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EDITORIAL

Teachers' Perceptions, Experience and Learning

Much has been said about the need for individuals to cultivate various competencies in order to succeed in the new century. These include cognitive competencies (such as critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation, decision making and creative thinking), intrapersonal competencies (such as intellectual openness with an appreciation for diversity, and metacognitive skills such as planning and self-reflection), as well as interpersonal competencies (such as leadership, empathy and the ability to collaborate and work in teams) (see Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). To deal with different facets of challenges in increasingly complex environments, individuals also need other 21st century competencies that include new forms of thinking: big picture, inter-disciplinary, simulation, design and computational forms of reasoning. In developing these competencies, teachers play a critical role. They have to embed these educational goals into the curricula they teach, and to do their job well, teachers need to be aware of their own perceptions and beliefs, feel that they are supported to carry out their plans and goals, and have the motivation to develop new pedagogies to improve their practice (e.g., Liu & Tan, 2015; Tan, 2003).

What and how teachers think about their work and the programmes that support their learning can have powerful implications for the system they work in, as the collection of 10 articles in this issue demonstrate. These articles centre on the theme of teachers' perceptions, experience and learning. Although different in educational, geographical and socio-cultural contexts, these articles collectively illustrate the influence of teachers on student learning, school culture and their own professional identity and growth, as well as highlighting challenges and constraints in pre- and in-service teacher education programmes that can impact teachers' own learning.

The first article by Retna examined teachers' perceptions, experiences and challenges in the use of design thinking in a Singapore school. The findings showed that teachers perceived design thinking to have the potential for helping students develop important 21st century skills. For it to be implemented successfully, however, teachers would need to address a number of challenges arising from their own ability to change the way they have been teaching and thinking about the goals of student learning. They would also need resources and time to carry out this initiative well. Related to this issue of teachers implementing change and innovations, Hong and Young examined the effects of a new national curriculum in South Korea that was intended to grant more autonomy to individual

schools and teachers. Contrary to the general belief that teachers welcomed greater autonomy and flexibility in customizing curricula to meet students' needs, the participating teachers did not take positively to their new-found curricular autonomy and were even doubtful that such efforts would diversify the school curriculum. Factors contributing to such perceptions were identified and discussed. In another study of teacher perceptions in the context of innovations, Clarke, Lu, Wang, Ma, and Collins investigated Chinese teachers' commitment to being a cooperating teacher for rural practicum placements under a University-Government-School (UGS) initiative. The results in this study were also compared with the responses of supervising teachers in three other countries. The researchers found that the Chinese teachers were more highly motivated as a result of positive perceptions of what the scheme enabled them to do in learning from the students as well as enhancing the quality of their supervision.

Teacher experiences and perceptions were examined from a cultural angle in a study in Thailand by Kainzbauer and Hunt. They gathered information about the efforts of foreign university teachers in learning about and demonstrating cultural sensitivity in graduate management schools. The authors identified five aspects of Thai culture which the teachers felt they needed in order to expand or adapt their existing repertoires. Although these aspects are specific to Thai culture, the discussion of cultural intelligence will find resonance in teacher experiences in other countries and for those interested in inter-cultural communication. The role of gender in specific areas of teachers' work was highlighted by Li in a discussion of school discipline. The issue of masculinization of this area of work and its interplay with power in a primary school in Taiwan is of interest. Notably, Li found that teacher workplace culture helped to explain and reinforced the notion that discipline was men's work and power as gendered. This was partly the result of women distancing themselves from discipline work, the physical advantages of men and masculinity, and parental expectations.

Two articles on inclusive education in Singapore are also featured in this issue. In the first article by Yeo, Chong, Neihart and Huan, teachers' first-hand experiences with inclusion were examined. The authors documented two broad clusters of teachers' positive and negative experiences. Specifically, the most salient positive experiences were satisfaction with pupils' progress and new learning for teachers while the most dominant negative experience was stress experienced from challenging behaviours and instructional activities for catering adequately the diverse needs within a classroom. In the other article, Poon, Ng, Wong and Kaur, collected information using an instrument that measured teachers'

perceptions of factors associated with inclusive education. They reported that teachers had neutral attitudes and that inclusive perceptions were predicted by teachers' confidence in teaching while other factors, such as experience and level of training SEN support, accounted for a large proportion of the variance in ratings of inclusive perceptions. The findings from both articles affirmed the importance of teacher preparation and support for their role.

The final three articles in this collection focus on wider issues of teacher preparation in different areas and contexts. Hardman, Stoff, Aung and Elliott examined the pedagogical practices of Mathematics teaching in primary schools in Myanmar. They reported the use of a transmission model of teaching where information and content ("recipe knowledge") was transmitted to pupils for recall. The authors applied insights from the study to propose reforms to the designs of teacher education programmes in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the country. Likewise, Zein focused on teacher learning by examining the adequacy of pre-service education in Indonesia for preparing primary school English teachers to meet the demands of English learning in an age of globalization. He further focused on factors contributing to the efficacy or the lack thereof in such programmes and offers insights for improvements. The collection ends with an article that addresses the global phenomenon of preparing teachers in the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Based on TESOL Teacher Education Programmes (TTEPs) in Australia, Liyanage, Walker and Singh explored the tensions among increased student demands for TTEPs, professional standards discourses, and the achievement of programmatic conceptual and contextual coherence in the "Asian Century".

The articles in this collection provide interesting cases for a more detailed understanding of the role of teachers and the impact of their thinking and practice. Generally, scholars agree that one way of strengthening professionalism in teaching is to prepare teachers well, give them the tools and time to do their job, and support and empower them to carry out their responsibilities well (Liu & Tan, 2015; Weingarten, 2010). This entails quality teacher education and a high level of professional standard. Amongst other things, teachers need to undergo rigorous preparation so that they have good content mastery, and develop a deep understanding of their learners along with a strong understanding of and skills for teaching (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). They also need to develop the values, knowledge and skills to nurture every learner they interact with (Tan, Liu, & Low, 2012). In addition, teachers need to feel supported and empowered within the school system to believe that they can make a difference. They also need to have the autonomy to make

decisions about teaching and learning in the classroom (Adedoyin, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2003).

It is also important that teachers see themselves embodying new roles beyond the traditional one of transmitters of information or authoritative conveyors of knowledge. Education scholars have suggested that teachers play multiple roles: facilitators, architects, guides, tutors, counsellors, instructors, and models. Similarly, new learning environments require students themselves to wear a whole range of “hats” : searchers, partners, designers, explorers, investigators, thinkers, clients, subjects, memorizers and trainees (Cheng, 2012). This wider range of roles and dynamics provide space for higher order learning, where students become less passive and more initiated as teachers choose to play less didactic and more facilitative roles in the learning process.

It is our hope that the selected articles for this themed issue of “Teachers’ Perceptions, Experience and Learning” will offer powerful reflections of many of these ideas and that the constraints and challenges discussed by the authors will also serve as a much needed reminder that for good ideas to take root and grow, realities experienced on the ground have to be anticipated and addressed.

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