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Editorial: New perspectives on curriculum: Rethinking collaborative enquiry and teachers' professional learning

Richard Pountney, Vivienne Baumfield, Gerry Czerniawski, & Sarah Seleznyov

Abstract

In BERA's 50th anniversary, this special issue of the Curriculum Journal recognises the debt to the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, former BERA President, and founder of the British Curriculum Forum (BCF), and his influence on teachers' work in researching and developing the curriculum. Papers in this issue address what Stenhouse called the central problem of evidence-informed practice: 'the gap between our ideas and our aspirations and our attempts to operationalise them' (Stenhouse, 1975, 2–3). Stenhouse's legacy for curriculum models and thinking, both within the four home countries and internationally, highlights the methodologies and theoretical perspectives that inform teachers as researchers and how we understand and evaluate such frames of reference. Approaches to involving teachers as researchers examined in this collection resonate with BERA's strategic plan to build on its links with practitioners, set in the context of BCF and its work to support teachers' curriculum research.

Introduction and background

In this extended editorial, the guest editors develop the frameworks around teachers as researchers with the aim of grounding the articles in this issue in the international landscape around the influences of Stenhouse's approaches to education and, more specifically, in teacher education. Special attention is paid to how current practices in the UK and internationally, as explored by the articles in this issue, are framed, especially in educational systems and higher education sectors. We set this in the context of the work of the British Curriculum Forum (BCF) and its parent organisation, the British Educational Research Association (BERA). We begin by setting out the role of BCF, and how it is inspired by Stenhouse's contribution, leading to the methodologies and theoretical perspectives and approaches that inform teachers as researchers and how we understand and evaluate such frames of reference. The tensions between policy and teachers' professional knowledge that inform their responses to curriculum research are then discussed, alongside the approaches to involving teachers as researchers, the impact of such endeavours on their practice, and how BERA is developing the involvement of practitioners. In conclusion we discuss a possible elaboration of Stenhouse's ideas that take account of the legacy of his contribution while responding to a changing world.

In May 2024, BERA announced the formation of the new BERA Teacher Network to provide a supportive environment for teachers and educators, from early years, primary, and secondary schools and further, adult and vocational education in the UK. The network aims to develop research leadership skills and to facilitate collaboration and communication among members, enabling them to access and engage with research more effectively. Resonant in the ambition of the BERA Teacher Network is Stenhouse's call for collaboration between teachers and researchers to support curriculum development (Hammersley, 1993). This, Stenhouse argued, is teachers' work in curriculum making, founded on co-operation, as a form of action research that is 'systematic enquiry made public' (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 104).

The synergy between curriculum as enquiry and as professional learning is central here, underpinned by Stenhouse's epistemological thesis that emphasised the provisionality of knowledge and research. Furthermore, Stenhouse (1967) set out his beliefs that the curriculum needs to be organised around culture so that knowledge in the form of subject matter is one of the building blocks in achieving this synergy.

In addition to offering a curricular lens to examine the accepted status quo, Stenhouse promoted curriculum development as a process of enquiry, and a set of hypotheses, tested in the classroom, that can be refined but never perfected. In his view, the role of the teacher as co-investigator, rather than as a facilitator of learning for prescribed outcomes, elevates the purpose of enquiry-based learning to the development of critical dispositions, and the learning of democratic values through enactment rather than instruction. This begs the question of the place of curriculum studies in teacher education to develop 'critics of work in curriculum, not docile agents' (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 75).

