
Introduction

As an editorial board, we decided on a different approach to this issue of *FORUM*.

By 2019, it was impossible to ignore the concerns that young people were raising about the climate emergency around the globe. Inspired by such activists as Greta Thunberg and using the means available to them, such as school strikes, petitions, public speaking, online groups and platforms, and student-led webinars and workshops, children and young people everywhere have been taking action to draw the world's attention to the crisis the human race is facing and to articulate their views. Their actions have had significant international impact.

In this issue, *FORUM* has responded to their concerns. Given that young people perceive climate change as a serious threat to their future and that education has a key role to play in equipping upcoming generations to deal with the problems it brings, and will bring in the years to come, this number is focused on the theme of 'Education in a Time of Climate Crisis'.^[1]

Student voice and student participation have always been valued by *FORUM*, as many contributions to the journal, over the years, demonstrate. As young people are making themselves heard and as they themselves are calling for changes in education at this particular time in the planet's history, it seemed appropriate to engage with them directly in the production of the journal. We decided to invite young people to join us in both putting together this issue and in writing for it and would like to fully acknowledge the tremendous contribution they have made. We have a guest editor, Izzy Lewis (16), along with Lucy Gibbons (16) and supported by Lara Hynes (16). Izzy led a successful petition, hosted by herself, Lucy Gibbons, Rasha Alsouleman and Kamila Chamcham in 2019, demanding more focus on climate change in the curriculum and more sustainable schools, so she and Lucy have a strong personal interest in the theme of this issue of the journal.

The hope is that our readers will appreciate the diversity of voices in this number – across age groups and of several different nationalities. We remain aware that despite calling for contributions across a range of groups and networks, our reach may have been limited to an extent and may privilege certain voices. But perhaps this particular issue of *FORUM* will engage readers beyond our usual audience and, through the online groups and organisations to which many of our authors refer, also take our regular readers into other forums

and channels of communication, and beyond, to continue these valuable conversations.[2]

Our young contributors range in age from 10 to 24. The articles speak for themselves. They are the authentic views of the authors; editing was kept to a minimum. They present their concerns, ideas and activities in varied ways – Daisy Coltman (18); Belmiro Costa (19); Lily Dunn (10); Brianna Fruean (20); Lucy Gibbons (16) – with Shannon Jackson (24), Annwen Thurlow (17), Harry Berry (17), Phoebe Cookson (17) and Cherry Tucker (13) – Stanley Hibberd (10); Clover Hogan (20); Ahelee Rahman (14); Hazel Singh (16); Jude Daniel Smith (15); and Anna Taylor (17). Other articles are written by a range of adult writers, from teachers and parents to academics, activists, an artist and a filmmaker. Several argue for the need for change in educational provision and offer suggestions for policy and practice, as well as guidance, to support schools and teachers in a time of climate crisis (for example, Matt Carmichael, Michael Basseby and Len Greenwood). Damon Gameau and Tim Jones call for radical solutions. Others (such as Rita Soares-Pinto and Sally Grove-White, and Jo Dacombe) report on successful, practical climate-related projects undertaken with children and young people in schools, which provide models of practice to inspire and replicate.

In the context of comprehensive education and its underpinning commitment to social justice, *FORUM* frequently carries articles that explore innovative and alternative approaches in education. This issue is no exception. Emerging and consistent themes across the articles are student agency and participation. These themes can be considered in two important ways: first, in terms of their being central to learning itself. If we adopt a sociocultural approach, participation can be seen as part of the explanation of learning itself. When learning is theorised *as* being and doing, then participation in the activities of a culture – within what Lave and Wenger (1991) describe as ‘communities of practice’ – is what *constitutes* learning. As Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 35) suggest: ‘learning is not merely situated in practice – as if it were some independently reified process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of the generative social practice of the lived-in world’. From this point of view, it is clear that young people, in exercising their rights as citizens and making their voices heard, are, like anyone engaged in such activities, learning what is inherent in any social practice: its social relationships, values, meanings and purposes (Cox, 2011).

