

The STeP Journal
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Alison Jackson
TEAN@cumbria.ac.uk

Editorial

We start the issue with a discussion piece from **Pamela Bowman, South Devon College**. Pamela advises us that education for sustainable development is essential in ensuring that the future generations of Early Years Practitioners are well equipped and prepared for employment within society. Courses therefore need to provide learners with the necessary knowledge and skills that they are then able to apply confidently and competently within the workplace. Pamela's research sought to critically evaluate the current linear curriculum model and its impact on the teaching and learning process of the Cache Level 1 Caring for Children Certificate and to suggest a proposal that could enhance the teaching and learning for post-16 learners. The key findings suggested that by following a spiral curriculum the learners will improve their skills by gaining and retaining a deeper understanding of knowledge.

Emma Gostling from Canterbury Christchurch University examines some of the additional struggles a trainee teacher with disabilities must overcome, by drawing on her personal experience. She describes her journey to become a teacher, despite seemingly overwhelming odds of autism, a stammer and other physical disabilities. Her paper takes an unconventional approach as she starts by explaining her methodology and explains how she interpreted her recorded behaviours. She then sets out my literature review and concludes her paper by suggesting that there is a lack of clear guidance and understanding when it comes to trainee teachers with disabilities. By highlighting this knowledge gap, Emma hopes it will pave the way for more in depth research to be undertaken in the future.

Olivia Reynolds from Canterbury Christ Church University is looking at outdoor learning experience and considering how they might impact on pupil development and conceptual understanding. Olivia suggests that outdoor learning in education is an area that is difficult to 'measure' the benefits of. Her paper provides an attempt to yield a better understanding of 'experience' as a key concept of learning and to ultimately find ways to better personal practice and enhance the opportunities for children to reach their potential. Her research suggested that outdoor learning is best utilised when supplemented with focused classroom learning, providing learners with multiple sources and styles of information to deepen their conceptual understanding. A clear connection between pupil and teacher enjoyment and their subsequent engagement was present in the data, culminating in significant leaps forward in understanding and learning.

Next is a paper from **Maarya Ahmed representing Tauheedul Future Teachers and also the University of Cumbria**. Maarya offers us a critical reflection on the role of success criteria in peer assessment. She investigates whether peer assessments contribute to the learning experience of pupils through establishing motivation, confidence and essentially dynamic higher order learning skills. Her research was carried out with science pupils in a secondary school and she discovered from her findings that pupils are more likely to connect with their cognitive and intellectual processes to reach suitable judgements in the absence of rigid, explicit success criteria – and that the use of broader guidelines is more appropriate, to enhance and guide the learning of pupils.

Abi Shaw from the Cambridge Partnership and the University of Cumbria studied how immersive learning can be used to facilitate high quality teaching and learning in educational settings. Her research focussed on the extent to which immersive learning can be used to facilitate quality teaching, whilst supporting children's engagement with the characteristics of effective learning: play and exploring; active learning; and creating and thinking critically. Data were collected in a fully immersive infant school through systematic observation and questionnaires. Her findings suggest immersive learning supports a teacher's ability to combine 21st century skills and traditional teaching roles, whilst children were observed engaging in all areas of effective learning.

Matthew Tipton from the University of Wolverhampton undertook an interesting investigation into children's gender stereotypes and the effect they have on children's career aspirations. His research was based in a primary school and his findings suggested that primary children do indeed have gender stereotypes and that gender does play a role in their career aspirations. However, he found much variety and some distinctions between the findings concerning girls and those concerning boys. Matthew concludes with some interesting recommendations for those professionals working with children so that they are aware of a wider variety of possible careers and understand that there is not necessarily any restriction because of gender.

Finally, we have a fascinating trio of papers from **St Mary's University College, Belfast** around the theme of **early specialisation in sport**. **Conor Meyler** takes us through an investigation which looked to establish if there is a correlation between parents' influences and the early specialisation in sport of their children. The study was conducted with 126 subjects aged 14-16 across three secondary schools in Northern Ireland and came up with mixed results: parents who were previously involved in sport had a positive correlation with their child's early involvement and continued involvement in sport, yet their sport of choice did not correlate. **Conor Convery** focussed on gender, aiming to establish a potential correlation between a child's gender and early specialisation in sport. His research used a questionnaire, created to analyse the overall number and gender of students who had specialised in a single sport. After analysing and discussing the results, it appeared that gender can impact on some elements of early specialisation in sport and that, as males enter puberty, changes they go through enable them to become faster, stronger and more powerful, whereas females reach physical maturity earlier in terms of sport during puberty, explaining why they push to specialise and peak in sport earlier than their male counterparts. The third angle on this topic was the impact/influence age has on the early specialisation of children in sport, presented by **Damien Ball**. His objective was to see if there is a link between starting age in sport and the level of representation reached. The data collection from the questionnaire used in his research found that subjects participated in a wide variety of sporting activities, ranging in starting ages and level of representation reached. The study revealed that there is no strong evidence or pattern to suggest that early specialisation is directly linked with reaching elite level representation in sport and that late specialisation can also lead to elite level representation in their sport.

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