Reviews

The Editors are pleased to receive notice of books written or edited by educationists in Wales, or with Welsh connections, or with a Welsh educational interest.

Stephen Gorard, *Education and Social Justice: The Changing Composition of Schools and its Implications* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), 242pp., £35.00, hardback, ISBN 0–7083–1619–0.

Is there a crisis in British education, with undisciplined children poorly taught, lowered standards and limited literacy skills disguised by 'dumbed down' examinations, and poor performance by international standards creating major problems for economic competitiveness? Or is there an alternative to this pessimistic narrative so popular with some politicians and sections of the media? Does a closer analysis of the evidence on the condition of state education give grounds for a more optimistic picture, with schools becoming less socially segregated than in the past, with fewer barriers to participation and achievement? And what does all this mean for the relationship between education and social justice?

These questions are explored in immense detail in Stephen Gorard's timely and absorbing book which examines evidence on the results of school choice policies, differences in school effectiveness, international comparisons of attainment, and attainment gaps between boys and girls of different social backgrounds. The book does a major service to Welsh education by drawing attention to the differences between education in England and in Wales, so often glossed over by researchers. (Four of the six data-sets presented refer to Wales.) While acknowledging the existence of poverty and inequality in general, and the increased social polarization in terms of income, the book sets out to demonstrate that there are positive trends which suggest grounds for belief that education might be contributing to a more socially just society. Gorard works with quantitative data in the 'political arithmetic' tradition, and is critical of much qualitative research for over-generalizing, and also of some other quantitative researchers' interpretation of their own data, although he is at pains to point out that the book is not intended as a criticism of any specific commentator (p.195). His own interpretations have been criticized, as he acknowledges, notably by Gibson and Asthana.

He also eschews politically orientated research and research where data and conclusions do not appear to match, and makes a plea for more balanced, rigor-

ous, replicable and numerate analysis of data on social justice and education. While this may be desirable – it would be nice if politicians and the media stopped referring to percentage points as though they were percentages – it may be that most data, collected by whatever method, are open to contradictory interpretation. Halsey, a major and highly respected interpreter of the relationship between education and social justice, is quoted as saying in 1999 that 'the essential fact of twentieth century educational history is that egalitarian policies have failed' (p. 4). Yet, in *Social Trends* (2000) Halsey writes of the long-term successes of egalitarian policies: 'In 1900 the vast majority of Britons were elementary schooled proletarians . . . by the end of the century millions of children of manual workers had risen into non-manual jobs and thousands had become the graduate children of butchers, bakers and candlestick makers.' Gorard himself points out that while problems in education may not be getting worse over time, poverty and inequality persist, and education and human capital theory are poor forms of social engineering to try and redress the situation (p. 188).

After introducing alternative accounts of the 'crisis' view of education, Chapters 2 and 3 take on the thorny issue of the social composition of schools, and whether, under market forces, there has been increasing socio-economic segregation between them. After reviewing reported evidence of increasing segregation, and noting that there has been no comparison of the extent to which social stratification occurred under pre-1988 catchment-area systems, the book describes the large-scale study by Gorard and Fitz, covering the years 1988–98, which used records relating to some eight million pupils in 23,000 schools in local education authorities in England and Wales. This study concluded that social segregation had actually decreased somewhat over this period (faster in England than in Wales). While this may mean that poorer families do have more access to desirable schools, it may partly be explained by an increase in pupils eligible for free school meals, and does not apply in areas with a high proportion of selective schools.

Chapter 4 considers international comparisons of school effectiveness, which are used by politicians to suggest that British schools and children are underperforming, and that policies need to be borrowed from more 'successful' systems. The chapter provides an excellent critique of comparative studies, particularly the third international maths and science study (TIMMS) which caused politicians to deplore the lower performance of English students especially when compared with those in Singapore. Apart from other methodological problems, the study overlooked the fact that the English students tested were six months younger than those in Singapore, where, in any case, possible lower achievers were excluded as there is not yet compulsory schooling. Chapter 5 examines a 'home-international' situation and demolishes the myth that, on indicators of educational attainment, Wales lags behind England, while Chapter 6 challenges research which has suggested that Welsh-medium schools perform better than their English-

medium counterparts, and re-analyses other data to suggest that the results of pupils in state schools are catching up with those in fee-paying schools, and that girls do not necessarily perform better in single-sex schools.

