
ESAI Newsletter

Spring 2000

President's Letter

Dear Colleagues,

The 25th Annual Conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland will take place from 13-15 April next in National University of Ireland, Maynooth. The theme will be *Education for the 21st Century: Prospect and Retrospect*.

It is timely as we have the first Annual ESAI Conference of the twenty first century, to reflect on the processes that have occurred in the century just past and on their implications for the future.

The Conference opens on the evening of Thursday 13 April with a Reception at 7.30pm, and the launch of Volume 19 of the Association's journal, *Irish Educational Studies*. This is followed by the ESAI President's Address, this year to be

given by myself as outgoing President. A wide variety of interesting

papers address themes and issues throughout Friday and Saturday.

As part of the Conference, on Friday afternoon there will be an important symposium on education – '*Education for a New Ireland*'. This will be led by three very eminent educationalists who will present perspectives from the Republic of Ireland, from the North and from across the Atlantic. This will be followed by what we hope will be a vigorous debate by as many Conference participants as possible.

As always, we hope to combine a stimulating academic programme with an enjoyable social programme.

On Thursday night there will be a Reception in Education House, just prior to the Launch of *Irish Educational*

Studies. After the first session, there will be a Social Evening in the Glenroyal Hotel, Maynooth, with musical accompaniment (perhaps

even by Conference participants!).

On Friday the Conference Banquet will be held in Pugin Hall on the South Campus of the University. We hope that both social evenings will provide relaxed opportunities to renew old friendships, to make new ones and to simply have fun.

I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours sincerely

Sheelagh Drudy
Education Dept., NUIM

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Editorial

As always, my sincere thanks to all of those who contributed reviews or news, or any other items to the newsletter.

If anyone has items of interest (including reviews of recent Irish educational publications) which they would like to contribute to the newsletter, I can be contacted, either by email

esainews@eircom.net

or on my mobile:

(087) 696 2293.

The deadline for receipt of news and other information for the Summer issue of the Newsletter is **Friday 5th May**.

So, as usual, the threatening emails and persistent phone calls will start on Monday 8th May!!!

See you all at the conference

Anne Lodge

Education Dept., Mary Immaculate College of Education / Dept. of Govt. and Society, U.L.

Book Reviews

Government of Ireland (1999) *Commission on the Points System: Final Report and Recommendations*, Dublin: Government Publications

In a relatively brief review of this nature, it will not be possible to deal comprehensively with every element of the report's 179 pages, but some issues are isolated for particular comment.

It is worth noting that the commission (and not a ministerial working group) was established in October 1997 and completed its final report just more than two years later, November 1999. Recommendations, therefore were arrived at after protracted deliberations and consultations.

While it may appear to be stating the obvious, a key element of any report is its terms of reference, and this comment is particularly apposite in the present context. The terms of reference were determined by the Minister "in consultation with the education partners" (p. 7). The opening statement is particularly revealing in light of what the report contains. It states: "[h]aving regard to the

necessity of ensuring a transparent, impartial and efficient system for entry to third-level institutions ..." it indicates that a number of issues need to be addressed. What is significant for me in this statement is the omission of two key terms: equity and social justice. It is possible that a system of selection be transparent, impartial and efficient without being equitable or just.

Staying close to the terms of reference has resulted in a conservative report that recommends a series of refinements to the existing system rather than significant reforms. Having recognised the necessity to take seriously the "high stakes" nature of "a single final examination" and the potential impact of, for example, multiple intelligences on the

substance and process of evaluation, the report acknowledges that “radical and creative solutions are needed” (p. 52). It then considers and rejects five alternatives but does not appear to consider combinations of interviews, references etc. in addition to other means of selection, when these are already in use in many institutions.

Continuous assessment, which the report acknowledges is widely practised and accepted in other European countries, is rejected on the grounds that teachers’ credibility could be undermined and possible pressure brought to bear by parents. Should it be concluded therefore that the professionalism of teachers in this jurisdiction is of a higher order than in other countries, and that teachers here are more susceptible to parental influence than in Dutch and German communities?

The report appears somewhat contradictory when addressing the Leaving Certificate as a valid predictor of success in tertiary education. It quotes approvingly from one of its commissioned reports that “... the entry qualifications [Leaving Certificate] are a reasonable, but far from perfect predictor of degree / diploma

performance in higher education” (p 42) and acknowledges that a range of factors including gender, socioeconomic background, the field of study chosen and the institution itself all influence performance. Yet, it concludes in the following chapter that research from other countries suggests that “overall performance in secondary schools is the single best predictor of success in higher education.” The conclusion appears to be that research generated elsewhere has greater predictive validity in the Irish context than native research.

