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IJED volume 103 summary of articles independently submitted and for the special issue on ‘educational warriors’

With 52 manuscripts, volume 103 may be the largest in IJED’s history. The size results from having a large selection of manuscripts independently submitted along with 30 products from special issues.[1] Some manuscripts in volume 103 include those from the debates over the medium of instruction, the characteristics of faith-based education and assessing the SDGs at the midpoint, whose summaries will appear in the next volume. We begin here with summaries from the other two special issues.

1. Recommencing school-based learning

The editors of Recommencing School-Based Learning have included a summary essay in Volume 103 titled: *“Recovering Educational Losses Post-Pandemic: What’s Next?”*. *Husaina Banu Kenayathulla and Miri Yemeni* summarize the issue and end with a recommendation of importance. After noting that students have suffered not only in academic achievement but that they have adversely affected emotionally from the isolation of year or two of school closing. They conclude that.

It is not appropriate for education systems to pretend that nothing happened and that students are just returning from a regular holiday break. …students should be assessed to identify the areas that they lack competence so that remedial classes can be targeted to help these students. Further, students need to be screened for mental health issues so that they can receive immediate help, rather than allowing their mental health to worsen further in the post covid era…There needs to be emergency budgetary allocations to settle this issue.

2. The perspectives of ‘educational warriors’

Influenced by programs of international assistance, the field of education and development is about 75 years old. New questions are being raised about its future (Burnett, 2019). Changes in philosophy, strategies of implementation, digital mechanisms of delivery and assessment, and objectives are changing. A few individuals have been active participants in the education and development effort from the beginning. Some have passed. Many have retired. The request for the perspective from those who remain offers an opportunity for them to reflect on what they have done and learned.

Why pay attention to their perspective? In the book *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, Richard Rohr provides one reason:

The first half of life naivete includes a kind of excitement and happiness that is hard to let go of, unless you know that there is an even deeper and tested kind of happiness out ahead of you. But you do not know that in the early years, which is why those in the second half of life must tell you about it. Without elders, a society perishes socially and spiritually (Rohr, 2011, p.112).

Every contributor to this special issue on educational warriors, is an ‘elder’. Each has been required to meet three criteria: (i) *40 or more years of professional experience; (ii) experience in multiple organizations, countries, and types of responsibility; and (iii) willingness to address shortcomings, mistakes, even failures as well as successes and significant positive changes.* Priority is placed on the quality of reflection rather than the magnitude of accomplishment. Each contributor was asked to provide a summary of what they experienced and how they have moved from one responsibility to another. Each was asked to include information on significant frustrations but also the results of which they are most proud. Each was asked if they had an opportunity to live life again, would they have chosen a different professional path? Each was asked for advice for those coming into the field today. Would they advise junior colleagues to remain in the field? And lastly, in their opinion, what are the most significant unsolved problems and whose responsibility is it to solve those problems?

Over the last several decades there has been a policy shift concerning international achievement testing. In 1933, an argument broke out at the International Bureau of Education (IBE) between Jean Piaget and M. Dottrens. Piaget said: It is extremely difficult to establish a table of comparable statistics,” (Smyth, 1996, p. 4). Piaget had a point. At that time there was no common definition of what education meant, on how schooling differs from learning ad hoc, or on how to distinguish between education levels. The meaning of vocational education and general education varied both between and within countries. There were 115 different ways to define literacy and 133 different ways to classify education attainment (Smyth, 2005, p. 15; Heyneman and Lee, 2014). In the late 1970′s UNESCO was still opposed to international achievement testing even though the International Organization for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), an NGO, was busy designing and responding to requests from more than two dozen countries (Heyneman and Lee, 2014). However, the shift from total prohibition of international testing to an abundance of international tesing was rapid.

[1] Special issue manuscripts are published online as they are received. Once all manuscripts from a special issue are received they are then linked to constitute the final digital publication. Summaries of special issues on the medium of instruction, faith-based education, and SDGs at the midpoint will appear in a later volume. Summaries of school-based learning and education warriors appear here in Volume 103.

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Between 1960 and 1989 there were 43 international surveys of academic achievement. Between 2000 and 2009 there were 152 international surveys, 47 regional surveys and 325 local and national surveys of academic achievement. By 2013 one third of the countries in the Europe and Central Asia region, half the countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa; 60% of the countries in East Asia and the Pacific and 74% of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were participating in international surveys of academic achievement (Kamens, 2013). What happened?

