

IB Research Notes

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In this issue:

Feature article

Linking school climate to student outcomes in the IB Diploma Programme

John Hardman

Commentary and discussion

Richard Pearce

Rejoinder to the commentary

John Hardman

IBRU news

~ Conferences, publications and events

Research noticeboard

- ~ Practitioner research project
- ~ Intergenerational learning
- ~ Research literature

In this issue of *IB Research Notes* John Hardman's research looks at a case study of linking school climate and the changes made to it with new leadership, and how these have impacted on student outcomes in IB courses. This article addresses issues of the level to which facilitative leadership can affect learning outcomes. Contextualizing local variables is important to any case study approach such as this. The commentary by Dr Richard Pearce addresses themes within the main article and extends the debate. The rejoinder by John Hardman takes up certain issues from the commentary. This kind of discursive format is an area we hope to develop by changing *IB Research Notes* to a more interactive medium for research dissemination and critical discussion over the coming year.

An online questionnaire will be placed on the *IB Research Notes* web site asking for opinions and information on use of the publication. Please spend some time completing this questionnaire as it will give us a stronger understanding of the needs and interests of our audience.

We are always very keen to hear about prospective articles for *IB Research Notes*. If you are interested in contributing, please contact me at the IBRU e-mail address. We will be changing the format and structure of *IB Research Notes* during 2007 in order to improve its structure and address the needs of its audience more directly. I would greatly appreciate any feedback about the publication. Please send your feedback to: richard.caffyn@ibo.org.

Richard Caffyn
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Feature article

John Hardman holds a master's degree in international school management from Oxford Brookes University. He is currently developing his doctoral dissertation on educational leadership in the global era, with a focus on environmental sustainability in education, at Florida Atlantic University (South Florida). His research interests include the impact of mindful leaders on teacher efficacy and on student achievement, the impact of technology on education in the 21st century, and the process of conversion of schools to environmentally sustainable communities.

Born and raised in Argentina, John's experience as an educator over the past 25 years has spanned teaching English, theory of knowledge, science, history and drama in primary and secondary schools, and section and school headships of international schools in Latin America. During this time, he has been involved in curriculum design and development, implementation of the three IB programmes, school construction projects and development of educational associations. In recent years, he has been a member of diverse educational committees, some of the more significant of which have been the Latin American Heads Conference (LAHC), the IBO's regional heads representative committee of IBLA and the Corporación Ecuatoriana para el Mejoramiento de la Calidad de la Educación (CORPEDUCAR), an association of private schools in Ecuador, of which he was co-founder. While in Ecuador, he worked closely with the Ecuadorian Ministry of Education in the reform of the national baccalaureate and in the improvement of the national school supervision system.

Linking school climate to student outcomes in the IB Diploma Programme

John Hardman

Executive summary

This paper provides evidence that conscious and systematic enhancement of school climate and working conditions promotes improvement in student learning. In the case presented here, the intention was to foster the transformation of a formerly strongly autocratic school environment, characterized by passive faculty, students and community, to a learning organization in tune with 21st century learning and the mission of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). While respecting traditional norms and values of the host country, the overall strategy established a process for the development of a flexible, collaborative culture of shared vision and decision making, which a growing body of research suggests serves to improve and sustain the quality of teaching and learning in a rapidly changing context. Over the course of the three years, a number of initiatives were implemented, intended to build and sustain a vision of educational excellence, high performance of students and teachers, and a nurturing and outward-looking community through empowerment and shared leadership. Among the outcomes described here are the positive changes in the school's climate and working conditions, and student results in the IB Diploma Programme from 2001 to 2004.

Background

From April 2001 to July 2004, I was privileged to head an international school in Ecuador. At the time, the K-12 school had 1,600 students on roll and 140 staff, made up of teaching, clerical and support personnel. The school was structured as an integrated pre-school, primary, and a two-stream optional national and international secondary section from grades 7 to 12, offering the IB Diploma Programme to approximately 50% of the student body.

For the duration of the contract, I was afforded a great deal of freedom in running most aspects of the school's business, which empowered me personally in the role of school principal, which in turn allowed us to develop a strong self-managing ethos. Without this support from the institution's governance, I believe that the following events would not have been possible.

