Who's learning whose learning? How internationalisation and pressure to perform are transforming education and learning

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The last two decades have seen a strong and accelerating trend towards the internationalisation of secondary and tertiary education. This manifests itself in such phenomena as franchising, the mushrooming of satellite campuses and the proliferation of exchange programmes. In just a seven-year period between 2000 and 2007, the number of internationally mobile students grew by almost 60 per cent from 1.8 million to 2.8 million. Not only students, but staff, too, are increasingly mobile, as are the educational models they follow. Processes of exchange and internationalisation offer obvious benefits, but they also entail many less obvious risks, not least of cultural homogenisation and a creeping academic imperialism. In the first article of this issue, entitled “Middle East meets West: Negotiating cultural difference in international educational encounters”, *Helen Goodall* posits that “there is still an appalling lack of awareness of cultural differences within Western learning and teaching environments ... [, and] a thorough understanding of the potential impact of cultural differences on learning and teaching is required by providers to enable them to respond appropriately in the design and delivery of international educational encounters.” She rejects the assumption underlying many academic exchange programmes that models of education and learning are easily transferable, and instead warns that “in order to provide successful transnational education programmes, it is essential to understand both the needs of the learners and how they learn.”

According to the author, an important factor to consider when transferring educational models between countries is the extent to which the recipient culture is collectivist or individualist. The Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category from another” (Hofstede 1991, p. 51). Goodall takes Hofstede’s model of culture as her starting point in evaluating a proposed staff

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development programme at a new university in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. While acknowledging that cultural difference is not solely delineated by national boundaries, she argues that the degree of collectivism or individualism within a society can be regarded as a significant component of culture. She examines the implications of Hofstede's theory for pedagogy, and focuses in particular on the value of individuality. One of the key determinants of this value is the imperative of survival; only in societies where survival is taken for granted can there be a strong emphasis on self-expression. Kurdistan provides a fascinating and perhaps unique setting in which to test this hypothesis, since we ought to see a shift towards greater self-expression as it becomes a more secure place to live.

Arguably, international aid donors, for better or worse, a role similar to that once played by missionaries in promoting Western educational models in developing countries. In the words of Catherine Odora Hoppers, they frequently "facilitate the process of diffusing cultural themes developed primarily in the West, and apply pressure for these to be adopted worldwide as 'universal' values" (Odora Hoppers 2014, p. 105). Development and education experts thus can become "foot soldiers in facilitating the symbolic and actual establishment of the universalist claims" (ibid.). One model which has found particular favour among aid agencies is the cross-border university network. This is because it appears to achieve two goals at once: building educational capacities while advancing specific (and not necessarily education-related) development goals. While university-to-university partnerships generally involve two institutions collaborating to accomplish a particular activity, university networks typically involve a larger number of institutions and focus on a broader set of activities organised around a particular issue or goal. They can take on activities which would exceed the capacity of individual institutions, and the intention often is to establish a longer-term, more sustainable set of relationships than are typical in university-to-university twinning arrangements.

David Chapman, Amy Pekol and Elisabeth Wilson look at three university networks (one in Africa and two in Asia) that were set up with the specific aim of strengthening the capacities of higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare health workers to respond to pandemic threats. In particular, these networks promoted the One Health programme of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The authors synthesise the key lessons that have emerged from these three networks, suggesting that such networks can be useful in promoting a social and educational agenda while at the same time strengthening the general capacities of participating universities. However, findings also suggest that success is far from guaranteed. While university networks can expand resources and capabilities, they also increase operational complexity. The authors' analysis of the advantages and constraints encountered in the development and implementation of university networks aims to offer guidance to those pursuing this mechanism as a means of strengthening higher education and achieving broader development goals.

Lifelong learning is sometimes understood as an educational luxury, affordable only to countries with high levels of participation in formal education. The example of Ethiopia shows, however, that it is of equal, if not greater, importance to developing countries, particularly those with long traditions of their own in formal education. The third article in this issue, entitled "Developing a lifelong learning

system in Ethiopia: Contextual considerations and propositions”, was written by *Dessalegn Samuel Abiy*, *Genet Gelana Kabeta* and *Dawit Mekonnen Mihiretie*. It emerged from a workshop on developing capacity for establishing lifelong learning systems in UNESCO Member States held at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in 2012. This study is based on a review of national policy documents and on interviews conducted with policy researchers, Ministry of Education officials, adult educators and coordinators.

It reveals a mixed bag of encouragement and disappointment that is typical of many developing countries: high enrolment numbers but low student retention; improved literacy rates but reduced quality of learning; more teachers but few new schools. In a balanced view that considers both the opportunities presented by many of the policy initiatives recently undertaken in Ethiopia (including a 10-year master plan for adult education) and the many challenges such as those identified above, the authors explore ways in which the concept of lifelong learning can be applied in the Ethiopian context, concluding with practical suggestions for policymakers.

