Key education and quality issues and reassessments coming from the developing world

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I am pleased to introduce this present issue of *Prospects*: the first non-thematic collection of peer-reviewed articles that we are publishing in 2013. We continue to seek strong general-interest submissions by researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners alike, on topics of crucial importance to the field of comparative education. While maintaining the journal's very distinctive profile, substance, and identity, we also continue our earnest efforts to publish the very best in education research, theory and practice, coming from various geographical regions, with a special focus on curriculum-related issues. In this issue, we showcase research pertaining to several topics that lie at the heart of contemporary educational research and policy: education quality, access to education, indigenous education, motivation, class management, school-based management, world-class education, and rural education. Most importantly, these studies offer ways to reinterpret and adapt theory to the needs and contexts of the international and developing world. The geographical coverage of the articles is notable and includes countries as diverse as Australia, Bangladesh, Chile, China, Guatemala, Hungary, Israel, and Pakistan.

The issue opens with a controversial Viewpoint, authored by Helen Abadzi, a leading psychologist who has worked for over 25 years as an education specialist and senior evaluation officer in the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education. Her article is a foray into a largely unexplored phenomenon: the decision-making processes of school-based management committees in low-income countries. Committees of low-income populations may lack the time and resources, as well as experience with quality schools, to accurately evaluate service delivery. She suggests developing links between two groups—the donor community and governments, and the neuropsychologists and experts in artificial intelligence who study decision-making—in order to better understand the routes from management committee decisions to service delivery and to help improve services to low-income populations.

Zsuzsa Millei and Robert J. Imre examine early childhood education in Hungary between 1948 and 1989. They argue that the socialist kindergarten in Hungary was set up

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to help modernize the Hungarian nation in a specific historical and political context of starting everything anew. Drawing on Popkewitz's (2008) notion of cosmopolitanism, which embodies "the Enlightenment's hope of the world citizen, whose commitments transcended provincial and local concerns with ideal values about humanity" (p. i), they show how specific civic/civil attitudes, behaviours, and values were combined in the effort to produce modern citizens, often in ways that contradicted the socialist ideology. Thus, they claim, kindergarten education was closer than previously thought to the democratic values promoted by education in the West.

M. Tariq Ahsan and Jahirul Mullick reflect on the ways that the government of Bangladesh has addressed inclusive education. They analyze in detail major national policy and reform initiatives, such as the National Education Policy 2010, the Second Primary Education Development Program, and the Teaching Quality Improvement project, all of which have brought the philosophy and implementation strategies of inclusion into the country's existing education system. However, the authors observe, certain policies still discriminate against children with intellectual disabilities, by not ensuring their access to regular primary education. Noting that recent education policies do not fully consider inclusive education as the "principled approach to education", Ahsan and Mullick also argue that Bangladesh does not yet have a national strategy for inclusive education. They suggest that policy reforms and practices should be harmonized, as specified in the International Conference of Education (ICE) recommendations (UNESCO IBE 2008), so that they all promote inclusive education in regular schools in similar ways and do not contradict each other. Lessons from these policies and initiatives, the authors conclude, could help other developing countries achieve the goals of Education for All through inclusive education.

Raza Ullah, John T. E. Richardson, and Muhammad Hafeez look at university students in Pakistan, analyzing their perceptions of the learning environment, learning preferences, motivation, and approaches to studying. Analysts of higher education are increasingly interested in these perceptions, in a perspective known as student approaches to learning (SAL) (Biggs 1988, 1993), but very few studies have looked into this topic in a non-Western context. These authors identify significant variations in Pakistani students' approaches to studying and perceptions of the learning context related to age, subject area, and gender. Their results show that the SAL perspective provides useful insights into the nature of the student experience in countries outside of Europe and Australia. At the same time, the nature of these variations is in most cases different from the findings of Western research.

Reiko Ishihara-Brito offers an ethnographic account of an issue frequently encountered in schooling: that parents and governments use different criteria to judge schools. Parents often report satisfaction with schools that teach few basic skills to students. The author highlights this issue in the context of rural Guatemala, where she focuses on indigenous parents' perceptions of their children's schooling and educational quality. For them, the mere opportunity to attend school represents a satisfactory educational accomplishment. As such, parents have low expectations for their children's academic performance, likely reflecting their own low educational levels. They do, however, see their children doing homework as a key indicator that they are learning. Thus, Ishihara-Brito argues that parental involvement in homework should be central to efforts to improve student outcomes. She also reflects on ways that families and the community might be incorporated into educational initiatives in order to foster a more conducive learning environment.

Oscar Espinoza and Luis Eduardo Gonzalez analyze how access to public and private institutions of higher education in Chile has evolved in the context of increasing

privatization of the post-secondary system. They examine students' access to higher education from four perspectives: institutional funding type (public/private), gender, family income level, and ethnic and minority status. The authors note that access to higher education in Chile has grown tremendously in recent decades, mostly because private institutions now enroll two thirds of higher education students. However, they observe, this expansion of higher education does not imply better quality or relevance to the labor market. Also, inequality persists, especially at the more prestigious private and public universities, despite a steady growth in the number of female university students, ethnic minorities, and low income students.

Shlomo Romi, Ramon Lewis, and Joel Roache discuss the relationship between classroom management techniques and teachers' coping styles in Australia, China, and Israel. In their complex study, 772 teachers completed questionnaires asking how frequently they used six classroom management techniques—hinting, discussion, involvement, recognition and reward, punishment, and aggression—and how often they used a range of coping styles. Their analysis reveals national variations in the relationships between management techniques and coping styles. The authors conclude that attempts to change teachers' classroom behavior should include more than the behaviour itself. Any strategy for intervention must be tailored to local conditions through a deep understanding of both the wider contexts within which these coping styles exist, and of national attributes and teachers' individual characteristics.

Jeongwoo Lee discusses a fast-growing research topic in the field of international higher education: how to create world-class universities (WCUs). Based on an in-depth analysis of existing studies, he provides an overarching three-step framework that may be used to understand what it takes to build a WCU and to draw a set of evaluation criteria in order to establish one. Lee's article comes as an articulate and natural continuation of the special issue on world-class education, guest-edited by Don Adams and published in *Prospects* last year (Adams 2012). His framework includes evaluation criteria to assess the possibility of a country either creating a WCU or achieving world-class status, with a specific focus on developing countries. It also points to further research on equally important topics such as the linkage between WCUs and the local economy and ways to balance internationalization with localism in order to serve internal demands.

John Fox pens a detailed profile of Lord Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941), the founder of the Scouts movement. Enrolling 30 million young people in 166 nations, and embracing virtually all of the major cultural and religious traditions, the Scouts is the largest non-formal youth education movement in the world. It has grown tremendously in developing and emerging countries; for example, it is one of the strongest associations in Arab countries (Vallory 2012). The Scouts was also the first organization to receive the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, in 1981. Given the history, global reach, and size of the scouting movement, it is curious that so little has been written about the Scouts (Farrell 2012). As Farrell observes, “in the comparative and international education literature there is virtually nothing about scouting” (p. xii). Thus, a profile of Robert Baden-Powell, the man behind the idea of scouting, is both timely and valuable.

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