However, the level of curriculum autonomy at both school and practitioner level presumed by Stenhouse in his 1975 seminal work, *An introduction to curriculum research and development*, is perhaps not so readily realised today. Beginning with the home countries of the United Kingdom as the primary focus of this special issue, curriculum arrangements can be seen as distinctive in their own way. Each country prizes its own cultural character, subject to internal and external pressures, while sharing a concern for an 'ambitious curriculum' (Spielman, 2018) and the teacher competences required to achieve it. In the English context, the greater emphasis on curriculum in educational policy (Ofsted, 2019) draws teachers' attention to the design of the curriculum, while the Department for Education white paper (2022) has shifted the focus away from teachers' agency as curriculum makers towards 'outsourcing' the curriculum to make it teacher proof, while perhaps promoting the reductive notion of curriculum as merely knowledge content to be taught. Elsewhere, curriculum policymakers in Northern Ireland, while based on the English national curriculum, are seeking curriculum reform that takes account of cultural integration. In Wales the blueprint for a new curriculum (Donaldson, 2016) heralds its introduction in Welsh primary schools in 2022, with concern it may not provide enough structure for teachers and could lead to variation in standards. In Scotland, meanwhile, a re-energised Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2019) seeks to encourage schools to tailor their curriculum, in the face of demands for teachers to take curricular aims and translate them into practice as a continuous process.

Internationally, the effects of global educational policy transfer and international student assessments, such as PISA, have encouraged a view of teachers as technicians (Winch, 2017). Furthermore, the effects of globalisation and neoliberalism have restricted what teachers understand as the purpose of the curriculum, highlighting the need for curricula that take account of contextual specificity and cultural sensitivity (Pountney & Yang, 2021). What is at stake for teachers, and the associated struggles that emerge, is illustrated by how nations have responded to the need for curricular reform, including debates around decolonising the curriculum such as those in South Africa (Hoadley, 2018; Muller & Hoadley, 2021), and questions arising from ethnic hegemony in New Zealand (Rata, 2017; 2021). In the European context, others have argued for a heuristic framing for understanding curriculum making, as transnational systemic activity across the continent (Priestley et al., 2021).

These tensions reflect educators' concerns globally, amplified by the ongoing debate between traditional and progressive viewpoints on the curriculum and nuanced arguments around curriculum as 'progression model' (Donaldson, 2016; Counsell, 2020), resulting in increased pressure on teachers to lead the curriculum coherently (Rata, 2021). What is not clear is how teachers learn to plan, design and create the curriculum. While perspectives on teachers' professional learning are informed by the notion of teacher expertise and know-how (Winch, 2017) and professional judgement, involving forms of powerful professional knowledge (Whitty & Furlong, 2017; Barrett & Hordern, 2021), mediated by teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015), there is a lack of consensus on how this is best achieved, or how such reforms can be best evaluated. How, then, can such theorising inform our current curriculum practice?

The contribution of Stenhouse to BERA and BCF

In contributing to rethinking collaborative enquiry and teachers' professional learning in curriculum making, this special issue offers an historical overview and consideration of how Stenhouse's legacy continues to impact on curriculum models and thinking, both within the four home countries and internationally. The contributions include the methodologies and theoretical perspectives and approaches that inform teachers as researchers and how we understand and evaluate such frames of reference. These perspectives address what Stenhouse called the central problem of evidence-informed practice: 'the gap between our ideas and our aspirations and our attempts to operationalise them' (Stenhouse, 1975, pp. 2–3). His view was that all teaching ought to be seen as experimental, and that the essence of teacher research and teacher development is sustained critical enquiry into your own teaching, 'structured over time by continuities lodged in the intellectual biography of the researcher and coordinated with the work of others' (Rudduck & Hopkins, 1985, p. 120).

The legacy of Stenhouse's process model of curriculum remains today in his claim that investigation and action are a pathway to emancipation and autonomy for teachers, as an education that empowers (Rudduck, 1995), in order to develop an understanding of pedagogical science, curriculum planning, design and assessment, the role of the teacher in improving education, and its relationship to practice (Elliott & Norris, 2012). This is a form of professionalism of the teacher that, for Stenhouse, is based on expertise in seeking to understand the world, including one's own practice, not on superior knowledge already gained (Stenhouse, 1983, p. 185). It includes teachers' work in developing a curriculum for sustainability and citizenship, interdisciplinary approaches, innovation in instructional design and activist pedagogies, and debates around knowledge in the form of subject matter, and how these are actualised in the classroom through the interaction of teachers and students.

