Preface

The Flinders Educational Futures Research Institute (FEFRI) is located in the School of Education at Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia. Our School of Education is responsible for pre-service and in-service teacher education, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate courses in fields related to education. The existence of the FEFRI within the School prioritises research as a valued activity within a context of political and economic pressure to increase student enrolments and consequent teaching activity.

The organisational structure of the FEFRI, which consists of individual researchers, Centres, and Clusters, reflects Flinders University’s strategic directions of Differentiate, Focus, and Intensify. The Centres and Clusters facilitate the pooling of knowledge, ideas, conceptual frameworks, and research expertise, and enrich research design and execution. In particular, the structures of the FEFRI support Key Strategy 5 of the Flinders Strategic Plan (2012-2016), which has as its theme “focus on those who are or may be research active and on research that is ethical, high quality, targeted, and collaborative, so that we can make a positive contribution to resolving society’s most challenging problems” (Flinders University, n.d.).

FEFRI members are drawn from all corners of the education sector who are locally, nationally, and globally connected. The leadership in research conducted by FEFRI members provides a currency to inform and engage with professional and community organisations, with a view to generating and connecting new and existing research knowledge with significant questions and thus advancing global educational policy and practice. FEFRI members’ work is informed by principles of Social Justice and Sustainability, which are components of the Flinders University future directions, and are also supported by the Aspiration Statement of the School of Education, as seen in Figure 1, which illustrates that the school’s core business is underpinned by three interrelated commitments.

The Flinders University Research Plan, the School of Education’s aspiration statement, and the work of the FEFRI, as represented by individual researchers, Clusters, and Centres, are well calibrated. This calibration has direct benefits for FEFRI members’ abilities to directly translate their knowledge gained from research into their teaching at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, recognising the importance of taking a student-centred approach to their teaching that connects new knowledge with the prior knowledge and experiences that students bring to tertiary study.

From the description above, it can be seen that the FEFRI provides a supportive structure within which researchers and practitioners can collaborate on projects of mutual professional interest. Our Institute’s resources have enabled the translation of a range of educational research projects and theories into a publication that will disseminate our research findings and syntheses to a wider audience.

Hence, the chapters in this book represent a collaborative endeavour that represents the broad scope of FEFRI members’ and associates’ research interests. The book is divided into five sections. The first
Figure 1. School of Education aspiration statement

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section, “Learning,” contains chapters that highlight the roles of knowledge and strategies for motivation, cognition and metacognition during teaching and learning. Chapter 1, by Michael Lawson and me, describes a study conducted over a five-year period that used hierarchical linear modelling to measure growth in students’ cognitive and metacognitive knowledge and strategies for learning. We discuss the implications of our results, which showed little average change in students’ reports of their cognitive and metacognitive strategy use over the five years of their secondary schooling. We propose that the generally disappointing growth trajectories suggest that cognitive and metacognitive strategies for learning do not appear to be subjected to the explicit teaching and evaluation processes applied to other school subjects. We ask whether school leaders and teachers recognise and value the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies for good quality learning across all subject domains.

Shane Pill, the author of Chapter 2, is a recent winner of a number of awards including a 2013 Council of Educational Associations South Australia World Teachers Day Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Teaching Profession in South Australia, a 2013 Flinders University Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law Award for Excellence in Teaching, and a 2013 South Australian Football League Coach Award. In his chapter about the development of sport literacy, Shane argues for reconceptualising current approaches and dominant paradigms at play in Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). Shane draws on his 18 years of experience in teaching and developing physical education curricula in schools, and uses autobiographical data and research literature to generate theoretical concepts to expand thinking about the practice of sport teaching in PE. Shane confronts the models, metaphors, and images that were part of his apprenticeship of observation and pre-service teacher training.

Remaining with the theme of learning, in Chapter 3, Lihui Wang and Michael Lawson review competing perspectives about the nature of mental imagery as a form of cognitive representation. Lihui and Michael provide an overview of the literature from the pictorial position, which proposes that visual mental imagery is depictive and spatial in nature. They also describe the propositional position, which
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explores the notion that visual mental imagery is epiphenomenal and denies images as a basic or primitive form of information processing. The authors suggest that a resolution of the debate is offered by a dual representation position that takes visual mental imagery as a key representational format, suggesting complementary and integrating roles for verbal and pictorial representations. Lihui and Michael propose that the integrated roles of verbal and pictorial imagery provide a clear basis for the use of imagery-based strategies for classroom teaching and learning.