Improving school climate and conditions through engagement and empowerment

One of the greatest challenges to change in any organization is its culture, as embedded in the behaviours, norms and values of stakeholders, and this is particularly true when the way things have been done in the past contrasts strongly with new initiatives (Carson 2005; Hofstede 1980; Trompenaars 1993). In this particular case, the situational analysis of the school conducted at the outset revealed, among other issues, a history of autocratic leadership within a hierarchical local culture, where faculty, staff and students had little say in curriculum development and delivery, and where the IB Diploma Programme was doing little to further the mission of the IBO "to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect".¹ It was understood that a suitable environment for this kind of development would be created if we worked towards developing the school as a learning organization (Leithwood et al 1995, 2006; Senge 1990; Senge et al 2000), and that this would become possible if all staff were to become active learners and participators in the school transformation process.

The strategy for improvement therefore focused on two central themes to engage all members of the community, including the parents, for the following three years. The major goal was to establish student achievement at the forefront of all school business. However, in order to accomplish this, we needed first to improve the school's climate and working conditions, by setting in place the mechanisms that would guarantee a caring, trusting, collegial learning environment.

Methodology

To achieve this level of commitment, an anonymous climate survey was administered to all personnel in April 2001. They were informed that the instrument was designed to provide all with an opportunity to express concerns and perceptions with regard to how well they felt the school was performing its main tasks, to identify priorities and to participate effectively in whatever changes were considered to be important. On the four occasions that the survey was administered over the three-year period, over 96% of administrative, teaching and ancillary staff completed the questionnaire. The contrasted results of the two first surveys, for April and November 2001, are presented in Figure 1.

¹ retrieved 30 May 2006 from <http://www.ibo.org/fastfacts/index.cfm>

Survey findings

The results of the survey were collated by the senior management team, and reported by the head teacher to each of the three sections: kindergarten, primary and secondary. These meetings were attended by section faculty and head. At full staff meetings, which clerical staff also attended, the overall results were summarized and discussed, and particular attention was paid to those domains that received the greatest number of “hits”. The quantitative results of the survey were therefore opened up to direct discussion for corroboration and adjustment purposes.

The survey was administered six months later and subsequently once a year each November to monitor how staff perceptions were evolving, and to make adjustments to the strategic plan as our priorities shifted. The first two surveys are presented here (Figure 1). They show how priorities were quickly shifted to the better through the process of staff empowerment. This shows how, through the application of different corrective initiatives, perceptions were shifted and new priorities identified.

Figure 1

Comparative results of the climate survey for April and November 2001

Climate survey comparison of results

Response: faculty and staff (96%)

Sample		93	
		April 01	
	Staff concerns	N°	%
K	Staff development	364	65.23
I	Motivation	337	60.39
H	Teamwork	329	58.96
D	Leadership	298	53.41
F	Resources (purchase and use)	291	52.15
E	Creativity and innovation	254	45.52
G	Problem-solving capacity	236	42.29
B	Staff recruitment	231	41.40
C	Structures and roles	199	35.66
J	Objectives (clarity and consensus)	185	33.15
A	School community environment	178	31.90
Total number of responses		2,902	
Percent in agreement		47.28	
Mean responses priority 2		279	
Priority 1 (mean + 25%)		348,75	

Response: faculty and staff (96%)

Sample		93	
		Nov 01	
	Staff concerns	N°	%
H	Teamwork	214	38.35
F	Resources (purchase and use)	210	37.63
K	Staff development	189	33.87
I	Motivation	166	29.75
B	Staff recruitment	152	27.24
A	School community environment	128	22.94
D	Leadership	123	22.04
G	Problem-solving capacity	107	19.18
C	Structures and roles	101	18.10
E	Creativity and innovation	97	17.38
J	Objectives (clarity and consensus)	85	15.23
Total number of responses		1,572	
Percent in agreement		25.61	
Mean responses priority 2		279	
Priority 1 (mean + 25%)		348,75	

The concerns expressed through the results of the survey are highlighted to identify their priority levels as priority 1 (dark grey, 62.50% or more as high) and priority 2 (light grey, 50%–62% as moderate). Below 50%, issues and concerns were not considered to be a priority requiring resolution at that particular time. As may be seen from the tables, over the first six months overall staff concerns were reduced by almost half (2,902 to 1,572 responses), which was translated into a perceptible improvement in the atmosphere of the school, and personnel, student and home-school relationships. There was also a perceptible shift in the concerns identified. This transformation resulted from real changes made in the school's approach to leadership as evidenced in the inclusion of teachers in decision-making processes (which went from routine matters such as assignment of teachers' daily duties to curriculum design and development), devolution of budgetary responsibility to individual sections, and a proactive approach to strengthening the home-school partnership.

