes but a few minutes—if you have access.

My preliminary shortlist of venues had excellent reviews. However, many of these exact same locations also received at least one scathing review by someone whose ‘bad’ experience was often singular in nature. While these expressions of dissatisfaction were likely strongly influenced by very personal perspectives at very distinct points in time, the current context of social media offers individuals (with access) the opportunity to share any feeling at any time. With this in mind, I place my bet on Trieste where, if Internet chatter is to be believed, Mario Puzo wrote *The Godfather*!

At Trieste, I found a casual, bustling and colourful 35-seat café/music venue complete with a cast of local characters and tourists. As with all unfamiliar places, my preliminary feelings of ‘not belonging’ catalysed my desire to attempt to quickly learn the basic rules and protocols of the Trieste community and to fall into line—the coffee

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line! The person ahead of me was definitely a Trieste regular. The giveaway was that, without more than a ‘good morning’ smile, his coffee appeared on the counter as he arrived at the till. However, his ‘regular’ status also afforded him a free dose of uninvited fashion critique as the barista openly teased him about his ill-advised choice of sweater for such a hot sunny day. Membership has its advantages and at Trieste, the benefits include outstanding anticipatory coffee service and fashion advice.

Watching the reception received by the ‘fashion failure,’ I am a bit lonely for London and my local favourite writing place. At Dan and Decarlo, it is I who get pleasantly chastised for working too hard and have my, seemingly telepathically ordered, latte delivered to my table of choice. Familiarity creates comfort and space for exchange. Trieste feels as if it is more than a world apart. In my short visit, I am an outsider. There is no critique of my fashion choices, I actually need to order my coffee, and the staff and regulars are just a bit frustrated that I am not actively demonstrating my knowledge of the protocols for getting my own (amazingly delicious) pastry from the shelf. However, there are lessons to be learnt.

From my somewhat ‘new school’ strategy for <best place> identification to Trieste’s very ‘old school’ community feel, my own perceptions of credible opinion, bias’ and expectations strongly influenced my readiness to, even temporarily join, and experience Trieste. In turn, the experience will undoubtedly encourage me to improve and refine my <best place> criteria and future decision-making. The entire cycle remains strongly influenced by the global information infrastructure, availability of data and information and my own willingness to alter my own choices and practice as a result. Tensions between new/old, global/local and very personal/impersonal interpretations are embodied within the papers in this rather serendipitously higher education-focused issue of EAEA.

The papers capture, in essence, the pressures and opportunities facing students, faculty members, leaders and policy makers within higher education institutions (HEIs) as the sector experiences a tumultuous period of change. Globally, the foundations of ivory towers are being gently rattled by, to name a few: funding contractions, internationalization, rising tuition, widening participation, MOOCs, and changing accountability regimes. Simultaneously, globally mobile students create new pressures and expectations for all stakeholders and social media creates an opportunities for institutional and individual freedom of expression and reach. While the above influence how universities select, understand and support students and faculty, this issue highlights the challenges of gathering and interpreting evidence at each level.

In *Tomorrow’s teachers—selecting the best: An exploration of the quality rationale behind academic and experiential selection criteria for initial teacher education programmes*, Manuela Heinz investigates the predictive value of entry criteria for a teacher preparation programme in Ireland. In examining the relationship between selection criteria and overall outcomes, Heinz highlights tensions between local university-based requirements and more global professional aspirations for an equitable representative professional workforce.

Jansen, André and Suhre, in *Readiness and expectations questionnaire: a cross-cultural measurement instrument for first-year university students*, explore yet another emerging trend in education, the increasing international student mobility and the relative readiness and expectations of those very students. The paper also offers an example of how to redefine and test previously validated instruments to ensure their domestic relevance translates internationally.

Scherr, Miller and Fast provide an intriguing discussion of student perspectives on the evidence provided by a prototypical on-line professor rating site in *Single comments or average ratings: which elements of Ratemyprofessor shape university students' judgements and course choice intentions*. When considering the online evidence of professor performance, individual comments were more influential than aggregate scores. The authors raise the issue of globally accessible public evaluation of local academic practice.

In *Faculty perception of improvements to instructional practices in response to student ratings*, Safavi, Bakar, Tarmizi and Alwi close the evaluation loop with their investigation of how faculty members at one university use the evidence generated by student feedback to improve their teaching practice. The authors illustrate various strategies employed and the importance of evidence usage demonstrating the relationship between the perceived credibility of evidence sources and individual willingness to create change.

Individually, the papers provide insight into student selection, readiness and engagement and, in turn, the implications for faculty members. Collectively, they provide real strategies for gathering and interpreting evidence to support students and faculty as they experience the challenges and opportunities created by the increasing globally connected world of universities.