

To echo Virgil, 'fugit irreparabile tempus'. Another edition (and another editorial) is upon us, and hardly any time seems to have passed since the last. Nevertheless, matters are moving quickly in Scottish education. Since the last edition, *Curriculum for Excellence*, described on the LTScotland website as 'the biggest educational reform programme for a generation under the Scottish Executive's *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* agenda', is gathering momentum and taking shape. Since November, we have witnessed the publication of draft outcomes in several subjects, including Mathematics, Literacy and English, and Social Studies. The next year will be interesting as schools start to engage more seriously with *Curriculum for Excellence* in the light of the published draft outcomes, highlighting perhaps tensions between the new curriculum, other policy and existing practice in classrooms and schools. The forthcoming Review of National Qualifications at SCQF levels 4 and 5 will add further to this interest. We hope that there will be lively debate around these issues, and that the next edition of SER, which will have a partial focus on Curriculum for Excellence, will provide a forum for such debate. A reminder, then, that we are welcoming papers on this theme (submissions will need to be received by the end of June); please feel free to contact me if you have an idea about a paper for the journal.

This edition perhaps heralds some of the debates around *Curriculum for Excellence*. Many of the papers contain a common theme, namely the complexity that inheres in educational policy and practice. The first paper, based on a 2007 SERA keynote address by Richard Edwards, characterises education as an 'impossible practice'. Edwards argues powerfully against attempts by policymakers to mandate and master the future through 'standards, accountability and audit'. He distinguishes engagement from the sort of 'fundamentalist' enthusiasm that leads to education being viewed by many policymakers and educators as a magic bullet to solve society's ills. Drawing on work by Biesta and Derrida, he argues that education is a risk-laden enterprise, with indeterminate outcomes, and that teachers have a responsibility for the emergence of the future, but one that is based upon a lack of knowledge about this future, or an 'emancipatory ignorance'. Thus education is a 'process of invention rather than an exercise in mandating and mastery'. Edwards concludes his paper by suggesting that the ethic of responsibility should be disinterested; drawing on Weber's classical work on bureaucracy, he suggests that enthusiasm-based approaches blur distinctions between a sense of self and the dispassionate 'obligations' of public office.

The second paper is based upon Morwenna Griffiths's 2007 SERA keynote address, and resonates sharply with (and differs from) the themes expounded by Richard Edwards. Griffiths poses the question 'What sort of research evidence should our leaders use?'. Her paper explores the notion of 'good' leadership, premising this firmly in values of social justice; in short, her view is that leadership involves ethical and political judgement. This discussion leads on to consideration of the role of knowledge (and research) in informing policy. Griffiths argues that, as education is a value-laden activity, 'when we discuss education, we are discussing our values'. Thus, educational research should be 'for education'; it should be 'action-oriented and passionate, rather than simply [being] disinterestedly about education'. Griffiths critiques the notion of research as a certain and universally applicable basis for policymaking, suggesting that such claims are undermined by variability in context. She concludes her article by suggesting alternatives to this view of research. Drawing on thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Arendt, she highlights the uniqueness of human beings and the variability and ever-changing

nature of the social world, calling for an ‘epistemology of the unique and the individual’.

The next set of papers form a valuable and fascinating contribution to the debate sparked by the recent publication of the OECD report on Scottish schooling, *Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland*. The continuation of the debate in this journal comprises three papers. The first is a detailed analysis of the OECD report by David Raffe. Raffe first provides an overview of the key tenets of the report; this includes a summary of the key strengths and weaknesses of the Scottish system. He particularly welcomes the ability of international observers to present the ‘familiar in an unfamiliar light’. He emphasises that there are many strengths - ‘the OECD review is not a crisis account’ - and highlights the perceived weaknesses: for example the ‘narrow, conservative and socially exclusive ethos of schooling’; insufficient challenge to low achievers; and ‘confused lines of responsibility, barriers to innovation and too little autonomy for local authorities and schools’. Raffe also provides a detailed critique of the OECD review itself. He is positive about many aspects of the report, but draws our attention to what he sees as unclear notions of equity. He is critical of the decision to exclude post-compulsory education (especially FE colleges) from the review, as this precludes discussion of alternative forms of provision that were criticised in the report for their absence in schooling. Raffe criticises some aspects of the OECD team’s view of qualifications reform, but he commends their proposal for a unified but flexible Graduation Certificate as an idea worthy of further exploration.

