

BOOK REVIEWS

EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH: BEYOND THE POST-MODERN IMPASSE

David Carr (Editor), (Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education, 1998), pp xiii+248, hardback, £50

Review by FRANK R. ADAMS

Teacher education colleges in Scotland are now becoming university Faculties of Education, accompanied by the inevitable reconsideration of the nature and content of teacher education courses and it could be that the philosophy of education could make something of a comeback. While never being entirely neglected, it could be argued that philosophy of education received something less than central consideration as courses were developed which strove to emphasise the inter-relationship of theory and practice and immediate classroom relevance. If such a come-back takes place this substantial book, edited by David Carr (recently appointed to a personal chair of philosophy of education at University of Edinburgh), may be essential reading, at least for staff who are non-professional philosophers, determined to bring themselves and their courses up to date with the current preoccupations of those for whom philosophy is a central concern.

As one of the non-professional philosophers (though very often of necessity philosophical about life as a teacher educator) and one for whom the existence of a 'post-modern impasse' had been less than apparent, this book provided new territory.

David Carr's book consists of fourteen perspectives on knowledge and truth and their relationship with education written by academics from UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa giving a truly international perspective as the Routledge Series intends. In addition, David Carr provides a scholarly introductory chapter in which readers such as myself learn that the 'post-modern impasse' appears, ironically, to be that the modern world, with its improved communications potential and the realisation of something like a 'global village', far from helping philosophers of education to come to agreed viewpoints on issues such as the place of epistemology, has only served to emphasise the lack of 'cross culturally applicable canons of rationality, knowledge and truth'. Professor Carr's position in the face of this impasse is that epistemology as a form of philosophical enquiry, and ideas of objective knowledge and truth as the legitimate goals of such enquiry, would be abandoned 'only at the gravest professional peril' and introduces some philosophers who have managed to come to a broad agreement - that 'some conception of objective knowledge and truth requires urgent defence or rehabilitation in the interests of coherent educational and curricular theorising'.

In an educational system where 'coherent educational and curricular theorising' seem to have been casualties of a drive to produce pragmatic answers to complex questions about how children learn, how teachers teach and how schools might provide the best context for these activities and where 'theorising' has been called into question as a legitimate activity that teachers might pursue, Professor Carr's volume of readings should be welcomed as an intellectual challenge to those responsible for current educational planning.

Following two chapters exploring issues relating to knowledge in general, there

are six essays on 'knowledge in particular' dealing with science education, religion, arts education, fiction, moral and values education and an intriguing consideration of what Jan Steutel, Vrije University Amsterdam, describes as 'non-moral education or educating for the flourishing life'.

Earlier, Jim Mackenzie, University of Sydney, analyses the impact of post-modern conceptions of science which he calls 'the results of failures in education, both in the sciences and in the humanities' and argues for a science education which provides all citizens with 'an understanding not only of what science says at the moment but of the kinds of reasoning and evidence that led to these conclusions, and of what sort of conclusions are intrinsically beyond science'. Fergus Kerr, of the University of Edinburgh, tackles the issue of what is meant by 'truth' in the context of religion and advises educators that the most they can do 'is to bring out the intelligibility of the basic concepts and claims ... not to cut them off from ordinary life'. Graham McFee of the University of Brighton, in an analysis of the philosophical underpinning of arts education, exposes the lack of a case for the downgrading that arts education has suffered in national curricula and makes a persuasive case for the contribution of arts teachers to pupils' educational experience. This is an important issue in our own contemporary context given the increased emphasis in SOEID teacher education guidelines on literacy and numeracy and the vulnerability of the arts in teacher education courses such as the BEd (Primary) when there is overall pressure to reduce contact time. Overall, this section of the volume provides a useful reminder of and analysis of key issues in the philosophy underlying a number of curricular disciplines.