Lawrence Stenhouse had a longstanding connection with the British Curriculum Forum (BCF), whose roots can be traced back to the Standing Conference on Curriculum Studies inaugural meeting in Exeter in 1973. This led to the creation of the Association for the Study of the Curriculum (ASC) in 1977 (the ASC was later to become the Curriculum Association, the British Curriculum Foundation and finally the British Curriculum Forum). The ASC's primary focus was on advancing the study and development of curriculum theory and practice and Stenhouse was among its founders. Stenhouse revolutionised curriculum theory with his emphasis on the teacher as a researcher and the process of learning

(Stenhouse 1967; 1975). Born in 1926, Stenhouse advocated for an educational approach where teachers tailor learning experiences to meet the diverse needs and cultural backgrounds of their students. Stenhouse's process model of curriculum theory (Stenhouse 1975) shifted the focus from content delivery to fostering critical thinking and creativity in the classroom. This model championed the idea that curricula should enable students to explore and question, rather than merely absorb knowledge. Stenhouse believed that teachers, through systematic inquiry and reflection on their practices, could enhance their teaching and contribute to educational knowledge. Stenhouse's advocacy extended to the humanities (e.g. the Humanities Curriculum Project in 1971) promoting subjects like literature and history as crucial for developing a deeper understanding of human values and social complexities (Stenhouse, 1971).

Originally established to address the need for independent and critical appraisals of curriculum reforms during a turbulent time for educational systems in the UK and globally, the ASC launched the Curriculum Journal in 1990. This periodical aimed to provide detailed analysis and critiques of both current and proposed educational reforms. Now an official journal of the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the journal aims to contribute to the renewal of the field of curriculum studies, enrich curriculum conversations, and enable practitioners and scholars to engage with curricular issues, thus placing consideration of curriculum firmly at the heart of educational discourse and practice.

In 1995, the British Curriculum Foundation started providing grants to support activities aligned with its historical goals. By 2014, it was incorporated into BERA as the 'British Curriculum Forum' (BCF). The BCF's efforts to connect research with practice have been central to its mission. The forum encourages a direct dialogue between educational researchers and practitioners, ensuring that curriculum development is informed by the latest academic findings and grounded in practical, classroom-based realities. For example, the recent collection of "think pieces" (Czerniawski et al., in press) celebrates curriculum research and features the work of practitioners. This approach aligns with the foundational principles laid out by Stenhouse, who advocated for research that supports and enhances teaching practice. A key aspect of the BCF's work involves organising events such as workshops, seminars, and conferences (see: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/community/british-curriculum-forum>) that bring together educators from all phases and regions across the UK (cf. Pountney, 2020). These events serve as platforms for sharing insights, discussing challenges, and exploring innovative approaches to curriculum design and implementation. Such gatherings are crucial for teachers, as they provide opportunities to learn from educational research, share best practices, and collaborate on curriculum development projects.

The BCF has maintained its foundational objectives, fostering collaboration amongst those interested in curriculum research and development, supporting the practical implementation of educational curricula across schools, colleges and other educational settings and promoting both theoretical and innovative aspects of curriculum studies (see: Needler and Fairburn, 2020; Prabhu-Naik, 2022; Shohel, 2023; Swift, 2024). Over the years, the BCF has facilitated communication amongst educators, researchers, and practitioners through national events, awards, and grants (e.g. the British Curriculum Investigation Grant) enhancing the integration of research into practical educational settings. These financial supports enable schools to experiment with new teaching methodologies,

integrate cutting edge research into their curriculum plans, and undertake projects that might otherwise be unfeasible due to lack of funding. This work continues the legacy of Stenhouse and impacts the educational landscapes of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland by fostering collaborative educational research and development, thereby influencing curriculum policies and practice across these regions (see: Bowes 2021; Smith 2022; Doyle & Smith 2022).

