Welcome
to the 7th School of Education newsletter.
The last Learning Strands (Autumn/Winter 2021 edition) focused on COP-26, the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, and the threat of climate change. For several years now, we have faced another global threat: Covid-19. If some are to be believed, zoonotic diseases are likely to increase in the coming years.

Fast-forward but a few months and there is the intensified spectre of hunger, famine, and increasing levels of poverty. In Autumn/Winter 2021, the majority of us could likely name but one or two Ukrainian cities. Now, the horrors of war in Ukraine compound human suffering, far and wide, as a lust for empire seeks to re-draw borders with blood.

There is plenty of fuel...for despair.

It is easy to feel powerless in the face of overwhelming global events and powers. What difference can we make?

Critical pedagogy speaks to a context in which there is disempowerment and in which people are deprived of agency. In this context, students are encouraged to take risks, act on their sense of social responsibility, and engage the world as an object of both critical analysis and hopeful transformation.

When this edition of Learning Strands was conceived, its theme was post-pandemic futures. At the heart of this is an assumption: that our activity as educators and researchers can speak to a different type of future; and beyond this, that it can contribute to its creation.

Education is so much more than the banking of knowledge; we are in the business of hopeful transformation – as those engaged with the world as it is, yet envisaging with others what the world can be.

I am delighted that we will be informed in this edition by an international contribution from Jessica Charles at Bank Street College of Education, NYC, who informs our thinking by offering a US perspective.

This marks my last Learning Strands at the University of Aberdeen. It has been my privilege to be Head of School of Education. It has been my privilege to be Head of School of Education and to work with such a wonderful group of people, within the School, the wider university, and beyond. Thank-you for your support and continued championing of Aberdeen’s School of Education.

Professor David Smith
Head of School of Education

2 Giroux, On Critical Pedagogy, 2011, 14
School News

Guest Contributor - Jessica Charles PhD
Senior Director of Research, Effectiveness, and Innovation | Bank Street College of Education, Manhattan, NYC

Public schools in the United States are more recognizable at this stage in the pandemic than they have been in several years. Children and their teachers have returned unmasked, segregated by zip code (a proxy for race and class), state tests are once again a central focus of classroom instruction, teachers are again struggling to meet the demands of state curricula with far too few resources, and as parents have been able to return to work and schools have reopened, they have become less connected to, as they were before 2020, the day-to-day project of schooling in America.

Yet, in many ways the old problems are now overshadowed by the individual and collective trauma that losing over a million souls to COVID-19 has wrought on the American psyche. Children, their families, and their educators have returned sadder and more anxious, more isolated, and more uncertain of what the future holds and what their role in that future will be. And, unfortunately, this fragile moment is compounded by the school shootings and gun violence that are plaguing our country.

The recent shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas should remind us that too many of our young people are disconnected from and angry with their lives, our society, and our schools. It should also be a moral reckoning for our country: we are failing at even the most basic responsibility to protect our youngest and most vulnerable citizens at the schools we mandate them to attend.

As schools in the United States move into what we hope will be a post-pandemic future, we will be grappling with the loss and fear that characterize our school communities.

This disruption is a chance for policymakers and educators to finally rethink the factory school model at scale, a relic of early 20th century America, which sorts and divides teachers, students, and communities from one another.

While digital technology in and of itself is not a panacea, rethinking where and how education can happen that might ensure a more relevant and expansive curriculum for our students, and knit our society together towards a more democratic and equitable future, could be an outcome of this moment. During the pandemic, parents were more connected to their children’s school experience because of online teaching. Teachers became more aware of children’s home lives.

If technology can be used to deepen family-school relationships in culturally sensitive and responsive ways, some of our learning from this digital learning experiment can be used to address one of education’s most vexing challenges. Technology also gives us opportunities to build relationships with people outside of our community, our race, our social class, and our political ideology. The pandemic has shown us that this type of connection through technology is possible; our socially and politically diseased culture has revealed it is imperative.

