Ellis: Educational Innovations in Countries Around the World: Editorial Comments on the Contributions to a Symposium
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Educational Innovations in Countries Around the World: Editorial Comments on the Contributions to a Symposium

This thematic issue of *International Dialogues on Education: Past and Present,* is dedicated to the topic of educational innovation. The articles contained in these pages focus on innovations in various forms, from pedagogical, to administrative, to technological. The articles are based on presentations made presenters at the 10th Biennial *Symposium: Educational Innovations in Countries around the World,* held on the campus of Seattle Pacific University, June 24-27, 2019. The symposium featured presenters from 12 countries and three continents.

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Innovation is a broadly conceived topic, one that has captured the educational imagination for decades. The English term "innovation" comes from the Latin word *novus,* which means new or novel. Thus, an innovation is somehow different from what has gone before. It is tempting to think of new as "improved" or "better than old," but it is not always the case that the valence is positive. The shores of education are littered with such shipwrecks as The New Math, Learning Styles, and Competency-Based Education, to name a few. Each of these three were highly touted at the time of their inception, but none of them has made its way into the curriculum. This is not to say that they were without merit. Why innovations succeed and fail is never an easy thing to determine. On the other hand, Piagetian Programs, Classroom Discussion, and Teacher Efficacy appear to be innovations that show continued promise. But it is well to keep in mind that teaching and learning in school settings is always situational, and other considerations inevitable temper the value of even the most promising innovations.

In his seminal book, *Diffusion of Innovations,* Everett Rogers points to innovations that seem to work, but only if the contextual setting supports them. He provides the reader with the example of an outside team of experts who came to a remote Peruvian mountain village because the water system had become unpotable. The experts were able to identify the problem and to correct it. However, the villagers refused to use the "new" and "improved" well. This was because the experts had not consulted with the village shaman, whose inclusion was a necessary condition of village life. If this sounds quaint, consider the example of the "New Math," an education innovation arising in the USA in the post-Sputnik era of the early 1960s. The New Math, which was transformational in the sense that in place of rote memory work such as memorizing multiplication tables, students were taught symbolic logic, number bases (other than base 10), and modular arithmetic. As in the case of the well-water replacement done by outside experts in the Peruvian village, outside experts imposed a curriculum that parents and elementary school teachers did not understand. In other words, the innovation was imposed on them without their consultation., and even without proper training. This innovation quickly went away. Teachers abandoned the new textbooks and used copy machines to produce old-style arithmetic problems. Like the new well water, the new math was in fact quite good. But the acceptance rate at local levels was dismal.

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Educational innovations come in various forms: pedagogical, technological, and sociological, to name three such. Given the dense refractory nature of school culture, all three forms must be taken into account for an innovation to be sustainable. One question to ask of any educational innovation is that of the extent to which it actually improves teaching and learning. But even this involves a number of factors, including empirical evidence, cultural compatibility, and adaptability to different contexts. Two pedagogical examples come to mind as successful exemplars: cooperative learning and team teaching.

Cooperative learning, as premier developers/researchers David and Roger Johnson readily concede, is an old idea; most innovations are. But old ideas in new forms are often an effective way to innovate. Cooperative learning involves student-to-student interaction and teamwork, two qualities so sadly missing in many classrooms where so often, as John Goodlad has noted, "student come to school to learn alone in groups. The empirical evidence is there, both cognitive and affective. Documented claims regarding cooperative learning results include "improved academic achievement, improved behavior and attendance, increased self-confidence and motivation, and increased liking of school and classmates." (U.S. Office of Research and Consumer Guide, #1, 1992).

Team teaching is yet another example of an educational innovation that has achieved sustainability. Decades ago, David Anderson and John Goodlad at Harvard developed a model wherein teachers meet with each other to consider cooperatively the strategic elements of a lesson. In some cases, the teachers would actually team-teach a lesson to several classes of students who were assembled in a larger room. However, the crucial element appeared to be the cooperative sharing done by the teachers who in most cases taught lessons to their individual classes. Over time, focus has shifted to Japanese Lesson Study, a method in which teachers work together to plan a given lesson carefully, including instruction, coverage, and assessment. Such reflection and exchange of ideas by teachers creates community and structure to teaching and learning. Another variant is the more recent implementation in American schools of Professional Learning Communities in which teachers meet to discuss, plan, and assess the learning of their students.

