The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland
Robert Anderson, Mark Freeman and Lindsay Paterson (2015) (Eds.),
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Reviewed by Daniel Murphy

*The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland* is one of a number of Edinburgh Histories published by EUP. Rather than a comprehensive history, covering all aspects in all ages, the nineteen chapters offer a selection of ages and stages, brought to the reader with the voices of different authors - evidence of the increasing depth and range of study in recent years. The editors are well placed to make such a selection, each with a record of distinguished scholarship in the field.

In early chapters, Matthew Hammond and Kimm Curran introduce us to a medieval Scotland whose scholars and clerics were closely connected to their European counterparts. Elizabeth Ewan narrates how, as Scotland's wealth and trade grew in the late medieval period, Universities and burgh schools were established and trade apprenticeships formalised. Stephen Holmes, writing of the century of the Reformation, declares that 'the traditional sectarian narrative of the decisive nature of the Protestant Reformation of 1560 ... needs to be discarded' (p. 76) and a new, more evolutionary account of the continuity of education in specific localities based on sound research should take its place. In their introduction the editors identify 'accessibility' as just such an important continuity, running across the centuries. But access, they argue, is perhaps a less prominent feature of the Scottish story than the continuing commitment to a liberal education - 'an ethical ideal, and an eschewing of directly practical immediate purposes' (p. 3). This classical model, nurtured in the medieval universities, survived the Reformation, is evident in the liberal curriculum of the post-1696 parish schools and can be traced right through to the eight 'modes' of the Standard Grade curriculum. Now, Paterson argues in the chapter entitled 'Democracy or Intellect: The Scottish Educational Dilemma of the 20th Century', the intellectual rigour of the modern liberal curriculum is under pressure from those who define learning in terms of accessibility and 'practical utility' (p. 239). Humes, in the concluding chapter, sees similarly competing forces at play in the design and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence - is the new curriculum 'content, process or product?'

Scotland is not alone in struggling to balance the potentially competing demands of accessibility and high intellectual standards, but in this volume many more particular details of the Scottish experience are introduced in the pictures drawn by authoritative experts. Legal education 1650-1850, Universities in the enlightenment era, Adult Education 1750-1850, Gaelic Education since 1872, the extraordinary engagement of the teaching profession in the research tradition forged around SCRE in the years after 1920, University students 1889-1945 - these and other chapters delve deep into the local particularities which lie beneath the generalisations of the Scottish 'myth' - of a country unique in the quality and accessibility of its educational system.
David Northcroft's account of education in the North East gives ready evidence of this variety of educational provision within Scotland. James Dick, a native of Forres made a fortune in the West Indies. In just the manner bemoaned by Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller in her demand for reparations for slavery during David Cameron's recent visit to Jamaica, Dick then reinvested that money in his home country, leaving a substantial legacy to pay grants to parish schoolmasters who had University-level qualifications, who passed teacher examinations in core subjects and were judged in regular inspections to be diligent in their work. These grants raised teachers' salaries in the parish schools of Aberdeenshire, Banffshire and Moray and raised standards in their schools, a development which Northcroft makes clear chimed in with increasing rural prosperity and changes in landholding associated with concurrent agricultural improvements. The North East offers some real exemplification of the Scottish educational 'myth' of 'socially inclusive classrooms and selfless graduate masters', a tradition continued in contemporary instances of the 'emotive literature of school reminiscence' (p.187). There is, however, equally plenty of evidence of features common to all Scotland of a system that was 'preoccupied with the forced feeding of the occasional bright lad and ... content to impose on the rest a diet of dry academicism and pietistic subjugation, policed by the swinging tawse and the bitter lash of the sermonising tongue.' (p.181) The 'swinging tawse' was such a notable feature of so many Scottish classrooms until the 1980s that it is surprising not to find it mentioned here more often.

Northcroft's chapter is one of several, including the editors' introduction, in which a close link is established between the Scottish educational system and Scottish people's sense of their Scottish identity - what it means to be 'Scottish'. While influencing, and influenced by, international developments and globalising social and economic forces, education in Scotland is now, as much as ever, closely bound up with Scottish identity. While a great deal of modern scholarship, quoted in several parts of the collection, thoroughly debunks the more self-serving aspects of the 'Scottish myth', Northcroft rightly reminds us, by quoting the story of Charles Mair, a Banffshire grocer and farmer whose seven sons all graduated with first class honours in Classics from Aberdeen University, that 'the stories people tell of their social experience compel the imagination and engage our sense of common identity in a way that the bureaucratic systems-speak of Curriculum for Excellence.. can never do.' (p187). No matter the broad generalities in which the historian hopes to encapsulate 'Scottish education', or its contribution to Scottish identity, it is in the particular, the individual experience, that it comes to life.

