



Comparing Equity and Quality Education in the Asia Pacific

Brian D. Denman and Meeri Hellstén

Contents

Comparing Equity and Quality Education	2
Theory to Practice	8
Discussion	11
Knowledge and “Quality” in Quality Education	13
Institutional Resets	15
Conclusion	18
References	20

Abstract

Multilateral interventions, based on evidence from large-scale surveys, tend to promote the idea that quality and equity can be combined and that globalization enables a more universalized, standardized approach to achieving this. However, in countries where educational supply fails to meet demand, there continues to be a polarization between policies for educational equity and those promoting individualized rights to a quality education.

The justification of this book chapter reflects paradigmatic approaches to equity and quality in comparative literature to ascertain positional frames of reference in order to improve the way in which equity and quality might be viewed and acted upon. The first literature review consists of comparative education articles that incorporate both equity and quality as descriptors in English-medium texts. The second review consists of chapters in this section not only to help summarize each, respectively, but to analyze them using a modified version of McTaggart and Kemmis’ practice architectures in order to highlight the psychological and sociological dimensions from outsider/insider perspectives. The aim is to provide direction in terms of the complexity between equity and quality education on the one hand and the identification of new trends

B. D. Denman (✉) · M. Hellstén
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden
e-mail: brian.denman@edu.su.se; bdenman@une.edu.au; meeri.hellsten@edu.su.se

from various approaches and lenses on the other. This book chapter reviews the assumption that perspectives of equity and quality education can be informed by the visualization of evidence and the comparability of contexts through textual, documentary analysis.

Keywords

Equity education · Quality education · Practice architectures · Asia Pacific

Comparing Equity and Quality Education

Comparing educational equity and quality across cultures and nation-states is about as cumbersome as finding two needles in a haystack. Firstly, there is no common definition of what education is, and we have only partial knowledge of what and how students are taught and of what sociocultural factors one might need to consider for drawing comparisons. Secondly, we are compelled to consider how the education system has developed historically, including equitable models that have been followed and borrowed and how and why reforms have been undertaken in the first place. While nation-state may be often seen as the principal organizer of political, economic, and sociocultural life, utilizing education as a driving force for the public good, conceptions of a nation-state “identity” are still highly contestable. They may not necessarily reflect a national education system that is identifiable, let alone accessible, for *all* of its citizens. Adding educational equity and quality into the mix, whereby each child – regardless of background – receives an education designed for the underlying purpose to develop and foster his/her academic and social potential, many countries may fail to identify ambiguous inequities, including inequities between those willing and able to receive an education and others. Educational access and opportunity may be considered cornerstones as to how equity could be measured (e.g., using large-scale surveys), but when combined with quality education, participation rates tend to fall short in missing the mark. Variables such as “types” of education offered, improper learning environments and/or lack of resources, and support structures for “at-risk” students are often not addressed. Those who are, for whatever reason, silenced, not in the “system,” or misrepresented (e.g., migrants) also sit in the periphery and offer pause to understanding educational gaps when it comes to equity. Educational need suggests that on a conceptual level, education could be considered the great equalizer for ensuring a quality standard of living, but how nation-states approach a more equitable educational system often rests in historical context, timing, and a bit of luck. These dichotomies also reflect spheres of influence from a social (nation-state; community) and a psychological perspective (individual choice; individual motivation). Compounding this is questioning the what in education. For many nation-states, there is concern with ameliorating educational illiteracy in adult education at one extreme and low performance in student achievement with school-based children on the other. Nation-state directives treating education are also

often dependent on leadership prerogatives and, at times, kept to a minimal cost (in an attempt to appease taxpayers as key stakeholders). The individual on the other hand – whether as educator or identified as one who is being educated – relies on the educational system to be both equitable and just. The underlying assumptions that equity in education is one that can be public, free, and for the common good presume that an equitable education frees any child from prejudice (depending upon context). As educators, we know that the monitoring of key indicators is necessary to improving equity and quality education but that contextual issues may need to be identified to better differentiate between what can be controlled, modified, and transformed.

In this introductory chapter, we use a comparative approach designed to help in addressing challenges arising out of broader, more generic areas of the field of education. Using Paulston’s conceptual map of perspectivism, constructivism, and rationalisms (1997), it may be possible to tease out key paradigmatic approaches in the literature to better understand contextual stances and approaches when exploring equity and quality in education. In Fig. 1, Paulston’s work (2000) helps to understand ontological and epistemological connections, which offers a level of openness through what Levin and Greenwood identify as a multi-perspective research (2011, p. 28). While an interpretation of comparative approaches may appear conceptually overgeneralized, covering many levels from the macro-sociopolitical to the pedagogic, our suggestions seek to provide a framework in an attempt to offer greater

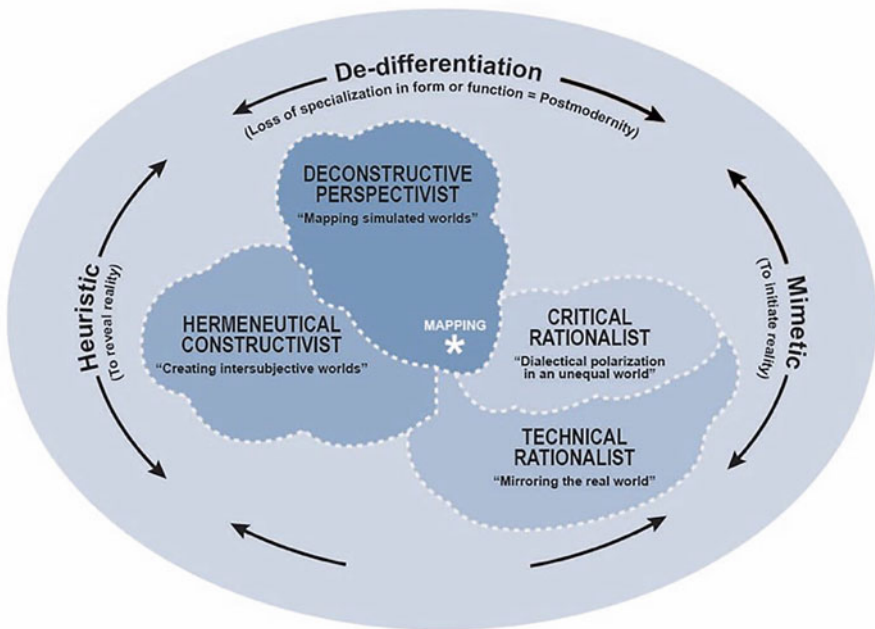


Fig. 1 Paulston’s conceptual map. (Source: Paulston, 1997, p. 118)

understanding of the broad and extensive literature dealing with equity and quality in education over a 40-year span.

