

Editorial

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It has been a frequent theme of recent editorials in this journal that education research in Wales has been seriously under-developed. On the deficit side of the account the inevitable consequence of this is that bold policy initiatives such as the Welsh Government's current national strategy for education (Welsh Government, 2017a) are not fully constructed on a high-quality evidence base specific to Wales. As one of the intellectual giants of educational research in the UK, Geoff Whitty, who sadly passed away in the summer of 2018, has noted:

Despite claims by politicians of all parties that they engage in evidence-based policymaking, there is relatively little use of evidence, other than anecdotal, in their speeches and highly selective use of research evidence in government White Papers and the like (Whitty, 2016: xi).

On a more positive note, the scant existence of evidence on many important aspects of education in Wales does mean that new and often innovative research can throw a bright light into previously dark corners of our consciousness. Such is the case with the contributions to this generic number of the journal.

Sian Rhiannon Williams reminds us of the precarious existence of women teachers in the educational workforce of the Edwardian period. Whilst the situation of their ancestors, who now dominate both the primary and secondary teaching professions in Wales, may be more secure, her article reminds us that we know far too little about gendered aspects of the teaching profession in Wales.

In a contemporary Wales focused on what the implications of Brexit might mean for the nation and its education system in future, where in

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recent times Wales has committed ever more strongly to becoming a bilingual nation (Welsh Government, 2017b), Sally Blake and Claire Gorrara point out that we have also witnessed a significant decline in the take-up of modern European languages at GCSE and A level. The relationship between these two developments is not the subject of their article: rather they explore the interesting way in which university students are able to act as role models and mentors to persuade young people in our schools to adopt more positive attitudes to language choice.

The growth of Welsh-medium education in schools has also led to parallel developments in higher education, but many products of our bilingual schools choose to undertake their higher education in English-medium settings both within and outside of Wales. Holly Parfett, Myfanwy Morgan-Jones and Maxwell Hart consider the experience of students educated through the medium of Welsh within the context of their own university and highlight concerns about their ability to fully participate in these new language situations and the potential consequences this might have.

Philip Smith and Mark Connolly also demonstrate the way in which educational research can highlight challenging situations and raise difficult questions. One of the highly unfortunate results of growing school accountability in the education system in Wales has been the increase in the number of pupils excluded from mainstream education and placed in *Pupil Referral Units*. The researchers highlight that whilst provision and practice in these institutions becomes a form of social pedagogy, external accountability still catches up with them using solely academic metrics.

Together these contributions also illustrate the diverse origins of educational research in Wales as elsewhere. This supports the contention that educational research 'is a field, not a discipline ... heterogeneous in its aims, character and style' (Hargreaves, 1998:115). In this case academic researchers drawn from the fields of History, Modern Foreign Languages, Geography and the Social Sciences provide our heterogeneity. As a journal we welcome this and believe we are all the stronger for it.

Our final contribution takes us back to the current state of educational research capacity in Wales. The development at Bangor University of a cross-University partnership with schools, the Regional Education Consortia and other organisations is an interesting and highly promising development. In a small country such partnerships between higher education and the education system must be an essential feature of the robust educational eco-system we need to develop.

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As has been pointed out by a member of the Editorial Board of this journal 'Universities do have a vital contribution to make to professional learning; it is perhaps more modest than was thought in the past...but their contribution is nonetheless critical'. (Furlong, 2013:189). It is a point echoed by the founder of a teacher-led research movement in England and by academics who helped to develop the research skills of teachers in a project designed to tackle educational inequity in schools (Bennett, 2018; Childs and Menter, 2018)

The introduction of new programmes for initial teacher education from September 2019, the imminent introduction of the first national policy for teacher professional learning in Wales and the ongoing investment in teacher professional inquiry at the heart of the development of the new curriculum in Wales, all provide exciting opportunities for this collaboration between University-based educational researchers and research-engaged practitioners to flourish. As this edition of the journal suggests there are many exciting and yet uncharted areas of education for them to explore.

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