



IJED Volume 94 article summaries

Of the eleven articles in Volume 94, seven concentrate on a single dependent variable: academic achievement. Many elements of education deserve scrutiny, but none seem more prescient in the prediction of employment, behavioral and attitudinal outcomes than exploring how much of the curriculum children have learned.

In the paper titled: "Why do Girls do Better? Unpacking South Africa's Gender Gap in PIRLS and TIMSS", Heleen Hofmeyr explores the common finding that girls typically outperform boys. She discovers that the gender gap is due primarily to the fact that girls proceed more rapidly through the early grades and complete them with more certainty. Girls also seem to enjoy reading more.

Much controversy has accompanied the installation of new teaching methods. One such method is known as Learner-Centered Pedagogy (LCP). Educators suggest this pedagogical style is superior and applicable globally. Is it?

In their paper titled: "The Outcomes of Learner Centered Pedagogy: A Systematic Review," authors Nicholas Bremner, Nozomi Sakata and Leanne Cameron explore whether the claims of Learner-Centered Pedagogy are substantiated by the evidence. Their review covers 62 journal articles. They find few studies provided objective evidence of LCP effectiveness. However, some studies provided non-objective evidence (student motivation, confidence, and enhanced relationships) of LCP effectiveness.

All know that achievement is associated with student social background. But is that association constant over time? Is it possible that in some periods, the association is stronger than at other periods? This interesting question was addressed in an article titled: "Trends in the Academic Achievement Gap Between High and Low Social Class Children: The Case of Brazil." Authors Martin Carnoy, Leonardo Rosa and Alexandre Simoes Gomes Jr. studied the trends in the SES/achievement gap between 2007 and 2017. They find that the gap had increased over the ten-year time, but that all of the increase was before 2013, mostly between 2011 and 2013. With respect to 9th graders, they find that the gap hardly increased at all and where it did, the increase occurred during the earlier years.

It is common to suggest that student academic achievement in Sub-Saharan Africa tends to be lower when compared to other regions. But to what is that attributable? In his article titled: "Teaching Too Little to Too Many: Teaching Loads and Class Size in Secondary Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa," Paul Bennell attributes the problem to the lack of limits placed on the numbers of students in a classroom and the lower portion of time which teachers are expected to be in a class teaching.

Some of us might remember when the availability of academic achievement information on a national level was both scarce and controversial. Objections from many prominent educators and

international organizations representing professional education interests were opposed to achievement testing on grounds that it overly simplified the educational endeavor (Heyneman and Lykins, 2008). Gradually the objections changed (Heyneman and Lee, 2012). Today, the objections concern the number and variety of national achievement tests, or their interpretation and ramifications, rather than their existence (Heyneman and Lee, 2014).

But what are the circumstances under which a nation decides to design and publicly display the academic achievement of its school children? It might be suggested that the circumstances differ by country. One paper in Volume 94 delves into the details of how and why one national test was designed and administered. In the paper titled: "We Went in Favor of Rebellion: The Decisions that Made India's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)," Melissa Rae Goodnight explains the political background. She suggests that it was through the work of 'grassroots' educational programs linked to national policy-making goals which can help explain the innovations in design and programming of the ASER. She concludes that examining the history of monitoring and evaluation efforts clarifies data validity and usefulness in attaining national goals of equity and quality.

Many arguments in favor of investment in preschool concern the probability of later effects on academic achievement. Is this claim borne out by the evidence? In the six years between 2010 and 2016 the Ethiopian enrollment rate in preschool increased by a factor of ten. What has been the result? In the paper titled: "Preschool Participation and Student Learning Outcomes in Preprimary School: Evidence from National Reform of Pre-Primary Education in Ethiopia," Janice Heejin Kim finds that literacy outcomes were positive and that the results may have been a result of the reform itself. On the other hand, the positive effects were not able to eliminate associations with gender, urbanity, and parental literacy. Those associations remain, in spite of the increase in preschool participation.