Using meta-narrative analysis of texts from comparative educators who explore educational equity and quality, one is able to infer what factors are represented on the basis of paradigmatic approaches, how scholars came to arrive at conclusions, and whether they have in any way identified some measure of causality whether directly or indirectly. This approach tends to reflect upon John Stuart Mill's description of the experimental method, where scholarly agreement on alignment, difference, and concomitant variations of the two is possible. Our use of meta-narrative also lends itself to discovering paradigmatic shifts from standardization – Weymans' coherence (2009, p. 573) and Watkins' etic approaches (2007, p. 303) – to differentiation which appears to be a new trend in education worldwide. Coherence refers to shared standards (Weymans, 2009, p. 570), including that of academic degrees but also in ways of approaching knowledge accumulation and advancement. Etic approaches refer to comparing cultures on what are thought to be universal categories (Watkins, 2007, p. 303). However, as this research attempts to identify “measures of variation” between equity and quality education through meta-narrative analysis, the approach taken seems justifiable in order to find uniformity in paradigmatic approaches and perspectives but, at the same time, identify anomalies or dispersed data (e.g., contestations) that suggest a more heterogeneous, more diverse complexity of our understanding of “equity” and “quality” in education. As Meyer would argue, in all areas of individual (scholarly) dispositions, institutional approaches suggest the importance of wider cultural issues and the culturally constructed character of micro-sociological effects (Meyer in Krücken & Drori, 2009, p. 70). This would offer a conceptual lens to the positional stances of researchers, which could then be compared with external influences that drive and motivate researchers to study such conceptions.

In an attempt to appreciate how various scholars have handled the same subject matter in treating equity and quality education, Fig. 2 attempts to delineate variations in paradigmatic approaches and perspectives treating equity and quality education.

The hermeneutic constructivist paradigm is one that attempts to explain and predict, building on theory and to further understand educational phenomena (*see* Denman, 2019). Viewpoints can be described in an attempt to align theory with historical representations or staged progressions of ideas. In the specific treatment of equity and quality education, Adamson's work has concentrated on how language has served as a relevant issue concerning equity and quality in China, particularly for those individuals—primarily ethnic minorities—who are multi-lingual and who require taking aptitude tests in one's second or third language in order to succeed in education (Adamson 2016). This suggests that variations in language (and perhaps culture) may have an impact on the pursuit toward educational equity. Brickman's (1981) early work was on the educational equity of credential equivalencies and explored the issue of evaluating educational equivalencies in different educational systems. This gave rise to the burgeoning market for assessing foreign credentials and recognizing prior learning and educational schemes such as the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Cho and Choi (2016), Keilash and Rust

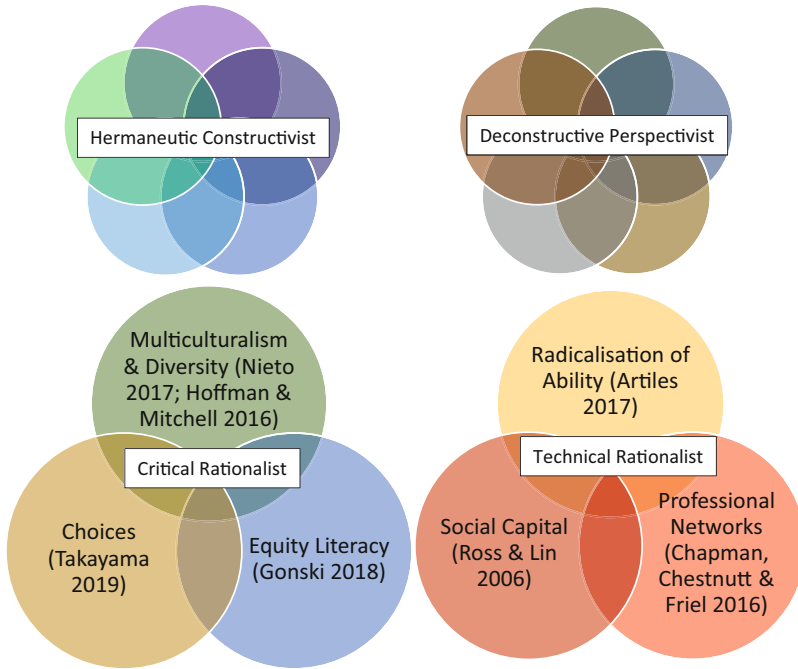


Fig. 2 Paradigmatic approaches to equity and quality education

(2008), and Zaida, Majhonovich, and Rust (2006) all explored the issue of social justice and social mobility as applied to educational policy and democratic ideals, with Masemann (1984) on gender, while Darling-Hammond (1994) and Elmore and Fuhrman (1995) explored equity in terms of individual performance through clear guidelines concerning self-reflection and self-critique. Lee and Manzon (2014) have been notable for addressing the question of whether equity and quality can coexist, using Hong Kong as a case study.

The deconstructive perspectivist, according to Paulston (1997), attempts to confirm and validate causality and correlations, examining the extent to which differences in one characteristic or variable are related to differences in one or more other characteristics or variables. Delineations of the two may require further explanation. In causal, comparative research, for instance, one looks at conditions underpinning what has already occurred and then collects data to investigate possible relationships between conditions and behavior. In terms of correlational research, however, investigations look at surface relationships between two or more variables, but do not necessarily seek clarity for causal reasons underlying them, in other words, how one variable may correlate meaningfully with another when a common causal bond links the phenomena of both in a logical, reasonable way. The deconstructive perspectivist also attempts to categorize and classify phenomena – through causality, correlation, and/or cause-and-effect – to describe the relationship between educational policy and practice. David’s research in 2007 was able to disaggregate equity

and quality education into four themes: (i) equity, social stratification, and social mobility; (ii) diversity as a changing concept in relation to ethnicity/race, social class, and gender for individuals and institutions; (iii) globalization and higher education nationally or internationally; and (iv) discourses around teaching and learning, pedagogies, and academic practices (2007: 677). Steiner-Khamsi and Gerelmaa (2008) attempted to address the issues of equity across urban and rural settings in Mongolia, highlighting the geographic divides for boys and the disadvantages of children from nomadic herder families. Jagers, Rivas-Drake, and Williams (2019) explored more equitable learning environments for producing equitable learning performance to improve educational opportunity.

The critical rationalist attempts to describe and explain educational phenomena, particularly for the marginalized and those on the periphery (or “the socially marginalized”), often seeking to dismiss dominant theories or ideologies. Studies in this tradition may attempt to identify understandable “exceptions to the rule,” looking for distinctive anomalies around ethical and sustainability issues and in relation to equity and quality education. Kwek et al. (2019) considered equity and excellence, suggesting that an ecology of equity (*see* Ainscow et al., 2012, p 141) depends on a range of interacting process that reaches into the school mostly from outside. While equity and diversity are understood as separate terms (or entities), some studies have considered them in conjunction, for example, Nieto (2017) which paired the two together in the name of multiculturalism. Cummings and Bain (2014) considered the issues of educational egalitarian treatment in Asia, and Neubauer and Tanaka (2011) linked equity with the massification and survivability of higher education institutions in the Asia Pacific. Gorski (2016) called a need for what he termed equity literacy in educational institutions and educators alike. Characteristics in the critical rationalist approach discern an expansiveness factor of fragmented concepts that link equity and quality education with terms such as ecology, multiculturalism, egalitarianism, and survivability.

