

## Editorial Introduction

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The role of education in transforming the lives of learners is an idea that has been advanced by many researchers, policy makers and others who have either a direct or related stake in the way formal schooling is designed, constructed and practiced. Certainly, people go to school to elevate their social and economic locations, with the intention of achieving a certified prospect that helps their enfranchisement with respect to others of similar or quasi-similar circumstances. More often than otherwise, the way schooling is constructed especially in liberal democratic, individualist ideology based societies, the objective is not necessarily social transformation but the enhancement of each person's capacity to compete with everyone else and win as many of the available goods as possible. Clearly in such contexts, the focus is generally on the liberalist notion of equal access to educational opportunities, which is expected, in a sort of misguided fashion, to lead to social development for all. By now, we shall all know that with the increasing intensities of globalization, which increasingly creates the mass movement of peoples (for different and continuously changing reasons) with immediate diverse learning needs and expectations, the talk about equal access or educational equality is, for all reasonable undertakings, more rhetoric than real.

Certainly those for whom contemporary contexts of schooling were created in the first place, i.e., those who come from the same social class background and speak the same language qualities as the schooling policy formulators would do, by and large, better than the rest of us. The now celebrated effects as well as the outcomes of cultural and social capitals, along with myriad other less visible capitals that are not immediately observable to the well intentioned eye, should remain our assurance that educational contexts, especially in so-called pluralistic western democracies such as Canada and the US are anything but equally accessible, or when physically accessed, capable of according all learners the subjective capacity to attain the necessary learning qualities that could endow them in their spaces of residence and work; and it is always worse for some groups than others. Among the most marginalized in, population-wise, western multicultural countries, are usually immigrant and refugee students, Aboriginal learners and others who are minoritized in one habitual way or another. The needs of these groups are many times missed due to a number of reasons that include not only the absence of policy and program possibilities, but as often, the de-operational realities of the learning programs that were promised in these places in the first place.

A salient example of the rhetorically present but practically de-operational policy platform is the much spoken about idea of multicultural education in the Canadian context. As a policy perspective with some program implementation possibilities, multicultural education should accord so much tangible empowering schemes for especially those students from those communities conceptually (and wrongly) ghettoized as multicultural communities, but as well for all students. As any serious observer of the situation should inform us, though, that is not at all the case. With decades of the rhetorical side of the story in full force, the case still begs some viable and pragmatically harnessable multicultural learning spaces that do not falsely equalize, but ‘equiticize’ the pedagogical locations and achievements of all learners irrespective of their background and/or social and cultural capital endowments. In addition, we need not minimize the crucial role of teachers in today’s complex, multi-background schooling realities that do not only require viable working and support mechanisms for these pedagogues, but as well, a clear and more advanced understanding of the multicentric epistemologies that should characterize their teaching platforms to advance the learning lives of their students. In focusing on these and related educational topics, the three articles included in this issue complement each other very well, giving, at least in aspirational terms at this time, some pragmatic hope that we can do better in our current schooling constructions and relationships.

In the first article, *Exploring School Principals’ Responses to the Needs of Somali Immigrant Students*, Shukri Nur and Mohamed A. Nur-Awaleh explore school principals’ responses in addressing the perceived educational needs of Somali immigrant/refugee students. To do so, they examine how school principals might seek to create culturally responsive and inclusive schools that build a partnership with Somali families. This qualitative exploratory study combined aspects of convenience and purposeful sampling to learn about how the school principals addressed the needs of the Somali immigrant students; and the extent to which they sought to create inclusive schools and build partnerships with the Somali families. The authors conducted interviews with a total of three school principals in three different schools who served these students and their families. This study shows that in the initial contact with Somali students, the school principals had very little awareness and experience in dealing with Somali refugee and immigrant students who continue to face challenges in adjusting into their schools. To address the educational needs of Somali students, they note, requires an approach that transcends the provision of ESL classes. It requires a transformative leadership approach that advocates for the needs of both the students and their parents and seeks to establish multicultural and mentoring programs which could play a role in better meeting the educational needs of all students.

In the second article, *Decolonial Pedagogy through Transcultural Narrative Inquiry in the Contact Zone*, Hartej Gill and Vincent White respond to the often tokenistic, ahistorical and apolitical approach to mainstream multiculturalism employed in schools, by theorizing transculturalism and decolonial thinking from a pedagogical perspective while also considering its potential as a transformative method of inquiry. Of particular interest to the authors is how employing transcultural narrative has the capacity to explore colonialism outside and beyond a conventional historical context in order to understand its impact on the present day. To this end, the authors discuss transcultural narrative as a form of decolonial pedagogy and inquiry, one that

invites messy and often uncomfortable intro/trans-spective reflections where conflicting cultural, social and historical locations come into contact. This contact zone effectively compels unsettling dialogue between the colonizer/settler and the colonized, whiteness and color, privilege and marginalization, obstructionist and agency/ally work etc., locations which the authors argue are best understood collectively, relationally, and along a continuum rather than as a fixed binary. Gill and White present an example of this form of engagement (in the form of a transcultural narrative between an instructor and guest speaker), including the rationale through which it was actualized as well as some of the new inner/understandings that emerged from the inquiry experience. The potential to employ transcultural narrative as a pedagogical process of inquiry is also discussed.

In the third article, *Challenges and Encouraging Educational Practices: Observations from Field Experiences*, Belete Mebratu studies the reported observations of teacher candidates about the challenges and encouraging practices at schools following their field experiences visits required to meet course work and licensure for teaching. The findings of the study indicate that the participants of the study observed that classroom teachers face the challenges of too much workload, meeting the needs of too many students who need support, lack of resources, classroom management, changes of curriculum and policies, and meeting the needs of diverse students. The teacher candidates, however, are encouraged by their observations of the use and applications of a wide variety of instructional approaches, the prevalence of a culture of a community of learners and co-operations, discipline systems, applications of technology and inspiring teachers' professionalism and commitment to make differences in the lives of their students. Ways of addressing the observed challenges include measures of providing support staff and assistants to the classroom teacher, supplying classrooms with adequate resources, efforts to involve parents and guardians in the education of their children and in the affairs of schools, refocusing teacher education programs on those reported areas of challenges classroom teachers face, and ongoing in-service trainings and professional development programs for teachers.

Besides the three articles, there are also three book reviews<sup>1</sup> in this issue. The first is Rumina Seth's *The Politics of Postcolonialism: Empire, Nation and Resistance* (2011) reviewed by Sourayan Mookerjee; the second is Raul Zibechi's *Territories in resistance: A cartography of Latin American social movements* (2012) reviewed by Hasriadi Masalam, and the third is *Growing up Canadian: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists* (2013) edited by Peter Beyer & Rubina Ramji and reviewed by Al-Karim Datoo. Together, the articles and the reviews should entice us to re-think the critical locations of knowledge and learning in effecting select global and local transformations that constructively interact with the lived contexts of people.

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to express our gratitude to Professor Dip Kapoor who has skillfully served as the journal's book review editor since its inception in 2009. This is the last issue of the journal where Dr. Kapoor is the reviews editor. Without his support and commitment, we would not have achieved this publication project which for us, and we are sure for him, was important in bringing perennially peripheralized ideas and perspectives into the centre of contemporary epistemic debates and possibilities. Dip, thank you so much and best of all.