

Editorial

Stephen Ward

Bath Spa University

Correspondence: s.ward@bathspa.ac.uk

The second edition of the Journal comprises papers from the third Annual Conference of the British Education Studies Association - *Alternative Visions of Education* - held at Bath Spa University in July 2007. The title was intended to reflect the opportunity which Education Studies presents to consider the diversity of education processes, policy and practice and to critique the received notions of education which underlie government policy in the UK. The papers in this collection reflect that diversity in the range of topics in primary, secondary and tertiary education, in the diversity of theoretical approaches and in international and global perspectives.

The Conference was addressed by two keynote speakers and their papers open and close this edition. Terry Wrigley began the proceedings with a sharp critique of schooling in Britain. Reflecting the theme of his recent book (Wrigley, 2007) he outlines the development of the neo-liberal Thatcherite policy and continued by New Labour, with its unremitting 'standards' agenda. The political assumptions underlying the 'school improvement' and 'school effectiveness' models have remained invisible and have operated to de-professionalise and disempower teachers. Using international examples Wrigley offers alternative visions of schooling drawn from different models of pedagogy and with moral and ethical perspectives.

The debate about the nature of Education Studies and the students which it produces is an ongoing topic for the Association. Hilary Dunphy and Dave Trotman call for the 're-imaging' of the educational professional which goes beyond the reflective practitioner of current teacher training. They continue Wrigley's theme and argue that Education Studies should prepare students for the moral and ethical aspects of educational practice.

The nature of students' learning continues in the paper by Will Curtis which reports his empirical research with sixth formers. He offers a critique of the theory of 'learning styles' and suggests a most convincing model of students' 'learning identities', some of which are empowering and some inhibiting. While his work is with secondary school pupils, the findings will resonate with those teaching university students.

Analysis of government policy on pedagogy continues with Tony Rea's article on outdoor learning which, he argues, should offer an alternative to the formal pedagogies of the classroom. However, his research finds that regulation of the curriculum and teaching through recent government policy inhibits the benefits which should be inherent in outdoor learning. He argues for the freeing of outdoor education centres from the national curriculum and government curriculum enhancement projects.

The 2007 BESA conference was the first to offer student bursaries. Education Studies student, Rebecca Hopkin, joins John Sharp to report on a national survey on the preparation of teachers to teach the primary science curriculum. Critique of national policy is not all

negative, and their regional findings indicate the strong progress made by teachers in providing a rapidly changing and rich science curriculum for pupils which did not exist before 1988.

Discussion of the primary curriculum continues with John Smith's examination of the historical patterns of change, switching from thematic to subject teaching and back. The twenty-first century, he argues, requires new approaches and he proposes a 'pragmatic' curriculum for the future, based on increased oral interaction in the classroom.

The international dimension of Education Studies is explored by Dan Davies who outlines the benefits to students' learning through participation in a visit to Zambia as part of a module on Education in Africa. While much of the global perspective in Education Studies comes from reading and second-order analysis, here students are able to experience first-hand the effects of the post-colonialism and, of course, a radically alternative vision of education.

In the final paper, the second keynote speaker, Mike Cole, continues the critique of education in capitalist Britain, drawing on his recent publication (Cole 2008). From a Marxist perspective he employs Althusser's concepts of Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) to explain what Wrigley describes as the invisibility of the neo-liberal politics of government school policy. He then adopts an international perspective by citing the case of Venezuela, a democracy founded on socialist principles and offering an alternative vision of both education and society. Cole completes the paper by suggesting a breaking of the taboo on the critique of capitalism by including in the school curriculum discussion of alternatives to neo-liberalism and a vision of progress to world socialism.

References

- Cole, M. (2008) *Marxism and Educational Theory: origins and issues*. London: Routledge.
- Wrigley, T. (2006) *Another school is possible*. London: Bookmarks / Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.