

From the Editor

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I wish to begin with updates on some editorial aspects of the *Scottish Educational Review*. In the two most recent editions, I have described a number of changes to the Editorial Board. I now have one more to mention. As I explained in the November 2011 edition, Gari Donn stood down as Chair of the Editorial Board last year, but temporarily continued as a Board member. At the time, I thanked Gari for her major contribution to the *Scottish Educational Review* over many years. In completing her move to new roles elsewhere, Gari has now also stood down as a Board member. Lorna Hamilton replaces Gari as the University of Edinburgh's representative on the Editorial Board, and I am delighted to welcome Lorna to the Board. On another editorial matter, in our guidelines to contributors submitting papers for consideration, we have amended the indicative guideline on normal length of papers from 4,000-6,000 words to 5,000-8,000 words. This increase in suggested length seems more consistent with the guidelines offered by other academic journals. In particular, we do not want potential contributors to feel constrained from an appropriately full exploration of important issues by an unnecessarily severe limit on length of papers.

The papers in this edition range over a number of interesting areas. The first paper once again continues the practice of sustaining links between the *Scottish Educational Review* and the Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) by publishing papers based on keynote addresses at recent SERA conferences. We are particularly privileged that Robin Alexander agreed to make his 2011 keynote address available as a paper for the journal. In a major critique of how international comparison on education is currently approached, Alexander argues that the potential of international student achievement surveys such as TIMSS and PISA 'is being subverted by political and media fixation on...league tables'. This leads to policies which 'respond less to national culture, values and needs than to the dubious claims of "international benchmarking" and "world class" educational standards – the latter equated with test scores in a limited spectrum of human learning'. Alexander draws upon a US National Research Council typology which differentiates three main types of comparative international study: large-scale surveys (Type I); studies designed to inform particular education policies, especially desk-based review of existing literature or data (Type II); and studies aiming to achieve further understanding of educational processes in different cultural and national contexts (Type III). Alexander is not so critical of Type I studies in themselves, but is very critical of how they are used by Type II studies. His main concerns are with Type II studies, and these are exemplified in critique of three major examples (a 1996 Ofsted report, a 2007 McKinsey report, and a 2010 Cambridge Assessment report). In contrast, Alexander argues for policy makers to draw upon the Type III approach to international comparison, which addresses educational values and principles. He exemplifies this approach powerfully, especially by drawing upon his own research on dialogic teaching across a range of countries. Such approaches 'can lead to genuine transformation of the quality and outcomes of student learning' by 'explicating the principles that underpin observed classroom practice'.

Anne Pirrie's paper is a thought-provoking contribution to the debate on the epistemology of educational research. In ways which can be linked to the work of Bourdieu, Pirrie explores the rich possibilities in viewing a research project as a work of literature, with educational research borrowing from the practices of literary criticism. This emphasises the often 'haphazard and unpredictable' in the process of gathering research data and the 'contingent and unpredictable way' in which a research project discloses itself (which is then 'mediated by the researcher's locus in an academic field'). Pirrie illustrates her thinking by drawing upon her involvement in a government-funded research study of young people

permanently excluded from specialist provision in England. The paper leaves us to reflect on challenging questions about how we can move beyond 'conventional educational research methodology' towards 'a new form of social research that enacts rather than records, and foregrounds textures and the quality of lived experience rather than attempt to "map" "trajectories"'.

Important issues in the economic and social contexts of education are addressed in the paper by Stephen McKinney, Stuart Hall, Kevin Lowden, Michele McClung and Lauren Cameron. The paper explores the relationship between poverty and deprivation and educational attainment and positive school leaver destinations. Research is based upon a quantitative analysis of this relationship in Glasgow city secondary schools. The paper includes a discussion of methodological issues, particularly the use of Free School Meal Entitlement, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation and Staged Intervention as proxy measures for poverty and deprivation. Some findings are described as 'unsurprising', demonstrating a 'major association between poverty and deprivation and attainment'. However, McKinney *et al.* also conclude that 'there is no major association between poverty and deprivation and initial leaver destinations'. Specifically, they suggest some schools serving areas of poverty and deprivation may be particularly successful in achieving positive destinations for their leavers in entering employment, training and further education (although not higher education). McKinney *et al.* stress such 'counter-intuitive' results have very important implications for education strategy for Glasgow and other local authorities in Scotland and the wider UK, and require further research.

Sheila Henderson's paper explores important international themes in the teaching of mathematics in recent years, and specifically the move to 'inquiry based learning that hopes to develop mathematical thinking'. Henderson argues that the success of this move requires teachers themselves to have an appropriate 'conceptual understanding of the content and processes of the subject', especially because mathematics curriculum reform has tended to remove 'subject content detail...from curriculum documentation'. After discussing this wider theoretical context, the paper relates these trends to the development of primary mathematics teaching in Scotland, especially as the national Curriculum for Excellence is implemented. Henderson suggests that Scotland faces some significant current issues with pupil attainment in mathematics, and with student primary teachers' mathematical knowledge. She questions whether Curriculum for Excellence will address such issues sufficiently, unless it is accompanied by certain other reforms, and she details additional proposals on the national school mathematics qualifications to be undertaken by prospective student primary teachers, on initial teacher education for student primary teachers, and on continuing professional development for primary school teachers.

The paper by Alastair Wilson and Stephen McKinney considers important issues in the development of ICT innovation in school education. The paper draws upon a case study two-year research and development project in a Scottish secondary school which 'pioneered the use' of a Sakai based virtual learning environment (VLE) before 'migrating this activity to "Glow", the national schools intranet, in Scotland'. Wilson and McKinney place this project in the wider context of the literature on the development of ICT for learning and teaching in schools, and the literature on school innovation more generally. They detail the methodologies of the 'innovative form of multidisciplinary action research' involved in the project. Wilson and McKinney argue that their findings 'illustrate the ways in which the school and its teachers have experienced innovation in ICT as a challenge to their organisational and professional development'. If the emergence of 'a deficit view of schools and teachers' is to be prevented, they conclude that ICT development needs to be reconceptualised 'from a "technology push" for change into a process of broader educational reform'. Apart from the wider implications of such conclusions, Wilson and McKinney emphasise for Scotland specifically there is 'still perhaps time...to reconsider the "push" to impose Glow in favour of more careful attention to the structure of Scottish education and the ways in which real transformation can occur'.

As continuing features, the edition contains Morag Redford's careful review of the activities of the Scottish Parliament's Education and Culture Committee from September

2011 to January 2012, as well as a number of book reviews on: Improving the Student Experience in Higher and Further Education; Didactics, Learning and Teaching in Europe; Disciplines of Education; The Transformation of Children's Services; Professional Identities in Early Childhood Education and Care ; Personal Epistemology and Teacher Education.

Ian Smith, May 2012