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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.

Welcome to our first pamphlet, produced to help the diverse perspectives and research interests and activities of the Centre reach a wider audience.

## There is a tree

Pen Williams

There is a tree in the playground that blossoms each year with the loveliest white buds. When the blossom falls it seems as snow. Everyone loves the tree, students, teachers, parents. It is a thing of beauty and joy. The children remember it when they move to the upper school, as a symbol of growing independence, scuffed knees, lost coats, community. We stood under the tree the day before we were locked down — not imagining this class would not return to this playground, that this was the last time we would gather under this tree.

There was a tree in another playground where the students hung messages of hope and good will for people in far off lands, imprisoned — or worse — for speaking out, for having a faith, for being a woman, for the colour of their skin. This simple act could, in some other place, lead to their imprisonment — or worse. This dangerous, outrageous act of compassion and solidarity.

Later, the tree was fenced off.

Later still, chopped down.

There is a tree at the end of the playing field, next to another tree, and another. They provide shelter from the rain during break times and during lessons illicitly not attended — keep cigarettes dry. Defiance and small love affairs. Names carved in bark, reaching for permanence in ephemeral youth. Where excluded students hide and watch the comings and goings of the world they have been barred from, superficially glad, inwardly bereft.

These are not just trees, these are symbols of hope, joy, youth, fear. Objects of nostalgia, regret, relief. Tall — so tall to young eyes — immovable, knowable, reliable. What more can these trees be? How far do these roots spread?

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## Developing RE teachers' powerful subject knowledge

Janet Orchard and Victoria Bowen

The 'Shared Space' project, based at the University of Bristol, has established a 'community of enquiry' comprising teachers and academic researchers. Pooling academic and professional knowledge and understanding, we address the following important social issue: can the positive impact of explicit teaching about religion in pluralist societies be assessed by teams of schoolteachers and university-based researchers? We bring experts to collaborate on this real world issue, following the recognized position that knowledge mobilization should be active, rather than passive, and reciprocal. We are mindful of the way in which too often the "default" model of engagement in research by practitioners has been directed by the academics, with practitioners subordinate. Alternatively, when small-scale classroom or school-based qualitative studies of personal practice have been led by practitioners, these rich and authentic sources of data have proved problematic where extrapolating information that could inform reform of educational systems is concerned. Typically, because these are seen to rely heavily on self-reporting (raising issues of reliability) these are discounted as what we term 'boutique' solutions.

So, this project draws on the distinctive potential of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to address these concerns of how to collaborate in ways that respect the complementary expertise of professional educators and academic researchers. Established as an insightful methodological approach for scaling qualitative data to conceptualise and empirically examine potentially complex causal relations where a more conventional 'randomised control trial'



(FCT) would be methodologically inappropriate, QCA is widely used in political science but relatively under-represented in the field of Education. In its second year, we are seeking to recruit a small number of teachers/schools in the Southwest to extend the study, using QCA to test the positive impact of explicit teaching about religion. Would you be interested in joining us?

Please contact the us for further information and/or check out the website.



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Unreliable tools

Harriet Hand  
In a recent lunchtime talk at the Pervasive Media Studio in Watershed, I explore what possibilities the unreliability of mapmaking offers, drawing upon my current research project that explores mapmaking with Post-16 learners. The QR code takes you to the talk.



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Diary of a pandemic headteacher

Victoria Bowen

March 2020

I still cannot believe how COVID-19 has disrupted children's education so profoundly and how I find myself standing in an empty school. What should I do? What should I prioritise? Why is there no guidance to help me? No one prepared me for this!

April 2020

My staff and I are working tirelessly, supplying essential food, childcare and support to the local community. However, I equally feel empowered to find and implement 'local', 'context-dependent' and 'common-sense' solutions to the issues faced at my school. The UK (United Kingdom) government needs to allow schools in England to implement local-level policy that meets the needs of their school and the community.

May 2020

School leaders are subject to unprecedented pressures from an abundance of 'over-centralised' policy and guidance (often delivered via the media in the form of the national daily briefing). Repeatedly, these policies and guidance contradict the needs of my school and the local community. The UK government lacks any understanding of the realities of schools and the issues they are currently facing.

June 2020

Despite the global health emergency, I still need to prioritise high stakes testing and accountability as OFSTED are due any day. It is not helping that, allegedly, 'the school down the road is gaining' policies issued about exams and assessments to stay competitive. Should I do the same? My parents, pupils and governors continuously compare my decisions with other schools locally. But surely, I should confound these neoliberal tendencies and act in the interest of my pupils and wider society by providing the social, personal, and emotional aspects of education commonly overlooked in this competitive education environment.

Diary adapted from my PhD research project 'A critical policy analysis of the enactment of COVID-19 policy in secondary schools in England'.

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Flexibility is a lot more important than just being able to touch your toes!

Bonnie McElvyn

How flexible are you? Not the kind of flexibility where you can bend down and touch your toes or get into some obscure yoga position, but the kind of psychological or cognitive flexibility that allows you to overcome and adapt to new and challenging circumstances (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010). So, does it really matter how flexible you are? It turns out, it does. Recent research in

Bermuda surveyed 371 late adolescents between the ages of 16 and 18 years, establishing that adolescents who have higher levels of cognitive flexibility have higher levels of career aspirations. Not only that but, having higher cognitive flexibility can also predict higher career aspirations. The research did not stop there, but also explored the relationship between gender stereotyping beliefs and career aspirations. The results were surprising! While it was thought that late adolescents who did not identify strongly with either a traditionally masculine or traditionally feminine role would have higher career aspirations, this was not the case. The study found that those individuals who identify with a traditionally male stereotype role, have higher levels of career aspirations. In addition, the study was able to establish that late adolescents who identify with a traditional male stereotype role predicts higher career aspirations. These findings suggest that cognitive flexibility can act as a protective factor for late adolescents as they aspire towards their future careers, and may also help protect against harmful gender stereotypes.

