

Editorial: Conceptualising Education in Wales Through Reform, Identity, Language and History

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As editors we have articulated 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, Crick & Thomas, 2021). Thus, in keeping with our broad conceptualisation of educational research, the articles in the current issue once again cover a wide variety of methodologies, approaches, sample groups, and research questions. However, they clearly cohere around our key foci: in essence, educational research *in* Wales, *from* Wales, and *for* Wales (Beauchamp, Thomas & Crick, 2022). As Wales continues along its major education system-level reform journey (OECD, 2020), currently framed as “our national mission” (Welsh Government, 2023), the renewed focus on the importance of — and commitment to — a strong and resilient educational research base in Wales is clear (Welsh Government, 2021). We hope that the *Wales Journal of Education/Cylchgrawn Addysg Cymru* continues to develop as a valuable, rigorous and impactful venue for this research in Wales, and indeed internationally.

In this issue, Glover *et al.* discuss the recent educational system-level reforms in Wales, with a particular focus on the initial teacher education (ITE) system. Their article highlights the distinct shift in the nation’s education system from a ‘managerial’ one to a more trust-based and professional system. The reforms to ITE in Wales (see Furlong, 2020) provide examples of this progress; the new system is characterised by partnerships between universities and lead partner schools, who are collectively responsible and accountable for the leadership and management of ITE programmes. Using the two-year flexible distance learning PGCE from The Open University Partnership in Wales as a qualitative case study, this article applies third space theory to consider how truly

effective and fair collaborative partnership working is achieved in the new ITE system. The challenges identified by the 20 key stakeholders during the development and early implementation stages of the flexible PGCE programme include communication issues and the large number of programme documents, including the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, and universities in particular (Watermeyer et al., 2021). On the other hand, the strengths of a clear shared vision, co-construction of programme materials and collaborative governance indicate the positive progress the new PGCE programme is making towards existing in the ‘third space’. Glover *et al.* concludes with commentary on how the Welsh educational reforms are progressing, and how the new partnership model offers an important learning experience for others to consider as partnership working between schools and universities gains momentum within ITE. They highlight the importance of effective communication, collaborative governance, and a clear shared vision in successful partnership working. Overall, this article offers an insightful analysis of the current educational reforms in Wales, with a particular focus on the ITE system. It highlights the successes and challenges of the new partnership model, and how it can contribute to the creation of the ‘third space’. They also offer useful lessons for other institutions and jurisdictions considering similar educational reforms and partnership models, and provides a valuable contribution to the wider discourse on educational system-level reform and partnership working.

Roberts examines the construction of national identity within the new Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2023), using Foucauldian discourse analysis. The recent educational reforms in Wales have led to the emergence of multiple themes of identity and nation, and this paper explores the potential for identity and belonging within the new curriculum by locating and analysing the subjectification of learners’ identity. Roberts establishes identity as diverse, fluid, spatial, and strategic, and explores the potential outcomes of these discursive constructions. Furthermore, her study finds that the discourses around national identity interacts with and are related to each other, but also bring with them the potential for conflict and contradiction. The findings reveal many complexities and nuances in themes of identities and belonging within the new curriculum. Roberts notes that there is potential for belonging, but also barriers such as alienation and exclusion. The article highlights the need for caution when considering the notion that these barriers can be

overcome for all learners in the implementation of the new curriculum. It indicates that the new curriculum can provide opportunities for learners to explore their identities in relation to national identity, but it also recognises that learners' experiences are diverse and that the new curriculum may not be able to address all barriers to belonging and inclusion. The Foucauldian discourse analysis provides a valuable framework for exploring the construction of national identity within the new curriculum; by examining the ways in which the new curriculum constructs and shapes identity, the study provides important insights into the potential outcomes of the emerging educational reforms in Wales. Overall, the study contributes to important ongoing discussions around national identity and educational reform in Wales. Roberts' findings suggest that while the new curriculum provides opportunities for learners to explore their identities, there are also potential barriers to inclusion and belonging. The study highlights the importance of considering the complexities and nuances of identity and belonging within educational reform and suggests that further research over the coming years is needed to understand these complex and intersectional issues in greater depth.

