

The BERA Curriculum Journal Editorial

Dominic Wyse, Louise Hayward, Steve Higgins, Kay Livingston

This is a prepublication draft that might contain errors. Please cite as follows:

Wyse, D., Hayward, L., Higgins, S. & Livingston, K. (2017). Editorial. – Language and Education. *The Curriculum Journal*, Vol. 28(4), 443-445.

Language and Education

Research over the last decade has increasingly shown that language is a fundamental, if not *the* fundamental aspect of effective teaching and learning. For example it is known that the interaction between parents/carers and their children is fundamental to children's future development; similarly that teacher-pupil interaction is fundamental to pupil's progress in early years settings and schools. Language and interaction is also a pre-requisite for successful progress in literacy, which is necessary to access all school subjects. This research on the importance of language comes from many disciplines including education, psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics, to name but a few.

One of the intellectual giants whose presence links language and multidisciplinary is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky's subjects of investigation were culture and consciousness, as the editor's introduction to one of his most well-known books explains:

Vygotsky argued that psychology cannot limit itself to direct evidence, be it observable behaviour or accounts of introspection. Psychological inquiry is *investigation*, and like the criminal investigator, the psychologist must take into account indirect evidence and circumstantial clues – which in practice means that works of art, philosophical arguments, and anthropological data are no less important for psychology than direct evidence. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. xvi)

And there is another language dimension to Vygotsky's work – its translation and reception in the West. Recent scholarship has shown the many aspects that should influence our understanding of Vygotsky's contribution: the role of Luria as author and/or editor; the uncertainties in some aspects of the translations; the role of Mike Cole presenting Vygotsky's work for the first time to Western publishers; and the initial rejection then success as a result of the Stephen Toulmin review describing Vygotsky as 'the Mozart of psychology' (Kellog, 2011, p.96; see also Wyse, 2017 for links between reception of Mozart, Vygotsky, and the language of music and words).

It is then with some excitement that we introduce another Russian scholar who is currently little known in the West: the first publication in English of the translation by Olga Campbell-Thomson of Lev Vladimirovich Shcherba's

paper. His article *The General Educational Value of Foreign Languages and their Placement in School Curriculum* was first published in Russian in 1942 in the journal *Soviet Pedagogy*. Campbell-Thomson discusses the relevance of Shcherba's views in relation to teaching foreign languages in schools today. In view of the anxieties in the UK and Europe about *Brexit* the timing of an article about the fundamental general educational importance of foreign language learning as part of the school curriculum could not be more timely. What's more the articulation of languages as foundational to literacy, and, even more significantly, to thinking more generally is a potentially ground-breaking contribution.

To parallel the historical importance of Shcherba's work we also publish two very recent studies on language. Mehrak Rahimi and Jalil Alav's research examined language teachers' response to top-down curriculum change. Their finding that the more experienced teachers felt that their agency and professionalism was challenged by top-down curriculum change is important in the context of similar challenges for teachers world-wide.

The third paper in this issue's mini-series on language addresses dialogues in relation to writing as part of teaching the subject of history. Written language is foregrounded in the finding that teachers' work to support students studying and writing about history has been paralleled by work on the ways in which historical writing can or should be structured ('genre theory'). Language is also implicated in the perception that communication between the academic tribes of history teachers and genre theorists has at times broken down. Greater activism to bring these two tribes more closely together is advocated to ensure more efficacy in students' extended historical writing.

The other papers in this issue address the topics of knowledge; assessment; and whole curriculum approaches. In our six-year term as the first editors of the curriculum journal, in its new guise as one of the British Educational Research Association suite of journals, we have built on and extended the curriculum studies field's emphasis on knowledge in the curriculum. Our most recent Editors' Choice paper by Lynn Yates and Victoria Millar (2017) adds important empirical findings to what has predominantly been a theoretical debate. Yet In spite of some excellent scholarship and empirical work the familiar political debates and so-called solutions continue. For example Professor Lindsay Patterson alleges a lack of knowledge being taught in Scotland as a result of the national curriculum:

The old academic knowledge - the best that has been thought and said by human beings - will still be given to the children of the well-educated middle class by their parents ... But the other children - who can't get it from their parents - are completely dependent on schools for it ... And if they're not getting the best that has been thought and said from schools, they will get it from nowhere, and that will make inequality of learning and of culture wider than it has ever been.
(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-41134835>)

The use of Malcolm Arnold's phrase 'the best that has been thought and said' was a repeat of what Michael Gove said when he was Secretary of State for Education in England prior to radically changing England's national curriculum into a 'knowledge-based curriculum'.

The concepts of pupils' every-day knowledge and school knowledge, which are a key component of the debates about 'powerful knowledge', are brought together in Graham McPhail's paper in this issue. The subject dubbed the Cinderella of the curriculum, music, is not one that features much in curriculum studies work so its inclusion in this issue is very welcome. McPhail argues that placing abstract concepts at the heart of the music curriculum may be a way to bridge the spaces between pupils' every-day knowledge and school subject knowledge. Dawne Bell and colleagues also address knowledge in the context of a school subject, Design and Technology. Subject identity and disciplinary identity are explored in relation to Design and Technology and the disciplinary knowledge that underpins STEM subjects.

Assessment, its use and misuse, is another central strand of recent work in curriculum studies. Going back over many years the education research community has provided powerful critical evidence on the effects of high stakes testing. Ben Will and Mike Coldwell examine a new test in England and its influence on narrowing the curriculum. Assessment of a rather different kind is addressed by Rachael Whittle and colleagues. In their paper they productively analyse the discourse of certified physical education courses. Key findings are presented around the ways in which students' physical performance is assessed, or not assessed, and how internal and external forms of assessment vary.

The final paper in this issue by Kazuyuki Nomura addresses curriculum in the context of Japan. Once again some enduring issues for curriculum researchers are addressed: child-centred education; project-based learning; and the perception of increasing state control over schooling in Japan (it prompted me to go back Takekawa's, 2015, thoughtful work). Of particular interest is the way that project-based learning/Integrated Study which is often perceived as a child-centred strategy paradoxically became a tool of state control of the curriculum.

Kellog, D., & Yasnitsky, A. (2011). The differences between the Russian and English texts of *Tool and Symbol in Child Development. Supplementary and analytic materials. Dubna Psychological Journal, 4*, 98-158.

Takekawa, S. (2015) Effects of Globalized Assessment on Local Curricula: What Japanese teachers face and how they challenge it. In D. Wyse, L. Hayward and J. Pandya (Eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy*. London: SAGE.

Yates, L. and Millar, V. (2017) 'Powerful knowledge' curriculum theories and the case of physics. Lyn Yates & Victoria Millar. *Curriculum Journal*, Vol. 27 (3). Also see here: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/news/curriculum-journal-editors-choice-paper-prize-for-volume-27-2016>

Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and Language*. Translated by Alex Kozulin. London: MIT Press, 1986.

Wyse, D. (forthcoming October 2017). *How Writing Works: From the Invention of the Alphabet to the Rise of Social Media*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.