The technical rationalist approach is somewhat similar to the critical rationalist but differs in its focus on consumable and accessible knowledge and information and producing evidence with a detached view. Artiles (2011) explores the radicalization of ability in equity with the aim of interpreting and celebrating difference. Radicalization here emphasizes a shift from prejudiced stereotypes of disability and race that encounter “shared histories of struggle for equity” (Artiles 2011, p. 431) toward a “celebration of difference” approach. Chapman et al. (2016) explore equity and quality in the form of building professional networks, placing greater emphasis on opportunity based on “beyond-school” approaches. Ross and Lin (2006) explore social capital, and Xiao (2021) reflects on justifiable and measurable standards for treating equity and quality education based on discourses, theory, cultures, learning environments, content, and assessment. The technical rationalist approach tends to look at overgeneralizations where distortions of truth may be found in individualized cases, discrepancies in perceived opportunity, and reflections of divisive forms of “quality” integrity.

The applied meta-narrative text analyses approach used here seeks to provide a framework for categorizing scholarly discourses on equity and quality in education

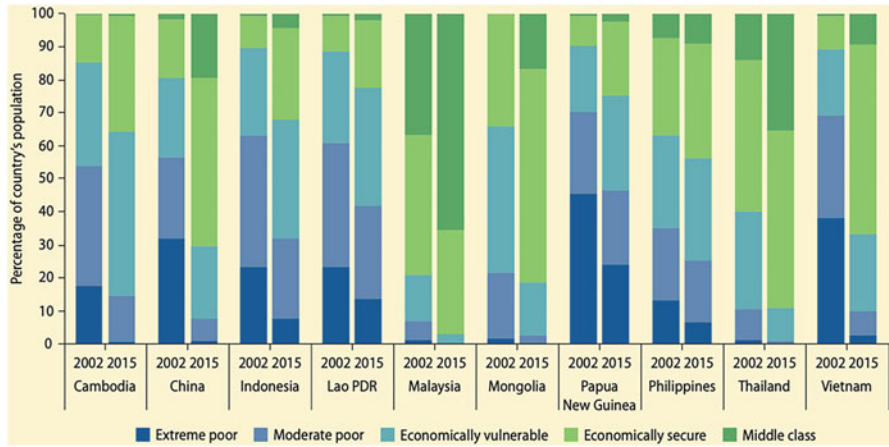


Fig. 3 Population distribution by economic class in the Asia Pacific (2002 and 2015). (Source: World Bank Report, *Riding the Wave. An East Asian Miracle for the 21st Century*)

to determine the nature and manner of their interpretations of policy and practice. While any broad-brush generalizations about comparative research practices on the topic are necessarily based on a selection of texts, it is hoped that they generate new themes worth exploring or, at least, point to unforeseen issues, trends, or indicators that require further examination and/or interrogation.

The meta-narrative data collected have helped identify additional new trends concerning equity and quality education on a global scale:

- Social-class gaps persist within educational systems.
- Educational inequities are more prevalent in nation-states that do not necessarily ascribe to social justice and democratic principles.
- Education may be seen as a driver for equity, but rising income inequality impairs the “system” (Figs. 3 and 4).

NB. Despite a reported rise in the Asian middle class, disparities in income inequality continue to persist, particularly between extreme poverty and middle class. While income disparities in equity are not a part of this study, it is understood that the observation of “standards of living” over an extended period of time may result in speculating about societal and individual behaviors affecting equity and quality education.

NB. Worldwide, the inequality of income opportunity is proving to reflect differences between nation-states. It appears that the higher the inequity within a nation-state, the greater the likelihood that democratic principles such as social justice are subverted, undermined, or muted. This corroborates Owens’ work (2013, p. 35) on educational inequality that is more prevalent in conservative nation-states compared to liberal ones, suggesting that our knowledge of associated characteristics on equity and quality may be dependent on sociopolitical influences

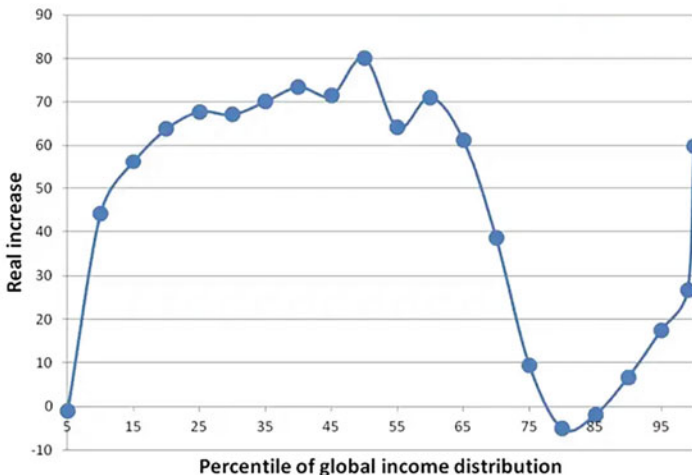


Fig. 4 Change in real income at various percentiles of global income distribution (1988 and 2008) in 2005 international dollars. (Source: *The Guardian*. Milanovic, Branko (2017). *The higher the inequality, the more likely we are to move away from democracy*)

of the nation-state. Intergenerational inequality is also showing signs of income divisions as shown in Fig. 5.

Figure 5 shows that inequality of incomes and intergenerational social mobility are negatively correlated across countries (i.e., the higher the inequality, the lower the social mobility). This seems to indicate inequities from generation to generation, suggesting, in some cases (e.g., Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina), disparities between intergenerational income are significant. This means that children born in these countries will have great economic challenges ahead in improving their own standard of living and, as a result, will infer that educational inequities will persist in these countries (Fig. 6).

NB. While social-class gaps in educational performance continue to persist, a child’s personal and family characteristics and parental activities do not necessarily capture how and why gaps develop in terms of socioeconomic status-related factors. The higher the gap, the greater the “learning” disparity. There are small increases between 1998 and 2010 in social gaps in most skills areas, but no change in “self-control” and a decline in social gaps in “approaches to learning.” Social gaps in reading and math have increased despite shrinking or flatlining gaps in some noncognitive skills.

