

Editorial: Education research in Wales, from Wales, and for Wales

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As editors we set out a vision that the journal would feature ‘local and international research that provides insights into shaping current and future education policy and practice in Wales’ (Beauchamp, Thomas and Crick, 2021, p. 6). This issue of the journal focuses on ‘local’ research exploring education *in* Wales, and, in this issue, *from* Wales. It reflects the growing research collaboration between universities in Wales, offering perspectives on all phases of schooling, through to Initial Teacher Education in university. Such successful collaboration supports the suggestion that ‘as a small country with a relatively large number of HEIs, research capacity, volume and quality are likely to be enhanced through collaborative activity’ (Welsh Government, 2021). It is important, however, that this collaboration extends beyond a potentially insular lens to include being involved in, and learning from, international research perspectives. Despite its challenges, the recent pandemic, by necessity, enhanced the digital skills of university staff to allow increased dialogue and ‘significant conversations’ (Beauchamp et al., 2022) about research. We hope that international researchers engage in such conversations and consider the *Wales Journal of Education* as an outlet for their research.

In compiling this issue, with support from the University of Wales Press, we have introduced a new online submission system for the first time, taking articles from first submission, through double-blind peer review, author revisions and through to platinum Open Access publication in English and Welsh. We believe this is an important step in modernising and streamlining the submission process to bring the journal in line with other journals in the field. This system is now also being used for the Practitioner strand of the journal, aimed at practitioners engaged in research and inquiry across the various dimensions of educational practice. The first online articles in this

practitioner strand will soon be freely available bilingually on the journal website and we believe that many more will follow. We believe that this synergy between research in universities and in schools will help us to ‘move beyond the pervasive but simplistic idea of trying to ‘bridge’ a gap, or rupture, between research and practice’ to a situation where it is ‘possible instead to think of both educational research and teaching as forms of inquisitive practice, and share some core attributes, in particular the systematic flexing of inquisitive thought and language; the reflective use of tools; and the considerate exercise of professional virtues’ (Oancea et al., 2021, p. 116).

This issue of the journal offers ‘inquisitive thought’ about education in Wales from its earliest days through to the present day. Beauchamp and Breeze consider how we can learn from a ‘usable past’ in the teaching of primary music. It provides a historical narrative from the earliest days of education in Wales, tracing the many lost opportunities in legislation and teacher education for primary teachers to be allowed to use other musical skills beyond the ‘performance paradigm’ to develop effective pedagogies. This historical narrative is important as, although Wales ‘has a long and proud history and its own language, for over five and a half centuries (from the 1530s until 1999) it was administered directly by London’ (Furlong et al., 2021, p. 62). This long and proud history included music being highly valued, and even considered the ‘third language’ of Wales. With the advent of the first national Curriculum as part of the Education reform Act of 1988, Wales was able to make changes to the content of the music curriculum to ensure that composing and appraising (using musical language to discuss music) were placed on an equal footing with performing in music teaching in schools. It was not until devolution, however, that truly potential ‘transformational point’ occurred which might allow primary teachers in Wales to use their own composing and appraising skills to develop effective pedagogies. They conclude that as Wales adopts a new curriculum, this is another transformational point in music education, which should not be missed to ensure pupils are provided with ‘a broad, practical experience of all that music education can offer pupils by exploiting a teaching pedagogy which supplants the historic performance paradigm’.

Goodall et al. present the results of a collaborative study that explored the value placed on parental engagement in children’s education as experienced during the periods of lockdown incurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the paper presents a set of situated, rich reflections on the experiences of those involved in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Wales during the lockdowns, as they were experienced by ITE providers

themselves, their student teachers, stakeholders and parents. The results revealed that whilst parental engagement was seen as important and valued by all stakeholders, there was a lack of consistent practice in how parental engagement was defined and enacted in ITE provision across Wales. The implications of their findings for ITE practice are discussed.

Thomas et al. explore some of the issues relating to the fair and equitable assessment of bilinguals' language abilities as compared to monolinguals, with a specific focus on literacy. Languages differ quite considerably in terms of their orthographic depth, with English among the most opaque in terms of its grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Welsh, on the other hand, has a relatively transparent orthography that makes it easier to decipher the links between form and sounds. Whilst English boasts a number of assessment tools to measure various aspects of children's literacy abilities, other languages, such as Welsh, have very few available. Where tests do exist, they are often adaptations of those available for English, tests that are usually normed on monolingual speakers. These tests are created purposefully to allow for the assessment of children's response to words and phrases that are particularly problematic for a language with an opaque orthography, but they are not designed to examine children's linguistic behaviours when learning languages with transparent orthographies. Tests that are available to use in Welsh may well mask the appearance of underlying literacy difficulties if those tests are based on tests created for the assessment of abilities in English. In this paper, the authors explore the issues with adapting/translating tests when assessing bilingual children. They argue for the development of more holistic means of exploring potential difficulties in languages with transparent orthographies, using tests that tap into language-specific issues and that are normed on appropriate bilingual samples. They suggest that more training is needed in order to raise teachers' awareness of these issues, and to help ensure early, and appropriate assessment of literacy difficulties for Welsh-English bilinguals.

Jones et al. consider the implementation of dialogic mentoring in the CaBan Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme in Wales. Using data from questionnaires and group interviews with mentors and Associate Teachers (ATs) from the programme, they outline the reframing of relationships between the mentors and ATs. They argue that a new, more democratic, partnership emerged which empowers ATs to challenge aspects of practice and explore more creative acts. They highlight, however, that this new relationship was not without tensions and can lead to more complex social relationship as mentors and ATs negotiate potential

discomfort as existing views are challenged. They conclude that a more dialogic approach may lead to desirable changes in mentoring strategies if mentors (who were generally positive about the approach) devote more time to open conversations about learning and are provided with additional training and support.

Goodall examines the concept of parental engagement and the work of Epstein in this area. Although one of many, and over 25 years old, Epstein's model of parental engagement is still widely cited and still influences policy. Goodall challenges aspects of this model, particularly how it treats parental engagement with children's learning as context-free and does not consider differences between different family backgrounds. She moves to propose a new framework that: is family, not school, centric; focuses on relationships; supports staff learning and practice; is aimed at fundamental, not superficial change; moves from practice to process; and supports effective evaluation and forward planning. Goodall concludes that this new model is tentative and should be embedded in ongoing development and discussion within the whole school community to reflect the fact that parental engagement is not an end in itself but a 'process to be lived'.

We welcome articles in both academic and practitioner strands for future issues, from within Wales and internationally. Please contact the editors if you would like to discuss your work, our peer review process or getting published.

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