



Education in the North

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Editorial

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The term 'vulnerability' is used across all domains within human services to highlight the needs of those requiring targeted or more intensive approaches, and is also often acknowledged across the range of disciplines and professions involved as a complex and contested notion – this is nowhere more the case than in the domain of child and youth services in general, and within the policy and practice of education in particular. We were aware in seeking contributions for this special issue that we wished to acknowledge and encompass a broad definition of 'vulnerability' and of its relevance to 'learning' within a range of professional contexts and across groupings - children, young people, young adults, older adults – whether in receipt of services or professionals. Furthermore, our understanding of 'vulnerable learner' sought to encompass the holistic nature of the learning process, through crossing over boundaries of education, health and social care.

The articles, features and book reviews in this issue of *EITN* address some of the complexities of 'vulnerability in learning' through offering a range of professional and theoretical perspectives, drawn from education and care/welfare settings. Alongside this diversity, they hold in common, in addressing issues of vulnerability for learners, their commitment to making a difference through innovative approaches and ways of thinking. They are also interesting for their methodological insights and theoretical positions.

All three articles take a broader perspective on learning, 'crossing borders' between education and care, and foregrounding empowering approaches to learning experiences in different contexts. Although not specifically focused in her article on the needs of vulnerable learners in the early years, Darling examines and deconstructs the notion and practice of 'curriculum' in relation to the impact on every child's engagement with learning. She seeks to challenge embedded understandings of knowledge acquisition as a structured process of 'delivery' of pre-ordained areas of knowledge by teacher to child, highlighting the potential of walking activities to engage teacher and pupil together in constructing and expanding understanding of the world. Shanks' article considers similarly the potential of 'expansive' rather than 'restrictive' learning environments in addressing vulnerability through her study of the experience of teachers in their induction year. Interestingly, she challenges in this context the relevance of stereotypical definitions and language of 'vulnerability' involving notions of paternalism and protection, instead highlighting the importance of empowering approaches. Moir's article also examines the role of the teacher, this time around enhancing inclusive practice within a further education context through integrating the dimensions of care/protection and empowerment for young people vulnerable through mental health issues. She explores through a range of interesting methods the impact of specific strategies aimed at empowering young people to reflect on and manage their emotional responses.

Our features also offer a range of perspectives from diverse settings and disciplines, and highlight similar emergent themes around creative, innovative and empowering approaches to learning. In the context of youth transition, John Cairns focuses on the 'Activity Agreements' project aimed at engaging young people whom he identifies as 'being furthest away from learning, training or employment'. Another interesting aspect of inclusion is outlined within the feature on Camphill Schools, in particular the Aberdeen schools' achievement of the gold standard in the international Eco-Schools initiative, led by the Pupil Council and involving the whole school community. Also within the context of commitment to inclusion through creative approaches and partnership, Anne Valyo, in her role as lecturer in drama within teacher education, presents the design of a research project in schools based on her conviction that drama has the power to help children and young people with autism to build self-esteem, confidence and empathy. In the context of Initial Teacher Education, Yvonne Bain highlights the key features of the DLite project, which promotes wider access to the teaching profession through innovative distance learning approaches, recognising and seeking to address the potential for vulnerability for distance learners.

Finally, to complement this special issue, our book reviewers are to be thanked for bringing to our attention stimulating publications from a wide and diverse authorship, covering a range of topics of current interest: the categorisation of children in terms of Special Educational Needs – the complex dilemmas involved (Jenny Spratt), the impact of the discourse of 'poverty', within different historical political and economic contexts, on the way poor children are managed and treated/excluded (Gabrielle Ivinson), and the theme of restorative practice in schools, as an approach to discipline and broader school culture which prioritises relationships rather than retribution (Norma Hart).

The Board of Education in the North hope that you enjoy this special issue, and that it may offer some new understandings of vulnerability in learning contexts, and its meaning for practice development across disciplines and professions.