Theory to Practice

Kemmis and his colleagues (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Mahon et al., 2017; Kemmis, 2019) have taught us that the theory of practice can take on the perspective from the individual and the social in terms of outsider “objective” and insider

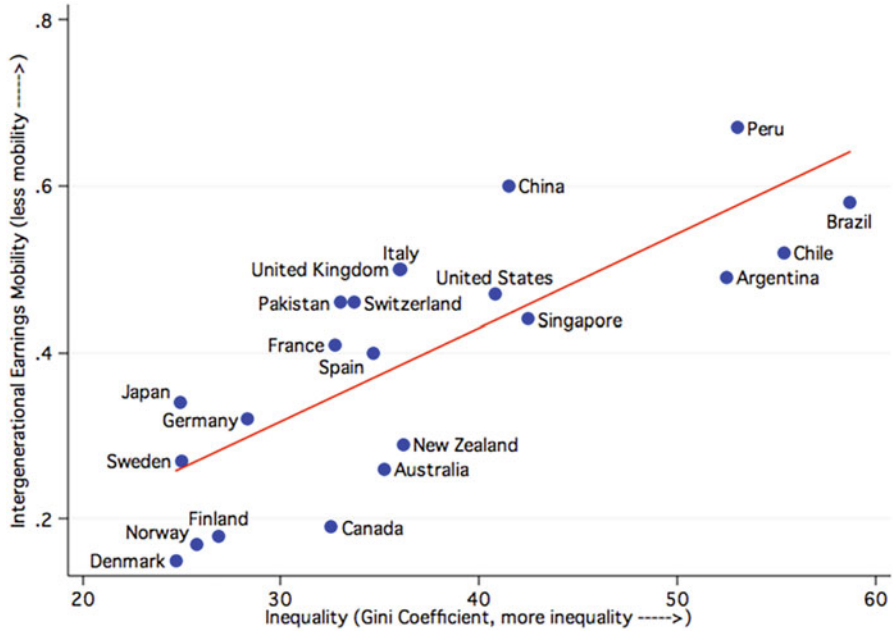


Fig. 5 Inequality from generation to generation. (Source: Miles Corak, 2012)

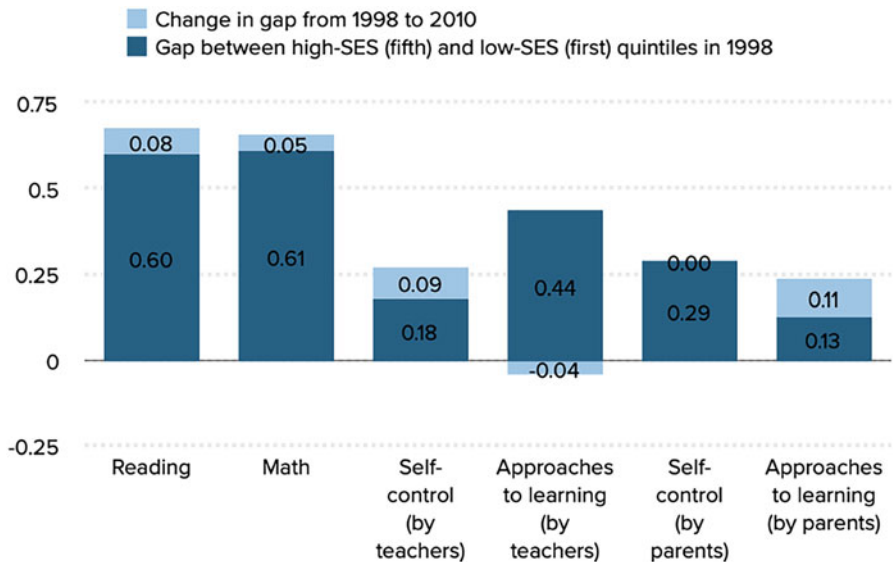


Fig. 6 Economic Policy Institute’s graph of fully adjusted cognitive and noncognitive skills gaps between high and low SES kindergarten children (1998–2010). (Source: Economic Policy Institute)

“subjective” perspectives. The study of practices is mimicked, borrowed, or embraced among participants over time; orchestrated instead of being facilitated by any one individual; and differentiated and ecologically dependent on other practices (*see* Kemmis’ Theory to Practice). Polarizing theory to practice may be necessary in helping to identify delineate practice as (1) individual behavior and (2) critical discourse analysis of social interaction by meaning and values or by paradigmatic discourses and/or tradition. Linking the two together helps to identify practice as socially and historically constituted action by human agency, decision-making, and influences from social pressures (Fig. 7).

Through the investigation of practice and how one perceives the world through research and action (e.g., paradigmatic approaches), one is able to identify elements of practice theory through the eyes of scholars who have approached equity and quality education in the Asia Pacific. This may compartmentalize ideology and approaches for purposes of comparison, but it does so in a systematic means of analysis as illustrated in Fig. 8.

Comparing scholars and their individual viewpoints on equity and quality education globally, a meta-narrative analysis was conducted to determine what was happening regionally in the Asia Pacific region. A meta-analysis offers clues as to whether there is overlap, gaps, or patterns in the way comparative education research is approached or undertaken. Admittedly, the publications identified have been principally published in English and, in addition, were authored by prominent comparative educators from within the Asia Pacific region or who have played an active role in researching in the region. For the majority of authors listed, they were identified as either holding key positions in comparative education societies or holding peer esteem for making significant contributions to the field.

The below research findings from the contributing authors of this section (or: in the current book series section) help to distinguish types of comparative education research coming from the Asia Pacific region using a modified version of McTaggart and Kemmis’ practice architectures (Fig. 9)

Focus Perspective	The individual (psychological)	The social (sociological)	Both: reflexive- and dialectical
'Objective' (Observer's/outsider's perspective)	(1) Practice as individual behaviour (e.g. behaviourism; cognitivism)	(2) Practice as social interaction, ritual, system-structured (e.g. soft systems theory)	
'Subjective' (Actor's/insider's perspective)	(3) Practice as intentional action, shaped by meaning and values (e.g. constructivism)	(4) Practice as shaped by discourses and tradition (e.g. hermeneutics)	
Both: reflexive-dialectical			(5) Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and reconstituted by human agency and social action (e.g. critical theory, practice theory)

Fig. 7 Perspectives on practice. (Source: Kemmis, 2019)

Act	Philosophy	Defined as	Individual (Psychology) Bloom's Taxonomy	Social (Extra-individually; media) Habermas; Bourdieu
Sayings	Logic (or dialectics)	How to speak and think well	Cognitive	Language (cultural, symbolic fields)
Doings	Physics	How to act well in the material world	Psychomotor	Work (Economic field)
Relatings	Ethics	How to relate well to others	Affective	Power (Social field)

Fig. 8 Sayings, doings, and relatings. (Source: Kemmis, 2019)

Discussion

Our comparative analysis of the publications reviewed in this section suggests a predominance of sociological and reflexive orientations with few psychological elements. In cases where observations were not applicable, this suggests that psychological elements were either not readily apparent, devoid of explicit meaning, or not thoroughly researched from this angle. This finding suggests the need for further research on the motivation of individuals to pursue an education from an equity and quality perspective. As for a sociological approach to knowledge, especially that which echoes a reflexive dialogic underpinning, dynamic dualities of cause and effect are indeed apparent, reflecting circular relationships of each and how time, place, and space provide essential contextual understandings to define position and add voice to, from, and within context.

