

FROM THE EDITOR

This edition is our last so, as Jill and I gather together the excellent articles for this SER, we reflect upon the past four years. In some ways these have sped past: it seems no time at all since we welcomed the Commonwealth Ministers of Education to Edinburgh for their 15th Conference on Access Inclusion and Achievement: Closing the Gap, and published the Keynote Paper by Professor Amartya Sen and the Issues Paper on which the Ministers based their discussions. Additionally, we have published articles on the many changes in national educational policies and issues connected with their implementation. Indeed, throughout our four years as Editors there has been continued research and writing on policy processes connected with inclusion and diversity; exclusion; literacy; school management and Headteacher programmes; CPD; assessment; FE College sector debates; and financing and funding concerns for all stages of education. The range of articles published reflects a healthy and wide-ranging set of interests and agendas from the Scottish educational community. A particular focus on Teacher Education and Professional Development was provided by Ian Menter, who we were delighted to welcome as Guest Editor of an additional Special Edition, funded out of the generous bequest from the late Stanley Nisbet, a pioneer of modern teacher educational research in Scotland.

We are pleased, therefore, to be able to pass to new Editors a Journal which generates a large mailing of papers, many submitted on the basis of findings from self-funded small-scale research projects. It is heartening to read of these projects and results and to learn that throughout Scotland's academic institutions there are those who value the importance of conducting research and the feeding of that into their everyday teaching. There have been, also, submissions from writers who have felt sufficiently strongly about a policy initiative or its implementation, an historical or international connection, a philosophical or psychological theory and its application, or contentions in educational discourses that they have trawled for sources in libraries and researched the bibliographical bases and narratives to thereby write coherently about their field of study.

Our new Editors, Mark Priestley and Greg Mannion, both of Stirling University, have many years of contact with the SER. Mark has written the Parliamentary column for SER and has been on the Editorial Board. Before moving to Scotland, Mark was a secondary school teacher in England and New Zealand. He is the Director of Initial Teacher Education at Stirling, with responsibility for History and Modern Studies. His theoretical background in critical realist social theory has supported research interests in school curriculum and curriculum change, ICT in classroom practice and, of course, ITE. Like Mark, Greg Mannion, was employed as a teacher before moving to Stirling University where he conducts research in lifelong learning, citizenship and post-16 education and training. We are sure that both Mark and Greg will make an excellent contribution to maintaining the quality of the Journal and we wish them well for their years ahead. They will be delighted to start to receive papers for their first edition, which will, in fact, be in November 2007.

The next edition of the SER, in May 2007, will be 'guest edited' by Professor Pamela Munn and others from the AERS Network. It will focus upon papers submitted from applied educational research. There will be Keynote articles from Professor Sally Brown on research capacity building and from Professor Tom Schuller on the possibilities of international links increasing coherence in research knowledge. Papers will be included which provide evidence of capacity building in action from teams working across the AERS networks. As well as capacity building, other areas to be addressed will include collaboration, teacher professionalism, leadership and methodological issues.

In our own final edition, Jill and I are delighted to publish articles on international and national themes. These are indeed, international times, we are reminded by Jenny Fernandes in her article on Trends in International Student Mobility. Fernandes focuses upon the movement of Chinese students to the UK and on their experiences at one UK University in particular. She argues that although Chinese student mobility to the UK has been almost taken-for-granted by university authorities, there are many factors which can influence choice of destination as well as the decision to venture out of China in the first place. Through careful analysis of numbers attending universities in the UK and the financial impact of studentships, she notes that China is now the largest source of international students to the UK. However, she suggests that universities should not be complacent. This economic situation can only be sustainable when the experience of the student is positive: there are many factors which may stifle such an experience. Student responses to her questionnaire noted that, in addition to academic and lifestyle experiences, cultural diversity is important: if too many Chinese students enrol onto specific courses, there is, it is suggested, an impact on teaching methods and class discussion. To remedy this possible problem, the author advises that those in university registration consider methods to facilitate the recruitment of Chinese students to a wider range of courses and to expand programmes which develop generic skills thereby building upon students' understandings of the assessment methods used.