Part three of the volume explores the wider socio-political context and it is here that we find a post-modern view of the relationship between feminism, epistemology and education. In her fascinating essay, Shirley Pendelbury of the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, challenges the claims for 'objectivity' in epistemology and reminds us of the need for 'objectivity to take subjectivity into account' and for educators to be aware of the contexts within which learners come to knowledge. Her analysis raises the issue of giving recognition to hidden voices - 'the view from below ... (women, ethnic minorities, slaves, children)' - while, in philosophical terms, recognising the need to retain the epistemic authority of the teacher but goes on to identify the consequent problems for learner-centred pedagogies.

The final section of the volume examines knowledge and learning and includes critiques of 'constructivism', (Christopher Winch of University College, Northampton), and 'critical thinking', (Sharon Bailin of Simon Fraser University, Vancouver), both of which are often invoked in teacher education course designs without an accompanying analysis of their problematic status in theory as well as in practice. Accompanying these chapters is a highly pertinent discussion of assessment, given the present preoccupation with targets, outcomes and other forms of educational measurement. Professor Bailin acknowledges that assessment has not been a traditional preoccupation of educational philosophers but leads the reader through a highly readable and thought-provoking sceptic's analysis of assessment and education concluding with an examination of the need to develop more precise forms of assessment while acknowledging that assessment is 'an activity conducted by imperfect human beings on other imperfect human beings in an imperfect universe'.

In a concluding postscript, Professor Carr argues that for teachers to be more than 'mere purveyors of second-hand information or deliverers of someone else's curriculum' they need to be able to ask the questions that philosophers have always asked about their disciplines and expresses the view that the volume should be indispensable reading for all teachers. This is undoubtedly one of the challenges for teachers and teacher education in the years to come - to be able to ensure that the requirements for high levels of practical competence are underpinned by an equally

rigorous ability to analyse the wider enterprise of education itself. While practising teachers and students may not find neat answers to the day-to-day preoccupations of the classroom in a philosophical volume such as that provided by Professor Carr and his colleagues, it is essential that new courses of University-based teacher education provide the context and the opportunity for the kind of reflection that may be more difficult to undertake once in the classroom but which, nevertheless confirms the higher purpose of education.

WRITTEN IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE SCOTTISH NATION: A HISTORY OF LITERARY TRANSLATION INTO SCOTS

John Corbett. (Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1998) Pp. viii + 199. ISBN 1-85359-431-8, £29.95, hardback.

Reviewed by J. DERRICK McCLURE.

Since translation, by its nature, is a process involving a donor and a recipient, a full account of any example of literary translation would include some discussion of the source as well as the target text, and of the relationship between them. It must be acknowledged at the outset that the scope of the present monograph is less wide than this. Corbett provides a full and detailed chronological summary of the corpus of translations in Scots literature, and his discussions of them as Scots texts abound in acute observations and interesting conclusions; but almost no attempt is made (in the manner, say, of Priscilla Bawcutt in her study of Gavin Douglas) to compare them to the foreign-language originals, or to make deductions regarding either the general principles or practices of poetic translation or the success of the individual translators in replicating or finding equivalents for the specific stylistic features of the source texts.

That being conceded, the ground which the book does cover is very extensive indeed; and the coverage is thorough and convincing. Corbett takes us from Barbour (whose poem, though not a translation, is firmly grounded in a literary tradition established by continental writers) to the contemporary experiments of translators such as Edwin Morgan and Liz Lochhead, providing detailed analyses of the achievements of key figures including Gavin Douglas, Drummond of Hawthornden, Thomas Urquhart, Alexander Gray, Hugh MacDiarmid and William Laughton Lorimer and briefer discussions of many others, and setting their work in the context of a general history of Scots—with the ever-changing aura of political, social and ideological overtones which the language (and even its name) has carried—as a medium for literature.

