

## BOOK REVIEWS

### TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS: ILLUSION OR REALITY

Bernard Barker (2005) Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books  
ISBN: 978-1-85856-364-0 (pp. 178, £13.99, pb.)

Review by CHARLENE BREDDER

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Improving schools is a tough job. Barker provides a detailed account of a school's journey from classification as a 'failing school' through three leaders in two years and countless changes in teaching practice, school ethos, and management styles and expectations. By focusing on leadership, he takes us on the painful journey toward the school's redemption as it climbs out of special measures. He captures the emotion of the teachers, parents, and leaders as the school is put under immense pressure to improve in a short time span.

This ethnographic account of one school is a good place to start to understand the changes, the leadership involved, and the highly charged emotional atmosphere that accompanies any struggling school designated as 'failing'. He uses literature on leadership to situate the discussion of the school's struggles, which is appropriate given the interviews, field notes, and focus are on the head teachers and teacher leaders. Barker points out that leadership qualities are not easily connected to student performance, which is ironic since leadership is heralded as the way for schools to improve poor student performance. The rich description of the various changes the head teachers brought in to rescue the school from special measures demonstrates the complexity of trying to change school culture and practices. The head teachers face bureaucratic and political obstacles, as well as low morale and teaching dilemmas.

The school is situated in a community with multiple needs, which Barker skilfully points out in his descriptions of how the head teachers handle daily concerns of teachers and students. The agenda for winning the school back from the brink of closure takes precedence but is very much impacted by social and financial concerns. The complexities faced by the leaders are described well and draw readers in to the drama of the school.

The storyline follows chronologically which also means that we get a rich picture of each head teacher's accomplishments, dilemmas, short comings, and vision. It is very clear that the head teachers brought in to 'fix' the school must build on what has been established. Even the leaders themselves see that the situation they have inherited is tenuous at best because of the immense pressure and public spotlight of being classified as a 'failing school.' The government agencies responsible for classifying the school as 'failing' emphasise leadership as a solution but then do not provide resources, stability, or clear aims for the school to achieve. The public struggle comes to depend on the personal qualities of the head teachers as the school community wonders how and whether it will succeed. Barker successfully uses this structure to explore the leadership qualities of the head teachers and uses each of the three as examples within the cultural context of Hillside school. It is a very effective exploration of leadership. The story is gripping as we as readers follow the school's progress in a highly politicized atmosphere.

In this account, however, the student and parent voices are missing. There are a few parent leaders who pop up now and again in the story, but the voices of those most impacted by the changes are largely silent. Barker focuses mainly on the

head teachers and teacher leaders that emerge through the change process. While he highlights leadership as essential, and rightfully so — no substantial change can happen without a skilled leader — the followers are equally important. The teachers are the ones who implement the head teacher's ideas and who either change or choose not to. In fact, Barker's account points to the importance of buy-in from those in the classroom, as many teachers resigned or took early retirement after the designation of 'failing school' was announced. This reaction both paved the way for new teachers who would embrace new ways of working but also simultaneously resulted in a deficit of teacher leaders and historical knowledge of the school. A more well-rounded account including student and general teacher voices would help us understand the school's experience more deeply.

This account also raises important issues about the effectiveness of putting schools into special measures. As demonstrated by this school's changes, it can be a way to jump-start a complacent school. However, Barker mentions the lack of qualified head teachers to turn schools around. The question arises whether this heavy-handed and high-stakes bureaucratic response to poor performance masks the responsibility that the system has in creating such situations in the first place. Other schools were in special measures at the same time as Hillside. It is interesting to contemplate how they may have fared.

Even Barker sends mixed messages on the utility and efficacy of using special measures to force school change; he claims that 'the turbulence and demoralisation created by Ofsted and the threat of closure did not prove serious obstacles to progress' (p.160) and heralds this uncertainty as a tool that the head teachers could use to force change. However, at what price? And the question remains, what skills, social contexts, and supports are needed by head teachers in order to turn this great upheaval into a successful transition for something better for students? The account of Hillside demonstrates the progress that exceptional leaders can make. Not all schools will have the necessary exceptional leader, nor the willing and capable teachers, nor the cultural and social context that Hillside had that made success possible. The experience of Hillside demonstrates how complicated and interdependent the 'ingredients' are for change. The 'solution' of special measures should not be taken lightly.

