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Education in the North

EDITORIAL,

Keith Smyth

Keith.smyth@uhi.ac.uk

Professor of Pedagogy

University of the Highlands and Islands

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Editorial

**Keith Smyth,
Professor of Pedagogy, University of the Highlands and Islands
Keith.smyth@uhi.ac.uk**

On behalf of Guest Editors Prof Keith Smyth and Dr Yvonne Bain

When we first began discussing the theme for this Special Issue of *Education in the North*, we were challenged by the range of ways in which it is possible to conceptualise and define 'Early Career Research' with respect to education and educational contexts. In the very broadest sense we were interested in submissions that addressed key issues in supporting the development of early career research with a focus on institutional strategy, policy and practice. Central to this, of course, is the fundamental concern of how to effectively support teachers and academics who are aspiring researchers, and those who are currently emerging as researchers either through postgraduate study or through initial engagement in research within their own disciplinary contexts.

With respect to colleagues in the latter group, we also recognised the potential value of this special issue as a platform for the surfacing and sharing of emergent educational research from emergent researchers working within or across the schools, further and higher education sectors.

The response to the call for contributions did not disappoint with respect to the hopes outlined above. Indeed we are fortunate to be able to bring forth a range of articles and features that address early career research in ways that fulfil and also extend the dimensions we had originally aspired to cover, and which do so through a rich range of theory, practice, empirical work and case study.

The challenges of being an early career researcher, and of engaging in educational research, are to the fore in the article by Catriona Oates and Nasim Nighet Riaz which discusses methodological difficulties in accessing the field to conduct research in schools. The authors draw an important distinction between access and cooperation, and underline the need for new researchers to be supported in developing the forms of social capital that will allow them to establish trust and negotiate their research terrain.

The school environment is also the locus for the research reported in the submissions from Paul McDonald, and from Tuija Huuki and Sandra Juutilainen. Both papers concern perceptions and experiences of school education, but with very different foci. In the former, Paul McDonald employs a mixed methods approach in investigating primary and secondary teachers' beliefs about mathematical problem solving. His research, presented as both a personal challenge and as a means to address an under-researched topic, reveals three qualitatively different belief systems as well as a dissonance between primary and secondary teachers. In the latter article, Tuija Huuki and Sandra Juutilainen present an in-depth study, based on the doctoral research of one of the authors, which draws upon feminist materialist and post-human theories in exploring the discrimination experienced by Sámi students at Finnish boarding schools. The authors confront the fragmentation of Sámi identity within the schools, the wider implications of this beyond school, and the potential for reconciliation.

The perspectives and experiences of students and educators at transitional points in their academic development features prominently in the remaining articles for this special issue, placing a research lens on those occupying 'early career' positions as learners or teachers. In the article by Debbie Meharg, Stephanie Craighill, Alison Varey and Jenny Tizard, the focus is on the self-ability beliefs and motivations of Further Education students who are making the transition to studying in Higher Education. Applying an established Expectancy-Value model within focus group research, their findings reveal a number of factors that shape the ability beliefs of the students, and which have implications for institutions and policy makers seeking to effectively support learners in making the transition from college to university.

In Aaron Sigauke's paper, the research participants who are at a transitional point are pre-service teachers at the University of New England, Armidale Australia. The perceptions being sought related to their views and beliefs on civics and citizenship education in the social sciences curriculum at the teacher education level. Key amongst the findings is that the coverage of citizenship issues within pre-service teacher education is too superficial, with a need to narrow the gap between policy and practice.

The forging of strong links between institutional strategy, policy and practice with respect to the development and support of early career research is addressed in the remaining full paper by Michael Rayner. This presents a detailed case study of longitudinal developments at the University of the Highlands and Islands to establish and grow a culture of support for early career researchers across the disciplines, and including initiatives relating to the development of educational research, research-teaching linkages, and capacity building for the Research Excellence Framework.

The practical interventions and wider policy considerations for supporting the development of early career research that are described by Michael Rayner are complemented by a number of the features for this special issue. This includes the article by Henri de Rutter and Karolina Gombert, which describes organising a conference to support interdisciplinary interaction, while Jonathan Firth examines the levels at which teachers can be supported to engage in research activity and the potential contribution of the 'teacher researcher' within the wider educational community.

Issues in professional identity are also considered in the feature by Jessica Singer. This reports on the design and early stages of a research study investigating the identity of the artist teacher/freelance artist tutor and the implications for learning throughout the life course.

Elsewhere in the features, we find broader issues of social development, policy and reform addressed by Maria Chalari, discussing teachers' responses to the socio-economic crisis in Greece, and by Iryna Kushnir who explores the research potential of Bologna and European reform for Norway.

Finally, Peter Ojudoro's feature article titled "The road less travelled in access to Higher Education" describes the work of a doctoral study which explores the potential for the examinations and certifications of professional bodies to provide an alternative pathway for transitioning into HE.

In addition to the features we have the winners of the School of Education, University of Aberdeen's 'PhD Haiku' competition. Entrants were to explain their own research or what they felt a PhD meant to them in Haiku style. The winner was Aristea Kyriacou with Owen Okie second and Annette Moir and Cathy Francis in joint third place.

In noting that many of the features included in this special issue are drawn from current or recently completed PhD projects, we are also pleased to offer reviews of several recently published books that will be of value to early career and more experienced researchers.

It has been a privilege to act as Guest Editor for this Special Issue of *Education in the North*, and I have learned a great deal from reading the many articles and features that we have been able to include. The various contributions have broadened my own thinking about Early Career Research in education and educational contexts, as I hope they will for other readers of this special issue.