

## Editorial

This is the third and final edition of volume two of Educational**utures**: The Journal of the British Education Studies Association. It follows the sixth annual BESA Conference that was held at Bangor University. The conference, as those of previous years, was a vibrant and exciting event which brought together a wide spectrum of interests and views from the field of Education Studies. The conference title was 'Education at the Fringes' and it was very interesting to hear the perspectives of those from the Celtic areas that make up Britain. In addition, at times it was salutary to be made aware of how the effects of colonial domination have influenced all of our recent histories.

Education Studies is a critical approach to the study of education and so draws from what is a very broad field. The conferences and the BESA journal reflect this. They include papers on formal and informal education processes from birth, through the compulsory education systems, onto post compulsory and higher education and into the third age. We realise that, for most people, as much learning takes place outside of the 'official' education systems as within them and this necessitates us all, involved in Education Studies, to consider broader social processes and structures. This edition of the journal stems from the annual conference held at Staffordshire University. As such it reflects the broad nature of the 'new' Education Studies discipline. This edition brings together an analysis of the theoretical writing of Luhmann; a small scale study discussing the different approaches to learning of A level students and first year undergraduates; an examination of the implications of audio feedback in HE; a report on action research into work based learning and finally an analysis of characters of lectureship in Further Education (FE).

This edition begins with a theoretical paper by Derek Bunyard that examines the contribution to Education Studies of the work of Niklas Luhmann. The paper focuses on one of the central aspects of educational theory and practice that of self-reflection. Bunyard suggests that Luhmann sees communication as the central feature of social life, thus his work focussed on the forms of communication that exist within the 'function systems' of mass society. Luhmann's critical perspective specifically targeted the phenomena of self-reference and self-reflection in relation to the social effectiveness of the education system. Bunyard's analysis concludes that, for Luhmann, institutional improvement will continue to be elusive because of inherent instabilities in the processes of self-recognition.

In our second article Ann Kenny reports on a small-scale research study comparing study skills employed by A2 students and first year undergraduates. In the study Kenny analyses the transitional difficulties many students seem to experience when moving from level three courses ('A' level or equivalent) to first year undergraduate study. The main aim of her study was to develop a deeper understanding of the differences in the academic skills employed by students studying for 'A' levels and those required by first year undergraduates. Whilst being well aware of the dangers of drawing from a limited data set Kenny does offer insights into factors that influence student transition from A level into Higher Education (HE).

Within his article Steve Dixon explores a related issue to Kenny's, that of how we report back on performance to students in HE. The main aims of this research were to examine the employment of digital audio feedback. The findings of this research will be of interest to all working and studying in HE. Dixon suggests that a majority of respondents were very enthusiastic about the use of audio feedback in that it saved assessors' time and provided richer feedback for students. Dixon cautions however that for audio feedback to be developed more widely, a number of guidelines and recommendations will need to be implemented.

Kathryn McFarlane in her article presents findings from an action research project conducted with professional support staff during the Working in Higher Education Award, an accredited, work-based course at the University where they were employed. McFarlane points to three significant domains, highlighted in the literature, that foster the linkage between learning and work, these being: the work environment, the learning environment, and the learner. Her research findings tentatively add an additional key theme which she labels the “social”. This theme is portrayed by McFarlane as having a significant impact upon the learner and is manifested in the support given from others, particularly colleagues and line managers.

In our final paper Will Curtis reports on the findings of an eighteen month ethnographic study in a Further Education college in the south-west of England. This paper considers how the changes in further education structures and cultures have impacted on lecturers’ professional identities. The research identifies four ‘characters of lectureship’ – ‘enforcer’, ‘diplomat’, ‘insider’ and ‘senior buddy’. Curtis contends that these characters help shape students and lecturers understanding of themselves, each other and the learning encounters they participate in.

The editorial team do hope that you find this collection of papers useful and that you enjoy reading them.

Best wishes from Steve Bartlett, Alan Hodkinson, Chris Wakeman and Sue Warren.