

REVIEW ESSAY

Lifelong learning: links between policy and practice

Policy:

Lifelong learning and the new educational order, by J. Field, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, 2006, 204 pp., £19.99, ISBN 978-1-85856-646-6

Overcoming the barriers to higher education, by S. Gorrard with N. Adnett, H. May, K. Slack, E. Smith and L. Thomas, Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books, 2007, 154 pp., £20.99, ISBN 978-1-85856-414-2

Post-compulsory education and lifelong learning across the United Kingdom: policy, organisation and governance, edited by A. Hodgson, K. Spours and M. Waring, London, Institute of Education, University of London, 2011, 188 pp., £19.99, ISBN 978-0-85473-904-2

Practice:

Preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector, by A. Gravells, Exeter, Learning Matters, 2011, 133 pp., £14.00, ISBN 978-0-85727-053-7

Learning to teach in the lifelong learning sector, by E. Ingleby, D. Joyce and S. Powell, London, Continuum, 2010, 176 pp., £19.99, ISBN 978-1-4411-8296-8

Continuing your professional development in lifelong learning, by A. Steward, London, Continuum, 2010, 255 pp., £27.99, ISBN 9780826445872

The books reviewed fall under two main categories: policy about lifelong learning and teaching within the lifelong learning sector. With the exception of *Post-compulsory education and lifelong learning across the United Kingdom: policy, organisation and governance*, none of the books take into account the changes that have taken place since the formation of the Coalition Conservative–Liberal Democrat Government formed in May 2010.

Overcoming the barriers to higher education by Gorrard presents an engaging argument throughout that challenges notions and assumptions underlying the widening participation agenda within higher education (HE). The 10 chapters (maximum 15 pages each) fall into five sections: an introduction to HE and associated problems of access; establishing the nature of the problem in relation to which students are missing and the evidence base for this; leading to HE with a focus on perceived barriers in education and the impact of early life and schooling; experiencing HE including difficulties for non-traditional learners in making the transition to HE their experiences of HE; beyond graduation and finally a concluding chapter on overcoming the barriers to participation. The book covers undergraduate courses and provision at level 4 or equivalent (under the National Qualification Framework).

The context of the book is set within the perceived problem of widening access to HE and how this has become a key policy issue within the UK and in many developed countries. However, what is interesting is that from the onset Gorrard and colleagues set out to disprove and challenge some of the 'myths' about widening participation within HE. For instance although the widening participation agenda has been based on the notion that particular social groups are unfairly under-represented in HE, Gorrard et al. argue that participation in HE has been widening for decades, albeit slowly. Certainly the book is of interest to academics, practitioners and policy-makers, but my sense is that it deserves a wider audience especially in relation to challenging known truths and also in the intense scrutiny given to questioning research evidence on which policy is often based.

Several chapters of the book are based on a review of available evidence concerning research into widening participation. However, Gorrard et al. raise many questions about the value of the evidence in terms of the quality of research and reporting; the nature of evidence; and the quality of evidence (see chapters 4–7). At a fundamental level they found insufficient information in many of the studies reviewed to be able to replicate the study either in respect of the methodology or the analysis. Prior to this in chapter 2 a detailed exploration takes place relating to the real difficulties that beset research in lifelong learning in relation to longitudinal data and the use of poor datasets. A genuine concern is raised about the lack of clarity and rigour of reporting research without explicit attention being given to those participants regarded as missing, unknown, or unclassified when these might make up a substantive proportion of the population. Such are the issues with poor research, lack of meaningful controls or comparisons, a misuse of figures that ignore proportions that Gorrard and colleagues argue that little is actually known about the impact or effectiveness of widening participation.

Whether as a reader you are drawn to Gorrard's approach he raises important points that are particularly pertinent for all those involved in lifelong learning. Why is it that research most often looks at those who are involved rather than those who do not participate? Why does research not make greater use of comparison and matched groups so that experiences can be compared and a more rigorous research base generated? Of importance to those involved in lifelong learning is the strong case made for understanding more about the learning trajectory to HE. Given the high correlation between academic qualifications and application and admission to HE; it is apparent that any initiatives to engage non-traditional students need to take place much sooner than post-16.