The report acknowledges that many students are placed under “high levels of stress” as a consequence of the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate. Acknowledged also is the fact that such high stress levels do not appear to have lasting effects, but the report avoids dealing with the unnecessary and undesirable nature of this stress in the first instance. It is disingenuous to suggest that “achievement pressures at school constituted the principal cause” (p. 49); though other factors are acknowledged, no attempt is made to recognise the extent to which such excessive pressures become a disincentive to

a significant (but unquantified) number of students and who opt out as a means of coping with stress.

Similarly, very diligent and consistent workers who know their worth through continuous assessment and feedback from teachers, often recognise intuitively that they cannot do themselves justice under examination conditions. It is increasingly the case also that many tertiary programmes utilise a range of continuous assessment strategies as integral to student evaluation. Their relatively token presence in the second-level sector is a poor preparation for dealing with these various modes of assessment and begs the question as to why they do not feature more prominently as part of the Leaving Certificate.

One of the significant constraints cited in seeking to address these concerns, presumably in an attempt to be fair to students as well as having an efficient and transparent system, is the likelihood of “major disruption to the school year” (p. 52). While this concern cannot be ignored, if it has been successfully circumvented in other jurisdictions, it should be possible to learn from

both the successes and limitations identified elsewhere. Commitment and tenacity, as well as allocation of resources, are prerequisites in the pursuit of creative and radical solutions.

At the time of publication, one of the recommendations in the report received much publicity though the media generally probably exaggerated the proposal. A submission from Dr. Newell, Director of the Central Applications Office (CAO) suggests that there should be "...no direct entry in this country by school leavers to the prestige healthcare professional courses but that aspirants should take a preliminary course in Life Sciences and then apply for a place in the particular healthcare discipline that they seek" (p.36). In his submission, reproduced as Appendix C of the report, he argues that this approach "... would be a much-needed impetus for the study of the sciences" (p. 179).

It is difficult to understand how this claim can be substantiated since the difficulty with "the sciences" appears to be the relatively small proportion of students taking these subjects for Leaving Certificate, thus there is a relatively small pool of potential science students for the tertiary

sector. Dealing with the perceived level of difficulty of Physics and Chemistry and the manner in which they are mediated to students would seem to be a more productive means of addressing this dilemma while greater equity in the level of grade awarded across subjects might also encourage more students to study these subjects for Leaving Certificate.

The Commission expresses reservations about the merits of his proposal on the grounds that a National Healthcare Admission Test to be taken by those wishing to study Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy and Radiography might lead to "'grind-type' preparation courses for the test". This assertion appears to miss the more general point that there is evidence that the high stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate already has this effect. Nevertheless, there is merit in suggesting that entry to new Life Sciences courses would be about 500 points, but this suggested reform deals with a small minority only of those who annually sit the Leaving Certificate.

While the suggestion that this proposal be examined in more detail by the

tertiary sector is laudable, and could relieve some stress on the most able students, it does little to make the Leaving Certificate a fairer assessment for the vast majority of students who submit to the annual grind of public examinations. Locating high stakes assessment elsewhere in the system is not a resolution of the dilemma created by the nature and timing of the Leaving Certificate.

A recommendation of particular interest to me relates to "reserved places" in Colleges of Education for Gaeltacht candidates who wish to become primary teachers. The Department of Education, under existing regulations, is entitled to allocate up to 10% of the total annual intake to the Colleges for these candidates. They do not have to achieve the same number of points as those who are allocated the remaining number of places. The report cites the historical precedent for this arrangement in post-independent Ireland, but appears not to question the underlying assumptions of this arrangement and their appropriateness at the beginning of the 21st century. Rather, it settles for broadening this category to include students who attend all-Irish medium second-level

schools or those who are in an all-Irish stream in a second-level school. This recommendation appears to compound the dilemma rather than question its premise.

Many of the report's recommendations are to be welcomed, particularly those in relation to a more comprehensive Career Guidance service to second-level schools. Extending the range of subject options for Senior Cycle is vital and the general idea of more common courses in the first year of tertiary education will enable students to keep their options open. Comments on greater access, pathways, and targets for major increases in provision for mature students are particularly welcome and overdue.

However laudable these recommendations, they cannot hide the fact that the "points system", with its high stakes dimensions and implications for teaching and learning, particularly at Senior Cycle, remains relatively undisturbed. Radical and creative solutions that respect individuals and their varied talents and that do not privilege efficiency and apparent objectivity over equity and justice are awaited.

Ciaran Sugrue
St. Patrick's College

A College of Dublin City University
Drumcondra
Dublin 9

*Walls of Silence:
Ireland's policy towards
people with a mental
disability*

Annie Ryan (1999)
Callan: Red Lion Press

This book is headlined as "A sad, disturbing account of the hidden squalor, neglect and injustice silently suffered by patients and staff of our mental hospitals throughout this century and of the failure of successive governments to respect the rights of these helpless citizens."