This is an illustrative, not a comprehensive collection, but its impressive scholarship takes the reader into a depth and range of sources which must be mined if a comprehensive understanding is to be gained. The footnotes offer access to a treasure trove of such particular nuggets of insight and understanding. At an eye-watering £125, the volume may not be quite right for the Christmas stocking of a teacher friend, or even an overstretched school History Department, but the promised e.reader version may be more accessible, while all University, College and public reference libraries in Scotland should be encouraged to stock this important work.
Everyone’s future: lessons from fifty years of Scottish comprehensive schooling.


Review by Donald Gillies

In a time of a plethora of high-profile anniversaries, the 50th anniversary of the introduction of comprehensive schooling in Scotland has passed without much public comment. This publication is both welcome and timely, therefore, but provides much more than simply a brief history and evaluation of comprehensivisation. Its 11 chapters cover a variety of important issues for Scottish schooling, particularly in the light of the developing, if unbalanced, angst about standards of attainment in Scotland. The book itself is tinged with considerable poignancy, its publication coming so soon after the untimely death of David Raffe, one of its key contributors and a crucial figure in the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh, the driving force behind this publication. The book opens with a warm tribute to Professor Raffe who is much missed in the world of educational research.

The book is both informative and stimulating and, while circumspect and suitably cautious in its claims, provides convincing evidence of some of the successes of comprehensive schooling as well as the challenges it has faced and continues to face. Indeed, one of the most compelling points in the book is raised in the introduction: while the authors focus on the comprehensive school, they are keen to explore the extent to which the values of comprehensive education have been realized. (I see an essay question for my students forming in my brain already …).

The book is marked by the quality of output we have come to expect from the CES: informed, well-researched, and infused with academic integrity. Teachers, researchers, and academics will all benefit from reading and returning to this text and its underpinning research data. Politicians, both local and national, will also find it rewarding and challenging.

Chapter 1 by Daniel Murphy provides a good introduction which plots the uneven development of the comprehensive school in Scotland and reminds us of the resistance which marked its introduction. What emerges here and elsewhere in the text is just how significant ‘placing requests’ have been, particularly in the Glasgow area, in skewing the social composition of schools, and so compromised the related comprehensive hopes. Chapter 2 is a very short chapter in which the editors explore the values of comprehensive schooling and some of the tensions, contradictions, and inevitable compromises which result in attempting to realise democratic ideals. There is a welcome call to look again at the issue of ‘fraternity’ or ‘community’ in schooling and this is a refrain which recurs in the book. Indeed, it is one of the successes the authors claim for comprehensive schooling that schools are much more inclusive and humane today than they were when reported
by Gow and McPherson’s deeply unsettling publication *Tell Them From Me*, a generation ago.

In Chapter 3 Croxford and Howieson produce some promising evidence of young people’s improved sense of enjoyment in school – sharply decreased levels of truancy being an encouraging symptom – but also highlight continuing disquiet about academic bias, exam domination, and questionable curriculum relevance. Indeed, a further recurring theme in the book is the prevailing problem with the status and place of vocational education. It is an issue David Raffe addresses in Chapter 5 where he presents a thoughtful case for a form of baccalaureate award which would go beyond traditional academic attainment and embrace wider vocational imperatives.

Cathy Howieson in Chapter 4 looking at the compulsory stage, and Linda Croxford looking at inequalities in Chapter 6, show how aspects of comprehensive schooling, and particularly the Standard Grade system, did serve to increase more equal outcomes for Scottish youngsters but how inequality is now seen more starkly at the post-compulsory stage. Deeper societal divisions are now played out more obviously at that point: although comprehensive schools have made some inroads, the result has been that stark educational inequality is merely delayed rather than unsettled. Murphy and Raffe present an excellent chapter on school governance to conclude Part 2 of the book.

In Part 3, reflections on the comprehensive ‘system’ in the other home nations are presented and they serve as provocative in their own right as well as a useful set of comparators for the Scottish experience. One of the problems here, and one which the authors repeatedly raise, is the diminishing set of data being gathered in Scotland on a systematic longitudinal basis. The Scottish School Leavers’ Survey, for example, ceased in 2005 and so finding the evidence with which to evaluate the comprehensive system has become increasingly difficult. David Raffe summarises the problem on p.107: a strong knowledge base and an independent research capacity are essential ‘for any system that genuinely aspires to evidence-based improvement’.

