

## BOOK REVIEWS

### UNIVERSITY, CITY AND STATE: THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW SINCE 1870

Michael Moss, J. Forbes Munro & Richard Trainor (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) ISBN 0 7486 1323 4 pp xii, 382 £35.00 (Hardbook)

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This is a substantial and scholarly history of the University from the mid-Victorian period to the present day. Immediately, readers may well wonder why the year 1870 was chosen as the starting point. The answer, of course, is that this was the date of the move to Gilmorehill from the High Street. It is argued early in the book that 1870 was the beginning of the 'modern' University but this is rather unconvincing and is not helped by the fact that much later in the book it is asserted that the end of WW2 marked the beginning of its modernity. It is at least arguable that any discussion of an ancient Scottish university's 'modern' period should at least include some reference to the Enlightenment, if 'modern' has to do with thinking, teaching and learning rather than the creation of a building. Did Adam Smith make no contribution to the modern university and its relationship with the city and state?

The book is therefore a history of events at Gilmorehill – a 'town and gown' where the town was the socio-economic roller coaster of industry and commerce which was, and is, the City of Glasgow. The 'State' of the rather grandiose title translates more prosaically into a history of government funding, or, in Glasgow University's case, government underfunding.

Much is made of the University's historical links to the city's fluctuating fortunes and this is evident in the increasing involvement of civic dignitaries in the life of the University during the relative affluence of the 1880's and the Kelvin Jubilee of 1896. During the boom in the local shipbuilding, mining and iron & steel industries prior to the First World War, the University (and its coffers) flourished. The post-war period reversed the dynamism of the city and this reversal of fortunes was mirrored by the University's failure (and not for the first time) to respond to new challenges, particularly in research and its continued reliance on its traditional success areas of the professions – the church, medicine, law, engineering and teaching.

Yet the relationship between city and University was never quite that simple. The institution tried at times to detach itself from such dangerous over-reliance on the city's fortunes, often by relying too heavily on government funding. Similarly, when socio-economic circumstances resulted in larger numbers of working-class students (many destined for the teaching profession) entering the hallowed portals to study for the Ordinary Degree, the University was keen to reduce its much vaunted commitment to the people of Glasgow. The conservatism of the Arts Faculty played a leading role here. Indeed such conservatism and elitism is something of a recurring theme in this balanced and detailed history.

Although a chronological, non-thematic approach is adopted, there are other themes which appear throughout, some positive, others less so. The University's pride in its medical education, engineering and the law is well documented and well justified but there are frequent references to its poor research record and its failure to attract and retain staff at the cutting edge, at least until relatively recent times. While some of this is often connected with government underfunding and an over

reliance on the economic circumstances of the city, the reader is left in no doubt that much of it was due to the University's historical conservatism, often despite the efforts of successive Principals who had to contend with Professors determined to retain the status quo at all costs.

The book's chronological approach tends to emphasise the crucial leadership role of the Principal and many chapters are perhaps rather dominated by this issue. Yet one is struck by just how influential these men could be, despite the best efforts of some of their Professors. Hector Hetherington and Alwyn Williams stand out as notable successes, extending the traditional role of Principal well beyond that of *primus inter pares*. Inevitably, the book looks in some detail at the internal politics of the University's committee structure in its assessment of the success or otherwise of the various Principals, and there is a great deal of this but it does seem necessary for a full understanding of what each Principal was able to achieve.

One of the authors, Forbes Munro, describes the University as being 'stirred rather than shaken' by social, political & cultural events outwith its immediate orbit. The reader is left with enduring image of the institution as something of a catalyst. Despite the best efforts of those who would 'shake' it, history suggests that the University is destined to remain merely 'stirred' for some time to come.

## PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Richard Pring, Continuum: London 2000, ISBN 0 8264 4822 4 (hardback) 0 8264 4813 5 (paperback) pp 168.

JOHN HALLIDAY

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This is a superb book which will interest a wide range of readers. It is written in an accessible style by someone whose grasp of the topic is entirely secure. For the novice researcher, the book contains a lucid explanation of research methods, ethical considerations and key concepts such as causation, phenomenology, ethnography and postmodernism. For the more experienced the book contains a sophisticated contribution to debates about the nature and purpose of educational research in which the names Hargreaves, Hammersley, Tooley and Hillage have recently featured. In addition to this content which is specifically concerned with research, the book also presents a mature account of Pring's Deweyan theories of education and teaching which ought to interest teachers, policy-makers and others looking for a coherent way through current difficulties that individuals and institutions face.

