



History of Education

Journal of the History of Education Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/thed20>

The history of education in Britain and Ireland: changing perspectives and continuing themes

Tom Woodin & Susannah Wright

To cite this article: Tom Woodin & Susannah Wright (2023) The history of education in Britain and Ireland: changing perspectives and continuing themes, *History of Education*, 52:2-3, 421-441, DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2023.2180095](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2023.2180095)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2023.2180095>



© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 06 Apr 2023.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 685



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

The history of education in Britain and Ireland: changing perspectives and continuing themes

Tom Woodin^a and Susannah Wright^b

^aDepartment of Education, Practice and Society, University College London, London, UK; ^bSchool of Education, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK

ABSTRACT

Reviewing the historiography of education provides insights into both the past and present of this growing area of research across the UK and Ireland. In the nineteenth century research reveals a close association with national identities. These were often Whig histories that celebrated the present and emphasised the progressive nature of educational development, sometimes characterised by an ‘acts and facts’ approach. From the 1960s, it is possible to identify a series of revisionist histories, which diversified further in the coming decades and morphed into the familiar patterns that we can identify today: theoretical and conceptual complexity; a concern with inequalities; an eclectic and widening interest in primary sources; a focus on schooling but moving beyond it, for instance to childhood, welfare and literacy; and a (re)discovery of new topics such as the emotions, senses and identities.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 March 2022
Accepted 23 January 2023

KEYWORDS

History of education; UK; Ireland; scholarship

Educational history in Britain and Ireland is a dynamic field of study. In 1977, Joan Simon argued that ‘economic, political and ideological’ deposits were sedimented into the educational processes of previous societies, which makes it a promising area to research.¹ Historians of education explore tensions between freedom and discipline across the life course of individuals and collectivities; persistent structures and institutions of learning as well as alterations; the interconnections between formal and informal practices of learning; and facets of human equality, diversity and difference, which may all be expressed in unique ways at varying historical moments. They occupy a space between history and education and look in both directions, producing ‘internal’ and ‘external’ histories, while engaging with past and present.² Those driven by contemporary problems have engaged with social, political, economic and cultural trends while those who position themselves primarily as historians may have very specific things to say about education.

Navigating the nations of Britain and Ireland is treacherous ground for the historian, who may find it hard to avoid dominant Anglocentric perceptions of Britain. National boundaries

CONTACT Tom Woodin  t.woodin@ucl.ac.uk  University College London, London, UK

¹Joan Simon, ‘The History of Education in Past and Present’, *Oxford Review of Education* 3, no. 1 (1977): 77; Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

²Richard Aldrich, ‘The Three Duties of the Historian of Education’, *History of Education* 32, no. 2 (2003): 133–43; History and Policy website: <https://www.historyandpolicy.org/> (accessed May 24, 2021).

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

are material facts that carry consequences, but they also play a symbolic role and, over time, are more fluid than first sight might suggest. Legal, cultural and ideological forms of control and acceptance have all adapted into different historical shapes. Recent nationalist pressures felt in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, especially in the wake of Brexit, highlight heterogeneous yet linked histories of incorporation, colonialism, independence and partition. The precise levels of devolution and mechanisms of rule have fluctuated considerably. National borders have been reconstructed, both legally and culturally, not least with the rise and decline of empire in which all the nations in Britain and Ireland were inextricably woven. Such developments have encouraged a rethinking of where British, English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish education took place.

We adopt a loose chronology of intellectual trends, commencing in the mid-nineteenth century when history of education became more distinctive. From the 1960s, a series of revisionist histories were developed that subsequently morphed into familiar patterns that we can identify today: theoretical and conceptual complexity; a concern with inequalities; a focus on schooling but moving beyond it, for instance to childhood, welfare and literacy; a (re)discovery of new topics and approaches relating to the material world, the emotions, senses and identities; and an eclectic and widening interest in primary sources, all of which have reinvigorated research into perennial themes. We expect that the uncertainties and rapid changes of the current world will impact on the way in which educational histories are contested in the future. It is, of course, easy to overemphasise the established nature of the field. In reality, historians of education have been scattered across university departments of education and history and have been complemented by activists, administrators and other commentators. Research centres and hubs of activity may have resulted from chance encounters and overlapping networks. The vast majority of historians prior to the 1960s were men, although this imbalance has been redressed to some extent over the last half-century. The field is still not particularly diverse with respect to other markers of inequality.

Nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

Nineteenth-century British and Irish historians were immersed in the rise of nationalism. The dominant position of England, and Britain, provided a backdrop for other nations to highlight their distinctive nature and sometimes to assert superiority over, or ask difficult questions about, the dominant power, which had been reluctant to view education as worthy of the status of a university subject. Scotland, under the Union of 1707, gained autonomy over the law, Church and education and, in the 1870s, it appointed professors of education, the first being S. S. Laurie at Edinburgh University; elsewhere chairs in education would not be established until the 1890s. Timothy Corcoran became a professor of education at University College Dublin in 1909.

Despite obvious linguistic, spatial and religious differences in and between Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the high status accorded to learning fed powerful myths of common cultures, which were contrasted with the segregated English. Corcoran's Irish history drew upon a passionate Catholic nationalism in opposition to the repression of the

English.³ In Wales, also, educational institutions could be deployed to bolster cultural nationalism.⁴ Many texts focusing on Scotland drew a distinction with England whereby Scottish post-Reformation education was characterised by accessibility and a high intellectual level, positive traits that were subsequently ingrained into Scottish national identity.⁵ Accordingly, Scottish educational history could be represented as the unfolding of what George Davie called the ‘democratic intellect’.⁶

Educators and their ideas, elite institutions and legislation suffused the minds of scholars, which resulted in top-down and policy-driven accounts of change.⁷ Richard Szreter and Peter Gordon were critical of histories that paid little attention to the realities on the ground.⁸ Similarly, Gary McCulloch described an instrumentalist ‘acts and facts’ approach, which provided a convenient version of the past for teachers, policy-makers and educators.⁹ Histories of Irish education by scholars including T. J. McElligott and Norman Atkinson have been censured for describing education and curricular systems ‘as if they existed independent of the society from which they grew’.¹⁰ Initial histories were derivative, drawing together existing writing on education for a new purpose. Stadial theories developed, informed by ideas concerning evolution and historical materialism, which presented education as a progressive social force. Britain was identified as a dominant nation advancing the economic, social, political and cultural improvement of humanity. A classic articulation is Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848), which plotted the rise of the British nation and stated baldly that ‘The history of our country during the last hundred and sixty years is eminently the history of physical, of moral, and of intellectual improvement’.¹¹

A similar narrative would later be applied to the rise of compulsory schooling, with an attendant marginalisation of other areas of learning. G. A. N. Lowndes, in *A Silent Social Revolution* (1937/1969), attached Whig notions of improvement to a universal system of state education in accounting for a gradual diminution of a parlous state of poverty and ‘ignorance’. As the author comes up for air out of the thicket of education policy and administration, historical improvements in the state of the people are identified. The book’s

³Timothy Corcoran, *State Policy in Irish Education, AD 1536 to 1816* (Dublin: Fallon Brothers, 1916); see also James Kelly and Susan Hegarty, ‘Introduction: Writing the History of Irish Education’, in *Schools and Schooling 1650–2000: New Perspectives on the History of Education* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 22.

⁴Deirdre Raftery, Jane McDermid, and Gareth Elwyn Jones, ‘Social Change and Education in Ireland, Scotland and Wales: Historiography on Nineteenth-Century Schooling’, *History of Education* 36, no. 4–5 (2007): 449–50.

⁵Robert Anderson, Mark Freeman, and Lindsay Paterson, ‘Editors’ introduction’, in *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 1–7.

⁶George Davie, *The Democratic Intellect: Scotland and Her Universities in the Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1961).

⁷Alfred Mumford, *The Manchester Grammar School 1515–1915* (London: Longmans, 1919); compare J. F. C. Harrison, *A History of the Working Men’s College 1854–1954* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).

⁸Peter Gordon and Richard Szreter, eds., *History of Education: The Making of a Discipline* (London: Woburn, 1989).

⁹Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2011), 12–13. For other accounts of the field see, William Richardson, ‘Historians and Educationists: The History of Education as a Field of Study in Post-War England Part I: 1945–72’, *History of Education*, 28, no. 1 (1999): 1–30, and ‘Part II: 1972–96’, *History of Education* 28, no. 2 (1999): 109–41; Roy Lowe, *History of Education: Major Themes* (4 vols, London: Routledge Falmer, 2000); Joyce Goodman and Ian Grosvenor, ‘Educational Research: History of Education a Curious Case?’ *Oxford Review of Education* 35, no. 5 (2009): 601–16.