The book has two central themes: the value of translations as contributing to Scotland's national literary identity; and the methods by which translators have exploited the status of Scots in different periods for literary effects and ideological proclamations. 'It is a reasonable argument that Scottish literature was founded on translation and adaptation'(p.2); and the author demonstrates this by pointing out the debt of many Early and Middle Scots texts to Latin and French models, and the resulting enrichment of the Scots tongue with loan-words from those languages. Emphasis is rightly placed on the patriotic motivation of Gavin Douglas, and later James VI and the poet-translators of the Castalian Band: their intention was to demonstrate the excellence of their national language and its literary tradition by producing worthy renditions of admired continental poems. (Douglas and

King James both took conspicuous pains to proclaim the status of their language as something distinct from and independent of Inglis.) In the present century, the desideratum of a Scotland once more politically and culturally autonomous, engaging in a mutually beneficial relationship of cross-fertilisation with the other national cultures of the world, prompted the Renaissance makars to experiment with translations from many languages: the sudden popularity of Russian models for, among others, MacDiarmid, Soutar and Goodsir Smith reflects their political radicalism as well as their nationalism.

In the post-Union period, the diminution of the status of Scots, its fragmentation into a number of different dialects and sociolects, and the attempt (only partially successful, as Corbett points out) of MacDiarmid and his successors to remedy both defects by re-creating a national literary language, have presented translators with a vastly increased range of problems and opportunities. The second main theme of the book (of course, the two are not unrelated) is developed in Corbett's discussion of such masterworks as Alexander Gray's renderings of German folk-songs in what he firmly asserted was a dialect (in reality, a realistic and expertly-handled representation of his Angus vernacular), Edwin Morgan's use of an ironic parody of post-MacDiarmid 'synthetic' Scots for his versions of Mayakovsky, Bill Findlay and Martin Bowman's selection of Glasgow demotic as a counterpart to Michel Tremblay's Montreal joul, and Sheena Blackhall's determined insistence on Aberdeenshire Doric for translating Italian stories. In all these (and many other) cases, the translator's choice of medium—not only Scots, but the specific form of Scots selected on any occasion—is shown to have strong and unmistakable ideological implications; and Corbett's perceptive and intriguing conclusion is that the very concept of Scottishness is perpetually questioned and re-defined by the ever-developing process of naturalising foreign literatures in a multiform and nebulously-defined language.

For readers unfamiliar with the history of Scots literature this book will provide an excellent historical summary, and even readers with a sound knowledge of the field may not have appreciated the full extent and importance of the corpus of translations and adaptations which it contains. The treatment of the modern period is, as the author admits, far from complete, outstanding translators like Mackie and Garioch receiving little more than a passing mention; but enough is said to enlighten any reader to both the richness of the corpus and the enormous and fascinating range of theoretical and practical questions which it embodies.

WHAT'S WORTH FIGHTING FOR IN EDUCATION?

Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (Open University Press 1988) pp. xiv + 146, ISBN 0335202721, £10.99, paperback.

Reviewed by JENNY REEVES

This book is the latest in a series of three produced by Hargreaves and Fullan which aim to make accessible, in the authors' own words, 'ideas steeped in theory, research and practice.'

What's Worth Fighting for in Education? argues that practioners need to take an active role in opposing current agendas for reform and redirecting change efforts to deal with the real problems which pupils, schools and teachers face.

Our book argues that the best way to change government policy and government attitudes on education in ways that will really benefit pupils and their teachers is by by-passing government altogether.

Schools must turn to their external environment and try through alliances with their local communities to create a political groundswell for pursuing the right course of action which consists of going back to the moral purposes of education: care, justice and inclusiveness.

This third book is interesting not only in that it continues an apparently subversive argument but also in the scale of its pessimism about the current directions being pursued by politicians. The language is almost apocalyptic as the authors survey the system's current ills.

There is a lot in this that one can agree with, particularly at an emotional level. Fullan and Hargreaves point to the current rule of nostalgia - a sick yearning for a past that is increasingly dysfunctional. They note a desire to turn back the clock and have schools pickled in aspic with a good old-fashioned, no nonsense traditional education based on traditional values in diametric opposition to the major waves of social, economic and technological change which face pupils and their families.

Nevertheless, as ever with these two writers, their proposals are also influenced by the fashions of the moment. In 1992 a great deal hung on 'vision'; in 1998 this has been replaced by 'hope' and 'emotional intelligence'. Having enumerated all the reasons, increasing cultural diversity, restructuring of family and relationships, fragmentation of work patterns that make determining the best direction for the future so difficult, the authors then go on to exhort readers to take a coherent moral stance. At this point I think they fall into the same trap as those they criticise. If they had opened up the debate about the ends of education without feeling the need to grab a simple sounding nostrum or two, that would have been a more useful and fundamentally more honest.

