

Editorial

The question of what education is, and what it ought to be, remains one of the most enduring and pressing questions that engages scholars across disciplines. While education continues to be valued as a social and moral ideal, educational scholarship has also acknowledged how its meaning and essence have been compromised by the mounting pressures of the market, which privileges certification, examination scores, and employability. Scholars have examined how the difference between education for the market and education for the social world has increasingly collapsed, as the former has acquired the legitimacy of what is today widely known as “education for real life.” This reorientation in educational goals and ideals has not only ironed out the fissures and fractures that constitute the social world, but has also detached education from the social context to which it ought to respond. This transformation is closely tied to the ascendancy of the institutional form of education, making formal institutional spaces the primary sites through which education is organised, experienced, and imagined in contemporary societies.

This institutional avatar of education is becoming increasingly pervasive, popular and dominant. As education was transformed to be a public and state-run enterprise primarily in the 19th century, educational institutions became significant places of struggles of inclusion, participation and justice. By the 20th century, access to educational institutions and performance of institutions became indicators of development and democratic participation. While much of the contemporary imagination of education is bound to institutional norms and practices, how would one imagine education outside of formal institutional domains? Or occupying the middle-space for that matter? What would the nature of these interstitial spaces be? We know that the claims of knowledge production, teaching and learning have existed in extra institutional spaces; but how can these claims be made legible amidst the current emphasis on certification, measurements, and performance? More importantly, how has this emphasis reshaped education, rendering it as largely instrumental and techno-managerial in nature and distancing it from the larger goals of social justice, democracy, and transformation?

For education to retain its essential character, it must ensure a degree of permeability between the formal institutional spaces and the ones that exist outside of it, recognising that the boundaries between the two are often drawn in the name of efficiency, accountability and measurable outcomes. The institutional and the extra-institutional are thus not discrete domains but are interconnected sites that mutually shape and give meaning to what constitutes education. Paying attention to this dynamic relationship between these sites will allow education to remain faithful to its inherent value which lies in affirming democracy, transformation, self-awareness, and growth. However, institutional education is increasingly distancing itself from these spaces, reshaping the meaning of education in narrower and instrumental terms.

It is precisely these tensions—between the institutional and the extra-institutional, or in other words, education reduced to its narrow techno-managerial form and education as a social and political project—that underpin the contributions in this issue.

The present issue of *Comparative Education Studies* has four research articles, three commentaries and two book reviews. Collectively, these contributions are attending to the shape that education assumes both within its institutions and beyond them, while also reflecting on the ways contemporary educational practices are distancing themselves from the larger social goal of transformation and social justice.

Teacher education comes to the fore with Pratyay Malakar's contribution, which explores the site of the Diploma in Elementary Education (D.El.Ed.) programme. The article examines how the programme shapes pre-service teachers' understanding of fairness, participation, dissent, and citizenship by looking at lectures, practicum, peer learning, and institutional culture. By weaving these insights with the narratives of the graduates of the programme, the study reveals that these graduates understand democracy primarily in terms of participation, rather than as critique. What this indicates about teacher education that has always valued democracy and dissent as foundational to the education of pre-service teachers is a question that needs to be further explored.

Jayashree Doley's article poses a simple yet provocative question: how is an "educated tribal" still understood to be an exception, or worse, an oxymoron. Foregrounding the need to understand

Indian academic worlds through tribal voices, she highlights the experiences of Mising students in institutions of higher education in Assam. At times narratives open up the familiar territory of aspirations, mobility, and responsibility. The students point out being perpetually different from the rest and shouldering the burden of carrying one's community's identity all the time. The pressure to not abandon the community, yet carry on individual enhancement, often takes a toll and is integral to shaping the contemporary educated tribal identity.

Themhorchan Shadang's article on schooling among conflict in Manipur, using a phenomenological approach, analyses 10 interviews with students from different ethnic groups, all of whom did their schooling in Imphal, and to a varying extent experienced disrupted schooling due to conflict. Shadang brings out the nuances of student experiences. These range from the struggles to keep up with schooling work, to the difficulty of maintaining the required conceptual understanding that schooling entails as well as the poignant loss of the experiences schooling is expected to provide, to issues of socio-emotional insecurity, and the reliance on alternative learning strategies, especially private tuitions. All of these together underline the need to develop a more grounded understanding of these experiences and the strategies that are needed to overcome the loss of learning due to conflict, especially in school settings.