Chapter 7 examines methods of investigating differences between school sectors and elaborates on what Gorard considers to be an unfair picture presented by claims about Welsh-medium schools. This chapter presents some of the clearest evidence available of the link between poverty and pupil performance; Welsh-medium schools take only half as many children in poverty as English-medium schools (but still do not perform as well as they should). It is interesting that, after criticizing qualitative researchers, this chapter comes to exactly the same conclusion as Stephen Ball's research: that the best way for a school to rise up the league tables is to attract more desirable students who will do well in examinations and exclude those who will not (Ball, 1993). Chapter 8 provides an interesting discussion of achievement gaps between groups of students, and concludes with a re-analysis of work by Gillborn and Gipps (1996), finding that the apparent underachievement of African Caribbean students is declining over time. Chapter 9 examines Welsh evidence for claims that there is a growing achievement gap between boys and girls, and finds that the differential attainment of boys and girls has remained relatively static since 1992, although girls have increased the gap over boys in some subjects and at the higher levels of attainment.

Chapter 10 takes on the task of drawing all the data together and considering the implications for social justice. A major conclusion presented is that 'Social justice in Britain is growing, as divisions between the home nations (England and Wales), between school sectors, between schools and between students are declining . . .', although 'the divisions are still large and injustice in the education system is still rife' (p. 180). With Halsey and others, Gorard concludes that the 1944 Education Act, the comprehensive system and other initiatives have combined to produce greater social justice in the education system, but that in addition to the plethora of political remedies for further improvement, reliable research is needed to help improve that system and reduce the deep divisions that remain in education. A final section suggests that, in any case, changes in school composition are not easily converted into changes in the social structure. The reduction of poverty and inequality cannot be achieved solely through education.

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Colin Baker, *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, Multilingual Matters (Clevedon, 2nd edition, 2000), 240pp., £9.95 paperback, ISBN 1–85359–455–5; £29.95 hardback, ISBN 1–85359–456–3.

The second edition of a book is clearly a sign of its popularity. There are numerous reasons why this is the case in this new edition of *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism*, first published in 1995 and reprinted a year later. The author is the repository of a tremendous amount of information, as both a parent and a teacher, about the topic of bilingualism. The term 'guide' in the title is an important focus in a volume that is practical, informative and comprehensive in its coverage of questions which might be asked by parents about child bilingualism. Indeed, it is evident that the book is informed by first-hand experience of these questions. The central positive message, which is conveyed throughout, is of the value of bilingualism, although some of the associated perceived or real problems are addressed, particularly in the second and third chapters. The author is authoritative in his knowledge of the topic and one is conscious of advice, based on evidence, given in a clear, direct tone. This is no mean feat, given the complexity of the subject. The book offers a great deal, then, as a practical reference text. Its structure is based on questions and answers and these can be viewed readily in the table of contents. Key terms in the text are emboldened which also helps for reference use.

The second edition of the book has some alterations, both in terms of changes to the original questions and in terms of additions, such as the sections on the world-wide web and the current world situation with regard to bilingualism. There are new navigational cross references, more boxed sections of text and further illustrative material, including colour photographs. The reference list has been updated and the glossary has been extensively increased. However, the use of boxed text, diagrams and photographs does not mediate greatly the effect of the question-and-answer format which is essentially a focused, small-scale sort of reading. It is certainly not a book to be read sequentially, as suggested by the author.

A further change in the second edition is the series within which the book sits. The first edition was in the series on 'Bilingual Education and Bilingualism'. This edition is the first in a series of 'Parents' and Teachers' Guides'. This marks probably the most fundamental change between the two editions. Although the titles are identical, the intended readership moves more towards non-specialists and those outside education. The ideal readership, of whom there will be many, will be those people who are parents in a bilingual family setting who are also teachers. Teachers outside this frame of reference might not find the book as interesting. They have other needs, such as further reading and detailed insights into teaching methods. The author makes the point (p. 166) about the need for teachers to be trained about bilingualism. Despite a number of books on this topic, notably by the author himself, this is still an important area of development for those teachers who are not personally part of a bilingual world.

