

## Editorial

Since the 1980s in the UK, as elsewhere in the world, education, like other public services, has been governed by the informing principles of a neo-liberal polity. A change of government in 1997 in the UK has not altered but rather accentuated the purposes and practices of this polity that now promotes not only parental choice and contracting out services but private finance initiatives to rebuild schools and the corporate ownership of local education authorities and services. The historical coalescing and intensifying specification of practice—strengthening consumer choice, contract law, audits of performance, corporate power and regulative accountability—are all designed to create the education service as a sphere of market exchange relationships, in which the actors are provided with an account of quantifiable performance that enables them to calculate their individual relative advantage.

Glimpses of more just educational practices have nevertheless begun to emerge. This special edition of the *London Review of Education* has invited a number of researchers to draw upon their work to look beyond the neo-liberal market place of possessive individualism to re-imagine an education for a just and democratic civic society. While the primary focus is upon education and public policy in the UK, it includes papers by Lynn Davies and Terri Seddon that provide an international perspective.

### Beyond the Market

The neo-liberal regime was designed to restore public trust by making services accountable and responsive to public choice conceived as consumer preference. Providing consumers with accounts of performance and service quality has produced a regime of performativity that works from the outside in, through regulations, controls and pressures, but also from the inside out, colonising lives and producing new subjectivities: ‘what we see here is a particular set of practices through which we act upon ourselves and one another in order to make us particular kinds of being’. Such performativity, experienced as a regime of externally imposed controls, generates identities disciplined by targets, indicators, measures and records of performance (Ball, 2001; Gleeson & Husbands, 2001).

This neo-liberal regime cannot realise its purposes of enhancing institutional achievement or strengthening public trust. Achievement grows out of the internal goods of motivation to improve (that follows recognition and the mutual deliberation of purpose) rather than the external imposition of quantifiable targets. While public trust cannot emerge from the neo-liberal forces of competition that only create a hierarchy of class advantage that turn educational opportunity into a hierarchy of advantage. Different conceptions of educational purpose, of who we are and what we would like to become, are excluded by such a regime (Ranson, 2003). Public trust can only emerge when the wider community of citizens is provided with the possibility of participating in and deliberating the common goods of a public education for all (Halpin, 2003; Marquand, 2004). Terri Seddon, in her paper for this

edition, contextualises this understanding within the long historic struggle between capitalism and democracy to shape civil society. The challenge is to rearticulate the democratic conditions for a new community based, democratic citizenship and education [1].

### **Re-imagining Civic Renewal for an Intercultural World**

Such a democratic community presupposes a public, civic space informed by very different principles from the neo-liberal polity. A sphere which recognises difference and contestation of public purpose that must reach shared understanding of the shared goods of justice and well-being (Fraser, 1997). Grasping our experience intersubjectively and interculturally in this way, as Les Back and colleagues argue, derives from a different way, than neo-liberal individualism, of understanding our being embedded in a shared world socially and historically. Our lived experience with others involves practices and forms of speech that are prior to and provide the context for individual communication with others. These patterns of activity and performance embody collective memories and shared traditions that have unfolded historically and shape our consciousness and ways of interpreting experience. A subject cannot know itself independently of others and the world both share. What needs explaining is this sense of sharing, or 'having in common'. What does it mean to say we share the meaning of a tradition or engage in a common practice?

The common practice of making a community inescapably involves three interdependent practices: the making of meaning, engaging in collaborative activity and mutual respect. Each dimension—cultural, material and social—mediates a different aspect of our relationship with others and the world, while the nature of the interconnections between them determine the cultural and ethical spirit of intersubjective experience achieved in the community.

#### *Reconfiguring the Meaning of Civic Purpose*

The conceptual schema created over time by communities discloses a shared way of interpreting the form of life we inhabit and make together (Taylor, 1985, 2004). Concepts carry and transmit our values, cultural norms and practices, presupposing the common form of life of a community that has created them over time. This language objectifies the collective experience, the common form of life, the shared practices of the community. The challenge, as Jon Nixon argues (cf., 2001), is to recover a public language and moral codes for civic renewal and international intercultural perspectives (Back et al.; Davies).

