

FROM THE EDITOR

It has been a pleasure for Jill and me to edit this edition of the SER, not least because of the high quality of articles submitted but also because of the range and breadth of subjects addressed. We are also pleased to welcome back 'Notes from SERA'. Much has happened at SERA and we know our readers will find current activities and plans of great interest. These build upon the excellent Conference organised by SERA in November 2003. The SERA Keynote address by Professor Andrew Pollard is published in this edition along with the Keynote address by Professor Amartya Sen for the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers which was held in Edinburgh, October 2003. We print these two Keynote addresses as they represent the continuing theme of education in Scotland and in wider international communities – the Commonwealth and the European. Although we continue to welcome articles in these fields, our primary focus and theme for 2005 will be concerned with the power of research to inform education policy making.

Professor Sen's address draws attention to the central importance of education for humanity and, indeed, for security. He argues that education acts as a civilising, unifying, social force – a force that not only has economic outcomes but also, and most importantly, acts for social and human emancipation. He notes that as the world moves into further versions of precariousness, illiteracy and innumeracy are also forms of insecurity; not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is a tremendous deprivation. The first and most immediate contribution of successful school education is a direct reduction of this basic deprivation – this extreme insecurity – which continues to ruin the lives of a large part of the global population, not least in the Commonwealth.

However, there are different ways we can act through education to make children of the world more secure. Professor Pollard argues that learning and teaching, supported by quality research, will contribute to individual opportunity, economic productivity and social cohesion. Much is being asked of education: however, for education to deliver these wide-ranging goals, both teaching and learning should be seen as part of a larger moral project to enhance and critique policy, not only in the UK but also, through programme-to-programme liaison, in the European region. Professor Pollard draws attention to a consortium bid to the EC to establish an ERA-Net made up of researchers from six European countries. Such innovative and collaborative research-based developments are indicative of a healthy teaching and learning environment and also of flourishing teacher practitioner research communities. Pollard refers to Judyth Sachs at BERA's 2003 Conference when she said, 'An activist teaching profession is an educated and politically astute one'.

Indeed, this edition of SER applauds such practitioner research through the publication of two articles based on the findings of small scale research. The first focuses on school choice in two European cities, Rotterdam and Dundee; the second examines features of small school policy in Durham, England. In the former, Christine Teelken compares the factors impacting upon school choice in these two cities – factors ranging from policy and legislation to travel to and from schools. In the latter, Smith and Hudson (Primary School Inspectors in County Durham) use interviews, reports from sample schools and analyses of performance data to identify some of the challenges facing small and very small schools. They conclude that small schools are effective and, although under pressure and constraints, the role of the Head teacher is paramount in leading school improvement.

Another practitioner-based research article we welcome, is from Josephine Munthali. Through a qualitative study of girls' schooling in Malawi, she has drawn a carefully crafted account of the cultural, social and economic problems faced by

girls not only on entering but also in remaining in school. Retention rates for girls in Malawi are frighteningly low and Munthali provides an understanding not only of the reasons for this but also of the possibilities for developments in policy and practice to improve the situation. She notes that with a background in trying to meet international targets, in Education for All, Free Universal Primary Education and the Millennium Development Goals, and with the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, Malawi draws on coordination between stakeholders, donors and policymakers in the formulation of policies to support girls' access to and achievement in schooling.

A further contribution linking Scotland with the Commonwealth is an historical study by David Limond on the role of Scottish higher education in the British Empire in India. The mid-19th century system of entrance examination to the Indian Civil Service (ICS) was perceived as disadvantaging Scots: George Davie in his influential work 'The Democratic Intellect' linked this controversy with moves to anglicise Scottish university curricula, diminishing their distinctive 'Enlightenment' nature. The author asks whether reduced Scottish recruitment to the ICS in the 1860s a feature of the decline of Scottish intellectual and academic traditions. In addition, he notes, there may have been an enhanced and continuing enrichment of an Oxbridge definition of 'knowledge' and 'intellectual capacity'? Limond examines both claims in light of the decline in ICS candidates from Scotland and concludes that further meticulous reading of ICS data could help to answer the questions raised.

