

Empowering Educators

**Proven Principles
and Successful
Strategies**

Edited by

Kevin Larkin

Marta Kawka

Karen Noble

Henriette van Rensburg

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Summary: "Empowering educators can be understood in two ways simultaneously: educators who work effectively and successfully to empower their students and thereby the families and communities to whom their students belong; and the need for these same educators to be themselves empowered by means of appropriate resources and support, relevant professional development opportunities and access to up-to-date research to enhance their content and pedagogical knowledge. The distinctiveness of this book's approach lies in the range of teaching and learning 'hot topics' and 'wicked problems' that each chapter draws on to explore these parallel manifestations of empowering educators. The book presents a number of proven principles and successful strategies that have been demonstrated by rigorous research to be effective in assisting teachers to carry out their fundamental mission of helping their students to achieve significant learning outcomes"— Provided by publisher.

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*For those who teach, for those who learn and for those who
research teaching and learning, and for all who strive
through teaching, learning and research to empower all of us
and thereby to make this world a better place for all*

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Foreword

Marc Clarà

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We are nowadays witnessing, on a global scale, how teachers and students are being continuously and progressively disempowered. This phenomenon is related to an ongoing process of homogenisation of educational systems around the world, which some authors have called the ‘fourth way’ (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012), the ‘Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM)’ (Graham, 2013; Sahlberg, 2012) and ‘Global Educational Policies (GEP)’ (Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012). Among these denominations, the acronym ‘GERM’ seems to me especially appropriate because taken as a word it becomes a metaphor that describes the phenomenon itself: GERM is very contagious and infects many education systems around the world.

Strongly connected to the ongoing process of globalisation framed by neoliberal ideology (Verger et al., 2012), GERM consists of a series of ideas and visions about educational politics – what Carney (2009) called a ‘policyscape’ – that are generated and disseminated mainly by international, transnational actors (e.g., the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], the United Nations Children’s Fund [UNICEF], the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], the World Bank), and that are adopted by policy-makers around the world, in some cases because of imposition or pressures, and in others because they are persuaded and convinced to do so (Verger et al., 2012).

The main idea in the ‘policyscape’ (Carney, 2009) of GERM is the transformation of education systems into ‘quasi-markets’ by means of decentralising school procedures and standardising (extreme centralising on a global scale) evaluation. The vision is that all the children in a country – and among all the countries – are evaluated according to the same standards (e.g., the Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]), which become the main indicators of the quality of teachers, schools and education systems, so that all the schools and all the countries can be located on a unique scale of quality. Accordingly, families and citizens can use this scale in order to choose a school or to decide their votes in an election (Batista, 2014).

Obviously this introduces new pressures on teachers, schools and policy-makers, who make decisions and set up reforms with the main aim of gaining improved positions in the national and global rankings. As a consequence, curriculums are every day more narrowed (prioritising literacy and numeracy) and more similar around the world, disregarding the differences among the cultures, interests, talents and necessities of the children and the communities at whom these curriculums are aimed (Sahlberg, 2012). At the same time, teachers are strongly pressurised, since the quality of their work is also measured according to the students' results in the standardised tests. Thus, test-based accountability is spreading rapidly in education systems infected by GERM, mainly by means of what is known as 'value-added' models. The main idea behind this type of teacher accountability is, in the words of Braun (2013):

Take all the available data and build a statistical model that predicts for each student what her current test score in a particular subject would be if she were typical of students with similar prior test scores and background characteristics, and was taught by a typical teacher. The difference between the student's actual score and the predicted score is treated as the teacher's value-added for that student. (p. 121)

Test-based teacher accountability, in addition to having many technical problems (Braun, 2013), implies strong distrust towards teachers' professionalism, and it is often accompanied by a discourse of concern about teacher quality (Graham, 2013). The idea that teachers are not capable is used as a justification of strong accountability by teachers, which in some cases, as in Australia, includes annual standardised tests like the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Thompson, 2013).

Thus, teachers around the globe see how their pedagogical capacity is denied and how they are relegated to the status of mere technicians, closely supervised through test-based accountability, without any real decisional power about what really matters in education. Similarly, students around the world see how their culture, their individuality, their interests, their talents, their necessities, they themselves, as unique human beings, do not matter at all in their education, which is framed by globally defined and narrow standards that they must fit

above anything else (Sahlberg, 2012). Both students and teachers are therefore being strongly disempowered by GERM.

Within this context, the book that you have in your hands or on your computer or e-reader makes an important contribution aimed at re-empowering teachers and students. In my opinion, what is especially valuable about this book is that it talks directly to teachers working in different fields and at different educational levels, to offer arguments and strategies to assist them to take back their own educational power and to re-empower their students. It explores empowering teaching from the perspectives of psycho-pedagogy and also of neuroscience, discusses the issue of standardisation and highlights strategies of resistance with which to face this disempowering process, and demonstrates the importance of considering students' cultures in teaching, among other issues.

This book is truly necessary in our lives; it puts teachers and students at the centre of education systems, tells them that they are at that centre and gives them tools to assume that centrality. In my view, this is of great value and it outlines a real path to build (or to rebuild) our education systems. Enjoy this wonderful book!

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