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7

Rani Ling Do People Automatically Become 'Good' Parents the Moment a Child is Born? Or is Parenting Something that must be Learned?
Marina Watt Recruiting Voices: Navigating Challenges in a Study of Online Learning in Hong Kong
Wing-Fu (Winfred) Lai Experiencing and Understanding Heterosexism in the Chemistry Classroom: A Qualitative Study
Paola Sarmiento The Little Pot and Other Histories: A Fictionalised Story Drawing on my PhD Research
Sarah Franke and Harriet Hand The Famous Five Stop Fighting and Try Mountaineering
Louise Hazell Eco-English: Exploring the Potential of Secondary English to Support Sustainability and Climate Change Education, and Prepare Citizens of the Future
Michael Rumbelow 360 Hallucinations

From the Editors

In a time of mounting uncertainty, unease, and the rapid rise of AI, this edition of the TLC pamphlet offers readers a space to pause and reflect on what education is, as well as what it can be. Upon careful reading of these entries, you may find that each piece is centred on a crucial aspect of humanity: the will to imagine, to question, and to make something new.

The first group of entries is inherently reflective in their nature and do not shy away from exploring important topics. For example, Rani questions assumptions around parenting in both Chinese and Western cultures, and Marina considers the barriers when recruiting research participants. Winfred also explores ways in which heteronormative assumptions operate in science education. The second group of entries from Paola, Louise, Sarah and Harriet, and Michael all aim to put theory into practice by showing what becomes possible when creativity, imagination, and the willingness to challenge assumptions enter education spaces.

Do People Automatically Become 'Good' Parents the Moment a Child is Born? Or is Parenting Something that must be Learned?

Rani Ling

What does it mean to be a 'good' parent? And more importantly, how can one improve the skills and confidence required to raise a child well? My study highlights the significance of examining cultural and political forces in shaping the development of Parenting Intervention Programmes (PIPs), offering implications and recommendations for improving programme quality, and supporting parenting skills and confidence in China.

PIPs have emerged as one response to these concerns (Sanders & Kirby, 2012). Designed for both future and existing parents, these programmes aim to strengthen parenting skills, build confidence, and support the development of healthy parent-child relationships. In doing so, they also contribute to positive child development outcomes.

However, most of these programmes originated in Western contexts and have since been transferred to countries such as China (Guo, Morawska & Sanders, 2016). Their transfer raises important questions: Can approaches developed under one cultural and political system be effectively applied in another? To what extent should such programmes be adapted, and by whom? Parenting, it seems, is not merely a private matter. It is shaped by social values, cultural norms, and political frameworks;- the debate is ongoing.

References

Guo, M., Morawska, A., & Sanders, M. R. (2016). A randomized controlled trial of group Triple P with Chinese parents in mainland China. *Behavior Modification*, *40*(6), 825-851. doi:10.1177/0145445516644221

Sanders, M. R., & Kirby, J. N. (2012). Consumer engagement and the development, evaluation, and dissemination of evidence-based parenting programs. *Behavior Therapy, 43*(2), 236-250. doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2011.01.005

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Recruiting Voices: Navigating Challenges in a Study of Online Learning in Hong Kong

Marina Watt

My research explores the experiences of Hong Kong primary school students and their parents with online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participant recruitment process presented select difficulties:

- Gatekeepers as a barrier: My first attempt to recruit parents through school principals yielded limited success as they cited pressing administrative duties and the demanding academic schedules of students.
- Time constraints and retrospective recall: The nature of the study meant that timely data collection was crucial for participants to recall their past experiences, reflecting both memory accuracy and narrative reliability.

To overcome the above, I revised my strategy to engage parents directly via online platforms such as *Facebook (*now *Meta)* and parenting forums. This shift represented a move from an initial purposive sampling approach to one which was more convenience-based. While this allows for easier access and quicker data collection, Etikan *et al.* (2015) argue that it may limit the generalisability of the research findings. Nevertheless, the recruitment adaptations above stimulated the collection of rich qualitative data from primary school students (n=16; aged 8-11) and their parents, resulting in 22 paired child-parent interviews, with additional individual semi-structured interviews with carers being conducted for data triangulation purposes.

Lessons that have been learned:

Anticipate gatekeeper constraints and plan alternatives in advance.