This journal special issue editorial team brings together members of The British Curriculum Forum (BCF) and the Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy (CAP) Special Interest Group (SIG) of BERA. Both groupings share a common interest in curriculum issues but serve distinct functions and address different (but related) aspects of educational research. The BCF serves as a hub within BERA for all matters related to the curriculum across various educational sectors. In contrast, the CAP SIG has a more specialised focus, concentrating specifically on the interplay between curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. This group examines how these elements interact to influence educational outcomes, discussing and researching the efficacy of different pedagogical strategies and assessment methods within various curricular contexts, including international perspectives (cf. Pountney and Yang, 2021). Taken together, the relationship between the BCF and CAP SIG is synergistic, with each contributing to the broader educational dialogue facilitated by BERA through:

1. Collaborative efforts: both groups often collaborate on projects, conferences, and seminars that explore the nexus of curriculum development, teaching practices, and assessment strategies. Their activities are complementary, each enriching the educational research landscape with its particular focus.
2. Contributions to research and policy: through joint events and publications, members of both the BCF and CAP SIG share research findings, debate educational strategies, and influence policy decisions, thereby fostering a richer understanding of comprehensive educational practices.
3. Community building: both groups help to build a community of practice among educational researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, promoting a shared commitment to improving education through rigorous research and informed dialogue.

In summary, the relationship between the work of Stenhouse, the BCF and BERA's Curriculum, Assessment and Pedagogy SIG is foundational, with Stenhouse's theories directly influencing and bringing together a focus on understanding and improving education through an integrated view of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy. Moreover, in their remit and operation both groups actively encourage teachers as researchers.

Methodologies and theoretical perspectives that inform teachers as researchers

Authors in this Special Issue contribute to the theoretical perspectives and methodologies constituting the case for teachers as researchers. They also inform the debate as to how any resulting frame of reference might be understood and evaluated. For Stenhouse, curriculum making was integral to teachers' professionalism and the basis of a dynamic relationship

between research and practice in which academics and teachers can be on equal terms. In what is probably his best-known work on curriculum research and professional development (Stenhouse, 1975), he characterises the relationship of academic research to teaching as offering intelligent propositions to be tested in action. Whilst there is currently broad agreement that using evidence to inform practice is important, what this entails is disputed. Does it mean engaging directly with educational research and if so, is this principally as producers or consumers of knowledge? Conflicting views on what teachers need to know and how best to acquire such knowledge reflect differences of opinion on what the work of a teacher actually involves (Zeichner et al., 2015). Resolving such conflicts requires the avoidance of simplistic binary oppositions of theory versus practice by focusing on how teachers' understanding of what has worked and not worked in the classroom contributes to a body of knowledge for, in and of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; 1999). Curriculum making opens up different ways of thinking so that research is not something external to teaching, a 'bolt-on' activity in which teachers may or may not have the opportunity or interest to do but is fundamental to teacher professionalism.

Testing in action is a fundamental principle of pragmatism, leading us directly to the work of John Dewey; an early champion of the importance of the perspectives of teachers in all aspects of education and ultimately for a democratic society. In early works such as 'The Child and the Curriculum' (Dewey, 1902) and the 'The School and Society' (Dewey, 1907) he describes the role of teachers as building a bridge between the everyday experience of students and the school curriculum. In order to fulfil their professional role, teachers require knowledge of the ways students learn and also of the formal structure of the different disciplines. Whilst teaching may therefore seem a daunting task, it is less so when conceived of as a collective endeavour undertaken in a spirit of inquiry and experimentation. In later works such as 'The Public and its Problems' (Dewey, 2012) Dewey outlines the role of experts and explores in greater depth how different types of expertise should be valued in conceptualising and solving social problems. The collaboration of teachers, academics, students, parents and policy makers contributing their distinct, specific expertise on equal terms is, according to Dewey, the key to the development of education for democracy. In an address he gave to elementary school teachers in Chicago during the time his experimental 'Laboratory School' was testing his ideas in action, Dewey (1903) opposed the close supervision of teachers as restricting their capacity to exercise the intellectual initiative and capacity for deliberation and collective decision-making their work requires. He emphasised that any school system depends on the quality and character of the teaching profession and concluded that the biggest obstacle to effecting any lasting change is their lack of freedom to exercise democracy in determining how education should be conducted.

