

EDITORIAL

There is currently a world-wide concern over the quality and relevance of education in schools and they are inevitably at the heart of contemporary debate on public education. The current global trends place emphasis on knowledge as the main capital for the development of the individual and the nation. The development of knowledge depends very much on creative, innovative and enterprising human capital. The role of teachers in developing a knowledge based society is of prime concern to the nation. The ability to think critically and creatively and to reason logically, among other skills, constitute the template for developing a nation that will be able to not just adopt or adapt borrowed knowledge but that which will be able to create and market its own knowledge. It is in this context that it is crucial for teachers to continuously improve the quality of their practice. Inquiry-based teaching grounded on empirical foundations have become a necessity in the 'new teacher education'.

The growing internationalization of teacher education continues to offer new pedagogies which emphasize a shift from behaviourist to cognitivist and constructivist theories of teaching and learning paying greater attention to functional rather than declarative knowledge. Most developing countries are at the crossroads. National development priorities keep emphasizing the need to nurture and develop human capital that will provide the necessary knowledge workers for the knowledge society and era driven by creativity and innovation. These pressures are leading to a search for new pedagogies. It is thus desirable to share experiences and good practices of developing countries which are trying to meet national considerations while also addressing emerging international trends in teacher education in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

The basic question that we seek to address in this inaugural issue the Journal of Research, Policy and Practice of Teachers and Teacher Education (JRPPTTE) is whether teacher education, particularly its curriculum (content, pedagogy and assessment), is actually delivering what it is supposed to deliver and if the epistemology of practice is congruent with the demands of changing philosophies and the host society's value system. There is an urgent need to share and inquire into experiences and best practices in teacher education for collective wisdom and continuing improvement of the quality of teacher education.

As much as the current focus on teaching and learning in schools and teacher education is on policies and practices, particularly pedagogies, which have originated in the Western context, there is certainly a pressing need to look at policies and practices in the East. Increasingly students from the school systems in East are performing better in many fields. Kerry Kennedy in his article addresses the issue of 'teacher quality in this context. His article involves three phases. Firstly it addresses the 'teacher quality' by locating it in the context of a policy discourse that originated in the West and which is often accepted uncritically in the East. He is of the view that the 'teacher quality' debate is politically constructed and therefore needs to be carefully evaluated. The second phase of his article examines 'teacher quality' in the context of East Asia. This involves the

comparison of Eastern and Western conceptions of 'teacher quality'. Finally he assesses of what it would take to come up with 10 million teachers by 2015 and to make this a high quality teacher workforce. Kerry Kennedy argues that all learning needs to be contextualized and that the preparation of teachers outside of their cultural context may not achieve the kind of student learning that policymakers are looking for. The article further emphasises the need for an integration of different kinds of learning, particularly in view of the fact that students have to live in a postmodern world. In this context, it is argued that an integrated or hybrid approach that draws from both the western and eastern conceptions of quality teaching may well be the great challenge of the twenty first century for our students and societies to serve their roles as learning communities in globalized societies.

In view of the emerging trends and challenges of globalization it has become necessary to view education and teacher education within the wider context of both the professional community and the society at large. The state and nature of these rapid changes requires teacher education to be more critical of existing assumptions and frameworks and be outward looking and geared towards enabling teachers to be engaged in continuous professional learning and self-improvement. Teacher education must also be sensitive to the changing values and social change in societies in which they are embedded so as to ensure that teachers and teaching remain relevant to the ever changing contexts. This involves the opening up of teacher education policies and practices to critical scrutiny and making teacher preparation issues accessible for change and use by others in the teaching fraternity. Gopinathan and Letchumy explore how Singapore's education policies and structure are responding to globalisation, particularly in relation to pedagogic change that has occurred in Singapore schools. Subsequently the authors addresses how enhanced teacher capacities are being developed to meet the challenge of pedagogic change. Within this context, the paper discusses the promise of Singapore's Teacher Education 21 (TE21) initiative and the implementation challenges that it faces.

Zhu Yiming and Fang Yanping discuss reform and change of teacher education in China in the new era. Starting with a brief overview of the history of teacher education development in China, they attempt to shed light on a few major positive characteristics in the reform and change in teacher education that has occurred in China over the past decade. These include the changing role of the central government, innovations in curriculum and instruction in pre-service teacher education and the strengthening of in-service teacher development. Challenges and issues faced by the reform and development of teacher education in China are discussed in the final part of the paper together with a brief discussion on directions for the future.

