



## Teaching in complex settings: issues of diversity and support

This issue includes seven papers from different parts of the world which address, in one way or another, key dimensions of teaching in a multicultural and complex reality. The papers focus upon issues of learning about and dealing with diversity, organisational and collegial support, conditions for teacher leadership, autonomy support and student engagement.

In the first paper, ‘Determinants of classroom engagement: A prospective test based on self-determination Theory’, Juan L. Núñez and Jaime León, from Spain, report on a validation of a classroom engagement measure to the Spanish context, investigating the effect of students’ perception of support for learner autonomy provided by their teachers. Data were collected from 448 undergraduate students by using a longitudinal design. The results indicated adequate psychometric properties for the engagement scale. The authors concluded that autonomy support was a significant predictor of the autonomy, which, in turn, led to likely changes in four types of classroom engagement. Emotional engagement displayed the strongest relationship with students’ need for autonomy. In addition, the need for autonomy mediated the relationship between perceived autonomy support and each indicator of student engagement. Núñez and León’s interpret their findings as supporting self-determination theory’s motivation mediation model that perceived autonomy support longitudinally predicts student engagement because it nurtured changes in autonomy.

Issues of quality support for beginning teachers is the focus of the second paper by Laura Thomas, Melissa Tuytens, Nienke Moolenaar, Geert Devos, Geert Kelchtermans, and Ruben Vanderlinde, from Belgium. In their paper ‘Teachers’ first year in the profession: The power of high quality support’ the authors used a social network perspective to examine characteristics (i.e., network size, frequency and perceived usefulness) of professional, emotional, and social collegial support networks. They also explored the extent to which these characteristics explain key factors affecting teacher retention, namely job satisfaction, intrinsic motivation to teach, and self-efficacy. Data were collected through an online survey with 292 beginning primary school teachers. Findings indicated that, on average, they receive professional, emotional and social support from six colleagues each week. The authors also found that network size and perceived usefulness of professional, emotional, and social collegial support networks were positively related to job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation to teach, reinforcing the importance of collegial support in teacher induction.

In the third paper ‘Understanding the relationship between work intensification and burnout in secondary teachers’, David F. Lawrence, Natasha M. Loi, and Boyd W. Gudex, from Australia, investigated teachers’ experiences of work intensification and wellbeing. They looked at the relationship between work intensification, satisfaction

with workload, perceived organisational support, and burnout. Data were gathered through a survey of 215 Australian teachers. Findings showed that teachers experienced work intensification, emotional exhaustion, and dissatisfaction and satisfaction with different aspects of their job. In line with other studies internationally, results indicated that non-teaching-related workload (e.g. meetings; communicating with parents, management, and colleagues; supervising playgrounds, detentions, student clubs, and organisations; preparing for and staffing school dances, trivia nights, fetes, and overnight camps; etc.) was a stronger predictor of burnout than teaching-related-workload. The authors also found that perceived organisational support moderated the relationship between work intensification and the emotional exhaustion component of burnout.

The fourth paper 'Promoting the development of 'backbone teachers through university-school collaborative research: The case of new basic education (NBE) reform in China', by Xiao Han and Yuhua Bu, investigates the role of 'backbone teachers' and on their leading and modeling roles in school-based groups of teachers focusing on research, lesson planning, and grade development. Within the context of China's New Basic Education (NBE) reform called for teachers' to shift their roles from transferring knowledge to students to constructing knowledge with students, and from teacher-as-curriculum-implementer to teacher-as-curriculum-maker and knowledge constructor. In this scenario, 'backbone teachers' play a key role in change. In this paper the authors elaborate on how NBE nurtures 'backbone teachers' so they can 'model as leaders' and lead other teachers 'as backbones' in the reform. The authors describe the origins of the backbone teacher concept and focus on why the NBE reform project emphasises the cultivation of these teachers in systematic school change. They also discuss the conditions to support and sustain backbone teachers' growth and argue for the importance of trust and collegiality between backbone teachers and their colleagues in order to foster the growth of professional learning communities.