Many might suggest that the demand for participation was because of the influence of international organizations, or certain OECD countries such as the United States. Few remember however, that the United States was reluctant to participate on the grounds that the technical demands and financial costs were too high as were the political and reputational risks.[2] What changed, and why?

The first essay in the special issue on educational warriors is written by *Larry Suter* and titled: *"Personal Memories of the Development of the United States Participation of Large-Scale International Assessment Surveys*." His is an inside view for over many decades working first at the director of international studies in the National Center for Educational Statistics and then with the National Science Foundation, he helped organizations design and use of international education data sets. He was influential in establishing the Board on International Comparative Studies in Education (BICSE) of the National Academy of Sciences which helped put into place the international protocols which guide participation and reporting of the international studies to the present. His personal lessons and caveats are worth noting:

> "A statistical report of size and relationships can never fully answer posed questions about the causal systems for achievement…The founding members of the IEA had planned to introduce empirical measures of educational outcomes to all countries as a scientific means of studying educational practices associated with differences in student achievement. Most recognized at the time that measurement of international differences would be a complex measurement problem even assumed by some to be impossible. Future researchers should approach the study of national differences with similar humility, candor and hope."

The second essay is written by a 'scholar-doer', someone who began as a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan and received training at Stanford University which prepared her for the multiple roles and functions. Her manuscript is titled: "*Women and Education and Development: The Experience of a Female 'Scholar-Doer'*. Author *Marlaine Lockheed* describes the struggle to advance as a female in a largely (at that time) male-dominated environment. Her experience includes her functions as a division chief in the Middle East and North Africa Region of the World Bank where she pioneered the applications of large-scale data collection of the kind described by Larry Suter. The effect of her work in fact has allowed many countries to look at themselves empirically for the first time. Her final lessons are that the status of women, globally, has improved; that success of education programs is now measured in learning; that a better balance in work-life is now, post Pandemic, possible. She too, has caveats. She argues that economic theories remain policy drivers in education, and often displace or disregard evidence provided by education research. She cautions those just starting out to not count on research evidence to drive policy; policy, she says, has a way of being driven by popular theory with the evidence selectively chosen to support it.

The third essay is titled: *"Human Capacity for Long Run Thinking," authored by Jo Ritzen.* Ritzen has been a faculty member at the University of California (Berkeley) two Dutch universities and the University of Wisconsin (Madison). He also served in the Dutch Planning Agency, as Minister of Education in the Netherlands, as Vice President for Human Resources at the World Bank, as President of the University of Maastricht, as chair of a school district and of the Conflict and Education Learning Laboratory. At a time when the focus of the international community was on the macroeconomic collapse of the former Soviet Union and the dangers from nuclear and environmental effects, as Minister of Education of the Netherlands, he took the lead in inviting the ministers of education and finance from the 15 new republics of the former Soviet Union to the Netherlands to discuss the future of their education systems. It was at that meeting that the reform agenda was launched (Heyneman, 2016, 2020). Like others today, Ritzen also points out that the insights from political economy are less advanced and that we understand little of the engineering for long run policies or for the social cohesion which generates support for such policies. It is the short-term self-interest of political forces which dominate. In his view, this requires an essential role for education.

The fourth essay is titled: *"Failing at Agriculture but Finding Education: Reflections on Planning, Fate, and Flexibility in a Career,"* authored by *Luis Crouch.* Luis Crouch is retired from his position as senior economist the International Development Group at the Research Triangle Institute (RTI). Prior to that, he served as a Team Leader in the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and as the Lead Education economist at the World Bank. His areas of expertise include the generation of the consensus needed to make difficult choices and the implementation of new demanding changes.

Luis Crouch speaks directly to younger professionals and offers four pieces of advice. The first is to be open to changes forced by fate. If one is curious and open-minded, forced changes can feel less like an imposition and more like an opportunity. Second, choose carefully among careers in academia, large development organizations and NGOs, each of which offers critical learning opportunities. Third: if you want to be a warrior, fight noble battles, not for fun or glory, but only for causes of importance. He also offers instructions on the choice of whether to be a 'guerilla' (by acting alone) or part of an 'army' (by creating a crowd). And fourth, he points out that in most cases one will not be implementing anything; that the advice given to local government officials should not be based on intellectual fad or bureaucratic mandate but on mutual trust.

