

The Social Agenda of the School

Jim O'Brien and Gale Macleod (2010) Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press. ISBN: 978-1-903765-23-4 (pp. 75, £14.50, pb.), pb.)

Review by MARGARET MCCULLOCH

An awareness of the importance of social aspects of learning and of the reciprocal relationship between education, as delivered by schools, and the development of democratic society has long been fundamental to a critical understanding of educational philosophy, policy and practice.

In their introductory chapter, O'Brien and Macleod outline the current Scottish policy situation in relation to guidance/support, as expressed in specific reports and within Curriculum for Excellence, and pose the key question to be addressed by the book – 'what approaches, theories, goals, policies and associated structures sustain or 'deliver' aspects of the social agenda?' (p5). As in companion books in the Dunedin series, there is a particular focus on the Scottish perspective, which is compared and contrasted with developments in other parts of the UK and abroad.

New understandings of children's rights, changes in contractual obligations of teachers, increasing pressure on schools to demonstrate 'success' and curricular reform which places a focus on students both as individuals and as future members of society are all identified as having impacted on policy and practice in the area of pupil support. A number of significant tensions have arisen from these changes and these are highlighted in the following chapters.

Chapter two traces the progress of guidance and pastoral care from the holistic concerns for pupils as individuals which were evident in the nineteenth century, through the heightened priority given to 'systems' alongside the development of comprehensive schools, to the current refocus, following the McCrone report, on the responsibility of all teachers within the model of 'first level guidance'. The chapter raises several questions regarding conceptualisations of guidance/pastoral support. How far is it seen and practised as the development of 'caring communities' (p14), encouraging pupil autonomy; or does it demonstrate, at best, 'benevolent paternalism' and at worst 'authoritarianism'? How does pastoral care relate to and encourage, rather than devalue or replace, the parental role? What are the implications of linking the rationale for pupil support to the raising achievement/ improving attainment agenda?

While there is a clear statement of the authors' belief that the pastoral element of teaching can and should not be split from the academic, there is also evidence in this chapter that structures to support development of the heightened responsibilities demanded by the McCrone report are not currently in place. This includes provision of personal and social education (PSE), which is discussed in more depth in chapter 3. Here, the authors again identify issues arising from the tension between 'the development of the individual and the needs of the social' (p27). In particular they take a critical look at the discrepancies between 'the myth and the reality' (p39) in relation to the impact of Scottish education on inequalities and social mobility. They argue that teachers should engage in debate about assumptions and beliefs about 'the constructions of childhood, the challenges of pluralism (and) the broader (and at times conflicting) purposes of education' (p40) which underlie PSE to ensure that they recognise that 'support' for young people can in fact become 'control'.

Chapter 4 extends the arguments of the previous chapter into the specific area of inclusion. The authors challenge any simplistic definitions of this term and outline some of the different perspectives offered on 'rights', 'social justice' and 'difference'. They again identify the possibility of 'inclusion' in relation to the school system having the effect of social control (rather than social welfare), noting the New Labour view of social inclusion as being conditional on conforming to the rules and norms of society, and the evidence that there seem to be limits to the tolerance of diversity and difference in a number of areas.

In chapter 5, the authors outline the evolution of what are now known as Integrated Community Schools (ICS), discussing the variation in rationale for the different models since the inception of 'community wings' in the 1970s. It remains to be seen whether the philosophical and policy assumptions that 'joined up' service delivery through the ICS model will lead to improved outcomes for young people are in fact correct. In a short conclusion, O'Brien and Maclean draw together some of the issues which have arisen and note some implications for professional development and practice.

In relation to the fundamental question identified in the introductory chapter, this book provides a useful overview of the history and development of policies and structures for provision of pastoral support for young people over the past thirty years, and the Scottish focus is particularly useful for readers who value this perspective. While addressing the issues of 'policy and practice' required by the title of the series in which the book sits, the authors have also included some discussion of the philosophies underpinning these. Since the book is necessarily concise, in some places this discussion felt tantalisingly brief; in addition, the measured tone of the book perhaps underplayed the vital importance of teachers recognising the role that they play in enacting the 'social agenda' of the school. Significant questions arise from the text in relation to differing perceptions of the integration of 'guidance' into the role of all teachers (which cannot be as simple as a 'straight' primary/secondary

divide). Similarly, what assumptions does the reader hold about the 'function' and actual impact on pupils of guidance/PSE? Is there, or should there be, a balanced approach between meeting individual and societal needs? Readers at different stages of their professional careers should be encouraged by this accessible text to consider these questions, which go right to the heart of teachers' professional identities, and to reflect on implications for their own practice, whether that be in the classroom, in policy development or in the professional development of teachers.