This second edition informs us further about current issues in bilingualism, both in education and in society; the illustration on page 18, for instance, speaks tellingly about language, culture and identity. Most aspects of bilingualism are tackled, including that of minority languages, bilingualism for in-migrant families and bilingualism for children who have learning difficulties. Bilingualism on a worldwide scale is addressed, although most examples come from Europe, the USA or Canada. Interestingly, this book has become the first in the series to be adapted and translated. The Spanish version is by Professor Alma Flor Ada, professor of education at the University of San Francisco, and Colin Baker.

Finally, then, this book demonstrates keen personal involvement and relish in the topic of bilingualism. It succeeds both in being locally rooted in Wales and in making links to many other contexts and situations of child bilingualism. We are offered clarity and coherence by an author with wide personal and professional experience of a complex, changing and important topic. This can be demonstrated by the following, from a new section of the second edition: 'Ultimately bilingualism has to be a pleasure and not a pain, a means of enhancing the quality of life and not an end in itself.' Hear! Hear!

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John Furlong, Len Barton, Sheila Miles, Caroline Whiting, Geoff Whitty, *Teacher Education in Transition: Re-forming Professionalism?* (Open University Press, 2000), Developing Teacher Education: series editors Hazel Hagger and Donald McIntyre, 210pp., £17.99 paperback, ISBN 0–335–20039–7; £55.00 hardback, ISBN 0–335–20040–0.

Of the many conflicts of the last twenty-five years in British affairs, one of the most intense is the struggle for our education service. Corpses strew the hillsides and clog the dykes. The full force of the charge against what some characterized as professional self-interest in our schools emerged when Mrs Thatcher came to power in 1979, and relentless reform continued unabated throughout the 1980s and 1990s. After Mr Blair's 1997 victory, if anything, the pressure of change intensified, albeit with its tone softened to one of more harmonious 'partnership' – so long as there was no doubt about which of the partners directed the ordnance.

At the heart of the struggle lay the question: who should determine the nature of teachers' professionalism – their knowledge, skills, values and standards of practice: teachers themselves, or the society which paid them? This larger question came to be focused on the way in which new teachers were prepared for their professional role. For (so it was contended) if new teachers were unable to deliver education appropriate to the times, it must be because they were being subverted from their task. Trained in the universities, polytechnics and colleges, new teachers were arriving incapable in

our classrooms, their heads full of fashionable theories about such things as *child-centredness* and *equal opportunities*, yet apparently able to teach neither their subjects nor their pupils. It was, therefore, against higher education's long-established custodianship of teacher education that many in positions of influence moved, some with extreme prejudice. This excellent book describes the process and anatomizes the consequences. Anyone involved in the education and training of teachers, as well as those with an interest in policy-making, should read it.

Drawing on the *Modes of Teacher Education* (MOTE) research, the authors observe in detail the relationship between what actually happened in the preparation of new teachers and the policies informing it. The dialogue is between context and practice. In particular, they identify three contexts for their policy analysis: *of influence* (those, often in disagreement, close to government); *of text production* (official and other documents, often themselves the products of compromise); and *of practice* (where the ideas of the influential and the texts of the policy-makers come to be realized by practitioners in the field).

On the New Right, those with influence include the neo-liberals (who would open up teacher training to the market place of schools, with practice in the classroom taking precedence over 'theory' on the campus); and the neo-conservatives (who would hold that intending teachers' main requirement is subject knowledge, with the craft skills of pedagogy best learned in classrooms and so with little need for higher education-based initial teacher education and training (ITET). Ranked against them is the profession itself (urging the view that good ITET occurs in the *partnership* between higher education (HE) and schools). Positioning itself between those camps – though very little influenced by the last – are the state bureaucracies (DfEE/DfES, TTA and OfSTED), those begetters of legislation, regulation and inspection. The authors show that, over the period of their study, practitioners' freedom to operate within the policy context, to interpret within the texts inscribing the nature of their task, and so to act according to their professional judgement, became ever more constrained. This is true of those in HE who prepare new teachers perhaps even more than for the new teachers themselves, when finally qualified to deliver the government's education policies in their daily work.