Claudio de Moura Castro has titled his essay as being the "*Multiple Incarnations of a Curious Researcher."* Multiple incarnations, however, may be an understatement. Castro's lifelong passion has been tools — woodworking tools, electronic tools, metal working tools. He is fascinated by them. He moved from one endeavor to another on the basis not of planning but what appears to have been serendipity. From Yale to Harvard to Berkeley to Vanderbilt. From wood to metal to electronics to management, to economics and to education. He was the third Brazilian to earn a doctorate in economics. He began as a researcher in a government think tank. He then managed an eight-nation regional academic achievement testing in Latin America for the Getulio Vargas Foundation, world's first. He then moved to become the director of the Brazilian agency in charge of all masters and doctoral scholarships. He then led the social policy unit at the Ministry of Planning. From there he directed vocational training at the International Labor Organization. From there, he became an education economist for the World Bank, then he became the chief education advisor for the InterAmerican Development Bank. He then returned to Brazil and founded a private university and joined a large and profitable education company and has rescued a failing medical school. Being a 'specialist,' he says, 'is boring'.

Castro's experience is remarkable for several reasons. He discusses with candor the clash between the logical empiricism of his training and the cultural adherence to ideologies in Latin America which viewed his orientation as being 'enemy science'. He contrasts the complexities of his

[2] An early international study sponsored by the IEA resulted in a very poor showing of 'the United States'. The study had been managed by academics who had insufficient access to acquiring nationally representative samples. Results were published anyway. This did not sit well with members of Congress who instructed the Director of the National Center for Educational Statistics to not let it happen again. It didn't.

experience with the views of those commenting from outside 'who define the World Bank as 'being this or that'. He says, that they miss the point that the Bank has many voices which often disagree. He says that multilateral banks are not banks but are more like credit unions whose members are governments. He provides the reader with numerous stories of the tension between his orientation and the organizations in which he worked. "I defined for myself', he says, 'to impose some discipline and preach quality… social justice and charity are misplaced…meritocracy should reign.' Is Castro satisfied with what he has done? In short, the answer is yes. At age 84 he is working on some additional 'interesting projects'.

Joao Batista Arujo Oliveira could also be categorized as having multiple incarnations. He started teaching as a teenager. He did his doctoral work at Florida State University and became a teacher, a professor, and a consultant. He ended up his first Brazilian period with the position of vice-minister for education in charge of de-bureaucratization. From there he became a senior education economist for the International Labor Organization, then a senior economist at the World Bank. After returning to Brazil, he became interested in the problem of illiteracy and in 2003 started Alfa e Beto, now a nation-wide organization which helps teach primary school children to read and teachers to teach literacy more effectively.

Titled: *The Education of International Educators: A Personal View"* Oliveira's essay traces these stages and offers the readers insights on what he learned. Among them are his views of the differing 'cultures' within each of the different international organizations. About the Bank he observes the creativity of its conditionality which led to visible and lasting results, not only in macroeconomic policies but in sector policies. Among the most successful was to promote equity by supporting women's participation. The valuable lesson of the Bank was to emphasize the importance of associating financial resources with convictions based on knowledge, science, and evidence, a good – but rare—example, supported by higher level policy changes that made the projects work. About ILO, which did not have the investment resources of the Bank, he described the unique way of using the tripartite basis of conducting sensitive discussions where employees, governments and employers all had equal seats at the table which promoted decent work, social justice, and fundamental worker's rights. About OECD he observes the importance of having discussions attended by well-prepared and well-informed peers. All problems and issues were common problems and issues, conversations take place on an equal footing characterized by mutual respect. A lasting impression from Oliveira's essay is the attribution he makes to his training at Tulane, Florida State and Stanford which had what he calls a 'profound impact' for the rest of his professional life.