Holy Cross Academy, Edinburgh: the Life and Times of a Catholic School 1907-1969

Norah Carlin (2009) Edinburgh: New Cut Press.
ISBN: 978 09563249 0 0 (pp. 174, £15.00, pb).

Review by MARIAN DOCHERTY

How do you capture the life and times of any school over a 60 year period, featuring two world wars and major social change? Add the religious dimension and the task becomes even more challenging. Norah Carlin's history of Holy Cross Academy in Edinburgh presents a detailed and evocative portrait of a Catholic school community from its inception in 1907 to its closure in 1969. She does so with scholarly precision and with respect for the people and the world depicted. This work is no attempt, however, to paint a nostalgic picture of an idyllic school in Ferry Road. Carlin's objectivity is welcomed by this former pupil, as I am sure it will be by many others.

If you scan the photographs and drawings, you will find Richard Demarco's beautiful sketches of Afton House, some sombre 1928 prefects, a youthful Pat Stanton, captaining his football team in 1959 and many familiar faces. Most moving for myself was coming across old friends and colleagues – even my brother, as a skeletal prefect. The photographs also evoke the smells of Holy Cross: the gym, the science lab and the dinner hall.

In her introduction, Carlin explains how the 2007 'centenary' celebration of Holy Cross Academy resulted in this work. Although the school closed in 1969, its memory as an Edinburgh institution lived on. The 12 chapters of Part 1 detail its fascinating history and expansion from what was a family house, Afton Lodge, bought by the Catholic Church. Part 2 includes the moving memories of former pupils. Carlin charts the impact of the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act and the sale of the Holy Cross site to the

Education Authority in 1921. By then, the school was already overcrowded and the struggle continued for 30 years to secure a new building, large enough to accommodate pupils from across the Lothians.

Meanwhile, the school endured financial difficulties, inadequate heating and even rats. Carlin includes such quaint details as the removal of the telephone line until 1931 because of excessive costs and problems caused by the janitor's hens in the school grounds. Likewise, the impact of World War Two is vividly recalled. School closure and evacuation were followed by classes taught in private houses and pupils acting as firewatchers in the school overnight. As one pupil recalled:

We had camp beds available, which we never slept on, and you can imagine what we got up to during those nights, when we were in charge of the school.

Indeed one can. For all Head Teachers, the book puts into perspective the challenges of running a modern high school and suggests that little changes over the years.

While the history of the building is interesting and entertaining, the main attraction of the work is its depiction of the people who made Holy Cross and the quality of the education offered. We hear about the first rector, Edward Lynch who was asked to resign in 1909 after an unfavourable HMI report. With many teachers leaving to take up better paid posts elsewhere, staffing remained a problem for several years. The book includes numerous comments on teachers, both favourable and damning. Some recall inspirational Art or Music teachers, lively school societies, Usher Hall concerts and a supportive school community. Unusually for its time, Holy Cross was always co-educational and included many pupils from Polish, Irish and Italian backgrounds, who enriched the school culture.

Others, however, highlight the casual brutality of some staff who belted pupils for spelling mistakes or being short sighted. The elitism of the selective school system was reflected in the indifference of some staff towards pupils in lower academic sets:

I think you were kind of almost condemned, if not to failure, certainly to a hard slog if you ended up in the lower classes.

Carlin presents these differing views fairly and with humour. Former pupil, Mike King, for example, disliked languages partly because of the teachers:

I often didn't understand what they said in the English language

Those pupils acknowledged that their experiences reflected class streaming, their own academic and sporting ability and the quality of their teachers. All will have their own views of Rectors Alexander Cran, Alexander Paterson and Hugh Toner and of those unforgettable faces in the 1953 staff photograph.