This is a story of leadership and of cultural transformation. It is the story of a school's successful journey out of special measures. It is also an unfinished story. The leadership qualities and extraordinary effort required of each head teacher left them too drained to carry on. At the end of the book, the school faces hiring its fourth teacher in three years. An epilogue is needed before we can understand whether the changes in the culture and in teaching practices are permanent building blocks from which the school moves forward, or whether this wrenching process results in temporary gains and surface change.

## VALUES IN EDUCATION: WE'RE ALL CITIZENS NOW

Henry Maitles, (2005) Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.  
ISBN: 1 903765 24 2 (pp. 90, £11.95, pb.)

Review by ELAINE M. COWAN

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In this book, (number 7 in the Policy and Practice in Education series), Henry Maitles has produced a clearly written review for all those who wish to understand why citizenship education has recently become important on the educational agenda in Scotland, England and more widely beyond the United Kingdom. He provides an analysis of developments in policy and research on citizenship and then goes on to speculate on possible areas for future investigation.

This slim volume (just 90 pages long) is structured into seven main chapters, each tackling a specific aspect of the issue. The author initially explores differing definitions of citizenship education and political literacy. He also examines the health-wealth gap in relation to educational achievement and the reform agenda. In the second chapter, he reviews research on young people's political attitudes. He highlights studies that indicate young people may be relatively apathetic in relation to participation in voting and political institutions, but they are aware, informed and active in other areas of politics.

The role and reality of pupils' councils form the focus of chapter three. Here the author identifies a clash between school claims on pupil participation in decision making and pupil perceptions of tokenism. What schools really want is, in Maitles' view, good citizenship without the trouble of having citizens. He identifies that to some extent this is because schools see parents, not children, as their clients. In chapter four, he examines what is learned within political literacy and citizenship and how it is taught within the classroom. Here he uses a detailed case study to examine teacher attitudes and the positive benefits of encouraging teamwork, and a democratic approach for an active model of classroom learning. From this, in chapter five he develops his view that "young people can be taught anything in an intellectually honest way at any age". He asserts that because of teacher inhibitions, controversial issues are often boringly rather than provocatively taught. Again he draws on case studies of teaching topics such as the Holocaust to develop this argument.

Developing positive values in a global village is the focus of chapter six. Maitles examines the currently contested issue of gaining consensus on the values to be developed in education in a modern, multi-cultural society. The final chapter reviews some of the differences between approaches to citizenship education in Scotland and England. He reminds the reader of the important links between exclusions, attendance and exam performance, highlighting good and effective practice such as more active teaching and learning approaches. He calls for more research on the impact of citizenship education initiatives on pupil attitudes and political participation.

Within several of the chapters, Maitles includes and evaluates practical case studies of citizenship and values education in schools and their impact on pupils. These case studies relating to school ethos are highly relevant for school managers. More specifically they also examine very important learning and teaching issues for teachers as well as initial teacher education students across a range of disciplines (e.g. Citizenship, Modern Studies, Religious and Moral Education, Personal & Social Education and English). Finally, an extensive bibliography draws on a wide range of relevant literature and research from across the English speaking world with more than 250 articles and books cited and a helpful index.

Given the rate of initiatives currently in Scottish education, it is inevitable that

Maitles could not make links to some of the most recent developments in policy and research that have important links to citizenship, such as A Curriculum for Excellence (SEED, 2004), the recent HMIE (2006) review of current practice in Scottish schools and for teaching and learning the evaluation of the Assessment is for Learning initiative (Condie, et al., 2005). For readers from beyond the Scottish educational scene, Maitles might have explained in more detail the role, development and links between Modern Studies and the Education for Citizenship agenda in Scotland. A minor criticism is that it was not always clear in the text where more detail of some of the very interesting case studies would be available.

