

## Jon Davison

**The concept of a Standing Conference was first aired at a meeting in St Catharine's College, Windsor, on research in Education, on the 10th and 11th of November 1950. After some discussion, Professors Judges, Niblett and Oliver were asked to draft proposals for the establishment of a new Journal of Educational Studies. (30, 2: 230)**

The Society for Educational Studies began life as the Standing Conference on Studies in Education (SCSE) on Wednesday 19th December 1951, when former Director of the Institute of Education, University of London, Sir Fred Clarke chaired a conference of Professors of Education and Directors of Institutes of Education from across the United Kingdom in order to discuss what they believed to be the problems raised by the growth of educational research during the previous few decades. The prevailing belief held by those attending was that 'British studies in the various fields of education—philosophical, historical, social, psychological and pedagogic—need to be better organized and better known' (1, 1: 67).

Professors, Judges, Niblett and Oliver reported to the Conference and their proposals for a journal were approved. Professor A. C. F. Beales, King's College, London agreed to become Executive Editor. The first edition of the British Journal of Educational Studies, which included a note of the untimely death of Sir Fred Clarke a month after the inaugural conference, appeared in 1952 and included a clear statement of intention. The statement was not made in an editorial – the Journal did not have one – but rather in a section entitled 'Notes and News':

The new Journal will [therefore] give prominence to articles embodying research, and it will disseminate information about educational research in progress. The journals sponsored by the British Psychological Society already provide a medium for the publication of psychological and statistical research into some problems of education. The new Journal, while taking account of this work, will be mainly concerned with other aspects of the study of education. But it will not be narrowly specialist; on the contrary, it is intended to serve the needs and interests of everyone concerned with education whom the implications of specialized research affect.

It will be different in form from existing educational journals in this country. Its 'Notes and News', for example, will not be a matter of editorial comment on topical events in education; they will indicate how and where these developments are being studied, and the trend of opinion upon them.

The major articles will be contributions by experts, sometimes as surveys of work in progress up and down the country and abroad, sometimes as original contributions giving the results of the writers' own individual work. The broad objects of the Journal will never be lost sight of: viz. to explain the significance of new thought, to provide philosophical discussion at a high level, and to deepen existing interest in the purposes and problems of current educational policy. These objects will determine the selection of books to be dealt with in review articles and in reviews. There will also be, from time to time, contributions from the national Research Foundations of England and Scotland; and particulars of graduate research in progress in the Universities and elsewhere.

With the exception of the introduction of a more 'traditional' editorial from Volume 26 Issue 3 in 1978, the Society's Journal has held true to these objectives for sixty years. The BJES has had three publishers in its lifetime: Faber for the first the first twenty years: Blackwell from 1972 – 2009, and Taylor and Francis since 2010.

At the inaugural meeting of the SCSE, Professor W. R. Niblett, University of Leeds, became Chair of the Standing Conference and Professor J. W. Tibble, University College, Leicester, Secretary-Treasurer. There were 74 members of the Standing Conference, 55 representing English institutions, 11 Scottish, 5 Welsh, one from Northern Ireland, and two from elsewhere (1, 1: 191-2). Founding members of the Standing Conference inter alia included: Professors M. Read, W. O. Lester-Smith, L. A. Reid and P. E. Vernon of the Institute of Education, University of London; Professor W. A. C. Stewart, University College of North Staffordshire, Keele; Professor F. J. Schonell, University of Queensland, Australia; Professor S. D. Nisbet, University of Glasgow; Professor R. A. G. Oliver, University of Manchester; Professor E. A. Peel, University of Birmingham; Professor J. Pilley, University of Edinburgh and J. F. Wolfenden CBE, University of Reading.

Writing in the Journal on the thirtieth anniversary of the foundation of the SCSE, Professor Roger Webster, Chair of SCSE 1973 – 1976, noted that the 1950s and 1960s were not good decades during which to take a holistic view of studies in Education:

This was the period when 'undifferentiated mush' was derided; when the sociology, history and philosophy of education were being established as studies in their own right, with their own associations and journals. However, despite the impressive advances made by the 'disciplines' of education, 'boundary maintenance' between them has considerably reduced the effectiveness of educationalists in influencing either teachers or policy makers. (30, 2: 230)

R. S. Peters had described educational theory as 'undifferentiated mush' in his inaugural professorial lecture at the Institute of Education, University of London in 1963 and in a keynote at the 1972 SCSE Annual Conference, Peters crystallised the problem facing educationalists, 'I take as my starting point that education, as a subject, is like politics in,

being concerned with problems which cannot be tackled, like mathematical problems or problems in physics, by reliance on just one way of thinking' (30, 2: 230). For Peters, 'education is not an autonomous discipline, but a field, like politics, where the disciplines of history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology have application' (50, 1: 100).

