

Operating according to its intentions, an education system will provide a fair opportunity for everyone. However, it has long been noted in Comparative and International Education that the ideal is obtained rarely. Consequently the subject of inequality has been of high interest from the outset. This issue has 13 articles; six of them concentrate on issues of inequality. We will begin by describing them.

In the article titled: "On the Impact of Early Marriage on Schooling Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southwest Asia" Marcos Delprato concludes that girls forced to marry early have shorter educational careers. If early marriage could be delayed by a single year it would be associated with half a year more schooling in Africa and one third of a year more schooling in Asia. In the article titled: "Designing schools for Quality: In International Case-Study-based Overview," Nwola Uduku takes us beyond universal access to education and helps us better understand the infrastructural design requirements: access to clean water, electricity, sanitation, and library/reading space. Much has been made of the superior PISA scores of schools in Shanghai. But the international results from Shanghai have come under increasing doubt. In their article titled: "The Education of Migrant Children in Shanghai: the Battle for Equity," Haiyan Qian, and Allen Walker explain why. They point out that children of families which have migrated from rural area of China face structural inequalities because they are not allowed into Shanghai's public schools. They conclude that Shanghai remains 'riddled' with on going challenges in equity.

Equity problems in China are also the subject of an article on higher education. In: "Geographical Stratification and the Role of the State in Access to Higher Education in Contemporary China," Ye Liu points out that a combination of wide diversity in the distribution of higher education institutions and differentiated admissions and recruitment processes add up to significant differences in post secondary access depending upon the accident of geographical birth. The eastern provinces are at an advantage while children born in the western and central regions suffer a continuing lack of opportunity in achieving upward social mobility.

A similar theme of geographical inequality is the subject of an article titled: "The Urban-Rural Divide in Educational Outcomes: Evidence from Russia," by Chiara Amini and Eugene Nivorozhkin. They point out that children born in urban areas have a distinct advantage over children born in rural areas. They conclude that these 'severe inefficiencies' plague schools in rural areas of Russia.

Lastly we have an article which concerns the impact of socio-economic status on school performance among school children in Italy. In the article titled: "Student Background Determinants of Reading Achievement in Italy: A Quintile Regression Analysis," Francesca Glambona and Mariano Porcu argue that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds tend to perform lower in reading but that the reasons differ. In some cases the strongest predictors are access to computer availability at home, but in other cases it may be access to parents with greater education attainment, or the availability of a desk for homework at home, the program attended or the region in which the student was born.

Themes other than inequality are of importance in this issue as well. Schools can only be effective if they are free of corruption (Heyneman, 2004). The question is how does one know the degree to which schools are corrupt? One way is to ask the students. In the article titled: "Exploring the Student's Perceptions Regarding Unethical Practices in the Romanian Educational System," Liliana Mata and Roxana Ghiatau point out that students are quite critical of their teachers' morality. They say that many teachers discriminate and favor a select few; that students in secondary rather than higher education are more likely to complain about their teachers' morality; and that boys, particularly in urban areas are the most critical.

Much has been made of the degree to which international agencies approach low and middle income countries with a set agenda by which changes in the education system can be supported (Heyneman, 2003) and much has been made about whether one type of change is more successful than another. However, it has been noted that successful change is often determined by influences which have little to do with the content of the project. In the article titled: "The Geometry of Policy Implementation: Lessons from the Political Economy Of Three Education Reforms in El Salvador during 1990-2005," D. Brent Edwards, Julian Victoria and Pauline Martin analyze reforms sponsored by international agencies over a 15 year period. They conclude 'that national-level political preferences and other local constraints facilitate or impede the implementation of international projects'. Similarly, in their article titled: "The Global Partnership for Education's Evolving Support to Fragile and Conflict-Affected States" Francine Menashy and Sarah Dryden- Peterson argue that policies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar and Liberia shifted in response to local demand and that these local factors seem to be as or perhaps more important than the agency's original intentions and strategies.

It is common to observe that enrollments in higher education have increased dramatically. Fewer have paid attention to whether the increase in students has been parallel to an increase in infrastructure or whether more students were being funneled into infrastructure which was not intended for the increase in numbers. In the article titled: "Re-Inventing Kenya's University: From a 'Graduate Mill' to a Development Oriented Paradigm," Mwangi Chege argue that the government approach has amounted to a 'graduate mill' where the emphasis has been on the numbers of graduates rather than on the quality of education.

Schools are expected to play an important role in socializing children to their the moral and political assumptions of their nation. But what happens when those assumptions change? In the article titled: "From Regime Change to Paradigm Shift: A Philosophical Perspective on the Development of Taiwan's Citizenship Curriculum," Chenbg-Yu Hung point out that textbooks and curricular materials developed during Taiwan's authoritarian period had to be revised (rather carefully) during the 1980s when Taiwan become more democratic and developed a different view of its relationship with the PRC. These curricular shifts are described in detail.

Schools are part of a complex system of organizations. Yet assessments often emerge with single and perhaps simplified pieces of evidence on their performance. In the article titled: "Counted In and Being Out: Fluctuations in Primary School and Classroom Attendance in Northern Nigeria," Sara Humphreys, Moses Dauda, Jiddere Kaibo and Mairead Dunne analyze the differences and fluctuations between annual, weekly, and daily school timetables and conclude that the systems themselves through their structures and practices help deny a pupil's right to educational access.

Lastly is an article by Jurgen Willems titled: "Individual Perceptions on the Participant and Societal Functionality of non-Formal Education for Youth: Explaining Differences Across Countries based on the Human Development Index (HDI)." He suggests that an 'inward focus' (called 'participant functionality') with respect to non-formal education remains constant across countries in spite of differences in the HDI. In turn, societal functionality (outward focus) varies with the HDI.

Taken together, these 13 articles portray a field which is rapidly shifting. Higher education is becoming as important a focus as primary education. Debates over international organizations and their influences seem to be balanced now with the emphasis on local factors determining project results. And the search for intelligent equity policies are receiving attention in new areas of structure, geography, architecture, internal assumptions about citizenship and segmented curricular specializations.

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