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## Editorial

### 03 **Guy Claxton: What is the Use of a University School of Education?**

Andy Davies, Alison Barnes,  
Nancy Barclay and Keith Turvey

At the beginning of this academic year Professor Guy Claxton gave a keynote lecture to the new intake of Secondary PGCE students and followed this up with a seminar discussion with colleagues from the School of Education and Education Research Centre. The first article in this issue captures the key themes from this seminar. The issues discussed are particularly pertinent in the current shifting political context in education policy and have implications for all in teacher education and development. We hope that this article will be the beginning of an on-going discussion and invite colleagues to respond in forthcoming issues of R.Ed.

### 05 **Collaborative Learning**

Alexander Ramiz

Much is made of the need for on-going professional development in education and politicians like to make comparisons to countries such as Finland where teaching is regarded as a Masters-level profession. There are many teachers and educators currently undertaking their Masters and Doctoral study here in the School of Education and the article, 'Collaborative Learning' by Alexander Ramiz illustrates extremely well the power of post-graduate study to facilitate critical reflection on professional practice.

### 10 **Research Excellence Framework and Education**

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# Guy Claxton:

## What is the Use of a University School of Education?

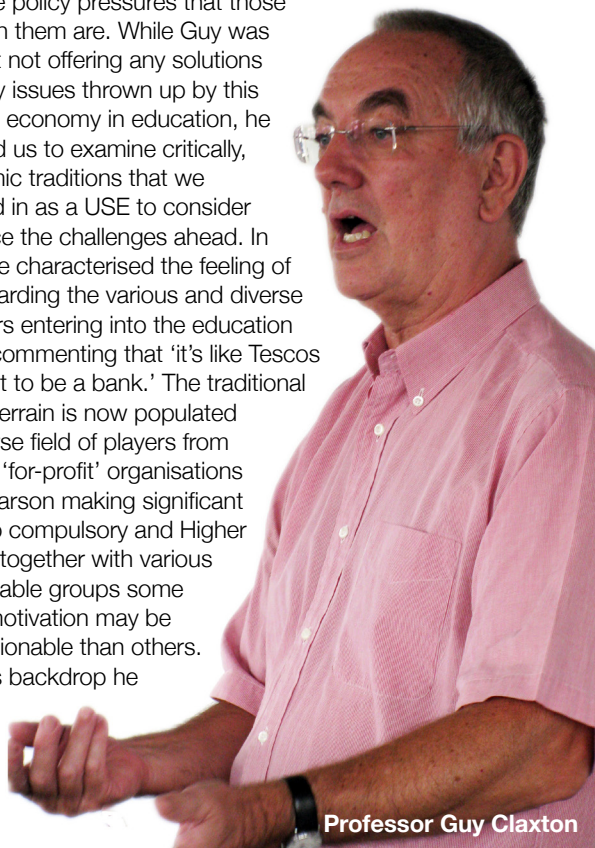
Andy Davies, Alison Barnes, Nancy Barclay and Keith Turvey

### Introduction

**On September 18, 2012 Professor Guy Claxton, who is currently Professor of the Learning Sciences at the University of Winchester, came to facilitate a seminar discussion regarding the role of University Schools of Education in the current changing climate of teacher education.**

The aim of this article is to continue the conversations that started in response to the above question in the seminar. Guy Claxton has been an influential voice in the field of education since the 1970s and we were grateful to utilise his perspectives and expertise in facilitating this discussion. The inspiration for this topic arose from the cumulative impact of ongoing educational reforms and spending cuts that call into question the place and purpose of a university school of education (USE) in a much-changed system.

Guy opened the seminar by speaking informally about his own ideas on the use of a university school of education from his position, which he described as an “educational entrepreneur” who was not subject to the same policy pressures that those who work in them are. While Guy was open about not offering any solutions to the many issues thrown up by this burgeoning economy in education, he encouraged us to examine critically, the academic traditions that we are steeped in as a USE to consider how we face the challenges ahead. In particular he characterised the feeling of unease regarding the various and diverse stakeholders entering into the education economy, commenting that ‘it’s like Tesco didn’t ought to be a bank.’ The traditional education terrain is now populated with a diverse field of players from large-scale ‘for-profit’ organisations such as Pearson making significant inroads into compulsory and Higher Education, together with various other charitable groups some of whose motivation may be more questionable than others. Against this backdrop he advanced the



Professor Guy Claxton

importance of having “your big idea” to give a sense of purpose and coherence to one’s work as a USE.

Following Guy’s introduction to the topic colleagues representing all areas of the School of Education considered the key issues in table discussions. A whole-group plenary then shared the conversations and themes. Below we summarise the central issues arising from the seminar in the hope that colleagues will respond to these in R.Ed over the forthcoming academic year.

### Passion and finding the ‘big idea’

With reference to his own career and experience Guy spoke on the challenge of clarifying a ‘big idea’ to sustain the moral intensity of our work in education. He drew on Finlay McRitchie’s book, *Scientific Research As a Career* (2011) to argue that research can often become trapped in a cycle of research for its own sake or to comply with external demands. McRitchie identifies three categories of this arguably less satisfying research: ‘Bandwagon, no stone unturned and ‘fancy that...’. Guy suggested that pressures to comply with for example REF, Ofsted or changes in policy, can lead to ‘doing things that our hearts aren’t in’. To counter this and to ensure that our work is morally grounded he argued that ‘it is important to rally round our own big ideas that appeal to teachers’ desire to teach in a way that is ‘bigger than squeezing kids across exam borderlines or having narrow technical arguments about raising the efficiency of what we do in schools.’

Guy’s framing of the discussion around the concept of moral intensity in our work led to a fertile discussion amongst colleagues from across the School of Education. Many of the discussions focused on our identity, to what extent we can claim a shared vision of our role, and how we can make our vision more explicit. It also raised a number of significant questions. Some asked, for example, is there a balance to be struck between establishing ourselves as ‘the provider of solutions’ and in developing partnerships in which we collaborate to problematize and formulate creative responses to partners’ needs? There can be a tension between clients’ expectations of us as providers of ‘solutions’ (the ‘tips-for-teachers’ issue) and the deeper, more critical discussions about learning which we know are vital for teachers’ efficacy throughout their careers in education, especially against a backdrop of political change. Rising fees and a greater focus on students’ employment prospects appear to exacerbate this tension but need this be the case?

Colleagues from across the School of Education are engaged with a range of partners from Early Years settings and schools to youth centres and various professional support networks. A recurring question that emerged for colleagues was: do we have a shared,

considered rationale for our approach to CPD work? Furthermore, is such a principled approach desirable, necessary, or even possible? If so, how do we construct this and how could research be positioned more strategically within such processes? We continue to develop our own knowledge of research together with developing our own

“...their continued professional development through the FdA routes is often life-changing as they engage with issues of professional identity.”

research base in relation to subject-specific learning and in relation to effective models and structures of CPD. How can individuals and teams within the School of Education use this knowledge most effectively and productively with a range of partners who may have different expectations of the nature and goals of CPD? Similarly the diversity across our provision raised key questions with regards to a shared vision or understanding for those working mostly in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). In educating professionals to become educators of children and young people colleagues asked: what is it we are we educating children for, and by implication what kinds of teachers does this require?

Such questions inevitably lead to tensions between concepts of applied and abstract knowledge and colleagues discussed how these relate to conceptualizations of curriculum and professional practice, and how to maintain an academic voice whilst meeting the needs of partners driven by a policy agenda for which there may be little research evidence. It was also suggested that whilst the provision we provide is diverse and there are inevitably boundaries to the different foci of our work, these boundaries could be more permeable in order to recognise the commonalities that give our work a common identity. It is often when working with mature students on the Foundation Degree routes that one is most explicitly aware of the potentially transformative nature of education. For many of these older students who are often already in employment their continued professional development through the FdA routes is often life-changing as they engage with issues of professional identity. Is this transformative potential then the basis of a shared vision across our work as a USE? In short, what is a USE for?

### Lost in translation

Guy argued that we need to become more ‘multilingual communicators’ by which he meant adapting the academic voice for different audiences and different discourses. He suggested that academia has often hamstrung itself in using language that is properly scholarly and precise in academic journals, but is counter-productive in other policy, CPD or practice-based contexts.

The need to translate education research for a range of audiences struck a chord with many. There is a rich and internationally recognised culture of research within the School of Education and Education Research Centre at Brighton University. An increasing number of colleagues within the School and the wider partnership are becoming research active through engagement with masters, doctoral and post-doctoral research. However, many colleagues recognised the need for greater synthesis between research and practice, and also more explicit avenues for translating the findings from research into implications for professional practice as well as practice-informing research. One group of colleagues discussed the importance of

sharing stories of practice as policies are refracted through practice. Such activities, they argued, are important in developing alternative discourses but also in developing a collaborative view of our shared identity and purpose.

Ongoing questions arising from this area of discussion were concerned with how we communicate what we stand for in education? How do we translate education research for our partners? Are they ‘clients’? And are we actually listening, and who are we listening to?

