Editorial

PENNY WELCH AND SUSAN WRIGHT

Welcome to this issue of *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*. Our thanks go to the authors of articles, commentaries 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. This issue heralds a growing focus on international comparisons, with articles on developments in Chinese, European and North American higher education.

In the first article, Jonathan Gorry explores the Socratic and Confucian models of learning and how they have been used in some of the Western educational literature to explain differences in the approaches to learning of students from Western countries and students from Asian countries. Through a detailed analysis of texts written by students of both philosophers, he confirms the traditional understanding of the Socratic method as one in which the teacher encourages the students to learn for themselves and the Confucian method as one in which the students learn from established authorities. However, to interpret the Socratic model as entirely individualistic and the Confucian model as concerned only with the needs of the state is to miss the view of Socrates that an educated citizenry facilitates a democratic society and the concern of Confucius that students should be enquiring and questioning.

The author advocates that teachers in Western higher education should reflect on their own cultural assumptions about student learning and be aware of the different learning cultures that may influence how students from different parts of the world approach their studies. At the same time, he cautions against any cultural stereotyping of Western students as active learners who are intrinsically motivated and Eastern students as passive and instrumental learners.

In the second article, Susanne Bregnbæk analyses the impact of the education for quality reforms on the lives of Chinese students at elite universities in Beijing. Initiated in the 1980s, the changes in educational principles and practices were intended to challenge the narrow and intensely competitive nature of the whole educational system. The new aim was to produce graduates who were well-rounded individuals capable of advancing the economic and cultural standing of the country. The emphasis on the need for students to develop their full personal and intellectual potential and not just their ability to pass examinations was linked directly in government pronouncements to the One Child Policy established in 1979. Parents were encouraged to put all their energies into raising their only children to be better people.

The author points out that parenting methods aimed at the self-realisation of young adults nonetheless co-exist with established values about the duty of parents to make sacrifices for their children and the reciprocal duty of children to repay their parents by being conscientious and high-achieving students. Similarly, the use of more active learning methods in schools to promote critical thinking has not replaced the need to obtain high test scores to achieve educational success. For these reasons, education for quality can increase rather than decrease the psychological pressure on students because the range of qualities and achievements they must aspire to is even greater. The role played by psychological pressures in the incidence of suicide among students at elite universities is unknown because these deaths are not recognised officially as suicide, nor publicly researched. However, their occurrence is believed to be greater at elite universities than at less prestigious universities and so they can be interpreted as a repudiation of elite education.

A report from their field visit to Mondragón University in the Basque region of Spain by Susan Wright, Davydd Greenwood and Rebecca Boden follows. They describe the representative structures through which decisions are made in the university and the role it plays in the MONDRAGON system of co-operatives. Characterised by solidarity and a community of interests, Mondragón University is very successful and is expanding. Its teaching and learning methods emphasise active learning through group discussion and group projects. The university is effective in enhancing the employment-related skills of its students and engages systematically in research and knowledge transfer with local companies. The authors point out that these achievements have not come about through neoliberal reforms, nor through practices that disempower academics and treat students as customers. On the contrary, the success of Mondragón University is a result of its co-opera-

tive values, structures and processes. The report acknowledges the time and effort required to maintain the values and make the structures work, but offers Mondragón University as an source of alternative ideas and practices that could benefit public higher education.

In the previous issue of *LATISS*, Davydd Greenwood reviewed *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* by Richard Arum and Josipa Roska. He endorsed the authors' call for academics to enter into a dialogue about their findings and about the future of higher education. *LATISS* asked a number of academics to respond to the issues raised in the book and in Greenwood's review article. Six scholars from the U.S.A., U.K., Australia and New Zealand – Sanford F. Schram, David Mills, Tim May, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Peter Quiddington and Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich – accepted the invitation and their commentaries, together with Davydd Greenwood's response, provide a rich collection of perspectives, insights, directions for further research and suggestions for action in teaching and in staff development.

This issue concludes with reviews by Silvia Rief, Antonino Palumbo and John Craig of books about interdisciplinary research, the commodification of academic research and the use of information technology in undergraduate teaching and reviews of three websites by Dorothy Sheridan, Barry Stierer and Gabriela Edlinger.