Many contributors to this special issue formed their careers associated with domestic and international government agencies. But others have made their mark in the private sector, as entrepreneurs with a purpose. One is *Quentin Thompson.* Like many, he began as a teacher, then a policy analyst and eventually as a policy advisor for the English Prime Minister. There he was behind several well-known pieces of English education legislation. He then became a partner at Coopers and Lybrand where he developed a product of advice focused on the improvement of institutions and systems of higher education. Eventually he undertook over 150 higher education projects in 60 universities and over 50 countries. His essay is titled: "*Trials and Tribulations of a Life in Education Consultancy and Advice."*

Thompson's essay consists of experiences at Coopers and Lybrand. One of his messages concerns the difference in dynamics between working for an international organization and working for a client (who is paying you). Another concerns the complexities of the 'stakeholders', the fact that the 'government' or the 'ministry' have multiple functions and a divergence of interests. Being successful requires one to be able to simultaneously read and manage all the pieces. There is also a difference between clients who have the resources to finance their own project and others who may borrow the project resources from an international agency. Consultants too differ. Academic consultants may pay more attention to data to publish whereas non-academic consultants may pay more attention to solving problems. Thompson has probably been more responsible for major education changes than anyone else, but he concludes with the thought that he has not obsessed about having a 'career'. I would, he says, 'check myself from time to time to see whether I was enjoying what I was doing, and if not, then look around for jobs and opportunities that were more interesting and fun, which also, for me, meant that they needed to be 'important' in a way which was socially useful. I would urge new graduates to take this approach for a better and more rewarding life.

James Tooley currently is the vice Chancellor of the University of Buckingham. But he is widely known not for being a university administrator but as an advocate for low-cost non-government schooling for the world's poor. Tooley has won prizes from the International Finance Corporation, The Financial Times Private Sector Development Competition, the Templeton Prize for Free Market Solutions to Poverty. One of his books won the Sir Anthony Fischer Memorial Prize.[3] His essay is titled: *"A Life in Low-Cost Private Education,"* and it follows his professional trajectory from his doctorate in philosophy, his being 'weaned' off Marxism and his accidental discovery on January 26, 2000, that there were numerous non-government schools in Hyderabad, India attended by the poor which the government did not know were there. He then launches into a mission to see if what he discovered in Hyderabad was common elsewhere. He then finds similar schools in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, India, and China. He becomes a crusader for paying attention to the many forms of private schools attended by the poor. To many in the academic community he was guilty of blasphemy. He questioned the monopolistic role of government in providing universal education. Tooley leaves the younger readers with several pieces of advice. He made the mistake of simultaneously starting a new chain of schools before making certain the first was properly operating. His advice is 'to focus'. He also suggests that younger entrants to the world of education and development should 'shake off' the desire to be liked by others. If one thinks what is doing is right, follow your instinct and though rejection will frequently come, and try to have a 'thick skin'. In other words, do not be a follower of the crowd and the way the crowd thinks. And lastly, acknowledge those who have helped. While the battle lines are still very sensitive on the issue of private schools for the poor, it is nevertheless true that private schools attended by the poor are a widespread reality. This requires us to understand why that is the case and what public policies are appropriate (Heyneman and Stern, 2014).

Manzoor Ahmed is currently a professor (emeritus) at BRAC University. He is also chair of Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network, Vice Chair of the Council for Popular Education (CAMPE). He helped to establish the BRAC University Institute of Educational Development. For Twenty years he served in senior positions in UNICEF including the senior education advisor in New York and country director in China, Ethiopia, and Japan. With Philip Coombs he developed concepts of non-formal education,[4] and has helped to plan for the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 and the launch of the global EFA movement. His essay is titled: *Education in Perennial Crisis: Have We Been Asking the Right Questions?* He begins with a question we have all been asking ourselves: If a crisis continues for six decades, is it still a crisis? Perhaps inherent characteristics of the education system have been misrepresented. The talk of persistent crisis arises from a mismatch of unrealistic expectations and the system's capacity to adequately deliver within the larger political context.

Ahmed makes several suggestions. First he points to the 'economistic fallacy' of aggregated categories, the summarizing issues in human

[3] Tooley, J. (2013) *The Beautiful Tree: A Personal Journey into How the World's Poorest Are Educating Themselves.* Washington DC: Cato Institute

[4] Coombs, P. and Ahmed, M. (1974) *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Non-Formal Education Can Help.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

capital terms, the linking of quantum allocations to changes in a nation's GDP, the neglect of the specifics of how education sectors are run, and the diversity of their proper management. He also raises questions as to the uses of the 'gold standard' of randomized Control Trials (RCTs) which may lead to precise answer to trivial questions. He challenges linking 'innovation' with evidence-based policy which can 'leap-frog' steps in educational progress. He challenges the likelihood that education aid can be sufficient to reach international targets and offers examples of local finance from low-income countries can be play a more realistic source. He focuses on the issue of teaching ethics and values in school. And lastly, he offers the possibility of using a Nobel-like prize in education as an incentive to highlight not only the research needed by the pragmatic solutions to management which are needed. He ends by suggesting that the 'political nature of the education failure has to be recognized, unpacked and dissected.'.

