

From the Editor

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Website and new look

It is with great pleasure that I start this editorial with an announcement. SER is finally online. The new website is located at <http://www.scotedreview.org.uk>. The site is enormously important for the journal, substantially raising its visibility and profile. A major benefit will be access to back issues. The site contains an archive of issues, going back to 1997. Individual papers are available as .pdf downloads, free of charge. The three most recent volumes will only be available as abstracts – although we have made the recent *Curriculum for Excellence* issue freely available to coincide with the launch of the website.

There are no plans to discontinue the paper version of the journal. Indeed, this has been given a facelift, sporting a new design that is more in keeping with the look of the modern educational journal. We have updated the font used and shape of the journal, producing what we hope is a more readable format and, moreover, a style that is more suited to online publication than was the case previously. We are of course happy to receive feedback on both the website and the new look.

Contributions in this volume

2009 promises to be a busy year for those working in education in Scotland. The recent launch of the Outcomes and Experiences of Curriculum for Excellence heralds a year of activity in schools, as teachers seek to make sense of and implement the new curriculum. Such implementation will inevitably involve new ways of working: collaborative practices that are both new and daunting, given the existing set up of schools; forms of pedagogy associated with active learning; and changes to the examinations system. Education professionals face higher demands than ever on their time and professional capacity. And yet at this time of change, Universities, Education Authorities and schools face challenging times financially, as the credit crunch bites. Interesting times indeed!

This volume of SER offers a set of thought provoking and at times provocative papers on a range of current issues that may strike a chord for those facing the above mentioned challenges. In the first article of this volume, a 2008 SERA Keynote Address, Anne Edwards discusses the concept of working at boundaries. This is an interesting paper both theoretically and empirically. In terms of theory, the paper draws upon and develops Engeström's *Activity Theory*, discussing notions of distributed expertise and relational agency, inter alia. Edwards argues that these are key concepts in understanding how inter-agency working might be enhanced to improve the trajectories of 'at risk' children. In empirical terms, Edwards presents an at times bleak picture of how the structures and cultures of schooling act to militate against such collaboration. She adopts the categories of sacred and profane illustrating how, in many schools, academic priorities are separated from pastoral concerns; the former remain sacred and untouchable, while the latter are often delegated to non-teaching staff, being afforded a lower level of importance in the affairs of the schools and in the eyes of outside agencies. In a sense, the 'important' core business of academic progress is being protected from outside interference,

through the surgical excision of the inconvenient and messy life worlds of the students in the school, and those charged in schools with the protection of young people are viewed as profane by professionals both within and without the schools, becoming vulnerable themselves in the process. As Edwards argues:

Boundaries are erected to protect. The welfare managers found themselves outside the boundaries of the higher status academic systems of schools and the crisis-driven heroic work of social services, yet carried considerable responsibility for the well-being of children.

The second paper is David Raffe's 2009 SERA Keynote Address, again, as with the paper by Anne Edwards, addressing the theme of boundaries in education. Raffe makes the case powerfully that many educational debates in Scotland are characterised by 'a sad lack of historical awareness'. As has been argued elsewhere in respect of the design issues currently exercising teachers implementing *Curriculum for Excellence*, this 'amnesia' has the potential to lead to 'déjà vu' in policy (Priestley & Humes, in press). Raffe describes a seminal development from 1983, the publication of *16-18s in Scotland: An Action Plan*, discussing its significance in challenging existing boundaries in Scottish education, leading for example to the development of unified credit and qualifications frameworks. He concludes by suggesting that the experience of the Action Plan and subsequent developments 'provide lessons that continue to be relevant to policy today'. He goes on to argue that:

Policy-makers like to believe that they are in uncharted territory. Yet many of the problems and challenges identified in the Action Plan are similar to those of today; and the lessons from the Action Plan and the reforms that have followed continue to be relevant.

