

The STeP Journal
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Editorial



We are delighted to open this issue of the STeP journal with the paper awarded to:

The Winner of the Critical Writing Prize 2016 awarded by Critical Publishing: Rachel Kurtz



Rachel Kurtz from Durham University presents a powerful position paper asking why attempts to promote equality of opportunity in schools in the UK and/or other countries failed. She begins by questioning David Cameron's assertion that we need to reach out to disadvantaged pupils through an examination of social mobility and homelessness in the UK and suggests that equality of opportunity is a societal, rather than educational issue. Using a metaphor from a Frans Francken painting, her paper argues that 'low achievers' are suffocated by those above them in the social hierarchy and concludes that instead of raising aspirations, the government should re-examine the responsibility of the establishment in keeping people 'in their place'.

Our second paper was:

Highly Commended in the Critical Writing Prize 2016 awarded by Critical Publishing: Jill Porter

Jill Porter from Stranmillis University College, Belfast considers the impact of bereavement in the Primary School. She suggests strongly that practitioners need to be ready to deal with the effects of bereavement on the children in their classes and alerts us to the complexity and need for sensitivity which surrounds this difficult subject. It is more than likely that all will encounter issues around bereavement at some time and Jill advises that although no proactive strategy can be implemented to prevent bereavement itself, there are a number of proactive and reactive strategies that can be implemented in order to prepare children for bereavement and to support them through this period of loss and adjustment.

With thanks to Critical Publishing for sharing these papers with the STeP readership.

We now go on to three papers from **the University of East London**.

Michael Dollan investigated the attitudes of teaching and support staff to the use of singing and song as a teaching method within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and year one. He suggests that the value of the use of participatory song as a teaching method was supported by the results of his study. Interestingly he discovered a divergence in attitudes to singing and song between EYFS and year one staff; EYFS staff proved to be much more confident in and positive about the use of song than their year one counterparts. In his future practice Michael will further develop his own repertoire of song and champion the use of song as a beneficial aid to learners.

Scott Dyer considered how poor spelling amongst young children can stifle creativity and limit the range of vocabulary that they use. He looked at the use of spelling tests as a vehicle for improving the spelling of phonemically irregular words by bilingual children. He concluded that spelling tests must be carefully considered and targeted to highlight patterns and strategy to the children in order to help them recognise existing rules or conventions in English spelling. If purposefully constructed, spelling tests can, he believes, create awareness of strategies such as morphology however, at their worst, they can simply encourage rote memorisation in pupils that will ultimately lead to no benefit whatsoever.

Bilsen Ibrahim explored the views of class teachers and support staff regarding the various behaviour management (BM) strategies deployed within the Early Years Foundation Stage within a school setting. She wanted to establish which positive BM strategies teachers and teaching assistants perceived as being most effective. The emergent themes were; teacher-child relationships, positive reinforcement, rules and routines, and 'power'. She recommends that an intervention action plan would serve to raise awareness of the two prominent themes, teacher-child relationships and power, allowing for teachers to establish effective and positive behaviour management.

Three student teachers from St Mary's University College, Belfast investigated various aspects of extra-curricular activities. Their findings strongly suggest more than a note of caution when deciding whether to accept others' opinions as the only truth.

Harry Loughran carried out an investigation to establish whether a correlation exists between a child's level of participation in extra-curricular activities and the characteristics of their class teacher. The study revealed mixed results, concluding that several teacher characteristics indicated a correlation with participation in active extra-curricular activities while other teacher characteristics displayed no evidence of any correlation with extra-curricular activities.

Christopher McGeown wanted to determine the correlation between children's participation in extra-curricular activity and their participation in external activities. A number of studies have suggested that there is a correlation for children in Key Stage 2. However the Spearman Rank Test used as an independent statistical analysis in Christopher's study suggested that there is a weak correlation between a child's level of participation in extra-curricular activity and external activities.

Finally **Maeve Mullen** looked to establish whether a positive correlation exists between a child's extracurricular activity participation level and their academic performance. She discovered that although many researchers highlight the positive effect which engagement has on academic performance, her study did not suggest a strong correlation between the variables examined. In fact her conclusion was that there was a strong negative correlation between physical activity participation and academic achievement.

Mary Conlan from St Mary's University College, Belfast discovered an issue which concerned her greatly; the low number of females (compared to males) who study STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects at A-Level through to industry. She therefore decided to identify the successful strategies being used in one post-primary school and promote those strategies through the creation of a professional development resource to be of use in future practice. The conclusions from her research include the identification of the problem that teachers, pupils and parents have a lack of awareness of STEM career opportunities and the skills required to be successful in these careers.

Michaela McHugh from St Mary's University College Belfast focussed on the area of reciprocal reading which aims to improve reading comprehension through the use of four reading strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising. She researched the effectiveness of reciprocal reading as an intervention strategy on pupils who were identified by the class teacher as underachieving. A six week intervention programme using reciprocal reading was implemented in an attempt to impact on pupil's comprehension and engagement with text. The findings explore the effectiveness of the intervention programme.

Jonathan Miles from University Campus Oldham compares two opposite theoretical viewpoints; deep personalisation and education essentialism. He looked to analyse their appropriateness for implementation in the UK further and higher education sectors. The results of his study were mixed, with neither theory holding suitable ground for implementation. However, he affirms that, despite the fact that both deep personalisation and education essentialism have issues, there are also underlying benefits. Research indicates that a combination of both, although not in their truest form, provides a positive development and can be relatively simply implemented in the UK further and higher education sectors.

Samuel Stones from Leeds Trinity University researched existing documentation relating to the underachievement of white working class boys. The aim was to identify and examine a number of methods and strategies which suggest how white working class underachievers may make better progress in an inclusive context. Amongst his findings, Samuel found a general consensus that aspiration interventions were, to at least some extent, effective in promoting progression and attainment for white working class underachieving boys. He realises that he is just at the starting point of this research and is keen to take it forward and build upon it in future study.

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