

Editorial

As we move through the depths of winter our thoughts turn to the longer days ahead. Whilst many global issues of human rights and individual freedom continue to concern us as educationalists, it is perhaps our national politics that will begin to preoccupy us more and more in the build up to the general election in the spring. Being a major part of government spending education will be at, or near, the centre of all the major party manifestos. Perhaps one of the interesting developments in recent government administrations as we moved from Thatcher to Major to Blair and onwards towards coalition has been the seeming convergence of education policies. The main parties, of course, claim to offer alternatives but in reality they have all promoted the development of the market with its choice and competition, increasing pronouncements from the centre, the decline in local management of local systems by LAs and a more technicist approach to learning. This common ideology seems to have successfully spread from the management of secondary schooling, initially, to all sectors of education. These apparently irresistible forces of the 'sensible' approach to education, whilst stressing value for money at the same time as the raising of standards, encourage a turning away from a deeper questioning of practice. We would argue that knowledge of philosophical debates is central to any serious discussion of education. Certainly an understanding of sociology and psychology would help anyone interested in the complex nature and processes of learning. An historical analysis can certainly shed light on current practice. It is these things that lie at the heart of Education Studies yet are neglected by those in government whatever their political persuasion. It is a desire to maintain critical analysis and debate that is important to Education Studies but also, and perhaps more importantly, to protecting and maintaining democratic ideals. A lack of proper debate on every aspect of education can be one of the first stages on the road to a closed society. It will be interesting to see how political candidates are able to respond to such points over the next few months as the election campaign 'hots up'.

In this edition of 'Educational futures: e-journal of the British Education Studies Association' we have a number of articles on different areas within Education Studies and a set of book reviews. Following from the above discussion the first article in this edition by Feldges, Male, Palaiologou and Burwood presents an analysis of the development of managerialism in HE. They see this being directly related to the growing demands of a market economy and a simultaneous erosion of the traditional ethos of HE. Rather than managerialism they propose the development of a leadership-for-learning approach to HE that, whilst putting higher demands on managers, will yield better outcomes for all involved, including the managers themselves.

Our next two articles examine the effect of differing approaches to teaching and learning on students in HE. Brook and Beauchamp report on a study of final year Education Studies undergraduate students' perceptions of blended learning within a Higher Education course. They discuss the various meanings of blended learning and explain how, in their model, it involves a mixture of online learning and face-to-face teaching and so is better able to meet diverse student needs. In their analysis Brook and Beauchamp show how students value both e-learning and also what can be classed as traditional style face-to-face interaction with the lecturer. It is the

blending that is significant and the study reveals that students appreciate blended learning as it offers them the greatest level of choice.

Brown explores the use of weekly debates as part of a taught module as an in-class teaching strategy that she believed had the potential to heighten students' critical thinking and collaborative learning skills. Data were collected using a card-sort and in-class structured interview questions. The findings were very mixed with students holding differing, complex perspectives on either the benefit of weekly debates in enhancing collaborative learning or critical thinking skills. The paper concludes by offering recommendations to strengthen the use of debate in the module in encouraging critical thinking as well as collaborative learning.

In our next paper Bryant, Bolton and Fleming conduct an examination of the use of 'child-centred' methods to gather data from young people about their leisure lives. These activities were used in a series of ethnographic case studies as part of a national secondary school research project in Wales. This interesting and novel approach to collecting information from young people was found to be effective on many levels and is something that many other education researchers may consider.

Our final article, by Burton and May, brings us back to the political processes mentioned earlier in this editorial. In a small scale study that explores teachers' experiences of teaching citizenship in secondary schools they address the nature of citizenship education and its position in the curriculum. It highlights the multiple and potentially conflicting purposes of citizenship education and the competing ideological drivers that remain a feature of this provision more than a decade since its inception. This is a discussion that is likely to become more significant not only in an election year but also in the wake of current social debates on migration, religion and identity.

We do hope you find this range of articles and book reviews stimulating and useful.

Best wishes

The editorial board: Steve Bartlett, Sue Warren, Chris Wakeman, Stephen Ward, Alan Hodkinson.