In Chapter 4, Shaileigh Page and Julie Clark describe and analyse teachers’ promotion of powerful positive affect in primary mathematics classrooms. Shaileigh and Julie’s research used a qualitative approach that focused on the interactions between the teacher participants, their thoughts, affect, and actions, along with the identification of complex situational factors that facilitated and constrained their pedagogical changes. The authors utilised Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and the Stages of Concern framework to understand teachers’ adoption and development of teaching tools that promote powerful positive affect. The chapter concludes with a conceptual model of the factors influencing teachers’ work in mathematics education, with a view to informing future theory and practice in mathematics education.

An International Baccalaureate program provides the setting for Penny Van Deur’s research reported in Chapter 5. Penny’s work shares many parallel concepts with Michael Lawson’s and my first chapter in this first section on learning. Penny describes how the International Baccalaureate approach to research influences students’ learning in terms of how they plan and reflect on carrying out the International Baccalaureate Personal Project. She reports the results of interviews conducted with 24 students about how they planned and reflected upon their research projects. Penny argues that the International Baccalaureate approach could provide a framework for students in other schools who are completing research projects, such as the South Australian Certificate of Education Research Project. The chapter includes three case studies that illustrate “less productive,” “productive,” and “very productive” sequences of students’ planning and reflecting strategies. Penny proposes strategies to develop students’ awareness of their knowledge about self-regulated learning.

Section 2 of this book, “Diversity,” begins with Chapter 6 by Svetlana King and Laurence Owens. Svetlana and Laurence report findings from their study into the experiences of African students from refugee backgrounds in Australian schools. Their research sought to understand the experiences and challenges that shape the students’ education and career pathways. The authors’ qualitative analysis revealed six key influences: previous schooling, English language skills, challenges and support in Australian schooling, family support, academic achievement, and post-school preparation. This chapter includes an indicative case study of a single student, including theoretical analysis and commentary. The authors provide a summary of implications for educational practices with a view to facilitating educational participation and success amongst this particular group of young people.

In Chapter 7, John Guenther reviews data from the 2012 Australian National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) with a particular focus on data drawn from very remote schools across Australia. John argues that although the data appear to support perceptions of failure in remote education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, it is possible to adopt alternative perspectives when interpreting the results. John proposes that perceptions of failure are built upon philosophical, sociological, economic, and psychological assumptions that may not be shared by the people (and their communities) who are subjected to tests such as the NAPLAN. John argues for a critical perspective that allows for novel ways of understanding difference, framed around the perspectives that come from the context of very remote schools.
Grace Skrzypiec (who was a recipient of a 2014 Young Investigators Scholarship from the International Society for Research on Aggression) and Laurence Owens, in Chapter 8, describe a cross-disciplinary approach used to develop an Intention to Transgress (ITT) model. The ITT model draws from theories in the disciplines of social psychology and criminology, such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour, together with motivators of crime identified from dominant criminological theories. The aim of the ITT model is to determine the antecedents of adolescents’ intentions to engage in offending or transgressional behaviour. Grace and Laurence propose that the ITT model—comprising four proximal antecedents of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived control, and negative affect, and two distal factors of moral norms and reputation enhancement—adds to our understanding of adolescent offending. They also suggest that this model may be used to design educational interventions to prevent offending or transgressional behaviour.

The implementation of the new Australian Curriculum provides a focus for Chapter 9, by Karyn Carson and Peter Walker. Karyn and Peter note that the Australian Curriculum has provided opportunities and challenges for ensuring that the needs of diverse learners are strongly addressed within inclusive education settings. The authors highlight national inconsistencies in the provision of assessment accommodations, the use of general capabilities as a starting point rather than for curriculum adjustment, and paucity of resources and professional learning opportunities to support inclusive assessment practices. Karyn and Peter provide recommendations for how educators can achieve effective student-centered assessment practices for diverse learners using the Australian Curriculum across and within different contexts.

Section 3, “Communities of Practice,” begins with Chapter 10, by R. John Halsey, who has held the Sidney Myer Chair of Rural and Remote Education and Community Participation at Flinders University (2009–2014). John argues for a deliberate and distinctively rural rationale for reframing the formation of educational leaders. John argues that education and training in rural contexts is more expansive and extensive than “just schools,” and that there are issues and challenges pertinent to the preparation of teachers and other human service professionals for rural contexts. He argues for attention to be focused on understandings of rural and rurality, considerations of sustainability, privileging the constructs of rural, space, and the primacy of relationships. John proposes that these considerations are essential to the formation of rural educational leaders as rich sources of intellectual capital who are uniquely placed to contribute towards rural community capacity building and sustainability through fresh, innovative approaches to education and access to essential human services.

