



## EDITORIAL,

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## Editorial

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It was a great pleasure to accept the invitation to act as guest editor for the October 2015 special issue for Education in the North since education in the North has been a long-standing aspect of my life over the last 20 years while living and working as an educator and researcher in regions such as northern Canada, Alaska and northern Scandinavia. Upon receiving the invitation, the concept of *bridging divides* quickly crystallized as the key theme to be covered by the issue. This took place because the concept closely embodies the multi-faceted and collaborative experiences I have been exposed to and exemplifies the ever-increasing need for greater collaboration and reconciliation among peoples and disciplines to address the common challenges confronting education in the North.

For our purposes, the idea of *bridging divides* centres on research and practice that negotiate those boundaries which are both challenging to traverse and infrequently crossed. By using the concept in this way, this issue is inherently multidisciplinary, but the term *bridging divides* is also used to highlight those concepts and practices that challenge conventional disciplines, attitudes and systems by offering new insights or by making connections not often made. *Bridging divides* is especially relevant in the North since living and working in northern regions means we must daily confront the challenging geographic and social divides inherent in our communities and environments. Some key examples of these challenges include: reconciling the needs of small, rural communities in the face of increasing globalization; appropriately recognizing the continuing political struggles of Indigenous peoples in the North; and articulating effective models of education by and for northern communities that are not just transplanted systems from the urban heartlands of North America, Europe or Asia.

In the case of *bridging* education in the North, reflection and practice must increasingly include innovative and 'outside-the-box' approaches at all levels of education from formal schooling for children to higher education, and even workplace and informal training. It is these types of approaches which we highlight in this issue. The topics covered by the contributions are highly diverse ranging from gender and Indigenous studies to social and health care, technology and entrepreneurship education. And yet, each contribution in their own way offers an example of *bridging* in a particular field of study or area of education. Articles detailing new empirical research findings, features of projects and work in progress, and book reviews have been included.

The first article by Karolina Gombert, *Bridging Divides: Interdisciplinarity in Action Research*, discusses a recent study in Scotland that brings together the fields of education, public health, sociology and nutrition. More specifically, this article explores the socioeconomic environment surrounding food choices by 'vulnerable' young people, and highlights those

factors which researchers can take into account to practice more effective interdisciplinary research. Mervi Heikkinen's article is titled, *Bridging Conceptual Divides Related to Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Teacher Education*. This second article deconstructs gender stereotypes and explores a more fluid understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality to inform practice in teacher education programming in Finland. The authors Kari-Pekka Heikkinen, Ulla-Maija Seppänen and Jouko Isokangas, in their article *Developing External Networks for Learning Entrepreneurship in Higher Education*, share a unique training model for breaking down the barriers between higher education and the world of work, and explore how external learning networks bridge formal education and business development together as part of a higher education programme in Finland.

Additionally, the October 2015 issue includes three features. Julian Cohen's feature on education about drugs points to the need for a more open discussion between teachers and students. The issues discussed highlight potential bridging pathways for those teachers who might feel unprepared to address this challenging topic. The second feature by Pamela Bain and Rachel Shanks describes work with elementary and secondary school students using technology at heritage sites to improve literacy. Specifically, this feature summarizes the Apardion initiative as part of the City of Aberdeen's Reading Bus Program in Scotland and describes how this novel initiative involves bridging school-based learning with visits to heritage landmarks across the city. The third feature by Ramone Al Bishware focuses on bridging the divide between educationalists and technologists when they collaborate in education technology projects. This feature outlines the need to look for shared understanding between these two groups when they engage in educational change involving technology. It further points to the need for reflecting on a wider range of factors such as politics and culture when discussing diverging views regarding the use of technology in teaching and learning.

This special issue also includes reviews of four recent books covering topics that further showcase fields within which *bridging* is taking place. The first review by Jacinta Birchley addresses a text by Sonia Jackson and Claire Cameron - *Improving Access to Further and Higher Education for Young People in Public Care*. This volume is relevant since it discusses international contexts within which further efforts are needed to connect children and young people in care to adequate educational opportunities. Terri Harrison reviews a new volume by Bonnie Thomas titled, *How to Get Kids Offline and Communicating with Nature*. This book discusses practical activities that work to bridge the divide between children and their natural environment. The third review by Sandra Juutilainen shifts attention to the field of Indigenous studies and the edited volume by Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith titled, *Theorizing Native Studies*. This volume is appropriate since it addresses Indigenous contexts, which are a key reality in many northern regions, and highlights conceptual approaches that bridge Indigenous theory and 'Western' theory. The final review is by Reem Mouawad on the text *Supporting Change in Autism Services: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice* by

Jackie Ravet with an emphasis on how this text discusses ways in which practice can better connect with the theory.

Ultimately, this issue brings together research and practice from a wide range of fields which all in their own way are highly relevant to the theme of *bridging divides*. This varied work also showcases examples of thought-provoking concepts and innovative programmes that represent ground breaking practice in their respective localities that in turn can potentially hold strong relevance for education in all northern regions. On behalf of the Editorial Board at Education in the North, I want to thank all of the contributors for their work. Furthermore, I point our readers to the diversity that this issue has to offer and encourage you to make connections for yourself with respect to how we, in our varied professions, are all attempting to bridge divides.

Blair

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