For once, these sensational headlines are not an exaggeration or misrepresentation of the reality experienced by this marginalised group within Irish society. Annie Ryan has provided a passionate and searing account of the systematic neglect of these people by Irish society over successive generations.

Annie Ryan provides a detailed account of the difficulties encountered by people within institutional settings. Lack of respect was clearly evident in the following report on a mental hospital in 1958: "patients undress in the day room downstairs. Then they

make their way up a stone staircase to the dormitories on the first and second floors. They have no clothing on them except their day shirts and in several cases they are naked." (p. 26)

People with a variety of difficulties including learning difficulties and epilepsy ended up in these institutions alongside people with psychiatric difficulties. Apparently, no distinction was made in the treatment and provision for this heterogeneous group of people. By the 1980's this anomalous situation was recognised by the Department of Health when a Working Party concluded that up to 2,500 people with learning difficulties were inappropriately placed in mental hospitals. Despite this belated recognition the vast majority remained within the institutions.

For Annie, the treatment of people within Irish mental hospitals was a personal issue which involved her own son who has a learning difficulty. This personal experience has led her to question not only the inadequate provision but the lack of accountable procedures. As a consequence of the dearth of accountability, institutions were allowed to develop with minimal public scrutiny. The

systematic neglect by successive governments is exemplified by the fact that for thirteen years the statutory obligation to furnish a report on mental hospitals was ignored. Perhaps more culpable was the failure of governments to implement the humane proposals to improve Irish mental hospitals contained in a series of reports.

'Walls of Silence' provides compelling evidence for the need to develop effective legislative safeguards for the most vulnerable members of our society who have been denied even the most basic rights attached to citizenship on a regular basis. Equally urgent is the need to enable these people to have a voice which will be listened to and acted upon. Annie Ryan has begun this process through breaking the silence surrounding her account of official neglect.

Michael Shevlin
Education Department,
TCD

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Conference Report

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E.S.A.I. Theme Conference

Educating the Educators November 1999

My attendance at the Theme Conference 'Educating the Educators' held on November 26th and 27th last in The Church of Ireland College of Education Rathmines marked my first experience of an ESAI conference. From both my perspectives as a practising teacher and as a researcher in education, I found the conference to be informative, enlightening and thought provoking.

Following the opening of the conference by Mr. Sydney Blain Principal of the Church of Ireland College, participants were treated to a memorable performance by pupils of the Kathryn Coffey Dramatic Arts Group who enacted scenes of life in the classroom from the pupils' perspective. This performance set a most practical context for the later discussion of Teacher Education issues.

The keynote addresses from Professor Maureen Hallinan and Professor John Coolahan, which followed, gave an excellent overall view of Teacher Education developments across the United States and Europe.

Saturday morning saw small work groups discussing core issues of Teacher Education

including Models for Teacher Education, The Role of Schools in Teacher Education, Educating Teachers for Change and Teacher Education for Life-long Learning.

My own attendance at the session on Teacher Education for Life-long Learning (Pre-primary) left me with a great sense of the burning issues of the early childhood sector including diversity of provision, training and quality issues. I found that participants got an overall perspective of the issues occurring in all workshop groups through the effective use of the rapporteur role at the plenary discussion. This lively plenary discussion brought a very successful conference to a close.

Congratulations to the conference organising team and to the staff and students of the Church of Ireland College of Education who extended a warm welcome to all conference participants.

Brian Murphy
Research Fellow,
Education Department,
U.C.C.

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College Bulletin Board

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Education Dept. NUIM

Aidan Mulkeen

The main news from the Education Department in NUIM is that Rose Malone has joined us as a lecturer in education, specialising in curriculum matters.

The first students on the Master of Education (School Leadership) course have completed the taught part of the course, and are now embarking on their thesis work.

The Education Department is delighted to be hosting the ESAI annual conference in April 2000, and we look forward to welcoming you all to Education House.

Information about the department and its courses can be found on the website at www.may.ie/academic/education.

Applied Social Studies, WIT

C. Niall McElwee

We appointed one new lecturer this year into the Dept. of Applied Social Studies called John Wells. He has joined us from Kings College London and specialises in management, social policy and mental health issues.

We just held an international conference on Vulnerable Populations with speakers from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. It was very well

attended and a book is forthcoming.

John Wells and Niall McElwee have just co-authored a new book (with M. Boyce, D. Ryan and C. Forkan) due to be published in the next six weeks called *Worthy Not Worthwhile? Choosing Careers in Caring Occupations* funded by the Dept. of Health and Children. Copies will be available from the Centre for Social Care Research here.

Niall McElwee has just published a number of papers in the area of child and juvenile prostitution, residential care in Ireland and mandatory reporting of child abuse. He is also giving papers at the forthcoming Irish

Association of Care Workers Annual Conference in Ennis 10-12th March on Registration and Certification of Social Care Workers.

