

## *Editorial*

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At the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference held in Edinburgh in September this year one discussant used a phrase that caught my attention. She wryly commented that doing policy analysis in the UK was a bit like sharing a bed with an elephant; you cannot help but be aware of the presence of England. The relevance of that thought was uppermost when I re-read the various contributions to this issue. We define what is 'Welsh' about Welsh education by constant reference to how it varies from what goes on England. This was my first visit to Edinburgh and aside from asking myself why I had not been there before, I was struck by the tangible evidence all around that this was self-confidently another country. That point is best made probably in the architecture of the new parliament building, nearing completion very close to Holyroodhouse. It appears not to be to everybody's taste but it is eye-catching, it is much larger than I imagined and it is perhaps symbolic of how far Scotland has travelled down the devolution road. The devolution process is different in Wales. Its distinctive policies continue to roll forward but as several contributors remind us, it is worthwhile keeping an eye on what is going on elsewhere.

Phil Bassett's prospective examination of Initial Teacher Education and Training (ITET) in Wales contains an interesting overview of the road England has travelled in the resolution of some of the tensions that exist in the 'partnership arrangements' between schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) in the provision of ITET. There, the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has funded three interesting programmes: partnership project managers, support for advanced skills teachers to engage schools in ITE and training schools. Whether or not these are appropriate for the Welsh system is one issue, the other, though, is that they are all funded in England but there is no indication yet whether the Welsh Assembly will support these or any other ITE initiatives to enable school-ITE partnerships to prosper. Bassett's account must also be read within the context of a major reconfiguration of ITE

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provision in south-east Wales via the amalgamation of Swansea University's Department of Education with its counterpart at Swansea Institute. There may be others, of course, depending upon the outcome of well-publicized talks about mergers between HEIs in Wales. Ken Reid's examination of programmes to combat truancy and other forms of absenteeism from schools has much the same approach as Bassett's article. He notes the funded initiatives, undertaken by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), social services, schools and voluntary agencies aimed at the reduction of absenteeism. In broad terms truancy policies fall within the Labour government's general concern to address the processes and presumed outcomes of social exclusion. Many of the initiatives, therefore, are not necessarily located within the domain of education but aim to cut red tape and bring different agencies together to tackle what, Reid argues, is a very complex social issue. Again, he suggests models of good practice exist in England while Wales might be considered to be still thinking through the options.

Peter Carter raises the broad question of 'what is Welsh about Welsh art?' – what is it, how might it be developed and what is the role of educationists in that process? He reports on the *Opt for Art* Wales initiative but his discussion ranges beyond that. Art and art education in Wales was the topic of a symposium at the BERA Conference in Edinburgh, in which Carter also participated, and it is our hope to reproduce some of the papers presented at that symposium as part of a future issue of this journal. Carter's article is further complemented by Jacqui Turnbull's consideration of education for citizenship. She draws on foundational work by Dewey and his ideas that to sustain democracy means rather more than learning about the concept in the abstract. It involves what the postmodernists might refer to as 'identity work', building and sustaining democracy by participation in democratic organization and systems, including schools. She takes us back to fundamental arguments about the character of Wales and Welsh identity when she suggests that a touchstone for discussion about democracy might well be the seemingly simple question, 'what is it to be authentically Welsh?'

Gwyn Lewis's study focuses on the complex issue of teaching and learning and bilingual environments. He notes that teachers in Welsh-medium primary schools work in classrooms which contain students with a wide variety of knowledge of the Welsh language, some are from Welsh-speaking homes others are not. As he points out this is not a peculiarly Welsh phenomenon. One can imagine teachers in classrooms on the periphery of Barcelona composed of Catalan-speakers and Spanish-speakers, children of families who have migrated into the area seeking work, having similar challenges. His case

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study explores an initiative designed to meet the different needs of children in the early-years phase of primary education. Francis and Thomas develop further the work on the relationship between religiosity and personality. They argue that a positive orientation towards Christianity is associated with tender-mindedness and the absence of certain forms of psychotic behaviour. The article also has an important methodological dimension. It addresses the extent to which standard English-language research instruments can be rendered into Welsh and measure the characteristics they were designed to measure in ways comparable to the originals. Francis and Thomas demonstrate that important nuances need not be lost in translation.

Richard Daugherty's short biography at the beginning of his article reminds us of his extraordinary engagement, both in educational policy-making and in the study and analysis of educational policy. In a wide-ranging discussion he notes that devolution has enabled Wales to devise policies that are sensitive to territorial and community values and interests. However, to what extent these can ever be evidence-based is an interesting question in light of the small research base that exists in Wales – in educational terms the number of active researchers based in Wales is, according to Furlong and White's report, probably about the same as a decent-sized university department in England. Daugherty prompts the thought that this lack of capacity has serious implications. Where is the research on all the new Welsh programmes? Is anyone taking a sustained and rigorous look at what Key Stage 1 teachers are doing now that there are no KS1 assessments? What, precisely, has been the schools' response to the literacy and numeracy strategies? Is it the case that teachers in Wales actually employ something not too distant from the literacy and numeracy hours? Daugherty raises some important questions, not only about our capacity to do research, but also about policy-makers' predilections to use it.

I end on a note of great sadness to mourn the death of Rob Phillips. His latest book is reviewed in this issue. It is followed by a brief memorial by Reviews Editor Dr Sian Rhiannon Williams. We intend to publish a longer appreciation of Rob's scholarship in a future issue.