

INTRODUCTION

Freedom to Learn

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This Special Issue – *Thinking the Yet to be Thought: envisioning autonomous and alternative pedagogies for socially just education* – arises from an international, cross-sector Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) seminar series. Both timely and in the best traditions of *FORUM*, it exemplifies the aspirations and grounded realities of a journal which has for over half a century been committed to truly comprehensive education 3-19. We are delighted to be able to present some of the fruits of that series in these articles and offer our admiring thanks to Catherine Montgomery and Max Hope for their editorial work and for their own fine contribution.

Not only does this set of articles confront the injustices, inequities and betrayal of dominant contemporary approaches to education and schooling, it names them in a manner which is intellectually acute and a disposition that speaks of integrity and hope. It also inspires and energises through the range and depth of grounded alternatives. There is an implicit insistence on Gandhi's exhortation that we must 'Be the change that you wish to see in the world', and many of the articles exemplify the point and possibility of that aspiration.

The diversity of authors mirrors the aspirations of the project itself. Here we have contributions from a range of identities; from different intellectual disciplines; from institutional and community contexts; from experienced authors; from those new to publishing and from young people themselves. And, as the editors compellingly point out, from all this diversity and creativity, a synergy suffuses the Special Issue in ways which bring us back to education in its most profound and enduring sense. In so doing it confronts the betrayal of a disgusting, demeaning and profoundly diminishing status quo. It exposes the lie of TINA (There Is No Alternative) and reminds us of the enduring truth that life-affirming, educational alternatives are possible, even within the most totalising hegemony.

In bringing these brief observations to a close I return to the work of the late Michael Armstrong and draw on two aspects of his remarkable scholarship, writing and teaching, which *FORUM* intends to honour next year both in the pages of this journal and in a special lecture dedicated to his memory.

The first aspect concerns how we choose to articulate our critique and name our aspirations. Michael Armstrong was not only one of the great educational intellectuals and radical practitioners of his generation; the resonance of his insights was invariably infused by the elegance and insistent beauty of his prose. One of the most important battles we have to fight concerns the manner, not just the matter, of our resistance. Too much contemporary academic writing is in thrall to the profligate calculus of neo-liberalism with its endless citations, sclerotic notions of evidence, and exhausted prose. How good, then, to see a range of styles and creative dispositions in this Special Issue. How good to see passages where the artistry of articulation, the rhythms and cadences of the prose are part of the meaning towards which it gestures.

The second aspect concerns the essential reciprocity of educational endeavour compellingly argued for in Michael Armstrong's seminal chapter 'The Role of the Teacher' (Armstrong, 1973) and in his jointly written *FORUM* article with Lesley King where they insist on the importance of

a kind of continual conversation [between student and teacher] – not a dialogue, discussion or argument but something more free-ranging, intimate, expressive and egalitarian, that is to say a conversation. Only through conversation ... [can] a teacher learn to identify and value the intellectual demands and interests of his students and a student those of his teacher. (Armstrong & King, 1976, p. 62)

Throughout his life and work the profoundly creative and joyful interdependence of teacher and taught, not just in terms of reciprocity of role, but also in terms of knowing each other as persons, weaves a tapestry of possibility towards which this Special Issue gestures with resolution and with joy. Not only does this Special Issue articulate an alternative view of the learner, it also illustrates and advocates an alternative view of what it means to be and become a different kind of teacher and the creative synergy between the two.

By the time this Special Issue goes to press the final event of the 'Thinking the Yet to be Thought' ESRC seminar series will have taken place. Its intention is to build on the network of over three hundred different academics, practitioners, teachers, parents, students, community workers, trade unionists, policy makers and others who have taken part. Should you be inspired by some of what you are about to read and wish to be part of the future network please do get in touch with either Catherine Montgomery at the University of Bath (c.montgomery2@bath.ac.uk) or Max Hope at the University of Hull (max.hope@hull.ac.uk).

References

- Armstrong, M. (1973) The Role of the Teacher, in P. Buckman (Ed.) *Education without Schools*, pp. 49-60. London: Souvenir Press.
- Armstrong, M. & King, L. (1976) Schools within Schools: the Countesthorpe experience, *FORUM*, 18(2), 62-67.

