



Dear readers,

This issue of the *International Journal of Instruction* is genuinely international in its reach, including as it does 14 papers from eight countries – Australia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Iran, Nigeria Taiwan, Turkey, and the United States of America. Looking across the articles we can see a snapshot of many of the areas of interest in educational research today. Between them the authors explore questions to do with inclusion, classroom management, student engagement, the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) and employer expectations. Papers focus on innovations in pedagogy with research participants ranging from young students to student teachers, university students and teachers. Data collection methods include surveys, interviews and documents.

Inclusion and individual difference

Four papers address issues to do with inclusion and individual difference and how these are perceived and accommodated within regular classrooms/ schools. The paper by Mackey provides an indepth insight into the views and experiences of three middle school teachers working in the United States. The teachers' classrooms were identified as exemplifying the characteristics of inclusive settings. Across a rich data set that included interviews, observations, and document analyses Mackey identifies themes to do with planning and preparation, attitudes and expectations, and in-class support and instructional strategies as influecnes on practice. The paper by Meeks, Martinez and Pienta focuses on the impact of a specific reading program on young students with disabilities. Also working in the United States, Meeks and colleagues collected fluency data using the STAR reading assessment and student attitude and engagement data through teacher-researcher field notes. Overall, they concluded the program had a positive impact on all three aspects. In contrast, the paper by Bhatnaga draws on focus group and individual semi-structured interview data from secondary school teachers working in schools in Delhi. The interviews focused on teacher concerns and perceived barriers to the inclusion of students with disabilities. QRS NVivo was used for data analysis and three concerns and eleven barrier themes identified. The paper by Avci and Akinoğlu has a broader focus. Their study sought to understand how often teachers in Istanbul employ approaches that fall within the scope of differentiated instruction and what influenced teachers' choice of approach. Their results suggest teachers utilise practices that are familiar to them, build on their own knowledge and interests when planning, and prefer traditional assessment approaches.

The use and role of information and communication technologies

Information and communication technologies are playing an increasingly important role in our everyday lives and in education. In this issue Dietrich (a principal) and Balli (a researcher) have come together to discuss fifth-grade students' views about the role of technology in classroom learning. Their findings suggest students are engaged in classroom learning when using technology, particularly when they have control of the technology, but that overall task structure supports authentic engagement with lesson content more than does technology alone. The paper by Gomez describes and analyses the dynamics of the use and/or mastery of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) by educators and students in two universities in Brazil. Data came from a questionnaire that was answered by 174 students/ instructors/ coordinators from the Media in Education and Physics courses from two universities. Findings suggest that student mastery of VLEs is important. The paper provides insight into the challenges posed to educational policies aimed at expanding the public provision of higher education.

This issue contains two papers by Jalali and Panahzade and colleagues, which address the link between computer use and classroom management. The paper by Jalali and Panahzade examines English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' beliefs regarding classroom management in conjunction with an examination of the relationship between teacher demographic variables, computer attitudes, and classroom instructional and behavior management orientations. Data for were collected via two questionnaires of 105 respondents. Their results indicate participants' computer attitude, age, and teaching experience are not suitable predictors of behavioral and instructional management. The paper by Jalali, Panahzade and Firouzmand builds on the same study but with a focus on gender. Data analysis revealed that there were no significant relationships between attitude and behavior and instructional management across gender. Interestingly, they found that as male teachers experienced a greater tendency toward using computers their classes became more teacher-centered. In contrast, the more female teachers tended to use computers the more student-centered their classes became. Taken together these papers provide insight into the complexity of the issues around the role and use of ICTs in education.

Classroom management/ school effectiveness

Four of the papers in this issue have a focus on classroom management – the two by Jalali and Panahzade and colleagues (discussed above) and the paper by Uysal and colleagues. Uysal, Burçak, Tepetaş, Akman and Hacettep explored the perceptions of preschool and primary pre-service teachers from Turkey by means of metaphors. 163 participants from two state universities in Turkey responded to the question: “What does ‘classroom management’ seem to you?” and then explained why this was the case. Content analysis identified 10 categories associated with a wide range of metaphors (60 from preschool and 48 from primary pre-service teachers). Looking more broadly, the paper by Panigrahi investigates the differences between more-effective and less-effective schools in relation to physical facilities, school leadership, and teacher and student performance. More and less effective primary schools were surveyed and all school principals and two teachers from each school were followed up. The findings

concur with those from similar studies that indicate that there is no simple combination of factors that produces an effective school.

Studies in higher education

A number of papers in this issue investigate teaching and learning in higher education, reflecting increased interest in this space in recent years. Complementing the papers discussed earlier, Jones and St. Hilaire investigated the implementation of Bruner's "Concept Attainment Model" in the teaching of traditional just war theory to an undergraduate religious studies class in Nigeria. They provide evidence that in a religious studies or similar humanities course, the Concept Attainment Model can be successful when highly scaffolded by the instructor. Yamanaka and Wu describe the results of the use of Bloom's Taxonomy and various other strategic models to classify the objectives from courses administered through a Midwest teacher education institution in the United States. Their analysis indicated that though the objectives are suggestive of higher ordered skills course syllabi do not provide detailed information on expected outcomes. The third paper in this section, authored by Haghghi, is also based around document analysis; in this case a course textbook in use in an English institute in Iran. The course book was evaluated according to: design and organization, topics, skills and strategies, practical considerations and illustrations, and activities. Findings indicated that a majority of students and teachers had a positive view of the textbook and that it was reasonably successful in meeting the intended objectives. The final paper in this section is by Aman and Sitotaw, writing from Ethiopia. Their paper details the perceptions of summer cooperative graduates of their employers' preferences for different kinds of skills. One-way-ANOVA analysis of questionnaire responses showed statistically significant differences among respondents in terms of higher order thinking skills as a priority amongst employers. Aman and Sitotaw propose this indicated the need for a greater focus on these skills in tertiary curricula.

To conclude

Readers might like to reflect on the extent to which the papers in this issue, which are come from scholars from very different countries, explore similar themes. There are other ways than those presented here to look for synergies in across our respective research endeavours. We encourage you to read them with an eye for research approaches and findings. We recommend this set of papers to you as providing insight into key issues in education today.

Sincerely,

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