Editorial

Going their own ways: educational developments in Scotland and Wales

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After some years of declining health, the onset of which forced him to step back from regular involvement in the journal, *FORUM*'s long-time editor, Clyde Chitty, died while this number was being prepared. We remember his irrepressibility, urbanity and charm, and his lifelong dedication to the cause of comprehensive education, a cause he tenaciously advanced in his many writings.

Optimism about human educability fuelled Clyde's advocacy of the comprehensive system. Profoundly democratic in its implications, such optimism confronts current education policy root and branch. It propels a commitment to re-conceive formal education and ameliorate its conditions so that each and every child and young person can learn without limit. Clyde wasn't alone in holding this view. 'It needs to be stressed,' he wrote in *Eugenics, Race and Intelligence in Education*, 'that there are groups of classroom teachers working in numbers of countries, including England, who have rejected … notions of fixed ability and are determined to base their teaching on an unshakeable belief in everybody's capacity to learn'.

Clyde had an insider's knowledge of the way the selective education system failed individual students and the role such a system plays in perpetuating social injustice. As a teacher in a secondary modern school he was compelled to consider questions of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and student 'voice' in relation to the non-selective system he was convinced should prevail. He was forced to think through the implications for policy of the comprehensive principle and how that principle might be systematically realised. As an academic and campaigner, he scrutinised and criticised the education policy of all political parties on this basis. Teachers and others who today reject the assumptions about fixed innate 'ability' or 'potential' that serve to justify a continuing secondary modern/grammar school divide in parts of the country, as well as the more insidious segregation embodied everywhere in 'ability' streams or sets or tables, will draw on Clyde's writings as they plan and shape a better educational future.

At Clyde's funeral, his friend and colleague Richard Harris, a longstanding member of the *FORUM* editorial board, gave the eulogy. Richard's words open this number. Derek Gillard, himself an erstwhile board member, offers a personal tribute. Nigel Gann thinks about the effects of educationally generated social segregation, and how Clyde's legacy of writing and activism can be built on.

There follow seven articles addressing aspects of education policy in Scotland and

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Wales. Since education became a devolved matter in 1999, both nations have opted to pursue policies whose course separates them from that which England's politicians hold to. As a result, spending per pupil has significantly risen in Scotland, and teacher/pupil ratios at primary and secondary level remain most favourable there. Neither in Scotland nor in Wales do SATs and league tables blight the educational experience for pupils and teachers alike. The damaging drive for 'full academisation' has been only England's fate. Walter Humes is anything but complacent, though, in his clear-eyed consideration of Scottish education's distinctiveness. Might Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, now well over 10 years old, need shaking up? Is the comprehensive principle north of the border more established in appearance than reality? Humes argues the need for a cultural change, not simply a structural one, if confidence in the system is to be rekindled. We have been too long complicit in our own containment.

Lynn McNair is sure, as she puts it, that 'the Scottish government is committed to giving each child the best possible start'. Her article highlights tensions which ensue from the struggle to meet this admirable aim. She notes how, in discussions of the curriculum, an understanding that learning is non-linear yet continuous is being eroded by an increased focus on benchmarking and attainment. She calls out the pedagogic harm which stems from overvaluing quantitative measures of educational success, and cautions against recourse to 'a narrow developmental lens' when talking about children's progress. She highlights parental concern about the school starting age and the notion of 'readiness' for school, and applauds the Scottish government's commitment to the educational value of play. This stance by government owes much to the work of activist parents and practitioners.

In a closely argued article, Chris Holligan castigates the way teacher-professionalism has been recast by a technocratic British state — a vital matter to which *FORUM* will return later in the year. He shares with Walter Humes a recognition that the Scottish government's education strategy sets out to foster in teachers a compliant rather than a critical practice. He discerns in the government's education research policy what he calls 'a politically conservative pro-business commitment'. This is evident, for example, in the bias against qualitative approaches to research, and in the way the 2017 policy document, whose language and framing the article carefully examines, leaves out of account teachers' working knowledge.

There is little agitation in Scotland around the right of parents to choose a school for their child. Aveek Bhattacharya lays out concisely how and why the issue of 'parental choice' has not emerged thus far as a policy objective for the Scottish government. His informative and measured article addresses the school admissions process, the ambiguous influence of 'choice' on attainment, and how the question of which school one's child will attend is not, yet, quite as fraught in Scotland as it tends to be in England.

In Wales, significant reform of the curriculum is under way. Glenda Tinney puts

this reforming drive in context, and draws attention to some of its implications for assessment and pedagogy. Her article focuses on the early years phase and on outdoor learning. She considers what effects policy reform may have at a practical level, and notes how settings without access to green spaces or the natural world can nevertheless enable valuable kinds of outdoor learning. She reframes the question of risk in relation to such learning, argues for the importance of valuing practitioners' voices, and urges the extension of opportunities for outdoor learning to all children and young people, not just those in the first few years of compulsory education.

Caroline Lewis turns her attention to higher education in Wales, and in particular to the impact on higher education policy of globalisation and 'internationalisation'. The sector has increasingly been seen as a vital driver of economic as well as educational growth. Universities are subject more and more to the demand that they inculcate students not only with knowledge and understanding, and ideally with a critical disposition, but also with attributes deemed necessary if they are to sell their labour in the globalised capitalist economy. Caroline Lewis considers the series of Welsh government higher education policies over the past decade which tend in this direction. She tracks an instrumentalist discourse at work whose sway can only thwart the progress of more holistic and emancipatory educational projects.

