Editorial

This issue of Educate has been brought together by the London Education Research Unit (LERU), a new group established by the Institute of Education (IoE) to build and share knowledge on education in London. Dina Mehmedbegovic, LERU's Research Co-ordinator and a recent graduate of the Institute's Doctoral School, had the initial idea for the special issue and has identified and worked with contributors to bring it to fruition, as well as submitting a paper herself. My thanks are due to Dina to for all her hard work in seeing her vision through, and bringing us a full set of papers dedicated to research on education in London.

As a global city, London presents a context for education that is unique in the UK. Its rapidly growing population, super-diversity, high cost of living and increasing socio-economic polarisation add to up a real challenge for London as a city *"to resolve tensions arising from its intensity; great wealth with social inclusion; diversity with tolerance; openness to migration with security and public support; mobility with community; and population and economic growth with quality of place and quality of life'* (PMSU 2004). The education system is at the heart of this challenge, responding to the changing characteristics of London's learners, and working to produce a next-generation London that is economically competitive but also inclusive, cohesive, affordable and sustainable. It was in recognition of education's central role, and the complex and changing issues facing it that in 2007 Tim Brighouse and Leisha Fullick brought together a group of IoE academics and other prominent London educationalists to produce an edited collection, *Education in a Global City: Essays from London*, to draw attention to current issues, challenges and progress across a range of key topics, from Every Child Matters to the school workforce and adult learning. The book is reviewed in this issue by Alice Bradbury, while Amelia Hempel-Jorgensen reviews A. Susan Williams, Patrick Ivin and Caroline Morse's recent book, *The Children of London: Attendance and Welfare at School 1870-1990*, which gives a more historical perspective on London education. Readers interested particularly in the London context, or indeed in urban education more generally, will find both books a valuable read.

Reflecting on research in and on London, I have also been struck by the challenges that London's context presents for researchers, including those undertaking doctoral research. I identify seven key issues. One is the need for multi-disciplinary capability to understand the connections between education, housing, the labour market, and the changing cultures of city life, if we are to understand the ways that education produces the city, as well as the ways it responds. A second is the need for diversity in the research community in order to be able to understand and access London's many communities. Academic research in educational settings in this city simply cannot continue to be dominated by white British middle class intellectuals: it will have to change to reflect the changing city. Third, and related, is the need to embrace methods of research that involve diverse communities in the co-production of knowledge, closing the gap between the researcher and the researched in order to keep up with the speed of change and to draw on the knowledge of communities which are small in number or lacking in power.

A fourth issue is the need for speed in knowledge production. As the city changes so rapidly, our research is almost out of date as soon as we have produced it. This is a particular challenge to the traditions of academic research and to the doctoral student, working alone and often for many years on a single piece of work. If we cannot speed up the pace of data collection and analysis (and often we cannot) we may need to think more about methods of more rapid and timely dissemination, using networks and new technologies to reach our audiences quickly. There will also need to be continued investment in innovative use of data, in particular looking at how survey and administrative

data can be used to produce contemporary knowledge of social and demographic change between decennial Censuses. This in itself creates fresh challenges around confidentiality, data sharing and the ethics of research.

Fifth, while it is easy to enthuse about the dynamic London context and while, for many, London has a very clear identity as a place, it is also the case that in trying to research <u>on</u> London, we will constantly come up against boundary issues. On the one hand, London's reach extends far beyond the Greater London borough – one only has to stand at any of the major London railway stations at morning or evening rush hour to realise the influence of London's economy and housing market as commuters flow in and out in all directions – to Brighton, Bristol and even York. London exports pupils to the Home Counties, and imports them to its many and nationally renowned private schools. On the other hand, the diversity within London makes it impossible to define one London: the experience in schools and colleges in Barking and Dagenham is very different from that in Westminster, Newham, Brent, Hounslow or Richmond-upon-Thames. Good transport and overlapping school and college markets make it hard to draw neat lines around a study locality, as we might in a smaller town or city. Sixth and related, how can we then generalise about our research in London or understand its relevance or generalisability to other cities, in the UK or globally. There is a real case for more comparative urban education research. Seventh and finally, I would argue that given all of these considerations, we as researchers need to continually review our relationship to policy and practice: who are we trying to influence, how and when do we reach them, how and by whom does knowledge need to be produced in order for it to be useful. In particular, how are we helping to create, sustain or challenge discourses about education in our city – defining 'problems', 'opportunities' and 'challenges'?

