



EDITORIAL

Research and Children in the North

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Editorial

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The development of the theme - *Research and Children in the North* - for this Special Issue of 'Education in the North' arose as a result of growing interest in research with, or for, children within education, as well as other disciplines. Indeed, within this Special Issue, while the contributions have primarily come from the field of education, we are delighted to also be publishing an article from the field of medicine. This marks an important shift for the journal in terms of its movement towards a broader scope, which aims to break down traditional disciplinary boundaries.

In addition to crossing this Special Issue also benefits from a range of Journal and Feature Articles, which report on research that has taken place across different northern regions, including Northern Finland, Provincial Denmark and Aberdeen, Scotland. The range of geographical perspectives adds another rich dimension to this Issue as different social, cultural and political contextual nuances come to the fore.

Despite the differences in disciplinary lenses and geographical perspectives, there are a number of common themes that can be identified across the range of Articles within this Special Issue. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the authors have reported on methodological and ethical issues that arise, particularly when researching *with* children and young people; there is a determination to develop methodological approaches that will support engagement with the perspectives of children and young people. These struggles and dilemmas mark an increasing awareness and commitment to children and young people as '*subjects*', as opposed to '*objects of study*'. The reporting of such research marks a promising move forward, not only in terms of challenging dominant societal perceptions of children and young people, but also in relation or the quality of research being carried out, in the Articles in the Special Issue.

This determination to engage with the perspectives of young people is central to Sidse Hølvig Mikkelsen, Peter Hornbæk Frostholm and David Thore Gravesen's (VIA University College, Denmark) Article, titled: '*Conducting Research with young people and developing the MTW [Map Talk Walk] approach- a methodology that grasps young people's perspectives*'. As the title suggests, this article reports on how a creative 'Map Talk Walk' research approach might be used to engage with young people's perspectives on complex issues, including their own understandings of '*youth*', '*normality*' and '*belonging*'. This article, which reports on data gathered through this multi-method approach, explicitly grapples with the ethical issues that

arise when doing research with young people, as the authors strive to create an inclusive research methodology which positions the young participants as experts in their own life-worlds.

This is then followed by: '*Eighty Five Years of Paediatric Research in the North East of Scotland – a partnership between children, teachers and researchers*' by Dorota Chapko, Alison Murray, Graham Devereux and Steve Turner (University of Aberdeen, Scotland). This Journal Article explores the relationship between childhood and adulthood from a medical perspective, which as stated offers an interesting disciplinary shift. Their research involved systematically reviewing medical data from children attending schools in Aberdeen, Scotland, collected over more than 85 years, in order to ascertain whether medical conditions that present themselves in later life can be traced back to childhood. The authors draw on the vast amount of longitudinal data collected over the decades since the 1920s to support insights into the factors that might contribute towards adults developing specific cognitive and respiratory conditions.

The relationship between childhood well-being and achievement in adulthood is echoed by Eliisa Leskisenoja and Satu Uusiautti's (University of Lapland, Finland) in their article '*How to increase joy at school? Findings from a positive-psychological intervention at a Northern-Finnish school*'. The authors explore how levels of 'joy' might be increased, by reporting on research carried out in a school in Northern Finland. This research, which has arisen due to specific social, cultural and geographical issues specifically affecting schooling in Northern Finland, is also committed to capturing the perceptions of the students as a central tenant of the quality of the research and as a means of validating the chosen approach. By applying 'PERMA theory', Leskisenoja and Uusiautti, establish a theoretical connection between well-being and the achievement of longer-life goals and aspirations. From this conjectural basis they explore the impact of different pedagogical practices on children's experiences of 'joy' at school.

The two Feature Articles included within this Special Issue pick up on key factors currently impacting on Early Learning in Scotland. Firstly, Catriona McDonald (University of Aberdeen, Scotland), offers insights into the challenges of developing a well-qualified Early Learning and Care (ELC) workforce, who have the knowledge and skills to support early learning and childcare. McDonald reports on a small scale study carried out by three universities who deliver a BA in Childhood Practice qualification. The data collected reveals the challenges for students with regard to their professional status. Core tensions within the Scottish education system regarding the lack of professional recognition given to staff working in the ELC sector, despite gaining professional degrees and qualifications, are brought to the fore and unpicked.

As Catriona talks from the perspective of a Senior Lecturer, Mark Watson (University of Aberdeen, Scotland) shares his experiences as a practitioner currently engaged in post-graduate study within the Early Years in Scotland. Through this Feature Article Mark reflects on the impact of children's socio-cultural environment on their learning development. '*Exploring the concept of community in relation to Early Years practice*' highlights several critical points in relation to his practice, including negotiating national policy developments and different theoretical perspectives.

These Journal and Feature Articles are complemented by three book reviews. Firstly, '*Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*', reviewed by Carolyn Cooke (University of Aberdeen), engages directly with some of the core themes brought to the fore within this issue, relating to researching with children. '*The Post-Human Child*', reviewed by Kirsten Darling-McQuistan, (University of Aberdeen) provides a deep theoretical and philosophical rationale for the need to challenge dominant configurations of children and childhood. Finally, '*Air & Light & Time & Space. How Successful Academics Write*', reviewed by Rachel Shanks (University of Aberdeen), focuses on the academic writing processes, which are critical to the dissemination of high quality research.

It has been a pleasure to take on the role of co-editor, along with Rachel Shanks, for this Special Issue of Education in the North and it is my hope that the role of children as active participants within research will continue to develop as children and young people are recognised, not as 'others', but as equals within the research community and more widely within society.