### New cultures of learning

Another challenge, Guy suggested with reference to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown’s book, *A New Culture of Learning* (2011), is the question of how we position ourselves in an apparently new order of ‘just-in-time’ ‘just-in-case’ ‘trial and error’ learning cultures. New approaches to learning appear to be emerging almost daily as new technologies yield ever more ways of connecting, communicating and expressing ideas with digital technologies. The University of Brighton’s Strategic Plan recognises the significant contribution digital and mobile technologies can have in supporting creative and innovative approaches to learning and teaching. What does the way we engage with the opportunities such technologies may yield say about our own view of learning as a lifelong process? However, it is also important, as another group raised, to remain critical about such new cultures of learning, enhanced through digital technologies. Does the increase in more connected and mobile forms of digital communication represent a fundamental shift in learning itself or just the media through which learners learn? The Mobile Technologies Project which has seen 80% of colleagues participating in the investigation of the use of iPads in their professional practice is indicative of our commitment as a School to embracing and critically exploring such new cultures of learning.

The key questions to emerge from this aspect of the discussion were how might our relationship to knowledge and our learners change, if at all, and what opportunities are there for genuinely new and enhanced forms of learning?

### Moving on

It is clear from the discussion facilitated by Guy that we have a depth and range of intellectual capital across the School of Education and Education Research Centre. However, as one colleague remarked, the pace of educational reform can often seem like we are ‘endlessly reacting to Government policy.’ It is precisely because of the pace and direction of these changes that we need more than ever to articulate our values and vision, to make explicit the rationale for the work that we do and to recognise the expertise that collectively we bring as a USE. Perhaps now more than ever USEs have an opportunity to turn up the volume of the academic voice to ensure that the vision of education they offer remains one of integrity, informed by research and critical analysis of practice. We hope this short reflection on the issues arising from the seminar with Guy will prompt further response, comment and discussion in the School of Education and beyond.

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# Collaborative Learning



Alexander Ramiz, teacher and student on the MA Education, discusses how the focus of his research project has emerged from a pilot study in collaborative learning.

## Alexander Ramiz

### Introduction

Entering into the final year of a Masters in Teaching and Learning, I was looking for an appropriate dissertation research topic. Within my own college I had observed students in a top set English class regularly engaging in higher order discussions in groups. These students seemed to have many of the skills I believed necessary for them to be able to lead collaborative learning. I had noticed, however, that students tasked with leading learning segments had a tendency to resort to straightforward PowerPoint presentations with little in the way of interactive learning or discussion. Anecdotally, this has been reported across the college.

I was particularly inspired by the work of Freire, who criticised the traditional teacher-led method of teaching as ‘it transforms students into receiving objects’ (1970, p.77). Certainly the students in my class seemed to be taking on the teaching role in this traditional relationship when tasked with leading learning. While many, both before and after Freire, have focused on more creative and student-centered approaches, Freire is particularly associated with participatory action research. I decided to carry out a preliminary action and reflection, after which, I hoped, I would be in a more informed position to decide whether I would continue action research to address problems that arose when I asked students to prepare interactive learning tasks for others, or narrow down to a focused research question relating to students’ perceptions of teaching and learning.

I wanted to see what would happen if students were given an extended homework project to prepare a collaborative learning task. This would be as part of a unit covering war poetry. To support the students, I led the class through a number of group work tasks using a variety of resources so they had an idea of the sort of thing that they were being asked to do. I stipulated that it was the interactive and collaborative task that was important. This was inspired by a discussion with my college-based mentor, who had told me that she had banned her Key Stage 5 students from using PowerPoint when they were tasked with leading learning segments, following repeated instances of students reading presentations to bored and passive classmates.

As this was a preliminary research that would hopefully lead to me focusing my study at a later stage, I decided to start with a large data set. I would collect in copies of any resources used by my students and make notes of my own observations of these student-led segments. I wanted to see if any trends emerged. I would then carry out a literature review that would hopefully lead me to refining my research focus and methodology.

### Class Context

At Gordon College, the top set for English comprises 26 students, all of whom are expected to sit the higher AQA paper for GCSE in 2013. They have been sat in groups of four for the duration of the year and are familiar with a variety of collaborative learning styles. Collaborative writing tasks, for example, are often used as starters in lessons, and the students approach such tasks with enthusiasm. The students enjoy sharing their work and often provide detailed and constructive feedback in guided informal discussion. These students

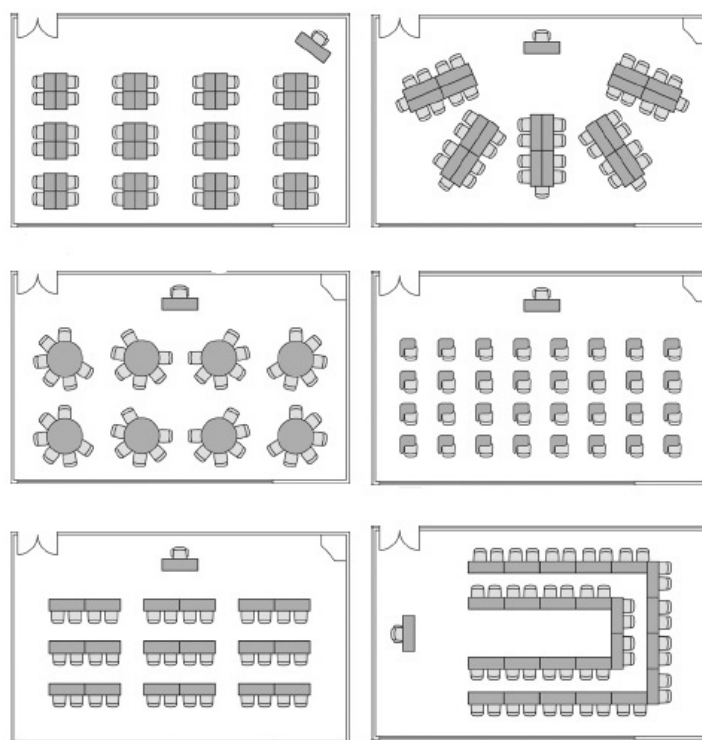


Figure 1: Classroom layouts



are capable communicators who respond thoughtfully to each other. They are both willing and able to shape discussion. They therefore seemed capable of planning and leading interactive and collaborative learning.

The classroom where these learning segments took place has an Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) and projector. The tables are arranged in groups of four so that the students face each other. Dictionaries and thesauruses are available for the students to use at any time. There is only one computer, and that is on the teacher's desk in front of the IWB. Although the students are set in groups, the classroom is clearly recognisable as a traditional learning space.

### Key Findings and Observations

In pairs, students were set the extended homework task of creating a short segment of the lesson that would explore a specific poetic technique drawn from a hat, stipulating only that it must involve group work. The students who had designed the segment would also provide oral feedback and questioning. A number of poems containing examples of the relevant techniques were made available to the students. I made it clear that there was no expectation of a formal presentation segment. To compensate for the lack of computer resources within my own classroom, I set the task as homework, so that students could access the internet at home or in the college's computer rooms as part of their independent study. I also hoped that students would use this time to reflect on a task that would engage learners, rather than just prepare a presentation

that they would lead from the front. By setting students the task of designing a collaborative learning task I was hoping that they would become engaged in the processes of learning, rather than merely presenting information in a dull way.

Although all of the students did come up with group-work tasks, most merely repeated ideas that I had used in previous lessons in the same poetry unit. All of the pairs, without exception, started their lesson segments with PowerPoint presentations containing dictionary definitions that had been copied from the Internet, which were then read to the class. The questioning at the conclusion of the tasks was closed, with feedback by the student teachers limited to subjective and summative comments such as 'yeah, very good'. Even though students had been asked to create collaborative learning tasks, they had all felt it necessary to act out very traditional teaching roles. This was in stark contrast to the more creative and discursive attitudes they demonstrated when I facilitated group work in class.

The resources that I collected in clearly demonstrated that the majority of the students had taken the work seriously, and had put a lot of effort into preparing PowerPoint presentations and resources for the use of the class. The use of traditional elements therefore seemed to be indicative not of a lack of effort, but rather because of difficulties in approaching the task.

Following my observations I carried out a literature review. I wanted to see why acting out the formal role of a teacher had seemed to inhibit

the collaborative and cooperative learning skills that the students had frequently displayed in less formal contexts.