One of the book's strengths lies in its elucidation of the inherent paradox that, in the quest for enhanced teacher 'professionalism' (an ever-greater insistence on standards, outputs, measurable competences, etc.), perhaps still more important professional skills and values are sacrificed. Our challenge, then, is to find the *rapprochement* between that view of professional teachers as people who take their own decisions, often in uncertain situations, and that of new teachers emerging through the present ITET process as having demonstrated competence in meeting official standards, but unready to operate outside those limits. It is difficult to see how professionalism of the first kind can be nurtured in the context of the low trust

and high state surveillance which has led to today's teacher training. However, the authors end by asking whether a third approach, one based on 'more participatory relationships with diverse communities', might succeed where the present model fails. The question for the future, then, is: how can we better articulate notions of teacher professionalism and autonomy with the needs of a participatory democracy? With the present shortage of teachers, the answer has never been more urgently needed.

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Peter Cobb, *At Cowbridge Grammar School 1949–1966* (Cowbridge Record Society, 2001), 101pp. £4.95, ISBN 0 9537029 1 X.

Because I have myself occasionally written about life in Cowbridge Grammar School I owe a particular debt of thanks to Peter Cobb for this vivid memoir. It means that people will be less inclined to think I made it all up. That they might otherwise do so is down to the fact that this was an extraordinary school; there was nothing else like it in Wales, maybe nothing quite like it in the whole of the United Kingdom.

Its particular character was not due to its size, although a tiny grammar school (280 boys when Cobb arrived in 1949) seems odd enough from today's perspective, but because, through an accident of history, it had attached to it a boarding house in which fifty of the pupils lived during term time. The circumstances were bleak: 'In any detached view [the premises] were awful', Cobb writes, 'but somehow, just because they were so inadequate they seemed, to me at least, to promote rather than cramp the resourcefulness and character of their inhabitants . . . I still wonder that there was no concerted complaint about the conditions, neither from the boys nor their parents.'

In effect, the boarders lived in their classrooms, among the desks, going to sleep in the dormitories above on thin mattresses held up by wire bed frames, each separated from its neighbour only by a metal locker. In winter the doors to the outside world were locked at six o'clock but, as the book records, many regularly slipped out through a convenient window for some night-time adventure or other. As for the other essentials of life:

> The food was not very good, even by the frugal standards of the 1950s: cornflakes, and perhaps something cooked, for breakfast, lots of stale bread and a mug of tea; . . . and for boarders' tea, tinned tomatoes or sardines on toast, baked beans, a curiously slab-like version of scrambled egg made from dried egg powder . . .

This kind of frugality was in part a reflection of the modest scale of fees paid for boarding. It was £90 a year in 1952, the equivalent of a couple of thousand now, I suppose. The education itself was

free. The seven boys a year who entered the boarding house were those in the County of Glamorgan who had achieved the highest marks in the 'Scholarship', as the 11+ was then called, and whose parents had entered them for the school, which was probably a small number. It may be, Cobb speculates, that because it was so cheap parents did not expect very much.

If the boarding house was a peculiar place, some kind of eccentric real-life version of one of those nineteenth- and early twentieth-century public school stories (how interesting it is that Harry Potter is now treading the same ground), we should not forget that the grammar school to which it was attached is now just as much a part of a vanished world. Selection meant a lot of clever boys went to Cowbridge and the brightest of them were often guided towards the classics. Science teaching expanded slowly; compulsory games were considered character forming; corporal punishment was administered by senior boys as well as by masters.

Peter Cobb is both affectionate and clear-eyed when he describes the institution and the people in it. He cherishes his past but does not weep for it, still less demand that it should somehow be restored. It is something you would expect from a man who, as a boarding master, was such an immensely civilizing influence, cultured, relaxed and tolerant.

The days of Cowbridge Grammar School were numbered when, in 1966, Cobb left teaching to train as a clergyman. And he is clear that there was much wrong with the institution:

> The antediluvian premises, the spasmodic discipline, the over-concentration on academic boys in the A stream, the doubtful quality of some of the science teaching in the early fifties, the lack of music, the woeful conditions in which the boarders were expected to pass their leisure time . . .

But there was something particularly right with it too, although this was perhaps less easy to pin down. Was it the fact that it was so small, he wonders, or was it something about Wales? For it was certainly the cheerful, irreverent give-and-take, cutting across all the available divides of intellect, physical prowess and class, which I remember with most affection, and cannot say that I really ever found in any other institution before or after.

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