

Preface

The value of pedagogical knowledge: an international perspective

Pedagogy is an applied social science which initially derived from Philosophy and is mainly associated with the research associated with children. Pedagogy refers to the holistic development of the child involving the body, mind and soul. As a discipline it is strongly associated with Psychology and it is a theoretical and practically applied science.

Pedagogy holds its roots back in ancient times with a first definition involving the ‘child’ ‘παίδι’ ped- and the teaching of the child ‘αγωγή’ -agogy. In fact, ‘αγωγή’ means the orthodox – ‘right way’ of teaching. This statement can have many interpretations overtime and according to context. It makes us think what is the ‘right education’ for a child, who determines what is right? The context the child lives in or the one who shares the knowledge?

The term has evolved over the years and the literature recently focuses on the teaching practices adopted by the teacher (Windschitl et al 2012 & Kazemi et al. 2009). Teaching practices can become procedural and eventually be considered as the ‘right’ way of doing things (Bourdieu 1990, Foucault 1980a).

The selection of the articles for the current issue underpins the above values on pedagogy and will aim to challenge what should be ‘right’, challenge the conception that what is new is seen as ‘right’, and appreciate reading different pedagogical practices from around the world, with a view to examine what connects us all and what is really, actually new.

How pedagogical knowledge is constructed is brought to us with the first article where the author shares the paradigm from the history of Jewish education. Bitty (2019) discusses examples he shares with his students during his lectures and where he tries to build their own identity as future teachers. In his words ‘...through historical sources, the students discover that the old and distant narrative is actually quite close to the reality that they face in their classrooms: the same dilemmas, the same difficulties and sometimes ... even the same educational solutions’ (Bitty 2019: 15). It makes us think with the illustration of a classroom back in the day featured in the article, whether we are any better today. Two groups of students doing differentiated work in the same classroom. Maybe the classroom is not then as traditional as we might have thought in the first place, even though this happened centuries ago. How teachers have constructed pedagogical knowledge over the years is deeply rooted into practice and into the classroom. Hence, we open the issue with such a dilemma and thinking: is what we see now happening in the classrooms new and better?

The next article in the sequence travels us back to our times and examines the challenges faced by the TOEFL –IBT test, during the speaking assessment. A challenge that derives from the automaticity of the environment, where there is not enough time for self-correction and what’s even

more, the candidate talks to a machine. The pedagogical practices are then developed whilst preparing students to take such a test. Souri and Merç (2019) discuss the ways teachers can overcome the challenge of such a standardised test by making the student more aware of their own mistakes, teaching them to step back and self-reflect on their errors before trying it again. Students can improve their performance if teachers provide them feedback on what they did wrong and what they can do to improve it. This pedagogical practice resonates entirely with the Assessment for Learning (AFL) concept (Black & Jones 2007) whereby one of the principles during the teaching practice is to promote feedback via formative means and provide feedback on a summative test, such as the one in the article, in order to improve learning and eventually the assessment outcome of the student.

A subsequent article by Luo (2019) contributes to the discussion on pedagogy in an innovative way, as it considers revolutionising the teaching of Mandarin Chinese via the WeChat app. The article is an empirical study which persuasively proves the benefits of social media and the impact on pedagogical practices. According to the research, WeChat's communicative functions can enhance the learning experience and have a positive impact on student attainment. Live chat facility between teacher and student, group chat amongst students, multimedia input by the teacher and document transmissions make the learning process interactive and at the same time taking learning away from the classroom. Learning becomes instant, achronic, with the teacher on the other side of the device ready to provide feedback and instructions. Even in this virtual situation, pedagogical practices are applied throughout and the study proves that this model 'works' and foreign language learners get better results.

Qing (2019) investigates learners' motivation and vision in learning Mandarin Chinese amongst different year groups in secondary schools in the UK. Language learning is seen from the students' perspective and we learn from their point of view what motivates them to learn Mandarin and how they envisage themselves. The group of selected students are part of the Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP) a government funded programme with intensive weekly teaching offered in many secondary schools in the UK. The programme also offers the opportunity for learners to go to China and immerse themselves in the culture they are learning about. Indeed, one of the main motivating factors is that students love to discover the culture of the language they are studying. The recommendation for pedagogical practices lies then with the teachers in order to include cultural input in their lessons as a result.

Han & Li (2019) explore more specifically one aspect of language learning – writing – and how students can improve their writing via the use of a new app called Cooperpad. The article discusses applications for both face to face and online learning environments. Cooperpad, promotes collaborative learning with a group awareness functionality, which continuously gathers group members' writing behaviour, analyses and visualizes their engagement intensity for group members to compare their participation with that of others. The results showed that the Cooperpad writing system is more helpful to enhance the student engagement and improve students' academic performance as well as promoting learning initiative and teamwork ability. We observe that the app enhances and improves many pedagogical aspects during teaching and learning where interaction becomes key, in a traditionally very difficult skill to master.

Wei, Chan, Yan (2019) through their investigation of grit and self-regulation and their impact on the five competencies: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, complex problem solving and creativity, they found something very valuable and indeed timeless. According to their findings, teachers should teach their students to never give up, to persevere with their goals. A teachers' job is to teach their students the way to growth, teach them that difficulties will occur but through self-reflection and seeking for help the students should be able to overcome their difficulties. Teachers, the pedagogues, should guide their students to set their own targets, choose suitable strategies to solve problems and when they meet difficulties they should know who to ask for help so that they can self-reflect and evaluate.

The last article takes us back to basics, and reminds us what is important in pedagogy and effectively timeless; even though these results were obtained through very modern means, the value of pedagogical knowledge lies within us, human beings. Each human being is unique, every learning experience is unique and we, human beings make it happen. That is what connects us all and makes us who we are.

To conclude this issue's introduction, we consider the importance of the pedagogical knowledge as a priority for educators. Diamantidaki (2019) discussed that the main goal of education should not be achievement in examinations; rather, the starting point should be the human qualities and capabilities we wish to nurture and what kind of society we hope for.

Education is defined and redefined by who we are and what we do matters to achieve a better society. Nelson Mandela shares that, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"!

This issue is organised with the view to help readers think about education and provide examples as to feel more empowered and confident to paint a colorful and valuable passage in this world, (Kazantzakis)¹.

We wish you an excellent reading and we hope to have added, with this issue and all our other activities², a small building block to the edifice of pedagogical knowledge! Thank you!

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¹ 'Έχεις τα πινέλα, έχεις τα χρώματα, ζωγράφισε τον παράδεισο και μπες μέσα' - Νίκος Καζαντζάκης

² See activities of the Communication Institute of Greece at <https://coming.gr/>

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