#### *Collaborative Practice*

A community can only be a community of speakers in and through collaborative intervention and labour in the material making of its world (Lukacs, 1975). Just as interacting subjects create a language which mediate their experience of reality, so their work together to meet their needs, creates practices, tools and institutions which objectify their shared relationships. These are objects that embody their accumulated ideas and collective experience of how to create a material infrastructure that supports their common form of life (MacIntyre, 1999). The papers in this edition refer to the remaking of practices and institutions, for example, the creation of partnerships (Seddon), the use of the media and technology (Davies) and the altered use of resources (Riddell & Tett).

### Mutual Recognition

Social and ethical practice: intersubjectivity is the foundation of subjectivity, that we become ourselves, individuals, through relationships of mutual recognition (Taylor, 1992; Honneth, 1995; Fraser, 2003; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Sennett, 2003). But understanding the significance of this for ourselves engenders recognition of the significance of mutual dependence on the structure of relationship in which all create and recreate. This is a relationship of struggle mediated by the 'space of reason' (Brandom, 2000).

Not only is the ethical life of a community expressed in the interdependence of material, social and cultural practice, the identity of this interdependence is formed out of a new democratic citizenship by the members of the community themselves. These public goods will be determined by enabling citizens to make their contribution through collective and democratic deliberation at a variety of levels, within institutions, the neighbourhoods and localities of civic society as well as nationally.

### *The Practices of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Learning Communities*

Despite the constraints of the market regime educational practices informed by very different purposes have been emerging over the past decade. Key research on learning has critically re-evaluated the dominant paradigm and proposed values and practices which amount to a new culture of learning: Gardner (1993) on multiple intelligence, Engestrom (1999) on activity theory, and Wenger (1998, 2000) on learning communities. Such research however is not divorced from practice, as the leading reform programme of Professor Brighouse (2003) in Birmingham and London illustrates, and is manifest in the work of government departments: the Scottish Office's prospectus on *New Community Schools* (1998), the Wales Assembly's *Community Focused Schools* (2003). This work proposes that education has traditionally been shaped by too narrow a conception of purpose, of human capacity, of frameworks of learning and of assessment (cf. Nixon et al., 2001). Education has divided knowledge and practice, while the point of learning is to integrate them in the purposes of living: active learning for active citizenship (Bentley, 1998, 2000). The central principles informing the new teaching and learning are:

#### *Learning for Citizenship*

If a central predicament of our time forms collective action dilemmas—in addressing, for example, the environment, congestion, or reconciling the rights and well-being in the context of diverse traditions—the urgent common need is to learn how to act together more effectively (Nussbaum, 1990; Dunn, 1992). This challenge presupposes cultural change if such cooperative, learning communities are to be generated. If young people are to become active citizens participating in the social and political life as members of their communities the process of learning in school and college will need to reach beyond the walls of typically enclosed institutions and foster learning in and for the community.

#### *Valuing the Whole Learner: recognising all the needs of all the learners*

Learning has been envisaged, mistakenly as a narrow cognitive process, with thinking and feeling separated out. The research of Goleman (1996) and others is illuminating the significance of emotional well-being, of health and quality of relationships for learning and fulfilling potential (cf. Nussbaum, 2001). Educators are learning to recognise the importance not only of developing basic cognitive skills and competencies but also the need

to address the social emotional health of each person to enhance their self-esteem, motivation and well-being.

#### *Learners are Capable*

Education has been undermined for many because of the flawed assumptions of capacity and intelligence. The research of Gardner (1993) is transforming our understanding of human capability and potential. Intelligence is far more diverse and broad ranging than traditional assumptions allow. Intelligence is not a fixed internal characteristic of individuals. Each individual is able and has a different portfolio of abilities which require careful nurture and attention to develop each person's talents to full potential. Intelligence is learned (Perkins, 1995) through experience, hard work and through developing capacities for critical self-reflection. Achievement in all areas of learning needs to be celebrated.

