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*Prism: Casting New Light on Learning, Theory and Practice*

<http://prism-journal.blackburn.ac.uk/>

ISSN 2514-5347

Vol. 1 (1): pp. 8-20

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## 1. A Third Space?

### 1.1 From Prospect to Print

Let's do things a little differently. Let's not roll out a standard, by-the-numbers, editorial contriving an argument to prepend the articles collected here. The articles collected here are far more deserving and, I suspect, are the reason you've given your precious time to us. I will aim only to be honest and clear. Clarity is important. I'm with Orwell (1947) on this one: 'our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts'. I'm also a linguist, so the prospect of engaging in Wittgensteinian language games is anathema to my discipline (even if some have yet to realise this fact). In any case, a linguist without data is a very dangerous beast. So, let's be dangerous by being honest. Let's be honest by being clear. In fact, let's be as clear as a prism and see what we might refract.

*This* is Prism. It's a peer-reviewed journal. We really want it to be an *international*, peer-reviewed journal but we're still working on adding substance to that adjectival claim. Nevertheless, it is a real pleasure to finally approach the finish line and have the opportunity to launch our very first issue. It hasn't been easy, we've learned quite a lot the hard way and, I can tell you, there have been times when we've howled in the wind. But we're here now, in your hands, brimming with all the potential and possibility that a new publication brings.

Prism entered this world in September 2016 as an impulse to do something different. We felt that we were different, working as we did in a HE institution in an FE environment. Whilst we deliver undergraduate programmes on behalf of a top 10 university, we also march to the beat of an FE drum with heavier teaching loads, lower student numbers, and a still embryonic research culture. We recognised our location in a third space, somewhat ill-defined and unrecognised, so we sought to locate the essence of this third space by defining our own terms and our own agenda. Our embryonic research culture, whilst lacking the monolithic and well-tested infrastructure of a large university, gave us the opportunity to determine how we might capture the output of our colleagues. We recognised, too, that we could extend our

reach to capture the output of colleagues at other institutions, regardless of scale, by opening up our space to all, and promoting the idea of doing things differently.

Difference is determined in contrast to that which exists as standard. Our difference, I argue, emerges from the space we occupy along with the opportunities that this space generates. We have come to define our own research culture so it seemed only fitting that we might come to define our own publishing culture, too. We sought to make this culture open and transparent, where others may restrict; amenable to fresh and radical ideas, where others may prefer the stability of the same; and free to commission and edit according to our own values and standards, where others may prefer the ossified ideas and practices of established tradition. We sought, in all, to be the difference that had come to define us.

There is, though, nothing new here: peer-reviewed, academic journals are commonplace. Open Access has been a stalwart of academic publishing since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Swan, 2006). Peer-review, a pre-requisite far older than we might have imagined. Defined as a 'quality control mechanism' designed to 'ensure that the reporting of research work is as truthful and accurate and possible' (Voight and Hoogenboom, 2012), peer-review is ubiquitous in the world of academic publishing. Whilst it might go wrong on occasion<sup>1</sup>, peer-review is essential if we are to maintain a semblance of quality and distinction. It is to this that we will now turn.

## 1.2 The Royal Society of Edinburgh

The conventions associated with the idea of a peer-reviewed, academic journal were first documented as editorial policy in 1752 by the Royal Society of London in *Philosophical Transactions Vol. XLVIII*. The notion of peer-review, however, came slightly earlier with the publication of the first volume of *Medical Essays and Observations* by the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge<sup>2</sup> (Kronick, 1990, p.1321). The Scottish Enlightenment is more popularly associated with Robert Burns, David Hume and Adam Smith but it is to the members of the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge that we owe a great debt.

In the prologue to the first volume of *Medical Essays and Observations*, the anonymised authors, listed only as 'a Society in Edinburgh', document their discontent with the current state of academic publishing. They identify the Collections of the *Academia Naturae Curioforum* (Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, Germany) as being of concern as 'they omit several necessary articles, which, in our opinion ought to be taken in' (p.xii). These contentions lead to the definition of an editorial policy that is hard to reject:

...we do not however pretend by this Power to reject Observations, tho' some Circumstances are omitted, if they are otherwise useful, nor to suppress Essays that are ingenious, tho' the Propositions they contain are contrary to our Way of thinking. All we propose by reserving this Choice of Papers, is to acquaint the author of such Omissions or Objections as might be taken Notice of, that, by supplying and correcting them, the Work may be made more acceptable to the Publick (p.xvi)

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<sup>1</sup> See the Sokal Affair for a famous example.