THE LIFE OF R. F. MACKENZIE: A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOUR

Peter A. Murphy (John Donald Publishers Ltd, Edinburgh 1998), pp. ix +166, £15.95, hardback.

Review by JILL DUFFIELD

Twenty-five years ago, R.F. MacKenzie's books on his vision of education were widely read by teachers and students, and the events culminating in his dismissal as headteacher of Summerhill Academy in Aberdeen in 1974 generated huge public controversy in Scotland. Although MacKenzie continued as an active speaker and writer almost until his death in 1987, his name faded from view. As Peter Murphy points out in this timely book, the Scottish Educational Review published in 1988 a 'valuable' paper by David Gordon, 'The Legacy of R.F. MacKenzie', which surveyed MacKenzie's contribution to educational ideas, while MacKenzie's own final book, 'A Search for Scotland', appeared posthumously in 1989, and MacKenzie figured in James Young's 1996 collection of Scottish radicals, 'The Very Bastards of Creation'. Nevertheless, with massive changes in education policy under way, these publications spoke to those who remembered the impact of MacKenzie, the

charismatic figure of the 1960s and the defeated campaigner of the 1970s. They did not succeed in introducing a new generation to MacKenzie, and students today generally have not heard his name.

Peter Murphy has set out in this book to record the story of MacKenzie's life and ideas; to give a retrospective evaluation of the struggles to realise his vision of education, first at Braehead School in Fife, and crucially, at Summerhill Academy; and, finally, to set MacKenzie's ideas against the trends of current educational policies. The story of MacKenzie's life, assembled with the 'generous and unstinting co-operation' of the MacKenzie family, is dramatic and appealing, bound up with a sense of Scottish identity rooted in the rural north-east. Murphy makes great use of extracts from MacKenzie's own writings, and the early chapters on his family and youth, pre-war travels in Europe with his friend, Hunter Diack, and war service with the RAF, benefit from MacKenzie's powers of perceptive and at times lyrical description.

A sense of increased urgency pervades the account of the Braehead years, drawing heavily upon the 'trilogy' in which MacKenzie developed his ideas and practice. He contrasted education emphasising creativity, stimulating curiosity and valuing the emotions, with the rigid, examination-bound Scottish system. Murphy allows MacKenzie's own romantic vision to stand, with little challenge to a portrait of the teacher as hero battling against narrow-minded bureaucracy.

The climax of the book is the inexorable unfolding of events at Summerhill. The crux of the opposition to MacKenzie was over his determination to abolish corporal punishment within the school. Murphy was personally engaged in this stage of the story, and although he had left the school before MacKenzie's dismissal, he remained close to MacKenzie and to the colleagues who regarded him as an inspirational leader. The failure of MacKenzie to carry the day was a political one; key members of Aberdeen Education Committee deliberately appointed senior staff who forcefully withstood the embattled but 'unbowed' head over corporal punishment, and over his conviction that a system dependent upon public examinations was anti-educational. In retrospect, the corporal punishment issue, resolved in MacKenzie's favour in the mid-1980s, seems a distant battle, the fury of MacKenzie's opponents to be indignant howls of inevitable defeat. The control exercised over Scottish education by centrally organised testing and examinations, in contrast, has grown to proportions scarcely imaginable in the early 1970s. In this respect, MacKenzie's vision has been rejected, not only by central policy-makers, but by the vast majority of the profession. Was MacKenzie wrong in thinking that child-centred education producing autonomous learners was incompatible with certification? This debate is touched on but not developed in Murphy's book. It is one that could well be taken forward in the years to come.