Niall McElwee has founded and is editor of the *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*. This is a quarterly publication.

Education Department, QUB

Tony Gallagher

A report entitled *Report on the Selection Project*, is currently being prepared by the Graduate School of Education. It will include approximately 20 annex papers on various aspects of the system here.

A second report entitled *Selection Report:*

Comparative Aspects will be issued shortly afterwards.

It is hoped that all the reports will be available on the Department of Education website, but have yet to be finalised.

The website for the Graduate School of Education is:

www.qub.ac.uk/edu

Equality Studies Centre, U.C.D.

Kathleen Lynch

Public lecture *Breaking the Consensus on Social Partnership: strategies for the Left in the Celtic Tiger*
Kieran Allen, Sociology, UCD
Thursday, 30 March 2000
B101, Arts Building, UCD

The Equality Studies Centre is a core partner in one of the core research units in the newly established Institute for the Study of Social Change, UCD, funded by the HEA.

There are nine PhD students registered in the Equality Studies Centre at present; four of these are doing research on a variety of aspects of education.

Adult Education, U.C.D.

Kevin Hurley

In keeping with the aspirations in the Green Paper *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* and those expressed at its launch, UCD instituted a Certificate in Adult Education (Professional Development) within its

Adult Education programme this February. The certificate comprises six independent modules, three of which are being offered this Spring - Adults and Learning, Philosophy of Adult Education, Designing the Learning Experience. The final three modules - Contemporary Issues in Adult Education, Course Delivery and Supporting the Adult Learner - will be offered in the autumn. The certificate aims to work with adult education tutors towards a greater understanding of how adults learn, and how to design programmes which facilitate adult learning. Consideration is also given to the work of leading thinkers in the field of adult education with a view to prompting reflection on how their theses might be adapted to an Irish context.

This modular programme enables students to work at their own pace and to devise a schedule that best suits their individual needs. On completion of each module a student earns credit towards the certificate which is NUI accredited.

All of the modules were over-subscribed for the Spring term with high levels of interest shown from a diverse range of tutors and trainers. As a result, it is anticipated that modules for the certificate will be offered at a variety of times and venues during 2000 / 2001.

Faculty of Education, NCAD

Gary Granville

Recent publications:

1. *In Support of Change: an Evaluation of the LCVP In-career Development Programme* Gary Granville Oct 1999
2. *Poverty, the Curriculum and the Classroom* External Evaluation Report Gary Granville Feb 2000
3. *NCVA Review of Assessment* Report of External Advisor Gary Granville Jan 2000

Appointment:

Nuala Hunt has been appointed as Co-ordinator/Researcher for Continuing Education with a brief to review current practice and propose policy development in the area of continuing education and lifelong learning.

Community Arts education
A working group chaired by Dervil Jordan has completed its work towards the introduction of a new module or course in Community Arts education

Website:

<http://www.ncad.ie>

Notice Board

Words Alone: the teaching and usage of English in contemporary Ireland. UCD Press 2000
IR£9.95

Edited by Denis Bates, Conor Galvin, Desmond Swan & Kevin Williams

Available from Columba Mercier on 01-2942560.

Conor Galvin

Education Dept. UCD

MAKING AN IMPACT

In 1994 the ESAI organised a theme conference entitled '*Partnership and the Benefits of Learning: A Symposium on Philosophical Issues in Education Policy*' which was subsequently published, edited by Pdraig Hogan.

The idea of philosophers addressing the policy makers has been also adopted by Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain. It is bringing our series of pamphlets written in an accessible reader-friendly style designed to alert the wider educational community to the relevance of philosophy to educational policy.

These short volumes would also be of immense value to students of education - both student teachers and those doing other diplomas and degrees. The IMPACT series is published by the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain (PESGB) and edited by John White.

IMPACT 1 Andrew Davis
Educational Assessment: a critique of current policy
October 1999

IMPACT 2 Michael Luntley
Performance, Pay and Professionals: measuring the quality of teaching, a challenge to the government's proposals on teachers' pay
January 2000

IMPACT 3 Harry Brighouse
*Educational Equality and
the New Selective
Schooling*

January 2000

IMPACT 4 Christopher New
*Labour and the Future of
Winch Training*

February 2000

Pamphlets can be ordered at
£5.99 plus £1 p. and p.
(£4.50 plus £1 for members
of PESGB) from The
Education Bookshop, 20
Bedford Way, London
WC1H 0AL.

Tel: 0171-612-6050.

Email: bmbc@ioe.ac.uk

Topics of forthcoming
IMPACT papers

Sex Education - by David
Archard

The Place of Modern

*Foreign Languages in the
Curriculum* - by Kevin
Williams

further information:

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Tel: 0171 612 6050

Fax: 0171 612 6407

Email: bmbc@ioe.ac.uk

Kevin Williams,

on behalf of

Prof. John White