<sup>2</sup> The society was granted a Royal charter in 1783 and is now the world renowned Royal Society of Edinburgh.

All submissions are welcomed, and open to consideration, as long as the authors exhibit the 'virtues' of 'sagacity and knowledge, accuracy and candour' (p.ix). Assessing these virtues ought to be the task of learned experts in the field with the editorial board acting only as overseers with the simple task of ensuring that none are excluded on judgemental grounds.

We can see, then, that the Society for the Improvement of Medical Knowledge offers us not only the first intimation towards a system of peer-review but also a clear definition of editorial policy. There ought to be no suppression of views that do not accord; only a mandate to ensure that views are communicated accurately and candidly to ensure that each is accessible to all. We can see, too, that this battle is far from over.

### **1.3 Monopolies of Knowledge**

We think. We write. We share. The universality of the human propensity for communicative exchange is pervasive in an age of global, digital technologies. Whilst the technological means of exchange have been liberated, and have, by degrees, become increasingly accessible, the modes of exchange, in turn, have become highly instrumentalised. Innis (1951) warns of 'vast monopolies of communication' where specialised knowledge is harvested as a commodity by mechanised institutions. Following suit, Parker (1988, pp.223-224) attests that:

[S]ince 1945, we have thus witnessed the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of a rapid and significant increase in the absolute general-informational density of advanced capitalist economies... combined with an increase in the relative concentration or monopolization of specialized knowledge.

Parker's observation is that, whilst we have experienced an increase in the 'general access to a basic level of cultural programming' (1988, p.223), we have, in tandem, witnessed a decrease in general access to specialised exchange. Technologies at once both liberate and constrain, creating an inverse proportionality between access and availability. This new relation supplants the old market binary of supply and demand. Surplus value is generated, not by a pricing mechanism fixed relative to the material exchange of commodities, but in access to the commodity in the face of restricted availability.

As a case in point, Monbiot (2011) cites Elsevier's journal *Biochimica et Biophysica Acta* as an exemplar with an annual subscription fee of \$20,930 per annum. The Economist (May, 2011) claims that, in Britain, '65% of the money spent on content in academic libraries goes on journals, up from a little more than half ten years ago'. The emergence of such a specialised market is alarming in terms of both the commodification of knowledge, much of which is publicly funded research, and also the availability of knowledge. Not everyone has access to a university library and, in many cases, access is only granted after enrolment which carries with it the burden of fees. And so, the marketisation of knowledge and educational commodities, restricts access in an age when the mechanisms of exchange are readily available and globalised. There are a host of other secondary effects worth exploring: the mistrust of experts, the proliferation of 'fake news' and 'post-truth', the ubiquity of false information and conspiracy theory: all concerns that currently plague western democracies<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> These concerns all warrant further exploration. I have yet to find a serious investigation into the relationship between restricted access to scientific research and the proliferation of the issues cited.

The commercial publishing world has, as Gibson (2006) argues, ‘an increasingly harmful monopoly on a number of prestige journals which are essential to disseminating new ideas and research’.

The restrictions on ownership, access and participation is, of course, a two-way street: if academics continue to provide content to commercial publishers despite the availability of open-access forums, we cannot simply blame the profit-driven motives of the private sector. This is an argument as old as the market: why produce, exchange, and consume goods that we find ethically dubious, or that produce tangible social ills? We all have a choice: another rule of the market, if we accept that one and all are rational actors.

However, the nature of the digital space presents us with a single, defining feature in that the cost of material production is negligible. As Mason (2015) argues ‘information goods exist in potentially unlimited quantities and, when that is the case, their true marginal production cost is zero’. The material capital to buy, or rent, the means of production is no longer an issue or, at the very least, is mitigated. Commercial, academic publishing, much like other traditional media platforms, is a vestigial artefact from a pre-digital age. They are, according to Mason’s analyses, wholly unnecessary, much like the family encyclopaedia has been usurped by Wikipedia. There needn’t be a ‘monopoly of knowledge’ if we, as academics, choose to behave differently.

#### **1.4 Principles of a Third Space**

Let’s return to our original commitment to clarity for a moment. I mentioned in a light-hearted way that my background is in linguistics. Whilst I am a teaching practitioner, my involvement in the subject matter of educational theory and policy begins and ends with my practice. This is Prism’s *coup de grace*. As Editor-in-Chief I have no vested interest in the positions and particularities articulated in the field. I can, then, remain impartial, acting as an overseer of process, rather than an arbiter of judgment. I can honestly say that this might not be the case in my own discipline. Like anyone, I assume, I might be more partial to submissions that are drawn from my own school of thought and, perhaps, even hostile to submissions from branches of linguistics that I feel have little merit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Much like a Doctoral viva voce may include a specialist from a related field, there is a significant benefit in a journal being managed by an Editor-in-Chief with no vested interest in the subject matter. I am, though, supported by an editorial team with a wealth of experience in the field as both researchers, practitioners, and assessors. I would offer this as our first principle and encourage other publications to follow suit. But, what of the other principles – how might we now round off this discussion with a definition of this elusive third space?

