



Educational Studies Association of Ireland

Cumann Léann Oideachais na hÉireann

Autumn 2001 Newsletter

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President's Letter

The letters "FMD" loomed large in the life of ESAI this year. For the sake of posterity, I had better translate: Foot and Mouth Disease, the scourge that caused—among other and greater consequences—the postponement of the ESAI Annual Conference from Spring until early September. Of course we postponed the conference gladly: in the national (and indeed international) interest, as the saying goes. However, there were resulting difficulties and disruptions. These were most acute for the staff in Mary Immaculate College as they first arranged, and then unarranged, and finally rearranged the schedules and support services for the three days of the conference. The disruptions were severe also for speakers, who did not get the usual facility of presenting their papers in Spring and revising them in the light of feedback before submitting them in the summer for possible publication. There was

extra pressure too on members of the Executive Committee and Editorial Board as they tried to keep everyone appropriately updated with regard to the altered arrangements. It would have been easy to think that "FMD" might stand for "Frantic, Muddled and Desperate." Not at all. Everyone was most gracious (something much appreciated by your President as she circulated emails galore). To a member, ESAI and the support cast rallied to the cause: Focused, Motivated and Determined!

It seems to have worked, too, for we had a very good conference. Most of our intending presenters (a record crowd) were able to be there; inevitably, however, some were not, and we both missed their contributions and felt for their disappointment. Nonetheless we had a bumper crop of papers, and we were delighted with the attendance at a time which we know was not the most convenient for many people. The arrangements in Mary Immaculate

College ran like clockwork; our thanks go especially to Jim Deegan, to Florence Macken and her team, and to everyone who helped so willingly and pleasantly. They have set high standards for those who follow them.

The work involved in the postponement of the conference had delayed the completion of proof-reading for *Irish Educational Studies 20*. We had hoped to send it out during the summer; but production took rather longer than expected, and we decided eventually not to issue the journal until the conference (with consequent savings as regards postage, in that copies were distributed on site to members who attended). Peadar Cremin duly launched it for us; and I can testify to my own delight and relief that *IES 20*—rather than something called *Elizabeth's Ashes*—eventually saw the light of day. Our grateful thanks go to Monica Dowdall who, as always, put in so much work and was a tower of strength in all respects. Even before we encountered the production delays, we had been thinking that the days of a “blockbuster” *IES* were over. With the blessing of the AGM, we hope to move to producing each volume as (say) three slimmer numbers—distributing the workload, as well as the supply of reading matter to our members, around the year. The

Executive Committee and the Editorial Board are looking at the practical issues involved.

The AGM also dealt with the usual reports and financial issues. Most of the business was routine, but one item was not. Don Herron has retired as Business Editor after umpteen years of dedicated service. ESAI owes him much, and we were delighted to make him a presentation of glassware that went some way towards recognising his major contribution to the Association.

Elizabeth Oldham
President, ESAI

Editorial

This newsletter is belatedly hoping to reach each of you in good cheer as the holidays approach. As the President's letter suggests, this past year has been a difficult one for the ESAI. However, 2001 was also a difficult year in much more profound ways around the world. This newsletter contains points of reference for some of these difficulties as they relate to Irish education.

Theresa Doherty's review of Thomas O'Donoghue's book on bilingual education in Ireland touches on the com-

ing issue of multi/intercultural education directly. While this book is an historical exploration of bilingual language curriculum in an Irish context, it does, "...identify the multifarious factors that encourage and/or challenge reformers" within education. Is Irish education prepared not only for bilingual and multi-lingual students, but for dealing with the cultures of students who bring a variety of languages and cultures into the classroom?

Likewise, Jennifer O'Keefe's review of a lecture by Howard Gardner provides a look at the theory of multiple intelligences. This theory challenges traditional forms of both curricula and assessment by looking at different ways of working with all students based on the individual form or mode of intelligence students best display. While there has wonderful research based on Gardner's theory, has the idea of multiple intelligences yet reached the so-called 'coal face' of the classroom in meaningful ways? Perhaps a more pressing question is how might multiple intelligences inform future work in Irish education in multi/intercultural contexts?

Anna Fiona Keogh's review of the Annual Conference in Limerick in September gives an overview of the sessions, many of which dealt with

education and social exclusion. Keogh re-states the eternal question, as suggested by the conference's keynote speaker, Máirtín Mac an Ghail, "what is school for?" and suggests that question opened a 'Pandora's Box'. It might be safe to say that the Box is now open, but what does it tell us about education and the direction education might take over the coming years. As this review suggests, it is "worthwhile for all of us to go back to basics" and both ask, as well as attempt to answer, such questions.