Lifelong learning and the new educational order by Field has five main chapters that include lifelong learning; a design for the future?; the silent explosion; the learning economy; who is being left behind, and new educational order. As with the three policy books reviewed here lifelong learning is seen as more than post-16 and includes changes across the lifespan, vocational and basic skills. This view of lifelong learning and the importance of informal learning tells against the more restricted view from government that has often seen lifelong learning as the vocational educational curriculum.

There is an interesting discussion of the blurring of boundaries between real and trivial learning and from that a sense that this new learning, although trivial, may present challenges to providers. Apparent is that the changing nature of work means that workers need to continue to learn; that occupational patterns are changing and that prominence of economic concerns is often a feature of the discourse of lifelong learning. Field comments on the requirement of professionals to undertake continuing professional development – an area that is explored in relation to Initial Teacher Education later in this review.

In the final chapter Field considers five elements of a future strategy that he perceives to be either important or neglected: rethinking schooling in a learning society; widening

participation in adult learning; developing the workplace as a site of learning; building active citizenship by investing in social capital, and pursuing the search for meaning (p. 148). Given that this special edition focuses on 14–19 education attention is given to the first concern: rethinking schooling in a learning society. At the onset there is a synergy with the work of Gorrard in questioning why discussions of lifelong learning pay most attention to education post school: this given the multiple influences on children and young people that shape their learning whilst at school. Field questions the front-loading of education and suggests that the consequences of this may be contrary to those intended. For instance, it is possible that FE or HE function as a potential warehouse (p. 150) for some young people and simply act as a holding mechanism between school and work rather than being a positive choice. Given the current economic climate it seems likely that this may become even more of an issue.

Of interest is his belief that the type of education seen in schools needs to change so that a key focus is given to learning how to learn and that notions of teaching and training move towards concepts of learning and a more learner-centred approach. I would argue though that this has been the case since before 2006 when the book was published. In addition, as with Steward below, I would suggest changes in notions of teaching and learning apply beyond post 16 and offer challenges to all those involved in working in the lifelong learning sector and those responsible for the training of teachers. Field challenges the reader to abandon their ideas of the core function of schooling and to agree a set of basics. Although this is not without challenge; Field identifies two essential skills: literacy and numeracy and comments that if the school system fails to deliver on these then it is not geared to the demands of a learning society. While totally agreeing about the importance of literacy and numeracy, it needs to be acknowledged this is not a new concern and it remains disappointing that so many young people continue to leave compulsory education without the most basic skills. Indeed, in the recent review of vocational education Alison Wolf has proposed that students under the age of 19 without sufficient qualifications in English and maths will have to continue studying these subjects as part of their programme of study (Wolf 2011).

The edited book by Hodgson, Spours and Waring brings together contributions from policy-makers, researchers and practitioners from Scotland, England and Wales and sets out to analyse the organisation and governance of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning in the UK with a particular emphasis on England, Scotland and Wales. Although the book examines change since the 1990s the real focus is on the changes following parliamentary devolution in 1999: the promises that were made in relation to this and the differences that have grown between the four nations as each country has pursued the policy directions that were perceived to be suited to its own traditions, and needs. The book arose out of an ESRC seminar series, comprising five seminars, entitled 'New directions in learning and skills in England, Scotland and Wales: Recent policy and future possibilities'.

The book is divided into three sections: national contexts and approaches to policy; organisation, governance and practice; and possible future directions. Although written as a book in its entirety, all chapters form a coherent whole in themselves with references helpfully provided at the end of each chapter. Readers might well wish to dip in and out of the different contributions.

For anyone new to the post-compulsory sector this book provides a really helpful map of policy directions and levers across England, Scotland and Wales in addition to considering the future direction that countries may take in formulating policy given the new UK Conservative–Liberal Democrat Government. I particularly enjoyed the separate chapters (chapters 2–4) on national contexts that outlined key organisational structures; the role undertaken by different providers; the range of qualifications on offer and key debates. These provided a

real grounding for the arguments that are presented later in the book. It also seemed to me that as a whole the book helps address the loss of 'collective memory' over policy due to turnover among ministers and civil servants, among others. Also engaging was consideration of how far the differences discussed across England, Scotland and Wales actually impact on practices at the level of colleges: extracts from interviews with college principals and governors really brought this discussion alive with one of the sad conclusions seeming to be that the college mission seems to be alive in Scotland and Wales with those involved in colleges having a greater say in policy discussions and decision making than in England. England, by contrast is continually presented as having a top-down process whereby policy makers have little understanding of what is happening on the ground.

