

The STeP Journal
Student Teacher Perspectives

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Editorial



TEAN is delighted open this summer issue of the STeP journal with the paper awarded to:

The Winner of the Critical Writing Prize 2017 awarded by Critical Publishing:



Simon Taylor from the University of the West of Scotland is concerned with encouraging boys to read. He starts his paper by critically examining a perceived trend in the underperformance of boys in literacy development to ascertain whether it does really exist. Once the underperformance of boys relative to girls has been established, Simon discusses ways in which this situation can be addressed, with particular reference to the role of primary school teachers. Both causes and solutions appear to be complex, but this paper certainly is constructive in its aim to improve the situation.

Our second paper was:

Runner up in the Critical Writing Prize 2017 awarded by Critical Publishing: Lara Conner
Lara Conner from the University of East London investigates dyslexia, warning us of competing theories and expanding definitions which have led to controversy over whether dyslexia as a separate condition even exists at all. Lara guides us through various definitions and causes of dyslexia, stopping to consider theoretical models before looking at the identifying features of dyslexia and competing notions of literacy. She concludes that for a teacher of a 'dyslexic' student, or indeed anyone with literacy difficulties, the successful interventions and supports outlined in the ongoing debate should be the focus.

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

We now go on to a powerful paper from **Noel Bradley-Johnston, St Mary's University College, Belfast** where he advises 'embracing the rainbow' by which he means those who are members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community in primary schools in Northern Ireland. In his study he discovered that although things are improving, these children still face profound difficulties, due to the attitudes of society and the lack of progress in schools. His conclusions transcend the

location of his research as he suggests that teachers need to be better prepared and supported with an increased production of curricular resources.

In the first of two sections based around a curriculum area, we explore various aspects of Mathematics.

Maria McLarnon from St Mary's University College, Belfast starts with her paper concerning the production of a hands-on learning resource to teach the topic of loci at GCSE. Maria's aim was to teach this topic in a more engaging and contextualised way, paying attention to the differing learning styles of pupils. She trialled the resource she had created and undertook a research project to investigate its effectiveness. She concludes that the hands-on approach is exciting and links learning in Mathematics to pupils' real-life experiences. Maria has shared her resource in the appendix of her paper.

Orla McSorley from St Mary's University College, Belfast realises that many parents are not too comfortable with Mathematics, but that the parental role in children's academic achievement is important. Orla realised that the teaching of fractions in the early stages of post-primary education has been shown to be very problematic for both children and adults. She produced a podcast (content shared in the appendix) to guide parents through this topic and feedback received suggested that parents found it an enjoyable, interactive method of learning which would provide them with more confidence when helping their children with Mathematics.

Donna Hayes from South Devon College was also looking for innovation in Mathematics. She was aiming to evaluate and analyse different curriculum models that affect the teaching and learning process of the GCSE maths curriculum. The purpose of her research was to suggest improvements that can be made to the maths curriculum design to enhance teaching and learning of maths for post-16 learners. More time to understand concepts and enjoy learning through multisensory approaches are part of the innovations she would like to see in order to bring about increased motivation.

Now a series of papers on a variety of topics.

Samara Willis from the University of Manchester presents a literature review on the use of VAK (Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic learning styles). She presents both sides of the argument as to how and why learning styles are required to aid pupil progress or, as the case may be, not needed. Alongside the research of others, Samara presents her own findings and examples through personal experience, to see how they correlate to this investigation. She reflects on what more could be done within the field to further improve research on a broader scale to incorporate all types of learner.

Eveliis Muller from the University of Cumbria compares and contrasts the early years education of Estonia and England. This unusual and fascinating study analyses the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' (DfE, 2014) from England and Estonia's guidance: 'National curriculum for early years institution (Vabariigi Valitsus, 2008). Her findings provide evidence of child-centred practice in both countries who view children as individuals with a unique set of needs for which appropriate support is required. However, Eveliis finds some parts of England's approach to recommend to Estonia; a greater focus on effective inter-agency work and children's emotional and social development.

Issy Hallam from South Devon College is considering student learners and looking at blended learning approaches, that is to say opportunities for face-to-face learning and an online environment, whose key challenge is social cohesion. She looked to identify strategies to enhance a

module on a Foundation degree in order to maximise social cohesion and collaboration. She concludes that Enquiry-based blended learning, which fosters collaboration, enquiry, research, reflection and critical thinking has the potential to bring the students together on the online learning platform to work collaboratively towards group tasks whilst supporting their own investigations towards the module assessment.

We now return to the second of our curriculum areas where two papers conclude the issue by investigating aspects of dropout from PE.

Aaron Beattie from St Mary's University College, Belfast sought to discover if a correlation exists between an individual's socioeconomic status and levels of dropout from physical activity. If physical activity is essential to an individual's health, could this be a factor in why many children do not engage sufficiently in such activity? Aaron's study in primary schools collected data concerning the socioeconomic status of the children's family and compared this with their physical activity. Although he found no correlation, Aaron advises that more work is needed as the literature suggests that certain types of physical activity may be impossible for some due to financial constraints.

Cristin O'Kane from St Mary's University College, Belfast looked for any correlation between a child's drop-out levels from physical activity and their academic achievement. The study was again conducted with primary school children and again no correlation was found. However, again, like Aaron, Cristin does not think that that is the whole story. Tantalisingly she suggests that she found some evidence that supports a positive relationship between levels of current activities and academic achievement; it is not necessarily the level of drop-out that has an impact on physical activity, but rather the remaining level of activity that will have correlation with academic attainment.

Time for more research is indicated here I think!

Thank you to all our authors – excellent ideas, inspirations and thought-provoking texts for us all to enjoy.

Alison Jackson
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