Nevertheless, during its existence the SCSE held annual conferences on a variety of topics including, during the first four decades: 'A Central Agency for Educational Research' (1951); 'The Development of Educational Studies' (1952); 'Teacher Training in Scotland and England' (1953); 'The Teaching of the Philosophy of Education in Departments of Education' (1955); 'The University as an Instrument of Education' (1963); 'Education as a Subject in First Degree Courses' (1964); 'The Implications of Comprehensive Secondary Education' (1966); 'The Purpose and Structure of Higher Education' (1970); 'Education as an Academic Discipline' (1972); 'Educational Attitudes and Economic' (1977); 'The Place of Research in Educational Studies' (1980); 'Quality Control in Education' (1991); 'The Idea of a University in the 21st Century' (1992); 'The Study of Education: Its Place in Professional Development' (1993), which included contributions from academics including, Professors Rosemary Deem, John Elliott, David Hargreaves, Maurice Kogan and Sally Tomlinson; 'Alternative Futures for Education' (1995), which included keynotes from Professors Anthony Giddens and Michael Barber.

By the middle of the 1990s the Standing Conference had enjoyed an international reputation for over forty years. Subscribers to the BJES were located in universities and schools across the world. In 1996 the Society, BJES publisher, Blackwell and the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools sponsored a series of fourteen at the University of Oxford entitled Affirming the Comprehensive Ideal. The title generated a fair degree of controversy. As BJES editor of the time, Professor Richard Pring noted, 'Should a university be affirming something which 'research has demonstrated to be a failure'? Should not a university be engaged much more impartially, through careful research, in the effectiveness or otherwise of the 'comprehensive experiment'?' (44, 2: 140).

The Standing Conference's defence was simple and true to its core intention: the lecture series was affirming an ideal — not necessarily the system, which was but one attempt to implement that ideal. 'That ideal sets out a moral framework within which, as a result of research, experience, argument, philosophical reflection, all young people might receive an education according to age, ability and aptitude. Such a framework or set of ideals is necessarily controversial... The lectures, therefore, within an affirmed moral framework, try to make sense of the research evidence, the experience of teachers, the diversity of arrangements, the values which sustain the system' (44, 2: 140).

Writing in the summer of 2001, the year of the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the Standing Conference, BJES editor Richard Pring pleaded, '...as my fifteen years of editorship — following the excellent precedents of Beales and Sutherland — approach their end, I make

a special plea, namely, namely, that the Journal abandons not its main and original task of applying the very best of historical, philosophical and sociological thinking to those questions of educational aims and value which permeate policy and practice' (49,1: 3).

At its Annual General Meeting in November 2001 the Standing Conference on Studies in Education decided to re-name itself the Society for Educational Studies (SES). The new name described far more clearly and accurately the aims and objectives of the Society and its associated Journal and provided a stimulus to re-consider the nature of the study of education. In line with its reconstitution, the Society changed its 'Annual Conference' to an 'Annual Seminar', to be followed by a financially sponsored seminar series in universities around the UK in the following year, which focused on aspects of, or issues raised by, the Annual Seminar. The first of the annual Seminars 'The Price of Performance: Emerging Evidence from Schools and Universities' was held on Thursday 13th November 2003 at Royal College of Physicians at Regent's Park, London. Other Annual Seminars and seminar series followed that included: 'An Academic Life: The Next Ten Years' (2008); 'Engaging Young People in Civic Action and Learning' (2009); 'Beyond Impact: Connecting research to policy and practice?' (2010); 'Disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and educational studies: past, present and future' (2011).

As well as publishing the Journal and organising the Annual Conference since 1951, the Society has financed its Annual Book Awards for excellent publications in the field. Additionally, the Society has awarded sums of money to support educational research in UK educational institutions. At first these sums were small and during the 1990s the Society was awarding approximately £5000 per annum in research awards. In 2003, the research awards were revised. A sum of £30,000, comprising a major educational research project award, was offered, as well as up to five awards of Small Research Grants of up to £2,000 to support small-scale projects. From 2009, the Society increased the sum for Small Research Grants to a maximum of £10,000 per grant and also instituted its National Award of £200,000. In order to address areas of major interest to the Society, the Research Subcommittee of the SES Executive invited bids to undertake research on its behalf upon a prescribed topic. The first biennial award was made to a team led by Dr. Hilary Cremin from the University of Cambridge for the project Engaging Young People in Civic Action and Learning. Fittingly, in its 60th Anniversary year the Society's National Award was entitled The Social Organisation of Educational Studies: Past, Present and Future. The call for proposals attracted a great deal of interest and the National award went a team from the Institute of Education, University of London led by Professor Gary McCulloch.

Throughout its 60 years, the Society, in its conferences, seminars, through its research funding and in its Journal, has remained steadfast to its original aim of bringing together educationalists of varying viewpoints and skills to discuss educational problems and issues. Many of the Society's officers, members of its Executive Committee and general membership have not only contributed to the numerous debates about educational studies

during the past six decades but have also written seminal and influential articles and other publications that have contributed to the development of the field: a fitting legacy to the integrity and foresight of the founders of the Society and Journal, in particular Professors Beales, Judges, Niblett, Oliver and Tibble.