### Collaborative and Student-led Learning

The criteria published in 'The Framework for School Inspection' (Ofsted, 2012), highlight the following as the key areas by which all schools under Ofsted's remit will be judged: 'Achievement', 'Quality of teaching', 'Behaviour and safety', and 'Quality of leadership and management' (2012, p.17). Such criteria would seem to put the responsibility for learning with the macro and meso levels of the education system. Teachers and schools are expected to manage students' learning. Such expectations, I would argue, lead to a teaching rather than learning focus. Furthermore, the use of published league table data, as well as teachers' performance management targets being primarily based upon statistical exam success, seems, to my mind, to be indicative of an industrial model. Such a model is recognisable in the Victorian classroom, or a church or lecture hall, whereby there is one focal point, such as an altar, blackboard, stage or PowerPoint,

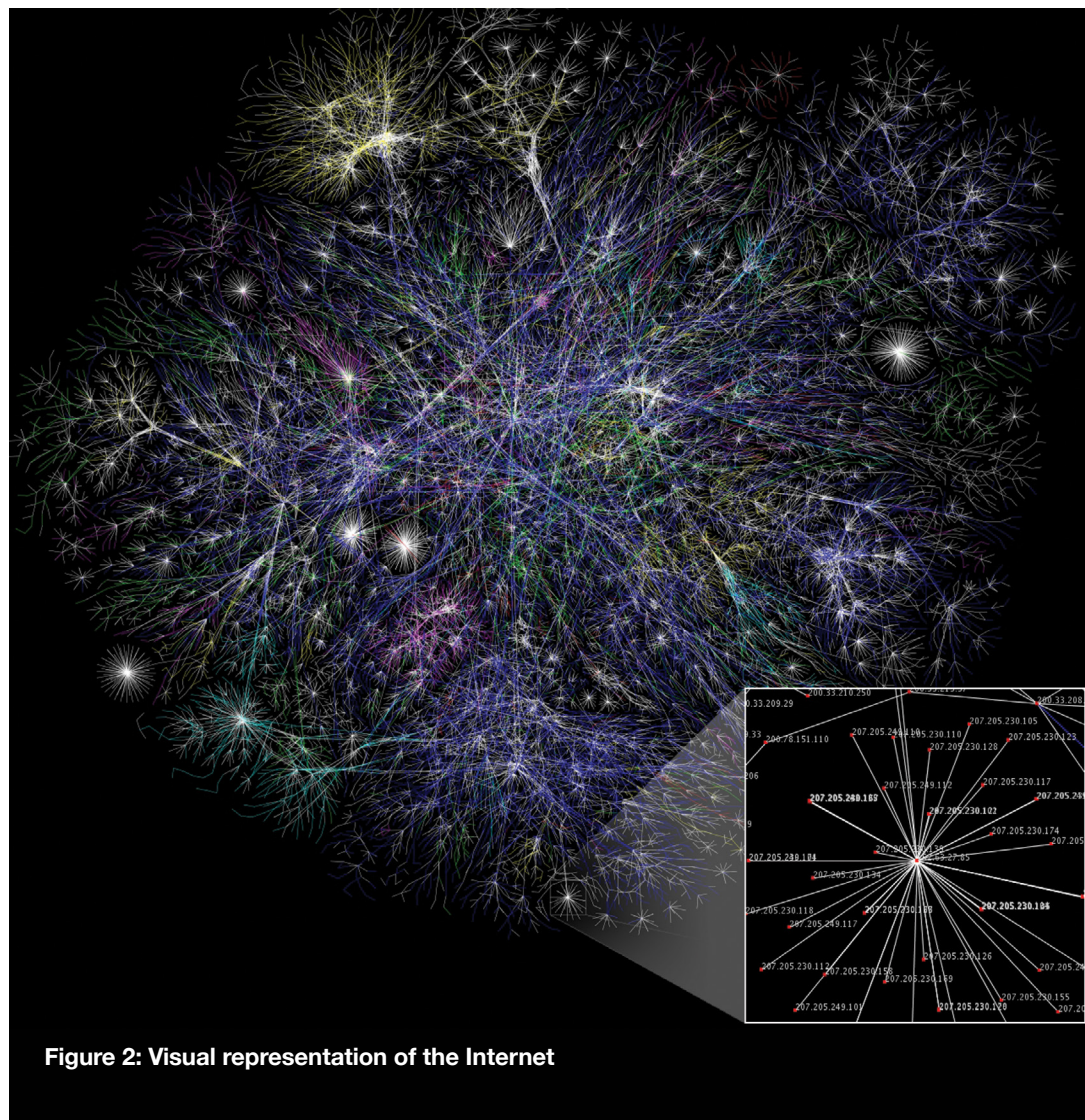


Figure 2: Visual representation of the Internet

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with the majority of people not contributing new knowledge, but observing passively. The students' use of PowerPoint and dictionary definitions seemed consistent with this approach.

Now that the world has entered the information age, Illich's (1971) idea that we may deconstruct the industrial monopolies of education and instead replace them with 'webs' whereby different learners contribute and engage meaningfully in learning seem perhaps more plausible, though no less controversial, than when his seminal work was published. If we compare present day classroom layouts (see Figure 1) with a visualisation of the Internet (see Figure 2), it is clear that traditional monopolies of communication are being superseded by the forms of mass communication offered by the Internet. It is interesting to reflect on the possibilities that are now opened up by the information age, both in education and wider society. How far is it possible to engage students in more collaborative group learning within traditional learning environments? I had hoped that my students would be able to use the Internet independently to prepare their segments, but I wanted to see discussion and group work take place within the classroom.

In his 'Hole in the Wall' (2010) experiments, Mitra showed that when young students are given access to the Internet and a distant mentor 'in the absence of supervision or formal teaching, children can teach themselves and each other, if they're motivated by curiosity and peer interest' (2010, p.1). For some reason, my students had replicated this 'supervision or formal teaching' (Mitra, 2010, p.1), despite being encouraged to take a different approach.

Perhaps the problem lies in the physical space in which the learning occurred. Within industry, it has been shown that innovation now frequently occurs from the user (Moore, 2011). Furthermore, across many fields of communication, such as journalism and book publishing, old monopolies seem increasingly less relevant (Moore, 2011), yet the present day education system is, according to the Deputy Head Teacher of High Close School, 'still the one set up for the industrial revolution' (Newport, 2012, p.12). It is perhaps unsurprising that my students made use of PowerPoint and the IWB, as I use these resources in every lesson to set the learning objectives and focus the students on a particular resource. My students used the resources that were available in a traditional classroom, so it seems plausible that the traditional roles they performed may have been as a result of the limitations of the learning space.

### **Firm Foundations**

Maybe it is unfair to be overly critical of these formal segments. Is it possible that they served as a prerequisite for collaborative learning to occur? It is interesting that the inclusion of these formal elements occurred at the start of the lesson segments. In Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst et al. 1956), knowledge retention is the necessary foundation for higher order thinking. This would seem to suggest an intellectual justification for the inclusion of the dictionary definition at the start of the lesson segments. Indeed, after making use of the dictionary definitions, there usually followed, for the majority of the students, some attempt to check understanding before moving on to application and synthesis, whereby students were asked to create a piece of poetry or prose using the technique. Additionally, Maslow (1943) provides perhaps an emotional justification for the inclusion of these traditional starts: security through acceptance by other students, through the inclusion of a formal start, may have been felt necessary by the students leading the segments to have legitimised the students as teachers. Perhaps as each pair presented in the same way, the students leading subsequent sessions felt the need to conform to the students who preceded them. The difficulty the student teachers had in questioning may also

**“Now that the world has entered the information age, Illich's (1971) idea that we may deconstruct the industrial monopolies of education and instead replace them with 'webs' whereby different learners contribute and engage meaningfully in learning seem perhaps more plausible, though no less controversial....”**

be understandable under these models, given that this is also a difficulty experienced in Gordon College, where there is 'a tendency for teachers to direct conversation too firmly, limiting the scope of students' independent thinking' (Ofsted, p.5, 2010). Questioning is a difficult skill for teachers. It took me a long time to develop the skill base to be able to conduct further order questioning with my students during my own teacher training and subsequent Newly Qualified Teacher year. Facilitating discussion as a teacher is a difficult skill, and the students lacked the capacity to do this, at least when leading an entire class through a learning segment.

A problem this may highlight, however, is that in their class work leading up to this incident, and in their speaking and listening assessments, those students taking on the role of student teachers had already demonstrated the abilities to engage in higher order thinking and discussion in less formal learning situations. Taking on the role of teacher and being responsible for leading the questioning in a more formal way had seemed to inhibit skills they had already shown themselves capable of in less formal settings. Why might this be?

According to Bertrand Russell (2003), the danger of encountering knowledge through dictionaries and text books (formal sources external to the creative agency of the learner), is that such thinking can become internalised and 'you have then become completely a public character and even your innermost thoughts are suitable for the encyclopaedia' (p.18). While this might mean that students become knowledgeable, what they know will not reflect the plurality of truths and meanings that exist, and they will be incapable of creating new truths and meanings. Or, as Russell puts it, 'you can no longer hope to be a poet' (2003, p.19). Given that my students were studying poetry, and were being asked to be creative and collaborative, such dictionary definitions and formal teaching become problematic. Rather than these formal elements being a stage leading to higher order thinking, they could instead be a means of suppressing it. This view is supported by Grzega and Schöner (2008), who highlight that lecturing is ineffective in promoting any sort of deeper reflection (including self-reflection), activity or creativity' (p.3)

### **The Role of the Teacher**

Another key point of interest for me was why they chose to act out the role of teacher in such a formal way, when I do not believe that this is reflective of the experiences that occur in my own classroom.



“While I did not recognise my own teaching methods in the roles that they performed, it occurred to me later that when asked to play the role of the teacher they would act out what they perceived the teacher role to be.”

I had modelled a number of collaborative techniques prior to setting the homework and I rarely read or present information on the IWB in a formal manner.

While I did not recognise my own teaching methods in the roles that they performed, it occurred to me later that when asked to play the role of the teacher they would act out what they perceived the teacher role to be. Are the students more likely to perceive me when I am leading and teaching from the front than when they are working collaboratively with each other? While acting as a learning facilitator to encourage them to take ownership of their own learning, ideally they would not be aware of me at all. Thus, it may have been a major oversight to expect my students to be able to act as facilitators rather than traditional teachers when I told them, specifically, that they would be acting as teachers.