Making the case for teachers as researchers has been beset by problems since the early advocacy of Dewey and the concentrated efforts of Stenhouse and subsequent promoters of teachers as professional educators. Difficulties are not confined to the very different opinions on what the work of a teacher involves and recent examples of reductive prescriptions in policies for the provision of teacher education (McIntyre et al., 2019) but include the confusion of terms amongst those promoting teacher professionalism making the clarity needed for evaluation difficult. There is a lack of consensus on what teachers doing research may imply with a spectrum from engaging in individual classroom inquiries to more extensive research projects. Consequently, debates on what is meant by 'evidence' and how it can be gathered and judgements as to its quality are often at cross purposes as

different people mean different things when they discuss the feasibility and value of promoting teachers as researchers (Winch et al., 2015). This Special Issue with its focus on curriculum offers the opportunity for contributors and readers to engage more deeply in the debate and achieve a clarity of perspective on the current 'state of play' in this vital aspect of teacher professionalism.

Tensions between policy and teachers' professional knowledge that informs their responses to curriculum research

Stenhouse at the beginning of the 1980s set out a challenge to the educational research community, raising questions about what it means to conduct educational research, who has authority or validity in this frame, and why:

“The professional researcher seems to me more vulnerable because of his distance from practice and his lack of responsibility for practice than is the teacher by virtue of his involvement in practice” (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 110).

Teacher as researcher was a key theme in Stenhouse's ideas, posited on the principle that educational research should be integrated with the work of teachers in schools, as extended professionalism based on the expertise in seeking to understand the world, including one's own practice. This approach envisages a division of labour between teacher researchers and professional researchers in which the “existence and role of a more theoretically oriented form of research is preserved” (Hammersley, 1993, p.428). The distinction here between teachers as consumers of research and producers of knowledge about research, raises questions about the role of research to inform teachers' practice, and indeed the purpose of research to provide solutions to problems of learning and teaching. In terms of the curriculum, Stenhouse was clear on the principle that, as a minimum, a curriculum should provide a basis for planning a course, studying it empirically and considering the grounds of its justification, as practical inquiry that is close to practice (Stenhouse 1975: 5).

Close-to-practice research (CtPR) can take many forms including lesson study, case study, action research, and teacher inquiry. The BERA Close-to-Practice Research report (Wyse et al., 2018, 2020) defines CtPR as:

“Close-to-practice research is research that focuses on aspects defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice, and often involves collaborative work between practitioners and researchers. High quality in close-to-practice research requires the robust use of research design, theory and methods to address clearly defined research questions, through an iterative process of research and application that includes reflections on practice, research, and context. (Wyse et al., 2018, pp. 1–2).

The BERA 2018 statement on CtPR stresses that it ‘focuses on issues defined by practitioners as relevant to their practice’ (BERA, 2018, p. 2). Parsons (2021) critiques the bias in the report towards what she sees as research that is done to rather than with teachers and calls for collaboration between research and practice in which practice knowledge is co-constructed, including a greater consideration of a range of methodologies,

including participatory ones. She argues for 'new knowledge creation (the what) through the shared endeavours of research and practice working together equally (the how)' (p.1492). Hordern (2021) takes up the notion of knowledge production in considering what we mean by practice, and problematising whether this can be enhanced by research. He sees the relationship between knowledge and practice as constituted as a knowledgeable practice. Knowledge, therefore, is emergent from practice, in which "new insights are not products of the experience itself alone, but rather products of the practice, and thereby part of the process of engaging with the propositional, inferential, procedural and experiential knowledge that constitutes the subject" (Hordern, 2022, p. 206). This raises questions about how teachers as researchers is perceived and enacted.

Approaches to involving teachers as researchers

To this day, Stenhouse's view of teachers as researchers remains a contested and largely unfulfilled one. Whilst on the one hand, Hargreaves (1999) has acknowledged that teaching is a process of perpetual 'tinkering' or experimentation, the outcomes of which can enable powerful knowledge creation at school level, on the other hand Goldacre (2013) has castigated teachers for failing to make systematic use of externally generated research evidence, a complaint which seems to downgrade the value of knowledge generated through the day-to-day 'tinkering' of teachers.

