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Introduction to Special Themed Issue of GER

Megan Adams

Kennesaw State University, madam104@kennesaw.edu

Sheryl J. Croft

Kennesaw State University, scroft10@kennesaw.edu

Jihye Kim

Kennesaw, jkim192@kennesaw.edu

Sanjuana C. Rodriguez

Kennesaw State University, srodri51@kennesaw.edu

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Introduction to Special Themed Issue of GER

Abstract

This is the introduction to the 2019 themed issue of GER.

Keywords

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Introduction to Special Themed issue of GER

“the darkest hour of the night came just before the dawn”

It has often been said that “it’s always darkest just before the day dawneth” or the darkest hour of the night came just before the dawn (Shapiro, 2006). With the advent of NCLB (No Child Left Behind education legislation), reform advocates recognized the possibilities of systemic accountability and touted it as the dawning of a new day for student achievement. This new day of reform, initially supported by its high-stakes testing and mandates for 100% proficiency by 2014, promised unparalleled achievement for marginalized populations (Croft, Roberts, & Stenhouse, 2015; Hess & Finn, 2007; Ravitch, 2010). Some scholars hailed it as both the “most ambitious federal education statute ever enacted” and the “remedy for failing schools” (Gamson, McDermott & Reed, 2015; Hess & Finn, 2007, pp. 1-2) with the dawn of increased student achievement as evidenced in gains in “math and reading across states” (Hanushek, 2009, p. 802).

Yet, other scholars of school reform have critiqued NCLB with its institutionalization of accountability as, perhaps, the darkest hour (or midnight) of school reform, especially for poor and marginalized students (Croft, Stenhouse & Roberts, 2015; Darling-Hammonds, 2010; Noguera, 2009; Ravitch, 2010; Theoharis, 2009). From its inception, however, labeling of schools as failures and concomitant sanctions would become the norm (Sunderman, Kim, & Orfield (2005). Notwithstanding the negative ramifications of NCLB, subsequent reforms such as Race To The Top and the recently approved reauthorization of the ESEA, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), now promise more gains for underperforming and marginalized populations. Whether these reforms are viewed as panacea to alleviate lingering achievement gaps or exacerbations of persistent, systemically hegemonic inequities, the work of many schools, teachers, students, districts, and school leaders is obscured by pervasive narratives of failure and underperformance propagated by the secretary of education. Rarely do critiques acknowledge the academic gains or achievements in other areas.

Most often, marginalized populations are still characterized as living or lost in the midnight of education. Despite this characterization, successful narratives of students, teachers, school leaders, school districts, superintendents and systems have persisted. The stories of those who have achieved and made great gains in spite of reform challenges bear telling. That counternarratives of success, persistence, perseverance, and sometimes incremental improvement exist in the midnight of school reform is a testimony to resilience and creativity that is often overlooked in the emphasis for improvement based solely on test scores. That there are few counternarratives of success suggests the need for more research on those who have shown improvement; additionally, more research is needed on those who have worked to help their students move beyond the midnight of their various circumstances toward the dawn of student achievement as measured by a myriad of factors. Because some students have improved despite seemingly insurmountable challenges, their stories deserve to be told; their voices deserve to be heard; their successes deserve to be celebrated.

It is in this spirit that the editors of this issue recognize that too often in education, the dominant narratives of deprivation and underachievement are those most exclaimed. On rarer

occasions are the counternarratives of success told or exposed. The purpose of this special issue is to provide educators (including teachers, principals, district personnel, and researchers) a medium in which to tell your stories of success, a venue and an opportunity to celebrate the dawn—the promise, if not totally realized, of new beginnings, new opportunities, new breakthroughs. Too often, we forget to focus on the innovations, energy, and limitless passion extant in public schools today. While waiting for capital-T transformations (Guillory, 2012), we sometimes fail to notice the seemingly small changes made in classrooms and schools daily that lead to huge gains for students – socially, emotionally, and intellectually. In short, this special edition is one that shines a light in the darkness and espouses AERA’s long held belief that “schools should change in ways that will enable them to respond to and reflect the cultural strengths of students from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural, and linguistic groups” (Banks, 2016, p. 15).

This issue, therefore, focuses on the positive innovations making an impact in schools and colleges of education today. It begins with a new tradition for *Georgia Educational Researcher*, the featured award winner. The article *An Examination of K-12 Teachers' Assessment Beliefs and Practices in Relation to Years of Teaching Experience* by Unal & Unal was awarded the Distinguished Research Award by the Georgia Educational Research Association in fall of 2018. Thus, it opens our winter issue. Following, the issue is broken into sections based upon the fields most impacted by the article, including another new feature, a featured practitioner piece that will be included in each issue of the journal moving forward.

Special Education: Pounds & Cuevas: *Student Involvement in IEPs*

Elementary Education: McKeen: *The Impact of Grade Level Flexible Grouping on Math Achievement Scores*

Secondary Education: Featured Practitioner Piece: Pace: *Preserving the Archives in the 21st Century Classroom: Designing History Classes Arounds Primary Source Research*

Educational Leadership/Teacher Leadership: Ata: *Fostering Students' Civic Skills: Education for Sustainable Democracy*

Higher Education: Jorin: *Hopscotch 2.0: An Enhanced Version of the Model for the Generation of Research Designs in Social Sciences and Education*

We hope that these articles provide insights and ideas to teachers, leaders, and educators across the P-12 and IHE spectrums. Additionally, we hope this issue reminds all of us that there are always positive things happening in public education that may fall below our radar – the sun rises on innovations great and small that impact children in many ways.

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