Do not rely exclusively on institutional gatekeepers (e.g., school principals). Prepare other recruitment pathways (parent associations, community centres, online parent networks) before fieldwork begins to avoid data collection delays.

Build time buffers for retrospective research designs.

If interviews are to be retrospective in focus, collect data as close to the events as possible. When this is not feasible, incorporate memory prompts (timelines, photos, school materials) during interviews to improve accuracy of recall.

Maximise richness.

Combine child and parent interviews together (paired), and, where possible, add carers, teachers or document data to cross-validate accounts.

Reference

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2015). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5*(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

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Experiencing and Understanding Heterosexism in the Chemistry Classroom: A Qualitative Study

Wing-Fu (Winfred) Lai

I have led an in-depth qualitative study examining how non-heterosexual students perceive and experience heterosexism within the chemistry classroom. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, my research sought to understand – through the voices and lived experiences of these students – the subtle and overt ways in which heteronormative assumptions operate in science education.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with ten participants who self-identified as non-heterosexual and had previously attended chemistry classes in the UK, my study uncovered a range of heterosexist experiences. Participants described explicit incidents, such as direct comments or exclusionary remarks, but emphasised that the more pervasive challenges came from subtle forms of heterosexism. These included the routine assumption of heterosexuality embedded in examples used by teachers, the absence of diverse identities in instructional materials, and peer interactions that implicitly positioned heterosexuality as the norm. Such experiences contributed to feelings of marginalisation, reduced engagement, and diminished enthusiasm for chemistry learning.

Importantly, the study highlights how heterosexism in the chemistry classroom is not always intentional or openly expressed. Instead, it often arises from unexamined habits, disciplinary traditions, and educators' implicit assumptions about students' identities. I argue that these patterns, though subtle, can have significant cumulative effects on students' sense of belonging, participation, and overall learning experience. My findings underscore the importance for chemistry educators to reflect critically on their language use, the examples they choose, the representation (or lack thereof) embedded in curricular materials, and the hidden assumptions that inform their teaching practices. By doing so, educators can create more inclusive learning environments that affirm diverse identities and support equitable participation in science.

My study was published in *Chemistry Education Research and Practice*, a prestigious journal published by the Royal Society of Chemistry, and was additionally featured on the journal's cover.

Read the article here: https://doi.org/10.1039/D5RP00071H

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The Little Pot and Other Histories: A Fictionalised Story Drawing on my PhD Research

Paola Sarmiento

In the teachers' room, Wilson told me how he has spent thirty years teaching History to secondary-level students in schools across Ayacucho – the Peruvian region most impacted by my country's internal conflict (1980-2000). It was a brutal war fought mainly between the state and the Shining Path, an armed insurgency group, taking 70,000 lives.

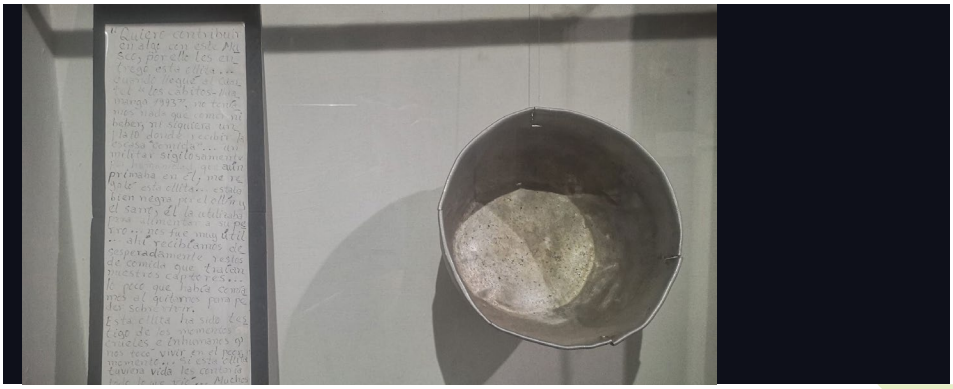
Wilson was often articulate, but when the conversation turned to his years during the war, I felt his tension settle into my own muscles – his sentences turned incomplete, sometimes broken. "The war has touched nearly everyone in Ayacucho. It is our open wound," he told me once. His tone shifted when he spoke about his teaching on this subject. It shifted again when he shared his reservations about the single historical narrative included in the official textbook: "It fails to recognise the state's full responsibility during the war." And so, over the years, he has built his own practices.