I recommend this book without hesitation to school managers and teachers as a brief, easy-to-read and very helpful summary of relevant research and readings on citizenship. I will definitely be suggesting it as an important starting point to the ITE students on all of the programmes on which I teach, to help develop their understanding – not only of citizenship, but also for teaching controversial issues in Scottish schools and encouraging active learning in the classroom.

#### REFERENCES

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- Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) (2004) A Curriculum for Excellence. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

#### ETHICS AND RESEARCH IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Kieron Sheehy, Melanie Nind, Jonathan Rix and Katy Simmons (eds) (2005) Abingdon: RoutledgeFalmer.  
ISBN: 0 415 352 061 (pp. 254, £24.99, pb.)

Review by GEORGE HEAD

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With the ethical conduct of research gaining in significance in recent years, and inclusion being one of the most important developments in education for a quarter of a century, their combination in the title made reviewing this book a particularly exciting prospect. I was hoping for some new thinking, possibly even some insight into how the ethical conduct of research within a context of inclusion might itself contribute towards the development of a more equitable ethos in our schools. In the end, I was both satisfied and disappointed.

This book was written as a reader for students on the Open University's MA in Education. It is set out in four parts encompassing the new context for educational research that the inclusion movement has introduced, the new voices and relationships that that context entails, methods and practices and, finally, a two-chapter coda on the legal context.

The first two parts were those that satisfied my curiosity and desire to learn of recent developments. The chapter by Gary Thomas and Georgina Glenny, in which they argue that inclusion demands a new epistemology, is particularly thought-provoking. They contend that the research methods of natural science deny the interactive and interpretive elements required by educational research in order to generate the understanding necessary to develop the structures and pedagogies needed to develop an effective, inclusive educational experience for our young

people. Indeed, they argue that ignoring these social aspects of human activity has led to the reinforcement of social structures (including schools, presumably) that 'hide behind scientific objectivity' to perpetuate, inter-alia, dependency. The reductionist and functionalist thrust of positivistic thinking, they argue, has led those of us who research in the area of additional support to look to 'analyse and fix instead of seeking to understand and include'. Instead, they argue for a moral activism that broadens out inclusion from righting the wrongs visited upon certain groups to enabling all our young people to lead purposeful lives both as individuals and as members of a community. How this might be achieved, is outlined in the three chapters that follow.

Marion Dodds tackles the tricky balancing act of subjectivity and detachment for the researcher. She argues for an oppositional form of research that challenges the researchers' sense of themselves and awareness of participants. Generating a sense of 'the other' is necessary in order to conduct the kind of research that will contribute towards meaningful change in the lives of those whom we teach. Similarly, Colin Barnes sets out a case for emancipatory disability research. Such research has a transformative aim, is multi-dimensional, and challenges the cultural barriers experienced by people whom others view as disabled.

In the section on new voices, Priscilla Alderson makes the case for the involvement of children in all stages, levels and methods of the research process itself. Other contributions in this section of the book consider the place, importance and meaningful involvement of otherwise marginalized communities such as children with special needs, vulnerable young people and parents. These chapters explore the ethical dilemmas facing researchers working with children, with one chapter addressing the gritty issues faced by males working alongside young children. This section, like the previous part, tackles the awkward questions. For example, Ros Frost argues that seeking to ensure that participants are recognized as subjects rather than objects of research not only avoids a potentially patronizing relationship, but can, indeed, contribute towards 'rescuing them from silence and exclusion'. What these chapters argue is that an ethical approach to research is to make research itself part of the process of inclusion. In this manner, researching with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in our schools serves to improve the research experience for all members of the education community.

Part three of the book dedicates seven chapters to exploration of the issues raised in parts one and two within specific research contexts. The chapters are repetitive in the sense that the same issues arise in each of the contexts, without necessarily building on our understanding of them. Thus, whether the discussion is about taking images of children, using an on-line environment or action research, the same issues of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity and dissemination arise. This section of the book will be useful for students to 'dip into' as appropriate for their own methodology and research environment.

The book is rounded off by two chapters on the legal context which, whilst largely focused on legislation pertinent to England and Wales, does recognize the similarities and differences elsewhere in the UK.