The volume is attractive to handle and is illustrated with a pleasing selection of photographs. Some editorial lapses are sprinkled through the text; these are more forgivable than the very skimpy index provided. For all its rough edges, however, 'A Prophet without Honour' is written with passion, and is an enthralling read. An appreciative foreword by Harry Reid characterises MacKenzie as 'an enigmatic but genuinely great Scotsman' who deserves to be remembered even more as a prophet than an educationist. Reid considers that MacKenzie's masterpiece was his 'devastating critique of modern Scotland', 'A Search for Scotland'. Peter Murphy has done a notable service in producing the present book, not only for the educational community but for any reader interested in considering how 'an allegedly democratic and humanitarian system' discarded this zealous, compassionate radical 'amid bitterness and recrimination'.

EDUCATION AND CARE AWAY FROM HOME: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH, POLICY AND PRACTICE

Moira Borland, Charlotte Pearson, Malcolm Hill, Kay Tisdall and Irene Bloomfield.
(Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1998) pp viii + 146, £12.50

Reviewed by FIONA WAGER

The “scandal” of poor educational experiences for looked after children and young people is explored by this comprehensive review, conducted by the Centre for the Child and Society on behalf of the Scottish Office. Policy and practice developments initiated to tackle the problems are also considered, giving rise to the hope for better future educational outcomes.

The evidence, drawing from a broad range of UK research and other relevant material from the UK, builds up a picture of poor educational experience and associated disadvantage for looked after children and young people over the past 10 years and points to the crucial role education plays in determining future outcomes. Leaving care studies particularly are highlighted, with findings indicating that the majority of young people leaving care have no formal qualifications.

Following a thematic approach, the review offers the reader a comprehensive overview of the key issues, exploring the complexity of reasons for children and young people coming into care, including family problems, social disadvantage and school problems, before considering evidence which shows that early disadvantage and behavioural difficulties are not compensated for during the care period in terms of education. The support available from schools, and continuity of school placements are found to be key factors influencing young people’s educational experience.

The review utilises collected views of young people, which show indications of school experience adding to the difficulties experienced by coming into care. Stereotyping, frequent changes of school, bullying and emotional upheaval are all highlighted. Support from schools welcomed by young people is also evidenced, including teachers who respect and value young people, who show appreciation of the difficulties faced, who make allowances for the impact of living in residential care and don’t lower their expectations just because they are looked after.

Teachers require to find a balance both between classroom support and emotional support, and between providing individualised support whilst being unobtrusive to prevent any potential stigmatising. The review provides a timely reminder that children looked after do not form a homogenous group, nor is the looked after population static; rather it is made up of a diverse range of individuals with individual needs, whose situations change over time. It is however encouraging to find evidence suggesting that teachers do see children looked after as individuals rather than as a homogenous group, thus reducing the potential for lowered expectations to develop.

Perhaps one of the most important issues explored in the review is that of collaboration between education and social work. The interaction of these two areas is explored as one of the key barriers to educational progress for children and young people looked after, leading to suggestions of the need for greater understanding between social workers and teachers, possibly facilitated by joint training initiatives. Young people’s comments echo this need for closer collaboration and understanding. Discussion surrounding the potential creation of a ‘social pedagogue’ role, as recommended in the Children’s Safeguards Review (Kent, 1997) was not included in the review, but could usefully be examined further in considering how to address these issues.

The review highlights the importance of the current legislative framework, through which local authorities have corporate responsibility for looked after children, creating opportunities for better collaboration. Evidence gathered by the authors for the review to supplement the available material indicates that Scottish local authorities do have systems for collaboration in place, although specific policies regarding the education of looked after children are not usual. An outline of two developments in Scotland are given which are useful in demonstrating how collaboration within particular local authorities is working in practice.

The reviewers assert that the time seems right for tackling the issues outlined. Certainly the priority now attached by government to tackling social exclusion and improving educational attainment supports this view.

Gaps for future research are highlighted by the review. Longitudinal research is particularly lacking, and research relating to the Scottish context is required, as is the need to apply the lessons of previous research.

The review will be of interest to all those who are concerned for looked after children and young people. It provides both a thorough overview of the evidence and a clear statement of the importance for those working with looked after children and young people to take on the challenge of improving their educational opportunities, whilst ensuring individual needs are taken into account, for educational experience will be a significant factor affecting their transition to adulthood.