

## EDITORIAL

### *PEDAGOGY – IT’S WHAT WE DO*

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Pedagogy is the defining feature of teacher professionalism. I am delighted to accept the invitation to write the editorial for this, the “Pedagogy Edition” of the Buckingham Journal of Education. As a career teacher turned teacher trainer, I have a deep interest in everything teachers do to bring about effective learning.

#### **BEING PROFESSIONAL**

I have always thought of myself as being the member of a profession. I have begun to wonder what it means to be a professional. My reasoning that teachers are professionals is: a doctor has the ability to prescribe what is considered appropriate for their patient, a lawyer is able to garner facts and present them in an appropriate setting to the best advantage of their client, and that a teacher could choose from a pedagogical repertoire to best ensure that their classes have the best outcomes. The discussion continues ability of the professional to self-regulate. My solicitor and my GP are regulated by a combination of legislation and their professional bodies. This is a significant difference: teachers do not have an independent professional body with a regulatory function. Teachers are of course regulated by direct legislation. Additionally, I would argue that there is an increasing amount of indirect legislation which governs and drives essential features of our work: curriculum, assessment and accountability.

Hargreaves (2000) considered the evolution of teacher professionalism:

1. The pre-professional age. Teachers carried out the directives of their superiors.
2. The age of autonomous professional. This was the stage where autonomy was considered an important part of the profession. There was pedagogical freedom.
3. The age of collegial professional. Cultures of collaboration were created developing a common purpose to cope with change and complexity.
4. The post-professional age. An age where forces compete to either de-professionalise teaching or to seek new ways of being a principled professional.

Pedagogy, the active processes of teaching and learning, must be at the heart of the teacher's professionalism. Whilst there is no direct regulation of pedagogy, indeed "trust the teachers" is an oft repeated pollical mantra, regulatory processes have begun to work together to impose a pedagogy. The effect of this is to erode the professional status of teachers.

The Cambridge University Teacher Status Project. Hargreaves. L, Cunningham, M. Hansen, A, McIntyre, D. Oliver, C. (2007) noted "To a large extent, it [teaching] is a profession that feels itself to be untrusted, undervalued and over-regulated by its government."

The same study noted; "the government could do much to enhance the status of the teaching profession. This could be done by treating teachers as professionals, by respecting their expertise, consulting with them on policy formation, reducing the external control to which teachers feel they are subject and, in particular, by making clear to teachers that they are trusted professionals,"

Where should this trust be manifest? Surely it is in the ability of the teacher to be able to make a professional decision of an appropriate pedagogy? A teacher has to task of making sure that their pupils get the best possible outcomes from their education but their professional freedom to choose how learning is planned and delivered in their classes is being eroded by legislative and regulatory changes.

## **PEDAGOGY AND PURPOSE**

"Living longer but not necessarily healthier" Is a paper which questions the goals of medicine (Jivraj. S et al 2020). It was the title that made me stop and think. As titles for academic papers go it was a terrific title, communicating a multi-layered message which affects us all. Modern medicine is a success, life has been preserved. How much more successful would medicine be if it went beyond the preservation of life and sought to maintain a healthy, active life

We can ask it there are parallels between what medicine has achieved and what we are creating in our schools. Could that opening title be reworked to "Children are attaining more but not are necessarily happier". Certainly, there are emerging data for example, pre-pandemic data from the ONS which suggests that this is a legitimate question (Young people's well-being in the UK, ONS 2020).

The TES (10/12/01) noted "Pedagogy is defined simply as the method, and practice, of teaching. It encompasses: teaching styles, teaching theory, feedback and assessment. When people talk about the pedagogy of teaching, they will be referring to the way teachers deliver the content of the curriculum to a class."(Tes Editorial 10/12/01)

It is a "motherhood and apple pie" definition, embracing all the actions teacher take to promote learning. But perhaps that is it: pedagogy **should** include all the

good things that teachers can and should do. If a good thing is missing to the detriment of learning, that is a pedagogical problem. From my perspective as a teacher trainer the most significant question is what do we teach teachers? This question has been partially answered in the form of the Core Content Framework, the equivalent of a National Curriculum for Initial teacher Training

This all ties in the essential question as to the purpose of education. What are we aiming to do? A sub text might be – what sort of citizens do we want? It is my contention that state education as it is presently organised can not give teachers the professional freedom to decide how best to teach their classes.