Assessment is a key feature in the article by Stephen Sharp on the Grading of Placement in Initial Teacher Education in Scotland. In light of now long-running debates on competences and the impact of the McCrone Reforms (SEED, 2000), the author conducted a study of grading of Initial Teacher Education programmes. He studied essay-based percentage marks, and placement-based grades to see whether there were major differences and whether one or the other had greater impact upon final degree results. Sharp notes that a larger percentage of higher grades are given for placement activity. He suggests that because essays and placements are qualitatively different forms of learnt activity, it may be more appropriate to develop different grading systems for placements, perhaps just distinction, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. This may become the norm as the movement for school-based grading gathers momentum. It is far from clear that the Scottish Executive and university funding councils will continue to support the costly exercise of having university placement supervisors travel to visit and assess all students, wherever they may be. More likely will be the situation where placement assessment is undertaken within school. This may not have profound implications for assessment *per se* but for the students' own perceptions of assessment. And that may be the benchmark upon which designations of degree and placement component are separated on final transcripts.

Student placements are the also the focus of the article by Dewhurst and McMurtry. Like Sharp, they note that placements are an integral part of Initial Teacher Education (ITE). That being the case, from 2003–2005, they conducted a study of the views of student teachers and teachers to delineate their understandings of why placements are important, what learning experiences and opportunities occur during placements and what is required for successful student learning during a placement. The authors provided self-completion open-ended questionnaires to two year groups of students on PGDE(S) programmes and to Principal Teachers in eight secondary schools in four local authorities. Their findings confirm the views outlined by Sharp in his article, that placement remains an important, indeed an inherent part of the process of learning to become a teacher. Their conclusions suggest that as learning to become a teacher is situated and social, it is best undertaken 'in the field' and supported by mentors familiar with the interconnections experienced by the student learner. It becomes important to ensure that the convergence continues of student learning through practice, school and university. It is this collaboration

— this sense of belonging and responsiveness — that engenders successful learning by student teachers on placement.

Another article on ITE by Moya Cove focuses on ‘recent relevant experience’ (RRE). This was identified in the McCrone Report as being important for the teacher educator. It was quickly followed up with a 2001 First Stage Review of ITE carried out by Deloitte and Touche which concluded the ‘universal agreement on the desirability in principle of RRE’. But, Cove suggests, although RRE was delineated as an important feature and various stakeholders have also supported its utility as part of the learning experience, there has been little academic research on its efficacy in experiential learning. In her own small-scale research study, using semi-structured interviews, Cove investigated what concepts of RRE are held and how it is defined by a range of people involved in partnerships in ITE; how RRE is important for ITE and how it is perceived to ‘add value’ to ITE programmes; and how the role of the teacher educator is perceived by a range of ITE stakeholders.

She notes that, worryingly, there is no agreed definition of RRE. There may even be competing definitions amongst ITE stakeholders, these often signifying varying definitions of the scope and purpose of teacher education itself. The conclusions indicate the need to strengthen communication and partnership in the teacher education enterprise so that ‘best practice’ principles from local authorities, schools and classes may flood into ITE courses. In this way competing definitions of RRE may converge, thereby promoting greater collaboration amongst all those involved in the development of a new generation of Scottish teachers.

Assessment practices for a new generation of teachers is the subject of June Mitchell’s article on Formative Assessment and Beginning Teachers. She draws attention to formative assessment as a priority for ITE institutions. With a number of policy initiatives supporting assessment in ITE she notes, ‘If formative assessment is to be the key to meeting the priorities of raising attainment or of lifelong learning, then aligning teacher education effectively with this particular policy is very significant for policy management’.