Similarly, Godfrey (2017) distinguishes between three approaches to teacher engagement with research:

- 'Evidence-based practice', a passive process in which teaching approaches are based on evidence about 'what works' produced by academics, predicated on the belief that teachers cannot be researchers, or that their research is of an inferior quality;
- 'Evidence-informed practice', which places an equal value on teacher generated research findings, and involves teachers actively combining evidence from academic research, practitioner enquiry and other school-level data;
- and 'research-informed practice', whereby teachers engage in and with academic and practitioner forms of research, using evidence from both to make changes to practice.

For Godfrey (2017) it is 'research-informed practice' which has the biggest impact on practice, giving teachers agency both to explore what works for them in their context and to generate new learning for other teachers to use.

The establishment of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/about/history/>) in 2011, and its more recent network of Research Schools, aimed specifically to address Goldacre's call, and has enabled academic research material to be made more accessible and digestible to teachers. However, Biesta (2017) questions whether the EEF 'what works' model of evidence-engagement devalues teachers' professional judgement or what might be called 'practice expertise', since it is based on narrow conceptions of teaching and school improvement. Others have critiqued the Foundation's insistence on Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) as the 'gold standard' and claimed that RCTs are not always suitable to answer the questions schools want to ask, fail to keep schools close enough to the research process (Edoald and

Nevill, 2021), and have shown little evidence of successful interventions despite the many millions of pounds spent (Lortie-Forgues and Inglis, 2019). In short, 'it is difficult to work out what works' (Edoald and Nevill, 2021:57).

Meanwhile, there has been little formal impetus nor funding to support teachers to engage in 'research-informed practice' (Godfrey, 2017), this decision sitting largely in the hands of individual schools or networks of schools (McPhail et al., 2022). In England, EEF has created a network of designated 'Research Schools', but these schools have not been tasked with engaging teachers in research, rather disseminating EEF research and recruiting schools to Randomised Control Trials. In terms of teacher engagement in curriculum research, this has been increasingly circumscribed since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 (Moon, 2024). To compound these challenges, schools' capacity to support teacher research has been hit by recent falls in school budgets, with spending on staff professional development falling by over 40% from 2018 to 2022 in real terms.

However, despite these constraints, there are reasons for optimism. There has been an emergence of new research-related job roles in schools (e.g. Research Leads and Research Advocates) along with a rise of grass roots teacher-led research-focused organisations such as researchED (McPhail et al., 2022). Teachers are interested and schools are engaging, recognising that the most powerful knowledge creation comes from teachers inquiring into their own practice. Schools approach the development of teachers as researchers in different ways, for example through action research (Educators Wales, 2024), research lesson study (Seleznyov, 2019), or a 'spiral of enquiry' approach to school improvement (Timperley et al., 2014). Schools and their local university partners are finding the 'gaps in the hedges' (Waters and Brighouse, 2022), or the pathways through current constraints which enable them to make the best use of the choices that are available, and which allow them to pursue a teacher research agenda.

How might the UK take advantage of this appetite for teacher research to support the development of a Stenhouse model of teacher engagement in curriculum design? There are already international models for teacher engagement in curriculum design from which the UK could learn. In Japan, for example, the systematic use of lesson study enables teachers to propose changes to the national curriculum, and nationally sanctioned textbooks and teachers guides (Wake and Selenyov, 2020). Similarly, in Finland, national curriculum reforms have included teacher and student voice, and teachers at municipal level have autonomy to decide on local curriculum change (Matiki et al., 2023). Key to these systems is the engagement of grassroots users of the curriculum in its design, through a bottom-up approach (Priestley and Xenofontos, 2020).

BERA has continued to prioritise these grassroots users and to support their appetite for teacher research in the absence of a national system of support and regulation. BERA encourages teacher researchers to present their findings at regular events, enables teachers to apply for research grants, and mentors school practitioners to run these research projects successfully. In January 2024, the Curriculum in Professional Practice forum was launched, as a dedicated space for rigorous dialogue amongst practitioners and academics and active researchers on contemporary curriculum theory and debates. BERA's Curriculum Journal recognises the diverse roles professionals play in curriculum research and practice. Similarly, in response to the growing number of 'pracademics', educators who hold both

research and practice expertise (Dickfos, 2019), the BERA Teacher Network may well provide a place for research-minded teachers to come together to network with peers to develop their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