The article is followed by rejoinder from Richard Teese, the OECD rapporteur responsible for the report. Teese offers a robust defence of the report, justifying the philosophy and methodology adopted by the OECD team. He comments specifically on the observations made by David Raffe in respect of equity, the curriculum (especially the place of vocational curriculum and addressing poverty) and testing. In the latter case, Teese advocates a more widespread use of testing through the curricular stages, both to measure individual performance and to test the health of the system. Teese’s rejoinder has elicited a further response from Raffe; in this, Raffe engages with the substantive points in Teese’s rejoinder. In particular, he raises the issue of the distorting effects of national testing, suggesting that the report’s conclusions, if fully implemented, would undo much of the current *Assessment is for Learning* work to ‘increase teachers’ ownership of assessment for learning’. Finally, while praising the ‘independence and clarity of thought’ of the OECD team, he is sceptical about the evidence base of the report, for example inspection data and official documentation, when ironically this same evidence base was subject to criticism in the report itself.

The article by Joan Stead and Gwynedd Lloyd addresses an issue which is of great concern to teachers. The paper investigates the different conceptions of ADHD, offering a timely critique of the medicalisation of this ‘condition’ and reviewing literature about diagnosis and treatment. The authors suggest that, in Scotland, diagnosis of ADHD correlates closely with low socio-economic status, and draw attention to the fact that ‘successful’ diagnosis potentially ‘rewards’ families in terms of being eligible for Disability Living Allowance. This lies in contrast to the USA, where ADHD has been claimed to be more of a middle class phenomenon, perhaps due to differing features of health care and education systems. Stead and Lloyd posit the ‘view that it is professional judgement, preference and subjectivity, rather than measurable incidence of children’s behaviour, which lead to a formal diagnosis of ADHD’. The article draws upon some empirical data to explore teacher perceptions of ADHD, including the role of school staff, inter-agency working and the practicalities of administering medication in school. The authors conclude that the medicalisation of ADHD is problematic and call for further research into the professional practices associated with identification of

ADHD and the characteristics of young people diagnosed with the condition.

Elisabet Weedon, Sheila Riddell, Linda Ahlgren and Judith Litjens explore a different, albeit no less topical, issue in their paper on equal opportunities policies in FE colleges. The authors investigate the effectiveness of new public management and social audit processes in raising the profile of equal opportunities issues in colleges, and the realisation of legislative requirements in actual practice within the colleges. The paper draws upon research commissioned by the Scottish Further Education Unit. This research investigates the dissemination of equal opportunities legislation and the processes by which this is implemented and monitored. The analysis also explores the impact of equality policies within the colleges. The authors conclude that there is still a way to go in respect of staff engagement with equality issues, although some progress has been made. More controversially, they suggest that the use of new public management approaches to the implementation has merit, despite the negative connotations associated with regulation and surveillance; according to the authors, 'there remain strong arguments for using targets to monitor progress toward equality' and that 'a commitment to gather hard evidence signals a new seriousness in relation to achieving greater equality'. We would welcome further debate in the journal on this issue.

The paper by Robert Hamilton and Alison Mackenzie takes us into different waters. Their contribution to the journal concerns the perceptions of several cohorts of students undergoing counselling training at a Scottish university. The article draws upon both qualitative and quantitative analysis of questionnaire and interview data to paint a detailed picture of students' experiences and aspirations during and following their study. The paper provides demographic data about the cohorts and offers insights into students' views on the professional and social benefits of undertaking such training. The authors provide analysis of the career trajectories and future studies of students. They conclude that undertaking counselling training has major benefits for participants, in terms of both personal and career development.

Morag Redford's regular feature, *Education in the Scottish Parliament*, offers its usual insightful and detailed look into the workings of the parliament committee. The paper identifies the priorities of the committee for the session covered. These are the governance and finance of higher education, *Curriculum for Excellence*, school estate, class sizes and school meals. As ever, the paper provides a systematic and readable account of the committee proceedings, as well as a useful starting point for researchers investigating the workings of the committee. Finally, this issue provides interesting and informative reviews of a number of books, covering a range of topics as diverse as writing a thesis, early childhood education and widening access to higher education.

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