¹⁰Raftery, McDermid, and Jones, ‘Social Change and Education’, 455.

¹¹Thomas Macaulay, *History of England from the Accession of James II*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1848), chap. 1.

title recognises deep cultural changes resulting from public education and democracy, a concern that was to endure.¹²

A related structuring device was to chart the history of ‘western’ education, including Britain and Ireland, stretching back to ancient Greece and Rome, via the Renaissance and Enlightenment rediscovery of the ancient world. It could be recounted in terms of an ineluctable process of educational growth that advanced in response to changing circumstances. For William Boyd, writing in 1921, western education was ‘essentially a record of evolution’ that ‘links up the past and present as members of one growing life which at the moment is our life’.¹³ Ellwood P. Cubberley, writing a year earlier, set the ‘progress and practice and organisation of education’ within ‘a phase of the history of the development and spread of our civilisation’.¹⁴ It was a model that attracted interest after the Second World War and beyond.¹⁵ Despite the historical variability in the notion of the ‘West’, which has been reinvented at different times, an apparently inclusive tradition was harnessed to an exclusive club in which, for instance, the contribution of Muslim influences and other non-white intellectual sources were systematically downplayed, perhaps paralleled in the way that the ‘white’ sculptures of the Renaissance falsely mimicked the ancient world.¹⁶

Individual lives both illustrated and generated educational change. Overarching historical forces blended fortuitously with an unplanned and spontaneous process that brought together the state, nation and individual.¹⁷ Collective tradition could thus result from a voluntaristic train of eclectic and innovative individuals who were presented as harbingers of educational progress. Learning from the lives of exemplary individuals had been energised by the Reformation with its emphasis upon the individual’s direct connection to God,¹⁸ although arguably this development could be accommodated by Catholicism too, by adapting its focus on saintly figures. By the nineteenth century, it was commonly assumed that the lives of individual educators proffered an interlinking chain of innovation and improvement. For Thomas Carlyle ‘Universal History . . . is at bottom the History of the Great Men [*sic*] . . . the leaders of men . . . the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators . . . the soul of the whole world’s history’.¹⁹ R. H. Quick’s *Essays on Educational Reformers* is often taken as symptomatic of a chronological listing of key educators. In fact, his interest lay in offering up the accumulated ‘treasure and wisdom’, particularly of Enlightenment thinkers, in order to help to overcome what he saw as the elitist, literary and classical educational heritage of the Renaissance.²⁰

¹²G. A. N. Lowndes, *The Silent Social Revolution: An Account of the Expansion of Public Education in England and Wales 1895–1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

¹³William Boyd, *The History of Western Education* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1968).

¹⁴Ellwood P. Cubberley, *The History of Education: Educational Practice and Progress Considered as a Phase of the Development and Spread of Western Civilisation* (London: Constable, 1948), viii.

¹⁵R. Freeman Butts, *A Cultural History of Western Education: Its Social and Intellectual Foundations* (London: McGraw Hill, 1947/1955). For a more recent version, see Denis Lawton and Peter Gordon, *A History of Western Educational Ideas* (London: Woburn Press, 2002).

¹⁶Shlomo Sand, *Twilight of History* (London: Verso, 2017); Martin Bernal, *Black Athena* (3 vols, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987, 1991, 2006); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); on selective tradition see Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961/1971).

¹⁷A. V. Judges, ed., *Pioneers of English Education* (London: Faber, 1952), 12.

¹⁸This tradition is exemplified by John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563).

¹⁹Thomas Carlyle, ‘On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History’, in *Sartor Resartus & On Heroes* (London: J. M. Dent, 1926), 239.

²⁰Robert H. Quick, *Essays on Educational Reformers* (London: Longmans Green, 1894), 505.

Challenges to the individualist model soon germinated. At the turn of the twentieth century, Owen Balfour, who implicitly recognised that powerful individuals required supportive contexts, played with the form. He placed key reformers such as Robert Owen, John Stuart Mill and Charles Kingsley together with a number of movements – Chartist, trade union, co-operative – as well as a collective group of educational reformers. This was an explicit corrective to Carlyle that grounded the nation in the democracy of the everyday and hinged historical development upon ‘humanity at large, on the life of the home, the workshop, the street, the club, the village, the church, the town, the nation’.²¹ In addition, John Adamson, A. F. Leach and Michael Sadler would all interrogate histories of ideas and individuals in the form of institutional history.²² Inevitably, there were antecedent institutional histories such as J. W. Hudson’s outline of literary and philosophical societies in *The History of Adult Education* (1851).²³

There were repeated, if partial, attempts to capture the wider social context. R. A. Butler welcomed Lowndes’s history because it ‘does not talk about education in a water-tight compartment’ but was permeated by ‘wars and struggles’.²⁴ A. V. Judges’s *Pioneers of English Education* distanced itself from Quick’s ‘flotilla of small biographies’ and highlighted how the post-Second World War years were concerned with the ‘social implications’ of educational proposals, something that would later become conventional.²⁵ There were perhaps precursors here also. A. E. Dobbs, inspired by the burgeoning adult education movement of the early twentieth century, had perceived that education was part of a bigger story.²⁶

Acts and facts were not hermetically sealed from values, philosophy and meanings, which seeped out almost involuntarily and stimulated a yearning for deeper scrutiny even if this was not openly countenanced. Graham Balfour’s intention to exhume the ‘dry bones’ of educational agencies and systems was a trend that would, over time, invigorate contrary musings on the nature of education. H. C. Barnard’s ambitious history of English education from 1760 to 1944 compressed a vast range of developments into a single volume but, as a finale, he implored his readers not to neglect the spirit of philosophy ‘in an age which otherwise can offer us only the destruction of our civilisation’. He warned that an exclusive focus on ‘legislation, codes, memoranda, curricula, and examinations may merely lead us into the wilderness’, and that education was becoming preoccupied with defending the class structure.²⁷

Liberal assumptions regarding progress would inform the growth of democracy and gain increased urgency with the rise of fascism in the 1930s. Fred Clarke highlighted the place of inherited traditions of learning in attempting to mould education to the needs of a post-war democratic nation which demanded that everyone should be educated.²⁸ In 1961, in the *Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams would address the implications of an educated democracy rubbing up against deep-seated historical assumptions concerning

²¹Owen Balfour, *Some Social and Political Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902), 5.

²²John Adamson, *A Short History of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919); A. F. Leach, *The Schools of Medieval England* (London: Methuen, 1915); Michael Sadler, *Continuation Schools in England and Elsewhere* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1908).

²³J. W. Hudson, *The History of Adult Education* (London: Woburn Press, 1969 [1st ed. 1851]).

²⁴Lord Butler, ‘Foreword’: Lowndes, *Silent Social Revolution*, iv.

²⁵Judges, *Pioneers*.

²⁶A. E. Dobbs, *Educational and Social Movements 1700–1850* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1919/1969).

²⁷H. C. Barnard, *A History of English Education from 1760* (London: University of London Press, 1947/1971), 317.

²⁸Fred Clarke, *Education and Social Change: An English Interpretation* (London: Sheldon Press, 1940).

class; he argued that extending traditions necessarily entailed their transformation.²⁹ Clarke and Williams provide a bridge between the interwar years and the issues that came to be identified with the 1960s. The cross-examination of received traditions was to become commonplace as class perspectives came into view and then exploded into an array of inequalities.

Revisionism: agency, conflict and control

From the 1960s there is indeed a conspicuous shift of direction. Distinctive national narratives, with England as the reference point, had necessitated some historical obfuscation. In the coming decades, histories increasingly focused upon education within respective nations that potentially opened the way to comparisons across national borders but, in reality, were rarely transgressed. By 1995, Robert Anderson could write that ‘The actual relationship of English and Scottish education was very close; yet their history has usually been written as if they were on different planets’.³⁰ Even so, intellectual advances were felt organisationally. In 1967, the formation of the History of Education Society (UK) helped to bring together various interested parties who at first coalesced around teacher training. Indeed, between the 1960s and 1980s, history of education was deeply integrated into teacher preparation. With a dearth of teaching material, many innovative works appeared and the ‘Students Library of Education’ series made available a range of educational research. In education departments, history of education partnered with other ‘foundation disciplines’ of philosophy, sociology and psychology, which, according to the philosopher R. S. Peters, were to ‘mesh’ in providing coherence to the study of education.³¹ Despite important collaborations, the disciplines often remained separate at a time when education departments were facing turbulent times.³² Pedagogy and curriculum were hardly covered while other disciplines, including geography and economics, were not initially included.