As Dewey highlighted in 1903, the biggest obstacle to effecting any lasting change is the lack of freedom for teachers to exercise democracy in determining how education should be conducted. Whilst Stenhouse provided a sound rationale for establishing a secure foundation in curriculum development on which teachers can build research-informed practice, improve the quality of their professional judgement and influence policy, progress is slow. The BCF, working with BERA and colleagues internationally, continues to seek to provide the 'hospitable spaces for dialogue' (Baumfield et al., 2021) between teachers and researchers necessary for the realisation of Stenhouse's legacy. Recent mapping of the characteristics of research into professional learning across professions internationally (Baumfield et al., 2023) reaffirms the importance of considering teachers' work context. More needs to be done to promote understanding how person, place and time intersect at the level of the institution to form the learning climate of the school and the availability of social support from close colleagues. Teachers and researchers will continue to look for, and find, the 'gaps in the hedges' but the creation of sustainable arenas for communication and action need to be created before the promise of teachers as researchers can be fulfilled.

The contribution of this special issue

The first paper in this special issue, written by Walter Humes, examines the work of Lawrence Stenhouse, through biographical, historical, and comparative lenses, highlighting his Scottish influences and significant contributions to curriculum theory. The author discusses Stenhouse's major works, *Culture and Education* (1967) and *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (1975) and connects his intellectual journey to curriculum policy developments in Scotland and England. Despite his early death in 1982, Stenhouse's ideas have, as this article demonstrates, continued to influence education albeit more in England than in Scotland.

Stavroula Philippou and Vassilis Tsafos examine the adaptation of Lawrence Stenhouse's 'teacher researcher' metaphor in Cyprus and Greece, analysing its influence on curriculum and teacher professional development through sociological and post-structural lenses. The authors trace the translation of Stenhouse's work into Greek and its incorporation into academic and policy contexts, highlighting four case studies involving new school types, state policies, teacher education programs, and curriculum change processes. The analysis reveals tensions in these centralised educational systems but also identifies opportunities for transformation and new understandings of curriculum and teacher professionalism. Despite challenges, Stenhouse's ideas have evolved in unpredictable ways, reflecting the complex, non-linear nature of educational change.

Karen Blackmore and Jennifer Hatley explore classroom inquiry linked to postgraduate primary student teachers' curiosity about curriculum-based learning during practicum, aligning with Stenhouse's (1975; 1985) concept of teachers as researchers conducting systematic inquiry in naturalistic settings. Feldman's (2020) definition of action research,

which involves teachers researching their own practice to improve and understand it better, further develops Stenhouse's ideas. The study, based on Close to Practice (CtP) principles (see above), involved collaboration between student teachers and schools, allowing for the creation and evaluation of small curriculum units. Critical Discourse Analysis of the research reports revealed socio-cognitive processes and the development of autonomy, resonating with Stenhouse's ideas and highlighting the value of this inquiry model for educational research and teacher development.

Complementing the theme of collaboration identified in the previous paper is an article from Sally Bamber, Sarah Blears-Chalmers, Daryn Egan-Simon, Sarah Guest, Joanna Hall and Christine Packer. Their article examines the design of local professional learning projects using collaborative design research in primary and secondary schools in England and Wales. The authors, representing teachers and teacher educators, acknowledge the challenges of university-school collaborations and the struggle for research-informed professional judgment. Stenhouse's work provides an analytical framework for interpreting local collaborations and understanding the navigation between educators' aspirations and curriculum design. The case study on making trigonometry accessible in a secondary mathematics classroom serves as a stimulus to explore conditions for effective collaborative lesson inquiry and to assess the relevance and impact of such research on practice.

Diane Swift, Gemma Clowes, Sarah Gilbert, and Alex Lambert critique the policy approach in England that promotes the Oak National Academy (2023) as a solution to developing teachers' curriculum design capabilities, arguing it restricts both curriculum and professional development. Drawing on Stenhouse's (1975; 1985; 1988) concepts of teachers as researchers and curriculum as an inquiry process, the paper presents an alternative approach through a case study of a curriculum design project involving primary teachers using the Curriculum Design Coherence (CDC) Model. This project emphasised teachers as knowledge generators and co-researchers, promoting a dialogic relationship between theory and practice. The authors of this paper contend that Stenhouse's insights offer a way to sustain teacher-researchers and generate educational research evidence that informs curriculum policies, rather than relying on externally created solutions.