#### *Voice and Dialogue*

The process of learning is inescapably a journey between worlds, that connects the language of home and community with the language of the public space. Learning is always a bilingual experience as we learn to move between genres and codes of the tacit and particular and the explicit and universal. The challenge for the school as Michael Fielding argues in his paper is to enable the expression of student 'voice', together with the pedagogic materials and opportunity for dialogue that facilitate this co-construction of meaning and relevance, grounding learning in the personal and familiar while tying it in to worlds of difference (cf. Fielding, 1997, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). The curriculum, the approach to learning and teaching, the processes of assessing progress all need to form bridges between worlds (Young, 1998, 1999, 2000).

A school cannot achieve its purposes without mediating worlds—remaking itself as an institution in and for its communities of difference, understanding of the interdependent nature of learning and living, and yet encouraging the capabilities that enable learners to flourish between cultures in a cosmopolitan public world (Richardson & Miles, 2003). The medium of this learning is reflective dialogue (Wells, 2000) that enables the give and take of claims to negotiate a frame of shared meanings and agreement in the space of reason. It is the elaborate code of communicative rationality within a community of practical reasoners able to examine and evaluate their common goods (Habermas, 1984, 1990).

#### *Creating Learning Communities*

That learning grows out of motivation grounded in co-configuration of meaning between worlds requires a school to create a learning community of mutual recognition that embraces institutions, parents and their communities as well as the codes of the public sphere. Schools work with family members individually and together to recognise parents as co-educators and encourage mutual support for learning, while professionals are learning that only inter-professional practice can address all the needs of the learner and the family in a coordinated approach.

Robert Starratt (1996) is unique in his theorising of the relationship of institutional and pedagogic form of the learning community. In the pursuit of *meaning in a learning community* he begins to set out the practices that a school needs to develop if it is to work 'between worlds' to connect the meanings of school-and-community. It would be a critical community of inquirers, a caring environment, and a school in which meanings would be continuously related to students' life-worlds through learning. This involves storytelling from the

experiences of everyday life; leads to production/ performance; explores large moral questions of meaning and being; and explores the meta-narrative social and cultural issues of the time.

The learning that takes place in the community could focus on the extent to which its members are engaged in learning, are supporting the learning of others (nurturing), and learning from others, from difference (reciprocity). Once more, however, an expanded understanding of the object of learning would grasp the learning as a collective activity through which members were working to transform the community, to become a community. In this perspective a learning community is a community of inquiry, in search of itself, acknowledging plural identities and voices that can be accommodated only by enabling all to participate in deliberation of common concerns in pursuit of shared understanding and agreement.

The challenge now is to draw together such emerging ideas into a coherent re-imagine an education beyond the neo-liberal market place of possessive individualism. The vision of such an education is one that serves the purposes of a just, democratic society that seeks to develop an ethical community of citizens while enabling the creative potential of each individual to contribute to the common good. The shared focus is upon the creation of learning communities as the expression of such an education for civic society.

Hope, we believe, is the starting point, not simply an exercise in wishful thinking that can be indulged in when critical engagement falters. Indeed, hope is intrinsic to the task of critical engagement (see Halpin, 2003). The papers that comprise this issue, while in many cases highly critical of the practices and policies they document and discuss, share a belief in the possibility of educational renewal. Since each paper is fronted with an abstract, we do not in this brief editorial introduction summarise them. However, we do see all the papers contributing in different ways to a shared intellectual project of hope in the possibility of educational renewal for a revived civic society. We intend to continue this project through further publications.

STEWART RANSON, *Institute of Education, Warwick University, UK*

DAVID HALPIN, *Institute of Education, University of London, UK*

JON NIXON, *School of Education, University of Sheffield, UK*

TERRI SEDDON, *Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia*

## Notes

[1] The ensuing discussion draws upon Ranson (2004).

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