Between an equity of production and access to consumption, between a tacit freedom of expression and a barometer of scholarly quality, between a transdisciplinary nexus and the boundaries of a remit – this is the fluid terrain of the third space. Much as we stand between the pragmatic and essential world of compulsory education and the free-ranging domain of research-led higher education, Prism – as the name infers – is a third space open and available to all where our authors are as valued as our readership and where each are equal, welcomed and celebrated. We walk the line between the traditional, academic journal, where access for both authors and readers may be restricted, and the new world of open-access publishing,

where access is open to all and where experimentation is invited. In all, we hope to become something else entirely, what those learned fellows in the climate of Edinburgh's 18<sup>th</sup> century renaissance hoped – a place where works of 'sagacity and knowledge, accuracy and candour' might be made available and accessible to all.

## 2. Overview of Inaugural Issue

The inaugural issue seeks to promote plurality. It is on this basis that we present in this volume a range of disciplinary and methodological approaches sampled from a broad spectrum from a Year 11 GCSE Drama class to an undergraduate environment in a traditional university.

**David Allan** examines the progression barriers affecting previously disengaged students. **Allan** charts the experiences of a group of previously disaffected 14-16 year olds, alongside vocational learning tutors and further education teachers. Challenging current policy, **Allan** identifies an inversely proportional relationship between vocational skills and academic success which leads, in many cases, to young people abandoning learning altogether.

A methodological 'turn' is documented in **Joanna Neil's** auto-ethnographic approach to self-reflexivity in both artistic and pedagogic practice. **Neil** presents an interview with the self as a way to both assess and re-observe the experience of creative-making. Documenting the methodological approach, examining the applicability of the findings, and critiquing the ubiquity of the 'self' in digital media, **Neil** offers a sometimes-intimate portrayal of the artist in situ whilst also accounting for the applicability of the method in arts-based teaching practices and beyond.

**Katie Strudwick** conjoins pedagogic practice with the notional role of the student as producer. The marketisation of Higher Education in the UK has led to claims of the student being positioned as a passive consumer of knowledge, whereas the student-as-producer framework encourages the co-production of knowledge with students entering into collaborative relationships with academic staff. **Strudwick** reflects on her own experiences at the University of Lincoln, supplemented by an assessment of the policy framework along with an appraisal of the framework's effectiveness in real-world situations.

**Abdul Aziz Hafiz** proposes a critical pedagogy for precarity as a response to the UK government's employability in HE agenda. Calling for local, solidarity-based associational spaces, **Hafiz** defines both the experience and practice of precarity in post-industrial landscapes, paying particular attention to the position of the precarious graduate in the neoliberal agenda and the 'new' working space.

**David Hayes** takes critical criminology out of the classroom and into the community with a focus on social learning and environmental responsibility. **Hayes** situates active social learning within the domain of critical pedagogy and argues that critical engagement with environmental issues, which may not typify conventional notions of criminality, is an essential civic responsibility when faced with potential environmental catastrophe, in this instance, hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking'.

Performance is central to **Helen Eadon-Sinkinson's** assessment of Friere's pedagogic strategies in the context of delivering a GCSE Drama syllabus to Year 11 pupils. Bringing in

Boal's theatre of the oppressed, **Eadon-Sinkinson** evaluates the transformational capacity of reflective learning strategies where performance becomes more than a mere reflection of study.

In our review section, **Val Todd** explores Field's *An Adventure in Statistics*, a fictional novel designed to guide the undergraduate through the often daunting terrain of quantitative research methods. **Jacqueline Dodding** examines Bakker and Montessori's collection *Complexity in Education: from Horror to Passion*. Exploring the notion of 'normative professionalisation', the volume presents an anthology of thematically aligned articles.

We hope this inaugural issue contributes towards broader debates, piques curiosities, and sets the standard for forthcoming volumes. Taking a publication from conception to print has been a rewarding and insightful experience. Thanks must go to the deputy editor, William Card, the journal's editorial team, the advisory board, and, of course, our authors, without whom nothing would have been possible. I hope all enjoy this issue and I hope there are many more to come. At the very least, I hope we have done things a little differently.

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