These two examples are success stories in innovation. On the other hand, as the celebrated Spanish poet Antonio Machado once noted, "Out of every ten innovations attempted, all very splendid, nine will end up in silliness." Whatever happened to Whole Language, Learning Styles, Multiple Intelligences, Outcome-based Education, Self-Esteem, Open Schools, Values Clarification, to name but a few innovations of recent times? The answer is that they appeared and disappeared for one reason or another, most typically because of lack of empirical evidence and/or user satisfaction. I once attended a national conference in which a keynote speaker dramatically proclaimed Outcome-Based Education (OBE) to be the educational equivalent of penicillin. Penicillin is still around, but OBE is at best a distant memory. This is not to say that the innovations mentioned here as well as countless others were of no value. Like the New Math, they may have had their strong points. But they failed to pass the important tests of either or both improved academic achievement and social/cultural compatibility.

Cooperative Learning and Team Teaching (and its current incarnations in the forms of Lesson Study and Professional Learning Communities) are examples of innovations that are pedagogical in both an academic *and* social sense. They are remarkable in that they fit two categories of educational significance. They also have economic appeal since they bring with them little or no additional monetary costs.

Beyond academic and social issues are those of rapid developments in technology. Any number of educational innovations have come from sources not solely connected to schools. The personal computer and the internet are premier examples. These two technologies, taken together, have transformed access to information. This transformation is as basic as that which followed the invention of the printing press and moveable type some centuries ago. It is one thing for an institution to have one hand-copied

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version of a book It is yet another thing for millions of print copies of the same book available to a world-wide audience. A generation ago, a school library was the repository of knowledge with its sets of encyclopedias, books of fiction and nonfiction, even films. The school (and the local public library) were where you had to go. They were central places. But the computer and internet have decentralized access to information. More than one futurist has noted that not only have schools lost their centuries-old monopoly on teaching and learning, but that in many cases they are places where older teachers know less than younger students how to navigate the information highway. This is not to suggest that schools will go away. But it is to suggest that they will have to change what they do and how to do it in the coming years. Ask any school librarian what has happened to the school library in recent times. Many school libraries today look more like coffee houses or tea rooms where students meet socially and discuss what they are doing and learning, and less like places of eerie quietude with people silently reading or browsing the shelves. At the tables one sees more laptops and I Pads than books.

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13 contributions have been reviewed and selected for this issue of *International Dialogues on Education: Past and Present.* The authors present different articles, loosely connected one to another by the theme of educational innovation. The articles include carefully considered thoughts that range from pedagogics to policy.

In our lead article, **Heiko Schrader** investigates processes of change and continuity in post-Soviet Russia, with reference to his own research and observations regarding the "people's economy." A key finding is that of the world of trust in an "us" vs. "them" sense. Pointing to the continuity of a dualistic world in which governments have come and gone, he provides to the reader a window to changes (and lack of changes) in thought and behavior at the level of ordinary people, some of it significant, some of it superficial. His insights bring to mind the French proverb, "plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose."

Reinhard Golz, Olga Graumann, and David Whybra address significant changes over time with respect to the "humanization of education" that emerged in Russia in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They focus on issues of national identity, individuality, and, social responsibility. The authors point to the "urgent task" to provide individual and socially responsive learning in an integrated framework, one that limits overemphasis on national interests and other dehumanizing tendencies.

Margret Winzer and Kas Mazurek investigate the issues that lie at the intersection of diversity, disability, and inclusive schooling in the Canadian province of Alberta. They focus on what the authors contend is a "tendency to conflate disability with diversity as expressed by the UNESCO versions of inclusive schooling...." This tendency, they argue, has created a "sustained muddle of intent" in Alberta's schools.