Furthermore, the word ‘teacher’ would be imbued with a deep set of meanings, not only from their wider classroom experiences, but from a far wider range of sources. Playing out the role of the teacher in a classroom which has, despite the use of grouped tables, a clearly elevated status for the teacher (See Figure 1), may have further encouraged them to play out the traditional role. Recently, a student in my Year 10 tutor group (we’ll call him Ignatius, though this is not his real name), told me about something he had been learning in his Design Technology lesson. He was telling me about the research techniques that are carried out prior to designing a tool. The example he gave me was of a pencil sharpener, yet I would invite the reader to do as I did, and let this serve as an example of how the student teachers in my English set may have approached their lesson segments. ‘In direct research’, Ignatius said, ‘you would go out and look at lots of pencil sharpeners to get an idea of how to design your own.’

*‘So you copy other people’s designs?’ I asked.  
‘Yeah, sort of,’ he said, ‘but you can copy lots of different ones.’*

When I told my students to act as teachers, they had played out a role that was clearly traditionally that of a teacher, leading from the front. The other method as told to me by Ignatius is that of indirect research.

*‘What happens in indirect research?’ I asked him.  
‘Well,’ he said, ‘in indirect research, you would go out and look at lots of pencils.’*

Perhaps for my students to have been able to engage with planning collaborative learning I should have thought about the restrictions I had inadvertently placed upon them by making them ‘teachers’ and

instead explored ways to get them to think about how they and others might learn.

### Children Teach Children

The Roman philosopher Seneca’s famous statement that ‘by teaching, we learn’ suggests that by teaching others we ourselves become knowledgeable, yet at the same time, those we teach do not necessarily learn as much as the teacher. For Seneca, it is the teacher who learns through the act of teaching. It has been pointed out that ‘Children and youth learn far more when performing the teaching role than when acting as students in the classroom’ (Tyler, 1971, p.IX) and it has also been highlighted that ‘children learn more from teaching other children’ (Gartner, Kohler and Riessman, 1971, p.1). The problem here, as it was in my classroom, is that when there are students taking on the teaching role there remain a number of students who are passive. It seems that to engage as many students as possible in collaborative learning it is necessary to avoid just replicating traditional relationships. After all, in the traditional classroom it is difficult for there to be more than one formal teacher actively engaged in planning and leading learning. How do we get students to think about sharpening pencils without automatically thinking about pencil sharpeners?

For Grzega and Schöner, the most effective model of education is the German model. The didactic model LdL (Lernen durch Lehren)’ (2008), which translates as Learning through Teaching. The difference between this model, first put forward by Martin (1985) and that of Gartner, Kohler and Riessman (1971), is that the German method encourages students to become actively involved in thinking about how other students learn, rather than merely presenting information. As Grzega and Schöner state: ‘It is not the student experts’ task to just present an issue in a linear manner, but to think about ways that will have their classmates find the answers to questions’ (2008, p.4).

Although I had set my students the task of designing interesting group tasks, by assigning them the role of ‘teacher’, by limiting their teaching space to the classroom, where they taught in teams to a class of twenty four students, and by dictating that they taught a particular word, I perhaps inadvertently led them to attempt something that is very difficult: teaching collaborative methods of learning within the traditional, formal context of the industrial classroom.

Illich pointed out that ‘The pupil is thereby “schooled” to confuse teaching with learning’ (1971, p.1). Indeed, for Illich, to enable these webs of learning, whereby students interacted meaningfully, we would need to deconstruct teaching as we know it and the institutions that surround it. While my asking the students to assume the role of teacher was intended to get them to take responsibility for the learning of others, I had not given enough thought to the effect of inadvertently putting restrictions on how they would approach the task by assigning them to work in pairs to teach large numbers. Also, by giving them a word to teach, it is unsurprising that they reached for the dictionary. Reflecting on this has led me to think about how I would approach setting students the task of creating interactive and collaborative learning tasks. That they had demonstrated strong discursive skills in less formal settings may suggest that I should adopt a similar approach in how I get them to prepare their tasks.

Moore (2012) points out that the role of the modern leader, by which term we may also stretch to include teacher, must be reassessed: It is no longer enough to play out the roles of the industrial institutions that have increasingly less relevance in an information society, as ‘In today’s world, people are seeking to work and collaborate together



in different types of ways. Leadership, in that context, is about the stewardship of enabling people to come with you willingly, as opposed to dictating how people are going to operate and function.' (Moore, 2012)

### Conclusions & Research Dilemmas

While the students had demonstrated in previous lessons and assessments that they had collaborative learning skills in less formal learning situations, when given the role of the teacher they adopted more a recognisably traditional teaching role, reading from the front and using closed questioning. Reflecting on this incident has led me to conclude that while collaborative and discursive learning can occur in the classroom, there needs to be recognition that the presence of a traditional teacher, or someone performing that role, can potentially inhibit collaborative learning. Merely to recreate the student and teacher roles may help those students who play out that role to learn, but it does not appear, in this instance, to have helped discursive and collaborative learning to occur.

Now having to make firm decisions about the research that will form my dissertation, I face a dilemma. My choice will doubtless be informed by the need to conduct a study within a certain time frame (and word limit), but in terms of how to address the issues that have arisen from my preliminary study, two broad options present themselves.

If I wish to address how to help my students to become more capable of planning and leading collaborative learning, I need to continue with action research and amend how I present the student-led segments to my students. This is certainly an area of interest to me, and I would like to explore how to encourage students to take ownership of collaborative learning, perhaps by changing the wording of the task, for example, or by setting my students goals of creating questions in class. Of course this would also involve engaging the students in reflecting on key incidents. Such an approach certainly reflects my own teaching philosophy of leading students to become more collaborative and independent learners, yet it may be impractical in terms of the restrictions of my Masters course.

This study has, however, raised a number of interesting questions regarding student perceptions of teaching and learning. A study following a more interpretive approach would allow me to focus on one of the many areas that this small scale study has highlighted. The use of dictionary definitions or PowerPoint presentations by the students, for example, or even their perceptions of the words teaching and learning, would undoubtedly prove fascinating. Such a study would still be informed by critical theory in that, as Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) have said of the critical enquirer, 'The role of the researcher is to bring to consciousness the restrictive conditions of the status quo' (pp.19-21). Understanding such restrictions would hopefully allow me to engage in a better informed participatory action research at a later stage.

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# Research Excellence Framework – REF



Professor Alan Tomlinson, Director of Research and Development with responsibility for the social sciences, gives his perspective on the REF to Professor David Stephens

**DS:** Can I start by asking you about your new responsibilities with regards to the Research Excellence Framework or REF?

**AT:** Yes, I'm the newly appointed Director of Research and Development with responsibility for the social sciences. I'm one of three new seconded posts, the others focusing upon Arts and Life/Natural Sciences. We are working closely with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research) and the dedicated support team within the Research Office at Mithras House to overview, support and develop appropriate elements of the REF, and more generally the institutional research strategy. It's worth noting that compared to the previous RAE exercise in 2008 the research outputs are worth less in terms of overall research grading, and what is awarded to research environment and an assessment of research impact, through selected case-studies, is worth proportionately more than those sort of elements in previous exercises – and the impact case studies are wholly new to the exercise. So it is in our interests to try and gain maximum scores in the environment and impact components, hence the University's concentration upon development and support for these aspects of the submission.

**DS:** And why is Brighton investing time and effort in the REF?

**AT:** Well, first we are a large institution of something like 22,000 students, but more importantly we are research leaders in a number of key disciplines, notably Art & Design, Sports Studies and Pharmacy, areas not widely replicated in the leading universities within the Russell Group. The RAE and REF also deliver significant resources, for example, the last RAE rewarded us with around £7 million per annum. I recall the first RAE that the university submitted to, in 1992, when the Faculty (Education, Sport and Leisure) was allocated £175,000 per annum for research; this might not sound like a lot, but it was new money that could be spent upon our researchers and the environment in which they work. Our current QR income might not match Oxford's 2009/10 figure of £100 million! But we know that a successful REF can generate funds to support innovative research, the efforts of emerging and early career researchers, and the establishment and continuation of funded research sabbaticals and the like.

**DS:** But will everyone benefit from REF or only those being submitted?

**AT:** It is important to remember that REF is a very competitive exercise and at Brighton we want to do as well as we can. But resources can also be used from REF to support a wider group of researchers who are part of a future submission; not all successful and productive recipients of sabbaticals or funds from other research initiatives will be submitted in the REF itself. It is surely important for us to be strategic at the moment – making sure that our 10 units of assessment for REF reflect the right balance of work that is of at least 3 and 4 star quality, in other words that we are a serious high-quality research player nationally and internationally. But we can all share the status that flows from that accomplishment, and forms of re-investment can seek to broaden the base of excellence.

And I think it is also crucial that all students who come to Brighton feel that they are in a lively, critical research-informed learning environment.

**DS:** And your assessment of the outcome of REF?

**AT:** A key thing is that the results are not used punitively, for example with job losses, research units dissolved. We are all part of a team building the research culture of the University. REF is important but it is not the be-all and end-all of our research plans, or of the University's vision if you like. We are keen to look beyond and outside REF, to keep in mind the bigger picture, which is of a University proud of both its high-quality teaching and an increasingly excellent research record.

