CHANGE: TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION

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CHANGE

TRANSFORMATIONS IN EDUCATION

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Editorial

This edition of CHANGE presents contributions from China, Australia, Norway and England and New Zealand. The issues canvassed in these papers indicate the diversity of research being undertaken in these countries. The papers represent work being undertaken in the fields of sociology, psychology, cultural studies, comparative education and curriculum. The work presented is indicative of investigations into higher education research in China, practitioner research that develops the idea of a knowledge building school, investigations into equity that relate to gender and class in Australia and New Zealand, rethinking leadership and methodologies for investigating educational leaders at work and finally an examination of past Higher School Certificate English Exams in New South Wales.

What do these contributions tell us about current education research being undertaken in these countries? First and foremost, they indicate the diversity of methodologies and interests of academics working in the field of education. Second, these papers demonstrate the levels of activity of academic practice. From China we get a sense of the broad political project of research into higher education, From Norway, England and Australia we see how academics are working with practitioners to better understand practice. In Australia and New Zealand, researchers are trying to better understand how issues of gender and class affect student performance and students’ perceptions of their performance. Finally, in various ways, we get a sense that education research does make a difference to education policy and practice. It informs the policy making process, it helps to communicate ideas about practice to various constituencies and contributes to the critique of taken for granted aspects of education in order to theorise the field.

The first paper by Pan, Li and Chen from China provides a chronicle of higher education research in China. The authors argue that since the mid 1990s, China’s higher education research has entered a stage of steady development and improvement. Research into theoretical and practical problems of reform and development have been the main focus. Importantly, this research has had a significant impact decision-making and in the education reform process itself. Many researchers elsewhere would be more than happy for their research to have such an impact on government policy.

The paper by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler provides an account the work of two school-based facilitators: an external consultant in the form of researcher in residence and the Director of Learning. Both use forms of practitioner research as a teacher development strategy. The paper describes the impact that these positions had on the development of an active school based research community.
Roy Nash’s paper reports on the Progress at School Project in New Zealand. This project is designed to investigate school effects, found progress at school to be associated with non-cognitive dispositions, most importantly aspiration, self concept and a willingness to be subject ed to the discourse of schooling. The paper presents some preliminary results into the conditions of differential attainment based on responses from a sample of secondary school pupils who had been identified as having demonstrated positive or negative relative progress. Using Bourdieu’s theory of habitus and the stratified self, Nash develops the idea of the dispositions of the self, which, he argues, direct the individual to behave in accordance with socialised habits. Nash makes the important point that a school where students are treated unfairly will depress their aspirations, their self confidence, and their willingness to accept the order of the school as legitimate.

Helen Watt presents the results of a longitudinal study of three sequential cohorts of students over three years to explore adolescent personal and social gender stereotypes about maths. Students rated the extent to which they perceived maths as more suitable to males than to females (or to both equally), as well as the extent to which they believed ‘society’ perceived maths as more suited to either gender. Watt reports that despite most students’ ratings favouring neither gender, stereotypes favoured boys for maths when stereotyping occurred. She goes on to argue that social stereotypes appeared to be more prevalent than personal stereotypes, perhaps reflecting cultural change and indicating perhaps a degree of political correctness on the part of students’ self perceptions.

Neil Cranston in his paper on revolutionary leadership seeks to raise debate about issues of leadership, strategy, structures and culture of many contemporary education systems. He argues that past reforms have failed to deliver the required changes to deal with uncertain and rapidly changing political agendas. In response to this problem, Cranston suggests the need for new mindsets that, at their core, fundamentally challenge and change the culture, the principles, values and power relationships in education systems. Such shifts, Cranston suggests, will provide the opportunity to generate new ideas that lead to doing things differently and put student learning as the driver of any new education initiative.

The penultimate paper by Møller and Spindler presents research from a comparative study undertaken in Norway and England. This paper explores the language games implicit in the interactions between researchers and school principals in the process of co-construction. It examines how ‘rules’ that structure interactions between researchers and school principles were established and sustained during the course of interviews. The issue of power is important, for as Møller and Spindler observe, the analysis of the language games inherent in the interviews has implications for the research process in general and school leadership in particular.

The final contribution to this edition is by Gary Rosser and is concerned with examining past Higher School Certificate (HSC) English examinations with an eye to
critiquing the questions that were asked and the criteria by which they were answered. Rosser argues that since 1965 the HSC English examination has attempted to call forth a style of writing that will allow students to 'pass' as members of an upper middle class. He maintains that this has produced a particular kind of knowledge and given preference to a particular kind of individual.

PROFESSOR JUDYTH SACHS, EDITOR