Every parent of school-age children understands that a school's informal character can make a significant difference in whether a child likes school and performs well. One of the terms often used to codify this 'informal character' is a school's 'climate'. But does school climate affect learning? This is the question approached by Julia Sbroglio Rizzotto and Marco Tulio Aniceto Franca in their paper titled: "Indiscipline: The School Climate of Brazilian Schools and the Impact on Student Performance." They discover that a negative school climate is detrimental to student performance. They specify the fact that the disciplinary climate in reading classes is one of the strongest predictors of academic performance.

School climate is not limited to school classrooms. School climate may affect a child's experience on the playgrounds and the journey back

and forth from home. What happens if that journey is fraught with danger? What happens when a child's school experience includes the worry of verbal or physical attack on the way to school or on the way home?

In the article titled: "Mapping the Unsafe School Journey: Rural Primary Schoolchildren's Perspectives on Dangerous Social Geographies in South Africa," Ndumiso Daluxolo Ngidi and Zaynab Essack pioneer an innovative method of assessing the damage from the anxiety and fear associated with the journey to and from school. They ask children to map their routes and identify specific areas on their maps which pose a threat. This 'participatory mapping' method allows them to not only assess the degree of threats but their location and causes. The authors suggest that this mapping exercise allows us to better understand the significance of space and place on routes to and from school. It might also offer us a means to intervene and reduce those threats.

The cultures of China and East Asia generally are known to emphasize schooling so much that students often attend two systems of school systems: public and shadow education schools. Political discussions have emphasized the adverse consequences of a childhood dominated by schooling overload. At one stage, South Korea took steps to outlaw private tutoring. Many countries have placed time limits on tutoring operations, subsidized access to private tutoring for students from low-income families, and initiated other social policies to help reduce the adverse effects of over-concentration on exam preparation.

China has initiated a national equalization policy called 'Ten Regulations to Reduce Academic Burden for Primary School Students'. The intention of this policy is to lower the level of both on-line and in-person private tutoring as part of a 'double reduction' strategy.

What has been the result? Can regulations making access to private tutoring more difficult overcome the parental demand for a competitive advantage on national examinations? In the article titled: "Government Policies and Unintended Consequences: Rising Demand for Private Supplementary Tutoring in China," authors Wei Lu, Sen Zhou, and Yi Wei find that the first-grade participation in private tutoring actually doubled following the introduction of the 'Ten Regulations' policy. They also suggest that the increase in private tutoring tends to be in the larger cities, with students with college education parents and in locations where after school childcare is less available.

With respect to the effect of schooling on social attitudes and to the role of religion, is it true that more schooling tends to reduce the opinion that governments should be run by religious authorities? This is the question posed in the paper titled: "The Secularizing Effect of Education in Indonesia." Javad Estiyagh finds that the level of education attainment increased the tendency toward the approval of secularization. In addition, the author concludes that people who live in extremely

religious or non-religious environments, are more likely to change their opinions on secularization with additional educational attainment.

Lastly, we come to higher education. It is a common aspiration to have faculty who are productive with respect to teaching and research. Despite the aspiration however, it is not so easy to predict which faculty will be more productive. What influence does endogamy (marriage within one's local community) or immobility (lack of experience outside the local community) influence the productivity of future scholars? This is the question raised by Elizabeth Balbachevsky (former director of CAPES) in Brazil. She finds that information about how mobile an academic is before and during the career is relevant in predicting academic productivity and that international experience is relevant to predicting the likelihood of publishing.

Summary and implications

From volume 94, one might conclude that the gender/achievement gap, at least in South Africa, may be due to the quicker rate in which females pass through the lower grades. The innovative work on the SES/achievement gap in Brazil should remind us that while such gaps remain present, they are not uniform in size or constancy over time. Because physical safety is a major handicap to girls' education, the innovative methods of 'participatory mapping' of the school route should be of considerable use in the future. We are also reminded that local education cultures are strong. These cultures may resist efforts to lower family competitiveness in seeking exam advantages for their children or incorporate imported pedagogies.

References

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