

From the Editor

Mark Priestley

University of Stirling

The new academic year finds the Scottish educational system in the middle of unsettled times – worries over funding, ITE programmes facing drastic reductions, redundancies, newly qualified teachers in unprecedented competition for an ever declining pool of vacancies, and so on. Moreover, these pressures are occurring at a point when schools are being asked, as highlighted by one of the contributors to this volume, to implement ‘biggest reform of education in a generation’ (LTS 2006: 3). Of course educators are used to being asked to do more with less, however the ongoing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence at such a time is truly a Catch 22 situation.

Some of the papers in this volume – and I will return to these in due course – address various aspects of the new curriculum, and it is good to see an emerging body of literature on such an important development, which to date has been under-researched and under-theorised. But first, let us begin by considering John Field’s article on lifelong learning. Field examines available datasets to draw conclusions about participation in lifelong learning in Scotland. He concludes that, while ‘while overall participation in Scotland is high by international standards, there are some indications that it falls slightly below the UK average in some respects’. In particular, there is evidence that inequality rates are higher in Scotland than for England and Wales, especially in respect of older people and those who are least well-qualified. Field concludes that:

.. this evidence on equity and participation should cause considerable concern to practitioners and policy makers alike ... Despite the considerable strengths of educational research in Scotland more generally, major gaps remain when it comes to the analysis of adult learning ... this is not a good basis on which to develop policy and practice.

Iddo Oberski writes about Curriculum for Excellence and creativity. Oberski’s paper draws upon Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy. He argues that while Curriculum for Excellence appears to advocate increased teacher creativity, there have been no concomitant changes to the relevant professional standards for teachers. This lack of alignment, he suggests, might be seen as evidence that:

... perhaps the new CfE is not after all the revolution it purported to be initially, but rather more like a repositioning of the 5-14 Guidelines with the notions of creativity and freedom injected for currency, but with very little real scope for their expansion. In this case it would be unrealistic to expect any real change in teachers’ freedom to

be creative. Alignment between CfE and ITE standards then becomes irrelevant to practice.

Misalignment of policy, and the potential resultant irreconcilable tensions for teachers enacting such policy, are of course issues discussed previously in this journal (see Reeves 2008), and moreover one that will continue to impact upon the development of the new curriculum.

Curriculum for Excellence also provides the focus for the article by Simon Beames, Matthew Atencio and Hamish Ross. Their paper argues that provision of outdoor education is variable and highly patchy, due in part to concerns about health and safety. They suggest that a particular type of outdoor learning, combined with CfE, provides a symbiotic opportunity to remedy these problems, claiming that:

From our perspectives, effective outdoor learning resonates so clearly with CfE that pupils who are being denied an education outside the classroom may be limited in their ability to develop the four capacities to their full potential.

Staying with the theme of the school curriculum, Henry Maitles offers, in his article, an analysis of how Modern Studies contributes to the development of political literacy. Maitles analyses empirical data from a research project that compares Modern Studies with two other social subjects – Geography and History. He concludes that young people studying Modern Studies have more knowledge of political issues than do their peers studying History and/or Geography, demonstrating greater levels of interest and less cynicism; however, in terms of the development of socially liberal values, there is no discernible difference. Maitles points to the growing consensus that:

... pupils do not just learn about democracy but rather must live it; they learn about democracy through democracy ... and this has major potential repercussions for many Scottish schools which, together with significant numbers of parents, do not yet see effective pupil participation and decision making as a high priority.

The final two papers relate to the issue of young peoples' and parents' voice. In the first of these, Elisabet Weedon and Sheila Riddell provide an analysis of empirical work around the disputes resolution procedures established in the wake of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The authors conclude:

... that, although a significant minority of parents are highly dissatisfied with local authority provision, only a minority have used the new formal dispute resolution procedures. Parents were generally dissatisfied with negotiation at school level as a way of resolving disputes, but also had reservations about the new ways of resolving disagreements, particularly mediation.

In the final paper, Peter Cope and John l'Anson offer a critique of market 'solutions' to educational 'problems'. Drawing upon and adapting a theoretical model developed by Julian Le Grand, they examine 'the relationship between exit, voice and loyalty in public services using Scottish education as a case study where choice is constrained by both geography and political factors'. The authors suggest that:

If the ambition of recent policy documents is to be realised, Scotland requires novel ways of designing the curriculum, motivating pupils and involving a range of participants in education.

As ever, this edition also contains Morag Redford's regular piece on the deliberations of the *Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee* of the Scottish Parliament, as well as a number of book reviews, covering publications on learning and teaching in primary schools and service integration, as well as the new edition of *Scottish Education*.

REFERENCES

- LTS (2006) *A Curriculum for Excellence: Guide for Student Teachers*, available at http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/Images/student%20guide-final_tcm4-393681.pdf (accessed 30/1/2009).
- Reeves, J. (2008) Between a rock and a hard place? Curriculum for Excellence and the quality initiative in Scottish schools, *Scottish Educational Review*, 40[2], 6-16.

Mark Priestley, October 2009