This account is needed because Pring is keen to distinguish educational from other types of research and education is an essentially contested concept for him. Rightly in my view, he shows the barrenness of what might be called the service view of education. For him talk of delivery of a fixed curriculum to customers in the most efficient way where efficiency is determined by educational researchers is an enormous mistake. Indeed it is much to his credit that he has been one of the few academics in prominent positions consistently to challenge such talk in the face of considerable political support for it. He views teachers as mediators of a cultural inheritance and particular student interests. Neither the inheritance, nor the interests are static however. They are both subject to criticism and modification in the light of experience. It is not possible to disconnect the practice of teaching from some goal logically disconnected from teaching. Therefore for Pring it is also not possible to disconnect educational research from the practice of teaching and so the book endorses the central position of teacher as researcher.

Pring is no great supporter of what has become known as action research, however. He is deeply suspicious of research findings that are not open to the most widespread and thorough criticism. He is also not entirely convinced by some of those of a postmodernist persuasion who suggest that there is something new about the idea of living with uncertainty. Uncertainty is the root of many perennial philosophical problems and Pring resists being 'seduced by the postmodern embrace'. While he is sympathetic to some of the now standard criticisms of educational research – that much of it is of poor quality, that it is non-systematic, that it provides little guidance for those trying to contend with educational problems on a day to day basis and so on – he offers no trendy alternative. Rather he offers a well-argued extrapolation from his philosophy of education. In summary his argument is that there is no substitute for the practical judgements of educators made in contexts that only they and their students can fully appreciate but that those judgements should be informed and refined by the findings of research.

So are there any disappointments in the book? For me there are just two. First I think Pring is mistaken to suggest that the most important 'warring camps' in educational research are centred on the qualitative/quantitative distinction. Rather I think there are currently a number of 'warring camps' in educational research and that the disputes between them are not centrally related to that distinction. He is right to debunk the idea that qualitative and quantitative researchers always work

within different camps but wrong to suggest that qualitative/quantitative is a false dualism in the Deweyan sense. It is something of a caricature to link these camps with constructivism or realism or to relate them to the distinction between what is generalisable and what is not. What is needed is for more researchers to emulate Pring by taking care to explain which camp they could work within. Government could then work with researchers to establish practical contexts within which research hypotheses from different camps could be tested.

This leads to my second disappointment. In a recent editorial in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* (48:1) Pring calls for the formation of research centres largely staffed by those who have a good track record in educational research within Universities. I would have liked to read how such research centres could include teachers in the ways Pring seems to want and the place of policy research and philosophical enquiry within such centres. Perhaps the practical implications of his arguments both for schooling and for educational research will be the topic of his next book.

**'DOING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS' SERIES: CASE STUDY RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

Bassey, Michael (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999) ISBN 0-335-19984-4 (pp.178, £15.99 Paperback)

MARGARET KIRKWOOD

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This book is one of a series, edited by Pat Sykes, on doing qualitative research in educational settings. The series aims to provide a high quality introduction to research methods. Michael Bassey's book on case study research clearly meets this aim. It achieves this whilst successfully avoiding the dry, impersonal style of many 'methods' texts which only serve to mystify the process and put beginners off. It also has much to offer the experienced case study researcher through its clear analysis of issues and the author's willingness to propose and exemplify methods which could address these issues. It is written in two parts, the first part leading towards a reconstruction of educational case study and the second providing illustrations of different types of case study.

In the opening chapter Michael Bassey builds a convincing case for the need to reconstruct educational case study. He argues that current educational research in the UK is not effective in developing theory which illuminates policy and enhances practice. To increase its impact educational researchers must direct their attention towards building a coherent and systematic body of knowledge which can be tested, extended or replaced. The challenge lies in rethinking educational case study as a method which can contribute substantially to this process. Part of this rethinking concerns how the findings of educational case studies can be generalized without making unqualified statements from relatively small scale studies. From this emerges the idea of making 'fuzzy generalizations' or 'fuzzy propositions' (more tentative), using a qualified general statement such as, 'in some cases it may be found that...'