The transformative surge of the 1960s and 1970s did not last. In the 1980s, reforms would exclude history of education and other disciplines from the teacher training curriculum. The bond with teacher education attenuated, although the ties of loyalty and commitment to teachers and teacher education would not be wholly severed. As a result, the history of education would diversify its interests and emulate more closely the discipline of history. Given this development, the foundation of the *History of Education* journal in 1972 presciently featured Asa Briggs’s much-quoted vision for the history of education to be part of the ‘wider study of the history of society, social history broadly interpreted with the politics, the economics and, it is necessary to add, the religion put in’, inverting G. M. Trevelyan’s definition of social ‘history as history with the politics left out’.³³ The new social history adapted ideas from other disciplines such as

²⁹Williams, *The Long Revolution*, 145–76. For a later period, compare Lindsay Paterson, *Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

³⁰Compare Robert Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People 1750–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Henry Macdonald Knox, *Two Hundred and Fifty Years of Scottish Education* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1953).

³¹R. S. Peters, *Education and the Education of Teachers* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

³²See Richardson, ‘Historians and Educationists ... Part II’.

³³Asa Briggs, ‘The Study of the History of Education’, *History of Education* 1, no. 1 (1972): 5; G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: Reprint Society, 1944/1948), vii.

sociology and anthropology. Sociologists had already made use of historical perspectives, an appetiser for the later development of historical sociology.³⁴

Brian Simon's oeuvre had a widespread impact, tying educational change directly into social and political conflict, particularly class struggle, from the late eighteenth century. Simon was interested to uncover what he viewed as the 'framework of the present educational system', which, for him, equated with a harmful focus on class division and selection.³⁵ The emergence of elementary education is presented partly as a ruling-class response to a radical working-class movement that had taken on the mantle of the enlightenment with a 'fervent belief in the power of human reason, in science, in education as an essential means to individual and social development'.³⁶ In 1960, Simon's originality drew in part upon ideas prevailing in the Communist Party, though he was perhaps more tangential to the work of the Communist Party Historians Group than has sometimes been assumed. While the preoccupation with class aligned with the mentality of the Communist Party, his exclusive interest in education was more restrictive than that of many historians in the group. Simon's work was to inspire a number of scholars, including those coming from different political persuasions.³⁷ In part, this was because his strand of Marxism, inflected by liberal humanist assumptions, allowed for a conception of education in which participants were seen as claiming autonomy and agency.³⁸ While the influence of Marxism was not ubiquitous – it had less of a hold, for example, in Wales – there was nevertheless an openness to contextualised historical outlooks.³⁹

Fissiparous tendencies were all folding history of education into economic, social, political and cultural forces reflecting the rise of social history. Impressive work was developed by J. F. C. Harrison, whose *Learning and Living* probed the 'social purpose' of adult education as well as the tension between provision from above and below.⁴⁰ This important monograph was perhaps less recognised in history of education, partly because Harrison was based in history departments and his focus on adult education may have been perceived as marginal. Harold Silver built critically on the ideas of American historians Lawrence Cremin and Bernard Bailyn by embracing social, political, economic and cultural currents, in order to penetrate a notion of 'popular education'.⁴¹ Gareth Elwyn Jones re-evaluated some aspects of the mythology of the Welsh intermediate and grammar schools;⁴² others would scrutinise radical and progressive education, liberal education, economic and

³⁴Olive Banks, *Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education* (London: Routledge, 1955).

³⁵Brian Simon, *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780–1870* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1981 [1st ed. 1960]), 13; Brian Simon, *The Politics of Educational Reform 1920–1940* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1974); Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1965); Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order: British Education Since 1944* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991).

³⁶Simon, *The Two Nations*, 14.

³⁷For example, Gary McCulloch, *Education, History and Social Change*, Inaugural Professorial Lecture (London: Institute of Education, 2004); McCulloch, *Struggle*.

³⁸Related to the problem of determination in Marxist theory, see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 83–9; McCulloch, *Struggle*, 48.

³⁹Raftery, McDermid, and Jones, 'Social Change and Education', 460.

⁴⁰J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living 1790–1960: A Study in the History of the English Adult Education Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961).

⁴¹Harold Silver, *The Concept of Popular Education: A Study of Ideas and Social Movements in the Early Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1965/1977); Harold Silver, *Education as History: Interpreting Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Education* (London: Methuen, 1983).

⁴²Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Controls and Conflicts in Welsh Secondary Education* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982); see also Donald Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: the National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

technological change or delve further back to Renaissance and Tudor England.⁴³ David Vincent's studies of literacy and working-class autobiography amplified the focus on social purpose by outlining the learning trajectories of individuals within a rich network of domestic, workplace, social and political movements.⁴⁴

Social class provided a crucible for debate, especially in the wake of E. P. Thompson's seminal *The Making of the English Working Class*, which propounded that the agency, self-learning and collective experience of the poor were decisive in the emergence of the working class. Thomas Lacquer argued that the working class could colonise institutions such as the Sunday schools rather than these simply being an instrument of middle-class domination.⁴⁵ A 'mature' and 'viable class society' that emerged in late Victorian Britain tied into discussions concerning 'reformism' and a 'labour aristocracy'.⁴⁶ Moreover, in the early 1970s, concepts of social control and social reproduction were deployed to explain the lack of change in the structure of education as part of a debate within Marxism.⁴⁷ Richard Johnson's use of social control, in part developed from Thompson's work, reversed the assumption that education was necessarily progressive.⁴⁸ Johnson also highlighted agency, particularly early nineteenth-century radical working-class opposition to 'provided education' as an attempt to frame 'really useful knowledge', a politicised counter to the middle-class notion of 'useful knowledge'. This had the effect of shaking the universal foundations of Enlightenment knowledge, an assumption of Simon's, which was reconceived as a contested force field.⁴⁹ In subsequent decades, the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu on social reproduction and cultural capital would span both social class and the deepening implications of cultural theory.⁵⁰

Social change, theory and inequalities

In the 1990s, new theoretical work appeared to mount an assault upon the foundations of historical practice. The period coincided with the end of the Cold War, which had been marked by sharply defined and bitterly contested ideologies based upon, for instance, functionalism, Marxism and liberalism. Debates over poststructuralism and

⁴³W. A. C. Stewart and W. P. McCann, *The Educational Innovators: Volume I, 1750–1880* (London: Macmillan, 1967), and *Volume II, 1880–1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965); Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Sheldon Rothblatt, *Tradition and Change in English Liberal Education: An Essay in History and Culture* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976); W. H. G. Armytage, *Four Hundred Years of English Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), vi.

⁴⁴David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom* (London: Methuen, 1982). Compare Lawrence Stone, 'Literacy and Education in England 1640–1900', *Past and Present* 421 (1969): 69–139.

⁴⁵Thomas Walter Lacquer, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

⁴⁶Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London: Routledge, 1969); Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Working-Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900; Notes on the Remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 4 (1974), 460–508.

⁴⁷Brian Simon, 'Can Education Change Society?' in Brian Simon, *Does Education Matter?* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 13–31.

⁴⁸Richard Johnson, 'Educational Policy and Social Control in Early Victorian England', *Past and Present* 49 (1970): 96–119.

⁴⁹Richard Johnson, "'Really Useful Knowledge': Radical Education and Working-Class Culture, 1790–1848", in *Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. John Clarke, Chas Critcher, and Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 75–102.

⁵⁰Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1977).

postmodernism came a little later to history than other disciplines, with vigorous disputes being aired in the journals *Social History* and *Past and Present* around 1992, converging especially on language and linguistic analysis. In architecture and English studies, these intellectual clashes had broken out earlier; their impact was to be felt much later in history of education. Michel Foucault's ideas on power, institutions, discourse and morality were pertinent to educational history. Power was not simply controlled by historical agents such as the ruling or working class but was ubiquitous, multi-dimensional and multi-directional. All institutions, including schools, shared disciplinary regimes.⁵¹ The deconstruction of 'grand narratives', as well as the insistence that all contexts were already textualised, potentially undermined the possibility of historical explanation.⁵² At one level, this work pointed to a critique of Enlightenment reason itself.