Overall, this is an excellent addition to the canon on Scottish education. As a whole, it is a stimulating, challenging read but each individual chapter is valuable and admirable in its own right. A welcome and thorough index means that it can be easily referred to, as it should, by anyone in Scottish education and anyone elsewhere with an interest in the comprehensive ideal.
Schooling Scotland. Education, Equity and Community

ISBN: 978-1-908931-61-0  (129pp. £7.99pb)

Reviewed by Anne Pirrie

This is an engaging and lively book about schooling in Scotland that considers issues of autonomy and control, freedom and equality in relation to various dimensions of school life. It is written for a general audience with a view to widening the debate on the complexities and challenges facing the school system in Scotland. The central tenet of the book is that people matter in school education. The author draws upon over forty years’ experience at various levels in school system, and has amplified this by touring schools all over Scotland. The School Tour Journal and extensive online references or each chapter are available at http://www.postcardsfromscotland.co.uk/book7.html and are intended to complement the book with an ‘up-to-date, real life portrait of the variety and excitement of the work going on up and down the country.’

The book comprises five chapters that addresses major issues for the school system: equity; the structure and organisation of the contemporary school system; learning and living in community; school leadership, management and systems of accountability; and the future of schooling within the framework of a new alignment of communities and their schools. The brief concluding chapter draws together the recommendations that flow from the preceding chapters.

Chapter 1 opens with a vivid description of the diversity of the ‘mini-communities’ of comprehensive schools in Scotland as a prelude to a lively and evidence treatment of inequalities, including the multiple disadvantages faced by the youngest children starting primary school, especially those from poorer backgrounds. The treatment of inequalities that result from poverty begins with a powerful account of the contrasting fortunes of two individual children from very different backgrounds. The author draws upon a range of statistical evidence to illustrate the obsturacy of social inequalities and their negative impact on educational outcomes. Murphy pinpoints one of the weaknesses of an approach that puts education rather than social policy at the forefront of combatting the negative effects of persistent inter-generational poverty: ‘The very things that improve the chances of the very poorest – individual support, continuing professional development for teachers, a warm and supportive ethos, high expectations – also improve the learning of other pupils’ (p. 28). In short, the current schooling system reinforces the effects of inequality. Murphy distinguishes between weak and strong forms of equality: equality of opportunity and equality of outcome before considering equity across diverse school communities and the impact of parental choice and the potential benefits of greater collaboration between the public and private sectors. Chapter 2 provides a clear and critical overview of four key policies that have informed Scottish schooling over the last decade, and proceeds with a couple of vignettes that illustrate the complexity of inclusion. The complexities of collaborative working across public services are also considered. There follows a section on Curriculum for Excellence, reprising some
of the criticisms that have been levelled against this initiative since its inception. The author provides a cogent outline of his misgivings about the senior phase, including prospects for the less academically able. The chapter concludes with a section on school improvement, the role of the Inspectorate and advantages and disadvantages of the current system of inspections. Chapter 3 owes a considerable debt to the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray in its treatment of community. There follows a section on motivation. This is the source of the one slightly discordant note in the book, in that Murphy takes a rather uncritical view of ‘autonomous’ learners, although he later makes it clear that motivation has a social element. The notion of autonomy sits rather uneasily with a vision of education that pervades the book, the first priority of education identified by MacMurray, namely learning to live in personal relation to other people. In an interesting section on the hidden curriculum, Murphy makes some very interesting observations on the impact of labels such as ‘foundation’, ‘credit’ and ‘Higher’ when they are used to describe people and classes rather than levels of qualification.

The penultimate chapter addresses the issue of who is in charge of schooling, charting ‘how the neat lines of responsibility of the official account are messed up by the complexity of life in the school community.’ The author observes how in a small country like Scotland ‘the insider discussions of the Scottish policy community often leave the civic community behind’ (p. 88). He makes some interesting suggestions for reform of the current governance arrangements before considering the opportunities and constraints facing contemporary school leaders and the deficiencies of current accountability structures. The final chapter strikes an optimistic note while pointing out the limitations of an approach that demands ever more of teachers school leaders and indeed pupils. The solution proposed here is a nuanced reflection on the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child: namely, that schooling ‘needs to be reconfigured as part of a wider educational project that embraces the whole of civil society and in which ‘school community learning hubs’ play a key role’. However, the bottom line (to use a metaphor that reminds us of the omnipresence of the market) is that education is ‘not an engineering job. It is personal and human.’

**Educating the More Able Student: what works and why**


**Reviewed by Margaret Sutherland**

Across the globe the education of highly able pupils can be viewed as contentious and thwart with difficulty and it continues to be debated among researchers and teachers alike. It is subject to accusations of elitism and to being misunderstood at best and ignored at worst. Undeniably, this group of learners need to be considered by teachers when they are planning challenging learning experiences for all, therefore the premise of this book – how to ensure the needs of the most able are met in our schools – is a good one.
The authors are very clear in their foreword about the scope of the book. They rightly, do not claim that this book is a global survey of organisation and practice in schools. Neither has it been written as an academic text or journal article. Instead it is in essence the views of two people who have been engaged in working with teachers and learners over decades and who consider various approaches to school and class organisation from different parts of the globe. Together the authors have gained impressive experience through working in diverse contexts. For 40 years, Stephen has worked in “three of the academically most successful independent schools in the UK” (xi) while Warwick has worked in inner city comprehensive schools for 20 years before setting up London Gifted and Talented 10 years ago. He has also worked in schools worldwide. They argue that this shared expertise provides a unique contribution to the debate around the education of more able pupils, as it is the first time authors from the private and public sectors have collaborated in such a venture. Undoubtedly their particular experiences will have influenced and formed their views on the education of highly able pupils.