I have taken the opportunity to raise these issues here because doctoral students, who come to London from all over the world and who are usually working independently of research funders, are in many ways best placed to shape and take forward new research agendas and develop new paradigms for educational research and its engagement with policy and practice in our fast-changing global city. The contributors to this special edition of Educate embrace some of the issues in their research.

Both Inyoung Shin and Dina Mehmedbegovic are concerned with language and communication in the light of London's global position and resulting linguistic diversity. Shin looks at English for Academic Purposes in higher education settings, arguing that the increasing diversity of London's student population and the transnational education and employment careers that many learners will likely experience create a need for subjective understandings of different learners' needs. Her case study of Korean postgraduate engineering students and their lecturers (interestingly from several different countries themselves) at a London university reveals both specific disciplinary demands and the need to adapt to differing national conventions about the nature of the academic community and expected relationships and practices. There is more to learning in a globalised world than curriculum content.

In her paper, Dina Mehmedbegovic concentrates on the perspectives of educators in London, rather than students. While Shin identifies the skills and competencies defined by the English university that students need to acquire in order to be 'proper engineers, Mehmedbegovic suggests that educators focusing on the value of operating in the dominant language may overlook the value of competence in two or more languages as an educational asset. In her study with a sample of London headteachers, negative or uninformed attitudes to bilingualism seem to prevail over research evidence which demonstrates its educational value. Headteachers have not been trained in the area and tend to 'do what feels right', 'learn from colleagues' or apply practice from a previous setting. This is surely a central issue for contemporary London – Mehmedbegovic cites an extraordinary figure – 52 per cent of studentsin inner London secondary schools are bilingual or have English as an Additional

Language. She also points to the datedness of data on pupil languages in London, a situation only remedied in 2007/8 by its collection in the School Census.

Paul Miller examines the impact of overseas trained teachers (OTTs) from the Caribbean on secondary education in the capital. Miller too provides some fascinating figures, in this case on the diversity of London's teaching workforce: up to 20 per cent of teachers in some Boroughs are overseas-trained. Through interviews with OTTs themselves, headteachers and students, he dissects the benefits that OTTs can bring. A key argument relates to the new duty imposed on schools in 2007 to promote community cohesion. Some headteachers in Miller's study point out that the recruitment of teachers from other cultures and countries is essential in order to support the 'multi-ethnic basis of the school', yet experiences of OTTs from the Caribbean are not entirely positive. Clearly London has something to learn about how it welcomes and values OTTs and maximises their contribution.

Finally, Vanessa Ogden addresses the question of how change is achieved across urban school systems as large and diverse as London's. She examines the 'London Challenge', a national government initiative to address low performance in London's secondary schools, which has been widely heralded as successful and extended to *other urban areas.* Ogden draws on Michael Lipsky's notion of street-level bureaucracy to argue that the relationship between policy and outcome is more complex than supporters of London Challenge would suggest. Teachers, and particularly headteachers, interpret and mediate policy, rather than 'implementing it'. Change in urban schooling thus depends much on leadership, and crucially, Ogden argues, on the ways in which leaders negotiate urban fields of practice which differ widely depending on social and economic context. If we want to know how to transform urban education systems, we need to understand not only the content of successful policies, but the processes behind them, with research that draws on the perspectives of practitioners.

This is a fascinating collection which clearly demonstrates the contribution that IoE doctoral research is already making to understanding education in London, global city. I would like to thank each of the authors for their contribution and hope that their research inspires others to focus their research on education in the capital.

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References

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