It is essential to first of all consider the purpose of education. The specification of the goal is all important. If an army has the goal of capturing a town intact the choice of weapon is significantly different to that when the goal is to decimate it.

Since James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech state education has move steadily toward developing education as an arm of the economy. This was developed by the Blair government and then explicitly brought out in the 2014 revision of the national curriculum. This was emphasised by Nick Gibb in 2015:

“Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it's an essential preparation for adult life. “Nick Gibb (2015) Speech to the Education Reform Summit.

The economic imperative was emphasised through the PISA results. Michael Gove's speeches make reference to the PISA survey data and place it in the context of international economic competitiveness. In a sense PISA performance has become a proxy measure for the contribution of education to the wide economy. There is a much broader discussion to be had around the nature of the PISA measures and how they might actually contribute to economic success either as correlation or causation. As PISA has been used as a justification for the present curriculum and assessment regime it will be interesting to see if the emerging new pedagogies are able to deliver an improvement in problem solving and critical thinking.

Since the inception of the National Curriculum successive governments have gradually increased the extent to which the state sets the key features of education. Whilst government has claimed an economic imperative for controlling what is taught, no government has overtly specified how teachers are to teach. There is however a combination of factors; the curriculum, the assessment regime and accountability structures, which when combined are pushing pedagogy in one particular direction.

## **PEDAGOGICAL DRIVERS**

### **Curriculum**

It is important not to see conspiracy where there is none. The law of unforeseen consequence is often much more operable than that! However, we do have a number of factors which have come together which seem to be directing pedagogy in our schools. There are three critical strands of policy which are combining to push schools into a particular form of pedagogy. These are: The curriculum (as expressed in GCSE Specifications), the assessment regime and accountability structures and processes.

I am simply going to observe rather than argue with, the current curriculum. Ministers and other educators use the term “knowledge rich” to describe the current curriculum. In practice this appears to mean that the curriculum requires a lot of factual material to be learned.

There is a de facto prioritisation of subjects in the curriculum. The Ebacc performance measure does drive subjects where the curriculum is “knowledge rich”. The consequence of this is less time for activities which may not directly involve retention and recall of knowledge. There are in particular screams of real pain from the arts community which is seeing an erosion of the time for the expressive arts in mainstream education (Brown, M. Guardian 8<sup>th</sup> May 2018.). Concern has been expressed over a reduction in time for practical work in science lessons. (BBC 21/11/13). These factors alone have to consequence of limiting the range of learning experiences available to children.

### **THE ASSESSMENT REGIME**

Effective assessment is tied very closely to what we want to examine. Whoever specifies the nature of the examination process is de facto going to control what and how it is taught. GCSE as it stands is heavily weighted toward recall of factual information. Understanding memory and the dynamic processes between working and long-term memory is now a key part of the teacher arsenal with a pedagogy that emphasises the development of memory becoming a core feature.

GCSE examination do give a priority to knowledge i.e. the factual content of the subject. So there is a kind of double jeopardy in operation where the curriculum is knowledge rich and the examination is going to have a principle focus on recall of that knowledge. This can't help but affect a teacher's pedagogical choices and the dangers it brings to the way children are taught is recognised by OFSTED. The September 2021 School Inspection Handbook delivers a clear warning:

“In order to develop understanding, pupils connect new knowledge with existing knowledge. Pupils also need to develop fluency and unconsciously apply their knowledge as skills. This must not be reduced to, or confused with, simply memorising facts. Inspectors will be alert to unnecessary or excessive attempts to simply prompt pupils to learn glossaries or long lists of disconnected facts.”

(OFSTED School Inspection Handbook 2021)

Of course, we have to remember that the current concern with curriculum and assessment arose out of grade inflation and concern about dumbing down as well as a modest decline in our PISA rating. I would suggest that we may again see grade inflation in that it could be argued that as teachers get to know assessment processes pupils' results will inevitably rise. Teachers are a talking community where knowledge and experience are shared. As experience of any assessment structure is built it is shared and practice refines. We have come to the end of a strange period for the world, which naturally has impacted education.

One key question must be around whether the assessment arrangements for 2021 are going to be allowed to inform future assessment practice. Is the current “norm referenced +/- 3%” going to be allowed to die? Perhaps the covid driven changes could bring us closer to a criterion referenced system than we have been for years and that will put pedagogical control back with teachers.

## ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURES

*Big fleas have little fleas  
Upon their backs to bite 'em,  
And little fleas have smaller fleas,  
And so ad infinitum.*

*Jonathan Swift “On Poetry: A Rapsody, 1733.*

There is a new “3Rs” in school leadership: Reward, Risk, and Responsibility. Those who would lead within the Academy structures are well rewarded. Leaving out the few academy CEOs commanding eyewatering sums, secondary heads can look forward to salaries of £100,000.00 (Guardian 20/3/20) putting them amongst the highest paid education professionals in the world. With rewards at this level there will naturally be considerable caution possibly conservatism in the way an organisation is led.

There is nothing wrong with being held to account. It is a prime function of leadership to hold colleagues to account. There is a thread of responsibility running from the classroom through Senior Leadership to Academy trusts and

from there to finish at the DFE. It is a system that moves accountability further from the classroom at every stage. A headteacher who wants to operate a humane accountability system may find themselves effectively hamstrung by a system which depersonalises.

This depersonalisation is driven by numbers, key indicators expressed as examination grades. NFER (2017) noted that Heads whose schools received a poor OFSTED report tended to leave their posts within a year of the poor judgement. One can only imagine the threat of losing a considerable salary. Responsibility of this nature will again lead to caution and conservatism.

We are now seeing the consequence of a knowledge rich curriculum, a content driven assessment scheme and complex accountability structures impacting on pedagogy.

### **What works?**

I would suggest that we can conceptualise current pedagogy as being the product of Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability and should not be surprised by that. It is a Venn diagram with pedagogy at its centre. We do know that as things stand the pedagogy as practised in this country is increasingly moving towards an un-apologetic teacher led pedagogy because that works i.e. delivers examination success, in the current context. The system as it stands has birthed a formal, highly controlled adult focussed pedagogy simply from a combination of fear and necessity.

### **THE APPEAL TO RESEARCH**

Research can be used for many purposes. In a system which requires a lot of factual memorisation research is directed toward finding the best methods for promoting effective recall. Educational research is rarely absolute in its findings. Educational research is essentially applied sociology which happens within an ontological framework. Good use of research is a synthesis of alternate, but possibly not necessarily, conflicting positions. “Research” is something of a difficult term. It is a word which when used to drive forward a particular agenda is loaded with meaning. Semiotically the term is associated with white coats, precision, certainty (although many scientists would disagree with this), and rationality; you would be a fool not to follow the direction of research. What we do know is that in general teachers are not good consumers of research. We only have to look at the malevolent ghost of “learning styles” to see the consequences of this.

In a sense the question of what pedagogy we teach to trainees is at least partially answered for us. The ITT Core Content Framework (DFE 19/11/19)

provides that partial answer and sets a pedagogical direct from which it will be difficult to step back. Reading through this document there are there striking features:

- “Learn that” statements which are “statements are informed by the best available educational research.”
- “Learn how” statements which are concentrated with how practitioners might implement the research informed statements.

The combination of “Learn that” and “Learn how” statements have effectively created an official pedagogy. Reading the Core Content Framework it is possible to divine what has become the goal of education has become – the acquisition of fact, what has become known as the Content Rich Curriculum. Again, we have a term loaded with extraneous meaning. Introducing the word “rich” conjures images of something you would want to have or to be.

But let’s return to the idea of doing things that “work”. We see schools that have correctly read the runes for the official pedagogy. These are schools which have recognised that in the era of a content led curriculum there needs to be a massive emphasis on memory and acquisition of facts. The success of Katherine Burbalsingh at Michaela School cannot be denied. In fact, there is a compelling pragmatism in the work of her team at Michaela School. I am pleased to be able to include a review of her book “Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers” in our review section.

The present system cannot work for everyone. Mick Waters in his piece makes the point that when any form of norm referencing of grades is used in those accountability processes there will always be losers. There will be pupils and teachers who have “done the right thing” and yet the system will always be loaded against them. Norm referencing can only ever provide a means of ranking children at some predetermined point in their careers.

I am pleased to be able to present two papers: Julie Tilbury’s and Simon Edwards papers considering the educational experiences of young people who do not for different reasons, fit the standard model of education. It is the ability of a fish to climb a tree question – we need an alternative pedagogy to enable some children to be good learners. It is a brave teacher who steps outside the accepted wisdom of the age and finds an alternative way of doing things. These two articles have their heart an alternative view of learning and its associated pedagogies – it does not come from external sources but comes instead from the child; the child’s needs, aptitudes and interests. Although the context is different the underpinning thinking links closely to the arguments brought forward by Laura Barritt in her paper, where pedagogy is a co-construction between the teacher and the student.