However it is important to contextualise both this expertise and the claims made within the book. Throughout the book and particularly in Chapter 3, the implication is that the UK is an inclusive educational and legislative entity when in fact there are four education systems with concomitant legislation being in existence across the four nations that make up the UK. Unfortunately this means that statements are made about, for example, The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted), General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), academies, National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth (NAGTY), grammar schools, Excellence in Cities, Teach First, sixth form schools, National Curriculum - all of which apply to England but are presented as through they are applicable across the whole of the UK and paint a “national picture”. This is disappointing and does not wholly reflect the situation across the country. Admittedly the complexity of discussing all four nation’s educational approaches would be a complex task within one text but an acknowledgement that the discussions focus on the English picture rather than the national scene where appropriate would provide a more accurate picture, especially as developments for high ability have been different across the nations.

There is much to commend the book and refreshingly it doesn’t get “bogged down” in the mire of labels and identification. In this regard I agree with the authors when they contest that for too long too much attention has been paid to “identification and naming” rather and “developing provision for talents” (p. 5).

From the outset the authors are keen to keep the focus on practice and the elusive concept of “what works/does not work” at the forefront of discussions although the focus of the book is more on school and system organisation for more able pupils rather than classroom practice and pedagogy per se. They review/overview techniques and approaches used across the globe including for example enrichment, extension, the Renzulli approach, pull out schemes, acceleration and compaction. Explanations of these approaches and indeed every chapter concludes with “questions for further thought” which would be a useful starting point for critique and discussion within teacher education.
Perhaps inevitably there are statements made throughout the book that may hold true in some situations but not in all. For example, the authors claim “teachers in highly selective schools have become used to the possibility that some or all of their pupils might know more than they do, and that that situation is to be welcomed” (p. 51). This could be said of some staff in state schools too and, from experience, I know there are staff in selective schools who are not comfortable with such a scenario therefore the reader has to critically consider the evidence for such statements and be open to thinking that there might be many different kinds of teachers within each educational context.

For laudable reasons, the authors set out to focus on “what works” and while it is right that this book did not become enmeshed in age old debates there none-the-less remains some hard issues that are acknowledged, but not given the attention they perhaps deserve. For example, the authors are clearly aware of the perennial but hugely important issues related to poverty, the global south and access to resources but they are left hanging throughout the book and would have merited fuller discussion.

When considering the Robinson Centre for Young Scholars, the authors present the case for early entry to University and the approaches adopted by the centre. They talk about the importance of parents in the child’s education and state that when the children attending the centre at night return to their parents it “at a stroke reduces and controls the number of temptations young people might be exposed to” (p. 60). They go on to acknowledge that this approach assumes that children are from a “strong family unit and conventionally stable home”. Equally, it is acknowledged on page 81 that while the Education Programme for Gifted Youth based in the University of Stanford has much to commend it, it has not managed to “solve the inclusion agenda issues”.

Chapter 11 states “one of the starkest features to emerge from this study is the crucial and overwhelming importance of the teacher in the success of any scheme for the most able” (p. 118). The rest of the chapter discusses teacher training, resources and the cluster approach. Again, “teacher training” is viewed through the English lens and the chapter takes no account of the many initiatives taking place, certainly in Scotland, within teacher education, many of which are doing some of the things the authors espouse – for example cluster schools working together. The case is made for gifted education to be included in all teacher-training courses. Of course authors writing about dyslexia or autism or attention deficit hyper activity disorder might demand the same thing and in part, this dilemma is discussed towards the end of the book. Getting more able learners onto the agenda is indeed crucial but they need to be there alongside everyone else.

I enjoyed reading this book and found myself agreeing strongly in parts while simultaneously questioning and challenging other parts. As with many issues in education there is no one answer to what works in the education of highly able pupils and what appears to “work” in one context may not in another. The clarion call for the needs of highly able learners to be met is to be welcomed and the book hints towards the end that a focus on pedagogy and learning and teaching may help us make learning and teaching better for all. Under graduate and post graduate programmes that encourage pre and post service teachers to challenge
accepted ideas about ability and who can use theory and research to critique ideas, policy and practice will find this book a useful text.