

Editorial: Starting a Journal, Starting a Conversation

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Starting up a new academic journal in the information age, an age characterised by an ongoing explosion of academic publishing around the globe, may seem like joining a bandwagon of the hopeful and reckless. It is an idea that many pursue and many such journals die quietly. But then, without a certain hope, without a certain degree of blind enthusiasm and unquestioning optimism many things would never happen, and many good outcomes would never occur or even be given energy and time. Starting up *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, is a risk worth taking for the sake of our remit and the conversations to be explored. What has made this sure for us is that wherever we have turned with this venture so far we have found help, support, interest and life.

The idea for the journal emerged with Helen a few years ago because the field of academic publishing in education seemed to her too limited and limiting if one had “difference” to offer. The title for the journal came up in a conversation she had with Nick Peim over coffee, debating what title to give the journal to get it started. Many “education otherwise” style possibilities were floated and then Nick simply said, “How about ‘other education?’” Over time we have come to appreciate the appropriateness of this suggestion, steeped as it is in the theories and philosophies of which *Other Education* as a journal will be taking recourse. It speaks immediately to many on terms of “other” philosophy intended but also includes and celebrates the communities of educational alternatives well versed in being other and othered. We thank Nick for this beautiful suggestion which serves our needs well, including, frankly, that it is easy to remember.

While the main title – *Other Education* – indicates the general direction of the journal, the subtitle – *The Journal of Educational Alternatives* – is of equal importance. The “The” in the subtitle is perhaps a little cheeky, as we have no intention to monopolise the field, but we wanted to make a statement that was sufficiently bold to attract some attention – and perhaps to spark some discussion. By position the journal is a journal of educational alternatives rather than a journal of alternative education. We want to highlight that our ambition is not to speak for or be a forum for “alternative education” on the assumption that its identity is

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already perfectly clear; as if the question where the dividing line between “alternative” and “mainstream” lies has already been definitively decided upon. Instead, we are precisely interested in the ways in which this distinction is being made and being used. We are focused on such questions as why there is a need, or people feel a need, to create educational alternatives, how such alternatives are articulated and justified, what the intellectual and political “case” for them is, what they seek to be an alternative to, and how all this relates to the question of institutions and their social and socialising role – not in the least because much education has become highly institutionalised. Creating any meaningful alternative often also means raising questions about institutions and institutionalisation. This bears in mind, of course, that institutions also provide form, commitment and responsibility. The question then is less that of overcoming institutions as creating new and different ones, or of allowing those we have to offer greater freedoms and forms of empowerment and that the context within which they sit offers also possibilities to not join them.

While we are “open to be different” – as the strapline on the journal's website says – *Other Education* is explicitly positioned as an academic journal aimed at fostering and promoting academic debate and conversation around the question of education and its alternatives. The conventions of academic publishing are therefore important to us, not because they are conventions, but because such conventions have a history and a “reason” that is not just a history of discipline and disciplining – of allocating who can speak and who ought to remain silent – but because it is a history of publicity and public-ness – in the democratic sense of the word. We are creating a forum where things can be made public. To align ourselves with academic conventions means taking this history and social location seriously, also being aware that to speak as an academic is to speak from a very privileged position. Yet we do not see this privilege as a privilege of power but as a privilege of public and hence democratic responsibility. In this spirit we want to position the journal within a long history of academic publishing – and note that publishing is precisely the act of making something public which our open access status supports – while at the same time creating opportunities for meaningful alternatives within this particular historical and social location. We invite our authors to experiment with the forms of academic writing and communication whilst being mindful of the core values of democratic publicity and public-ness, not in the least in order to investigate what such values in themselves can still mean in the information age.

Readers and writers of *Other Education* might also appreciate that our underpinning philosophy with this journal is two fold. Firstly, we will tell the truth. Secondly we will be brave and unafraid. We think a good journal is an interesting journal and what is interesting tends to be what is both true and bold. All feedback is very welcome and the frank exchanges we will have are going to be treated with deep respect. This journal will be run as democratically as we can, within the

constraints of limited time and energy. The power we hope to stimulate will be that of a collective and a community.

Another way in which this journal is explicitly not a “power-ful,” but a community venture is that it is a no-budget rather than a low-budget journal, brought together from the efforts of those who have a strong belief in its cause. In developing the journal we have had discussions with a number of commercial publishers and we do want to leave open the possibility that in the future an alliance with one of them might be of benefit to the nature, community and development of *Other Education*. But for the moment we felt that it was better to launch the journal from a different position. This means that we are extremely grateful to all whose expert support we have received so far. We particularly want to mention two people. Michaël Bekaert, as our technical advisor, has helped us with all the technological challenges in setting up the journal and getting the online submission and publishing system up and running. Emily St Denny has taken a major responsibility for the technical production of the manuscripts and is our editorial assistant. Without their input and dedication we would literally be nowhere. We also want to acknowledge the support from the University of Stirling in making use of their ICT facilities and for hosting the journal.

We have been supported by our book reviews and interviews editor Harriet Pattison, who will play a key role in organising an understanding of publishing and individual opinions at play in the educational alternatives arena. Crucially, of course, those reviewers who have given up their time and energy to assess our submissions are a fundamental part of this endeavour. Our sincere thanks goes to them now and into the future.

The members of the editorial board make *Other Education*, through their wide range of perspectives and expertise which when seen together is an indispensable resource and a sum of parts offering something new to educational studies. We have been buoyed and empowered by their support. The composition of the board was a very easy and very enjoyable process as everyone we approached with the question to support our initiative was happily willing to do so – even at a stage where it was nothing more than an idea. An editorial board is often there to give a publishing effort a certain status, which is what our editorial board is doing as well. But we also see them as a circle of guardians, providing encouragement and belief in our endeavours. From those colleagues now on board this ship, just launched, we are very grateful for the support and encouragement we have received so far and for the generosity with which they have taken up their role. Within the editorial board we have three members who are acting for us as advisors on strategic matters: as a ballast for our editorial decisions where there is need to branch this out democratically into a wider conversation. They are Lynn Fendler, Ian Stronach and Nick Peim.

The editorial board also provides the journal with a network, not only in the strategic sense, but also intellectually. These collected networks link furthermore to areas that are not directly within their own specialisms. We will be connecting and communicating to all our colleagues where they cover the wide territory that educational alternatives can substantiate and learn from.

The members of the editorial board have all devoted a significant part of their scholarship to the cause of education and, more specifically, to the ongoing search for meaningful alternatives. We wanted to make this intellectual effort visible and have therefore invited all board members to contribute a piece to this inaugural issue. Many of them were able to do so, and the few who were not just had other pressing commitments. The contributions in this inaugural issue thus provide a first example of the scholarship that we hope *Other Education* will be able to bring together in future years.

As a no-budget journal we are aware that we will not be able to offer many services to our authors, which is why we want to express our gratitude in advance for their understanding and patience as we are trying to make *Other Education* into a living reality. We have been encouraged by the response so far from potential authors, reviewers and readers. To us this indicates that the unquestioned enthusiasm and belief in the cause of *Other Education* with which we started this (ad)venture shows promise to become something meaningful and good in a wider sense, involving many.

Finally: starting this journal is not meant to provide just another “outlet” for papers, but stems from the ambition to continue, develop and start important conversations. We warmly invite you to join in. The issues *Other Education* considers are yours.

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