Finally, this newsletter contains a call for papers for the Spring Conference, to be held in Trinity College, Dublin, from the 21st to the 23rd of March, 2002. The hope of this conference is to ask questions and seek possible answers to issues of education in challenging times.

Brian Donovan

Book Review

Bilingual Education in Ireland, 1904-1922 Thomas A. O'Donoghue

Tom O'Donoghue is an Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of a num-

ber of books including *The Catholic Church and the Secondary School Curriculum in Ireland 1922-62* (Peter Lang, 1999).

In the context of increasing interest in bilingual education internationally this book examines the Bilingual Programme of Instruction introduced in selected schools in Irish-speaking districts in Ireland between 1904-1922. Scholarly and well-crafted this book fills a hiatus in current historiography as well as contributing to the discussion on the principles for curriculum development and innovation. Written in a clear and accessible style it is attractive to a wide range of readership. It is of interest to students of the history of Irish education, to international readers who wish to focus on colonialism and education, to bilingual educators in many countries and to curriculum theorists who wish to gain fresh insights into curriculum innovation.

On a macro-level the text examines the political, social and cultural factors that favoured the introduction of the Bilingual Programme in 1904. O'Donoghue skilfully encompasses the broad sweep of Irish history in the opening chapters and chronicles the growing consciousness amongst Irish people of their native language, tradi-

tion and culture. He discusses the political climate that created a willingness on the part of the British authorities to accommodate bilingual education, a radical move at the turn of the century. The role of the Gaelic League was central to this decision and the text explores Spolsky's distinction between bilingual programmes that seek to "salvage the child" and those that seek to "salvage the language".

O'Donoghue provides a comprehensive account of the Bilingual Programme introduced in 1904 in Irish-speaking districts. The origins, nature and operation of the Programme are explored in detail and its varied success analysed. The text highlights the lack of teacher education in bilingual teaching methods, and the absence of teaching resources or textbooks. In this context teachers, convinced of the benefits of bilingual education, took the initiative and participated intelligently, enthusiastically in the design, implementation and revision of their own bilingual methods and resources. They met in clusters and developed teaching methods through their own critical reflection on their practice. They used the *Irish School Weekly* and *An Claidheamh Soluis* as vehicles for sharing this pedagogical knowledge which they had gained from their

classroom experiences. The implementation of the Programme is an historical example of what is nowadays termed “school-based curriculum development”. While the author draws on a range of secondary sources, the text relies heavily on a wealth of carefully researched primary sources, including Gaelic League files, pedagogical materials developed at the time for teaching the Bilingual Programme, local newspaper reports on activities connected with the Programme, National Board files on individual schools, organisers and inspectors’ report books. The energy and commitment of teachers involved in this curriculum innovation and the complexity of educational change is captured through the detailed accounts in the text of the work undertaken by individuals and schools.

O’Donoghue brings an international perspective to an Irish case study of curriculum innovation. He successfully weaves concrete examples of the difficulties associated with curriculum implementation with the underlying principles of curriculum reform as presented by modern theorists. This analysis of the bilingual programme of 1904 identifies the multifarious factors that encourage and/or challenge reformers, and gives credence to the ar-

gument that study of former curriculum innovations and practices can remind us that change is humanly possible given the will and opportunity for change.

Teresa O’Doherty is lecturing in history of education in the University of Limerick.

Meeting Review

On Friday 11th May Howard Gardner, Professor of Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education and co-director of Harvard’s Project Zero, was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate by the National University of Ireland in University College Cork. In conjunction with his visit to Cork, Gardner gave a public lecture on Thursday 10th May entitled ‘Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century’.

Attendance at this public lecture was extremely high with the main lecture theatre, seating four hundred people, full to capacity well in advance of the scheduled starting time. Indeed, demand for seats was so high that an overflow room seating a further three hundred and fifty people and equipped with audio and visual links was also filled to capacity.

As the pioneer of the theory of Multiple Intelligences, it is hardly surprising that the turnout for this public lecture

was so high. Gardner's theory has recently begun to influence curriculum and pedagogical approaches in many countries and Ireland is no exception. One could not help but notice that the audience was composed of an eclectic mix of academics, established teachers, prospective teachers, psychologists, sociologists etc. all united by a shared interest in this theory of learning.

The lecture itself could, in this reviewer's opinion, be described as a concise introduction to Multiple Intelligence's theory. Gardner began by explaining how he came to look at the traditional view of intelligence and to question the rationale behind measuring intelligence solely in linguistic or mathematical terms. Emphasis was placed upon the restrictive nature of such a limited classification of intelligence from the point of view of individuals who do not express themselves effectively in linguistic or mathematical terms.

The audience then listened as Gardner described how he began to look at things previously seen as talents and to consider their implications for the ways in which people learned and illustrated understanding. The idea that individuals comprehend and subsequently show this comprehension in

different ways is the corner stone of Gardner's theory.