Second, there is the valuing of active citizenship and collaboration as socially just educational imperatives. At this moment in time, children and young people are taking action in contexts of climate breakdown and threats to ecologies. These are the lived, everyday situation of themselves and of all of us. Young people are playing their part as citizens in waking the world up to this reality. The moral case for educational practice is clear. As Roger Holdsworth argues so convincingly in this issue, students’ active citizenship must not be deferred to some future time, but should be enacted in the present; active citizenship (as distinct from activism) should be at the core of learning. Young

people themselves are calling for education that is grounded in dialogic engagement, as illustrated by Belmiro Costa in this issue of *FORUM*, which not only affords a different kind of experience of education, but exposes the power structures and injustices within the existing system, as well as the social injustices of climate change.

As has been discussed often in the pages of this journal, the impoverished 'fact-based' curriculum in the United Kingdom, introduced under Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove in 2013 (Department for Education, 2013), and the underlying, backward-looking assumptions that teaching is a process of transmission have worked against the potential of the school curriculum to embody the real-life concerns of young people. Instead, these 'givens' feed into the perception of education as a 'commodity', with the goal being to pass high-stakes tests and exams. Knowledge, seen as an entity, is 'passed on' – a view that carries with it the implication that it remains unchanged, and that minds can remain unchanged by it. The 'exchange value' of a commodity suggests that the value of school activities resides in the extrinsic rewards they lead to: achievement, success and status – and future employment. A consequence is that the intrinsic values inherent in the activities themselves can be overridden. The pressing questions and concerns of the young people involved go unexamined. It is unsurprising that something appears to be missing from their own point of view and that they are questioning the value of the existing system.

In contrast, when learning is understood as embedded in the activities of cultures, in social practices, 'knowing' is seen 'not as an individual possession but a continually evolving communal activity' (Wells & Claxton, 2001, p. 7). Potentially, the institution of school, as well as communities of practice beyond it, can engage children and young people in knowledge-making communities of enquiry, in which students and adults participate together (the collaborative activity of creating this number of the journal is, perhaps, an example). The activities and discourses, which they join in with and learn, provide the tools for collaboratively building on the 'everyday' knowledge that young people bring (Vygotsky, 1987). As Simon Taylor, Lew Zipin and Marie Brennan suggest in their article, 'problems that matter' to young people can be approached through their existing 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al, 1992).

Bruner (1986, p. 123) analyses culture as a forum, where meanings are negotiated and actions explicated: 'It is the forum aspect of a culture that gives its participants a role in constantly making and remaking the culture – an *active* role as participants rather than performing spectators'. Our fittingly named journal, *Forum*, perhaps illustrates this in a novel way in this particular number, both in how it has come together and in what is represented in the content of the articles.

While young people may be drawing attention to the paucity of educational provision that meets their needs in a time of climate crisis, they focus on ways forward in this 'remaking'. Jude Daniel Smith makes clear, in his article on behalf of Teach the Future, that they are organised and have challenged the government to introduce legislation they have already

formulated to bring about the changes they want to see. Other voices in this issue (for example, Ahelee Rahman; Lucy Gibbons, Shannon Jackson, Annwen Thurlow, Harry Berry, Phoebe Cookson and Cherry Tucker; Lily Dunn; Stanley Hibberd; and Hazel Healy, reporting a conversation between Brianna Fruean and Anna Taylor) demonstrate the passion of young people and their determination to challenge the status quo and bring about change. The vision, overarchingly, is a positive one. The hope is that this special number, both in what it is and in what its contributors are saying, presents an optimistic outlook, highlighting collaborative and constructive action across generations. As Daisy Coltman says in her article: 'fear can encourage people to take action, but too much does the opposite. Being open and engaged with one another is our best hope of combatting this'.

Sue Cox

Notes

- [1] The COVID-19 outbreak happened as this issue of *FORUM* was being produced. As a further pressing issue, some authors have referred to it in their articles, but most were already focused on the climate crisis, which is not to be forgotten in the unfolding of the current pandemic. We would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the journal at a time of difficulty caused by COVID-19, especially those young authors whose lives have been so disrupted.
- [2] *FORUM* may not endorse all the views expressed by the authors or the organisations to which they may refer.

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