Most of us recall with a shudder that dreaded parental enquiry: “Have you done your homework yet?” Even the most assiduous student will occasionally have experienced homework as an unjust intrusion upon their precious evening and weekend hours. Moreover, whatever the failings of school to make learning enjoyable, these tend only to be amplified in homework. Yet, in most education systems, homework is a given, as tightly woven into the fabric of a child’s educational experience as schoolbooks and satchels. The homework debate has been raging for close to a century, and though the balance appears to tilt periodically for or against, there is still no sign of a victor emerging. Most contentious of all is the issue of homework for primary-school students. Many opponents essentially subscribe to the point of view expressed by the six-year-old hero of the comic strip Calvin and Hobbes: “I quit doing homework. It’s bad for my self-esteem ... All that emphasis on right answers makes me feel bad when I get them wrong.” Yet a considerable body of research also suggests that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between homework and school achievement. The problem with homework, it seems, is that, like so many other educational tools and methods, its effectiveness depends entirely on judicious application and dosage.

Drawing on data collected in UNESCO’s Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE), the largest learning achievement study ever implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean (sampling 200,000 Primary Grade 3 and 6 students in 16 countries), *F. Javier Murillo* and *Cynthia Martinez-Garrido* look at the homework-setting habits of Latin American teachers, and investigate the relationship between homework and achievement. Their article is entitled “Homework and primary-school students’ academic achievement in Latin America”, and focuses on two main variables – time and design. The study shows that for primary-school students, the effectiveness of homework diminishes beyond a period of 15 min. The findings also highlight the importance of following up on the contents covered in homework in the classroom to maximise effective learning. The authors conclude that incorporating homework into classroom dynamics is vital for obtaining maximum impact and is more important than the amount of time students dedicate to their homework or the supervision of the homework by the teacher.

For many modern schoolchildren, homework has been absorbed into a larger domain of extra-mural study. This is the world of “shadow education”, a system of private tutoring which exists alongside, albeit in the shadow of, formal education. Perhaps the metaphor popularised by Mark Bray in the seminal UNESCO study “The shadow education system: private tutoring and its implications for planners” (Bray 1999) needs some adjustment, as the private tutoring sector expands and casts its own considerable shadow in numerous countries, driven by social competition, school performance rankings, examination-based learning and other pressures on families and children. The phenomenon of private tutoring emerged powerfully in the latter part of the last century in rapidly modernising East Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Since then it has spread to every continent, and is particularly pronounced in medium-income countries that have recently embraced market economics (Dang and Halsey 2008). In their article entitled “Does private tutoring increase students’ academic performance? Evidence from Turkey”, *Giray Berberoğlu* and *Aysit Tansel* evaluate the impact of private tutoring in different subject areas, taking into account several student-related characteristics, such as family and academic backgrounds, as well as interest in and perception of academic success. The authors apply a multiple linear regression analysis to survey data gathered from almost 10,000 applicants to the Turkish Higher Education Entrance Examination. The results indicate that while private tutoring does have a positive impact on performance in mathematics and Turkish language, this is not the case in natural sciences.

Private tutoring centres (PTCs) have proliferated in Turkey; there was a 200 per cent increase in the number of students attending PTCs between 1997 and 2006. It is difficult to confirm or refute the claims of success made by PTCs, since the widespread perception of success acts as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Yet, the results of this study point to a very small return on investment from private tutoring. Responding to a perception of increased competition, parents turn to private tutoring to ensure that their child is not disadvantaged. However, it is likely that their money would yield far better results if it were invested in the formal education system. This reveals one of the paradoxes of marketised education – the priority is not to increase the overall quality of education for all, but merely to ensure competitive advantage. Increased investment in public education cannot, by definition, promote the latter.

Students and parents are not the only ones under pressure in the modern educational landscape. On several occasions in recent years, we have published articles on the problem of “attrition” or dropout among newly fledged teachers. Most recently, this journal published a study from Québec, Canada, which looked at the factors that influence teacher attrition and what can be done to stem this tide (Karsenti et al. 2013). In the final article of our current issue, entitled *La résilience d’enseignants œuvrant en milieux défavorisés : la voie prometteuse de la réflexion sur la pratique pour faire face à l’adversité* [“The resilience of teachers working in deprived environments: How reflection on personal teaching practice can help to overcome adversity”], two Quebecois researchers – *Mylène Leroux* and *Manon Théorêt* – take up and further explore an issue which was briefly mentioned in the earlier paper – the fact that dropout is far more pronounced among teachers working in disadvantaged areas. Using research gathered as part of their doctoral studies, the

authors consider the factors that make teachers more resilient and likely to remain in the profession beyond the crucial five-year watershed. As the term “resilience” suggests, this study concerns the strategies that teachers may adopt to preserve their working sanity (what the authors more scientifically refer to as “biological, psychological and spiritual homeostasis”). If such strategies are needed by teachers in general, they are doubly needed by those working in socially deprived environments. In particular, the authors focus on reflective, problem-solving approaches, and investigate whether their application enhances the resilience of teachers working in deprived areas.

The study involved twenty-three teachers from seven deprived primary schools in Montreal, who were asked to complete a questionnaire on the quality of their working lives and keep a self-evaluation diary of their day-to-day stress levels. They then took part in a semi-directed personal interview. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data identified four resilience profiles in the subjects, and described how they reflected on their teaching practice, taking account of the process and content of the reflection. A comparison of the two extreme cases in the sample, the most and least resilient teachers, showed significant divergences in terms of reflection. The discussion highlights the relationship between resilience and reflection, and ways of encouraging the development of both.

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