

## **Editorial: New Scholars of Education Writ Alternately**

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I sigh (in advance) a little bit when aiming to write about “new people” in a way that writes myself out of the frame. I was young once in the sense of new endeavour I mean here—which is those colleagues, students, activists, thinkers, practitioners who wish to get a foot on the ladder of academic alternative education. I enjoyed the adventure and challenge immensely. The lack of ladder, for example. I’m still, relatively speaking, a yooof-full one, but getting old in this sense because I already have a PhD linked to the field, have written books in the area and edit a journal of alternative education, now publishing its sixth issue. I even have a “permanent” job where much of my teaching is linked strongly to alternative education. I’m off that rat wheel of research contracts so many new scholars unfortunately suffer. So, “established”? And those youngsters? The new people; the ones to come? What about them?

I had the unusual and lucky support of a senior, eminent professor with similar interests to myself when I began—Clive Harber of the University of Birmingham (now Emeritus) was the one who let me into the academy as a student and freely gave me/facilitated what is so necessary to survive and thrive: collegiate friendship (and a studentship). Such luck cannot be repaid. It is also hard to replicate. Who now is letting in the others? The newer generation of scholars of alternative education than I? Who is powerful enough to be their friends? Who is taking any trouble over them and their interests? What is your name? There are people who want to contact you and who want to work with you. They’d also appreciate some institutional support.

This editorial is dedicated to all the people (alternative educationists) currently in education, who wish to be so and who will wish to be so yet cannot find an alternative education space, nor real support beyond well-wishing. I get many emails (compared to other externally generated ones from people I have never met) from young scholars of education wanting to pursue a PhD or MA with a focus in the alternative education arena. They ask me about supervision and studentships. None of them seem to have a rich granny to pay the fees, nor a scratch card with some promising similar pictures lining up. All have a passion to contribute to new knowledge. Very few indeed can find funded research opportunities which care about alternative education. Those students interested in policy, assessment, school

outcomes, behaviour management, leadership, professional education and the like seem to fare much better. It's hard being different in education.

Unlike philosophy of education which speaks of a decline in institutional status but a vibrant scholarly field supported by a relatively long standing community and the financial resources of international prestige (Biesta, 2015), alternative education has no decline in university institutional status as a disciplinary area. It has no status to speak of at present to suffer decline. Institutionally it seems to have little official history. I have not yet heard of a Professor of Alternative Education, although there are plenty of senior figures in the community of alternative education thinkers. Is it that such thinkers cannot stomach academia; cannot bear to play the game on the terms provided? Whereas philosophy of education (as a comparison point here) has a few thriving professorial chairs around the world and many more dedicated lecturing posts specifically to teach in that area in university schools of Education. Alternative education is financially poor, disciplinarily lowly and struggling still to find a voice *within* the academy. Relatively speaking and institutionally speaking it barely yet exists as a visible named or acknowledged disciplinary presence, even if what emerges punches above its weight. The forces of education subsume it; taming it. This has affects on students who wish to speak with a radically different voice.

Alternative education scholarship is perhaps often experienced within educational studies courses (on its own terms of the democratic other) as the awkward cousin with a bad hair cut – the one no-one really understands but they pretend to like because they have to: he is family. Yet like philosophy of education – albeit on a much smaller scale at present – it has a vibrant community of scholarship which is growing. The audience is certainly present as Other Education downloads statistics are showing: just one data set among many to support such a claim. There are academic places where alternative viewpoints are taken extremely seriously and given significant voice. My own institution and education studies colleagues there are an example. I can count another six such settings a train ride away without effort. This is just within my own local area so no doubt much else in other countries is in place. Will such factors of activity and voice improve its *disciplinary* position? Undoubtedly. Give it time.

Will time serve the young alternative educationists currently hungry for a piece of the action? Eventually, undoubtedly. But this is conditional. This is where I have concerns because it is not easy to secure a PhD studentship focusing on alternatives or find oneself on an alternative education study module with informed, active researchers of the field as “teachers” or even find oneself having a half way decent conversation with people who have some basic knowledge to build on in discussion. It is not easy to find powerful scholars – those with the institutional clout and MA/PhD studentship committee minutes weight to be collegiate friends to the new generation. Everyone is so busy. Let those eager young alt edders take care of themselves? Alternative education serves by virtue of its epistemological demands

and its ontological interests few with educational power. It serves those who don't care that much about power for a start. This does it no favours in getting ahead. In other words, scholars with positions and power need to actively support and develop new students of this field so that education about something other than power for the already powerful can matter. The time is now. The "young" scholars of this field need your friendship in real terms *within* the academy.

To my (of course limited) local/international knowledge only one university in recent times has managed to secure deliberate, specific, dedicated "alternatively labelled" studentships to look at alternative education scholarship and answer new questions linked to this body of knowledge. This is the *Freedom to Learn* research initiative led by Catherine Montgomery and Max Hope at the University of Hull, UK ([www.freedomtolearnproject.com](http://www.freedomtolearnproject.com)). If you know of other places and people who are supporting young scholars in this research area, do get in touch with me. It would certainly be good to hear about: why it's being done, what for and how. The spirit is willing but the money is missing. If you have found some, let me publicise this for you. Other Contributions, announcements and so on in this vein most welcome and, of course, encouraged.

This first publication issue of 2015, we welcome a new book reviews editor in the form of Adam Jordan of The University of North Georgia, US ([Adam.Jordan@ung.edu](mailto:Adam.Jordan@ung.edu)). Thank you Adam, for your support for the journal. We thank, as ever, the superb Robert Hamm of Sligo, Ireland for his dedicated work as Other Education's editorial assistant. Naturally, massive thanks to all our expert peer reviewers without whom this journal would not exist.

Looking back there are pioneers. Currently there's a bunch of fantastic people. In the future let's be able to say we have an academic community within the disciplinary area of alternative education? Build it.

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