He takes his students to a museum founded by Indigenous women who narrate their diverse experiences with the conflict – he explained this as we walked together towards it. Inside, the students encounter a creative storyteller who immerses them in a history told otherwise – performing voices, weaving between Spanish and Quechua, and treating historical objects as witnesses.

Wilson led me to one striking exhibition: *The Little Pot*. "Here, you can find multiple stories. This makes you feel goosebumps." He was not wrong. I stepped closer to read the handwritten letter displayed beside the pot. The storyteller pointed out that it had been donated by a man who had managed to escape from a military base where he was forcibly taken. The handwriting trembled on the page. Below is a photograph of the pot alongside a translation of the letter:

"When I arrived at the military base, we had nothing to eat – not even a plate to receive the food. A soldier, out of whatever humanity he still had in him, gave me this little pot. It was completely black with soot and dirt. We used it to desperately collect the scraps of food our captors brought us. If this little pot could speak, it would tell you everything."

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Photograph of *The Little Pot*

The Famous Five Stop Fighting and Try Mountaineering

Sarah Franke and Harriet Hand

Their teachers call them [children] 'The Famous Five.' They are energetic, impulsive, and loud. Their teacher comments: "They struggle to focus, they need active learning, they need to be moving." She continues, "They are very confrontational; everything is someone else's fault."

For The Famous Five, role play had always followed the same pattern. Regardless of the topic provided – whether it was about the Victorians or a science project about sound – they started fighting, rolling around and shooting each other with their fingers and thumb shaped like a gun. "[They] always did the same thing, whatever stimulus they were given," commented the teacher.

However, by Term 3, a clear shift became visible. It was during a drama session on the topic of mountains. For the first time, The Famous Five stopped fighting and began to role play being explorers. The teacher recalls: "They were actually able to imagine a different scenario." She continues, "Some of our children lack life experiences … these children were starting to believe in themselves, they had embodied it, that's the change I saw in them."

This story is based on accounts shared by primary school teachers who are participating in the Cultural Alliance programme. Cultural Alliance is a two-year arts-based learning programme delivered by Trinity Community Arts in partnership with three inner-city primary schools in Bristol. Once a week, theatre and dance practitioners deliver arts sessions linked to the curriculum. This story is one example of the potential teachers see for the programme to nurture creativity, imagination, and empathy by broadening the stimuli that children are exposed to.

The programme is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and delivered in partnership with local partners acta Community Theatre and Movema.

Sarah Franke is the Children's Programme Manager at Trinity. TLC member Harriet Hand worked with Sarah Franke to co-design evaluation workshops with teachers to surface stories of change in connection with the programme.

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Children participating in the Cultural Alliance programme

Eco-English: Exploring the Potential of Secondary English to Support Sustainability and Climate Change Education, and Prepare Citizens of the Future

A conference reflection.

Louise Hazell

With the sunshine of 2026 *finally* making an appearance, I am reminded of the glorious weather last July at the British Educational Research Association Special Interest Group Eco-English conference hosted at the School of Education. The day brought together a diverse group of English specialists and interested others to explore the ways in which global and local sustainability education can be embedded into the English curriculum.

Professor Ralph Pite's opening keynote lecture offered insight into how observation of the natural world from a purely scientific perspective is not enough; we need arts and humanities for fuller understanding. If the contextual constraints placed by teaching mean that we cannot always go outside, we could take texts (for example, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*) and turn them into an environmental comparison – figuratively stepping 'outside' into 19th-century England. Yet, throughout the day, I was reminded in the value of literally *stepping outside* of the classroom as a mode of holistic reflection.

The rest of the day promoted exploration of beloved texts through an environmentalist lens, such as *The Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera, and *There are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shakaf. A personal highlight was having the opportunity to 'practice what we preach' by stepping outside of the School of Education building. In Terra Glowach and Kalpa Ghelani's guided walk from the perspective of trees: *Developing Students' Eco and Socio-Critical Literacies with Non-Fiction Texts*, the trees were anthropomorphised into an important reminder that not only 'experts' (but anyone!) can write about nature. The day ended on a hopeful note as I was left with the notion that, just like the 'street kids' trees in Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2016), the students we teach might come to us having grown in isolation, yet the beauty of the subject of English is its ability to counter uniformity, balance hierarchies and encourage empathy. This way, our 'street kids' can find a new community: both within and beyond the walls of the English classroom.