In the second chapter a sample case study is used very effectively to illustrate the approach. A useful checklist of criteria is applied to ascertain that the research is indeed an educational case study and not some other form of enquiry. The idea of publishing an audit certificate (an indication of probity requested by the author from a professional peer) is posited. Journal editors could invite replications of case studies within a given time frame, which, subject to the normal peer review process, the journal would commit itself to publishing.

The third chapter which examines the question, 'What is case study?', through review of the literature, provides a prime example of a research area which lacks coherence! It takes considerable concentration to read this chapter (not through any fault of the authors) and it is difficult to emerge with any clear insights on the question, given the frequently overlapping categorizations and plethora of terminology used by the various writers on the topic. However some clear issues do emerge, particularly in relation to making clear the purposes of a study (for example, whether the case is of intrinsic interest or intended to cast light on broader issues) and the problem of generalization. A succinct definition of case study is presented by the author in a later chapter: 'Case study is study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings'.

The fourth chapter maps out the territory of research in education and locates educational case study within it. It provides a clear delineation and careful definition of the different categories of research conducted in educational settings. There is an

important distinction drawn between educational research, and discipline research in educational settings, with educational case study viewed as a subset of educational research which fits within the interpretive (as opposed to positivist) paradigm. Three categories of empirical research are described – theoretical research, evaluative research and action research – and also three types of generalization, resulting from either scientific investigation (laws of nature), studies of samples (statistical generalization) or studies of singularities (fuzzy generalization). Only the last two are appropriate to educational research. The structure is now in place to examine the important issues of dissemination and contribution to theory.

Chapter 5 examines the central question of how educational research may impact on educational policy making and practice, together with the implications for dissemination of research findings. In David Hargreaves' model (1997) educational research provides an evidence base which feeds directly into teacher's craft knowledge and thus impacts on the practice of teaching. Michael Bassey argues against this direct relationship and highlights the importance of professional discourse amongst teachers and policy makers, which he claims both influences and is influenced by educational research. Professional discourse provides ideas that add to craft knowledge. However, most research writing is neither memorable nor easy to get hold of, and so much of this potential influence is lost! The idea of 'fuzzy generalizations' is then developed. These will enable the findings of case studies to be communicated clearly and succinctly, and to become cumulative. The formation of a searchable index of research findings expressed in this form and made available on the Internet is proposed. At this point, whilst not holding any objection to the concept of 'fuzzy generalizations' on methodological grounds, I find myself wondering how acceptable this term is likely to be in political and policy making realms. I believe a substitute term is needed.

Chapter 6 draws the arguments together by setting out the key characteristics of educational case study and providing short descriptors for theoretical (theory-seeking, theory-testing), evaluative, and narrative (story-telling) or descriptive (picture-drawing) case studies. The author recognizes that not all case studies fall neatly within one category, however he hopes the system may prove to be useful more times than not.

Chapter 7 concentrates on how case study should be conducted. There is a clear account of the process leading towards the formulation of research questions (which my own students have benefited greatly from). There is discussion on methods of testing analytic statements against the data. What would make for trustworthy evidence is explored. Overall there is a clear focus on research as a creative process which nevertheless makes very stringent demands on the researcher to be systematic, rigorous and ethical. While the discussion of best practice in relation to each identifiable stage of the research is thorough and helpful, one must question just how realistic this portrayal is in the present-day climate of short scale projects and tight funding constraints. Perhaps one could argue that if these are the desired quality standards, then the circumstances surrounding the work of educational researchers need to improve drastically.

The final three chapters each present a different educational case study. These are interesting accounts in themselves but serve the additional function of exemplifying well the approaches discussed in the preceding chapters with rather more of a practical emphasis. The first of these, an evaluation, makes for fascinating reading for anyone who has conducted an evaluation of an innovative training programme. Presented as a narrative (or story-telling) account, it teases out the formative and summative aspects of the evaluation and the tensions between these purposes, using the interesting analogy of a railway journey! The second, an exploration of classroom organization in the primary school, is conducted through three theory-seeking case

studies (a day in Mr A's classroom etc.) drawn together into a narrative account. The third is a fictional account, firmly based on fact, of what it is like to be a student on final teaching practice.

There is a great deal of thought provoking material contained in this text. There are interesting ideas that could (should?) be put to the test and refined (or rejected), and if this results in a more coherent body of knowledge on educational case study as a method, a prime objective of the author will have been realized.