

Editorial: Reclaiming education: ‘fake news’, research and social justice

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It feels like a sign of the times that, in 2017, dictionary publisher Collins named the term ‘fake news’ word of the year. Education has not been immune from its own forms of ‘fake news’. Of course, there are policies that are well-informed, drawing evidence from research, policy and practice to offer high quality frameworks to guide educational practice. However all too often there is an international trend for policies to emerge where it is difficult to discern the underlying evidence base that has informed the thinking that lies behind the policy. On occasion there is not even footnotes or a reference list to allow those interested to track the dependability of the policy or its guidance. Even when there is a reference list it may refer only to previous policy: a vicious circle of ideas that may or may not be dependable. And these same policies are intended to act as the basis for teachers’ practice with children and young people in schools and classrooms. We live in challenging times politically, economically and socially. Times when dependable evidence matters. The articles in this edition employ a range of approaches to educational research but they share a number of common features: they are shaped by reason; they are explicit about the evidence base on which they draw, and they have been subjected to rigorous peer review. Articles such as these offer examples of the way in which research might make a contribution to challenging the world of educational ‘fake news’.

In the opening article of this edition, on a topic that as editors we have pursued as part of our vision for the Curriculum Journal [cite our first special issue?], Wrigley explores the relationship between ‘Knowledge’, curriculum and social justice and critiques Social Realist interpretations of the place of knowledge in the development of a socially just curriculum. He argues that for knowledge to be powerful for all learners, it must pay attention to issues of power and inequality. Wrigley contests the commonly postulated idea that critical pedagogy is relativist and suggests that alternative perspectives can offer new insights into seemingly intransigent problems. He also proposes a more socially inclusive model of powerful knowledge that includes both vernacular knowledge from marginalised groups and canonical knowledge from academic disciplines.

The importance of curricula that are designed for all learners is developed in the second article. Garcia-Huidobro explores this idea in the context of people from non-dominant backgrounds who want their children’s education to be informed by a curriculum that balances identity and knowledge; home cultures and beliefs and more traditional ‘powerful’ knowledge. This article proposes a model where curriculum design can bridge these two potential worlds through the idea of

interstitial curriculum that forms what he describes as connective tissue within and across disciplines. He offers examples from the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) to illustrate how curricular interstices might help address the aspirations by non-dominant communities for a curricular balance between home and society.

The potential for curriculum reform to address the rights of marginalized groups is explored by Awada, Diab and Faour in the third article of this edition where the authors reflect on the experience of Syrian children mainstreamed into Lebanese schools. More than 1.2 million Syrian refugees migrated to Lebanon after the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011. The article explores teachers' attitudes towards the establishment of a new curriculum based on Human Rights Education (HRE) that might better address the Syrian young people in Lebanese schools. The evidence emerging from the study emphasized the importance of the development of a new curriculum supported by new textbooks that emphasise diversity, peace, democracy and citizenship, and new collaborative approaches to curriculum enactment.

The centrality of making context more explicit, by opening up alternative explanations of historical events, is the emerging finding in the fourth article where Wendell explores Swedish students' causal reasoning about the rise of the Third Reich in Germany. Analysing student texts from the Swedish national test in history, Wendell found that although most students were able to explain events using both agents and situational factors in their explanations, students consistently restricted their explanations, e.g., relating the German people and the economic crisis to Hitler. These restrictions limited their exploration of other causes that could have enabled them to explore different interpretations of why the Nazi regime came to power.

The idea of restricting explanations and interpretations in deepening understanding is explored in a different context in the fifth article of this edition. DeLuca, Chapman, LaPointe-McEwan and Klinger highlight the comparative absence of student voice in studies of Assessment for Learning (AfL) internationally. Using evidence emerging from a survey of 1079 K-12 students and portfolio-based interviews with 12 students, the authors found that students most commonly used and valued teacher feedback and success criteria. They least valued peer feedback. The findings emphasise the need for students to be explicitly taught about AfL, its concepts, terminology, and use and that authentic enactment of AfL needs sustained focus, research, and support in schools and classrooms for students to value and benefit from AfL.

In the sixth article and using a very different research methodology, Vidergor, sought to assess the effectiveness of the Multidimensional Curriculum Model in the development of higher order thinking skills. Using a study module based on the multidimensional curriculum model with a sample of 394 elementary and secondary school students in Israel, the study used a quantitative quasi-experimental pre-post design and compared findings from the intervention group with the control group. The study found that in measured thinking skills the intervention group improved by

40% as compared to an increase of 4 % in control group. The skills where the greatest improvement was detected were in future thinking and in creative thinking. Vidergor suggests that if used regularly the Multidimensional Curriculum Model could improve thinking skills among students.

The challenge of integrating 21st century competences in national and school curricula and in classroom activities is investigated by van de Oudeweetering and Voogt in the seventh article. They postulate that, at least in part, this may be due to the ambiguity of definitions of 21st century competences and the absence of educational actors in curriculum development. The study collected data from a web-survey (responses from 2,804 primary- and secondary school teachers). The data were analysed to explore teachers' conceptualization and enactment of these competences using an exploratory factor analysis of teachers' self-reported classroom activities intended to foster students' 21st century competences. The results suggested six coherent, inter-related dimensions of classroom activities that foster 21st century competences: digital literacy, innovative thinking, critical thinking and communication, (digital) citizenship, self-regulated learning, and (computer-supported) collaborative learning: insights might be used to inform curricular guidelines. Teachers did not perceive that 21st century competences could be fostered by disconnected classroom activities, but already had a more integrated model of the curricular innovation.

The final article also focuses on teachers' understandings and experiences of curriculum reform. Bergh and Wahlstrom report on a study that focused on different ways in which teachers relate their situational agency and professional assignment to national curriculum content and curriculum dilemmas. Building theoretically on transactional realism and empirically on analyses of interviews with teachers, the authors explored teacher agency during the enactment of a new Swedish curriculum reform. They explored teachers' agency temporally: 'projective experiences' (future), 'practical-evaluative experiences' (present) and 'iterational experiences' (past). They focused on 'what' in the curriculum – what the teachers found intriguing, important or impossible and sought to explore what affects how teachers relate to the curriculum as part of the multidimensional structures that influence teacher agency. Perhaps their most important finding was the impact on teacher agency of the policy discourse on knowledge and equity, standards and the effect of assessment on pedagogy.

Responding to a keynote given by one the Editors of this journal, in his Editorial, Henry Hepburn of the Times Educational Supplement (December 2018) argued that a 'global perspective shaped by reason and reliable evidence, may never have been more important'. As Editors, we could not agree more strongly. Young people deserve educational experiences that are well informed. When researchers, policy makers and practitioners work together, sharing their different yet complementary kinds of expertise, there is at least a better chance that we can defend education from ill-informed ideas, and we can defend children and young people from poor

quality educational experiences that disadvantage most those whose need for educational is greatest.

Reference

Hepburn, H. (2017) Taking a Global View Reveals Mis-information about Education in *Times Educational Supplement (Scotland), Editorial, December 8th no. 2551*.