

Editorial

Culture, Freedom, Oppression, and Better Educational Opportunities

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Occasionally an issue of the Journal of Educational Thought is more diverse than usual, and for one of the most diverse journals, that is unusual. This issue of JET spans a remarkable range of topics though each in its way relates to our broader understanding of culture, both widely and educationally.

In the first article in this issue, Erica Amery and her colleagues look at the relationships between graduate supervisors and their students, especially in the event that there are obvious cultural differences between them. This topic certainly hits home in my own case as my recent successful doctoral students have been from indigenous Canadians from nearby reserves, from China, Nigeria, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan as well as from other Canadians from widely different cultural backgrounds. Certainly, any advice as to what might be difficult personal or social issues or approaches to scholarship would have been helpful.

In the second article, Derek Cameron writes on one of the would be panaceas to educational improvement in our time, the idea of a professional learning community. These have been attempted to be implemented in many school districts across Canada and the United States and have been assumed to be a big improvement. However, as Cameron's research shows, there is little understanding of the point of these professional learning communities on the part of the incorporated teachers. Nor in his findings was there much support actually provided so that the teachers felt they were part of such an entity. And perhaps most telling of all, the teachers he surveyed felt that while a great deal of time ought to have been spent on communal discussions surrounding actual student learning, none or very little was ever provided.

An increasing phenomenon in post-secondary institutions is that of student suicide. It has always been present, of course. For

example, in the early years of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, a university situated across the river from the provincial parliament buildings which could be easily crossed to by a high-level traffic bridge, every Christmas there was the usual student suicide by jumping from the bridge to the ice and water a few hundred feet below. Usually, the student had failed their Christmas exams and was the first in their family or from their small farming community to have attended a university. Clearly, an article like that of Manssoory that tells the reader the present state of play in the mental health area relating to suicides in the post-secondary sector and makes useful recommendations for the mitigation of the phenomenon is welcome.

Hassani tackles a rather more philosophical topic in his paper, namely, that of trying to begin a dialogue between a dominant twentieth-century Brazilian thinker, Paulo Freire (whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was a central topic of discussion since its publication in Portuguese in 1968 and in English in 1970) and a thirteenth-century mystic poet Rumi. Both opposed the dominant educational systems of their day which each saw as oppressive and unfair. The educational system of Brazil left out many and indoctrinated the rest. The educational system of Islam in the Middle Ages created an intellectual and emotional straight jacket for its students, a straight jacked that Rumi wished to replace with intellectual and emotional freedom. Hassani would unite Freire and Rumi into a whole that opposes external oppression as well as internal oppression, freeing the individual to succeed as a human.

Perhaps most subtle of all, but equally devastating to the learner besides lack of adequate cultural awareness, bad transformational tactics, lack of understanding of mental stresses faced by students, or the oppressive nature of both external and internal constraints is that of micro-aggression from one student to another in many educational settings: slurs, culturally pointed jokes, subtle cruelty, non-inclusion and the like. Again, this has its roots in lack of cultural awareness and appreciation, in lack of understanding of the other, of the pain that one's fellows may suffer daily, and in a failure to care. Martinez-Becerra hopes his article will help lead to the removal of systematic discriminatory practices in the many contexts of schooling.

It is my hope that the reader of this issue will not only be informed about a number of topics that may have been vaguely on their conscious periphery but will also perhaps inspire them to useful action for the betterment of schools and society.

Ian Winchester
Editor