To that end, she explores issues related to assessment especially the school-focused national policy initiative to implement formative assessment. Drawing on research around the Assessment is for Learning initiative, she suggests that while many teachers recognise the significance of the formative assessment strategies in relation to learning, many others teach the strategies without adjusting their approaches to using assessment as a core learning tool. This has meant that many beginning teachers are under-prepared for utilising the recommended strategies when they come to the end of their teacher training courses. This could create problems as the majority of Scottish schools have begun to implement formative assessment. It is therefore suggested that teacher educators may have a significant part to play in moving the vision of formative assessment into a sustainable reality.

Teachers are indeed being asked to undertake more in not only the ITE process but also in the ever-changing business of learning. As Lorna Hamilton writes, the importance of teacher beliefs is recognised and yet it is difficult to capture and examine them. Teacher beliefs about pupil potential and ability are, it is suggested, crucial to children’s learning experiences. However, ‘ability’ is not an uncontested concept, and its various definitions serve to dissipate its importance when perceived by the classroom teacher. Hamilton conducted a study by asking teachers to articulate their own implicit theories of ability in relation to their teaching practice with first year (12 years of age) and fourth year (16 years of age) high school pupils in two state-funded comprehensives and two independent schools. She notes that definitions of ‘able’ and ‘average’ were more commonly mentioned than ‘very able’. She concludes by arguing that fundamental to any teacher education programme there needs to be a rigorous and reflective process of self-evaluation in relation to teacher beliefs and values, exploring their significance for practice and consequentially for learners.

The hidden nature of teacher implicit theories of ability needs to be constructively challenged and investigated.

Sometimes the role of local authority helps in defining development, but sometimes policy may actually impede this process, or so argues Brian Boyd and Fiona Norris: in their article *From Development to Improvement: A Step too Far?* A key player in development has been the role of local authority advisers. However, with recent changes in remit for local authority officers concerned with development there has been a move towards their role as enhancing improvement of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Attention is drawn by the authors to the increasing concentration on quantifiable measurement — notably in relation to quality improvement and performance monitoring — as indicators of ‘successful CPD’. The change, from ‘development’ to ‘improvement’, occurring in the past decade, has impacted, the authors suggest, upon the quality process of the local authority CPD and the relationship between Quality Improvement Officers (QIOs) and HMIE. They critique the changing titles of positions and the overlap between responsibilities so that frequently schools are unprepared for which body is conducting what type of ‘development’ or ‘improvement’ activity. They argue that ‘QIOs do not feel that they are equal partners with HMIE; schools still find the new role of the former advisory service problematic; and most of the time and energy spent on improvement seems to be narrowly focused on the inspection element of the process.’

It is always a pleasure to read of debates and policy initiatives in our regular Parliament column. Morag Redford’s column continues to provide an in-depth examination of some of the discussions in Committee and in the Parliament itself. The past few months have seen much activity. There have been debates on pupil motivation and early years, and the completion of the Early Years Inquiry. Additionally, Morag provides an account of discussions surrounding the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Bill.

Our thanks, again, go to David Miller for his collation of the Book Reviews. It is good to see the range of books reviewed as well as a growing list of reviewers. We are certain that David would be pleased to accept recommendations of not only books to review but persons willing to act as reviewers.

The next edition is the time to instigate our exciting new development in new technology: we will commence a web-based SER. All past-articles, previous to the three most recent editions, will be available on the web. Abstracts of the articles in the most recent editions will also be included on the web. The service will be operated through the University of Glasgow, t4 Content Management System. We are grateful to John Dakers who has agreed to act as web publisher. John will keep the pages up-to-date in terms of content and information relating to SER. In this way, a searchable archive becomes possible through which a world-wide audience can access the literature on Scottish educational research and can contribute to the discussions raised.

We complete this edition with many happy memories of our last four years as Editors and send thanks to the Board for their constant encouragement throughout this period. We also thank most profoundly, Emily Salvesen, for her invaluable administrative support and In-house, our faithful publishers. We thank all contributors, reviewers and, of course, our readers.

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