Another disruption that has occurred which has deep implications for education is in the field of early childhood. Early childhood education and care in the United States is a patchwork of federal, state, and local policies that regulate and fund programs. While some families have access to subsidized child care, many do not.

A recent report by Childcare Aware America estimates that an average American two-parent family will pay about 30% of their income for childcare for one child. This is unaffordable for many American families, and the pandemic has exacerbated the situation. Early childhood care providers, who are some of the lowest paid workers in America, making on average just over $11/hour, are leaving the field in large numbers. Additionally, the long closures due to the pandemic, combined with staff attrition, have caused many centers to close, making childcare even more inaccessible than it was before the pandemic.

The United States now has an opportunity to rethink the fractured early childhood education system, and to put in place policies that will stabilize the sector through adequate funding, better wages and working conditions, and workforce development strategies such as access to free or subsidized education for currently employed caregivers and educators.

The pandemic appears to be becoming an endemic feature, rather than an anomaly, of our lives and of our schools in the United States. Whether we choose to learn from this disaster is yet to be seen. Early findings of a study of teachers’ experiences during the pandemic indicate we may not be learning much.

Bartlett and colleagues’ early data analysis suggests that while teachers were granted great flexibility (although little support) in responding to the needs of their students and families in the early stages of the pandemic, schools quickly snapped back into their pre-pandemic shape. By the fall of 2020, expectations for attendance, curriculum coverage, standardized testing, and grading were back in place in many districts, and the routines of school, even when online, mirrored the structures that we have known for decades do not support learning.

However, as we respond to the emotional and mental health needs of our students, work to retain what we have learned about teaching with technology, and rethink how we provide quality, affordable childcare for families, we have a once-in-a-century opportunity to make sustainable, systemic change.

Attention to supporting the social-emotional learning of children, which was already a practice in ascendancy, should become a central focus of educator preparation and professional development.

This will require not only a shift away from an emphasis on academic performance toward holistic, developmentally-informed practice in pre-K-12 settings, it will also demand far greater attention to the needs of educators whom we currently expect to nurture young people under adverse conditions with very little emotional and professional support.

Moreover, to meet the challenge that this moment presents us, we will need to draw on the lessons of the pandemic to reconsider the organizational arrangements in which children are asked to learn and their educators are asked to work. During the pandemic, we saw the integration of technology on a broad scale that enabled teachers and families to rethink the way that education happens across time and space.

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It is always a special moment when students and tutors meet for the first time. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, my students and I were unable to meet in person at the University of Aberdeen, and like many, were learning online — a task rather difficult for a practical subject that requires the creation of a fictional context. This is an important point, as not all practical subjects can easily transfer to online teaching.

For example, drama enables students to create, enact, and reflect on fictional worlds. These fictional worlds are often based on students’ understandings of the real world through the adoption of role. When in role, pupils adopt different perspectives and attitudes which result in a lived emotional experience (Vygotsky termed this as perezhivanie).

This involvement enables students to rework their understandings of the real world within the safety net of the fictional world. Consequently, students can test out their real-world experiences within the fiction without ever living with the consequences of their actions as they would do within the real world (Vygotsky labelled this as the dual affect). This, as one might imagine, is a delicate and complicated negotiation between teacher and students when in a classroom, and near enough impossible online.

As such, learning in the usually practical PGDE Drama course has largely been theoretical during the pandemic. Therefore, when an opportunity to attend the Dorothy Heathcote Now conference in Birmingham arose in October 2021, my students and I were keen to experience and develop our theoretical understanding by developing our drama praxis. Dr Dorothy Heathcote was a pioneer of drama education and of education in general. Her theories are practiced in schools around the world and have influenced drama and educational theorists since the 1960s.

A central aspect of Heathcote’s pedagogical philosophy was a living through drama approach, where she supported pupils and teachers to co-create together. However, this ‘living through’ approach did not reject the theatrical tradition as she drew upon the work of theatre practitioners such as Brecht and Stanislavski to help create and reflect upon the drama.