So, what does all this mean if you're a teacher or a college counsellor? Both cognitive flexibility and gender stereotyping beliefs are cognitive processes which can be changed. Therefore, the more students can be encouraged to be flexible and look for alternatives, the more beneficial this is, especially in helping students think beyond harmful occupational stereotypes. In a world full of uncertainty, the more open and flexible a student is, the more ready they will be to embrace the careers of the future.

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Teaching and learning in the new climatic regime

Aif Coles

We are in a new climatic regime (Latour, 2008), the patterns and relative predictability of the past have gone and will not return in our lifetimes. We are witnessing some of the negative effects of this new regime, in the increased likelihood of floods, droughts and harvest failure – with all the knock-on social and political effects these have. Collective action (spectacularly successful in the past) offers possibility for hope. A number of educators are asking, 'how does schooling need to change, in such a context? How long can we continue, in a business-as-usual manner? At what point does the world outside the classroom walls make enough of a difference, to make a difference to what we do?'

A phrase being toyed with by a group I am involved with, is the idea of a 'socio-ecological' practice of education. In such a practice, social and ecological issues are taken to be interconnected and inseparable. From such a perspective, we work to notice when we are taking the environment as a fixed background for our concerns, for instance, studying classroom dialogue, without stopping to consider the quality of air students and teachers are breathing. A socio-ecological practice of education involves bringing to awareness the ethics what we do. A group of former teachers (Barwell, et al., 2022) have proposed we need a "dialogic ethics", which links to Levinas's "call to responsibility" (p. 134). For Levinas (2011), it is through recognition by an Other, that we come to recognise ourselves as an individual subject, with responsibility for others. We are not individuals first, who come into relation with the world. We are first in relation and then come to recognise ourselves as individual.

These concerns may seem a long way from the reality of the classroom today. But, there is a ground swell for change and it cannot be long before the curriculum responds. The student-led group, "Teach the Future" have commissioned a project to re-imagine the National Curriculum in such a way that socio-ecological concerns can come to the fore. This is a resource which can be used now: <https://www.teachthefuture.uk/blog/curriculum-for-a-changing-climate-science>

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From principles to practice and back again

Rosie Hunt

The past few decades have seen 'evidence-based' for teaching to become an 'evidence-based' profession (NFER, 2014), presenting teachers with the urgent task of interpreting and applying a vast body of educational research, where different studies are underpinned by disparate epistemological stances. It seems that in the messy busyness of school life, amongst pressures of heightened accountability, what often sticks are tangible, clearly applicable principles regarding 'what works'. One such example is Rosenshine's 'Principles of Instruction' (2012), now ubiquitous in UK schools. In the time-stretched world of the school teacher or leader, research needs to pull its weight with bold, simple formulae. Rosenshine's outline of the ideal lesson of the 'master-teacher', progressing from the initial 'daily review' towards the unquestioned climax of 'independent practice', feels solid and easily imitable. While many of Rosenshine's recommendations undoubtedly advocate sensible classroom practice, I am troubled by our profession's veneration of such sweeping rules.

My own practitioner-research, a case study involving staff and student interviews across three contrasting schools, is less 'what works' than 'what is happening here, within this learning community, and why'. While Rosenshine's principles were not an object of study, my interviewees frequently challenge his version of learning: the notion of the ideal lesson formula; the primacy of retrieval practice and repetition; a conflation of learning with 'automaticity'; a lack of acknowledgment of learning as a social process. Case studies are often dismissed as 'anecdotal or non-replicable' (NFER, 2014, p. 46), but the vital importance of educators paying close attention to the contextualised nuances of their professional practice arguably represents a different but equally valuable form of knowledge, referred to by James Britton as "a quiet form of research" (Britton, 1993, p. 90). As acknowledged in the NFER's 'Using Evidence in the Classroom' report, teacher-led inquiry into professional practice has the potential to aid both professional development and the more effective application of other research.

I am uncertain about the certainty of Rosenshine's 'what works' approach. How, then, should teachers utilise the mountain of educational research in front of them? By keeping a continual focus on their practice, I would say, by listening to the students alongside the sages and building their own principles from there.

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Playing with blocks: the square root of tree

Michael Rumblelow

In my episode for the Freshed Flux podcast, the aim was to communicate my work-in-progress PhD research on Kindergarten block play as a sonic journey, loosely based on a walk around Tavistock Square in London, following in the footsteps of Virginia Woolf and Charles Dickens, to the site of the first English-speaking Kindergarten, opened in 1853.



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Public event: all welcome

**Teaching with embodied technologies:  
Supporting the genesis of  
body-artifacts functional systems**

Inaugural annual lecture by Anna Shvarts,  
University of Utrecht, The Netherlands

Thursday 23 March 2023, 5–6.30pm

The lecture will be given online. You  
are invited to join remotely, or to join  
a group in the School of Education who  
will access the event online together.

Online access



Meeting ID: 998 9157 4868  
Passcode: 657166

Or join us in Room 4.10 where we will  
access the event online together.

School of Education, University of Bristol  
35 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1JA



**It is spring again. The earth is like  
a child that knows poems by heart.  
(Rilke)**

Would you like to grow flowers and  
vegetables this spring on the TLC  
allotment on St Michael's Hill?

No experience or commitment required.  
Come along any Tuesday lunchtime  
from 12.30, all welcome.

To express an interest and receive  
TLC allotment news please email  
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