Even though scholarship has long affirmed the need for textbooks to reflect the social and cultural milieu of children—especially at the primary level, when children transition to the formal institutional world of school—textbooks continue to remain opaque to the world children inhabit. By examining textbooks through content analysis, two pieces in this issue of *CES* bring to the fore this important institutional side of education. The research article by Shalini Moolechalil looks at Malayalam textbooks in Kerala, while Satish Bhalerao in his commentary takes the site of Marathi textbooks in Maharashtra. Both these pieces, in different ways, demonstrate how curriculum choices in language textbooks are often guided by being culturally and politically “safe,” rather than by children's lived realities or broader educational ideals.

In the backdrop of critical pedagogy, Shalini Moolechalil examines the disconnect between primary school textbooks and the life of children. Through a close reading of Malayalam-language textbooks, her article demonstrates how cultural nostalgia and idyllic natural settings appear

dominant in them while having little connection to the lived experiences of the children. Moolechalil argues that these representations function as politically “safe” curricular choices within Kerala’s long-standing struggle between the vision of secular, progressive education and the demand for culturally rooted, tradition-based learning. By looking at the textbooks from two curriculum revisions over the last two decades, this article locates the shifts in the content of the textbooks within the larger political tensions in the state. Unfortunately, these shifts are not informed by children’s lived realities or pedagogic concerns, but by broader ideological struggles arising from changes in the ruling government of the state.

With the commentary of Satish Bhalerao, we get an examination of Marathi language textbooks prescribed for secondary schools in Maharashtra. Drawing on the framework of multiculturalism, through an in-depth content analysis, the commentary argues that these textbooks lack not only diverse literary voices but also perpetuate stereotypes through limited and marginal representations. They demonstrate a dominance of Hindu religious narratives, while underrepresenting minorities, particularly Muslims, Christians, and Adivasis. The conflicts and contradictions related to these minorities are papered over in favour of adopting a “safe” stance, which consequently eschews not just critical thinking but also runs counter to the democratic, inclusive spirit that education needs to attend to.

Ritika Srivastava’s review of the film *Beyond the Blackboard* (2011), based on the memoir of a teacher, Stacey Bess connects the film’s storyline and content to the theories of teacher development. Bess began working with “deviant” children who were homeless, had been exposed to crime, violence and substance abuse, and were admitted to school so that they could be off the streets. What qualities and resources are needed to work in a challenging and under-resourced school? Initially overwhelmed by poverty, Bess develops her teaching practice through reflection, adaptation and engaging with children’s families. The review highlights the importance of reflective practice, experience, and commitment in teaching.

An interesting commentary by Saraswathy Vaidyanathan explores the site of teaching of intellectual property law from her own experience of being a former student and a faculty member. The article examines the structural reasons that have rendered the teaching of this important paper

outdated in Indian law schools. It argues that its pedagogy remains impervious both to the significant shifts that the field has undergone as well as to the changing reality of students; leaving the subject entrenched in bureaucratic inertia and hollow theory-practice divide. By taking the site of legal education, the article demonstrates the structural inertia that is part of the broader pedagogical crisis across the Global South, where practice is strictly siloed from substantive theory. With this, the commentary also offers valuable insights on pedagogical experiments to overcome these challenges.

Case studies such as this, which examine the singular experience of a teacher in different disciplines are important in informing the discipline of education. They not only bring forth the challenges confronting the education system, but also locate the wider theoretical debates in the experience of the practitioners. After all, the challenges facing legal education are not unique to the discipline; they are part of the larger structural changes that education itself is going through.

Taken together, these contributions attend to the multiple forms that education takes in the formal institutional spaces and beyond them, by exploring the questions of democracy, inclusion, justice, and pedagogy, among others. They remind us that the enduring significance of education lies in attending to the contradictions, fissures and fractures of our world, rather than in turning away from it.

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(Executive Editors)