Many will recall the Qualifying Exam and the narrow, classical education offered by senior secondaries of the period. Carlin does not avoid this and notes its divisive effect on communities and pupils. She cites many from

humble origins who passed the entrance exam but were forced to leave at 15. While fees in the primary school were minimal and secondary education was free, many families struggled to pay for uniforms, books and travel. Some thrived in the competitive academic environment while others in the 1950s were told by the Rector to leave at the end of Third Year and experienced shame and failure. As Carlin stresses, Holy Cross was not alone in adopting this approach but it must have sat uncomfortably within the Catholic ethos of the school. The latter is highlighted in Carlin's details of daily prayers, Friday Masses, spiritual retreats, school chaplains and the rote learning of the catechism. She presents this fairly and also includes the view of those who welcomed the moral framework Holy Cross provided.

This began in primary, which receives less coverage throughout. Carlin does mention, however, the long journeys to school, the dilapidated buildings and the traumatic 3 year move in 1961 to Pennywell while the new primary school was being built. Pupils and staff recall burst pipes, frozen outside toilets, whole-class rote learning, slate pencils, archaic text books, mindless arithmetic exercises and strict discipline. But Carlin also includes memories of some 'gentle' teachers, operating within the restrictions of the times. I would have welcomed more details about the new primary building and about the secondary post 1965, when younger staff and varied activities enhanced school life.

For former pupils, another interesting chapter is 'Life after Holy Cross'. Carlin lists the doctors, lawyers, academics, teachers, artists, nuns, footballers, civil servants, HMIs, entrepreneurs, 2 Cardinals and a former Lord Mayor of London who all went to Holy Cross! An impressive list and a credit to those poorer families who struggled to help their children to achieve. In highlighting these success stories, however, Carlin could be accused of neglecting those who found fulfilment elsewhere. As she stated herself in the introduction:

the majority of pupils left at the minimum age of fourteen or fifteen and never won prizes or took part in trips, joined societies or went on to higher education and professional careers.

For them, the academic focus of the school curriculum would have been little preparation for the future.

In some ways, the book tells the story of a divided school. This may partly explain the acrimony surrounding the eventual closure of Holy Cross and the move to St Augustine's, following the introduction of comprehensive education. For former pupils like myself, who attended Holy Cross primary and secondary, endured Pennywell, moved to St Augustine's and went back to teach there, the closure of Holy Cross in 1969 was a positive milestone in Catholic education in Edinburgh. The achievement and traditions of Holy Cross were transferred to St Augustine's and developed within an inclusive and supportive environment, which nurtured pupils of all abilities. Carlin's history of Holy Cross is a history of Catholic education itself in Edinburgh and one which is honestly and objectively told. Not always expressed 'in words that tell of happy days' but with fairness, empathy and humour. A memorable book and a challenging one.

Globalisation and Higher Education in the Arab Gulf States

Gari Donn & Yahya Al Manthri, Y. (2010) Oxford: Symposium Books.
ISBN 978-1-873927-31-1 (pp. 176, US\$48.00, pb).

Review by NEIL HUNT

In recent decades, countries of the Arabian Gulf have seen spectacular economic growth. Income from oil and gas industries has been diverted away from international markets and inward investment policies pursued. For example, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have invested heavily in a range of ambitious infrastructure projects. Although the images of gleaming, 7-star hotels and shopping malls with interior ski-slopes have become familiar, less well known are the efforts that Arab Gulf states are making to improve education in the region. Qatar's Education City, for example, has six American universities including branches of Texas A & M and Carnegie Mellon. Abu Dhabi managed to tempt New York University and Paris-Sorbonne to open branches in the city and in Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, an international, graduate university, is being built North of Jeddah. This is in addition to the many existing tertiary institutions which are currently at the forefront of reform efforts in the region. Donn and Al Manthiri's book, therefore, provides a timely and critical account of changes occurring in Gulf higher education, drawing particularly upon close study of tertiary sectors in Bahrain and Oman.

In the first chapter, Donn and Al Manthiri contextualise their study by considering definitions of globalisation and the implications they hold for higher education both in general and in relation to the Gulf States. This provides the book with a strong theoretical basis by acknowledging the sociohistorical forces which are influencing development of higher education globally and within the region. In the second chapter, the authors consider the current socioeconomic, cultural and political position of the six Arab Gulf States – Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar – before providing brief biographies of each nation. This allows for detailed discussion of the specific characteristics of higher education in each country, highlighting policies and challenges within a clear historical framework. The third chapter addresses the issue of global pressures upon labour markets in Arab Gulf countries, in particular the problem of a high youth population and the imbalance of national and expatriate labour. Through consideration of higher education's role in labour market reform, the authors warn of the tendency for Gulf countries to 'borrow policies' without consideration of different cultural, social and political traditions. Nevertheless, they claim that some insights may be gained for the region from studying Finland's

successful transition from rural to knowledge economy. In short, Donn and Al Manthiri argue for a more critical appropriation of knowledge on the part of Gulf education policy makers.