Manfred Oberlechner explores the concept of fluidity in life-long learning processes. Harkening back to the progressive maxim of educating the "whole child" or person, he writes convincingly that ongoing developmental growth throughout a lifetime opens doors. He argues that sustained life-long learning offers new perspectives for pedagogy in such realms as the cultural, intellectual, creative, and practical. This possibility is, of course, greatly enhanced through access to new and emerging technologies that the progressives of John Dewey's time could only have dreamed of.

Günter Graumann's thoughtful premise is that each educational innovation should be questioned critically, particularly with regard to its potential to achieve progress in the humanization of education. He reminds the reader than innovation does not necessarily result in improvement. Two examples he cites are the New Math and the OECD-sponsored TIMMS and PISA studies. The resultant change from inputs to outputs, he thoughtfully suggests, is fraught with imminent peril.

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YaRu Zhou addresses the much-overlooked topic of *collective* teacher efficacy. Her writing includes an axis that extends from theoretical construct to empirical evidence. She carefully includes discussion of cross-cultural perspectives, especially since Western societies are often thought of as emphasizing individual effort and performance as opposed to Eastern societies where collective efforts are often more prized. She carefully defines/describes efficacy and provides related empirical findings regarding school-based achievement.

Ira Rasikawati explores the theory and research bases of corpus-based Data-Driven Learning (DDL) on second language acquisition by school students. She cites and synthesizes the empirical evidence in support of DDL in second language learning, particularly in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses in non-English speaking countries. She addresses the question of why DDL is not widely adopted in spite of efficacious research findings to support it.

Robin Henrikson summarizes the changing role of that uniquely American school officer and leader, the School District Superintendent. She addresses the dynamic between the School Superintendent and another slice of American, the School Board. Superintendents are selected. School Board Members are elected. But they have to work together. She argues for strategic levels of collaboration between Superintendent and School Board, foremost by clarifying their respective roles, duties, and obligations.

Marianna Richardson, Ryan Stenquist, and Jennifer Stenquist present an intriguing model of greatly expanded student engagement in university-level business courses and programs. In particular, they argue for practical, real-world experiences that connect to the realms of business management and communication. Tying theories to practice, they offer a case study in university coursework that makes theory-to-practice connections through a student-led peer-reviewed journal and podcast for business students.

Liz Ebersole links three pedagogical theories: self-efficacy, self-determination, and situated learning with the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards for educators and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge Framework (TPACK) framework. Her purpose in doing so is to explore the potential to inform preservice teacher education, both coursework and field experience. She raises the important question of context provided to student teachers by mentor teachers with respect to the use of technology in school settings.

Eric Howe's quasi-experimental study of the effects of metacognitive reflection on vocabulary development offers possibilities that such reflection is efficacious. He tested the effects of metacognitive reflection (MR) and teacher feedback on learning academic language, in this case in the arts. While the study shows promise, it is clear that continued research in this area is much needed.

AnnRené Joseph's experimental study, also in arts education, used creative dramatics activities as a means of increasing students' arts vocabularies. Her careful attention to random assignment of students and teachers as well as consistent monitoring of the intervention gives credence to her conclusion that the statistically significant achievement results favoring drama as a means of developing vocabulary is warranted. Of interest is her observation that federal law in the United States encourages and requires arts experiences in elementary school settings.

Finally, and of significance, is **Dietmar Waterkamp's** commemoration of Gotz Hillig (1938-2019), a German contributor to comparative education and an important researcher regarding the life and work of Anton Makarenko (1888-1939), a visionary Russian educator, social worker, and theorist who promoted democratic thought and practice in education.

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I wish to express my gratitude to the authors of these studies in educational innovation. The scale of their work ranges from the classroom to the central administration in school settings, and beyond to

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state, provincial, and national levels. I also wish to thank Reinhard Golz, Editor-in-Chief of *International Dialogues on Education: Past and Present,* for providing me with this opportunity to serve as Editor-in-Chief of this special issue.

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