Thorburn's study of the curriculum in Scotland draws its findings not only from statistical performance data but also from empirical research in three schools. It focus upon the translation of policy to practice in the field of Higher Still courses in physical education (PE). The general critique, by David Raffé, *et al.*, of the nature of changes made by Higher Still is used as a framework for analysis of findings, leading Thorburn to conclude that in contrast with the stated aims of Higher Still, new assessment demands in PE led to rote learning in this as in some other subjects. Thorburn argues that whilst Higher Still seeks to maximise opportunities for the empowerment of learners and teachers, it has not yet reached that goal.

Research by Margaret Sutherland, Chris M.M. Smith and Alan McLean on motivation, is located in the research tradition of literature analysis, having, however, a practical purpose: the formation of a model of the motivating classroom designed to help teachers analyse their own practice. The model has been put into use in one Education Authority; a future study of teachers' responses would be interesting. Meantime, Sutherland and her colleagues explain the basis of the model and argue its potential to support affirmation and empowerment of learners. Teachers, the authors hope, might draw upon the approach to resist pressure to emphasise control in the name of meeting attainment targets.

In our last edition we noted that comments on published articles would be welcome. We are delighted, therefore, that Colin Smith has contributed a comment setting out the perspective of a teacher-researcher on Maclellan and Soden's article (SER 35(2)) on Teachers' Theories of Learning. They, in their turn, have responded to Smith's comments. In the interests of rigorous debate, we hope further comments on our current articles, will be submitted.

Also much welcomed in this edition is the return of Education in the Scottish Parliament. Mark Priestley has taken up the challenge and captured the debates and select committee proceedings related to education. He outlines the changes to the Committee structure, identifies the key areas discussed and focuses in detail upon debates concerning the Education (Additional Support for Learning) Scotland Bill. He asks whether the new Co-ordinated Support Plan be an improved multi-agency resource for vulnerable children, or is there a danger of by-passing certain needy individuals? We are very grateful that Mark will keep readers up to date on Parliamentary affairs especially as there are so few other channels for taking careful note of what MSPs debate within the Parliamentary fora.

Our book reviews are similarly welcomed, especially Sally Brown's lengthy review of the second edition of Bryce and Humes' 'Scottish Education'. Brown recognises the debt that Scottish educationists owe to the editors and authors of this important work: its excellent descriptive material is a rich resource for students, practitioners and the policy community. However, she identifies the uneven presence of a critical perspective, and notes some key questions are glossed over, for example, the neo-subject based curriculum sustained in the primary stages. The international perspective introduced in the general topics of Section X111 is warmly welcomed, but she suggests that some sections of the work would have benefited from a section introduction to flag up a coherent conceptual structure for the relevant chapters. The other reviews, on special educational needs in the primary and early years stages, research methodology and a fascinating anthology by David Northcroft of reminiscences of the schooldays of Scots from the mid-19th century to the present, also provide interesting insights into current publications in a diverse field of education. A list of current titles received by the Reviews Editor is included and readers interested in reviewing any of these are invited to contact David Miller.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we conclude with an appreciation of the life of Professor Stanley Nisbet. We re-print the obituary by his brother John Nisbet alongside two personal recollections, these from Dr Bill Gatherer and Professor Tom Bryce. Both draw attention to this special man, a man of immense integrity. Stanley Nisbet, was the first Professor of Education at Glasgow University and a leading light in the founding of and support for the Education Colloquium. So whilst we are saddened to learn of the death of Stanley Nisbet, we join his brother, Dr Gatherer and Professor Bryce in reflecting upon his impact on Scottish education throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. We know that as we advance into the twenty first century, there are committed educationalists, academics, policy-makers involved in Scottish education and all well-placed to build on the legacy Stanley Nisbet has bequeathed our nation.

GARI DONN
Editor