Karen Mundy is a Professor of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Toronto. Her career has included contributions to UNESCO and the Global Partnership for Education. She is widely known for her analyses of the staffing and decision-making in the World Bank and other major international development organizations. Her essay is titled: *"Living and Learning in the Field of International and Comparative Education"* and concentrates on lessons in the field derived from her scholarly life, her life within international development organizations, and her private or personal life.

She divides these three aspects into what she calls 'cantos' (borrowed from poetry referring to sections of a long poem, derived from the Italian word for song or singing). Her first canto traces her introduction to international development and to the field of Comparative Education which was swept along 'as much by random opportunities as intention.' She also comments on the nature of the differences between the field as she found it 40 years ago and today, a shift from feeling that 'radical alternatives at the society level were not just needed but were available, which in turn could engage technocrats and positivists.' Today, as she puts it, the decline of democratic governance and rise of populisms, the geo-political and economic instability and war; the climate crisis, the challenges of migration and demographic shifts, the fourth revolution and artificial intelligence' — education is expected to respond to all of them.

Her second canto includes observations on the nature of foreign education assistance and the changing mandates for international organizations which include a declining emphasis on planning system-wide approaches. Her third canto includes her family life, the strong hostile work climate against women in research universities, the antiquated health insurance to support spouses in UNESCO and by comparison, the warmth of home within Canadian institutions. She suggests that except for Canada, 'there is no script for the role of the caregiver, which is highly gendered and within which the collision of professional career and commitments to family play out so intensely.' In the end, she seems quite right to conclude that the 'study of international organizations, and the study of them, really matter'... particularly given the existential crises humanity now faces.

Birger Fredriksen worked for the World Bank for 20 years, 18 of them focused on Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) culminating as being Director for Human Development for Africa. Before that, he worked at UNESCO for ten years and for two years at the Center for Educational Research and Innovation at OECD. For three years before that he led the Division of International Economics at the Norwegian Institute of Foreign Affairs. And before that he taught at the University of Oslo. His origin is well north of the Artic Circle. He grew up a fisherman in a community without electricity or access to a road. He had to travel by boat 7 h to the closest secondary school. His essay is titled: "*One hundred years of International Cooperation in Education: Some Takeaways from My 55 Years of Involvement.*"

Birger Fredriksen has been working for universal primary education (UPE) since 1971. In his essay he concludes that 'even prior to COVID-19 it was clear that most SSA countries will not reach the 2030 target of UPE.' His contribution contains a careful explanation as to why, what happened, where are the shortcomings, and why were there so many catastrophic miscalculations. One concerns the allocation of domestic resources where military spending exceeds spending on both education and health, and where countries spend more on subsidizing university student living costs than in total on primary education. He points out that while education budgets may have increased by one percent/year, the population was growing at 2.7%/year, making the collapse of quality inevitable. His final lessons about his professional life deserve attention. While progress has been disappointing, he says, I do not regret my many years of work to promote progress. I am happy to have been part of my generation's efforts and hope the next generation will turn past lessons on why progress has been so challenging into stronger and more effective actions.

Among the essays in the special issue on educational warriors, is one by myself, titled: *"Comparative and International Education in My Experience: 1970–2022."* Originally given as an address to the Chinese Taipei Comparative Education Society, it tries to summarize the 'campaigns' for education in which I have been engaged during the 22 years in the World Bank and 15 years at Vanderbilt University.[5] With the World Bank these 'campaigns' were required as part of the competition for resources where academic theory was less important than the ability to affect those who make public policy whose decisions provide tangible and immediate benefits for students and school systems. With the university, my campaigns could range more liberally, including issues of education corruption, faith-based schools, and the role of education to affect good citizenship. The essay concludes by noting areas I believe are unfinished: The role of the recipient countries in adequately financing their own education, the need for an adjustment in the 'aid architecture', the question of the role of universities in an autocracy, the conundrum of over-population in SSA, and the issue of private tutoring and non-government schools for the poor. References to the literature publicly available are provided in an annex to illustrate the nature of each 'campaign'. Less public documents are available in the special collections at Vanderbilt University.