The demands of the knowledge era require teachers to be knowledge workers too. The teacher has to move from the routine employment of technical rationality to grounding practice in reflection (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1996). This concern is imperatively linked to the knowledge, intelligence and professional competence of teachers. Teachers have to function as reflective practitioners who engage in an interactive and intellectual discourse where curriculum is viewed as process and as what transpires between teacher, student and knowledge. It involves the collaborative construction of knowledge which will facilitate the learners to make the shift from declarative to functional knowledge.

In discussing teacher education in Japan, Eisuke Saito and Masatsugu Murase argue that pre-service education, particularly the curriculum at the Bachelor's degree level has shifted more to an approach that emphasizes reflective practices. They are of the view

that professional schools of teacher education, which have recently been established for the Master's degree level, are supposed to function as a practical course of education. However, they contend that it is still very unclear how they are different from the existing graduate schools of education. They further argue that although in the domain of in-service training in Japan, a teacher license renewal system had recently been introduced, but it does not seem to be meaningful because of its high cost. They argue that instead of the introduction of a license renewal system, it will be more efficient and effective for teachers to be united and involved in reforming themselves at every school level in order to create secure learning spaces and communities inside the schools.

Still on the subject of developing teachers as reflective practitioners, Bridget Somekh, Chang Lee Hoon and Noor Aini Ahmad focus on the more specific context of developing a Critical Reflection Profile (CRP) and guidelines which have recently been developed at Sultan Idris Education University in Malaysia UPSI being its acronym in the Malay Language), which is one of the major providers of teacher education in Malaysia. Over the last decade, Sultan Idris Education University has built up a vibrant tradition of action research in partnership with local schools in the State of Perak and Selangor in Malaysia. The current initiative builds upon this work. With the support of the vice chancellor, a group of professors and senior lecturers are working to embed critical reflection in all aspects of teacher education: pre-service and in-service courses for teachers and continuous professional development of lecturing faculty. In a country with considerable ethnic variety such as the Malays, Indian and Chinese communities, it is true that the introduction of critical reflection which is grounded in educational values requires inter-cultural sensitivity and open dialogue. The CRP has been developed as a mediating tool for this process of cultural change. The article presents the theoretical framework for critical reflection in eight dimensions upon which the new Guideline for Critical Reflection in Teaching and Learning were grounded; and explains the process envisaged for use of the CRP and its function in mediating the embedding the critical reflection in teacher education.

Tania Aspland's raises some serious challenges to teacher educators throughout the world as we are called on to reshape our business to better prepare teachers for the new age of learners for the real world. Her arguments are contextualized in the context of Australia and Asia. She argues that the standards movement and government intervention is also reshaping teacher education from the outside rather than from the inside – a reshaping of practices through coercion and myth rather than on empirical research findings. In order to address the crisis facing teacher education, the paper articulates a need to think differently about knowledge construction, curriculum design and implementation and the implications for teacher preparation. Further the focus on innovative pedagogies and learning engagement more closely aligned to new age learners, is argued as central to the reconstruction of teacher education programs away from a traditional focus on pre-determined content and regulated practices. This paper calls on the profession of teacher educators to differentiate on how we think about ourselves as knowledge workers for new times; to decide whether the current learning spaces of the academy are appropriate and whether our current role and positioning as academic lecturers is in need of reinvention. She further argues that as a matter of urgency teacher educators must rethink the ways in which they design curriculum programs for teacher preparation before they are replaced by larger forces. In short teacher educators are called upon to differentiate or die!

In relation to the standards movement, Pauline Swee Choo Goh views the introduction of the *Malaysian Teacher Standards* (MTS), introduced in the year 2009, as move to improve the standard of teacher competency, skills and values with a view to offering quality learning for students. She argues that although proponents of the standards have welcomed its introduction, MTS actually poses significant challenges for teacher educators as they set out to train new teachers to begin teaching in ways that are congruent to the standards. She claims that the new MTS represent the standards towards which teacher educators must now aim for. The Malaysian government hopes that by initiating standards by which teachers are to be appraised upon, will in turn effect changes in how they are prepared. However, she contends that less understood are the challenges it presents for the teaching institutions. Her article presents various challenges (and possibilities) for teacher educators.

In addition to the seven articles, this issue also offers a book review of Suseela Malakolunthu's book, *Teacher learning in Malaysia: Problems and possibilities of reform* by Santhiram Raman.

This issue has provided an initial platform for the sharing of ideas and experiences, pertaining to teacher education, from Malaysia, Singapore, China, Japan and Australia. It is hoped that this sharing will provide an impetus and opportunity for developing collective intelligence and collective wisdom for the continuous improvement of teacher education and learning in the knowledge era and beyond.

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