Although I found parts three and four less satisfying than the early chapters, I nevertheless consider this to be a very helpful book. Most obviously, the intended audience of postgraduate students will find most of what they need to ensure the ethical conduct of their research. In addition, ethics officers, and academics who teach on research courses, would find this a useful addition to their libraries.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION, LIFELONG LEARNING AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Lyn Tett (2006) Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.  
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Review by JOHN FIELD

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Community education and lifelong learning are in a complex, not to say paradoxical position. Both are current policy priorities, but their importance is largely due to their role in servicing other priority areas; in particular, they are seen as promoting competitiveness, inclusion and civic participation. Both are broad concepts that are hard to define with precision, yet policy makers often try to regulate performance through neat, controlled forms of performance management and target setting. Despite their policy salience, neither is easy for the state to deliver. Rather, government can only act through partnerships and other strategies that mobilise people and encourage them to take action. And lastly, both community education and lifelong learning encompass different tiers of government and different government departments, complicating further the policy context and institutional landscape.

In addition to this complexity, lifelong learning and community education are also contested and even controversial. It is not just that the concepts themselves provoke vigorous disagreements, sometimes verging on the theological, but there is also a lively debate about the basic principles of practice. Lyn Tett works alongside a number of talented radical thinkers at the Moray House School of Education who are interested in the social and political dimensions of adult education, community development and women's education, and her brief and incisive study continues this excellent tradition of provocative and challenging thinking about the field.

It starts by summarising crisply the historical development of lifelong learning and community education in Scotland, before reviewing the contemporary policy context, which Tett sets in a wider European context. For Tett, the European Commission's interest in lifelong learning and community education is double-edged: while the Commission's policy approach is a broad one, which acknowledges citizenship and social change, it has ignored personal and community development. Tett also condemns European and UK policies for their failure to acknowledge learner agency; rather, she says, learners are often "constructed as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and skills by others that were also able to predefine their needs" (p.25). UK policies in particular force education and training into the corset of market forces, with the stated aim of improving quality through competition. Tett believes that this open justification is allied to a covert goal of reducing the power of professional educators.

Tett then goes on to consider different aspects of lifelong learning and community education in contemporary Scotland. While taking a broadly critical perspective, she is careful to illustrate her argument with positive examples of what can still be done in practice. Existing policies may be double edged, but Tett sees them as also opening up spaces where learners may be able to determine the content of the curriculum, enabling them to challenge "imbalances in the power to decide what is to be learnt" (p.37). In this particular instance, Tett provides a case study of family literacy in Edinburgh to help reinforce her point.

Tett's cautious optimism also extends to the role of research. If disadvantaged communities are to engage in developing long term strategies for social and economic development, then they need full access to relevant information, which can be gained through participatory action research. Communities also need access to specialist advice, enabling them to play an active role in determining the agenda

for community development.

Tett's optimism is welcome, but I was less convinced by the broadly welfarist attitudes that she brings to the study. If the market suffers from the defects that she rightly condemns, statist solutions have all too often created passivity and dependency, alongside bureaucratically defined versions of 'need'. Hoping that a devolved Scotland might avoid these twin traps, Tett argues that a devolved Scottish administration represents "the beginnings of what could be a new kind of democracy at work" (p.75). Yet her examples of distinctive Scottish policies leading to "a more equal distribution of resources" are poor ones; both — personal care for the elderly and university fees — disproportionately benefit people from affluent middle class backgrounds. Moreover to describe Scotland's graduate charge as "the abolition of tuition fees for higher education" is to accept a bit of government spin (p.75). But if these point to deeply-rooted problems with welfarist solutions to poverty and injustice, Tett is right to see the neo-liberal market as a problem rather than a cure.

Overall, then, Tett provides an excellent overview of two related areas that other commentators on Scottish education have often overlooked. She writes clearly, in a highly accessible style that makes the book eminently suitable for postgraduates, thoughtful professionals, and undergraduates taking specialist modules. She approaches her subject with a blend of critical passion, analytical care and a constructive will. The result is a concise and incisive critical guide to community education and lifelong learning in Scotland, and even well informed observers of our educational system will learn a great deal from her account.