The chasm in seminar rooms was less pronounced in the history of education where poststructuralist ideas took longer to digest, by which time the explosive early disagreements were calming. Both Lowe and Aldrich had rebuffed obdurate postmodern assumptions, which had made limited incursions into history of education, in defending the search for truth. In reality, the two supposedly distinct approaches were being selectively grafted onto one another and basic historical assumptions were sustained.⁵³ It was possible to make good use of 'discourse' while retaining a sense of external 'reality' as well as the category of experience. Rigid theoretical loyalties splintered into a new eclecticism in which theory could be 'used' to help interrogate specific institutions, practices and lives. The toolbox metaphor allowed for theories to be promiscuously tried out in an exploratory way. The 'cultural' focus of poststructuralism also turned out to share some common ground with earlier social histories. An example was Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin's *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain*, which regarded education as a dialogic process, part of 'a fluid . . . area of cultural practice' that entwined the history of learning into more extensive historical explanations.⁵⁴ Indeed, it became evident that ostensibly poststructuralist approaches could in fact generate quite general, if nuanced, explanations of historical change, increasing our understanding of narratives surrounding race and colonialism, welfare, educationalisation, privatisation and other historical forces. Occasional friction over theoretical matters did not inhibit a constructive dialogue and, as Pavla Miller noted, not all historians needed in-depth theoretical training or knowledge to be able to apply its insights.⁵⁵

In addition, many historians were involved in educational departments where post-structuralism had been received more as a means of making visible 'other' groups – women, minority ethnic, disabled voices – which extended knowledge in a productive way. Race and gender studies sought to disassemble what were deemed to be monolithic and white male-centred accounts of class. Women could be hidden behind a historical façade of formal institutions and movements.⁵⁶ The new social history had opened up

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (Harlow: Longman: 1980).

⁵² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

⁵³ Aldrich, 'The Three Duties of the Historian of Education'; Geoff Eley, *A Crooked Line* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Roy Lowe, 'Postmodernity and Historians of Education: A View from Britain', *Paedagogica Historica*, 32, no. 2 (1996): 307–3, addressed theories of postmodernity in general.

⁵⁴ Mary Hilton and Jill Shefrin, eds., *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 20.

⁵⁵ Marc Depaepe, 'Essay Review', *Paedagogica Historica*, 39, no. 1 (2003): 185–99; Pavla Miller, 'Historiography of Compulsory Schooling: What is the Problem?' *History of Education* 18, no. 2 (1989): 23–44.

⁵⁶ Dorothy Thompson, *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993).

social processes and experience, but it became increasingly problematic to prioritise one set of experiences over another. The diversity of class experiences could not be contained easily within a singular category of class.⁵⁷ A Pandora's box of new agendas relating to gender, race and, to a lesser extent, disability was released.

Innovative work on inequalities resulted from these debates as contemporary developments influenced perspectives on the past. Historians of education took some time to respond to the rise of the women's liberation movement,⁵⁸ primarily in the 1980s and 1990s. The traditional focus on key educators took on a new significance when applied to women, stimulating debates on change and reproduction.⁵⁹ The emphasis on agency could also give prominence to the processes through which women had opposed their subordination in quite radical ways.⁶⁰ It was apparent that these battles had not all been successful. Women in educational settings from schools through to universities lived out, and were at times complicit in, deep-seated ideological and structural inequalities. The ideal of femininity, the ideology and construction of separate spheres and patriarchal structures, including the family, were implicated in the reproduction of women's subordination. Carol Dyhouse, for example, delved into the way young girls were socialised in Victorian and Edwardian England, not least through the family.⁶¹

The close examination of women's experience, which had generated new ways of looking at historical and educational issues, also threw up problems relating to the bounded experiences of different groups; for instance, black women might hold conflicting views on the family and work. An important way forward was the development of the category of gender, encompassing femininity and masculinity, which were embroiled in active educational processes even where the story of women appeared to offer fewer opportunities.⁶² The category of gender did not simply replace the interest in studying women, but rather augmented it, a coupling that has continued to the current day. Gender formations and women's agency, in relation to equality and inequality, are habitually interrogated within the nations of Britain and beyond. A few examples include investigations of female pupils engaging with careers and politics in schools; the affinities between female emancipation and Welsh education; historical correctives to the Scottish celebration of equal opportunities; and the varied impact of femininity in colonial India.⁶³ Moreover, gender was further developed with the much smaller number of studies focusing on masculinity. The range of work includes

⁵⁷Tom Woodin, 'Working-Class Education and Social Change in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain', *History of Education* 36, no. 4–5 (2007): 483–96.

⁵⁸Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It* (London: Pluto Press, 1974).

⁵⁹Sheila Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶⁰Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (London: Virago, 1983).

⁶¹Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). See also June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991); Carol Dyhouse, *No Distinction of Sex: Women in British Universities 1870–1939* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

⁶²Joan Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75.

⁶³Stephanie Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); Helen Sunderland, 'Politics in Schoolgirl Debating Cultures in England, 1886–1914', *Historical Journal* 63, no. 4 (2020): 935–57; Gareth Evans, *Education and Female Emancipation, the Welsh Experience, 1847–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990); Helen Corr, 'Teachers and Gender: Debating the Myths of Equal Opportunities in Scottish Education 1800–1914', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 27, no. 3 (1997): 355–63; Tim Allender, *Learning Femininity in Colonial India, 1820–1932* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

J. A. Mangan on the ethos and culture of fee-paying schools, and Heather Ellis on the self-fashioning and public image of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British ‘man of science’.⁶⁴

Work on race and education was similarly delayed and remains less developed than gender. Activists wove historical reflections on education into contemporary reflections. *The Heart of the Race* had outlined the history of migrants from the Caribbean, highlighting the work of Bernard Coard and the suspect notion of ‘educationally sub-normal’.⁶⁵ Official reports, including the 1985 ‘Swann Report’ and the 1999 MacPherson Report, which gave formal recognition to ‘institutional racism’, increased public awareness. Historical work on race had sometimes inadvertently stigmatised ethnic minorities by associating their presence with demonstrations and ‘riots’. As with women and gender, focusing on the agency and active involvement of racialised groups, for example through supplementary schools and community groups, went hand in hand with a desire to comprehend ubiquitous processes of racialisation and racism.⁶⁶ From the outset, the notion of race was problematised although the concept of whiteness garnered less attention. Scholarship focusing on disability has been even more scarce. This is perhaps surprising given its centrality to education and the ways in which disabled people were actively differentiated and segregated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁶⁷ Pritchard’s 1963 history, which bears a resemblance to some of the earlier Whiggish works we have noted, had outlined a progressive story of institutional provision for the disabled.⁶⁸ This would later be challenged by social movements and academics who accentuated the harmful effects of medicalisation and segregation. Recent work parallels that on race and gender by considering that categories may be ‘socially constructed’, for instance, how ‘personal judgment preceded standardised tests’ in identifying ‘mental deficiency’ or individual proficiency.⁶⁹ Intersections with other factors have been surfaced, for example, in the way that girls with visual impairments, who were placed outside mainstream schooling, were expected to conform to ‘expectations of a female middle class education’.⁷⁰ A focus on the nuances of inclusion and exclusion, of ‘doing good’ and exerting control, reveals confusions and contradictions.

The study of inequalities has been tenacious. At the end of the twentieth century, Jurgen Herbst argued that the focus on class, race and gender had become hackneyed and he called for new paradigms. Paradoxically, at the time, inequalities were sharpening rather than

⁶⁴James Mangan, *‘Manufactured’ Masculinity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017).

⁶⁵Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain* (London: Verso, 1981); Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971).

⁶⁶Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 1998); Kevin Myers, *Struggles for a Past: Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1951–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Ian Grosvenor, ‘“What do they Know of England who Only England Know”: A Case for an Alternative Narrative of the Ordinary in Twenty-First Century Britain’, *History of Education* 47, no. 2 (2018): 148–68; Jessica Gerrard, ‘Self Help and Protest: The Emergence of Black Supplementary Schooling in England’, *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 16, no. 1 (2013): 32–58.

⁶⁷Felicity Armstrong, ‘Disability, Education and Social Change in England since 1960’, *History of Education* 36, no. 4 (2007): 551–68.

⁶⁸D. G. Pritchard, *Education and the Handicapped 1760–1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963). Compare Simon Jarrett, *Those They Called Idiots: The Idea of the Disabled Mind from 1700 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020).

⁶⁹Anna Brown, ‘Ellen Pinsent: Including the “Feebleminded” in Birmingham, 1900–1913’, *History of Education* 34, no. 2 (2006): 546.

⁷⁰Jeanette Normanton-Erry, ‘Phyllis Monk: A Pragmatic Revolutionary in Charge of a School for Girls with Little or no Sight’, *History of Education* 50, no. 3 (2021): 360.

declining,⁷¹ and were deeply imbricated in historical evidence, so could not be easily discarded. Indeed, perspectives based on social class and economic inequality have retained their attraction in the face of new theoretical provocations. For instance, since the 1990s, contemporary views of poor children as both a threat to social order and in need of protection have been discussed – charity, control and agency have intersected with gender, class and neighbourhood.⁷² Class and gender remain important lenses to elucidate social change over the long term.⁷³ The persistence of work on labour, social and adult educational movements is unearthing fertile historical trends.⁷⁴ Attention has been directed to previously under-examined groups such as the ‘middle-classes’.⁷⁵ The education of elites – particularly in England but also within other nations – has been studied through public (fee paying) schools, with attention given to the creation of school and class cultures via architecture and sport.⁷⁶ Inequalities and their intersections thus represent a far from exhausted topic, which has helped to generate new directions, theories and sources.

