



Editorial

Recurring and common themes



Though the contributions in this volume have undergone a through and, in some cases, lengthy review process, nevertheless they constitute the first issue of my turn as Editor-In Chief. This allows me opportunity to reflect on their meaning. Several articles speak to the importance of classroom pedagogy. For decades the importance of pedagogy has been questioned. Not only have there been disagreements over whether there was a universal definition of excellence, but because of classroom autonomy, it has been difficult to observe and quantify the kinds of classroom behavior which might make a significant difference. However, three articles in this volume find significant effects from teaching practices. In “Does Teaching Style Explain Differences in Learner Achievement in Low and High Performing schools in Kenya?” Ngware, Oketch and Mutisya find that the style of teaching has an impact on achievement independent of classroom conditions. In “Which Teaching Practices Improve Student Performance on High Stakes Exams?” Zakharov, Carnoy and Loyalka compare three categories of practice and find that the effect of ‘test-specific homework exercises’ is large, positive and consistent. Perhaps more interesting is the fact that for advanced track students this teaching practice has the greatest impact when focused on the more difficult test items and for students in the basic tracks it is more effective when focused on the easier test items. Lastly, the influence of the schooling experience is of long-standing interest in our field and several articles concentrate on this. In “Learning to Trust: Examining the connections between trust and capabilities-friendly pedagogy through case studies from Honduras and Uganda,” Murphy-Graham and Lample test the effects of a particular pedagogical approach in influencing student trust. They argue that trust is a learned capacity and hence influenced by particular types of pedagogical styles. They isolate four styles which are effective at building trust in students: (i) teacher/student relations that emphasize shared learning; (ii) peer relations that emphasize collaboration rather than competition; (iii) direct engagement with the community through service learning and (iv) the incorporation of lessons about trust and community in the curriculum.

Although many might assume that teachers can be trained to offer the most effective style of pedagogy, the paper by Wang and Clark titled: “Practicum Experiences during Curriculum Reform in China” suggest that it is not so simple. Their paper concentrates on the difficulties faced by practicum students attempting to navigate between the different expectations of the university and the schools where they are placed. The difficulties of the teacher profession are highlighted too by the paper on “Science Teacher Shortage and the Moonlighting Culture: The Pathology of the

teacher labor market in Uganda” by Urwick and Kisa. They demonstrate that teachers of particular subjects are not only scarce in supply but are forced to teach in more than one school to make ends meet. Curricula are rarely based on student demand, and two articles speak to the question of the student role in setting education policies. In “Perceived Effects of Competency-Based Training on Acquisition of Professional Skills,” Hofman and Boahin argue that the opinion of polytechnic students should be taken into account when deciding on the types of competencies needed to perform professional tasks. And in “Exploring Vietnamese Children’s Experiences of and Views on, Learning at Primary School in Rural and Remote Communities,” Phelps, Graham, Thi Tuyet and Greeves suggest that children should be viewed not as just beneficiaries but as partners in the setting of education policies and strategies.

The question of gender and female discrimination has also been an issue of long-standing concern. Two articles speak to this issue but report unexpected findings. In “School Resources and the Gender Reading Literacy Gap in South African Schools” Zuze and Reddy report that increased availability of school resources had a larger effect on female reading scores across all levels of socio-economic status. They conclude by suggesting that girls may be able to take advantage of school resources more effectively than boys in the improvement of reading scores. In “Educational Returns beyond the Mean: Differences along wage distributions of man and women in India’s formal labor market,” Mohapatra and Luckert report that education has a differential effect at different wage distribution levels. The effect of primary education is significantly higher for females at the middle of the wage distribution level and above the median wage levels with respect to post-primary education.

The effect of education attainment and economic development is another common theme and is explored in two papers. In “Modeling the Macroeconomic Impact of Future Trajectories of Educational Development in Least Developed Countries” Basten and Cuaresma argue that today exposure to both primary and post primary education may be a greater influence on macroeconomic differences than primary education alone. In “Drop out from Primary to Secondary School in Mexico: a life course perspective” Gibbs and Heaton explore the explanations associated with drop out behavior. They find that among the most influential family factors, mother’s education has the highest impact on primary school drop outs and paternal unemployment has the highest impact among secondary school dropouts.

Lastly there are the issues of language of instruction. In their paper “The Dilemmas and Complexities of Implementing Language-in-Education Policies: Perspectives from urban and rural contexts in Uganda,” Altinyelken, Moorcroft and van Der Draai find that being taught in the mother tongue makes a considerable difference in the early pupil achievement, but that local language policies were ‘fiercely disputed’ by teachers, parents, and policy-makers at all levels who were deeply

concerned that local language policies would constrain children's transition to secondary education and beyond.

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