Notable distinctions include:

Objective (Observer's/Outsider's Perspective)

Sociological

- Education is not only a means to an end, but a form of empowerment. (Power, 2022) (S)
- The maturation of educational systems must be considered to help better understand and respect the variability of equity and quality across cultures in the Asia Pacific. (Kitamura, 2022) (D)
- Gaps in educational inequities may derive from factors outside of respective school systems, but the indicators needed to measure and compare against these inequities may not be easy to standardize, as the educational contexts differ widely in the Asia Pacific. (Sute et al., 2021) (R)
- How educational quality affects economic growth is still a mystery. (Suter et al., 2022) (R)
- Educational inequalities exist also in teachers' capacity-building in the Asia Pacific. (Suter et al., 2022) (R)

Objective (observer's/outsider's perspective)	
(1) Practice as individual behaviour (e.g. behaviourism; cognitivism)	
Sayings:	n/a
Doings:	n/a
Relatings:	n/a
(2) Practice as social interaction, ritual, system-structured	
Sayings:	"Education empowers all learners"; "Power at the expense of the masses" (Power 2021)
Doings:	"The twin goals of Education and Health for all" (Power 2021); Kitamura 2021 "...higher education in East Asia has been considerably transformed in the last 30 years" (Kitamura 2021) ; "The United Nations is dedicated to inclusive and quality education...advancing knowledge capacity of the individual rather than concentrate on prescriptive approaches" (Denman 2021)
Relatings:	"...students attend school but learn little because the schools they attend are of such poor quality" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "...less is known about the quality of education and how it affects growth differently" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "...unequal opportunity for teachers' capacity building" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "...reliance and trust of data collected" (Wu 2021); "Knowledge Communities" (Kitamura 2021).
Subjective (actor's/insider's perspective)	
(3) The Individual (psychological). Practice as intentional action, shaped by meaning and values (e.g. constructivism)	
Sayings:	n/a
Doings:	n/a
Relatings:	"hidden dropout" and "language complications for ethnic minorities in terms of how education is taught through Mandarin" (Wu 2021)
(4) Practice as shaped by discourses and tradition (e.g. hermeneutics)	
Sayings:	Suter, Leung & Revina 2021 "gaps in students' achievement likely emerge outside the formal school system" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "older versus newer illiterates" (Wu 2021); "policy directives focusing on children out of school than teaching them in school" (Wu 2021)
Doings:	n/a
Relatings:	Relatings: "meritocracy has been overly emphasized by neoliberal ideology" (Kitamura 2021); "in post-liberalism, the increased oversight role of the government may lead to a crisis situation that threatens academic freedom and autonomy?" (Kitamura 2021)
Both reflexive and dialectical	
(5) Practice as socially- and historically-constituted, and reconstituted by human agency and social action (e.g. critical theory, practice theory)	
Sayings:	"Knowledge/Science Diplomacy" (Kitamura 2021)
Doings:	"inappropriate behaviour in schools; cannot enjoy learning" (Wu 2021)
Relatings:	"The gaps in performance tend to increase when governments opt to reduce their share of national income allocated to education." (Power 2021); "...explicit focus on equity in which the measures of access and learning, along with data on child characteristics, should be used to ensure equitable learning opportunities" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "family status and student achievement are not uniform across countries nor consistently associated with a country's level of development" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "social status was only weakly associated with ICT-use-for-learning" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021) "quality of the teaching force and of instructional practices have a direct bearing on the learning and achievement of students" (Suter, Leung & Revina 2021); "diversity among universities...quality education they provide varies significantly" (Kitamura 2021) ; "universities incapable of adequate responses" (Kitamura 2021)

Fig. 9 Perspectives on practice

Subjective (Actor's/Insider's Perspective)

Psychological

- Hidden dropouts may be attributable to language issues in how education is taught in China. (Wu, 2022) (R)

Sociological

- Meritocratic educational systems in the Asia Pacific have largely been borrowed from Western ideologies based on neoliberal principles. (Kitamura, 2022) (R)
- The intensification of a post-liberalism agenda for much of the Asia Pacific has shifted the focus on educational oversight by governments, which has repercussions to possibly undermine academic teaching and learning freedoms. (Kitamura, 2022)

Both Reflexive and -Dialectical

- Knowledge/science diplomacy is reappearing as a means to foster international cooperation/collaboration. (Kitamura, 2022) (S)
- Student disinterest and disengagement is on the rise, as students are not enjoying learning in schools. (Wu, 2022) (D)
- Gaps in academic performance tend to be dependent on the amount of subsidies allocated to education at national levels. When resources/subsidies are reduced, gaps increase. (Power, 2022) (R)
- Explicit indicators targeting equity (access, learning, and individual student characteristics) are needed for coherence in measurement. (Suter et al., 2022) (R)
- Family status and educational achievement are not uniform across cultures nor indicators of national growth. (Suter et al., 2022) (R)
- Quality of the teaching staff and instructional practices has a direct relationship with quality learning. (Suter et al., 2022) (R)
- Asia Pacific universities are struggling to adequately respond to issues of equity and quality education. (Kitamura, 2022) (R)

All of these points have merit and reflect similar sentiments in the earlier analysis of literature treating equity and quality education. As we apply Kemmis' theory to practice to the meta-narratives of publications surveyed, it highlights intersubjective spatialities. For example, in the publication by Wu (2022), the cultural-discursive arrangements that were found or brought into being by means of language or ideas were considered acts of "saying." Scholars who approached physical space, time, and place were considered acts of **doing** are able to arrange artifacts which tend to be either material or economic in origin or analysis. Scholars who take to a **relatings** approach are those who embrace affective social spaces, power, and dimensions of solidarity, suggesting influences of sociopolitical arrangements in people, ideas, and relationships between people (Fig. 10).

