

# ESAI Conference Theme 2023

## *Education, Change and Democratic Societies: New imperatives and creative responses*

In these times of war, rising anti-democratic politics, increased social and economic inequality, growing consequences of climate change and widespread social disruption there is a need to encourage education for democracy and change, to explore new imperatives and creative responses. Education for democracy raises awareness of ourselves and others, how we act in society, our freedom and 'the limits that our living together poses to our own freedom' (Biesta, 2020, p.96). Across the education sectors, from early childhood education through to higher education, there is much work to be done in exploring our capabilities as democratic citizens and how we might more fully realise our capacities to work with others in collaborative and sustainable ways (Riddle et al, 2022a).

Education plays an important role in the production and reproduction of rational communities and there is a need for more explicit attention to be paid to the ethical, political, and democratic dimensions of education (Biesta, 2010). Both formal and informal sites of education, across the lifecycle, provide microcosms for social change and political action (Riddle et al, 2022b). They provide contexts in which to explore how education can help to generate democratic interactions between people, enabling them to explore different ways of working with and relating to others, and promoting tolerance and understanding. They can create a deeper awareness of the ways in which individual actions and structural forces interact to promote positive responses and change.

A democratic education has at its core the building and nurturing of relationships. Relationality is central to both education and democracy and can often be witnessed in the interactions and collaborations between teachers and students and between students themselves. Our shared obligation to one another is central to both democratic citizenship and an education that fosters care, change and creative responses.

What is the potential of education in equipping young people to develop creative responses to the growing challenges and complexities of the twenty-first century? How can educational experiences support students to develop a disposition toward active, resilient citizenship to enable them to respond with increased confidence to uncertain futures? What new imperatives should guide

our leadership of change in our societies? What role can education play in supporting and encouraging us to take active roles in initiating change for the better in society? What creative responses are currently being implemented to lead social and climate justice? What steps are being taken to nurture relationships, care and tolerance in education?

The Educational Studies Association of Ireland invites scholars, practitioners, policymakers, emerging researchers and interested others from Ireland and internationally to come together at our face-to-face conference on March 30<sup>th</sup> to April 1<sup>st</sup> inclusive, and to reflect upon, debate and discuss the possibilities in education.

The conference theme ***Education, Change and Democratic societies: New imperatives and creative responses*** welcomes broad interpretation, interrogation, and a diverse range of responses. We invite papers, presentations and posters that consider the concept through a variety of lenses which include (but are not limited to) sociological, pedagogical, historical, religious, ethical, technological, philosophical, political and economic.

Hosted by **Stranmillis University College, Belfast**, the ESAI annual Conference 2023 will continue our strong tradition of providing a forum for the dissemination of research that considers past, present and potential contributions and influences at local, national and international levels.

#### References:

- Biesta, G.J.J. 2010. *Good Education in an Age of Measurement. Ethics, Politics, Democracy*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Biesta, G.J.J. 2020. 'Risking Ourselves in Education: Qualification, Socialisation, and Subjectification Revisited' in *Educational Theory*, Vol 70, Issue 1, pp 89-104
- Riddle, S., Bright, D. and Heffernan, A. (eds) 2022a. 'Education, policy and democracy: Contemporary challenges and possibilities' Editorial in *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, Vol 54, Issue 3, pp 241-244
- Riddle, S., Heffernan, A., Bright, D. 2022b. 'On the Need for a New Democracy of Education in a Post-Pandemic World' in Riddle, S., Heffernan, A., Bright, D. (eds) *New Perspectives on Education for Democracy: Creative Responses to Local and Global Challenges*. New York and London: Routledge.