Despite Northern Ireland's divided education system, Paul McFlynn argues that it has maintained relative stability over the past four decades, yet its potential remains unfulfilled due to various constraints. In identifying these constraints, his paper critically examines ambition, autonomy, and agility within educational curricula, highlighting the impact of Lawrence Stenhouse's 'teacher-as-researcher' model and the Department of Education Northern Ireland's Learning Leaders policy. The country's curriculum reviews of 1989 and 2007 are analysed, revealing shifts from product-oriented to process-driven approaches, and the challenges of extending innovative teaching methods due to rigid, exam-focused cultures. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for integrating Stenhouse's (1981; 1985) model within Northern Ireland's education system to foster teacher agency, student ambition, and a more responsive curriculum.

Phillip Poulton and Claire Golledge's article examines how the Global Education Reform Movement has constrained teachers' perceptions of themselves as curriculum workers, with a focus on the impact in Australia. The emphasis on "classroom ready" graduates and standardised pedagogical approaches has led to a preference for prescriptive curriculum

materials, undermining the role of teachers as curriculum-makers who engage critically with curriculum processes (Stenhouse, 1975). Through case studies of three preservice teachers, the article highlights the limited opportunities for engaging with process models of curriculum development during professional placements, promoting technical and outcomes-compliant thinking instead. The study argues that achieving Stenhouse's vision of curriculum as an iterative, inquiry-driven process requires both a theoretical and practical re-framing of curriculum work in initial teacher education, alongside addressing broader policy constraints.

Standardisation and evaluation resonate as themes in the following article from Moira Hulme, Abigail Comber, Eli Jones, Julian Grant and John Baumber. These authors explore the disconnect between teacher evaluation and professional learning, examining the tension between curriculum inquiry for formative purposes and evaluation for accountability. From the perspective of 'educative leadership' (Gunter and Courtney, 2021), tensions are explored between curriculum enquiry for formative purposes and evaluation of teachers' work for accountability purposes. The article critiques the widespread adoption of consequential evaluation systems and their lack of positive impact on student outcomes and teacher learning, while highlighting associated occupational stress and teacher attrition. Using case studies of laboratory schools in the U.S. and England, the article illustrates how redesigned annual teacher appraisals can promote collaborative inquiry and counter reliance on external assessments. The findings suggest significant implications for job quality, teacher development, retention, and the promotion of professional growth and collective responsibility.

Nearly forty years ago, Stenhouse emphasised that the curriculum should stimulate teachers' reflection and learning from practice, aligning with the Welsh Government's commitment to an evidence-informed profession amid major education reforms. In their paper, Russell Grigg, Helen Lewis, Miriam Morse, Lucy Crehan and Tom Crick describe a case study of a university Initial Teacher Education (ITE) partnership promoting research-informed, reflective practice among postgraduate primary student teachers, using Stenhouse's (1975; 1981; 1988) principles to support reflective practice through in-the-moment feedback from mentors. The findings show that student teachers value this feedback, although their reflection remains at a technical level, and the study highlights the importance of maintaining Stenhouse's vision in the context of curriculum reforms.

We conclude this special issue with an article from John Elliott, that focuses on rethinking teachers' roles in curriculum development, drawing on Lawrence Stenhouse's legacy. Elliott emphasises that over the past 35 years, teachers have been seen mainly as technical operatives executing state-prescribed curriculum reforms. The author reflects on his own extensive work with Stenhouse and the development of the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), noting the creation of a neo-Stenhouse tradition that views teachers as researchers in curriculum development. Elliott acknowledges the challenges posed by state-controlled national curricula but argues that Stenhouse's ideas still provide valuable frameworks for involving teachers in curriculum research and development. The review also underscores the importance of descriptive case studies in narrowing the gap between curriculum theory and practice.

[6157 words]

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