Knowledge and "Quality" in Quality Education

Kemmis and colleagues have helped frame ontological perspectives, approaches, and paradigmatic frameworks, as noted above. Linking this with knowledge and

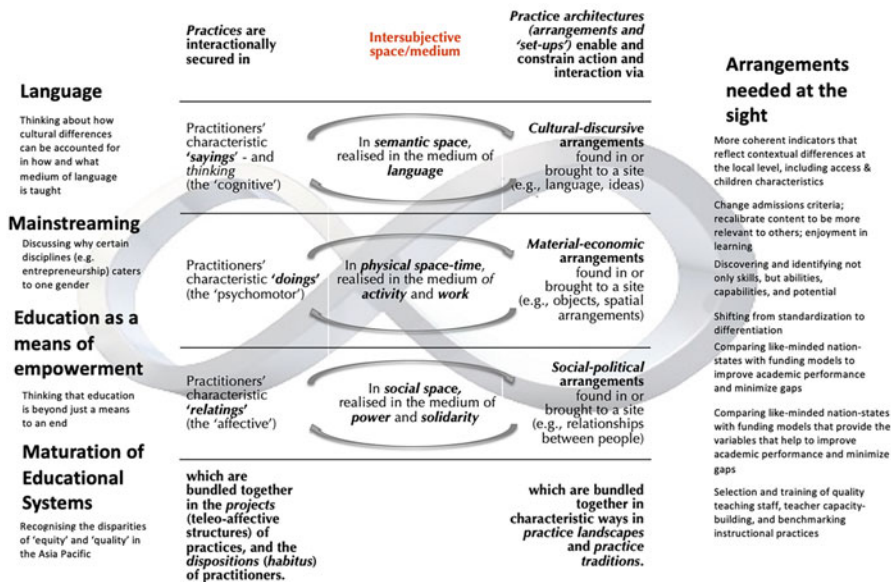


Fig. 10 Kemmis' Theory of Practice Architectures. (Source: Modified Theory to Practice Architecture (Kemmis, 2019))

quality in education is necessary to bridge the gap in knowledge accumulation, advancement, and potential. Worldwide, nation-states today face new challenges in a global environment where the role of knowledge is becoming increasingly important. Among the most critical dimensions of change are the converging impacts of globalization, the importance of knowledge as a driver of growth, the utility and optimization of information, communication and technology, and the questioning of “quality” in quality education.

Knowledge accumulation and application have now become major factors in economic development and are increasingly recognized as the core of a country's competitive advantage in a global economy. The ability of countries to select, adapt, and use knowledge has become a critical driver for sustained economic growth and improved living standards. This includes any quality feature in quality education, because knowledge accumulation and application are constructed as the most important influences in economic development. Quality education begets quality knowledge.

While globalization may be waning in certain parts of the world (while the globalization paradigm might be redefining itself during the UN's era of Agenda 2030), the pursuit of new forms of knowledge and knowledge advancement keeps accelerating globalization. Comparative advantage among nation-states today derives less and less from abundant natural resources. Increasingly it is technological innovations and the competitive use and utility of new knowledge that are driving change. However, a nation's capability to harness and generate new knowledge

remains internationally unshared, which resonates within and across institutional qualities (e.g., schools, universities, and other forms of education) in the nation-state. PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS may have helped standardize educational performance and achievement over the last two decades, but the pace of change and innovation has intensified markedly since then, compelling institutions such as schools and universities to (critically) reformulate the system as we know it in order to meet the new challenges and societal demands, particularly in a post-COVID environment.

This new COVID environment suggests that technological transformations of knowledge carry real dangers of rising digital and economic divides between and within nation-states.

Institutional Resets

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, quality can be seen as an attribute, property, special feature, or characteristic that shows evidence of novelty, originality, and uniqueness. Quality can also be seen as the nature, kind, or character (of something) in which there is comparison (expressed or implied) with other things of the same kind, hence the degree or grade of excellence (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, p. 2383).

From philosophical centers of teaching, research, and intellectual critique in a cultural and professional setting, the university has seen massive ideological shifts in its role with the nation-state. Since the 1960s, many countries have seen university education repositioned in its relationship to government. Academic programs have been rationalized, specializations have been developed in the interests of “quality” and efficiency, and the opportunity for social mobility has been purposely built to create a contained form of network capital regionally (e.g., ECTS and the Bologna Accord). Massification of higher education was replaced by a reinterpretation of human capital, whereby the greater the education of the populace, the greater the economy. The emergence of neoliberal agendas has, to a large degree, shifted the focus from the realm of the state and population as a whole to that of the individual, with the national accumulation being the aggregation of the educational gains of the individual.

A focus on quality assessment of educational institutions (including universities) has multiple, justified claims, which reflect increasing levels of accountability for the receipt and expenditure of funds both in core funding and in competitive funding for teaching and research aligned with government policy priorities. The competition for students and placement of high profile of research academic staff has never been greater. Schools, universities, and other educational institutions are becoming equally concerned, which suggests a filtering down system that leads ultimately to the education of the individual student. While the term “quality” may be seen and spoken as quite ambiguous, particularly when addressing different cultures or nation-states, there are some underlying similarities.

As Pitman writes:

Education systems are under continuing pressures to be reshaped in ways that respond to the aspirations and fears of the societies that they serve. These concerns are grounded in the context of increasingly interconnected world systems that characterize the globalizing trends in communications, trade and discourse. Increasingly, the issue of quality has become a cornerstone of debates, and policy formation in relation to education systems and their reform. This has been coupled with governmental moves to assert greater control and surveillance over the academic activities of educational institutions at all levels. At the university level, the use of rankings such of that compiled by the *London Times*, based on citation analysis, are among the most important of these. Worthy of note is that governments pay attention to them, and it should be recognized that they are the products of commercial enterprises. Through means such as these, governments try to position themselves internationally through gauging the quality of their educational institutions and curricula through comparative processes. At the same time, within nations, the role of formal education in the framing of the identity and particular economic character of countries and regions is of central interest at the local level. (Pitman, 2007, pp. 9–10)

Thus, through instruments such as the Shanghai Index and the Bologna Agreement in Europe, pressures are created to apply the unidimensional, comparative notion of or on quality. Turner (2006, 2011) makes a trenchant point about these quality measures by introducing a defensible alternative heuristic which largely stands the generally accepted rankings on their heads. Further, referring back to the duality of meaning of “quality,” it would appear that accountability measures and quality outcomes militate against diversity and the maintenance of the quality(ies) that make a university (or school) unique, pushing for standardization, a uniformity of scope and method in both teaching program, and research agendas that appear to be borrowed from outside the “system.”

At best, there are limits which flow from how people engaged in discourse can come to understand each other. As Gadamer makes clear, self-understanding occurs through understanding the integrity of something else (2013, p. 9). A consequence of these considerations is that one is led to a concern for the distribution among researchers of Bourdieu’s social capital (1986) as it relates to academe (*see* Schuller & Theisens, 2010). It is of interest that this is a problem that has come to the attention of interests beyond academia. *The Economist* of February 4, 2017, carried a piece in its regular “Johnson” column – *The Giant Shoulders of English* – in which the role of English as the dominant language of academic journals was discussed. While acknowledging the communicative benefits of a common language as, it is pointed out, Latin was for Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton, the perils lay in linguistic “capital” advantages for native speaking researchers and in the potential limitation of the expansion of the research vocabularies of other languages. The article concludes with, we believe, the full meaning of the term, “That would be a shame” (*The Economist*, 2017, p. 72).