This is, in part, what made Heathcote’s work unique. For example, she struck a middle ground between those practitioners who viewed drama as ‘child development’ (Way, 1967) and those that focused in drama as a product to be performed to an audience (Homibrook, 1989). In turn, her work encouraged the use of theatrical constructs or elements without the need for an external audience to enable pupils to learn by doing (Heathcote, 1984).

Learning by doing was central to this conference as the students and I were able to work with artefacts from the Heathcote library. It was a privilege to work with these artefacts and contribute, in some way, to our shared understanding of her work. Additionally, it was a pleasure to work with the drama education scholar - Professor Cecily O’Neill.

Professor O’Neill’s workshops enabled the students and I to develop our understanding of teacher artistry (and co-artistry) within the classroom. For example, working from a pre-text, Professor O’Neill reflected on how we create areas of learning that question dominant modes of teacher led communication (instructions) with our young people.

In turn, Professor O’Neill suggested the importance of sharing, guiding, and creating alongside our learners to jointly shape the aesthetic experience. To create this shared aesthetic experience, Professor O’Neill reminded us of the importance in treating everybody’s contributions as gifts which are to be shared and cherished.

Meeting, learning, and reflecting with my students during this conference will be something that I cherish as I develop my own praxis as a teacher, lecturer, researcher, and artist.

1 Our group of PGDE Drama students at the archive workshop. 2. Our first workshop working with Tim Taylor on learning about teaching voices. 3. Dr Will Barlow and Shannon Fraser in discussion with Professor Cecily O’Neill.
The European Universities Association’s 2022 Learning and Teaching Forum was held virtually due to international travel restrictions in place in late February. Aligning with the University’s ongoing strategic work regarding education delivery, a member of staff attended this event.

The Forum rallied a number of international experts and key figures as well as innovative practitioners.

The event outlined the positions and plans of our neighbouring and far-away institutions, and it also included lots of practical ideas and initiatives on how to move forward with the delivery of education.

- One brief presentation outlined a Polish private university’s experiences and lessons learnt from the development and implementation of hybrid learning environments.
- A different view of transitioning to online and blended learning was provided by a Greek university whose student population mostly studies at a distance.
- Another session, presenting an international perspective, centred on approaches to evaluating the state of learning delivery and digital capabilities, as well as developing corresponding organisational strategies for their enhancement.
- Additionally, Spanish colleagues showcased a project aiming to encourage the sharing of pedagogical practice and enhancement of community by organising teaching teams and teacher retreats.
- Focusing on student communities, staff members of an Irish university outlined their experience of moving their campus into the virtual world through a popular game, Minecraft.
- The CEO of Jisc discussed trends in education technology and a representative of a student union called for increased attention to the digital skills of staff and students alike. The list of interesting sessions could go on.

The Forum’s main messages can be organised into three statements.

Firstly - digitally enhanced learning appears to be the future, but it has to be driven by active pedagogical approaches.

Secondly - a variety of professional learning development initiatives supported by ample resources (i.e., time and funding) can drive culture change in terms of the adoption of active blended learning.

Finally - listening to and acting on student feedback are becoming increasingly important.

These messages, as well as the projects and initiatives presented during the event, may inspire ways to complement our own university practice relating to education delivery. The Forum’s and the Association’s resources can be found on their websites.

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A Short History of the School of Education

The story starts in 1872 with the Church of Scotland Training Academy, which was set up to train teachers. In 1897, the Academy was reformed as the Church of Scotland Training College in Aberdeen. The college was established to provide higher education for teachers and to promote the principles of the Church of Scotland.

In 1903, the college moved to a new building on the site of the former Victoria School. The college continued to grow and expand, and in 1920, it became the College of Education for Scotland. In 1955, the college became part of the University of Aberdeen, and it was renamed the School of Education.

The school continues to educate teachers and researchers in various fields, including primary and secondary education, special education, and teacher education. The school has a strong reputation for research in education, and its work is recognized worldwide.

While researching graduates from the Church of Scotland Training College, there were a lot of interesting stories of individuals and how the outside world affected not only the university, but also that of its students.