Case studies of Bahrain and Oman provide the focus in Chapter 4 for a discussion on the extent to which higher education should relate to labour market requirement. The authors suggest that attempting to match higher education too closely to short-term market concerns is counterproductive, claiming that as discourses of 'economic globalisation ... gain control of international, regional and local policy processes ... human interests, get subsumed and ... marginalised' (p.94). The result, the authors claim, is that higher education in the region may create technically competent graduates who are unable to contribute to research and innovation, and who lack critical-thinking skills. This, they continue, is likely to create immense socioeconomic problems in the region and perpetuate the peripheral position of the Gulf States in knowledge creation.

In chapter five, Donn and Al Manthiri contend that an international 'magistracy of influence' consisting of influential bodies (G8 and the EU) provide technical expertise and experience in educational policy which creates discursive limits to reform through defining needs and aims of education in terms of concepts that resonate with Western/Northern understandings, rather than building upon indigenous knowledge and culture. In the final chapter, the authors tie the preceding threads together effectively, arguing that the large-scale importation by Gulf States of 'a baroque arsenal' of educational practices – 'institutions, curricular and assessment practices, structures for quality assurance, accreditation and qualification frameworks' (p.153) – will minimise, even disqualify any likelihood of states in the region developing infrastructure of knowledge production. This eventuality, they claim, may mean the Gulf States become further marginalised socially and politically at the global level.

This is an important book which deals with complex, continually changing topics in a well-focused and accessible manner and should be required reading for both policy makers and the armies of imported advisors currently working in the region. It provides a sobering, thought-provoking picture, warning of the problems ahead should Arab Gulf States continue to rely on imported forms of knowledge rather than take the longer route of developing indigenous capacity building and knowledge generation.

Why Knowledge Matters in Curriculum: a Social Realist Argument

Mary Leesa Wheelahan (2010) London: Routledge.
ISBN: 978-0-415-48318-6 (pp. 208, £80, hb).

Review by MARK PRIESTLEY

As acknowledged by Michael Young in the Foreword, this is an important, significant and original book, which contributes greatly to our understanding of the place of knowledge in the curriculum. The book is structured around a number of premises. The first of these is that modern day curricula face a crisis, largely due to their lack of attention to matters of theoretical knowledge. This crisis may be clearly perceived in policies such as Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, as has been highlighted by various writers (for example Paterson 2009; Priestley 2010). The book is thus a critique of 'three dominant approaches to curriculum, which are constructivism, technical-instrumentalism and conservatism' (p. 1). Second, Wheelahan considers the denigration of knowledge to be a problem, as it potentially denies young people access to what Young (2009) terms powerful knowledge. Such knowledge constitutes the intellectual resources that are needed to address the issues and problems that are faced on a daily basis. According to Wheelahan, these include issues of distributional justice. Thus, in the words of Michael Young (Foreword, p. xii), 'the book reminds us that, in the broadest sense, all educational is vocational – and increasingly so as we try to prepare the next generation, whatever they are studying, for the complexities of building a safer, fairer and more sustainable world'. Third, the book maintains that such powerful knowledge is to be found in the academic disciplines, and 'argues that the disciplinary basis of academic and vocational/professional qualifications needs to be restored and made more explicit' (p. 16). Finally, the book draws explicitly on two social realist traditions of thought. The first is the later work of Basil Bernstein, which is used to theorise the nature of knowledge structures. According to Wheelahan, this work is in part contradictory and insufficient on its own to address the important questions concerning curriculum and knowledge. She addresses this lack through the complementary use of critical realism, seeking to provide a synthesis of these two intellectual traditions.