Overall the authors argue that devolution of powers has been accompanied by increasing divergence in policy frameworks, in governance and institutional arrangements, and in educational and training programmes in the separate parts of the UK. Governance arrangements in Wales and Scotland are more inclusive than England and collaboration remains the main ethos in Wales and Scotland. One basic premise of the book is that within the UK different policy-makers across the four home countries have done little to learn from each other's own experiences.

What is interesting is that although the contributions by Field and Gorrard were published some four or five years before that of Hodgson et al. a number of common themes are present across all three. All these books refer to the influence of upskilling, global change and technology. Questions are raised about whether increasing funding for training is a solution to recession given concerns about whether jobs exist. Historically it seems easy for governments to influence the supply of vocational training as a lever of choice. Furthermore, all authors comment on the notion of over qualification/over education and the mismatch between skills and qualifications. Concerns too are expressed about the increased division between academic and vocational qualifications which are especially important in relation to the way in which non-traditional students are able to apply for and gain admission to HE (see Gorrard).

Interestingly, none of these books give real consideration to those teaching within the lifelong learning or post-compulsory sector in respect to the policy changes and drivers that influence the pathways to qualification; the economic benefits that teaching might bring; the under-representation of particular groups within the teaching profession and the requirements for lifelong learning for all those employed within the sector.

For those wishing to teach in the post-compulsory sector, traditionally there had been no national requirement to train to teach until 2001, although many colleges encouraged staff to gain educational qualifications offered by higher education institutions and national awarding bodies (e.g., the Certificate in Education). These initial qualifications were drawn up by the Further Education National Training Organisation with the main training routes being set at level 3 or 4: Teaching Certificate or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. In 2003 Ofsted, having become responsible for the inspection of initial teacher training for further education teachers in 2001, published a highly critical survey report. In response to that report the following reforms were put in place from 2007:

- Revised initial teacher training qualifications for new further education teachers (Certificate/Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector/PGCE).
- The introduction of a professional status for all FE teachers – Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), which was comparable to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for school teachers, and Associate Teacher Learning and Skills Status, which covered those who do not take on full teaching responsibilities.

- New continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for all FE teachers – completion of 30 hours of professional development per year or pro-rata equivalent.

A further complication was that teaching qualifications were offered by both higher education institutions (HEIs) and awarding bodies and could be offered at different levels. For instance, the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) could be offered at level 5; although many HEIs took the opportunity to provide Postgraduate Certificate of Education courses at level 6 or level 7 which encompassed DTLLS. This complication is relevant in relation to the plethora of books that have been written since 2007 aimed at those undertaking teacher training courses within the lifelong learning sector since the work undertaken, the expected reading and the criticality of the assignments will vary according to the level of study.

Preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector by Ann Gravells focuses on Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), the mandatory award for those working in the post-compulsory sector be they working in FE, adult and community learning (ACL), work-based learning or prisons. For those new to post-compulsory ITE it is important to note that the PTLLS award does not fully qualify teachers. Those working in the sector with a full teaching role will then need to progress to the DTLLS or PGCE award and then undertake a process of professional formation before being awarded Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills Status (QTLS) by the Institute for Learning (IfL).

The eight main chapters cover teaching and learning; theories of learning; identifying needs; planning learning; enabling learning; assessing learning; quality assurance and evaluation, and micro-teaching. Gravells indicates that these chapters cover the theory for the PTLLS award and notes that there is a companion book *Passing PTLLS assignments*, also by Ann Gravells.