When the survey was administered in November 2002 and 2003, the quantitative results were similar. However, the issues had shifted by that time to a concern about the adequacy of the school facilities and use of resources, rather than about people issues, which indicated a sustained improvement in teamwork due to an increase in trust and collegiality.

Student outcomes

The qualitative change in climate and conditions of the school is clearly represented in the responses of the staff in the surveys presented here. But this change, though significant in itself, could not be considered entirely successful unless learning outcomes in students showed measurable gains, which represented the main purpose of the entire initiative.

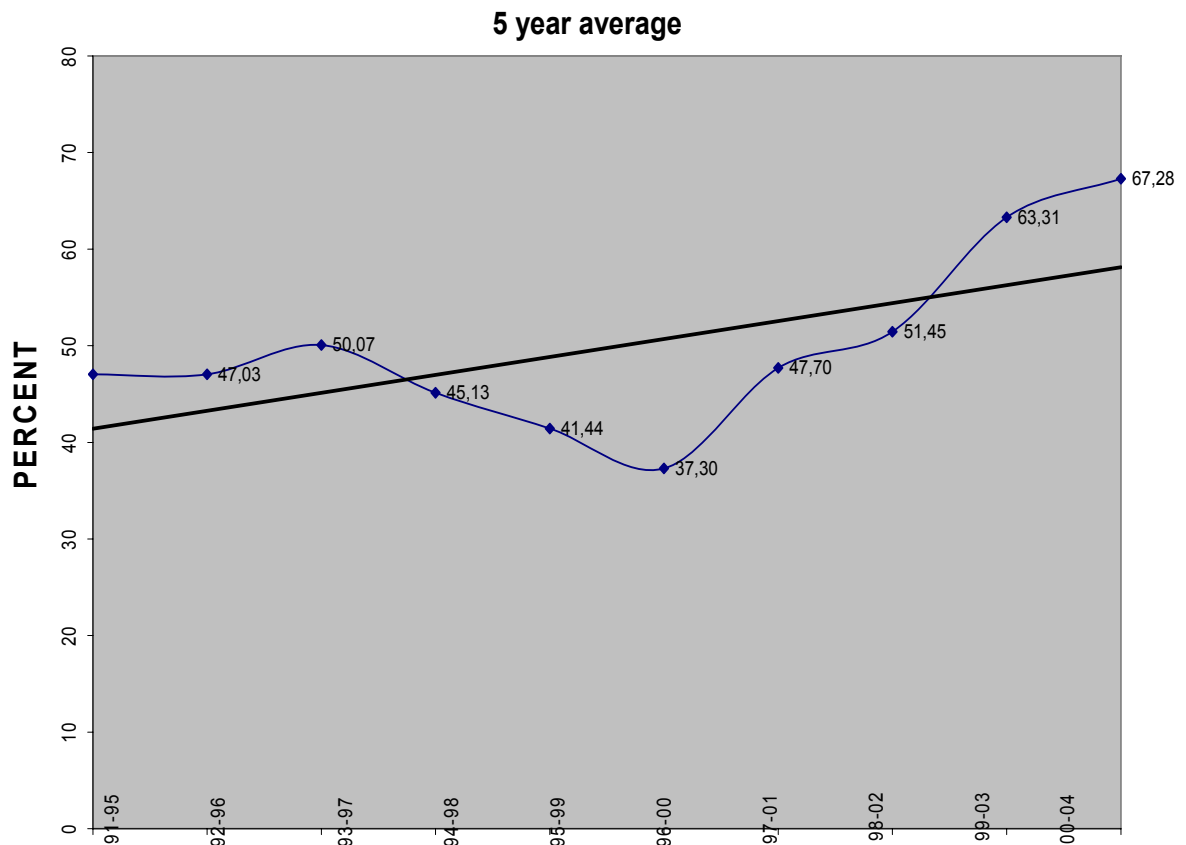
The results in the IB Diploma Programme examinations provided external validation of the gains in learning. Up to 2000–2001, students had decided whether they wished to sit for the full IB diploma examinations, or simply take individual subjects. This situation was compounded by parental indifference to both the educational value of the diploma and its recognition for university admission. In that year, 25 students of 36 volunteered to sit for the full diploma, and 52% of these obtained it. The remaining 11 students took individual subjects rather than the full programme to examination, and a number of these received certificates for subjects passed.

