

Editorial
Education as a national mission: the role of the
Wales Journal of Education

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This issue represents the next step in the journal's evolution with a new team of editors, building on the work of our predecessors over many years who have ensured that the journal has survived in challenging times. The fact that the journal has not only survived, but is entering a new phase of development, is testament to the work of all those editors and editorial boards and we would like to extend our thanks to them all.

In 2018, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and Welsh Government jointly organised a conference for researchers from universities, schools and other stakeholders. In the report of this event, Welsh Government highlighted the importance not only of undertaking research, but also 'making it visible and accessible to all in order to help develop knowledge and expertise' (BERA, 2019: 3). We hope that the *Wales Journal of Education*, with high-quality research being freely available to all, will make a significant contribution to this aim. To help in this, we are joined by a new editorial board (representing all HEIs in Wales) and a new advisory board (representing key stakeholders). Together, we will work to ensure that we provide readers with insights into education from a range of disciplines and settings. The guiding principles, however, will be that the bilingual, multi- and inter-disciplinary research we publish will be theoretically grounded, methodologically robust, rigorously analysed, and with findings that will find applications in educational settings across Wales, at all ages and in all sectors.

In keeping with our broad conceptualisation of education, the articles in the current volume cover a wide variety of approaches, sample groups and research questions. Taking a behaviourist approach, O'Boyle and Hoerger

explore the measurable impact of a purposefully designed classroom behaviour analytic intervention on KS1 pupils' ability to access the curriculum within a maintained Special Education Needs (SEN) school in Wales. Set within a traditional A-B-A (pre-intervention, intervention, post-intervention) evaluative cycle, the authors utilised P Scales assessment data to track pupils' progression within the curriculum alongside two standardised measures of receptive and expressive communication, visual reception, motor skills, adaptive behaviour, daily living skills and socialisation, namely the *Mullen Scales of Early Learning* (Mullen, 1995) and the *Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scales, Second Edition* (Sparrow, Cicchetti and Balla, 2005). They conclude that strategies based on the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis can complement educational provision in maintained SEN schools, and can be implemented quite effectively within SEN classrooms.

Lewis and Thomas explore practitioners' knowledge and understanding of the constructivist notion of schemas alongside their knowledge and promotion of well-being within the Foundation Phase classroom by drawing together the findings of two distinct studies. Both studies adopted a case-study approach involving observations, interviews and questionnaires and the results highlighted some clear commonalities across their findings. In both cases, they found a lack of clarity in Welsh Government curriculum guidance about schemas and well-being. Whilst there are generic statements on what schemas are in Foundation Phase policy documents, there is no specific guidance on how to support schemas in classroom practice. Likewise, they suggest that whilst there are references to various aspects of well-being in various relevant documents, there is a lack of clarity and guidance to practitioners about how to go about implementing well-being effectively in the Foundation Phase. Consequently, they conclude that practitioners feel limited in their understanding of schemas and well-being, and how to use them in classroom practice. The authors argue for the importance of collaborative professional development and critical reflection in light of curriculum change.

Moving on to further education (FE), Davies adopts the principles of behavioural economics to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different models of choice, in terms of linguistic medium of instruction, as presented to students in Welsh-medium and bilingual FE contexts. Framed within the wider strategic context of *Cymraeg 2050*, the study seeks to identify the role of choice architecture in supporting or complicating students' abilities to access Welsh-medium study and to provide

recommendations for effective strategies. Using semi-structured interviews with staff and focus groups with students, the results suggest that the ‘opt-in’ model is not succeeding in significantly increasing the number of students opting into Welsh provision. Opt-in models place great onus on the students themselves to request that provision and is highly dependent on the nature of the communicative exchange between lecturer and student when ‘asking’ learners if they wish to study in Welsh or bilingually. The author argues in favour of adopting a libertarian paternalistic approach, by modifying choice architecture from opt-in to opt-out in order to increase the number of learners studying through Welsh and bilingually.

Finally, Jones presents a critical reflection on the potential impact of the increased focus on modern foreign languages (MFLs) within the primary sector – as proposed in the *New Curriculum for Wales: 2022* – in terms of increasing the uptake of pupils studying MFLs at GCSE and A level, and provides a series of recommendations to be implemented. She reviews the challenges already identified in the English context where MFLs have been introduced in KS2 since 2014, and offers ways in which practitioners and curriculum designers can learn from these observations in implementing the proposed curriculum changes in Wales. She presents a critical review of the role of motivation, enjoyment and perceived difficulty in compelling pupils to study MFLs, and the logistical limitations that are placed on students who wish to study MFLs when they clash with other subjects when making their subject choices. The paper concludes with a cautionary, but positive, note that whilst there is scope to realise the vision of *Global futures* (Welsh Government, 2015) through the new opportunities afforded by the new curriculum, educators and policy makers need to plan effectively for this to happen.

This final article directly references a key overarching theme of curriculum – and indeed wider education system-level – reform in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020b), which has stimulated significant national and international scrutiny and attention (OECD, 2020). On the cusp of major system reform, Wales is a microcosm of the educational challenges (and opportunities) that are being faced by other countries and jurisdictions across the world. Thus Wales represents a tractable national-scale education policy test-bed for such reform and change, including a range of innovative, bilingual, co-constructed, learner-centred interventions and initiatives. Since the publication of *Successful Futures*, Professor Graham Donaldson’s independent review of curriculum and assessment

arrangements (Donaldson, 2015), we have seen the evolving development of curriculum and qualification reform in Wales, culminating in the publication of the new *Curriculum for Wales* in January 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020a). The developments of the past five years provide a lens through which to view the next five years (Welsh Government, 2020b): significant changes to initial teacher education, new professional teaching standards, developing leaders at various levels, rethinking accountability and the role of the inspectorate, coherence with major additional learning needs reform (Welsh Government, 2018), as well as evaluating the impact of large-scale investment in practitioner professional learning and development.

As part of the wider ‘national mission’, the development of Welsh Government’s *National Strategy for Educational Research and Enquiry* (NSERE) aims to ensure that research, enquiry and evidence play a meaningful role in the development of practice in all aspects of our education system. This is one area where we see the *Wales Journal of Education* playing a key role in further supporting and developing the educational research base in Wales, by providing a venue for a diverse range of high-quality submissions reflecting the diverse nature of educational research methods and methodologies. In this context, we welcome local and international research that provides insights into shaping current and future education policy and practice in Wales. Furthermore, the focus of the journal is not just on schools and compulsory-level education: we very much welcome educational research on issues that affect the entire life course, from early years through to post-compulsory education, training and lifelong learning.

There is little doubt that ‘Education in Wales is changing’ (Welsh Government, 2020b: 6). We very much look forward to future submissions to the *Wales Journal of Education*, in either Welsh or English, both from within Wales and beyond, which will help inform this change for the benefit of everyone in educational settings in Wales, now and in the future.

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