Historians interested in inequalities have rooted out the profound nature of learning in a range of settings.⁷⁷ Working-class communities, broadcasting, play schemes, social and youth movements, workshops and the home, within which multiple inequalities circulate, have all been appraised as contexts of learning. ‘Learning’ in these settings has encompassed literacy (reading and writing), moral values and expectations of good citizenship, and (Welsh) cultural and linguistic identities.⁷⁸ Pageants have orchestrated arresting renditions of the past while exhibitions of artwork or writing workshops have helped to justify social action.⁷⁹ There is also some lineage between recent work on

⁷¹Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better* (London: Penguin, 2009).

⁷²Jane McDermid, ‘Gender and Geography: The Schooling of Poor Girls in the Highlands and Islands of Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *History of Education Review* 32, no. 2 (2003): 30–45; Susannah Wright, ‘The Work of Teachers and Others in and around a Birmingham Slum School 1891–1920’, *History of Education* 38, no. 6 (2009): 729–46.

⁷³Roy Lowe, *Schooling and Social Change since 1760: Creating Inequalities through Education* (London: Routledge, 2021); Jane Martin, *Gender and Education in England 1770 to the Present Day: A Social and Cultural History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

⁷⁴Mark Freeman, ‘Adult Education History in Britain: Past, Present and Future (Part I)’, *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 3 (2020): 384–95, and ‘(Part II)’, *Paedagogica Historica* 56, no. 3 (2020): 396–411; Tom Woodin, ‘Co-operative Education in Britain during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Context, Identity and Learning’, in *Learning for a Co-operative World*, ed. Tom Woodin and Linda Shaw (London: Trentham, 2019), 18–35.

⁷⁵Gary McCulloch, ‘Education and the Middle Classes: The Case of the English Grammar Schools, 1868–1944’, *History of Education* 35, no. 6 (2006): 689–704.

⁷⁶For example G. P. T. Finn, ‘Trinity Mysteries: University, Elite Schooling and Sport in Ireland’, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (2010): 2255–87; William Whyte, ‘Building a Public School Community, 1860–1910’, *History of Education* 32 no. 6 (2003): 601–26.

⁷⁷Gary McCulloch and Tom Woodin, ‘Towards a Social History of Learning’, *Oxford Review of Education* 36 no. 2 (2010): 133–40; David Hamilton, *Towards a Theory of Schooling* (London: Routledge, 1989); Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Gary McCulloch, series ed., *A Cultural History of Education*, vols. 1–6 (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

⁷⁸Christina de Bellaigue, ed., *Home Education in Historical Perspective: Domestic Pedagogies in England and Wales, 1750–1900* (London: Routledge, 2016); Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens 1930–1960* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Lottie Hoare, ‘Dons not Clowns: Isaiah Berlin Challenges Richard Cawston’s Edit of the Educator’, *History of Education* 46, no. 1 (2017): 76–93; M. Kernon, ‘Developing Citizenship through Supervised Play: The Civics Institute of Ireland Playgrounds, 1933–75’, *History of Education* 36, no. 4 (2005): 675–87; Sian Pooley, ‘Children’s Writing and the Popular Press in England 1876–1914’, *History Workshop Journal* 80, no. 1 (2015): 75–98; M. Löffler, ‘Foundations of a Nation: The Welsh League of Youth and Wales Before the Second World War’, *Welsh History Review* 23, no. 1 (2006): 74–105; Tom Woodin, *Working-Class Writing and Publishing in the Late Twentieth Century: Literature, Culture and Community* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

⁷⁹Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Alexander Hutton and Paul Readman, eds., *Restaging the Past: Historical Pageants, Culture and Society in Modern Britain* (London: UCL Press, 2020); Siân Roberts, ‘Education, Art and Exile: Cultural Activists and Exhibitions of Refugee Children’s Art in the UK during the Second World War’, *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 3 (2017): 300–17; Woodin, *Working Class Writing*.

reading and learning and earlier studies, for example Jonathan Rose's *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* in 2001, which attended to the fluid and evanescent nature of learning, had been influenced by Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader* of 1957.⁸⁰

Space, place and the emotions

In the past few decades, debates on learning, poststructuralism and inequalities sparked a chain reaction of theoretical and methodological developments that had application in history of education. The strange pairing of a poststructuralist focus on the textual and logical and a contrasting Catholic embrace of theoretical experimentation and multiple borrowings across disciplines contributed to a hunger for repeated innovation. Discourse analysis had little to say about the affective aspects of social change that were embodied, understood and articulated through the senses and emotions, which were highly suggestive for educational history. Emotions were recognised as a crucial aspect of learning as were the senses, in all their cultural variations, which provided new leads.⁸¹ For some time, literature and oral histories had enhanced archival research; visual and sensory sources were to extend the range further.

Moreover, 'new materialism' highlighted the agentic role of material facets of the educational process: buildings, desks, blackboards and the structural environment of learning have all been imbued with a level of agency.⁸² At a detailed level, seeing the world in a grain of sand, as William Blake had it, the meanings of small spaces and material artefacts of schooling, allied to emotions and the senses, have been excavated to examine power, inequalities and identity. Looking into the classroom – the so-called 'black box of schooling' – helped to comprehend the rhythms of everyday schooling in the past.⁸³ The material could expand beyond the classroom. Essays in *The Decorated School* explore, for instance, how post-war progressive education enlarged the parameters of art education to broader aspects of teaching and learning about the visual, or political components of children's involvement in public and school murals against the backdrop of 'The Troubles' in Belfast.⁸⁴

Each of these developments was associated with a widening deployment of concepts, disciplinary frameworks, sources and methodologies, many of which were investigated in the 'Sources and Interpretations' section of the *History of Education* journal.⁸⁵ Indeed, the sensual and emotional often entered history of education as new methods and sources

⁸⁰Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*; Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁸¹Russell Grigg, "Wading Through Children's Tears": The Emotional Experiences of Elementary School Inspections, 1839–1911', *History of Education* 49, no. 5 (2020): 597–616; Stephanie Olsen, *Juvenile Nation: Youth, Emotions and the Making of the Modern British Citizen, 1880–1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); Martin Lawn, Kate Rousmaniere and Ian Grosvenor, eds., *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Ian Grosvenor, 'Back to the Future or Towards a Sensory History of Schooling', *History of Education* 41, no. 5 (2012): 675–87; Catherine Burke, 'Feet, Footwork, Footwear, and "Being Alive" in the Modern School', *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 1–2 (2018): 32–47.

⁸²Martin Lawn, ed., *Modelling the Future: Exhibitions and the Materiality of Education* (Oxford: Symposium, 2009).

⁸³Sjaak Braster, Ian Grosvenor, and Maria del Mar del Pozo Andres, eds., *The Black Box of Schooling: A Cultural History of the Classroom* (Peter Lang, 2011).

⁸⁴Jeremy Howard, Cathy Burke, and Peter Cunningham, *The Decorated School: Essays on the Visual Culture of Schooling* (London: Black Dog, 2013) (see especially chapters by Peter Cunningham and Emma Duff).

⁸⁵William Richardson, 'British Historiography in International Context at the Turn of the Century, 1996–2006', *History of Education* 36, nos. 4–5 (2007): 569–93.

rather than representing a Kuhnian paradigm shift. The result has been the construction of an inclusive zone of deliberation in which substantive analyses, political and methodological tensions can be engaged from diverse theoretical anchorings.⁸⁶

Moreover, in the wake of disturbances in spatial divisions of learning and labour wreaked by global change, inequality became increasingly spatialised, focusing the eye of the historian not only on the small scale but also larger panoramas and the affiliations between them. In recognition of the contingency of the nation, settings for British and Irish education have been identified in colonies where race, class and gender relations played out.⁸⁷ Transnational approaches helped to shift the trajectory away from what critics termed ‘inward’ histories based upon ‘methodological nationalism’.⁸⁸ School stories from Britain and the United States shared features of genre and constructions of femininity.⁸⁹ Teachers from different parts of Britain and Ireland were exposed to transnational influences through travel and links with past students who moved overseas. In turn, experiences and objects from these travels and connections would find their way into British classrooms. Imperially based interchange schemes provided a space within which multiple ‘British worlds’, consisting of real and imagined associations, could develop.⁹⁰ For teachers and architects, school buildings facilitated transnational exchange.⁹¹

Although transnational histories have blurred and pushed beyond national boundaries, the nation has remained significant, if contentious. The borders between English, British and Imperial identities can be difficult to unpick, deriving in part from elisions within contemporary sources themselves where British has frequently implied an English identity, and where ‘British’ and imperial loyalties have been assumed to be synonymous.⁹² Evaluations of distinctiveness and similarities in Ireland and Britain both complicate and sustain previous notions of national paths and traditions. For example, Welsh identity has been perceptible but tied in with England in terms of administration and funding. Episodes of particularity and debate from the mid-nineteenth century around curriculum, provision of schools and legislation drew on an assumed ‘Welshness’ in agricultural and nonconformist education. Welshness and memories of its suppression by the English have informed public and political discussions. Similarly, powerful assertions regarding Scotland’s distinctive

⁸⁶ Compare Philip Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (London: Routledge, 2010); McCulloch, *Struggle*; Goodman and Grosvenor, ‘Educational Research’.