3. Individual manuscripts

Gender Gaps. Four manuscripts focus on issues of gender. While it is true that female attendance, completion, achievement have made great advances, gender remains a significant influence. In a paper titled: *"Children and Adolescents Educational Gender Gaps Across the Life Course in Sub-Saharan Africa: On the Role of Lack of Empowerment as a Barrier for Girls' Educational Performance," Marcos Delprato* finds that gender gaps continue to be a significant barrier caused by the weak 'agency' of women.

In a paper titled: *"A Glass Ceiling at the Playhouse? Gender Gaps in Public and Private Preschool Enrollment in India,"* authors *Arindam Nandi, Soham Sahoo, Nicole Haberland and Thoai Ngo* find that girls were 18.6% less likely to be enrolled in private preschool than their brothers.

And in a paper titled: *"The More Male Classmates, the Worse: How Male Peers Harm Academic Performance of a Student," Yehui Lao* discovers that students with a high portion of male classmates have lower performance in Mathematics and English but not Chinese.

Sweden is often used as an example of an efficient and successful education system. However, between 2011 and 2013 Sweden inaugurated a new grading system and increased the number of student assessments and eligibility requirements for higher education. A decade later, what have been the results? In the paper titled: "*Have Performance-Based Educational Reforms Increased Adolescent School Pressure in Sweden? A Synthetic Control Approach," Matthew Cashman, Mattias Strandh and Bjorn* Hogberg find that the changes led to increased school pressure

[5] I left out the years working for the federal Office of Child Development and in the private sector for reasons of brevity but hope to return to them later.

which has fallen disproportionally on girls, and increasing the gender gap in school performance.

Flawed Implementation. Several manuscripts point to the long-standing problem of weak systems of implementation. In his essay on the South Asia Region, titled: *"Schooling without Learning is a Terrible Waste of Precious Resources and Human Potential" John Richards* looks at the evidence and concludes that an improvement in GDP/capita is not strongly associated with school completion but rather with literacy, implying that in South Asia, students complete school without learning how to read.

Beginning in the 1980′s, attention to examinations was justified on the grounds that incentive for doing well on examinations was strong for both teachers and students, and that modernization of examination design was feasible (Heyneman, 1987). However, the results have proven to be more complicated than originally thought, In the paper titled: *"Examination Reform for Higher Order Thinking: A Case Study of Assessment-Driven Reform in Uganda," T J Agostino* finds that examination reform focusing on higher order thinking skills is complex and politically fraught and characterized by limitations of implementation capacity.

Lastly though in a different context, *Gavin Tucker* finds that regardless of how carefully designed, a code of practice cannot be implemented. In the paper titled*: "Special Educational Needs and Youth Justice: How Effective is the Code of Practice at Supporting the Resettlement Population? A Conceptual Review*" the author finds that the code of practice designed to assist young people 'transitioning through resettlement' from prison was simply too complicated and ambitious.

Successful Results Not all manuscripts report problematic results. In the paper titled: *"Promotion of Community School Interaction Through Performance and Budget Hearings, Social Contracts and Community Scorecards,"* authors *Kanykey Jailobaeva et. al.* report significant effects on performance once budgets were made transparent.

Access to textbooks have long been discussed as being essential ingredients for academic performance (Heyneman and Jamison, 1980; Heyneman et al., 1981; Heyneman, Jamison and Montenegro, 1984). This continues to be the case. In the paper titled: *"Improving Reading Abilities, Attitudes and Practices: A Home-Based Intervention of Supplementary Texts for Young Readers in Cambodia*," authors *Michael Crawford, David Rutkowski and Leslie Rutkowski* find that a combination of story books and reading support improved reading outcomes, reading confidence, reading frequency, duration, and proficiency.

In the paper titled: " *Revisiting the Wage Effects of Vocational Education and Training (VET) Over Life Cycle: The Case of Thailand," Saiwooth Wongmonta* discovers that except for university graduates in engineering and the sciences, vocational school graduates have higher lifetime earnings over those with a general education background.

The results of previous studies on ability tracking have raised concerns as to its adverse effects on student motivation and academic confidence. However, in a study titled: "*Association between Ability Tracking and Student's Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes: Empirical Evidence from Junior High Schools in Rural China," Shriyam Gupta et. al.* find that ability tracking had no significant effect either on student academic or student non-academic performance. In fact, ability tracking was found to reduce math anxiety in high ability students.

