

Editorials

The theory versus practice dilemma - effecting education practice and research in the best possible way

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Theory and practice have always arguably been seen as two important components that should be integrated meaningfully into any educational process or situation in order to make it more realistic and effective. However, the difficulty has always been to determine the level and scope of integration and the degree of importance placed on each of these facets. Some perspectives posit that theory should precede practice with the argument that theory is the foundation of any discipline and by which it identifies itself as scientific or scholarly; thus, the basis through which all its actions are guided (Suppes, 1974). However, the challenge of this perspective is that 'there is no such thing as a well-established unified "theory of education"' (TRCN, 2012) accepted by all and also given that most theories used in education are 'borrowed' from other disciplines notably, Psychology and Sociology. Educational professionals such as teachers, highly appreciate the complexities of practice but often show indifference to theories that have no bearing in confronting the realities of practice. Research shows that the main causes of teachers' indifference in integrating theory into practice is that most educational research has limitations in their practical application to the classroom learning and teaching issues (Broekkamp and van Hout-Wolters, 2007). Schön (1983) conceptualises the idea of reflective practitioner that emphasis that practitioners do not merely apply theory to practice but engage in reflection before, during and after the performance of their practice which leads to concept/theory development. Several other scholars have presented alternative but similar perspectives to illustrate how practice takes on this complex and evolving phenomenon of theory-practice interaction in education (Eraut, 2000; Levin, 2011; Admiraal et al, 2017). The provocative statement by Susser (1968), "To practice without theory is to sail an uncharted sea; theory without practice is not to set sail at all", sets out clearly the importance of these two domains in education practice. In education practice, pedagogy is neither solely 'an art' nor 'a science' but should be viewed as 'the science of the art of teaching' (Simon, 1994; Galton, 2003). The Journal for Researching Education Practice and Theory creates the platform for educational practitioners and researchers to further this debate.

In this first issue, a collection of five papers look at a wide range of practices in education relating to teacher leadership; teacher perceptions of their assessment literacy; use of GoAnimate in task-based language teaching and teachers' perspectives about social media in the classroom. In the first article, Ikrame Sbai presents a report of a study that explores K-12 teachers in the UAE perceptions of their own assessment literacy and obstacles that hinder them from conducting effective assessments for their students. The paper draws on a wide range of perspectives and argues that while teachers have a high perception about their assessment literacy and evidence of using a range of traditional assessment strategies in their classrooms to assess students, they use assessment solely to evaluate students' performance instead of improving their learning experiences. The paper attributes large class sizes as a major obstacle to effective assessment and provides a number of recommendations to makes assessment more effective.

Marwa Al Tanahy examines the concept of teacher leadership and how teachers perceive the potentials to become effective teacher leaders in the second paper. The paper highlights current views about how

effective teacher leadership can indeed contribute to effective student learning. The finding shows that most teachers have good perceptions of their potentials to become effective teacher leaders with a strong show of the top six teacher leadership abilities. Teacher qualities such as professional ethics and interpersonal skills which are essential for effective leadership have contributed to this good perception of themselves. However, the paper suggests that the biggest gap in teacher leadership abilities is the lack of awareness of important leadership qualities and the desire to develop such abilities consistently. Al Tanahy suggests that in order to motivate teachers to engage in development of teacher leadership skills, policy makers should consider reducing the distinction of roles and work and to integrate and distribute tasks of teacher leadership among teacher staff, which she argues will generate responsible teachers who are able to work and lead more effectively.

The third paper by Shatha Al Khalili explores the effects and challenges of integrating the 'GoAnimate' web-based tool with task-based language teaching (TBLT) in teaching writing to a grade 11 EFL classroom in Oman. Shatha Al Khalili explains that GoAnimate is a newly introduced web-based tool which is flexible and allows its users to create customised videos. The research involved designing a female GoAnimate character which was then used to teach a writing lesson while the researcher observes and takes notes. A sample of 6 teachers and 34 students who participated were engaged in a focus group discussion. The findings show that the use of GoAnimate has the potentials to create an exciting learning environment and to promote active engagement in lessons. However, Shatha Al Khalili argues that the use of GoAnimate can have varying degrees of challenges in the Omani classroom and provides some suggestions to help alleviate them.

In the fourth paper, Zahra Zamani evaluates the extent to which servant teaching influences students' engagement in Dubai's middle schools. Based on a sample of 383 students from four middle schools in Dubai, the study used the Student Engagement in School Four-Dimensional Scale Questionnaire (SES-4DS) to collect research data. The paper discusses the concept of servant leadership and the varying dimensions coming up in literature. Zahra Zamani argues that the servant leadership style positively influences student engagement in general and specifically increases cognitive, behavioural and agency aspects of student engagement in the classroom. However, it is noted that the influence of servant leadership was insignificant on affective engagement in the classroom; the paper also acknowledges that although servant leadership influences student engagement, literature points out that other factors accounts for student engagement in the classroom.

Finally, Mohamad Ezzat Alkutich assesses the perspectives of teachers in Abu Dhabi schools on the use of social media for instructional purposes in the classroom. The paper maintains that social media currently plays a fundamental role in changing the way communication is carried out across the globe and that since schools reflect the society in which they operate, it is important to understand how this trend influences teaching and learning in the classroom. The results from this research indicate that teachers appreciate the integration of social media in the classroom and consider it as a significant tool in their day-to-day school communication. However, respondents show scepticism about social media policies. Moreover, teachers depicted that the implementation of social media in teaching and learning is still an elusive target.

We hope that the articles in this first issues would provide an interesting and stimulating reading and to generate discussion on how the findings from the papers inform and apply to your practice contexts and own research.

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