⁸⁷ Tim Allender, *Ruling through Education: The Politics of Schooling in the Colonial Punjab* (Perth, Western Australia: New Dawn Press, 2006); Rebecca Swartz, *Education and Empire: Children, Race and Humanitarianism in the British Settler Colonies, 1833–1880* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

⁸⁸ Compare Depaepe, ‘What Kind of History of Education?’; Kevin Myers, Ian Grosvenor, and Ruth Watts, eds., ‘Education and Globalisation’, special issue, *History of Education* 37, no. 6 (2008); Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, ‘Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences’, *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (2002): 301–34.

⁸⁹ Nancy Rosoff and Stephanie Spencer, *British and American School Stories, 1910–1960: Fiction, Femininity and Friendship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019).

⁹⁰ Christopher Bischof, *Teaching Britain: Elementary Teachers and the State of the Everyday, 1846–1906* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Jody Crutchley, ‘Teacher Mobility and Transnational, “British World” Space: The League of the Empire’s “Interchange of Home and Dominion Teachers”, 1907–1931’, *History of Education* 44, no. 6 (2015): 729–48.

⁹¹ Cathy Burke, ‘Putting Education in its Place: Mapping the Observations of Danish and English Architects on 1950s School Design’, *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 5 (2010): 655–72.

⁹² Ian Grosvenor, ‘“There’s no Place Like Home”: Education and the Making of National Identity’, *History of Education* 28, no. 3 (1999): 235–50; Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

democratic political and cultural traditions have been unsettled through empirically based scholarship.⁹³ The urge to contrast Scottish exceptionalism to English lacklustre educational performance, while remaining potent in public and political debate, has waned so that Scottish traditions of access and liberal education are now viewed more as exiguous rather than all-encompassing.⁹⁴ In the Irish context, research into the Gaeltacht (Irish-speaking regions) in the twentieth century has unpacked ‘uniqueness’ and, partially invented, Irish linguistic and cultural traditions. Simultaneously, the same governments which promoted these traditions required an English-speaking curriculum that fostered convergence.⁹⁵

Reworking perennial themes

The plentiful ‘turns’ in recent scholarly work indicate a concern with innovation and originality, which has not only spotlighted new areas but also rejuvenated customary ones. The emphasis on change and struggle can lead us to underplay durability in the history of education. Four recurring themes that have retained their allure among historians are: religion; the individual; institutional and contextual studies; and the relevance of history to contemporary times.

First, the previously well-tilled area of religion, so central to educational provision, had been partly marginalised by Marxist tendencies, which tended to view it as a cover for secular class-based interests.⁹⁶ Although religion has not seen the levels of interest devoted to, for example, gender, its enactment in educational arenas has received persistent attention.⁹⁷ Recent work has resuscitated and revisited controversies over the role of Church and state with regard to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century schooling and the 1870 Elementary Education Act, as well as subsequent contests over religion and citizenship.⁹⁸ Educators within the religious education subject community have been assessed, as has the role of women teachers and educators, for instance within Unitarian and Quaker networks.⁹⁹ A rich seam of work has mined the educational initiatives of

⁹³Gareth Elwyn Jones, ‘Education and Nationhood in Wales: An Historiographical Analysis’, *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 38 no. 3 (2006): 263–77; Martin Johnes, ‘Education: the Decline of Welsh and Why Communities Matter More Than Classrooms’, <https://martinjohnes.com/tag/welsh-not/> (accessed November 9, 2022); P. Munn and M. Arnott, ‘Citizenship in Scottish Schools: The Evolution of Education for Citizenship from the Late Twentieth Century to the Present’, *History of Education* 38, no. 3 (2009): 437–54.

⁹⁴Anderson, Freeman, and Paterson, ‘Editor Introduction’, 2.

⁹⁵Tom O’Donoghue and Teresa O’Doherty, *Irish Speakers and Schooling in the Gaeltacht, 1900 to the Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); see also David Limond, ‘“An Historic Culture ... Rapidly, Universally, and Thoroughly Restored?” British Influence on Irish Education Since 1922’, *Comparative Education* 46, no. 4 (2010): 449–62.

⁹⁶Nancy Ball, *Educating the People: A Documentary History of Elementary Schooling in England, 1840–1870* (London: Maurice Temple Smith, 1983); Marjorie Cruickshank, *Church and State in English Education, 1870 to the Present Day* (London: Macmillan, 1963); N. J. Richards, ‘Religious Controversy and the School Boards 1870–1902’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 18 (1970): 180–96.

⁹⁷Compare Deirdre Raftery, ‘Religions and the History of Education: A Historiography’, *History of Education* 41, no. 1 (2012): 52; Raftery, McDermid, and Jones, ‘Social Change and Education’, 456.

⁹⁸Mary Clare Martin, ‘Church, School and Locality: Revisiting the Historiography of “State” and “Religious” Educational Infrastructures in England and Wales, 1780–1870’, *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 1 (2013): 70–81; Stephen G. Parker, Sophie Allen, and Rob Freathy, ‘The Church of England and the 1870 Elementary Education Act’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68, no. 5 (2020): 541–65; Susannah Wright, *Morality and Citizenship in English Schools: Secular Approaches 1897–1944* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017).

⁹⁹Jonathan Doney, Stephen Parker, and Rob Freathy, ‘Enriching the Historiography of Religious Education: Insights from Oral Life History’, *History of Education* 46, no. 4 (2016): 1–23; Camilla Leach, ‘Religion and Rationality: Quaker Women and Science Education 1790–1850’, *History of Education* 35, no. 1 (2006): 69–90; Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England 1760–1860* (London: Routledge, 1998).

religious orders, especially operating in Ireland, but also overseas.¹⁰⁰ Although many missionary attempts to reach the rural population in colonial India or Africa could be limited, they nonetheless swayed religious and educational thinking at a time when state provision was itself limited.¹⁰¹

Second, the meanings and constitution of individual and collective lives remain a source of fascination. Individuals afford an important means of revealing social forces and unlocking the development of educational thinking and policy in Britain, Ireland and its colonies.¹⁰² The ‘great’ lives of earlier studies have been juxtaposed with silenced, marginalised and everyday voices, as in Jane Martin’s recovery of Mary Bridges Adams.¹⁰³ The agency of women has been asserted without losing a sense of social connection with others, marking a shift of emphasis in our appreciation of the individual as a social being. Accounts of Mary Sumner of the Mother Union, Mrs Humphrey Ward and her influence on idealist philosophy, and Mary Beaumont Medd on school design, all place the life and actions of the individual within a circle of friends, networks and collaborators.¹⁰⁴ Lillian De Lissa and Mother Cabrini are examples of English-based educators who left institutional and pedagogical legacies, both local and transnational.¹⁰⁵ Collective biographies have drawn on oral history to apprehend experiences and subjectivities, for instance in Peter Cunningham and Phil Gardner’s oral history of early twentieth-century teachers whose unique stories were interwoven with official policy and institutional outlooks.¹⁰⁶

Third, despite the interest in informal sites of learning, institutions and their settings, as Mark Freeman suggests, remain central to educational encounters within social and historical processes.¹⁰⁷ Higher education has provided a base from which to sift through student identities and experiences beyond formal tuition that embrace volunteering, activism and gender norms.¹⁰⁸ Attending to pupil and teacher lives, perspectives and

¹⁰⁰Tom O’Donoghue, *Catholic Teaching Brothers: Their Life in the English-Speaking World, 1891–1965* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012); Deirdre Raftery, Catriona Delaney, and Catherine Nowlan Roebuck, *Nano Nagle: The Life and the Legacy* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2018).

¹⁰¹Tim Allender, ‘Anglican Evangelism in North India and the Punjabi Missionary Classroom: The Failure to Educate “the Masses”, 1860–77’, *History of Education* 32, no. 3 (2003): 273–88; Peter Kallaway, ‘Education, Health and Social Welfare in the Late Colonial Context: The International Missionary Council and Educational Transition in the Interwar Years with Specific Reference to Colonial Africa’, *History of Education* 38, no. 2 (2009): 217–46.