In 2001–2002, a change in the school policy required all students to attempt the full diploma, save for cases of exception. In spite of a more rigorous and demanding programme, 40 out of 45 students sat for the full diploma, and 62.5% of these obtained it.

In 2002–2003, 88.46% of the students obtained the IB diploma. In 2004, the results were somewhat lower, but this can be explained in part by a further increase in the demands placed on the students. For the first time we offered English A2 and physics higher level. The overall trend of student outcomes may be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Distribution of average Diploma Programme results in five-year increments



Conclusions

Though the developments presented here are set out in an organized manner for the purposes of this report, it must be said that these were only a part of a larger picture involving numerous initiatives, and that not all the initiatives proceeded to completion as smoothly as they were originally envisioned. In an age of fast-paced change requiring quick decision making, school leaders need to learn to reflect effectively, to share these reflections and engage others in meaningful conversations that demonstrate clearly that decisions are authentically shared. This shared reflection-in-action involves “on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, re-structuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena; often, it takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation” (Schön 1984: 42). When this quality of shared intuitive reflection can be instilled in all stakeholders in school cultures, including students, and intelligent, sustainable decisions can be made in keeping with the pace of life today, without fear or resistance to change, then those schools will truly become a guiding light for others to follow.

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Commentary and discussion

Dr Richard Pearce is based in London. He is an international educator and consultant to multinational enterprises and families on schooling for internationally mobile children.

Linking school climate to student outcomes

Richard Pearce

It is surely the dream of the ambitious head to bring about those changes that will visibly raise the academic success of a school. Given the observation that the average survival period of international school heads is 2.8 years, few can aspire so high (Hawley 1994). Therefore any research that promises so much deserves attention and circulation.

Does this account tell us what we need to know to reproduce the evident success? This commentator can only claim a degree of authority in examining cultural aspects, but from that viewpoint there are some questions whose answers might add to the value of this lucid and encouraging paper.

First, what is the mix of the personnel? In this location one might expect many teachers to be from the USA and many non-teaching staff to be host-country citizens. These would represent dramatically polarized contrasts of organizational style. Concepts such as the “learning organization”, or the initiative towards “empowerment” suggest that this is in some ways a reframing of norms from local to those of the expatriate community. This could represent a movement of power from the service community to the academic community, with consequential impacts on the internal politics of the institution.

Space is bound to be a limitation in such an article, and limits the explanation of the methodology. It would be interesting, for example, to read the phrasing of the questionnaire. In a week in which a “Readers’ Digest” poll found New York to be the politest city in the world we are reminded that the answers we get depend on the questions we ask. The figures are impressive and the table admirably clear. The persistence of material concerns when social ones appear to be diminishing is a very reasonable internal indicator of validity, but some further questions are necessary. It could be that expatriates will more openly express “concerns” than will locals from a more hierarchical culture. Does reduced concern indicate growing confidence, declining novelty, or loss of faith in the process?

When the issue of causality is approached the author reasonably observes that the link between interventions and outcomes has been adopted from “a growing body of research”. However, the conclusion that priorities of concern were shifted “*through* (my italics) the process of staff empowerment”, or that “this transformation *resulted from* (my italics) real changes made in the school’s approach to leadership”, is so important that the possibility of ambiguity needs to be eliminated. Even in a domestic setting, in which there could be fewer variables, sophisticated means such as multi-level modelling (Aikin and Longford 1986) have been employed to identify the level of input variables responsible for observed outcomes. In an international school setting a further dimension of cultural variety occurs, which could perhaps be initially checked against Hofstedeian dimensions (Hofstede 1980).

The student results, too, prompt some questions. Did the increased rigour of the IB Diploma Programme lead to added seriousness or divert some uncommitted students to the national programme? Would not increased rigour by itself be expected to improve pass rates? Were there any other factors of the school demographics at work? The smoothing effect of the five-year average of results is paralleled by the smoothing effect of “numerous initiatives”, and as this brief

account stands one cannot feel convinced that the causes cited were unambiguously responsible for the exciting effects.

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Rejoinder to the commentary

John Hardman

The critique offered by the commentator is very relevant in that it flags up issues of validity and reliability that were also of concern to the author. However, it is important to understand that this article narrowly focuses on only one aspect of a larger improvement plan and that the main purpose of the initiative was innovation from a practitioner perspective, with all the accompanying messiness associated with change, rather than to inform research. That said, it is the author's belief that the analysis presented in this brief sketch offers those in positions of leadership a manner of addressing innovation to good effect.