Raffe suggests, in the light of this, that policy-makers need to be realistic in their aims, to take account of the institutional logics which inevitably exert a powerful influence on policy implementation and to be aware that flexibility is not a 'simple panacea', but can bring its own tensions and contradictions, both to the work of practitioners and to the education of young people

Moira Paterson's article examines the development of enterprise education in primary schools in the light of the *Determined to Succeed* and *Curriculum for Excellence* policies. The paper draws upon empirical data from a research project, considering whether primary schools are giving a higher priority to enterprise than previously, inquiring into the benefits of enterprise education for pupils and staff, and exploring the links between enterprise and the new curriculum. Paterson's paper explores the meaning of the term enterprise, and provides some useful background information on its development as an organising theme in Scotland's school system. She concludes that Scottish primary schools are increasing the emphasis on enterprise education, which is becoming 'more of a core and less of a marginal activity in the curriculum', and that many teachers are positive about this development.

The article by Anne Pia explores the notion of learning, both from a highly personal perspective and from within the grounding provided by an empirical research project with adult learners in a Further Education environment. Pia's paper emphasises the role of dialogicality in learning; this 'is the central means through which individuals forge and practise identity'. Pia's study reinforces the notion that it is mistaken to view the formal curriculum 'in isolation'. Echoing to some extent Raffe's earlier conclusions about the importance of acknowledging the institutional logics that guide and impact upon reform, she argues that learning can only be viewed within its wider context; a context that inevitably acknowledges 'who learners are, have been and aspire to be'. According to Pia, learner relationships – and dialogue – are important factors to bear in mind.

The paper by Chandi, Reid, McWilliam and Gray takes us into a different realm altogether. This paper explores the use of systems theory and conceptual modelling in the teaching of Science. The paper explores some of the literature relating to

systems thinking, before outlining a model for applying such thinking to the teaching of Biology in high schools. Drawing upon an empirical study conducted amongst science students in Pakistan, the paper argues for the adoption of the model more widely.

Once students internalise and develop a framework for thinking in levels, then they can go on to use that framework to understand and explain the biological phenomenon at different levels ... as levels of biological organisation play a vital role in almost all the topics involved in biology education, it is argued here that a systems-based model is suitable for teaching many biological topics.

Alastair McPhee and Fiona Patrick present the results of empirical research into the post-McCrone establishment of a 35 hours working week for teachers. Their research indicates that this ideal remains a chimera for many teachers, who were found to be working considerably longer hours. Moreover, many teachers view the specification of 35 hours with 'scepticism – even' at times, with derision'. According to the authors, the McCrone Report and the subsequent agreement:

reinforce, rather than challenge, moves towards performativity by linking professionalism with education standards, promotion, reward and enhanced salary ... In spite of numerous statements from successive government ministers suggesting that teachers are hugely valued and that they should be reprofessionalised – whatever that means – the rhetoric is not usually borne out in practice. There has been repeated failure at policy level to understand the complexity of the contexts within which teaching is carried out.

James Stanfield returns us to the theme of the OECD review of Scottish schooling (OECD 2007), picking up the debate conducted last year between David Raffe and OECD Rapporteur Richard Teese (Raffe 2008a, b; Teese 2008). Stanfield is critical of the report in that 'it tries to do too much and as a result diverts attention away from the key area of concern, which is the ongoing failure of the Scottish Government to deliver world class educational opportunities to those children living in the most deprived areas across Scotland'. He suggests that the report is hamstrung in its failure to acknowledge market-led models of education, which purport to provide choice for parents and pupils and autonomy for schools, and which he suggests have delivered benefits around the world. Stanfield's conclusions will be challenging for many in Scotland, running counter to the general consensus about the value of the comprehensive system. The editors would welcome further contributions to this ongoing debate.

Finally, the journal contains Morag Redford's regular feature on the proceedings of the *Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee* of the Scottish Parliament, as well as a number of shorter articles. These include a research note from Elaine Cowan, concerning research carried out within ITE programmes about student teachers' use of formative assessment strategies, and several book reviews. There is also a tribute by Peter Cope to the late Tom Conlon. Tom was a frequent contributor to the journal, most recently notable for his excellent and thought-provoking article on GLOW in the last volume. He will be greatly missed.

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