The early chapters provide an overview and critique of Bernstein's often dense and difficult work. Chapters 2 and 3 present a distinction between horizontal and vertical discourses, otherwise characterised as forms of knowledge that are profane/sacred, mundane/esoteric and contextual/abstract. Drawing on Bernstein, Wheelahan suggests that vertical discourses tend to be strongly framed around explicit grammars, whereas horizontal discourses tend to have weak grammar, being situated in contextual practices. The former are based upon humanising principles, but the latter run the risk

of becoming dehumanised, being captured from example by economic instrumentalism. The above arguments relate mainly to the structures of knowledge. Wheelahan also draws upon Bernstein to address the production and reproduction of knowledge, discussing notions of the fields of knowledge production, recontextualisation and reproduction. This is a helpful distinction that captures the multi-layered nature of the translation of knowledge forms into school curricular structures.

The book then moves onto a discussion of critical realism, chapters 4 and 5 providing a clear and helpful overview. We read that critical realism presents two dimensions of knowledge: first that theoretical knowledge is a product of social practices and arises from our practice in the world; and second that our knowledge is knowledge of real objects. Such knowledge is inevitably fallible and subject to modification; thus to teach one unchanging truth is to misrepresent the nature of knowledge. Wheelahan suggests that students need to be equipped with the necessary tools, including access to theoretical disciplinary knowledge, in order that they can make judgements about the world. A 'key argument is that the academic disciplines provide access to the natural and social worlds, even if this access is imperfect' (p. 71)

Chapters 6 and 7 offer a critique of current curricular practices, drawing upon the social realist arguments presented to date. Chapter 6 provides a socio-historical analysis of the 'dethroning of knowledge in society and the curriculum' (p. 87). Such trends are, according to the author attributable to 'globalisation, [changes in] the nature of work and weakened insulation between knowledge production and society' (ibid). In analysing three competing models of curriculum – constructivism, technical-instrumentalism and conservatism – she suggests that instrumentalism has selectively appropriated the discourses of both progressive (constructivist) and traditional modes of thinking about curriculum. She also suggests that some forms of constructivism have contributed to the decline in the status of knowledge in the curriculum. Chapter 8 develops these themes further, in the context of vocational education. In this chapter, Wheelahan shows, convincingly in my view, how technical-instrumental discourses have been successful in appropriating the discourses and methods of constructivism, for example student-centred, situated learning. She suggests that such approaches have decoupled knowledge from the academic disciplines, attaching it instead to specific contexts, often for wholly instrumental purposes. The result is 'policy that uses as its justification and source of legitimation a pastiche of theories and approaches that draw from sometimes opposing theoretical premises, which are then blended by processes of recontextualisation' (p. 134). This process has been evident in Curriculum for Excellence, as Walter Humes and I have argued elsewhere (Priestley & Humes 2010).

Wheelahan's book is clearly written, presenting lucid arguments for a social realist approach to curriculum. It is ambitious in scope, seeking to reconcile two often contradictory realist accounts of the world, namely the

Bernsteinian and critical realist epistemologies. However, as an advocate of critical realism, I find this reconciliation to be unconvincing in some respects. I am unconvinced about the utility and validity of the dichotomy between horizontal and vertical forms of knowledge. This dichotomy is redolent in many ways of the early work of Paul Hirst (1974) and the writings Philip Phenix (1964), which sought to reify idealised forms of theoretical knowledge as being somehow *a priori* to human activity. Interestingly, Hirst's later work suggested a more overtly pragmatist view of knowledge as being rooted in social practices:

the main error of my position was seeing theoretical knowledge as the logical foundation for the development of sound practical knowledge and rational personal development. ... I now consider practical knowledge to be more fundamental than theoretical knowledge, the former being basic to any clear grasp of the proper significance of the latter (Hirst 1993, p. 197).

The Bernsteinian position presented by Wheelahan, rightly in my view, asserts the importance of knowledge in curriculum. However, I am less convinced that knowledge rooted in disciplines is the logical starting point or foundation for curriculum development. Bernstein's work does not seem to readily address the question of why or how knowledge becomes socially powerful. Nor does it provide the conceptual tools to inform our selection of curricular content. I would rather see the conceptual underpinnings for the selection of curricular content to be driven by socially mediated purposes, for example: the development of educational attributes such as the ability to think critically; and the articulation of socially desirable goals such as sustainability and social justice. This is not to deny the utility of centrality of disciplinary knowledge in the curriculum; for instance educational goals will inevitably be informed by disciplinary knowledge. It is simply to suggest, as did A.V. Kelly (1999), that there are better starting points for curriculum planning than knowledge/content.

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