

*'Pwy a gyfyd Cymru? By whom shall Wales be raised?' A Quarter-Century of Devolved Educational Policy in Wales*

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In his overview of the life of the educational reformer Thomas Charles (Y Bala), the historian Ieuan Gwynedd Jones cites a religious and educational maxim that exercised the minds of Charles's 'conscientious and literate' contemporaries in the eighteenth century: 'Pwy a gyfyd Cymru, canys bechau yw? By whom shall Wales be raised, for she is small?' (Jones, 1963, p. 31). Smith (2016, p. 22) has reflected on how this maxim posed a pointed and contested question in a Wales rapidly embracing social, economic and religious change, in asking who was, and who should be, the caretaker and steward of Wales's 'salvation and scholarship'. We have chosen these words as the preface to this editorial, and to this special edition of the *Wales Journal of Education*, as the question still prompts reflection and is worth asking. Indeed, it echoes somewhat uncannily as contemporary Wales finds itself in the thick of a period of educational change no less profound and far-reaching. As we mark a quarter of a century of devolved policymaking in education, this special issue therefore celebrates the successes, and grapples critically with the ongoing challenges that Wales's education system faces.

After centuries of being enmeshed within what Jones and Roderick term the 'England/Wales' state (Jones and Roderick, 2003, p. vii), the power to control almost all aspects of education in Wales arrived with devolution in 1999. Prior to this, during the twentieth century, Wales had made some ground in shaping some aspects of the education system to reflect its distinctive historical, cultural and linguistic identity, such as the *Curriculum Cymreig* and the growth of Welsh-medium schooling. Yet, the ability to develop and control a distinctive statutory education

system, which was designed to meet Wales needs, had previously been ‘synchronised ... out of existence’ (Jones, 1997, p. 2). Devolution instigated a landmark opportunity to bring educational policymaking closer to learners, parents, communities and to the locus of practice. It enabled, and continues to enable, the development of a statutory education system which reflects Wales’s different and distinct priorities, and which distinguishes it from other countries, both within the United Kingdom (UK) and beyond. In this way education was, and remains, both a showcase, and a ‘policy laboratory’ for ‘radically different solutions’ (Reynolds, 2008, p. 753) to address the specific needs and aspirations of Wales’s people (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002, p. 5). Although similar issues have confronted further and higher education (see, for example, Shattock and Horvath, 2019), this issue of the *Wales Journal of Education* will focus on early years and the statutory phases of education, given the speed and intensity with which policy change in these areas has accelerated over the past 25 years. Educational policy has provided an opportunity to be *different*, not for its own sake, but to reflect Wales’s differences, be they cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and, in terms of the *politics* of education, its purpose, practice and governance. From early innovations like the Foundation Phase, through new curricula, to current national MA and Doctoral programmes, various Education Ministers (whose titles have changed to reflect changing priorities) have worked to justify, cajole or encourage change through the profession, and external mechanisms (such as OECD / PISA).

The question of ‘by whom should Wales be raised’ takes on a number of different significances in the articles within this special issue. It poses critical questions: about the leadership of reform; about where responsibility lies for the successful implementation of a number of post-devolution policy innovations, such as the Foundation Phase and the Curriculum for Wales; about the nature and ownership of accountability; about how professionals can best be developed and supported to deliver the current ambitious reform journey; and a great deal more.

This issue therefore examines statutory education since devolution through a variety of lenses, reflecting key priorities and changes. Two key features of the special issue are worth noting: firstly, the incorporation of early career researchers into the writing teams of papers, reflecting our desire to encourage and support those at the beginning of their academic careers; and secondly, the engagement of a number of colleagues through the four Welsh Government-funded Collaborative Research Networks

(CRNs), which are engaged in building educational research capacity in a number of the areas covered in this issue.

In answer to the recurring question of ‘by whom shall Wales be raised’, this issue suggests that responsibility lies with all of us, at every level and in every domain of an education system that is unrecognisable from that which preceded devolution, and which continues to evolve apace.

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