What, then, are the possibilities for recognizing these situations and finding the means to open the research and reporting frameworks? We would argue that the situation is not an impossible one, given the emergent technologies at our disposal, with the development of interactive networks and powerful search engines and data

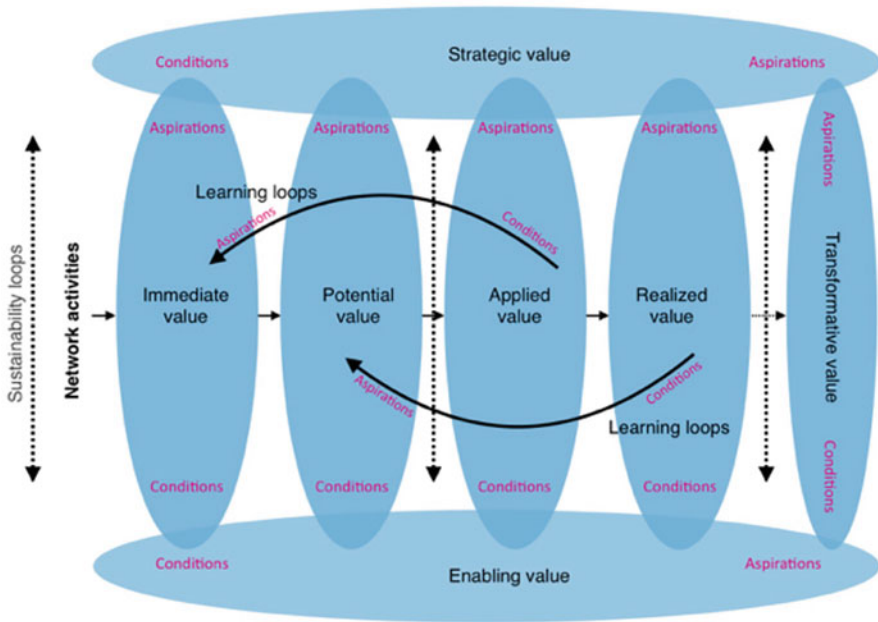


Fig. 11 Value-creation cycles framework with aspirations and conditions, risks, and mitigation. Source: Wenger-Trayner et al., 2015

and information bases. There is always, of course, the codicil as to who or what interests control these resources (Figs. 11 and 12).

When considering notions of value into what constitutes as “quality,” it then offers the opportunity to explore communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) as the missing link with Kemmis et al. practice architectures. This helps frame ontological elements with the epistemological, thus leading to cycles of continuous improvement by means of aspirations and conditions which underpin them. Unlike Shewart’s pioneering work in the 1920s and 1930s on quality variations at Bell Laboratories in the United States, using principles of probability and statistics, the refocused attention on quality moves away from symptoms and causes and is replaced by processes and philosophical basis of purpose in order to generate new forms of quality. While interrogating the data to determine levels of value creation according to each culture/nation-state goes beyond the scope of this research, it is hoped that scholars would consider looking at learning loops that manifest themselves in the form of strategic and enabling values. This would then regenerate elements of “quality” within educational systems without undermining qualitative “value.”

The seven value-creation cycles include:

1. Engaging in a social learning interaction that can produce *immediate* value
2. Engaging that can generate *potential* value such as insights, connections, or resources

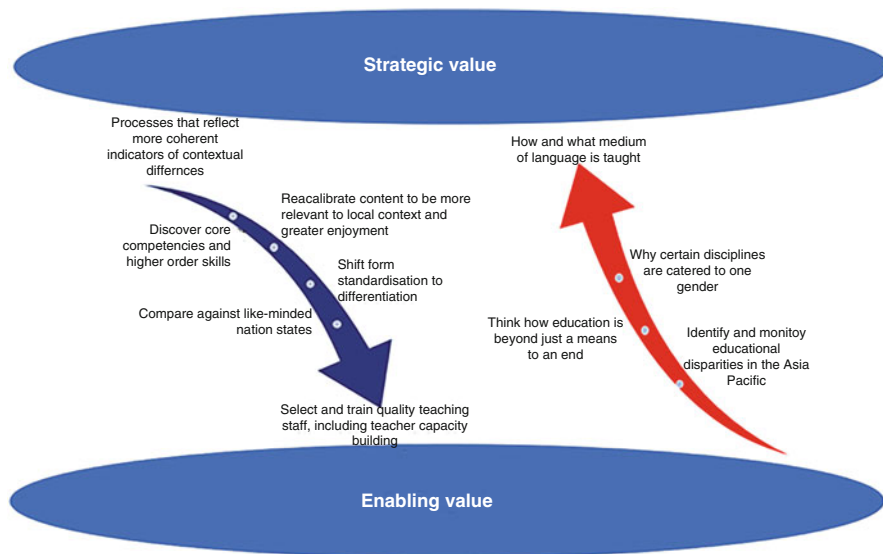


Fig. 12 Value creation related to equity and quality education transformation. Source: Modified from Trayner-Wenger et al., 2015

3. Drawing on insights, connections, or resources to change one's practice, which requires much creativity and learning and, thus, is viewed as generating applied value
4. Practicing difference to what matters, so as to arrive at social learning that produces realized value
5. Transforming people's identities or the broader environment, leading to producing a transformative value
6. Engaging with relevant stakeholders to ensure that their learning makes a difference, offering a strategic value
7. Getting better at supporting and enabling learning which produces enabling value (Ibid, pp. 323–324)

If one were to juxtapose processes with epistemic ways of knowing (through sayings, doings, and relatings) and ontological characteristics of equity and quality, the cyclic dimensions between strategic and enabling values become self-evident.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to align how equity and quality education is being considered on a global scale, narrowing the focus to the Asia Pacific. The terms “equity” and “quality” were identified in the literature as dualities but also as separate entities.

Unlike aspects of New Public Management and quality assurance principles that have been designed to focus upon the relationships between products, services, and processes of quality – mostly to develop a planning of processes to prevent problems occurring in the first instance – it is hoped that nation-states would consider new processes of quality education by exploring the utility of practice architectures and linking it with Wenger-Trayner’s value-creation cycle to identify aspects of equity and quality in education contextually at local levels and to consider adopting arrangements for processing and implementing educational change in an effective manner. The goal would be to develop continuous improvement loops between localized/regionalized aspirations and the conditions that underpin them, as it is believed that culture necessarily plays a highly significant role in determining what constitutes as quality in education. In this book chapter, while educational equity remains as a challenge yet to overcome, educational quality is seen as where there is scope and opportunity to make a difference. The nexus between learning, teaching, scholarship, and research should be explored further, especially around sustainability, scope, mutuality, research rigor, and evidence.