**DS:** Thank you, Alan.

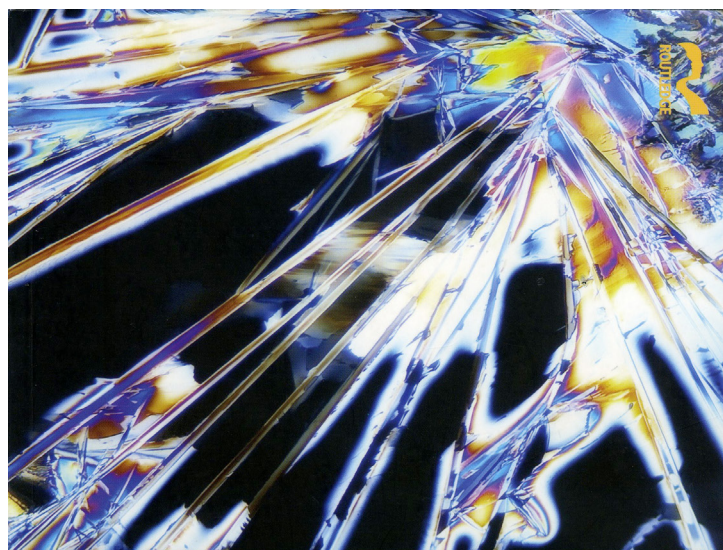


# Why 'matter' matters in educational research

Dr Nadia Edmond

**A review of *Emerging Approaches to Educational Research: Tracing the sociomaterial* (2011) by Tara Fenwick, Richard Edwards and Peter Sawchuck, London/New York: Routledge.**

The purpose of educational research is to develop our understanding of what it means to learn and the process of learning. But of course,



## EMERGING APPROACHES to EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Tracing the sociomaterial

TARA FENWICK, RICHARD EDWARDS  
and PETER SAWCHUK

the form research of education takes is itself constrained by existing conceptions of knowledge and learning. Historically, in the West, these conceptions have been dominated by individualistic and cognitivist models – learning seen primarily as something that is done by (or to) individuals, as a process which goes on in individual heads/ minds and the result of which is ultimately 'located' there – knowledge and learning reified in terms of what Sfard (1998) has termed the 'acquisition metaphor' of learning. However, this hegemonic perspective has been increasingly challenged in the past few decades by the emergence of conceptual frameworks and theoretical innovation deriving from perspectives associated with phenomenology and social constructivism which foreground the dynamic sociality and materiality of learning.

This shift in how we can view learning and its implications for educational research is the focus of "Emerging Approaches to Educational Research" by Tara Fenwick, Richard Edwards and Peter Sawchuck, which sets out to open up a dialogue between theoretical conceptions that reclaim and rethink material practice in educational processes and research. These are conceptions which go beyond seeing the social and the material as the background or context for learning and practice, and instead see them as components of relational systems brought together and emergent in practice.

The book is organised in terms of four sociomaterial "research arenas" which the authors have chosen as reasonably established in educational research; Complexity Theory, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), Actor Network Theory (ANT), and Spatial Theory. Each 'arena' is addressed in two chapters, the first introducing the theoretical framework and the second summarising and providing illustrations of the theoretical framework applied in educational research.

In different ways, in each of the four arenas, the issue is to move beyond a focus on human agency to a more balanced understanding of how the human and non-human are in active and dynamic relation in practice in which material things are performative and not inert. As Jensen notes 'the aspiration is to thereby facilitate more nuanced analyses of how humans and things (broadly construed) together create, stabilize and change worlds,' (2010, p.5).

It is likely that, as I did, readers will come to this book with more or less developed understandings of one of these arenas. Certainly

the Vygotskian legacy apparent in CHAT will be familiar to many educationalists, although its antecedents in dialectical philosophy and Marxism perhaps less so. It is a strength of the book that the overarching concept of 'sociomateriality' as the 'coming together' of human and non-human components offers a way in to less familiar territory. CHAT conceives purposeful 'activity systems' in which human action is mediated by artefacts and expressed in and through rules, community and division of labour. Actor-network theory as a "material-semiotic" method originating in science and technology studies and reflecting the concerns of post-structuralism, conceptualises "assemblages" in which elements come together and manage to hold together. Complexity theory deriving from a body of theories in a range of disciplines including evolutionary biology, mathematical fractals and general systems theory, conceptualises complex adaptive systems in which phenomena, events and actors

“These are conceptions which go beyond seeing the social and the material as the background or context for learning and practice and instead see them as components of relational systems brought together and emergent in practice.”

emerge together. Spatial Theory focuses on mapping mobilities in time and space and the ways in which flux is enabled, regulated and constrained to stabilize particular spaces at particular times. In bringing these 'arenas' together, the authors are seeking to do three things: to introduce new educational researchers to the possibilities of sociomaterial approaches; to highlight a distinctive sociomaterial orientation emerging in the research of education; to invite further dialogue between sociomaterial conceptions. As a reader, I found it successful in relation to the first two aims, and its success in relation to the last is evident in recent special issues of journals which have continued and contributed to this dialogue (see for example *Journal of Education and Work*, and *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*). This is a dialogue to which the University of Brighton will be privileged to contribute when Tara Fenwick comes to the School of Education to discuss sociomaterial approaches in April 2013.

As with sociomaterial approaches, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and through seeing these perspectives in relation to each other we gain a better understanding of both the individual arenas and the practice of educational research more globally. The authors make the case for a 'sociomaterial turn' and I was persuaded that matter matters.

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**Professor Fenwick is giving a seminar on sociomaterial approaches as part of the Education Research Centre Seminar Series in April 2013**



# Abstracts:

## Research papers and presentations

### Student Voice

**Robinson, C. (2012) Student engagement: What does this mean in practice in the context of Higher Education Institutions? *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 94-108.**

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The paper aims to consider recent developments in student engagement practices within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and to reflect upon the practical reality and challenges faced by HEIs as they develop such practices. Consideration is given to theoretical understandings around institutional and social power relations and to the influence such relationships can have on the development of student engagement practices within HEIs. The works of Giroux, Freire and Foucault are drawn upon to help develop and deepen our understanding of the power relationships at play within HEI student engagement practices. Throughout the paper it is argued that the power imbalance ingrained within student-tutor relationships serves to constrain how students act and respond in the presence of tutors, and this can have significant implications in terms of the extent to which student engagement practices genuinely capture the perspectives, interests and visions of students. The paper proposes that thought needs to be given to how HEIs balance student engagement with academic work and argues that the historical hierarchical staff-student relationship needs to be challenged and re-defined as staff and students move outside of their comfort zones and begin to work as partners and develop mutual understandings around, for example, practices of assessment, curriculum and teaching, in their endeavour to improve the

“Which pupils were allowed to be involved in the decision-making processes within school? Who allowed pupils to make decisions?”

quality of students' HEI experiences. The paper enhances our understanding of the power relationships at play within HEI student engagement practices and opens up debates about the potential and related dilemmas which surround the development of such practices.

**The following Abstract is from a paper titled 'Who has the freedom to have a voice in school?' presented at the ECER Conference in Cadiz, Spain, Sept 2012. The paper was presented within the Children's Rights Network as part of a symposium with three other papers. The title of the symposium is: Children's rights in Education: Conundrums of Freedom**

This paper focuses on how power relations within schools serve to silence the voices of some pupils and, in some cases, silence the voices of pupils in relation to certain areas of their school lives. It draws on evidence from a study focusing on schools which were deemed to demonstrate 'best practice' in terms of adopting UNICEF UK's Rights, Respecting Schools approach, and draws on empirical data collected from visits to the nine participating schools. The paper specifically focuses on how power relations within schools can lead to the silencing of pupils, even where schools are aiming to move towards a more democratic approach and to provide opportunities for pupils in their schools to have the freedom to voice their opinions. Consideration will be given to questions raised by Fielding (2001) in his discussion of student voice work in schools, for example: Which pupils were allowed to be involved in the decision-making processes within school? Who allowed pupils to make decisions? And what were they allowed to make decisions about? The paper is concerned with continuing to develop

theoretical understandings of school-based student voice work and student participation and draws on Giroux and Foucault's understandings of issues of power operating within school settings.

### Pedagogy & Technology

**Fisher, T. Denning, T. Higgins, C. & Loveless, A. (2012) Teachers' knowing how to use technology: exploring a conceptual framework for purposeful learning activity, *Curriculum Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 307-325.**

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This article describes a project to apply and validate a conceptual framework of clusters of purposeful learning activity involving ICT tools. The framework, which is based in a socio-cultural perspective, is described as 'DECK', and comprises the following major categories of the use of digital technologies to support learning: distributed thinking and knowing; engagement; community and communication; and knowledge building. Small-scale research to test the framework was carried out with 12 teachers in English primary and secondary schools. The methods involved mind mapping, 'think aloud' procedures and interviews. The framework was modified in the light of teachers' responses and offers a way of describing and thinking about the diverse uses of digital technologies to support learning in various contexts.