¹⁰²Gary McCulloch, *Cyril Norwood and the Ideal of Secondary Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 1; Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012); Lawrence Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney: Socialism and History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

¹⁰³Jane Martin, *Making Socialists: Mary Bridges Adams and the Fight for Knowledge and Power 1855–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

¹⁰⁴Sue Anderson-Faithful, *Mary Sumner: Mission, Education and Motherhood: Thinking a Life with Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2018); Helen Loader, *Mrs Humphry Ward and Greenian Philosophy: Religion, Society and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019); Cathy Burke, *A Life in Education and Architecture: Mary Beaumont Medd 1907–2005* (London: Ashgate, 2013).

¹⁰⁵Kay Whitehead, *Lillian De Lissa, Women Teachers and Teacher Education in the Twentieth Century: A Transnational History* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016); Maria Williams, ‘Mobilising Mother Cabrini’s Educational Practice: The Transnational Context of the London School of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus 1898–1911’, *History of Education* 44, no. 5 (2015): 631–50.

¹⁰⁶Peter Cunningham and Phil Gardner, *Becoming Teachers: Texts and Testimonies 1907–1950* (London: Woburn Press, 2004). See also Stephanie Spencer, Andrea Jacobs, and Camilla Leach, *Alumni Voices* (Winchester: Winchester University Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁷Freeman, ‘Adult Education History ... (Part I)’, and ‘(Part II)’.

¹⁰⁸Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880–1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Laura Kelly, ‘Irish Medical Student Culture and the Performance of Masculinity, c.1880–1930’, *History of Education* 46, no. 1 (2017): 39–57; David Malcolm, ‘A Curious Courage: The Origins of Gay Rights Campaigning in the National Union of Students’, *History of Education* 47, no. 1 (2018): 73–86.

experiences enables a nuanced interrogation of progressive traditions.¹⁰⁹ In addition, new theoretical insights have not subdued the desire to contextualise educational institutions. In the 1990s, W. E. Marsden closely mapped schools within their socio-economic environment. More recently Hester Barron has argued that London inter-war schools served as the hub of community social life, and potentially even drivers of social change.¹¹⁰ If spaces could shape teachers and learners, then teachers and learners could shape spaces too. The tenacity of the ‘social’ is evident.

Fourth, our perception and understanding of education policy has been refreshed repeatedly.¹¹¹ An analysis of the raising of the school leaving age compared policy developments with the experience of pupils and teachers. David Cannadine, Jenny Keating and Nicola Sheldon surveyed history teaching within curricular, policy and political change. Peter Mandler’s *Crisis of the Meritocracy*, which emerged from a series of lectures for the Royal Historical Society on ‘educating the nation’, outlines the rise of mass secondary education based on a tension between meritocracy and democracy and makes good use of quantitative data to explain the burgeoning popular embrace of education. Mandler critiques policy-based narratives and aims to offer a novel historical perspective but, in large part, relies on policy histories and tends to remain within the parameters from which he seeks to escape.¹¹² He has been working with others on the experience of secondary education so this may be the beginning of a productive debate.

The nature of the relationship between past and present is a pressing concern, especially in terms of speaking to present-day educators and policy-makers.¹¹³ It has been filtered through a critical examination of remembrance and commemoration, and by engaging with different communities, which may confront dominant assumptions and traditions.¹¹⁴ Kevin Myers’ reconstruction of Irish and Afro-Caribbean pasts casts doubt upon still-powerful ‘national narratives’. Roy Lowe and Yoshihito Yasuhara have brought back to life traditions of higher education that predated the emergence of the ‘European’ university.¹¹⁵ Some approaches have been critiqued as overly ‘presentist’, and potentially leading to ahistorical or selective interpretation.¹¹⁶ Yet meaningful public engagement has become a widely accepted priority in the UK and Ireland, given perceived threats to

¹⁰⁹Peter Cunningham, ‘Innovators, Networks and Structures: Towards a Prosopography of Progressivism’, *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001): 433–51; Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

¹¹⁰W. E. Marsden, *Educating the Respectable: A Study of Fleet Road Board School, Hampstead* (London: Routledge, 1991); Hester Barron, *The Social World of the School: Education and Community in Interwar London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022).

¹¹¹Andrew McPherson and Charles D. Raab, *Governing Education: A Sociology of Policy since 1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988); Gary McCulloch, *Educational Reform Legislation in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2018); Wendy Robinson and Marie Bryce, ‘“Willing Enthusiasts” or “Lame Ducks”? Issues in Teacher Professional Development Policy in England and Wales 1910–1975’, *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 3 (2013): 345–60; ‘Education Reform Legislation in a Changing Society’, Society for Educational Studies Annual Colloquium, Oxford, September 2019.

¹¹²Tom Woodin, Gary McCulloch, and Stephen Cowan, *Secondary Education and the Raising of the School Leaving Age: Coming of Age?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013); David Cannadine, Jenny Keating, and Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Peter Mandler, *The Crisis of the Meritocracy: Britain’s Transition to Mass Education since the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹¹³Richard Aldrich, *Lessons from History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2006); Wendy Robinson, ‘Revisiting Teacher Professional Development: Past and Present Models 1920–2008’, *History of Education* 85, no. 1 (2010): 28–33.

¹¹⁴Andrea Jacobs et al., ‘Celebration, Commemoration and Collaboration: Milestones in the History of Education’, *History of Education* 48, no. 2 (2019): 151–5.

¹¹⁵Myers, *Struggles for a Past*; Roy Lowe and Yoshihito Yasuhara, *The Origins of Higher Learning: Knowledge Networks and the Early Development of Universities* (London: Routledge, 2017).

¹¹⁶Depaepe, ‘What Kind of History of Education?’

the historical profession as well as the incorporation of ‘impact’ into research funding criteria.¹¹⁷ Historians of education, not only through funded projects, have emphasised the tethering of past and present and speak to policy-makers, practising teachers and academics, as well as the public through publications, exhibitions, databases and websites.¹¹⁸ Given the popularity of public history and our enduring if ambiguous attachments to educational pasts, it remains surprising that educational museums have been few and far between, unlike in other European countries where such heritage may be revered and even represented by national associations.

Looking forwards

Since the 1990s, publications have proliferated within the history of education and a healthy range of academic interests have been instigated across Britain and Ireland. English-language journals have become increasingly attractive to international submissions, but the proportion of articles dealing with the UK has decreased since about 2014. This reduction applies to England in particular. The proportion of articles concentrating on Wales and Scotland increased a little between the 1980s and the 2010s. There has been a marked growth in publications focusing on Ireland in very recent years while those related to empire and colonial settings have remained at a stable level.¹¹⁹ This might indicate at least a partial shift away from Anglocentrism.

History of education has developed through changing configurations of scholars and institutional settings. A small number of research centres in education departments and elsewhere still generate new ideas and projects.¹²⁰ The increase in historical research on education emanating from history departments represents a welcome diversification of scholarship. Many historians of education do much of their research alone and, as such, are subject to the vagaries of institutional priorities and politics. History of education may be located in an array of settings, which can raise its profile and simultaneously shroud it under other subject headings. The search for inspiration can be exciting but there are inevitable difficulties in encroaching upon new intellectual and institutional territory; at the same time, small-scale and low-cost projects can enable imaginative, flexible and original research. As a relatively small field, just a few active academics, and even lone scholars, can make a consequential difference. Indeed, a significant amount of history of education research and publications stem from people independent of institutions. The importance of this group remains; in its 2019 submission to consultations

¹¹⁷For example, Roy Lowe, ‘The Charitable Status of Elite Schools: The Origins of a National Scandal’, *History of Education* 49, no. 1 (2020): 4–17.; Georgina Brewis, ‘Student Solidarity across Borders: Students, Universities and Refugee Crises Past and Present’, <https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/student-solidarity-across-borders-students-universities-and-refugee-crises> (accessed October 20, 2015).

¹¹⁸History in Education (2009–2011, Linbury Trust) (accessed February 19, 2021); Secondary Education and Social Change (2017–2021, ESRC) (accessed February 19, 2021); The Redress of the Past, Historical Pageants in Britain (2013–17, AHRC), <https://historicalpageants.ac.uk/> (accessed February 10, 2022); Raising of the School Leaving Age (2009–2010, ESRC); Social Organisation of Educational Studies (2011–13), Society for Educational Studies; Alumni Voices (2004–2009, University of Winchester); Faith on the Air (2014–17, Leverhulme).

¹¹⁹Richardson, ‘British Historiography’; Mark Freeman and Alice Kirke, ‘Review of Periodical Literature on the History of Education Published in 2016’, *History of Education* 46, no. 6 (2017): 826–53; Malcolm Noble and Susannah Wright, ‘Review of Periodical Literature on the History of Education Published in 2017’, *History of Education Researcher* 103 (2019): 48–72; Malcolm Noble and Tom Woodin, ‘Review of Periodical Literature on the History of Education Published in 2018’, *History of Education Researcher* 105 (2020): 32–59.

