INTRODUCTION

As incoming Editor, among the first things one tries to do is to undertake a survey of how the journal has been doing, and to identify recognisable trends. A pretty daunting task when it is clear that the *International Review of Education* has had such a long and distinguished history. Luckily, what should be on my desk upon arrival in Hamburg but the minutes of the Editorial Board meeting of the *IRE*, held in May 2008, together with the publisher's overview of 2007. This made it easy for me to absorb the available information and, at the same time, provided me with some interesting material to share with readers in this, my first Editorial.

During 2007 there were 92 manuscripts submitted to the *IRE*. The manuscripts came from 31 countries, with the highest number coming from the United States (21) followed by Turkey and France (both with 9) and Canada (8). There were 41 articles published in the six print editions in the year, and 46 published electronically.

The apparent aberration in this last statistic allows an opportunity for a little reflection on the process of publishing in a journal like the *International Review of Education*. Generally speaking, an article is available on the publisher's Online First system earlier than it is in a print edition. Articles may exist in electronic form for several weeks before they are gathered together to form a printed edition. In part this reflects the way in which modern journals are consumed: publishers argue that the move is toward downloading and viewing individual articles rather than keeping a printed edition. People very rarely read an entire edition, and prefer to pick and choose selected items. The disadvantages of a single bound edition are well-known to scholars and students alike who share one library copy between them: who has borrowed the edition containing the particular article I need for my assignment or piece of research? More importantly: where is that copy, and when will it be returned to the shelf for my use?

The counter-argument to this point of view, however, is that a journal is more than just the sum of its parts. Themed editions, for example, assembled around a consistent and coherent editorial brief, may bring together articles which reinforce each other and collectively are very powerful, or which may represent different extremes of opinion on a contentious theme. Our guest-edited double editions are an attempt precisely to do this – to concentrate the efforts of leading exponents into a tightly-focussed set of articles, held together by a shared editorial aim, to explore various facets of a particular subject, illustrated with appropriate case studies and examples.

In editions which contain a rather looser selection of articles, perhaps the publisher's argument may hold more strongly, and perhaps readers may like to expend a little effort in pondering whether the current edition falls within the category of "individual" or "collection". Whatever your thoughts on this, the hope is that the articles prove to be stimulating and thought-provoking well-written and informative.

It is interesting that the authors of two articles in this edition decided to preface their articles with attempts to give a short definition of "democracy". *Heidi Biseth* makes the case for careful attention to be given to linguistic issues in education for democracy. She examines the relationships between language and national identity, and between multilingualism and democratic participation. She argues that the linguistic rights of minorities should be protected, and makes the forceful point that abilities to speak more than one language are strengths, not only for the individuals and communities concerned, but also for the nation-state as a whole.

Kaya Yilmaz, in his analysis of the problems and constraints confronting learner-centred instruction in Turkey, explains how democracy and education inter-relate, and contends that only when learners' needs are placed at the forefront will there be a realistic chance of developing critical thinking and achieving democratic objectives. In addition to conducting a literature review, the author contacted 54 educators at 15 Turkish universities to assess their perspectives on the actual provision of learner-centred learning. To what extent both teaching professionals and students are ready for learner-centred education is open to debate: some sizeable cultural and policy shifts have to take place.

A rapid cultural shift is arguably what has taken place in four Asian societies (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan), according to *Chi-Kim Cheung's* comparative review of the development and implementation of media education. His discussion touches on the move from an initial reluctance to embrace media education to an acceptance that a critical appreciation – and now production – of the media is empowering. By understanding how the media are produced (including issues of authorship and control) learners may come to be much more aware of, and begin to question, economic, social and political issues.

Dorothy Nampota, *Jeff Thompson* and *Felicity Wikeley's* study of the development of science and technology in Malawi makes the case for a reinvigoration of science education in secondary school curricula and university programmes. Their paper surveys the state of science education, with little or no equipment, few qualified science teachers and teaching techniques which encourage neither enquiry nor curiosity. The authors are convinced that without investment in science, the country will not be able to produce the next home-grown cadre of scientists, further impoverishing the nation. As in any political decision-making, however, the question is always about where best to invest scarce resources: all-too-often it is a case of meeting immediate short-term needs.

In the only non-English article in this edition, *Christine Fournier, Pierre Béret, Pierre Doray* and *Paul Bélanger* reflect on the professional status of women adult educators in France and Canada. As anyone who has attended an adult education conference may testify (whether research- or practice-oriented, though perhaps less-so in policy conferences), more women than men work in adult education. The authors show that women's greater presence in professional training courses is a relatively new phenomenon. Noting the growing demand for continuing education in Canada and the increased rate of participation by full-time employees in France, the authors examine the social factors which influence women's participation.

Staying in Canada for the last article in this edition, *Mary Ann Coulter* and *Paul C. Abney* examine the important subject of teacher burn-out. The best educational policy in the world cannot work if the people employed to carry it out are under-resourced, over-stretched and inadequately supported. This study makes an attempt to discover whether teachers are more likely to "burn out" if they teach in a school in their country of origin or in an international school (away from their home country). Controlling for demographic factors in their sample of Canadian teachers, the authors found that international teachers had a statistically lower level of burn-out than teachers working in their country of origin. So, what is the magic ingredient, and can it be bottled and sold?

That was not just a flippant question. Maybe some of that stuff is being used here, at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, where just about all the staff have been committing themselves fully to preparing for the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, which will take place in Belem, Brazil, in May 2009. They have also been involved in organising one or more of the five Regional Preparatory Conferences (Mexico City, September 2008; Seoul, October 2008; Nairobi, November 2008; Budapest, December 2008; and Tunis, January 2009). Their levels and reserves of energy are immense, it seems. It's a breathtakingly busy time to be taking over the *IRE*, and it's a momentous time not only for the Institute but also for all adult education policy-makers and providers.

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