

Editorial

Education is purported to play a crucial role not only in creating opportunities and aspirations, but also for its capacity to shape these opportunities across generations. Educational inequalities in terms of access and attainment have far reaching consequences on transitions in the labour market and for the life course more generally. For those on the margins, these inequalities are compounded over generations. This is especially so when rather than fulfilling their transformative potential, educational institutions, through certain practices, concretise inequalities. In contemporary contexts, inequalities can no longer be adequately examined and resolved through the conventional binaries of inclusion and exclusion. This dichotomous framing overlooks the complex and constitutive role that inclusion plays in sustaining forms of exclusion. Afterall, exclusion is not merely the result of institutional neglect or lack of access; instead, it can be actively and procedurally produced through inclusionary processes themselves. This is particularly evident in the seemingly neoliberal inclusionary frameworks of contemporary times, which are organized around notions of “merit”, choice, and quality.

In light of this, the impact of neoliberal policies on education has been a global concern. Questions of neoliberalism call for an unpacking of the nature of the state, which is constitutive of an inherent contradiction between its two sides – if on the one hand, it forges its relationship with its citizens through rights, then on the other hand, it is deeply invested in ordering and governing its populations. Neoliberalism then may be understood as an intensification of this tension wherein the domain of rights increasingly collapses into the ordering tendencies of the state. Moreover, it is also important to resist the strong temptation to treat neoliberalism as a total explanation, and to continue to engage with it critically and contextually. While there is much written and debated about neoliberalism, there are several questions that persist: How has neoliberalism shaped expectations and practices in educational institutions, directly and indirectly? How has it affected linkages between policies and work involving educational professionals in everyday life over time? How do these effects in turn affect our understandings of neoliberalism? While neoliberal policies and practices can shape how we experience education, local communities and markets may respond to these pressures in unexpected ways with differing forms of acceptance, adjustment, survival and resistance.

To understand the complex ways in which educational institutions, the state, and an individual's identity intersect and influence life chances, requires an approach that brings together varied methodologies, disciplinary perspectives and lived experiences for a comprehensive understanding. This issue of *Comparative Education Studies* brings together a rich collection of research that pushes these questions further. The papers cover a range of intellectual frameworks, methodological approaches, and datasets across different scales that can provide some answers while offering new points of departure for a holistic understanding of education as an experience, and as an institutional process, with a transformative potential for those located at the socio-economic and political margins.

In his paper, Edward Vickers addresses the contradictions of educational research. Vickers argues that contemporary universities and research institutions are entangled in the economic logic of learning and matrix-driven performativity. Drawing on cases from England, Japan and India, along with a focus on China, in the context of a neoliberalism push, Vickers demonstrates the linkages between the technocratic imagination of education, the convenience of depoliticization, and policy that espouses maximisation of efficiency and accountability. He reminds us to revisit the basics of comparative educational scholarship rooted in humanistic and critical inquiry to restore the ethics of education.

Ruchi Sharma, in her article, draws attention to the coaching industry that has grown in the shadow of Engineering education. In her ethnographic work with a coaching hub in Delhi during the Covid-19 pandemic, Sharma underlines the connections between the coaching industry, aspirations, and educational choices; and the strategic adaptive behaviours of small coaching centres.

Aiswarya Thykkandi's article traces the migration corridor between West Bengal and Kerala. Based on research with families that are currently settled in Kerala, the author analyses their mobility, their connections to the village, their working conditions, and schooling. Education decision-making by people on the move opens up issues such as migrant childhoods, institutional support, bilingual programmes and education-driven class mobility. The paper demonstrates that while education is not central to initial familial migration, it figures prominently once families find a foothold, even though education is placed at the margins of welfare programmes and labour reforms.

This issue of *CES* includes four commentary pieces. Ekta Singla discusses the spaces within and outside classrooms where students learn and interact, and draws our attention to studying the “silences” within these spaces, which are marked by intersecting identities. Mridula Muralidharan examines the role of shadow teachers in the arena of inclusive schools. She discusses how inclusion, especially of students with disabilities, is sustained through care-based, informal labour that often remains invisible within schools. The author highlights the extension of shadow teachers’ work which goes beyond classroom-based pedagogic responsibilities. Abhijit Bardapurkar’s commentary argues for re-orienting the focus of philosophy of science to truth. He contends that science education needs to respond to the slippage of mis-information and easy, social media led, production of scientific fact, as was witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The piece calls for accuracy, honesty and patience in the endeavours of teaching and learning of science and locates the responsibility of good scientific practice in the categorical, not conditional commitment to truth. In the final commentary, Radhika Iyengar et al. examine the connections between education and just transitions towards a sustainable economy. Located in their engagement with a grassroots organisation in Bhopal, the authors highlight the contradictions between an increase in enrolment of women and their lower participation in the labour force. They advocate for a rethinking and reordering of women’s work by highlighting the need for better access to formal education and secure working conditions.

In addition to these articles and commentaries, this issue includes three book reviews on themes of contemporary relevance. Together, this issue draws our attention to the significance of a comparative and critical approach to the study of education and its potential.

Jyoti Dalal, Shivali Tukdeo, & Divya Vaid

(Executive Editors)