


Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the second volume of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. Our thanks go to the authors of articles and reviews, the anonymous referees who read the articles, the publishers who provided review copies of the books, our own publisher Berghahn and the Editorial Board.

Learning and Teaching invites students and staff to explore their education practices in the light of changes in their institutions, national higher education policies, the strategies of international agencies and developments associated with the so-called international knowledge economy.

In the first article, Davydd Greenwood analyses the higher education reforms proposed by the Spellings Commission in the U.S.A. in 2006. The commission was set up by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings and its membership of 19 included 5 senior representatives of private corporations but only 3 practising academics. The Commission's report emphasises the role of colleges and universities in training students who can contribute to the international competitiveness of the U.S. economy. The research function of universities is not mentioned in the report, and students are positioned as customers of higher education who, it is claimed, need more information about the costs and benefits of the courses offered by more than 4000 institutions.

The Secretary of Education did not have the constitutional power or the extensive political support required to impose performance targets on higher education institutions. Instead, she put pressure on the many higher education accreditation agencies, all dependent on the Federal Government for recognition, to increase the demands they made in terms of performance indicators and quality assurance systems when accrediting and monitoring institutions and their programmes. These develop-



ments have increased the institutional power of administrators over academics but Greenwood detects little resistance to these bureaucratic forms of transparency and accountability.

Greenwood draws out parallels between these new forms of control in the U.S.A. and contemporary trends in European higher education. In both parts of the world, governments committed to promoting a free market in higher education use direct or indirect state regulation to undermine the concept of higher education as a public good and, in the process, reduce institutional autonomy and curtail academic freedom. He urges academics and academic leaders to resist these attacks and to act collectively to redefine the public purposes of higher education. Greenwood's essay is written to provoke discussion and readers are invited to send in responses of up to 2000 words. We will publish these in future issues.

In the second article, Bettina Dahl, Eirik Lien and Åsa Lindberg-Sand examine recent changes to the higher education grading scales used in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The aim of these changes was to harmonise descriptions of student achievement as part of the Bologna Process' creation of a European Higher Education Area. Discussions of amendments to the grading scales in the three countries were informed by the pre-existing European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) 7-point grading system and the developing commitment to the use of learning outcomes in both the Bologna Process and the European Union's work on qualifications frameworks. The authors conceive of grading scales as forms of classification systems, ways of dividing up aspects of the world which, once established, shape practice in ways that are not apparent on the surface. However, when examined closely, classification systems that look very similar may operate in very different ways.

In Denmark, the government replaced the nationally-established 13-point scale with a 7-point scale in 2007. The new scale was intended to be comparable with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) scale. In 2000, the Norwegian universities proposed a common 6-point scale in which 5 pass grades replaced the 31 points that had been used hitherto. In 2002, the Norwegian government obliged all



higher education institutions to use this 6-point scale or to adopt pass/fail grading. The result is that, in Denmark and Norway, student grades appear to be comparable but, in fact, identical grades do not mean the same in the two countries and translate into different ECTS grades. Universities and university colleges in Sweden are free to establish their own grading scales. Before 2004, most higher education grading scales had one fail grade and one, two or three pass grades. Since 2004, the government had encouraged institutions to provide students with an ECTS grade in addition to the original grade. This prompted some institutions and subjects to move towards 7-point scales, and overall practice has become more, not less, divergent.

In the third article, Karima Kadi-Hanifi reflects on her experience of applying adult education methods to a higher education course in a pre-1992 university in the U.K., Committed to an emancipatory pedagogy common in adult and further education but not mainstream in higher education, she devised forms of learning and teaching intended to encourage active engagement with socio-linguistic issues of racism, imperialism and class discrimination with a group of high-achieving and relatively privileged students majoring in English literature. She started by asking the students what and how they wanted to learn and responded to their preference for experiential learning in a multiplicity of ways.

She used role plays extensively for presentations and debates, which also encouraged collaboration and reduced the fear students had of expressing controversial opinions. She introduced texts by African and Indian authors and set writing exercises that drew on the students' experience and their creativity. The students' positive responses to these innovations lead her to conclude that relatively privileged students are not exempt from the disempowering effects of conventional teaching and learning methods and, like the students from disadvantaged groups that she previously taught in adult and further education, benefit from approaches that focus on the learners rather than the subject.

Kadi-Hanifi locates her approach to learning and teaching within the critical pedagogy tradition associated with the ideas and practice

of Paulo Freire and gives examples of other writers who are attempting to apply critical pedagogy to higher education in the U.K. She points out that higher education teachers in Europe could also learn much from the contemporary Popular Education movement in Latin America.

This collection of articles exemplifies the breadth of the higher education issues that come within the scope of this journal. Taken together, the articles show the value of close and critical analysis of international developments, of national policy-making and policy implementation and of the values that shape educational practice. The five countries in which the authors work are also those from which most of the submissions to the journal currently come. The editors welcome articles, essays and reports from authors in other parts of the world too.

Penny Welch and Susan Wright