The rationale for the improvement plan at this school was devised in part precisely as a response to the homogenous demographic constitution and widespread hierarchical culture prevalent in both staff and student body. The student population was over 90% Ecuadorian, though over 28 nationalities were represented, the majority of these of Latin American origin, with a small number of Asians, Europeans and North Americans. All teachers were local hires as the school did not subscribe, for financial reasons, to the practice of hiring overseas teachers. This limitation was offset to some extent by the recruitment of local teachers of foreign extraction and experience, or Ecuadorians who had been educated abroad. The search committees, which included parents, established recruitment criteria that gave preference to teachers who, aside from general qualifications and experience, were bilingual, who professed a progressive philosophy of education and who could bring a more international perspective to the school. For example, one social science teacher was Serbian, another was from Myanmar, and several had attended school in the United States. With regard to seniority, at the beginning of the innovation, over 70% of the teachers had been working at the school for eight years or more and only a few were bilingual.

The more recent hires, given their more liberal profile, did indeed give rise to friction with those espousing the dominant culture, as this was decidedly hierarchical and, in "Hofstedian" terms, was uniformly tinged by collectivism and high power distance, and a marked degree of conflict avoidance (Carson 2005; Hofstede 1980; Hofstede and McCrae 2004). Because this was reflected in the classroom in a highly directive teaching style that did little to stimulate critical thinking or experiential learning, it was agreed that this was counter to IB philosophy and pedagogy, and constituted an approach inconsistent with the needs of students in the 21st century. In response to this understanding and to the findings of the climate survey, the staff development budget was increased from US\$2,000 to US\$30,000 per annum. This included training in group dynamics, generative learning (led by trainers from the Harvard Graduate School

of Education), IB subject areas and extended essay writing, service-learning, and even meditation for stress management.

With regard to the climate survey, it should be emphasized that it was administered at a single session each time in order to preserve objectivity and sustain interest, and that the response rate, as recorded, was greater than 96% on every occasion. Prior to completion, the purpose of the survey was reviewed, as was the value of the teachers' voice in the identification and resolution of concerns. Furthermore, the results were discussed at length with each group, by level, very shortly after the survey was completed, which provided a participative forum fostering ownership, empowerment, and agreement on common priorities. The value of the exercise may be assessed to some degree by the comment of one highly regarded senior member of the secondary school staff, who stated at one of these meetings, "this is the first time in twelve years that someone in authority has come and told us the truth." The shift towards material concerns, such as limited space and inadequate resources, may therefore be seen as an indicator of the genuine reduction of vertical and horizontal distrust and lack of collegiality, the social concerns referred to by the commentator. However, the fact that there were no international teachers should not diminish the validity of the comment made regarding the possibility of a loss of interest in the improvement process or the survey by members of staff. This is a highly subjective process where personal feelings and concerns are difficult to ascertain. It should therefore be considered that the responses to the survey very probably do reflect subjective bias of one form or another. However, the consistency of the progression of results between the four applications—only two of which were shown in the article—appear to support the overall validity and reliability of the findings.

It is most probably true that the improvement in the IB examination results cannot be attributed solely to the change in the school's climate and working conditions, either through staff empowerment or a shift towards a more participative style of leadership by the section heads. Other factors, such as the impact of new hires, increased rigour and expectations, better student advising, increased investment in staff training, better systems management, sporting results, among other factors, must all have played a part in affecting outcomes. However, it is the assumption here that the increased care and support demonstrated for the staff, and their own enhanced professionalism, influenced the climate and working conditions for the better, and should therefore be seen as variables that were reflected in the survey each time it was administered, and that by extension this had an impact on student learning. It is by no means the intention here to establish linear causality between two such complex variables, an impression that may easily be read into the account due to the constraints of space awarded through this medium. On the contrary, it is the author's understanding that the success of any innovation is directly proportional to the number and complexity of the internal connections within the system, and that schools are particularly good examples of organizations governed by the complex laws of non-linear dynamics (Capra 2002). That said, Phillip Hallinger has found again and again, after more than 70 studies in this area, that indirect leadership effects are as important as direct effects on student learning. More recently, Bauer and Bogotch (in press), demonstrate the value of multi-level decision making, which was one of the intentions underpinning the change towards organizational learning and empowerment of staff. The fact that student results in the IB Diploma Programme improved systematically during the period of the implementation of this change provides some further evidence of a link between the two factors and, hopefully, may contribute to the ongoing debate on school improvement.

