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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE
FIRST CYCLE OF PISA (2000-2006)--INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES: RESEARCH AND POLICY DIRECTIONS

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The *Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA)* is an international standardized assessment of the performance of 15 year-old students in the literacies of mathematics, science and reading. PISA was developed by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is administered in a cyclic 3-year schedule beginning in 2000 with a focus on reading, followed in 2003 with a focus on mathematics and 2006 with a focus on science. The PISA surveys have made an important departure from other international evaluations by decoupling the instruments from school curricula: the assessment instruments were based on holistic definitions discipline-specific literacies – those adult skills that will be needed to function in a 21st century economy. This departure broke the tradition of curriculum-driven surveys and removed the necessity to use the ‘lowest common denominator’ that require curriculum coverage of all participating countries in selecting test items. Rather, the assessment is designed to investigate how well young adults are prepared to meet the challenges of their future: to analyse, reason and communicate their ideas effectively; and to have the capacity to continue learning throughout life (OECD, 1999).

PISA is administered to all 30 OECD countries and a growing number of non-OECD countries volunteering to participate – for the 2009 administration, the start of the second cycle of assessments, there are a total of 67 countries participating. Tests are typically administered to a sample of 4500 students in each country; although some nations choose a larger sample – for example, Canada samples over 25 000 students to allow for the development of provincial level results as well as the national results.

In addition to the performance measures, PISA collects information about student background, perceptions and attitudes, and school traits from the perspective of school administrators. This results in a substantial pool of information linking mathematics, science and reading performance to student, home and school traits that has considerable potential for secondary data analysis with relevance to educational research and policy (Anderson, Lin, Treagust, Ross & Yore, 2007). The results of the PISA administrations are made available to researchers on the OECD/PISA website (www.pisa.oecd.org).

PISA was designed by the OECD to provide policy-relevant information on student performance in the core literacies of reading, mathematics and science – key elements in the human capital of the knowledge economy. The information generated consists of both estimates of student achievement and information about student traits and perceptions, and the conditions of schooling from the perspective of school administrators which could be correlated to student performance in reading, mathematics and science. The OECD clearly states that the knowledge and skills associated with these domains are . . . *necessary for successful adaptation to a changing world* (OECD, 2003, p.9).

The OECD describes PISA as a collaboration of the participation countries with shared policy-driven interests (OECD, 1999). The OECD administers the program with each country taking responsibility at the policy level recognizing that . . . *the primary reason for developing and conducting this large-scale international assessment is to provide empirically grounded information which will inform policy decisions* (OECD, 1999, p.7). It is clearly stated that the results from PISA allow for international comparisons of student performance – which is the most common result generally reported – and that the results should lead to enhanced focus and motivation for educational reform and improvement.

This special edition of IJMSE focuses on the PISA project now it has completed a full cycle of administration – reading, mathematics and science – to look at the how PISA has been used in participating countries and with what consequences, and to identify research potentials and policy directions emanating from this international assessment initiative. Papers have been invited to reflect international perspectives on the uses and consequences of PISA to date; and to speculate on the future directions for research,

curriculum and policy using the PISA datasets. To provide the reader with an informed perspective on the nature of the PISA data, we will include a paper on the nature of the PISA instrumentation, scoring, analysis and reporting from a key member of the technical agency. A policy framework will also be provided in a paper from the director of the OECD Education Directorate who had responsibility for the first cycle of PISA – resulting in insights to the policy intentions of the project and a perspective on future directions and uses of PISA.

We are inviting papers from education researchers who have conducted secondary data analyses that focus on the uses and potentials – both research and policy – of the results from this first full cycle of PISA with a focus on specific geographic regions. The guest editors are especially interested in contributions from Eastern Europe, Austral-Asia and Central/South America. We are intending that this special issue of IJMSE be published in early 2010. The deadline for submission of manuscripts is **September 1, 2009** – earlier if possible to facilitate prompt review and revision.

Please forward any indications of interest and participation to John Anderson at the University of Victoria (anderson@uvic.ca).

References

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