Lovell's paper discusses one of the main developments in relation to the Welsh language in the new Curriculum for Wales, namely the language continuum. While the term "continuum" is frequently used by both academic researchers and policymakers to describe this wider concept, the term has several specific interpretations, not only in bilingualism and bilingual education literature, but also in Welsh language policy and education. This paper reviews the main interpretations of the language continuum, before offering an alternative interpretation; Lovell refers to this as a "continuum of complexities", aimed at bridging the theoretical and practical by linking the concept of the language continuum with the concept of the learning continuum, as recognised in the new curriculum. In particular, the implications of introducing the continuum for the Welsh language in English-medium schools are discussed. The paper begins by acknowledging the historical context of the Welsh language, which has been subject to language shift and decline over time, and how this has impacted on language education policy in Wales. The introduction of the Welsh Language Act in 1993 marked a significant turning point in the promotion and protection of the Welsh language, and has since been a key driver of language policy in Wales, perhaps culminating in *Cymraeg 2050*, the Welsh Government's long-term approach to achieving the target of a million Welsh speakers by 2050 (Welsh Government, 2022). The concept

of the language continuum emerged as a result of efforts to promote bilingualism in Wales, and has been recognised as an important aspect of language education policy in Wales. Lovell then provides a comprehensive review of the main interpretations of the language continuum, drawing on previous research and policy work. He highlights the various ways in which the language continuum has been conceptualised, such as a continuum of proficiency, a continuum of language use, and a continuum of language attitudes. Lovell acknowledges that these interpretations have contributed to a deeper understanding of the concept of the language continuum, but argues that they have not adequately bridged the theoretical and practical, nor fully captured the complexities of language learning. Lovell proposes an alternative interpretation of the language continuum, which he refers to as a “continuum of complexities”, aimed at linking the concept of the language continuum with the concept of the learning continuum, as recognised in the new Curriculum for Wales. He argues that this interpretation better reflects the reality of language learning (see Thomas et al., 2022), which is complex and multifaceted, and involves a range of factors, such as proficiency, use, and attitudes, as well as social, cultural, and historical factors. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of introducing the continuum for the Welsh language in English-medium schools (also see Beard, 2020); Lovell argues that while the introduction of the continuum presents challenges for teachers and learners, it also presents opportunities for promoting bilingualism and enhancing language learning outcomes. He reiterates the importance of a whole-school approach to the implementation of the continuum, which involves all stakeholders, including teachers, learners, parents, and the wider community.

Finally, Griffiths explores how social constructions of ‘education’ and ‘childhood’ are visually represented over time, through a montage of school class photographs from a small town in Wales, dating from 1885 to 2015. Using the framework of Goffman’s compositional codes and conventions, she examines how people, identities, and context are depicted to demonstrate how concepts of ritual equilibrium and ritual disequilibrium shape meaning-making processes. The article also investigates how standard compositional codes and conventions established early in the tradition of school class photography are reiterative and often align strongly with the disciplinary mechanism of education, with gender and age emerging as powerful organising agents. Griffiths argues that patterns in visual representation reveal how constructions of ‘education’ and

'childhood' are shaped by shifts and developments in socio-political thinking, as well as developments in photographic technologies that broaden the repertoire of visual storytelling techniques. She draws attention to the importance of school class photographs in documenting and preserving cultural practices and changes, and how these images can be used as historical sources for exploring and understanding the social and cultural dynamics of education and childhood. Furthermore, Griffiths highlights how the compositional codes and conventions of school class photographs have changed over time, reflecting broader societal changes in education and childhood. For example, early photographs tend to be formal and hierarchical, with the teacher at the centre of the composition, reflecting the authoritarian nature of schooling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Later, photographs become more egalitarian and inclusive, with greater emphasis on the individuality of students and the diversity of their experiences. This work also identifies how gender and age play significant roles in shaping the visual representation of education and childhood in school class photographs. For example, in early photographs, girls and boys were often separated into different groups and posed differently, reflecting gendered expectations and roles in society. As social attitudes towards gender equality shifted, photographs began to feature girls and boys together, with greater emphasis on individuality and diversity. Overall, this article provides a compelling analysis of the visual representation of education and childhood in school class photographs over time, using a case study of New Quay in Ceredigion over a period of 130 years, highlighting how compositional codes and conventions, gender, and age shape meaning-making processes. Griffiths convincingly argues that school class photographs are important cultural artefacts that provide insight into the changing nature of education and childhood over time, and can be used as historical sources for exploring and understanding the social and cultural dynamics of these concepts. This article will be of interest to scholars of education, childhood studies, visual culture, and photography, as well as anyone interested in the history and culture of education and childhood (especially in Wales).

In closing, as always, we welcome submissions to both the academic and practitioner strands for future issues, from within Wales and internationally. Please contact the editors if you would like to discuss your work, submitting to Janeway (our online submission system) in Welsh or English, our double-blind peer review process, or getting published in the *Wales Journal of Education/Cylchgrawn Addysg Cymru*.

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