Policy which furthers educational equity occupies Mel Ainscow. What has happened to it in Scotland, Wales and England over recent years? His synoptic article reviews important initiatives taken in all three countries, whose outcomes, in his view, underscore the powerful influence wielded by cultural context. To advance what is equitable it may prove necessary to challenge cherished norms or break with the consensus. Serious pursuit of equitable education requires that schools collaborate among themselves and with other organisations. Practitioner knowledge and understanding are vital resources: they should be tapped. Mel Ainscow warns against narrowing the educational offer made to young people, for example by privileging particular subjects or teaching to the test. He hopes for a future in which greater trust and scope for action are extended to those who are closest to the challenges and so better informed about how these might be met.

In the second half of this number, articles address aspects of pedagogy and policy less directly rooted in national concerns. Rupert Knight and Daryn Egan-Simon each write about the importance for learning of pupils' talk. In particular, what Rupert Knight calls pupils' 'authentic' talk may be of great value in fostering further understanding of issues of social justice that matter to pupils themselves. Such talk arises when pupils feel able to share their views on their own terms while having confidence that their words will be listened to and, where possible, acted upon. His article offers examples of teachers consciously enabling 'authentic' talk, responding to it, sustaining it in the classroom, and ensuring it has an outcome beyond the lesson itself.

A similar spirit of inquiry and advocacy, and of confidence in young people, informs Daryn Egan-Simon's article. He observes Year 5 pupils talking together about a film they saw as part of their work on what the school terms 'social justice citizenship education' (SJCE). He offers examples of how pupils shared understanding, contested it and purposefully extended it through discussion. He outlines the nature of SJCE and shows how film can be used to promote critical and cumulative shared meaning-making. Such an approach helps lay the ground for the kind of authentic talk Rupert Knight recommends, and so opens up for young people the prospect of increased social agency.

In a series of roaming and sometimes provocative reflections, David Kazamias thinks about the importance for learning of play, and especially of imaginative play. He draws on writers from Michael Armstrong and bell hooks to Maria Montessori and Friedrich Hegel as he sketches how the idea of play has developed in Europe. He contrasts immersive online gaming and the legitimised violence of contemporary sport with the fruitful untrammelled aimlessness of playing. He wonders who gets to play, what German Romanticism saw in play and what late capitalism has made of it, especially in regard to schooling.

An 'authoritarian' education of the kind criticised by Diane Reay in our previous number (*FORUM* 64(3)) has no time for play. Matthew Clarke and Charlotte Haines Lyon join the debate. They consider how 'evil' — a term they use advisedly — is inherent in authoritarian approaches based on overstrict discipline, 'zero tolerance' and the application of immediate sanctions to enforce compliance (from teachers as well as from students) in pursuit of a narrowly instrumental and exam-focused schooling. Isolation booths afford a prime example of what they mean, and the authors detail and criticise the use of such booths in school. Clarke and Haines Lyon are alert to the 'white logic' which its proponents, some of whom are of colour, make use of to justify and promulgate authoritarian educative approaches and a 'no excuses' outlook. We need to think again, say the authors, even when we believe what we are doing is for someone else's good.

Students can suffer in school in many ways. John Quicke considers how schools have tried to address the crisis of mental ill health among young people. He is not unmindful that the pressure a school can impose on its students to 'perform and conform' (in Clarke and Haines Lyon's phrase) can add to this ill-health. He considers forms of characteristic response, which he terms the adaptive and the progressive. He suggests a whole-school approach is preferrable, and notes how this can open up opportunities for curriculum innovation. But he is also mindful of its drawbacks. In the second half of his article he looks at 'education for self-identity' and how schools can encourage 'good stories about the self' to be told.

Alan Parr returns us to the potency which 'play' retains in anyone's education. In contrast to David Kazamias's broad historical sweep, he retrieves the work of a single

teacher, Harriet Johnson, who taught in a Suffolk village school at the turn of the 20th century. Her practice rooted itself in 'the dramatic method', in part a kind of immersive imagining and role-play, about which she wrote after her career was prematurely ended by the sexism of the time. Her ideas and their educational effectiveness enthused no less a person than Edmond Holmes, then His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools. Holmes wrote at some length about Johnson's work in his vibrant book *What Is and What Might Be*. Alan Parr charts the neglect of these ideas across the mid-century, and their return in the shape of Dorothy Heathcote's practice, and in what has come to be known as 'mantle of the expert'.

Prompted by reading Geoffrey Marshall's book *What Is Education For? And other writings*, which was reviewed in the last number, Derek Gillard shares in a letter his memories of teaching in primary schools across three decades. He pays tribute to 'what has been lost in the drive for conformity and competition'. A note from Geoffrey Marshall's son, Charles, gives updated information on the availability of his father's book.

This number is rounded out by reviews of three other equally worthy books. The last of these bears witness to Clyde Chitty's conviction that there continue to be teachers whose work is founded in an optimistic conception of human educability, one which, against all discouragement, finds ways to transform their pupils' and students' learning.

One of the backroads I sometimes take into Norwich runs for a stretch beside the River Yare at Marlingford. Clyde Chitty rented a house in this village for some months in the 1960s. Instructed by his landlord, the local squire and scion of Marlingford Hall, to vote Conservative in the forthcoming general election, Clyde demurred, perhaps politely. Times needed changing for the better and he would do his part.