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IBRU news

In January 2006 IBRU merged with the professional development division under the leadership of Jonathon Marsh to become the newly structured professional development and research division (PDRD). We are looking at a number of changes focusing on services and support systems for researchers throughout the IB world.

In November 2006 the European Council of International Schools' (ECIS) annual conference will be held in Nice and IBRU will have a number of presentations within the programme and a presence on the IB stand. Please come and talk to us at the stand and after presentations.

IBRU personnel have presented at the following conferences during 2006.

- ◆ Nordic Network of International Schools, Helsinki, Finland
- ◆ IBLA regional conference, Lima, Peru
- ◆ IBNA regional conference, The Bahamas
- ◆ 13th International Conference on Learning, Jamaica (online presentation)

We will be presenting at the following conferences and hope to meet you there.

- ◆ IBAP regional conference, Hanoi, Vietnam—October 2006
- ◆ IBAEM regional conference, Athens, Greece—October 2006
- ◆ The Alliance for International Education, Shanghai, China—October 2006
- ◆ ECIS, Nice, France—November 2006

One of the articles highlighted in the research literature explores issues of undertaking research in small-scale locations and the problems and challenges that these create. This is important to IB researchers who often conduct investigations in closed or sensitive locations. It also highlights the challenge of over-research that can happen to IB World Schools (Morrison 2006: 255). The other looks at a European Union pilot project developing and promoting intercultural awareness in future teachers (Dooly and Villanueva 2006).

Research noticeboard

Practitioner research project

The research data is now being analysed and we are aiming to report findings during the latter half of the year. A number of presentations on the project are scheduled for various international conferences and we will be aiming to write about practitioner research in the IBO in a number of IBO publications and journals.

Intergenerational learning

Research into interactive intergenerational learning has been reported in previous issues of *IB Research Notes*. The outcomes of this research are now being shared with the wider academic and practitioner communities. In April, an article by Jim Cambridge and Anna Simandiraki discussing a typology to describe and analyse intergenerational learning appeared in a collection of case studies of intergenerational practice published by the Beth Johnson Foundation. Jim and Anna were invited to write for the *Intergenerational Justice Review* published by the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations based in Germany. They are also looking forward to the publication of another article on this subject to be published in the *Journal of Research in International Education*.

Cambridge, JC and Simandiraki, A. 2006. "Typology for the description and analysis of Interactive Intergenerational Learning". In Hatton-Yeo, A (ed). *Intergenerational Programmes: An Introduction and Examples of Practice*. Stoke-on-Trent: Beth Johnson Foundation/Centre for Intergenerational Practice. Pp 137-144. Online: <http://www.centreforip.org.uk>.

Research literature

Morrison, Keith. 2006. "Sensitive educational research in small states and territories: the case of Macau". *Compare*, 32 (2), pp 249-264.

This paper explores the sensitivities of conducting educational research in small states and territories, where the very act of conducting research, aside from its purposes or focuses, is itself a sensitive matter. The paper takes a "critical case study" of Macau and examines cultural, educational, political, micro-political, interpersonal and practical issues, overlaid by characteristics of Chinese culture, that must be factored into the planning and conduct of research in the territory. It suggests that compromises and trade-offs have to be made in educational research in small states and territories, and argues that researchers must anticipate a range of problems in advance, and, through ingenuity, networking and sensitivity, overcome them. The magnification of sensitivities in small states and

territories contributes to their special educational ecology; investigating these is frequently an interpersonal as well as a research matter.

Dooly, Melinda and Villanueva, Maria. 2006. "Internationalisation as a key dimension to teacher education". *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 29 (2), pp 223-240.

The European Union has recognized the need for promoting social and political change through education. Special emphasis has been placed on the role of schools in personal and human development, along with the need for greater understanding of the diversity that is found within the European Union and throughout the world. This means that teachers are now expected to involve learners in the process of acquiring knowledge of their own culture(s) as well as other cultures. This article discusses a pilot project carried out in six European countries and designed to promote intercultural awareness of future teachers. The nexus of the training programme included empirical knowledge drawn from the teacher trainees' international experiences, combined with intercultural communicative theory. How the pilot project was set up, some outcomes and conclusions derived from qualitative and quantitative research about the project are discussed.