CALL FOR PAPERS

Small Systems: Making Connections?

Ideas of effectiveness and improvement have moved from an institutional basis to systems level developments particularly in the wake of highly influential surveys by the McKinsey Group of the performance of national and state educational systems (Barber and Mourshed 2007, Mourshed et al. 2010). Increasingly, national educational policy is driven in part by performance in international programmes of assessment (OECD n.d.) and in part by high level political discussions such as the now annual International Summit of education ministers (Asia Society 2011). Educational systems are "engaged in self-conscious strategy formulation and implementation looking to what they can learn from their own and others’ experiences and evidence" (Fullan 2009: 111). Among the strategies deployed by national and state educational systems typically are workforce remodelling, professional development and performance systems, curriculum and assessment reform, systems leadership development and diversification of provision. Across these strategies there is a tension between accountability and development, between prescription and autonomy.

Harris (2010) argues that the focus should be both on school level and system level development that requires 'collective capacity' across a system. Rather than seeing the teaching profession as deliverers of educational reform, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) pose a fourth way to system change that stresses democracy and professionalism. Among the four drivers for system improvement, Hopkins (2007) identifies issues broadly akin to Hargreaves and Shirley fourth way notably, professional teaching and intelligent accountability. In addition, he highlights the importance of personalised learning and networks and collaboration. One of the central issues is the engendering of a common sense of purpose where individual institutions can, at one and the same time, connect with the wider system and exercise autonomy in decisions and practices relevant to the context.

Much of the literature explores systems-wide development and the generation of strategies without any close consideration of the size of the system. This themed edition seeks to put a spotlight on small education systems seeking systemic level improvement and the strategies deployed in these contexts. In this regard ‘small’ is defined in terms of a system serving a population of around 10 million or less. The system in question might be a national system or a state system where the state has a high degree of autonomy in determining the direction of educational
policy and in shaping ongoing development. There are questions about how small educational systems bring about reform including:

- how do small systems grapple with issues related to culture, educational traditions and structures;
- in what ways do small systems build connections through partnerships;
- is diversity of provision viable strategy for small systems;
- are there issues around sustaining change in small systems?

Through this collection of papers, we hope to identify some of the key questions for subsequent research and practice. This issue seeks articles that may include theoretical, policy and practice implications. Articles can also focus on specific areas such as curriculum and assessment reform; systems leadership development; workforce remodelling; professional learning; performance management systems including quality assurance; and diversification of provision. while much of the focus in policy and indeed in the literature is on the school system, we would also welcome contributions related to other sectors of education within small systems: early years, higher and further education, community and informal educational provision.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**

The deadline for submission is **15th January 2016**. All articles will be peer reviewed. Articles should be submitted following the *Guidelines for Submission*.

**REFERENCES**


Mourshed, M., Chijoke, C. & Barber, M. (2010) *How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better*. McKinsey,