It is commonly found that there is a gap in demand for preschool education between wealthy and poor families. However, in the paper titled: *"The Impact of Social Class on Out-of-School Activities: Converging Trends in Parental Choices?"* authors *M. Nutsa Kobakhidze and Ying Ma* discover that in Hong Kong regardless of socio-economic status, parents are remarkably similar in their demands for preschool for their children.

During the pandemic many students struggled to keep up; students whose language was different from the language of instruction found it particularly difficult. However in one program, students with non-native language kept up rather well because of receiving well-designed support. In the article titled: "*Teacher Support of Non-Native Language Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Cross-National Comparison*," authors *Holmes Finch, Maria Finch and Brook Avery* discovered that when support to non-native language parents was provided, non-native language students perceived that they were better supported by their teachers.

While it was the case that universities in the former Soviet Union were largely prohibited from entrepreneurial innovations, in the paper titled: "*Entrepreneurial University: Exploring Its Essence, Phases of Development and Operating Mechanism During Wartime in Ukraine*," authors *Alla Starostina et. al.* find that current necessity has been a key influence on university entrepreneurship today.

Lastly, in terms of school leadership, in the paper titled: *" Controlled Autonomy: Experiences of Principals Under Two School Funding Regimes in Kazakhstan*," author *Rita Kasa* discovers that school leaders felt more freedom in deciding how to operate their school better under the per-capita funding regime as opposed to the historical line-item funding. This represents progress.

Reiterations of Expected Tendencies In some cases it is important to be reminded of trends and effects. In the paper titled "*The Persistent Effect of Conflict on Educational Outcomes: Evidence from Ethiopia," Samuel Weldeegzie* finds what one would expect, that armed conflict has exacerbated school dropouts, the probability of grade repetition, and lowered school achievement in language and mathematics.

When parents move away to seek employment, school achievement suffers. In the paper titled: *"Parental Absence and Student Academic Performance in Cross-National Perspective: Heterogeneous Forms of Family Separation and the Buffering Possibilities of Grandparents," Ran Liu and Emily Hannum* point out that in households with co-resident grandparents or extended family co-residence, disadvantages of an absent parent are attenuated.

The demand of families for private schools is widely acknowledged. However, in a paper titled: *"Does Private Tuition Crowd Out Private Schooling? Evidence from India," Sayoree Gooptu and Vivekananda Mukherjee* find that preference for private schooling pertains only up to a specific price point.

The importance of 'demographics' (home and family conditions) is widely acknowledged to have a strong influence, but can that influence be overcome with digital equality? In the paper titled: *"The Opportunity to Learn During COVID-19 Pandemic: Social Inequalities and the Digital Divide in Brazil," Sara Vitral Rezende* finds that demographics have a more constant relationship to learning than access to technology.

Similarly, is the issue of criminality: is it influenced more by a lack of 'agency' (poor choices) or demographic circumstances? In the paper titled: *"Inequality or Opportunity in Juvenile Crime and Education," Alejandro Bayas and Nicolas Grau* find that demographic circumstances vary between 39% and 46% when explaining crime but only 26–34% when explaining secondary school completion, suggesting that the norm of school attendance is more able to overcome the tendency to make bad choices.

The closing of schools during the pandemic required teachers and students to rapidly transition to digital instruction. How did they do? In the manuscript titled: "*Lessons from the Pandemic: Teacher Educators' Use of Digital Technologies and Pedagogies in Vietnam Before, During and After the Covid-19 Lockdown," Jane O′Connor et. al.* find a significant range of results with some teachers doing rather well while others were deeply uncomfortable with the technologies. They recommend that school systems should: develop e-learning policies, make improvements in IT infrastructure, and increase professional training.

Lastly, is an historical lesson. In the paper title*d: "Education in Albania Under the Italian Occupation (1941–1943)," Valbona Nathanaili* describes what happened in education under colonialism. The first initiative was to promote the idea that colonialism was beneficial to the poor. The second initiative was to infuse fascist ideology throughout the system. When colonialism was withdrawn, the education system had to be retrofitted and cleaned of these influences. To those who experienced the withdrawal of colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa, East and South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and the Former Soviet Union, the description of 'retrofitting' in Albania may sound familiar.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Stephen P. Heyneman

International Education Policy Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

E-mail address: s.heyneman@Vanderbilt.Edu.