As occurs in a number of texts about post-compulsory ITE all chapters include a list of how the Professional Standards relate to the content and activities in the chapter and hence provide an opportunity for the trainee to map their individual progress. Chapters include examples, activities and extension activities throughout which seek to engage the learner in thinking about practical aspects of teaching in relation to the theory covered. Throughout there are a number of helpful tables in each chapter which summarise much information and it is pleasing to see examples of lesson plans and schemes of work. The tone is approachable and clearly set at those working at levels 3 and 4.

One of the difficulties in books of this nature, partly due to the structuring of PTLLS by Standards Verification UK (SVUK) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) is that they attempt to cover a lot of territory but in very little detail. Hence some descriptions and activities are poor at encouraging trainees to think about the relation between theory and practice and are in some cases misleading. One such example occurs with the coverage of behaviourist theory. The text and the example given suggest that positive and negative feedback are both effective in facilitating learning: this is not the case; rewards and positive responses are more likely to ensure that behaviours are repeated than negative responses. Similarly, it was disappointing to see trainee teachers being directed to consider the learning styles of their students in relation to visual, aural, read/write and kinaesthetic (VARK) and the work of Honey and Mumford as if these are fact. There is extensive criticism of learning styles (see for instance, Coffield et al. 2004) in addition; increasingly colleges are not using learning style questionnaires any longer.

It was interesting to see a separate chapter given to micro-teaching and I wondered whether some of the ideas expressed in this chapter might have been threaded through the book. For instance, there might have been an icon in each of the chapters that drew

attention to issues that trainees would need to think of when planning and delivering their micro-teach session. This in particular since one of the real challenges in ITE is to enable trainees to make links between theory and practice so that an iterative dialogue takes place between the two.

Learning to teach in the lifelong learning sector by Ingelby et al. is for those wishing to gain a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and the authors state that the context of the book is aimed at trainees working at level 7 (i.e., masters level). Given that DTLLS and PTLTS are embedded in this award, the book will be appropriate for trainees studying for qualifications at level 5 and 6. The book is based on the academic modules that contribute to Teeside University's PGCE. The main chapters focus on preparing to teach in the lifelong learning sector; teaching in the learning and skills sector; theories and principles for planning and enabling learning and assessment; classroom management; curriculum development for inclusive practice, and research methods for the lifelong learning sector. As in Gravells each chapter contains activities and case study examples, and identifies the professional standards covered.

The authors state that a key theme of the book is the emphasis given to the link between theory, practice, reflection and learning about teaching. I am not entirely convinced. For instance, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are introduced in chapter 1 which the authors say is written specifically for pre-service trainees. I'm puzzled as to why these pre-service trainees, in thinking about ILPs that their students will complete, are not asked to reflect on the ILPs that they will be completing as part of the PGCE. Surely an opportunity is being missed here since the trainees could be reflecting on how they feel about completing an ILP; how they articulate their aims and objectives so that these translate into practice. As with Gravells, I am concerned to see the attention given to learning styles. Reference is made to the work of Coffield but there is no real consideration of the concerns and issues that arise within research in this area. In chapter 2 the focus on learning styles continues with the use of Herrmann's whole brain model whereby trainees are being encouraged to ascertain whether students are left or right brain thinkers and to ensure that they adopt different approaches in their lessons to develop the weaker side of the brain.

Given the previous concerns mentioned by Gorrard et al. about research carried out in the lifelong learning sector, it seemed useful to focus on the research methods chapter as part of this review. If new teachers in the sector begin to develop research skills as part of their PGCE and become more critical of research then longer term changes may be seen in the quality of research used to inform practice. From the start, I found this chapter problematic. The definition of research as either being scientific or non-scientific is not convincing and no mention is made of the increase and value of mixed methods as a research approach (see for instance, Teddie and Tashakkori 2009).

The chapter contains endless short paragraphs that define terms but insufficient links are made to initial teacher education or the lifelong learning sector. A number of the definitions are poor and/or muddled. The section on validity introduces ethics which seems highly confusing to a trainee teacher new to engaging with research. The section on analysing data is similarly confusing. The tables and graphs that are presented are without context and it is difficult to see how these would be understood by a trainee teacher. Is it helpful, for instance, to set out the differences between nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio measurement without any examples that relate to research in the lifelong learning sector?