ELIZABETH (BESSIE) CRAIGMYLE | 4th September 1863 – 28th February 1933

Bessie Craigmyle came first in her entrance exams to Teacher Training College and attended Class IX of the Church of Scotland Training College. She gained LLA ("see image 3") in English, History, Physiology, Botany, Zoology, French, German, Geology and Education from St Andrews in 1882 (number 394 in the image 3 above). Bessie went on to gain a teaching certificate in 1885. In 1886 she became an assistant at the High School for Girls Dolgelly earning £13 and 15 shillings a month. She wrote and published poetry:

- “Poems and Translations” (Aberdeen, 1886)
- “Handful of Pansies” (Aberdeen, 1888) (Dedicated to former classmate Margaret Dale who died 1887)
- 1889 a translator and editor for “German Ballads” in the Canterbury Series.
- 1895 A short biographical series “Famous Men and Women of Aberdeen – Scottish Notes and Queries”. Bessie was also President of Aberdeen Girl’s High School former pupils club from 1903-1904 and was a donor and designer of the chair of office. Bessey was also a member of the Women’s Liberal Association.

ANDREW MITCHELL BRUCE | 30th March 1877 – 23rd April 1917

Andrew Mitchell Bruce was a Private with the 5th Battalion Gordon Highlanders. Andrew was born in New Deer, on the 30th March 1877 and was educated at New Deer Central School. He trained at the Church of Scotland Training College and was awarded a Bursary. He continued his studies until he graduated M.A. in 1906.

His first job after graduating was at Inverness Academy and later at the Central School, Inverness. Although beyond military age and suffering from poor health, he enlisted under the Derby Scheme and went into training at Ripon with the 3/5th Gordons in April 1916. He was transferred to the Signal Section, and went to France in March 1917. Sadly he was reported “missing” on the 23rd April 1917. A comrade reported that he had fallen in action at Roos on that date and this was confirmed later.

While both as a teacher and friend Andrew was valued by all who came in contact with him. His keen interest in educational matters, his sincerity and conscientious thoroughness had much influence on his pupils. Andrew was given a brass tablet in the Hall of the School, and the “Bruce Medal” was founded in his memory. All testimony to the esteem in which he was held.


* And even: Female Teachers 1872-1901: Biographical List. Alison T. McCall. Published by Aberdeen and North-East Scotland Family History Society. Morayshire Print Ltd. October August 2007

https://www.abdn.ac.uk/special-collections/roll-of-honour/172

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**Staff & Alumni Spotlight**

**Tracy Collier**  
**SCHOOL TECHNICIAN**

I was inspired to become a technician after working closely with one of the technicians at school when doing my CSYS Chemistry...and little did I know that I would literally end up following in her footsteps when I started working at St. Machar Academy in 2002 helping to inspire the next generation of scientists. After graduating from RGIT, I worked at Aberdeen Grammar School, 3 years later getting promoted and moving to Linksfield Academy where I spent 8 happy years before finally moving to St. Machar Academy.

January 2022 saw me start my 16th year here in the School of Education and even after all this time, I still love coming to work in the mornings...as long as I can get a coffee! Over the years I have worked with some great colleagues and love seeing the students progress over the course of their studies to become teachers.

Outside of work I love my sport – I am an avid Dons fan, Scotland pass holder at Murrayfield and get up at stupid o’clock every weekend from March to September to watch Carlton play in the AFL. Some people know already, but I am an avid fan of Neighbours and will be sorry to see it end later on this year. In 2008 on our first trip to Australia, we (the other half under duress!) did the obligatory Neighbours tour and managed to visit Ramsay Street when they were actually filming, which was a great added bonus!

My other great love is travelling albeit not so much in the past couple of years due to Covid. I have probably been to more states in the USA than the average American has, such is our love for going there as well as north to Canada so I can stock up on Tim Hortons hot chocolate...and see the family too! We’ve been down under to both Australia and New Zealand and States in the USA than the average American has, such is our love for going there as well as north to Canada so I can stock up on Tim Hortons hot chocolate… and see the family too! We’ve been down under to both Australia and New Zealand and looking forward to going back to Dubai later on this year, hopefully minus the mask wearing as it’s not so good for the tan!

**ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**

**Stephanie Inglis**  
**PGDE PRIMARY 2022/23 COHORT**

My name is Stephanie Inglis, and I am a former professional judo athlete, winning Scotland’s first silver medal at the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. This was certainly a career highlight.

I had always wanted to be a primary school teacher however the love and commitment I had for my sport, meant I could not commit to the traditional 4-year teaching course. Therefore, I chose a more flexible degree, MA Management, knowing that the option to do a PGDE would be available when I could commit.

After having a knee reconstruction in 2015 which crushed my Olympic dreams, I decided to go to Vietnam for 5 months to teach English to underprivileged primary pupils and gain experience of teaching to make sure this is something I still wanted to do. Four months into my trip I was involved in a horrific motorcycle accident leaving me with a 1% chance of survival. As you can imagine my life has completely changed. I still have a long road to go in my recovery but thankfully I am making good progress. My doctors told me I could never do competitive judo again as another knock to my head could be fatal. This has taken me a long time to accept and I still haven’t fully got over this, but I do feel so lucky to have come through what I have. Sadly my sporting career had to come to an end one day although I would have preferred to have made that decision myself!

Doctors also advised me that I would not be able to pursue a career in teaching due to the nature of my brain injury. I therefore went into Active Schools and was working in primary and high schools. I got on well with this work and proved to myself that I could work in a school environment, it also proved to me that a career in teaching was where my heart truly lay.

I am very determined and goal driven, some might say stubborn, so I set off to prove the doctors wrong again and applied for the PGDE programme and was more than delighted to be offered a place at Aberdeen.

Although COVID has interfered and been a really difficult time, I feel it worked in my favour as it has allowed me to pursue this course from the comfort of my own home. As I have been diagnosed with epilepsy and sometimes have problems with this, living away from home alone was a worry, so I am thankful the course was delivered online (and wonderfully at that!!)

I have thoroughly enjoyed my year so far and although it has been a lot of hard work, I feel so lucky to be part of such a supportive community. Cathy (Cathy Francis, Head of PGDE Primary) and the PGDE team have been great and so helpful. My placements, support teachers and tutor groups have all equally been understanding and encouraging.

If I have any questions I post a wee message on our what’s app group and any anxiety or concerns I have are quickly subsided. I really feel I am learning so much and I am excited about becoming a qualified primary teacher and making a difference to our future generations for years to come!

Moral of my story, don’t let anyone tell you your limits! Go, try, experience it for yourself! Sure it might not work out, but then you’ll know, and you will go on to something different. But what if they are wrong and you find the path that is for you and what you wanted all along. Good luck everyone where ever your future will leads!!

**Student Spotlight**

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Additional Research Activity

Publications


24 MARCH 2022
Darling McQuistan, K. Presentation on “How we support inclusive approaches in practice in Scotland” in the series Baku University Expert Talks (online).

NUTKINS, S. Presentation “Creative Approaches” (online). www.ventureeducation.org

31 MARCH 2022

7 APRIL 2022

8 APRIL 2022

11 - 13 APRIL 2022

Public Engagement


Shanks, R. (2022) University of Aberdeen Café Connect podcast episode 16 ‘School uniforms: Taken for granted but are they fit for purpose?’ https://www.abdn.ac.uk/engage/podcasts/cafe-connect.php

Research Funding

PAMELA ABBOTT AND PETER MTIKA
One-year funded extension (2022-2023) to a research grant, Fostering a Social Practice Approach to Adult Literacies for Improving People’s Quality of Life in Western Rwanda, Funder – Scottish Government, additional award £268, 629.

Conferences

3 DECEMBER 2021

24 FEBRUARY 2022

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Yvonne Bain (second from the right) attending the TEPE 2022 Conference, 11 - 13 April 2022