**Turvey, K. (2012) Questioning the character and significance of convergence between social network and professional practices in teacher education, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, Vol. 43, No. 5, 739–753**

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This paper captures and characterises the interplay between a group of student teachers' narratives of social network practice and their emergent professional practice with technologies. Teachers on an Initial Teacher Education programme in the UK spent a semester studying a module that synthesised university-based lectures with a professional intervention using online communications technologies in a local primary school involving a class of 30 children (8–10 years). A narrative methodology was developed to capture and conceptualise the teachers' perceptions of the experience. Teachers' dispositions towards the appropriation of technologies were found to be as ubiquitous across social network and professional contexts as the technological tools themselves. However, the distinctly nuanced ways in which the teachers experienced the process of convergence raises questions with regard to the significance of such convergence and how we both capture and characterise convergence as a technological, cultural or agent-centred process. The findings support the need for an agent-centred view of convergence embedded within the wider socio-cultural ecology that incorporates individuals' engagement with media and social network practices.

## Pre-School Relationships

**Jennifer Colwell, Research Fellow in the ERC presented the following paper at the BERA Conference in September: 'An Investigation into the use of Circle Time as a Tool to Support the Development of Children's Peer Relationships in Preschools'**

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Children's relationships with their peers have been recognised to affect their development across every aspect of their lives, including within education; as such, supporting the development of these relationships is recognised as a key element of high quality early years provision. One approach used by early years practitioners, within the UK, USA, New Zealand and beyond, to support the development of peer relationships is circle time; yet there is little in the way of a robust evidence base to support its use. Indeed, circle time as used in the UK seldom follows any clear theoretical position, lacks a foundation rooted within theories of child development, and is frequently used by staff with little training; as a consequence it has been claimed that circle time can have little tangible impact.

## Children's Literature

**Dr Sandra Williams of the School of Education presented a paper at the 33rd IBBY International Congress titled 'Frogs, Fireflies and Geckoes: how talking animals help establish a distinct national identity in emergent children's literature.'**

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While there are many well-known animal characters in English children's literature such as Black Beauty, Badger and Peter Rabbit, there are other significant animals who appear in emergent children's literature across the world. In this paper a number of these will be identified and analysed focusing on how they serve to construct a distinct local identity for the child reader.

Examples offered include Bhaktaprasad an adventurous frog from Kathmandu whose journey encapsulates the cultural and geographical diversity of Nepal serving to create a cohesive national identity in a country that has ten major ethnic groups, thirty major dialects and more than 12 languages. Written in Czech, Karafiát's family of fireflies (Broučci) make visible the lives and rhythm of the Moravian countryside at a time of a resurgence of national identity while still under the domination of the German speaking Hapsburg Empire. Stories concerning geckoes, beetles and mice offer child readers in the multicultural islands of Mauritius and Singapore a recognisable landscape whether urban or rural. In all the countries under

discussion there are issues concerning cultural identity whether from migration, colonisation or both. These talking animals have a role in supporting a sense of place while offering the child reader a space to find their own identity.

## Vocational Education and Training (VET)



**Yvonne Hillier, Professor of Education in the ERC, recently gave a keynote lecture in Sydney, Australia on the topic of innovation in VET:**

**"It is widely agreed that the innovative capability of the workforce can lead to greater competitive capability and prosperity (OECD, 2008). There is clearly a relationship between the levels of workforce skills and the extent to which companies are innovative. Thus innovation is high on the policy agenda of governments and VET, as the link between learning and the labour market is critical to building more innovative capability. However, innovation and regulation are often polar opposites; one pushes the boundaries to do things in new ways and the other regulates work to ensure consistency and quality. Balancing the tensions between innovative VET practices and regulatory requirements is a significant challenge for VET providers."**

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# Research Active

## Conferences

**Jane Melvin** has presented her current research titled 'Using activity theory to explain how youth workers use digital media to meet curriculum outcomes' at two international conferences. In August 2012 she presented at the 7th International Youth Work Conference, Strathclyde University, Glasgow. She also presented her work at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) annual conference at Manchester University, 4-6 September, 2012. To read Jane's abstracts go to the following link <http://brighton.academia.edu/JaneMelvin> .

**Mel Gill** also presented a paper at the 7th International Youth Work Conference, Strathclyde University, Glasgow. Her paper was titled 'Improving the student experience: the role of the student support and guidance tutor, with particular focus on Youth Work students at the University of Brighton.' Her full paper was published in the previous issue of R.Ed, Vol. 4 No. 1 & 2.

## Projects and Bids

**Dr Tim Rudd** has just returned from India, where he has been working on the *Unbox 21* project, a British Council funded project bringing together over 40 science teachers from India and the UK to explore the potential of 'off the shelf commercial computer games' in the classroom.

The project began earlier this year and runs until early 2013. All the teachers have now used the games in their classrooms, and at the end of October congregated for a final project workshop, and also to present their experiences to an external audience of teachers and policy makers at the Unbox 21 conference hosted by the British Council in New Delhi.

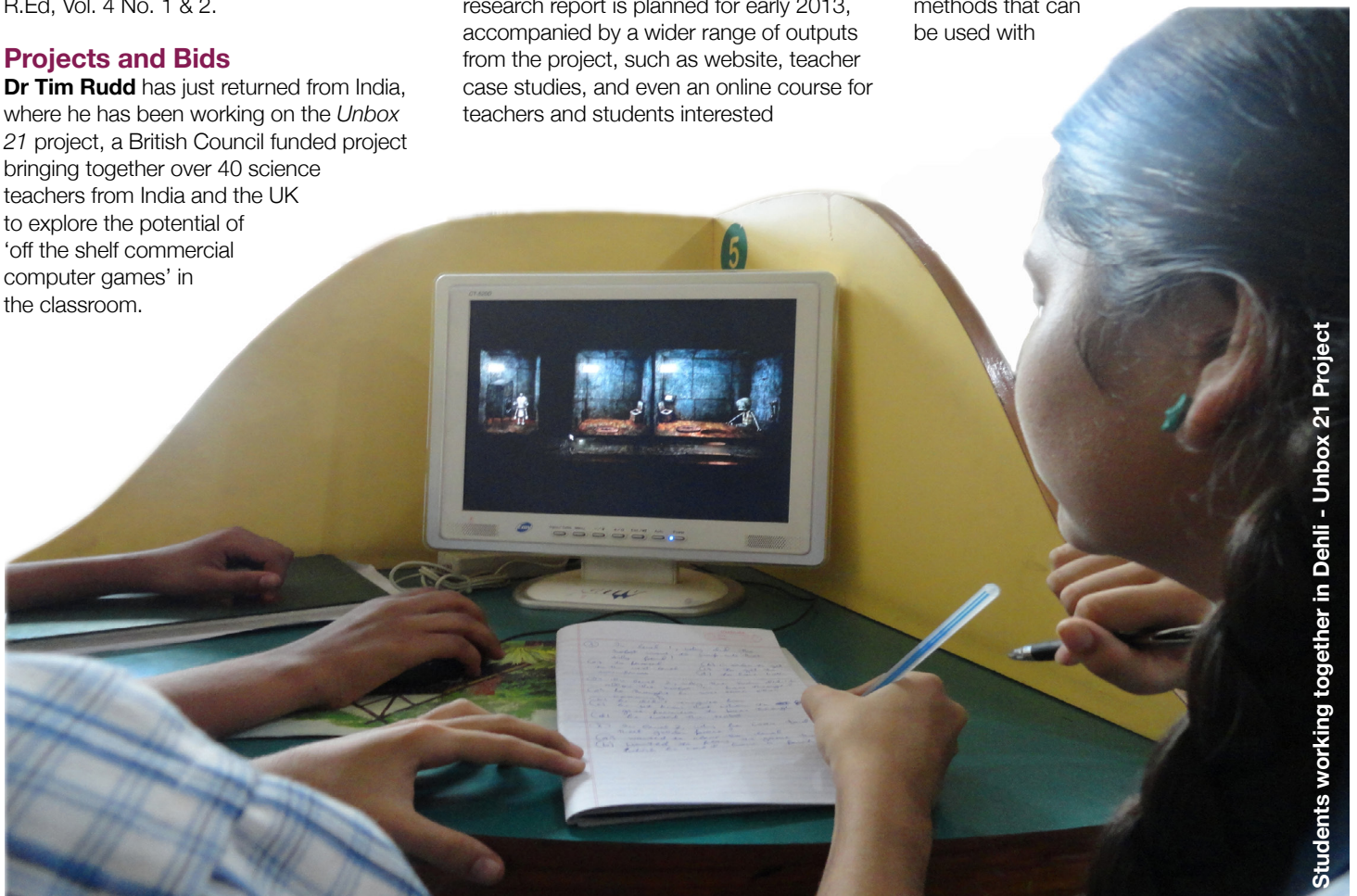
At the event, a number of teachers gave presentations outlining their experiences to date, and each teacher was involved in creating displays showing their lesson plans, photos, and a range of other learning resources, such as pupil project diaries, sketches and animations.

The project sought to not only explore the potential of computer games in the classroom but also to enhance the development of 21st Century Skills. A final research report is planned for early 2013, accompanied by a wider range of outputs from the project, such as website, teacher case studies, and even an online course for teachers and students interested

in exploring the potential of computer games in their own classroom. **Arunabh Singh** from Nehru World School has put together an excellent Prezi about the project. Follow this link: <http://prezi.com/bsuzsp6gdnya/unbox-21-delhi/>

**Dr Vicky Johnson** has just secured funding from The Bernard Van Leer Foundation to build a better understanding of methods and approaches for working with younger children, ages 5-8 as their perspectives are often absent from participatory work in international development.