Insufficient attention is given to discussing the development of a research question/project within the context of studying for a PGCE. For instance, what types of research might be possible for those already working within the sector compared to those who are

pre-service and on placement? What might be the scope of the research undertaken? Most often, trainees new to research ask questions that are far too large in terms of time scale and scope. Hence it was disappointing not to see real examples of research questions presented with a critical discussion about any problems and issues that might arise. Similarly, in terms of ethics scant attention was given to how ethics work within a workplace environment. Given how important it is for those working within the lifelong learning sector to engage in small scale research appropriately, to value research and to consider how this might apply to their practice; this chapter was inadequate, especially when considering the criticisms made by Gorrard et al.

Continuing your professional development in lifelong learning by Steward attempts to engage a dual audience in that it is written for both trainee and qualified teachers. So although one focus is on the requirement for all teachers working within the lifelong learning sector to undertake 30 hours of CPD each academic year; the book also focuses on trainee teachers who are undertaking DTLLS or PGCE qualifications. The book is divided into three sections with a total of 10 chapters. Section 1 reviews past policies and includes a chapter on workforce reforms. Section 2 focuses on the role of the teacher: professional standards and code of practice, the role of the teacher, and the teaching and learning environment. Section 3, constructive practice, covers approaches to continuing professional development; professional development as constructive practice; constructing a professional role; constructing professional knowledge; constructing professional relationships and constructing a repertoire of intellectual skills. There is a final section on continuing your professional development. Case study examples are used throughout.

Chapter 1 provides an interesting overview of the professionalisation agenda and key policy documents that have led to many changes within the FE system; the development of ITE qualifications and government responsibilities and organisations. The author is careful to draw attention to the rate of change within the sector and does acknowledge that many more changes may have occurred before the reader reads this book. That said, such has been the recent turbulence within the FE system that many of the policies described in this chapter no longer exist. For instance, Lifelong Learning UK ceased to exist on 31 March 2011; 14–19 Diploma lines have been reduced and young people have a reduced entitlement to Diplomas following the election of the Coalition Government.

Chapter 3 would be of interest to new teachers within the sector especially since it sets out some tensions within the lifelong learning environment in terms of teachers' roles and requirements with an acknowledgement of the increase of non-teaching duties and the compromises that individuals have to make. Steward is also quite forthright in discussing the different perceptions that might be held from those in management and those with a teaching role. Throughout the book an argument is put forward for a more holistic approach to CPD, this given the complexity of the teacher's role in a workplace that is constantly changing due to shifts in policy. In particular Steward perceives there to be two key issues in CPD: an individual's control over their workload and their intention to continue to learn.

Throughout Steward is really pro CPD and convinced of lifelong learning with a specific focus on those delivering teaching and learning. As a whole the book provides a helpful scaffold to think more broadly about CPD – the opportunities and challenges from a reflective but evidence-based position. Steward makes a clear argument for more informal approaches to CPD which is echoed in the policy books already discussed. She also makes clear that CPD is not just about the needs of an organisation and that much improvement is needed in aligning the needs of the individual with those of the organisation. The book is engaging, makes effective use of research and offers an appropriate level of challenge. Whether it succeeds in the dual audience that is intended is questionable.

Although this review has focused separately on books exploring policy and on books targeted at trainees or practitioners working in post-compulsory education, important questions are raised across both areas in thinking about the future of post-compulsory education and lifelong learning. The recent review of vocational education (Wolf 2011) suggests that vocational qualifications need to be reviewed so that young people are taking worthwhile qualifications that lead to employment rather than taking qualifications that lead nowhere. It remains to be seen how the recommendations that arise from this review will impact on the lifelong learning sector as a whole and those teaching within the sector, but given that lifelong learning has often been construed as being about vocational education it seems likely that there will be another period of change. The rise in age of compulsory schooling is likely to impact further across the sector and there remain concerns that the new government is creating a more divisive educational system than previously. How non-traditional students navigate through this, and how lifelong learning needs to change so that student needs are met, are questions not necessarily answered in the books reviewed given the rapid changes put in place since the new government. A fundamental question remains: what is the function of education in the time of a recession?

References

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