

Editorial

# Comparative Perspectives on the Role of National Pride, Identity and Belonging in the Curriculum

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In this Special Issue, *Comparative Perspectives on the Role of National Pride, Identity and Belonging in the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Experience of Higher Education*, papers explore how contemporary issues in democratic education play out in higher education curriculum policy, pedagogy, and the student experience within and across different national contexts.

Education for democracy has a long history across countries around the globe, blending an ideal as both a goal and a form of instruction. The ideals of democratic citizenship are embedded in higher education systems, seen in the Dearing report in the UK, which positioned democratic development as a fundamental purpose of higher education.

In the current political environment, democratic education plays out across countries with different histories and development pathways. The same words and ideals lead to a variety of higher education systems, all shaped by their national political, social, and economic context, the institutions that comprise them, and the students that experience them.

Within democracies, the formless creep of neoliberal globalisation has been countered by waves of nationalism and populism. Depending on one's positioning, such movements can bring about feelings of national pride or fears of isolation and closing off. This can occur at national levels or across groups of students within national contexts. Such events can also impact individual students and academics, particularly when crossing borders and participating in the internationalisation of higher education.

Three papers in this Special Issue explore democratic education, nationalism and higher education across South Asia, focusing in particular on the rollback of democracy in universities in India, Pakistan and Myanmar.

Looking at the effects of the 1 February 2021 Myanmar coup on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and staff, Khaing Phyu Htut, Lall, and Kandiko Howson [1] present the voices of academics and teacher educators who have joined the Civil Disobedience Movement in response to the military takeover. All publicly employed university staff who have set themselves in opposition to the military regime have lost their jobs and, with it, their accommodation. Yet they stand defiantly against what they see as a dramatic rollback of the decade of reforms that was leading to a more participatory governance of their country. The respondents see their academic identity closely linked with Myanmar's slow pathway towards democracy and therefore refuse to give in to the identity promoted by the Myanmar military that disregards the role of higher education in the development of their country.

Over the last decade, India has seen an erosion of democracy quite different from what happened in Myanmar. The rise of Hindu nationalism has led to a populist government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Today India's government sees the critique emanating out of universities as a danger to the Hindutva discourse it is propagating. Kadiwal [2] focuses on how women, and in particular female Muslim students, have stood up to the new normal, including the revised laws on citizenship and the discriminatory practices against Muslims across India. She shows how universities are



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some of the last spaces where discussions about Indian identity are engaged with, although these debates are under threat. She presents the courage of female students in standing up to the police and other institutional violence that tries to silence their critical voices.

The other side of this coin is discussed by Niaz and Anand [3], adding Pakistan to the mix. In their article on national belonging, they show how university space in a Delhi and a Lahore higher education institution are being co-opted by the populist governments of both countries to put forth a government-supporting national identity based on national pride. They focus on how the higher education institution space is used, analysing imagery and political installations, including flags and political posters. Their discussion engages with how the state tries to control this space in order to influence, possibly even control the narrative and debate on identity – something that has led to the kinds of protests discussed by Kadiwal [2].

Within institutions, notions of identity are constantly debated, reshaped, and reformed, with consequences for the wider society and individuals within them. Such issues are overtly recontextualised in some subjects and courses, such as in the social sciences and humanities, but have a more elusive yet controlling effect in the natural and health sciences.

Two papers in this Special Issue explore notions of belonging in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects. Viola [4] draws on empirical data with students at a STEM-based institution in the UK to understand how students develop as global citizens. Students with different socio-democratic characteristics discuss how they feel they belong—or not—and what supports them to feel part of their multicultural institutional community. Contrary to many perceptions, STEM subjects offer opportunities for students to increase their capabilities for living and working in a diverse society.

By drawing on the under-researched area of PhD supervision practice, Kandiko Howson, Kinchin and Gravett [5] present democratic pedagogies that can support cross-cultural supervisory relationships. The study used longitudinal concept-mapping across pairs of students and supervisors. The role and hierarchical nature of supervisory relationships are unpacked, highlighting how uncertainty in communicating across cultures can impede students' development as independent researchers. Concept mapping is shown as a way to facilitate dialogue between students and their supervisors, opening up opportunities for more democratic doctoral education.

Who 'belongs' in higher education drives policies around access, shapes the curriculum, and is the bedrock of the student experience. Simultaneously, who does not belong also has significant impacts on institutions, society, and the ability to deliver on democratic ideals. The curriculum—what is taught, who is taught, how teaching and learning are experienced, as highlighted in Kandiko Howson, Kinchin and Gravett [5]—is vital to understanding how democratic education functions. The role of bodies of knowledge in defining and shaping notions of freedom, democracy, and citizenship are constantly in flux.

The final paper in this Special Issue is a systematic review of the experiences of international Fulbright scholars in the United States. Lally [6] uncovers the tensions that international scholars face in the US. Nationalism and current political rhetoric can create challenging environments for those coming from abroad, even into open democratic education systems. There are echoes of the findings by Viola [4] about global political situations impacting the experiences of those studying and teaching outside of their national contexts.

All of these papers have identity at their core. How does national identity impact students in higher education? How do current political dynamics affect who studies higher education—and what can be studied? What happens when students and staff cross borders in higher education? Higher education institutions can be places of coming together and sharing ideas, creating new collectives of belonging. However, they can also be isolating and discriminatory. Several papers in this Special Issue also highlight how higher education can be a gathering point for political change and revolution, seen in Khaing Phyu Htut, Lall and Kandiko Howson [1], or a space that governments try to co-opt.

We hope this Special Issue is a catalyst for further international and comparative work exploring democratic education and belonging in higher education. All too often

internationalisation of higher education is examined through a financial transactional lens, ignoring the lived experiences of students and scholars.

Moreover, comparative higher education is a highly under-researched area. This Special Issue provides insight into the challenges of delivering on the ideals of higher education in challenging political circumstances. Future research is needed on how the contexts reported on here develop and on those more widely across the globe.

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