This of course requires alternative pedagogical thinking, which breaks free from the imprisoning Venn to meet children where they are.

## **RECAPTURING PEDAGOGY – RECAPTURING PROFESSIONALISM**

So who owns pedagogy? So far, the picture I have painted has been gloomy. But there are those willing to argue that the present situation driven as it is by knowledge and assessment is actually inadequate. Tilbury has recaptured pedagogy by saying very firmly “your curriculum and assessment methods will not do for our children!” It is hard to overstate the potential for everything to go wrong and yet it didn’t and OFSTED were able to see the real benefits for the young people in her school. Our current Venn driven pedagogy is in some sense’s incomplete.

Tilbury’s account is of a school which decided to be radical and, in a sense, so has James Mannion. The climate around Learning to Learn has distinctly cooled. Mannion enters this debate and shows that at Seaside School this programme had a positive impact on pupil outcomes. What is striking is that Mannion’s project really depended on a Headteacher and colleagues who had buy in from the start, seeing a need i.e. coastal deprivation and finding a solution. Again, it is the bravery of stepping out of the Venn that really matters.

But is our current pedagogy fully developed? We have a new reality which must not be allowed to pass us by and that reality is embodied in smart phones. This does indeed give us a new reality which we can either ignore or embrace. The smart phone has become the target of politicians and some teachers. The presence and application of new technology has placed our young people in a rapidly changing world where knowledge is no longer a commodity but a reference point akin to a way marker, something you pass by using in a few seconds of dedicated time, which enables life to be successfully negotiated. In school mobile phones offer at least three possible positives:

- Mobile phones a reference tool,
- Mobile phones as learning tool,
- Mobile phones as a means of exploring relationships and learning together.

It is likely that most adults are familiar with Google and it’s power to provide information. At the present time there is no real pedagogy of Google. There is still an ongoing discussion around teaching discernment and critical thinking. I was delighted to receive a letter from a Buckingham University MA student who has used the phone itself as learning tool. Unsurprising this student is a younger member of the teaching community for whom the mobile phone is a tool to be

manipulated to make it do what we need it to do. Her work to date is proving to be extremely interesting.

We are already seeing the new ways of exploring relationships and reality which is facilitated by mobile technology. Laura Barritt's article show how teenagers are using the internet in a way that is co-constructing their world from a series of complex entangled realities. Barritt, brings forward the compelling argument for an alternative dynamic pedagogy worked out by teachers and students in dialogue as this new set of realities evolve. Barritt's position will not only recapture pedagogy but in some sense share pedagogical power and decision making with students. Recent pronouncements from the secretary of state have made it clear that there is official disapproval for the use of mobile phones in school. I would suggest that this is a fear response from the secretary of state. Yes, some pupils are abusing mobile phones but would a better response be for the adults to reflect on the problems and find positive ways forward. This is where Ian Coombs's article is extremely important. In fact, the adult world is already aware of the need to make the use of the internet a safe experience. We have to ask if the Secretary of State's proposal to outlaw mobile technology in schools is actually driven by a perceived inability of adults to regulate children's access to the internet? Is this essentially a temporary decision whilst we develop a pedagogy of the internet? Perhaps we are just awaiting the next generation of teachers to come through the system. Is this now an area where de facto young teachers will develop an effective safe pedagogy and approach becoming professional in a new way. As things stand but one of the key forces for good in curriculum policy i.e. OFSTED, is not following through on teaching about as part of the inspection regime. It is not unreasonable to question if OFSTED inspectors lack the skills or knowledge to be investigating this area.

## **CONCLUSION**

Teachers want to be regarded as professionals. It is not unreasonable to ask what is the teacher's equivalent of the doctor's stethoscope or the lawyer's wig. I suggest it is the ability to make informed pedagogical choices.

The combination of curriculum, assessment and accountability structure have restricted pedagogical choice to such an extent that teachers are becoming post-professionals simply looking to so what works in an increasingly regulated system.

We do need to acknowledge that the system does not work for everyone and other routes to success are available. We need teachers to join the research community, be brave and develop informed arguments which support alternative pedagogies from which we as professionals can select to ensure the very best for all our pupils.

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