There will be a number of outputs and outcomes of the research including: a review of why younger children's perspectives have been neglected and a rationale for working with younger children aged 5-8 years; a network of expertise across disciplines and contexts; and a typology of methods that can be used with



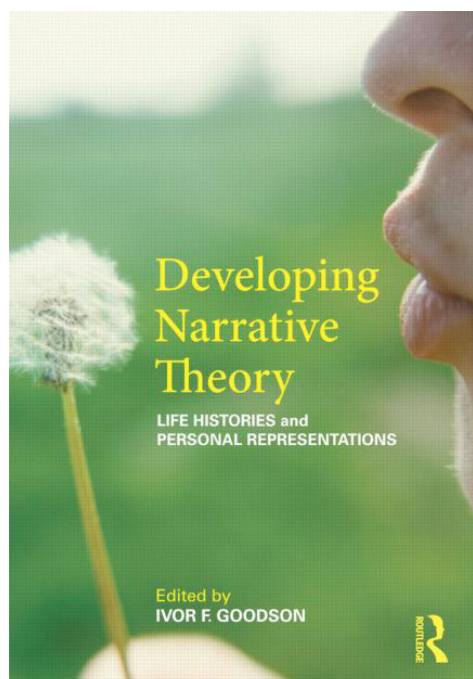
Students working together in Delhi - Unbox 21 Project

younger children with cases to illustrate their application in different contexts which can help to systematize methods for non-governmental and government organisations.

The research will be carried out February – December 2013 in two phases by Dr Vicky Johnson who will act as Project Coordinator. There will be an expert meeting in The Hague in May 2013 with a group of 10-12 experts who have actively worked with younger children.

### Book Publications

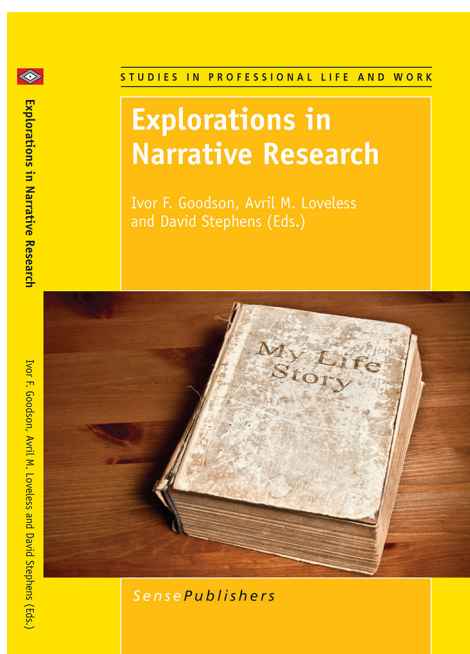
**Professor Ivor Goodson's** latest book was published by Routledge in September 2012. *Developing Narrative Theory* looks at the contemporary need to study life narratives, considers the emergence and salience of life narratives in contemporary culture, and discusses different forms of narrativity. It shows in detail how life story interviews are conducted, and demonstrates how the process often begins with relatively unstructured life story collection but moves to a more collaborative exchange, where sociological themes and historical patterns are scrutinised and mutually explored.



Ivor has also edited a book with Avril Loveless and David Stephens following last year's Research Challenge events which brought together academics from countries around the world to participate in symposia examining narrative methodologies. For more information see Ivor's new website at the following link <http://www.ivorgoodson.com/>.

2013 will also see the publication of three new books all with Routledge, from **Professor David Stephens, Professor Avril Loveless** (with **Dr Ben Williamson**)

and **Dr Keith Turvey**, respectively. For further information and reviews see the next issue of R.Ed in early Summer 2013.



### Doctoral Success

**Dr Andi Mabhalha** recently completed his EdD after a successful Viva. **Andi is Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology at the University of Chester where he is also Programme Leader of the MSc in Global Health. His doctoral thesis abstract:**

Recent UK health policies have identified nurses as key contributors to public health strategies to reduce health inequalities, on the assumption that all nurses understand and wish to contribute to the public health agenda. Following the policy shift, public health content within pre-registration nursing curricula increased. Public health nurse educators come from varying backgrounds, and some had limited formal public health training or involvement in or understanding of policy required to contribute effectively to it. However, their knowledge of this subject, their understanding and interpretation of how it could be taught, was not fully understood.

This research aimed to understand how public health nurse educators' (PHNEs) professional knowledge could be conceptualised and to develop a substantive theory of their knowledge of teaching public health, using a qualitative data analysis approach. Semi-structured interviews (n=26) were conducted with higher education institution-based PHNEs.

The research concluded that PHNEs are embodying knowledge in teaching through critical pedagogy, which involves them engaging in transformative, interpretive and integrative processes to refashion public

health concepts; this requires PHNEs who possess a vision of what to teach, know how to teach, and are able to learn from experience. Their vision of public health is influenced by social justice principles in that health inequalities, socioeconomic determinants of health, epidemiology, and policy and politics are seen as essential areas of the public health curriculum. They have developed appropriate critical pedagogical practices to make these concepts intelligible to students, and teaching strategies which put greater emphasis on students' engagement with them, allowing students to recognise the connectedness of public health with their lives. They believe in forms of teaching that achieve social transformation at individual, behavioural and societal levels, while also enabling learners to recognise their capacity to effect change and to reflect upon their own and others' experiences in their teaching practice.

**Congratulations also to Jen Colwell. After a successful viva and, subject to minor amendments, the examiners have recommended her for the award of PhD.**

### Special Issues

**Dr Carol Robinson** was co-editor, with **Dr Carol Taylor** from Sheffield Hallam University, of a special edition of the Journal of Applied Research in High Education, entitled 'Exploring student engagement in higher education: theory, context and practice.' The journal was published in October and Carol had a paper published within this entitled 'Student Engagement: what does this mean in practice in the context of higher education institutions?'

Carol has also had a paper accepted for publication in 'Improving Schools', due out early 2013. The paper is entitled 'Student voice as a contracted practice: power and participation in student voice projects.'

### Research Opportunities

The University has announced three research initiatives with available funding. These include; Research Sabbatical Scheme; Rising Stars Initiative and; the Research Poster Competition. For more details about these initiatives visit the Research Initiatives page on StaffCentral <http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/ro/ResearchInitiatives.shtm>.

For internal colleagues a reminder also that the School of Education is offering a number of small research grants to support research that addresses the School's identified themes. There are two deadlines for submission which are 17 December 2012 and 15 March 2013. Professor Avril Loveless has circulated information internally but can be contacted for further information.



# Introducing...

## Sara Bragg and Vicky Johnson – Senior Research Fellows

### Dr Sara Bragg



Much of my previous research has been interested in child and youth cultures inside and outside the classroom. For instance, I have explored 'violent' popular films in the context of A-Level Media Studies (in my PhD, 1996-2000); sexual learning from and through the media (with David Buckingham at the Institute of Education 2001-3 and a 2005 EU-funded project that designed materials for KS3 PSHE lessons); the alleged 'sexualisation' and 'commercialisation' of childhood (for the Scottish Parliament, 2009-10). I was one of the organisers of an ESRC-funded seminar series on Rethinking Youth Cultures in the Age of Global Media, 2009-11, and am currently editing a book based on the series. Another significant strand of my work has explored democratic and participatory initiatives such as 'students as researchers', the 'transfer of good practice' (both with Michael Fielding at the University of Sussex 2001-5), 'youth voice' in the work of Creative Partnerships (2007-9) and 'creative' school ethos (2009-10, again in relation to the Creative Partnerships programmes). These projects have used a diverse range

of primarily qualitative methods, including 'creative' and 'visual' approaches (although I am sceptical about some of the grander claims made about how 'empowering' these are). I have written about the strengths and limitations of using scrapbooks or diaries in working with young people on 'intimate' topics such as sexuality. My school-based studies (for my doctorate and for Creative Partnerships) have used interviews, focus groups, textual analysis, shadowing students, photography and 'metaphorical thinking' exercises amongst others; the 'sexualised goods' research involved focus groups with parents, and devising creative tasks that were then delivered by teachers as part of media or PSHE lessons.

Some unifying strands across this work include my endeavour to 'read through' a wide range of media and cultural theory to understand and rethink education and pedagogy, whilst also using empirical work to interrogate these theoretical perspectives. For instance, my PhD research was precipitated by my chaotic attempts to teach about horror films in a sixth form college: it developed insights from the psychoanalytically-informed feminist film theory that had enabled me to develop a different relationship to media (and psychic) 'violence' in order also to illuminate the unconscious, relational and affective dimensions of classroom life. Youth participation is another way of re-imagining what schools could be like and do, although reading specific practices through the lens of cultural theory highlights their 'governmental' as well as 'empowering' aspects.

In talking about the 'unconscious', I mean in part to highlight the importance of critical, self-reflexive analysis that is attentive to how our own investments shape our interpretations and the positions we adopt. Recently, for instance, I wrote a thinkpiece for a Special Issue of the journal *Gender and Education* on 'sexualisation'. Subtitled 'conversations with my inner Barbie', it attempts to use my own experience of

disfigurement as a way into understanding how 'sexualisation' may have achieved its policy and public prominence in some measure by serving as a repository for diverse disavowed parts of our (social) selves.

