Foreword

International perspectives and trends in education are part of the complex conversations governing the continuing search for excellent experiences for all children. Many countries are engaged in this process and few questions are more difficult to answer than the total number of countries in the world, as there is no single correct answer. Depending upon the source, there may be 189, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195 or 196 independent countries in existence upon our globe today (worldatlas.com/nations.htm). This edited volume presents perspectives from a range of countries, subjects, grade levels and challenges and captures student and teacher classroom experiences from Asian, European, African and North American authors with an emphasis on classroom practice. Chapters address primary grades to college teaching and learning. Authors provide their voice in describing their existential evolution during teaching and learning in their practice with the student populations discussed. Reading the voices of teachers provides an opportunity for readers to consider their own evolving human nature as they recognize the role teachers play as first responders to school children in very challenging environments. Readers will see that sometimes these students enter classrooms with multiple identities that teachers must navigate in leading them to success. Some students view teachers along a spectrum from profound to indifference. Students can view the teacher as a soldier for the status quo and can view the teachers as a facilitator of educational hope and succor.

The audience will discover what it is like to be a student in one of these countries where differing languages, economics, or experiential backgrounds may well be different from their own students or even the majority of students in these varied countries.

Authors discuss and recognize the resiliency of both teachers and students as they move forward. For the teacher that goal is captured in the question, “how can I improve my practice.” For the student that goal may be “how can I mange my life in a sometimes frightening environment.” Understanding the need for students to be listened to, particularly if their concerns are sometimes inaudibly expressed, this volume asks educational leaders to intently listen. A sensitive ear might sense the
ubiquitous rhythmic desire of these students to be taught in a manner on par with the best and brightest of all students.

Chapters provide practical instructional designs and curriculum tools that reflect authors’ experiences with varied student populations. The ideas are merely an entry point for considering how to approach students with unique needs in circumstances beyond their control. The curricular ideas address both specific issues of student identity as well as general policy directives. The contributors attempt to clarify the “student engagement” construct for conceptual as well as contextual specificity in order to provide a broad overview of the construct’s use in the professional understanding of teaching and learning. Included in the book are insights into the use of the arts, working with at-risk and low achieving students, and parents. Topics also include cultural, sociopolitical and multicultural aspects. Authors look at the work of engagement from a comparative perspective addressing student response to failure, post war living and gender issues.

The editors recognize the invaluable inquiries on student engagement already part of the extant literature on the subject. In the Handbook of Research on Student Engagement, authors argue for explanations of the construct “Engagement” that entails multiple and discreet perspectives (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). Chapter authors of this excellent Handbook attempt to clarify the “student engagement” construct for conceptual and contextual specificity in order to provide a broad overview of the construct’s use in a professional understanding of teaching and learning. Perusing the Handbook will provide readers with additional insight into this important topic.

The editors and contributors wanted to present a volume on engagement from an international perspective and thought it useful to limit inquiry to as close to classroom practice as possible. Many of the chapters contain narrative inquiries that address personal experiences. The authors’ research traditions on student engagement provide a different etiology from those found in the Handbook. By providing the reader with an understanding of student engagement from global and local perspectives simultaneously such a perspective would bring to light global educational systems having unique elements and show that students and teachers in these systems are not unique regarding their conceptual and contextual understanding of engagement. That is, schools address student engagement in a multiplicity of ways. This collection offers an opportunity for readers to embrace the idea that regardless of country, children and teachers perform the teaching and learning ritual of which engagement is fundamental. How the conceptual clarity on engagement will involve in our global community will rely on the work of researchers.

“Challenges” provides the reader with the ability to recognize the ubiquity of teaching and learning across a wide variety of countries. As the reader synthesizes the experiences of the teachers and students in the chapters it is possible to develop
teaching and learning engagement strategies unique to each individual current pedagogical practice. As this occurs each reader will be able to become more adaptable to an ever changing global environment that continues to present challenges to student optimal learning.

REFERENCES