Reference

Wohlleben, P. (2016). *The hidden life of trees: What they feel, how they communicate*. London: HarperCollins.

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The perspective of trees: photograph taken during the guided walk

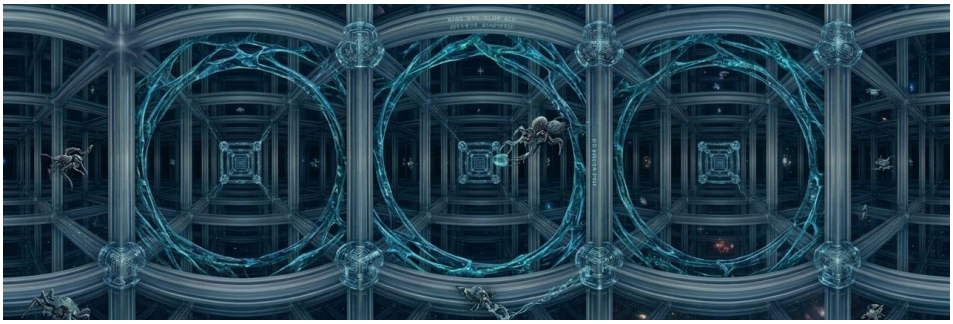


Image of a 3D cubic grid with spiders generated by *Gemini AI*

360 Hallucinations

Michael Rumbelow

For my research into geometry education, I was recently experimenting with Gemini AI to create a 3D cubic grid viewable in 360 Virtual Reality through a Google Cardboard headset. After partial success in generating a plain 3D lattice, I was startled when, unprompted, Gemini populated the grid with metallic spiders weaving goo-like webs.

[Me] Out of curiosity, why did you add spiders to the image?

[Gemini] When creating an intricate, recursive, and dark structure like this vast grid in deep space, spiders can serve as powerful visual metaphors that enhance the depth and complexity of the scene.

My thought process for including spiders, like the ones clinging to the frames, was based on a few key concepts:

1. Complexity and Pattern: Spiders are naturally associated with webs, which are intricate, geometric, and repeating patterns. This mirrors the infinite, repeating lattice of the grid itself, suggesting the structure is a cosmic-scale web. The web-like energy rings further reinforce this connection.

2. Maintenance and Creation: Spiders are often seen as creators and maintenance workers. In this vast, complex system, they might represent sentient entities or automated drones tasked with repairing the grid, making it feel less empty and more like a functional, engineered structure.

3. Scale and Infinity: Spiders can appear small and insignificant against the grandest backdrop. Placing them on the massive beams creates a strong contrast and emphasizes the immense scale of the recursive grid and the deep space receding into the distance. It makes the viewer feel like a microscopic observer.

4. Symbolism of the Ancient or Alien: The form of a spider, which is so fundamentally different from human structure, can represent something ancient or truly alien. This aligns with the non-English, mathematical script seen on the frames, hinting at an ancient or extra-terrestrial intelligence that built or operates this system.

In short, they add layers of meaning – pattern, scale, and function – to the visual language of the infinite cosmic structure, moving it beyond just simple geometry into a complex, perhaps even lived-in or engineered, environment.

All the images from my experimentation are viewable on *YouTube* using the QR code or link below

https://youtu.be/ULIOew3VDKA

To borrow a Google Cardboard headset to view in 360, email: michael.rumbelow@bristol.ac.uk



A community of post-graduate researchers at the School of Education joining together for a coffee morning organised by student reps

Spring on the allotment



A Romanesco Cauliflower on the TLC Allotment

"For after all what is man in nature? A nothing in relation to infinity, all in relation to nothing, a central point between nothing and all and infinitely far from understanding either."

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)

To visit the TLC allotment, drop in any Wednesday at 3.30pm, all welcome.
What3words: copper.lawn.sunset
For more information, email: cc18401@bristol.ac.uk

The Research Centre for Teaching, Learning and Curriculum (TLC) is concerned with questions relating to education in schools, universities, community and out-of-school contexts, including a focus on issues of social justice. We research the learning of individuals, groups and systems from a range of perspectives, including practitioner research.

This pamphlet is produced to help the diverse perspectives and research interests and activities of the Centre reach a wider audience. All opinions are the authors' own.

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