Following on from this introduction to the underlying principle of Multiple Intelligences theory was a whistle-stop tour of the eight intelligences with an all too brief reference to a new 'half' intelligence, the existentialist intelligence. Gardner's discussion of how the eight intelligences may be combined with the use of diverse entry points to facilitate the inclusion of more learners within the classroom provided many people with an opportunity to reflect on how they could alter their teaching practice to benefit more of their students. Gardner then moved slightly away from the immediate educational context by concluding with some comments on the importance of a life-long awareness of personal intelligence profiles in order to enhance learning and further personal development.

It is the opinion of this reviewer that the implications of this lecture were two-fold. On one hand it allowed those who were already familiar with the theory to hear its originator speak at first hand and provided them with an opportunity to ask any questions or voice any opinions that they may have had in relation to the theory. On the other hand it provided those who were

not familiar with the theory with some food for thought in relation to their views on intelligence. It raised questions about the potential implications of taking the emphasis away from the linguistic and logical mathematical intelligences and teaching to and through all eight intelligences in order to benefit those who may be deemed to be underachievers as a result of the constraints of the current system. Essentially the lecture served to reinforce what many of us had heard before while at the same time raising awareness among the uninitiated in an effort to promote the celebration of diversity within the classroom and to ultimately benefit the students of the twenty-first century.

Jennifer O'Keefe is teaching in Castletownbere.

Conference Review

As a first time participant at an ESAI conference, I arrived in Limerick with anticipation and curiosity. Having just been appointed as researcher with a brief in educational disadvantage with the Children's Research Centre in Trinity College, the theme 'Social Exclusion and Educational Disadvantage: Contexts, Perspectives, and Voice' could not have been more appropriate.

My background in anthropology and sociology directed me towards seminars dealing mainly with theoretical and conceptual areas. Máirtín Mac an Ghaill posed a question in the keynote session on Thursday night, 'what is school for?', and although it seems a very simple question to ask at an educational conference, it reopened a Pandora's box. I found myself being challenged and invigorated, as key concepts in education - ability, intelligence and learning were all revisited and explored. Roland Tormey considered how the term 'disadvantage' itself is understood in different ways, Paul Conway urged us to rethink our notions of 'intelligence and ability' and to ask ourselves the provoking question 'in what contexts are you smart?' Jim Deegan brought the discussion back to where it starts, with the children, and how we need to listen to children in order to be able to educate them. And finally, Ann-Louise Gilligan gave a most enlightening seminar on how imagination is a vital tool for combating educational disadvantage. Imagination is the key to developing new approaches to schooling and educational policy making, understanding children and encouraging them to pursue their ambitions. She argued that a new focus has to be developed, away

from the ladder of achievement to the unique talent of each child .

These are but a few of the themes touched on, but for this reviewer there was enough in these seminars alone to keep me occupied! It's worthwhile for all of us to go back to basics and answer one question 'what is school for?'. It's not as easy as it may seem.

Anna Fiona Keogh is a researcher at the Children's Research Centre located at Trinity College, Dublin.

News and Announcements:

Would university departments of education and related disciplines, and schools of education, please e-mail news and announcements for inclusion in the Spring 2002 Newsletter to donovanb@tcd.ie, or post to ESAI Newsletter Editor, School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin 2, before Friday, 8th March, 2002.

ESAI Spring 2002 Conference: Call for Papers

Education for Uncertain Times: Teaching and Learning Differently

As the repercussions from the events of 11 September 2001 continue to unfold in various locations around the world, it is safe to say that the world today is in "uncertain times." The times are uncertain from the perspective of safety in the Western World, the dominant world of the past few hundred years of human history; and they are also uncertain from the perspective of the Southern Hemisphere, which is suffering the effects of war, famine, and social devastation on a near daily basis. However, the same sense of uncertainty pervades education as well. In an age of fast-moving technology, with which young people are more and more comfortable and some adults more and more uncomfortable, young people's learning skills and strategies may be changing. Teaching approaches and methods which have served us well for generations may no longer suffice. Moreover, social certainties are shifting towards social and economic uncertainty; the rate and scope of change is beyond many people's comprehension. How does education, at all levels, deal with this situation?

The Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) Annual Conference 2002, at Trinity College, Dublin, will offer the opportunity to explore these, and other, areas of uncertainty relating to education. ESAI invites papers on the conference theme - and indeed on other themes relevant to education. The conference seeks to address research, from both empirical and theoretical standpoints and from a variety of perspectives: Irish and international, and covering all areas of educational theory and practice.

Deadline for submission of papers for presentation: **Thursday, 10 January, 2002.**