

FROM THE EDITOR

It is a privilege as the new editor to have the opportunity to write a few words to mark the publication of Volume 31 of *Scottish Educational Review*. This issue of the journal coincides with the dawn of a new era for Scottish education with the election of the Scottish Parliament. Full democratic accountability will pose significant new challenges to the “cosy” consensus which has been said to characterise the educational establishment in Scotland. The Holyrood Parliament represents an exciting opportunity to stimulate debate and effect change in the education system in Scotland. In this context the need for scholarship and rigorous research in education is greater than ever. On behalf of the editorial team, I sincerely hope *Scottish Educational Review* can play its part by contributing to that debate and helping to inform the process of change in this country. At the same time, it is our aim to provide a channel for wider educational dialogue involving colleagues further afield by setting Scottish Education in its international context.

This issue contains a number of potentially important contributions to the educational agenda. John Nisbet provides a vigorous, scholarly account of the beginnings of educational research in Scotland, tracing its international origins from late nineteenth century pioneers in Europe and USA and identifying two sharply contrasting styles whose influence persists today. Education is by definition a problematic activity, characterised by *uncertainty*, and all those who are professionally involved in educational matters are obliged to adopt a questioning, reflective approach. The concept of uncertainty is explored by two of our contributors. Firstly at a time when we are facing the prospect of a fresh review of the curriculum as the new parliament takes shape, it is perhaps appropriate that we have from Donald Macnab a review of the uncertain vision revealed in accounts of values, purposes and attainment in mathematics education together with a call for a new clearer vision to guide any future developments. Secondly, Bob Sparkes provides a timely and challenging analysis of the now widely accepted Value Added methods of deriving indicators of school effectiveness and concludes that these are indeed uncertain measures.

With the quality of education provision being a prime consideration of all political parties at the recent election and with particular importance being attached to the quality of headship in Scottish schools, the survey by Valerie Wilson and Joanna McPake of headteachers in small primary schools fills a significant gap in our overall picture of school management in Scotland. In the educational discourse of recent years there has been increasing acceptance of the concept of inclusiveness as a key indicator of quality in education. Gwynnedd Lloyd, Joan Stead, Elizabeth Jordan and Claire Norris explore the ways in which teachers respond to one particular aspect of cultural diversity in Scotland by examining their attitudes towards children from the Gypsy Traveller community. Finally, Marcus Bowman reports the findings of a detailed study of children engaging in group work using a word processor and raises some very pertinent questions of both policy and practice in relation to classroom literacy activities.

The spotlight is now firmly focused on education in the New Scotland, which makes this a very interesting time to take on editorial responsibility for *Scottish Educational Review*. I am delighted that my colleague Joan Menmuir has agreed to assume the role of Deputy Editor. We have been very encouraged by the number and range of articles being submitted and are particularly grateful for the efforts of the many anonymous referees who so willingly have given their time to review articles. We welcome any comments about the current issue or any suggestions

about future issues of the journal. However, it would be inappropriate to conclude this editorial without formally paying tribute to the retiring members of the editorial team, Angela Roger and Paul Standish, for their commitment and the resulting high quality of *SER* during their tenure.



SERA NEWS

Plans for SERA Conference 1999 (to be held at West Park Centre, Dundee, from September 30 October 2) are shaping up, with abstracts under consideration for a varied and challenging programme. Professor Ian Stronach of Manchester Metropolitan University, will give the SERA Lecture, and SERA also hopes to finalise arrangements for an address by a representative from the new Scottish Parliament with responsibility for education. The organisers look forward to welcoming many readers of *SER* to the conference at a time of fascinating change for Scottish education.

Other news highlights SERA's efforts over the past year to stimulate communication about educational research among a wider range of groups, especially practitioners, local authority officers and post-graduate students. Members of SERA Executive have discussed with officers from CoSLA's Education Research and Intelligence Group, and with ERU and SCRE representatives, ideas for collating and disseminating support for practitioner research. Some local authority education staff development initiatives have taken on a research orientation and are based on interests identified by teachers and schools. There are signs of an increase in research bringing together practitioner and academic researchers, which SERA strongly supports. CoSLA has now established an on-line database of research in education, supplementing the ERSDAT database administered by SCRE. The CoSLA facility aims to develop practitioner and institution profiles and on-line discussions, through which closer working relationships between local authorities and researchers can grow (<http://www.championinternet.com/cosla/>).

Postgraduate research students in education can sometimes feel isolated from the academic and practitioner research communities. SERA is indebted to Executive members Kim O'Driscoll-Tole and Elizabeth Davies for developing active links with research students in BERA, and for running a series of informal seminars for research students in education. Seminars have so far been held in Strathclyde and Stirling Universities; more are planned. The focus is on giving conference papers and associated skills, aiming to provide research students with early encouragement to disseminate their work and participate in SERA and other conferences.

Keep up with SERA news on:

<http://www.mhie.ac.uk/-sera>

Jill Duffield, SERA.