The following dot points are further research endeavors that link educational equity with that of educational quality:

- Educational reform must be considered transformational but when introducing reform – regardless of purpose – can lead to unforeseen consequences.
- The ultimate question is whether reform is and should be transformational. Would incremental change be better? The ultimate question is “relevance.”
- Educational contexts must be taken seriously into account with enough flexibility and adaptability built into the “system” in order to encourage learning and teaching freedoms without undermining quality. Mimicking “best practices” therefore requires a comprehensive understanding of context, timing, and evidence-based research (piloting).
- Understanding educational context is critical for evaluating performance and attainment. It therefore requires scholars who can interpolate relevant information from secondary sources. However, caution must be exercised when analyzing sources that may not be entirely accurate. It requires qualitative skills in interpreting policy and practice at the coalface.
- The general health of an educational system reflects upon the state of health of its incumbency or those individuals that make up “the system.” In unhealthy systems, health becomes endangered and pivots into a dysfunctional manifestation of social dissonance and fragmentation. Unhealthy individuals can therefore lead to dysfunction and, eventually, social discord.

Acknowledgments This chapter was made possible via funding from the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Sweden.

References

- Adamson, B. (2016). *New directions for education in China* (S. Cowan, T. Jin, L. J. Cowan, & Z. Pan, Eds., Taylor and Francis: pp. 134–136).
- Ainscow, M., et al. (2012). Making schools effective for all: Rethinking the task. *School Leadership & Management*, 32(3), 197–213.
- Artiles, A. J. (2011). Toward an interdisciplinary understanding of educational equity and difference: The case of the racialization of ability. *Educational Researcher*, 40(9), 431–445.
- Branko, M. (2017). The higher the inequality, the more likely we are to move away from democracy. *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/may/02/higher-inequality-move-away-from-democracy-branko-milanovic-big-data>
- Brickman, W. W. (1981). Equivalences and equity in education. *Western European Education*, 13(4), 3–5.
- Chapman, C., et al. (2016). Professional capital and collaborative inquiry networks for educational equity and improvement? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1, 178–197.
- Cho, H., & Choi, J. (2016). Teaching for social justice: Voices from prospective South Korean elementary teachers. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 13(2).
- Cummings, W. K., & Bain, O. (2014). Educational quality and egalitarian educational structures: A multi-nation multi-variate analysis. *Educational Studies in Japan*, 8, 33–48.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1994). Performance-based assessment and educational equity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 64(1), 5–31.
- David, M. (2007). Equity and diversity: Towards a sociology of higher education for the twenty-first century? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(5), 675–690.
- Denman, B. D. (2019). Critical challenges in approaches and experience in comparative education research. In L. Suter, E. Stone, & B. D. Denman (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of comparative studies in education*. Sage Publications.
- Elmore, R., & Fuhrman, S. (1995). Opportunity-to-learn standards and the state role in education. *Teachers College Record*, 96(3), 432–457.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2013). *Truth and method*. A&C Black.
- Gorski, P. (2016). Rethinking the role of “culture” in educational equity: From cultural competence to equity literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 18(4), 221–226.
- Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 162–184.
- Kemmis, S. (2019). *A practice sensibility: An invitation to the theory of practice architectures*. Springer Nature.
- Kemmis, S., & Grootenboer, P. (2008). Situating praxis in practice: Practice architectures and the cultural, social and material conditions for practice. In *Enabling praxis* (pp. 37–62). Brill Sense.
- Kheiltash, O., & Rust, V. D. (2008). Inequalities in Iranian education: Representations of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnic diversity, and religious diversity in school textbooks and curricula. In *Inequality in education* (pp. 392–416). Springer.
- Krücken, G., & Drori, G. S. (Eds.). (2009). *World society: The writings of John W. Meyer*. OUP Oxford.
- Kwek, D., Miller, R., & Manzon, M. (2019). ‘Bridges and Ladders’: The paradox of equity in excellence in Singapore schools: Experiences of East Asian High-Performing Education Systems. In: *Equity in Excellence*, 87–108. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2975-3_7
- Lee, W. O., & Manzon, M. (2014). The issue of equity and quality of education in Hong Kong. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(4), 823–833.
- Levin, M., & Greenwood, D. (2011). Revitalizing universities by inventing the social sciences: Bildung and action research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 27–42). Sage.
- Mahon, K., et al. (2017). Introduction: Practice theory and the theory of practice architectures. In *Exploring education and professional practice* (pp. 1–30). Springer.

- Masemann, V. L. (1984). Multicultural programs in Toronto schools. *Cultural diversity and Canadian education*, 349–369.
- Neubauer, D., & Tanaka, Y. (Eds.). (2011). *Access, equity, and capacity in Asia-Pacific higher education*. Springer.
- Nieto, S. (2017). Re-imagining multicultural education: New visions, new possibilities. *Multicultural Education Review*, 9(1), 1–10.
- Owens, T. L. (2013). Thinking beyond league tables: A review of key PISA research questions. In *PISA, power and policy: The emergence of global educational governance* (Oxford Studies in Comparative Education, vol. 23.1). Symposium Books, Oxford, UK.
- Oxford English Dictionary (1971). R.W. Burchfield, ed. Oxford University Press.
- Paulston, R. G. (1997). Mapping visual culture in comparative education discourse. *Compare*, 27(2), 117–152.
- Paulston, R. G. (2000). A spatial turn in comparative education? Constructing a social cartography of difference. ERIC, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED442711>
- Pitman, A. (2007). Presidential address the ideological and economic repositioning of universities. *Comparative and International Education*, 36, 3. (2007).
- Ross, H., & Lin, J. (2006). Social capital formation through Chinese school communities. In *Children's lives and schooling across societies*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Schuller, T., & Theisens, H. (2010). Networks and Communities of knowledge.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Gerelmaa, A. (2008). Quality and equity in the Mongolian education sector. *Prospects*, 38(3), 409–414.
- The Economist. (2017). Johnson. The giant shoulders of English. *The Economist*, 422(9026), 72.
- Turner, D. (2006). *World university rankings* [Unpublished paper, Learning and Teaching Office, Glamorgan University].
- Turner, D. (2011). *Quality in higher education*. Sense Publishers.
- Watkins, D. A. (2007). Comparing ways of learning. In *Comparative education research* (pp. 299–313). Springer.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems Thinker*, 9(5), 2–3.
- Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, S., Kubiak, C., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Learning in landscapes of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. Routledge.
- Wenger-Trayner, E., & Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015). Introduction to communities of practice. A brief overview of the concept and its uses, <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/>
- Weymans, W. (2009). From coherence to differentiation: Understanding (changes in) the European area for higher education and research. In *International handbook of comparative education* (pp. 569–585). Springer.
- Xiao, J. (2021). From equality to equity to justice: Should online education be the new normal in education?. In *Handbook of research on emerging pedagogies for the future of education: Trauma-informed, care, and pandemic pedagogy* (pp. 1–15). IGI Global.
- Zajda, J., Majhanovich, S., & Rust, V. (2006). Introduction: Education and social justice. *International Review of Education/Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft/Revue Internationale de l'Education*, 52, 9–22.