However, I am interested in knowledge that is experiential, tacit and intuitive as well as unconscious. Pedagogic authority, for instance, is embodied, encoding (amongst other things) an understanding of the environment and one's relationship to others: the 'knowing' that enabled a teacher I observed to stop a fight brewing between two male sixth-formers by stepping between them is very different from the

**"I am interested in knowledge that is experiential, tacit and intuitive as well as unconscious."**

'knowing' that would explain why she did so or instruct others in how to deal with similar situations in the future. Acknowledging these differences suggests that our attempts to represent practices (to explain them, in words) will inevitably be inadequate, won't do justice to the breadth of understanding embedded in those practices. But those attempts should also therefore be seen as a work-in-progress, aiming to 'reflect back' practitioners' knowledge and enable them to relate to it in new ways (as Elizabeth Ellsworth has suggested). This is partly what I think research can offer and why I am excited to be part of a School of Education with such extensive, collective expertise: although if it sounds like the adage that 'those who can't teach, research teaching', I admit that too(!).

My interests in these respects relate also to students. Education as it is currently conceived consistently overrates specific



formal discourses and genres (such as essays) at the expense of others. Yet many students (particularly, but not only, from disadvantaged backgrounds) express understanding within academically denigrated forms such as story-telling, descriptive writing, jokes, practical media or other creative work and even 'mistakes'. Finding a way to value them and put them to work pedagogically might contribute to what educationalists (rather grandly and thus dauntingly) refer to as the 'social justice' of practices: albeit as a matter of small adjustments to 'messy realities' (as Ian Hunter has put it).

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Hunter, Ian (1996) 'Four Anxieties About English' *Southern Review* Vol. 29 No.1 pp.4-18.

### Dr Vicky Johnson



My research and consultancy in childhood studies and international development has focused on addressing the rights of children to express their opinions and to gain access to quality education and other social services. Understanding the challenges young people face in varying cultural, political and institutional contexts has also been central to carrying out largely qualitative research into their lifeworlds. I have gained recognition for my international research on participation of children, young people and their families, and the examination of how this has, or has not, influenced social policy and practice. On the basis of detailed qualitative research, I have been asked as a keynote speaker and expert adviser by organisations such as Plan International, DFID, CIDA, the ILO IPEC programme and the Arab Resource Collective. As a consequence of being invited to share my research experience as a practitioner I

became more interested in the world of academia and have a continuing enthusiasm for gaining evidence and understanding that can help us to improve the lives of children and young people. I believe that I have the depth of experience in academic research, teaching and learning, and linking research and theory to policy and practice, to engage with a wide range of international and UK students and professionals. I really look forward to bringing these experiences into my new research role in the Education Research Centre.

I pursued a doctorate later in my career after carrying out detailed research as a practitioner in children's participation, community development in the UK and environment and international development. I found it very satisfying to consolidate my research by completing a funded PhD (Nov 2010) in Childhood and Youth Research at the School of Social Work at the University of Central Lancashire, with supervision on international development from the University of Bath. I conducted revisits and examined what type of evidence decision-makers had valued from evaluations that I had previously conducted in the UK and Nepal. The 'Change-scape' model arising examines how participation is linked to political economy, cultural and institutional contexts, as well as the agency, identity and interest of children and young people.

My research is largely from a constructivist perspective in order to understand the roles of children in households, schools and public decision-making, in varying cultural and political contexts. As a policy advisor at ActionAid (1990-1995), I led government-funded anthropological and participatory research in high hill regions of Nepal on children's roles in household decision-making and in society, including understanding gender preferences for sending boys to school. This resulted in a publication, 'Listening to Smaller Voices: Children in an environment of change', Johnson et al. ActionAid (1995), and subsequently I edited a book with UK and international practitioners and academics called 'Stepping Forward: Children and young people's participation in the development process', IT Publications (1998). I continued to be contracted to carry out research and evaluation as a consultant, for example leading a DFID-funded programme of research on evaluation with partners in government and NGOs in South Africa and Nepal (1999-2001); acting as the local evaluator for the Croydon Children's Fund for five years; carrying out participatory action research for Save the Children to explore issues of violence against children in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uganda and Honduras (2005); informing the UN Study on Violence. I have also carried out research

**“My research is largely from a constructivist perspective in order to understand the roles of children in households, schools and public decision-making, in varying cultural and political contexts.”**

for the YWCA to explore the challenges and strategies faced by young people with limited education, training and employment opportunities, as they transition to adulthood, particularly examining some of the barriers faced by young women. More recently, I have provided expertise in monitoring, evaluation and learning for ChildHope UK, in partnership with national non-governmental organisations working to reduce violence against children, and on the Right to Education in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In my educational work in ActionAid (1990-95), Development Focus Trust (1997-2008), and as Head of Partnerships and Programmes at ChildHope (2010-present), I have had experience of designing and delivering innovative capacity-building programmes for national organisations, International NGOs, UN agencies and Government departments. Subjects include participation and inclusion, child protection/safeguarding, Child Rights, monitoring and evaluation, impact assessment, and research methodologies, particularly participatory action research. I have used a range of teaching and learning approaches such as individual and group work using discussion and participatory visual methods, case studies and sets of evidence, presentation and discussion, experiential learning, distance learning, skype conferencing and webinars. Part of this work has been to design an OCN accredited course in 'Community Assessment and Action' delivered to professionals and residents working in around 25 disadvantaged areas in the UK in the context of providing health, education and social services, including in Brighton and Hove. This course consisted of six months of research training including mentoring students and regularly monitoring their research skills and

“Central to my ongoing real-world research has been to forge relationships and links between those in academia, policy and practice...”

outcomes. Part of this process was also to support residents and professionals to present their views to service providers. Central to my ongoing real world research has been to forge relationships and links between those in academia, policy and practice, and in my international work I have maintained partnerships that have been sustained and built upon.

A couple of my recent publications readers may find interesting are: (2011), ‘Conditions for Change for Children and Young People’s Participation in Evaluation: ‘Change-scape’, in Special Issue: Child Indicators for Diverse Contexts, *Child Indicators Research*, Springer Vol 4 No 4 October 2011 pp. 577-596; and (2010), ‘Revisiting Children and Researchers in Nepal: What facilitates and hinders change in a context of conflict and the changing political economy’, *Journal for International Development*, Wiley, Vol 22 No 8 pp 1076-1089. I have also published extensively on children and young people’s participation in the international and UK contexts, and on international development and environment issues in publications such as: *Participatory Learning and Action*, *International Affairs*, and *Environment and Urbanisation*.



Vicky planning a workshop with trainers in Ethiopia

### Conferences

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#### Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE)

##### Annual Conference 11\*, 12 - 14

December 2012, Celtic Manor Resort, Newport, Wales, UK. \* New Researchers' Conference

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#### British Early Childhood Education Research Association (BECERA)

Annual Conference 20 - 21 February 2013  
Midland Arts Centre, Birmingham

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#### 10th World Conference on Computers in Education

2 - 5 July, 2013. Torun Poland.

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#### British Educational Research Association (BERA)

Annual Conference 3 - 5 September  
University of Sussex, Brighton

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#### European Conference on Educational Research (ECER)

10 - 13 September, 2013  
Istanbul, Turkey.

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### University of Brighton

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#### Centre for Learning & Teaching, Pedagogic Research Conference

1 February 2013, Falmer, University of Brighton. See link [here](#). Or visit <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/clt/events/research-conference/>

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#### Centre for Learning & Teaching, Annual Learning and Teaching Conference

12 July, 2013. See link [here](#). Or visit <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/clt/events/learning-and-teaching-conference-2012>

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### Education Research Centre

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#### 11 February 2013

Checkland A501, 3 - 4pm. Neuroscience and learning with technologies, Professor Paul Howard-Jones of Bristol University.

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#### 13 March, 2013

Mayfield 101, 5 - 6.30pm. Do universities serve a purpose today? Political action in different settings: The case of HE in Latin America, with Professor Ivor Goodson and Dr Tim Rudd of Brighton University.

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#### 20 March 2013

Mayfield 101, 5 - 6.30pm. Dr Andrew Townsend, University of Nottingham. Title to be confirmed.

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#### 22 April 2013

Mayfield 101, 5 - 6.30pm. University of Brighton, School of Education. Pecha Kucha (20 slides, 20 seconds each).

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#### 29 April, 2013

Mayfield 101, 5 - 6.30pm. Professor Tara Fenwick, University of Stirling. See book review pages 11-12 of this issue.

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#### 29 May, 2013

Westlain 113, 5 - 6.30pm. Dr Carol Taylor of Sheffield Hallam University will give a talk focusing on aspects of feminism.

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#### June 2013

Postgraduate Research Conference  
Falmer, University of Brighton.

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### Back copies

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> Student Support and Guidance

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> Reflections on FE & Lifelong Learning Sector

> Research Active; publications & projects

### Notes for contributors

We are now looking for contributions for the next issue Vol.5 No.2, which will be published in July 2013. Contributions should be sent to Sylvia Willis by Friday 26 April, 2013 at:

[sylvia.willis@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:sylvia.willis@brighton.ac.uk)

Short pieces should be approximately 1500 words, and longer pieces between 2500 - 3500 words.

If any article contains photographic images of people or children please ensure that you have their consent for publication on the web.

Harvard referencing conventions should be followed.

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“In understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical we know about the person the teacher is..”

Ivor Goodson  
Professor of Learning Theory  
University of Brighton