Editorial

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The second issue of ERPP for the year 2013 examines policy and practice issues in Cambodia, Taiwan, Singapore, China and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In the paper “The distribution of pedagogical content knowledge in Cambodia: Gaps and thresholds in math achievement,” Ngo use data from a large survey of Cambodian schools to investigate the effect of math teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) on third grade students’ achievement. Ngo finds pedagogical knowledge to be a strong predictor of student math achievement in Cambodia in comparison to other student, school, and background variables, but the effect is concentrated among higher achieving students. The research also exposes gaps and thresholds in achievement associated with other explanatory variables, and shows that lower quality teachers are more likely to be teaching lower achieving students of low socioeconomic status.

In the next paper, Hua and Bevertson examine the issue of Taiwanese vocational high school (VHS) students’ perceptions of their English courses and their relevance to the future careers of these students. The research findings suggest that there is a mismatch between VHS students’ perceived needs from their English course and the actual content they receive, which is set by the Ministry of Education. VHS students hope that their English course will provide them with language skills relevant to their future employment. This is not met. The authors opine that the English curricula should be reviewed, and that steps need to be taken to ensure that policy goals in this area are in fact achieved.

In the paper “An examination of school accountability from the perspective of Singapore school leaders,” Ngo reports a research that examines each of the questions of what and to whom Singapore schools are accountable, from the point of practitioners holding leadership positions in Singapore schools. According to the findings, Singapore schools are accountable for students’ holistic development; site, funding and staff management; national survival and nation building; and humanity and the future; and are accountable to students, parents, country and citizens, and themselves. Interestingly, although Singapore is reputed for its academic achievement, the participants refer more to the importance of holistic education rather than

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examination results. The author also suggests that in the participants' minds, the concepts "accountability" and "responsibility" are inseparable.

In the paper "Teaching for identities, writing between the "we" and the "I" paradigms, Zhao et al. argue that because of the culture of collectivist and Confucian traditions, much of teaching and learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) assimilate individuals into a group identity. This can be detected in the preferential use of "we" over "I" and lack of self-identity in students' EFL writing. The authors adopt a biographical approach to the teaching of stories expressed as personal narrative as part of the work to help students make a conceptual breakthrough to understand the difference between the collective and the individual identities, of the "we" and the "I." An evaluation of the effectiveness of this strategy suggests that biographical narrative accounts have a creative and self-actualizing force in forming the individual's identity, using his or her original "voice."

In Abu Dhabi, UAE, there is currently a major education reform to improve schools and parental involvement in support of student learning is a critical part of the agenda. Stringer and Hourani explore the managerial aspects of implementing such home-school relationships in seven primary public-private partnership (PPP) schools, involving principals, social workers, teachers, parents, and students. In particular, the authors examine the benefits of home-school relationships; the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders; home-school communication; and the constraints and challenges faced in the management of home-school relationships. The paper concludes that there is a gap between the policy-rhetoric of promoting home-school relationships and the reality of its implementation. It calls for more effective dialoguing among all stakeholders to develop a framework to effectively manage home-school relationships.

As always, as one of the most important objectives of the ERPP, I hope the articles assembled in this issue will initiate further dialog and scholastic engagement in educational policy and practice.