The fifth paper 'Roles, practices and contexts for acting as agents of social justice—student teachers' perspectives', by Natasa Pantic, Mary Taiwo, and Amanda Martindale, from the UK, reports on a study aimed at examining how students in two teacher education programmes perceived their roles, practices and contexts in acting as agents of social justice. Data were collected through mixed methods including a survey ( $n = 299$ ) and scenario-based interviews ( $n = 9$ ) to explore how student teachers think about social justice issues in context. The authors found that student teachers generally saw agency for social justice as part of their role. They concluded that, although their students' understanding of the ways in which issues of social justice could be addressed focused on classroom practices, the extent to which they were able to do so depended on others in the system.

The sixth paper 'Teachers' professional identity in super-diverse school settings: teachers as agents of intercultural education', by Christiana Karousiou, Christina Hajisoteriou, and Panayiotis Angelides, from Cyprus, focuses on the ways in which teachers experience, negotiate, struggle, contest and enact the educational policy on intercultural education in their work settings. The study also examines what shapes and influences teachers' identities in 'super-diverse' school settings. In total, 20 interviews were carried out with teachers from 10 primary schools which represented diverse profiles of their student populations. Findings suggest that contextual and professional factors such as work intensification, lack of training and resources, lack of respect and

negligence of teachers' previous experiences, ideologies, values and beliefs affected teachers' sense of identity and consequently intercultural policy enactment. The authors argue that teachers are not technical implementers of externally imposed agendas, but professionals and creative policy actors who mediate policy in context. They suggest a need to invest time and energy in supporting teachers and in providing them with the opportunity to make choices and decisions regarding their work, creating spaces to exercise agency, including adequate resources and relevant training in order to increase their satisfaction, commitment, autonomy and confidence.

The final paper, 'Seeking a reflexive space for teaching to and about diversity: Emergent properties of enablement and constraint for teacher educators' by Mary Ryan, Terri Bourke, Jo Lunn Brownlee, Leonie Rowan, Sue Walker, and Peter Churchward, from Australia, reports on a pilot study of twelve teacher educators' experiences by using reflexivity theory and a social lab methodology. The authors examined teacher educators' understandings of diversity—and how these understandings shaped their teacher education practices—through social labs, surveys and case studies. Findings showed that the participants were more constrained than enabled in their reflexivity for teaching to and about diversity, citing Issues such as lack of time and a sense of little control over highly regulated programmes.. Although the participants experienced enabling discourses for theorising their own beliefs or standpoints, they also demonstrated narrow understandings of diversity, relying heavily on their past experiences to prepare pre-service teachers for diversity in future classrooms. The authors discuss the implications of their findings for teacher education, arguing that teacher educators need to form deep and enduring inquiry relationships with schools and communities in order to develop context-specific solutions to address the complexities of teaching to diversity.

Overall, the papers included in this issue point to the importance of organisational and collegial support in order to address the challenges of teaching in diverse and multicultural school settings, and to the relevance of supporting teachers' roles and practices. The rise of a performance culture through increased accountability and imposition of standards (Sachs, 2016), the decline in teacher autonomy and an environment of distrust (Sachs & Mockler, 2012), and issues of increased diversity of student populations and school contexts, owing to migration and multiculturalism (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018) continue to be the subject of extensive discussion in the international literature. It is, therefore, possible to identify the presence of a restricted view of teacher professionalism related to the 'technicisation' of teaching which entails an outcome-led orientation to teaching and the fragmentation of teachers' work. At the same time, a more interactive and collaborative professionalism has been advocated, highlighting teachers' sense of agency and the moral purposes in improving the quality of education provided for pupils and young people (Hargreaves & O' Connor, 2017). As such, the consideration of the dynamic of teachers' interactions, their beliefs and professional values is key to fully understanding how they navigate and respond to the challenging and sometimes contradictory nature of their work (Ben-Peretz & Flores, 2018). Paying attention to the complexities of contexts of teaching and the dynamic influence of combination of structures, cultures and supports on teachers' sense of agency and efficacy and their willingness to engage in change (Day, 2017) deserves further consideration in future research.

## References

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