¹²⁰Richardson, ‘British Historiography’; Goodman and Ian Grosvenor, ‘Educational Research’, 609.

concerning open access ‘Plan-S’ proposals, the History of Education Society identified the need to facilitate publication from this group as an important consideration.

The international ambit of scholarly activity carries strengths and snags. While much research has become increasingly global, humanities and social sciences often remain tied to particular places. In publications and seminars, Britain and Ireland are frequently placed in an international comparative context, which helps to encourage new directions and elevate localised research. Journals and conferences welcome a multiplicity of interests and approaches, which may appear separate but stimulate serendipitous discoveries and novel theoretical and methodological threads. One unexpected outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic was greater virtual communication between some of these research communities. On the downside, the recent shift to more elaborate theoretical and conceptual ideas may have made it more difficult for new scholars, less familiar with this kind of approach, to enter debates, thus reproducing global hierarchies.

Discourses of education and learning have become more pronounced in public policy and debate, a space into which contradictory and exaggerated hopes have been cast, with promises of economic expansion, positive social relations, social well-being, sustainable development and harmonious environmental improvements. The contemporary exaltation of education among policy-makers raises the possibility that history of education might not only be the recipient of ideas from other areas and disciplines but also provide a source for innovation and new thinking.¹²¹ Scope for interdisciplinary exploration remains. The related disciplines of sociology, philosophy, psychology and economics all have a valency in the history of education. Others, such as architecture, literature, geography and biology, have also helped to divine additional sources of knowledge and provide a basis for collaborations and borrowings across the spectrum of knowledge. Developments in the natural sciences, for instance in genetics, neuroscience and technology, may fundamentally reshape our comprehension of humanity and direct our attention to unfamiliar primary sources alongside existing ones.¹²²

Moreover, there will be a need to pay attention to the fluidity between informal and formal education and the boundaries where schools and other institutions interweave with the interests of pressure groups, ideological or party-political movements and the family. A focus purely on informal or formal might not fully capture this complexity.¹²³ The recent period of globalisation has been marked by a curious tension between the recognition of all forms of learning in documents such as UNESCO’s *Learning: The Treasure Within*, and the severe restriction of what is actually counted in league tables. Capturing both the powerful structures and changeable movements of individuals, groups and social formations remains a critical challenge. Such border crossings have created opportunities and provided a productive lens for the development of new ideas but, as Stephanie Spencer suggests, can make it difficult to discern ‘rules of engagement’.¹²⁴

¹²¹Stephanie Spencer, ‘Learning the Rules: Writing and Researching School Stories in History of Education’, *History of Education Review* 47, no. 1 (2018): 1–15.

¹²²Richard Aldrich, ‘Neuroscience, Education and the Evolution of the Human Brain’, *History of Education* 42, no. 3 (2013): 396–410.

¹²³Compare Peter Kraftl and Sarah Mills, eds., *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

¹²⁴International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996); Spencer, ‘Learning the Rules’.

Pervasive inequalities straddle past and present. Some are under-explored in history of education, most notably sexuality on which intense debates are taking place elsewhere. Identifying changing and unique matrices of inequalities is a further agenda towards which scholars are working. The idea of intersectionality, originally developed by black feminists wanting to move beyond the idea of multiple forms of oppression, has paralleled work by historians who were investigating class, gender and race in a systemic way.¹²⁵ Although the term has not been adopted beyond specific academic communities, it might help to heighten our alertness to the range and intricacy of overlapping inequalities over time. Grasping the experiences of marginal groups will also require a sensitive excavation of submerged subjective meanings, emotions and senses within disparate material environments. In turn, depictions of inequalities must also face up to the role of elite forms of education, the uneven reciprocities between margins and centres, countercultures and the mainstream.

Recent seismic change will impact upon history of education. Shifting global hierarchies, besides making the world a more dangerous place, will disturb historical perception even further. World events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, debates on gender, and the 'Me Too' and Black Lives Matter movements highlight oppression, vulnerabilities, solidarities, diversifying forms of inequality, as well as cultural conflict and the rise of anti-democratic forces. While it is possible to argue that digital technologies have penetrated only the veneer of educational practice, they are undoubtedly contributing to the deeper reconfiguration of social relations. Commentators have conjectured whether the age of neoliberalism is starting to mutate into new formations that may help to elicit new questions about the past. The dominance of the so-called '1%' – the super-rich modern-day paladins – may shift our historical focus to parallel periods of the past, while anti-democratic forces may lead us to reconsider the fragility and contingency of democracy. Self-reliance, autarky and the retreat from globalisation into blocs may enliven fresh thinking about transnationalism.¹²⁶ These are linked to, and overshadowed by, climate change threatening the future of humanity, which is likely to intensify inequalities and mass migrations. There is certainly scope to rework education with reference to environmental history and, in Aldrich's words, to think further about 'education for survival' and even post-humanism.¹²⁷ These forces can appear overwhelming but they can also help to surface new thinking at a micro-historical level.

The national framing of history of education has been under pressure for some time and will continue to be agitated by forces of devolution and independence across Britain and Ireland as well as globally. Interestingly, a transnational lens has not yet been adapted thoroughly to the nations constituting Britain and Ireland, notwithstanding the fact that the context of devolution and independence movements might have encouraged it and may still do so.¹²⁸ The nation-state has also been a live topic in debates surrounding the politics of Islamic influences at home and abroad. The events of 11 September 2001, and subsequent global shifts, have kept religious issues at the forefront of debates on culture,

¹²⁵Miller, 'Compulsory Schooling'.

¹²⁶Ben Chu, 'The New Age of Autarky?' *Radio 4*, 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001f6rh> (accessed November 25, 2022).

¹²⁷Richard Aldrich, 'Education for Survival: An Historical Perspective', *History of Education* 39, no. 1 (2010): 1–14.

¹²⁸Raftery, McDermid, and Jones, 'Social Change and Education'.

identity and belonging.¹²⁹ A state of almost permanent migrations, induced by conflict, environmental disasters and inequality, will threaten the cohesive conceptualisation of the nation that is commonly deployed across the political spectrum. While there are limits to transnational analyses, it seems clear that a reassertion of the nation will not simply signify a return to the past but must take on board the volatilities and fixities involved in the emergence of regional, national and supra-national identities. The rise of China and India as global superpowers has helped to highlight the importance of events such as the Opium Wars or Indian Rebellion and may nurture reconceptions of philosophical traditions of learning. The interest in Confucianism or First Nations in other countries is not unconnected to a recovery of older traditions of learning. Similarly, the intensifying interest in colonialism and education has underscored the mutual flows of information and learning across national borders and empires.

History of education is in some respects well placed to unravel these conundrums: it has a strong disciplinary identity but is able to recast itself to address new dilemmas and theoretical knots. It has been heavily implicated in the rise of nation-states, not least in the UK and Ireland where national histories will evolve into new forms, yet it is also capable of looking beyond and across such boundaries.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Tom Woodin is a professor of the social history of education at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, where he is a programme leader of the MPhil/PhD. His research interests span the history of education and learning, working-class writing and culture, and cooperation and education. Recent publications include *The UCL Institute of Education: From Training College to Global Institution* (UCL Press, 2021) with Richard Aldrich; *Working Class Writing and Publishing in the late Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2018); *Secondary Education and the Raising of the School Leaving Age – Coming of Age?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) with Gary McCulloch and Steve Cowan; and two edited collections on *Learning for a Co-operative World* (Trentham/UCL Press, 2019) and *Co-operation, Learning and Co-operative Values* (Routledge, 2014). Previously he has edited the *History of Education Researcher* and *History of Education*. He is vice-president of the History of Education Society, UK.

Susannah Wright is senior lecturer in Education Studies and postgraduate research tutor in the School of Education, Oxford Brookes University. From 2013 to 2019 she was a co-editor of *History of Education* and is now Hon. Secretary of the History of Education Society, UK. She has researched and published extensively on secular approaches to moral education and citizenship from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, with a monograph *Morality and Citizenship in English Schools, Secular Approaches 1897–1944* (Palgrave Macmillan), published in 2017. Current research projects focus primarily on children and remembrance, and children in the peace movement, historically from the inter-war years to the 1970s, and also an interdisciplinary project looking at remembrance in schools in the present.

¹²⁹Robert Jackson, 'European Institutions and the Contribution of Studies of Religious Diversity to Education for Democratic Citizenship', in *Religion and Education in Europe: Developments, Contexts, and Debates*, ed. Robert Jackson et al. (Munster: Waxman, 2007), 27–55.