In Chapter 11, Michael Bell and Carolyn Palmer (AM) propose that much of the contemporary research and theorising about educational leaders’ practices is situated in a modernist and machine-based paradigm. The authors argue that this approach has portrayed the living forms that play out in the day-to-day social worlds of educational contexts as interactions between relatively static entities. In contrast, Michael and Carolyn suggest that a relational ontology recognises that diverse perspectives energise discussions about leadership. They believe that positioning leaders as inquirers will collapse artificial divides between experts and practitioners, researchers and the researched, and the everyday experiences of leadership and leadership theorising. The authors argue for a need to re-situate the work of academics closer to the lived experiences of leaders in context, and for research methodologies to engage with the living forms of leadership as they occur in context and in relation with others.

Carolyn Gregoric and Laurence Owens continue the theme of communities in Chapter 12, with a report of a research study about the involvement of business and community groups in schools. Carolyn and Laurence draw from interviews with students, staff, and community representatives. The authors use inductive analyses to examine participants’ perspectives and experiences with school-community
involvement. They report that many positive outcomes occur when schools and the community work together, yet the potential of school-community involvement is not always fully realised. Carolyn and Laurence provide recommendations that seek to enhance opportunities, review policies and build capacities for relationship-building within schools and the community.

Section 4, “Student Mental Health and Wellbeing,” reflects growing national and international concern about the positive development of all aspects of students’ lives at school. Valeria Cavioni and Maria Assunta Zanetti, in Chapter 13, describe a quasi-experimental study on the effectiveness of the implementation of a social-emotional program with Italian kindergarten children. The researchers’ observations of children, and reports from teachers and parents, indicated that an intervention program called Con la tua mano [By your hand] had a positive impact on the social and emotional competencies of children as they transitioned from kindergarten to primary school. The research found indications of young children’s enhanced emotional competence, improved relationships, and reduced behaviour problems. Valeria and Maria Assunta discuss implications for the delivery of social and emotional education programs in early childhood settings, particularly for the period of transition between kindergarten and school.

Next, in Chapter 14, Laurence Owens reports that over the last two decades researchers have broadened their conceptualisations of aggression to include more indirect (also called social and relational) forms of aggression, with particular reference to aggression by girls. Laurence was a 2013 recipient of a Flinders University Vice Chancellor’s Excellence in Teaching Award. Laurence summarises recent research on indirect aggression and efforts to find effective interventions. He adopts a specific focus on teenage girls’ aggression and discusses ways in which interventions need to take account of the nature of teenage girls’ friendships, the functions of indirect aggression and girls’ own relational strengths, and language and social skills.

In Chapter 15, Ann Lendrum and Neil Humphrey explore the implications of the accumulated body of research about social and emotional education programs for developing effective educational practices. Ann and Neil draw upon an international literature base, including research about the importance of social and emotional education, the role of schools in promoting it, how this process works to influence key proximal and distal outcomes, the kinds of approaches and strategies that have been shown to be effective, and the centrality of different aspects of (and factors affecting) implementation. The chapter culminates in an extended vignette with a view to demonstrating what social and emotional education might look like in a school in which research knowledge is routinely used to inform practice.

Grace Skrzypiec, Phillip Slee (who is the Director of the Student Wellbeing and Prevention of Violence Research Centre), and I, in Chapter 16, address the measurement of students’ wellbeing. The availability of good quality measures can be a problem for researchers who are attempting to assess the impact of social and emotional education initiatives in schools. To date, researchers have been uncertain about the number and types of domains that should be included in measures of students’ mental health and wellbeing. The chapter reports our study that compared the results of three currently available instruments that measure subjective wellbeing. Combining the results from the three scales, our study indicated that the majority (55%) of students were flourishing, a large proportion (39%) had moderate mental health, and a small proportion (about 6%) were languishing. However, we found that all three instruments required some modification to make them better suited as measures of the subjective wellbeing of young people in the middle-school years.

In the final chapter, Rosalyn Shute calls upon her extensive experiences, not only as a university educator but also as a family and community member, to draw from the chapters six themes for reflection and further discussion. The six themes comprise what education is for, the relational nature of education,
strengths and empowerment, making the implicit explicit, diversity and pluralism, and the importance of context. The themes provide ways of linking the chapters to each other and also to other contemporary published works. The six themes also provide ways of extending the contribution of this book into new fields of enquiry. Rosalyn’s final chapter captures the strength of the collection of chapters in this book, which through the appreciation of relationships, diversity, and personal and contextual strengths, in her words, seeks to improve the lot of children and adolescents and help them onto positive paths in life.

Helen Askell-Williams
Flinders University, Australia
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REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 Carolyn Palmer was made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2014 for services to people with vision impairment.