

Researching with democratic intent: the responsibilities of researchers in high-stakes accountability systems.

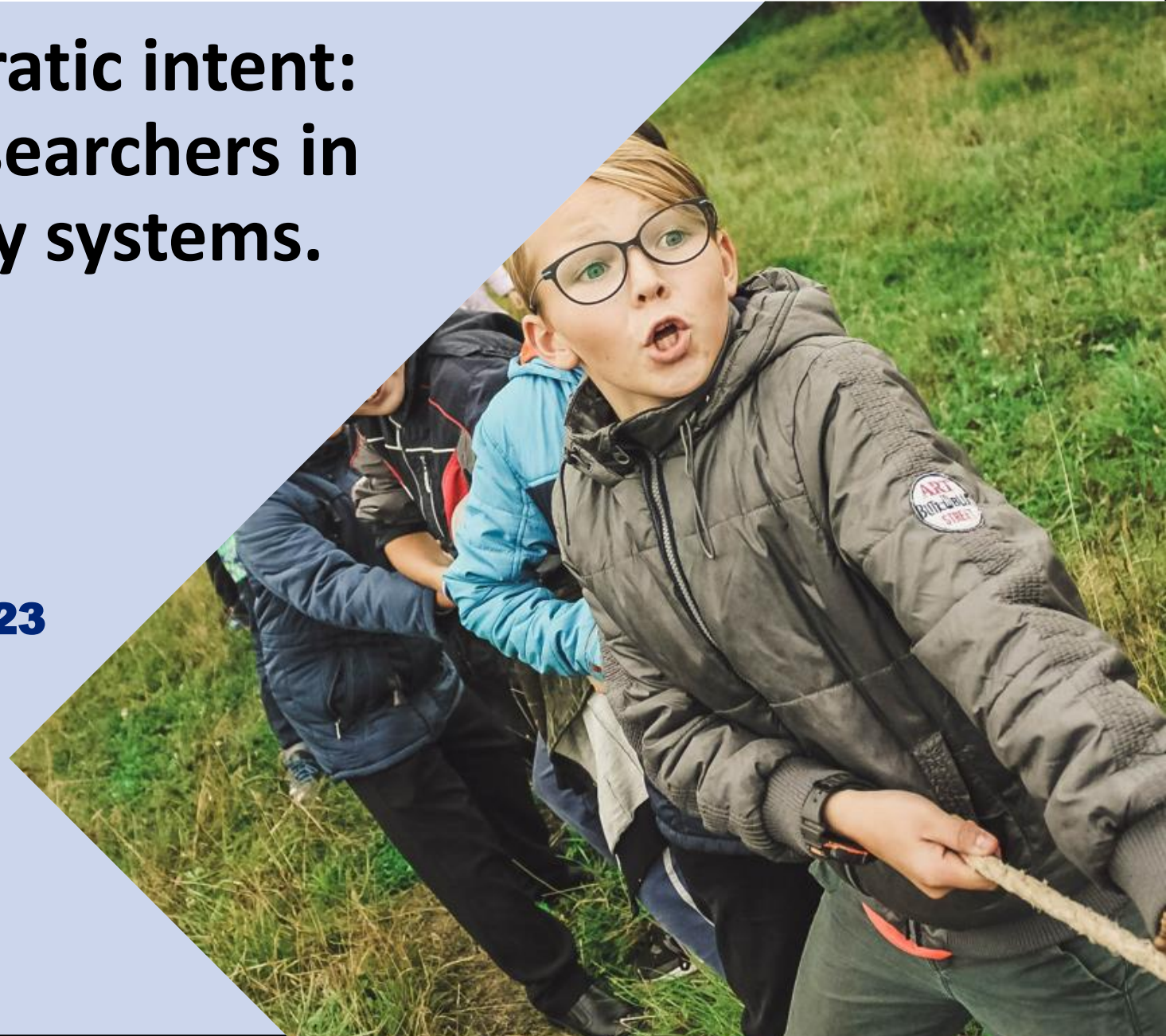
Professor Gemma Moss

UCL Institute of Education

ECER Network 23 seminar 1 June '23



**ESRC Education
Research Programme**
Empowering educators



Overview:

1. Critical policy sociology and education: theorising policy impacts and policy change

2. Education policy in England: policy instruments and knowledge flows in context

3. Research to foster “democratic governance of education in service of the common good” Fontdevila et al, 2021

4. Resetting research objectives: tension points and possibilities

Researching up or researching down: preoccupations in critical policy sociology

- Tracking the reinvention of the state and its new modes of governing in a globally connected world
 - Governing at a distance; policy borrowing; network proliferation; new actors and agencies; new knowledge flows; mapping who counts (Savage et al, 2020)
- Policy impacts: texts, tools, and trajectories
 - Structure and agency revisited as education policies proliferate – often with strong links to measurable impacts and outcomes (Verger et al, 2019)
- Policy change or policy enactments?
 - Recontextualisations and translations that disrupt linear policy implementation (Ball, 2015)
- Research that intervenes to make a material difference in people's lives
(Singh and Glasswell, 2013)

Issues and dilemmas in critical policy research

- Where we look shapes what we see –
 - Look up, and too much weight can be given to the strategies of the powerful
 - Those who seek to ‘critique’ elite networks might instead be partaking in the *research of elites, by elites and for elites*. (Savage et al 2021)
 - Look down, and is sufficient weight given to identifying an agenda for change?
 - Going beyond explaining what is wrong with the world to develop the means for transformation (Lingard, 2021)
- The political project: How to unsettle the links drawn between “policy problems” and “policy solutions” that dominate everyday educational thinking and restrict the tools that professionals can think with
 - enabling professionals and others to think differently as they struggle to come to terms with the potentials and pitfalls of the pressure from the evidence discourse (Krejsler, 2013)

Characterising the English case: high accountability and high autonomy combined

High stakes accountability – data, data everywhere

- Frequent testing
- Benchmarked standards
- Pupil progress between test points used to judge school “value added”
- High penalties for “failing” schools

High autonomy – at a price

- New market entrants with license to innovate:
 - Multi-academy Trusts; Free Schools; Teaching Hub schools
- Absence of a middle tier
- Democratic and locally based accountability diminishes

A quasi-market – with a proliferation of actors

- In practice heavily regulated by contract
- Increasing exercise of patronage at the centre
- Growth in external agencies with different degrees of oversight and control
 - Ofsted- inspectorate
 - EEF – “What works” Centre

How did we get here: a policy trajectory?

Education reform round 1: invest and direct

- The National Literacy Strategy centrally directs reform
- Investments are based on school improvement principles
- Test results plateau just short of improvement targets

(1997-2010)

Education reform round 2: outsource and control

- “Closing gaps” as the defining educational purpose
- Proliferation of tests, driven by politicians’ picks
- Proliferation of education actors offering different services
- New ways of determining “what works” close gaps and filter knowledge flows
- New ways of determining what counts as relevant professional expertise

(2010 +)

The test architecture in English primary schools

Year Group	Key stage	Age	Testing and Assessment
Reception	Early Years	4-5	Reception Baseline Assessment – tests within first 6 weeks Early Years Foundation Stage Profile
Year 1	KS1	5-6	Phonics screening check
Year 2	KS1	6-7	<i>Phonics screening check repeated for those who failed in Year 1</i> English grammar, spelling and punctuation test (SPAG) English reading test English writing teacher assessment Mathematics test
Year 3	KS2	7-8	
Year 4	KS2	8-9	Multiplication tables check
Year 5	KS2	9-10	
Year 6	KS2	10-11	English, spelling, punctuation and grammar test (SPAG) English reading test English writing teacher assessment Mathematics test

Introduced by
Conservative
government

The proliferation of actors involved in making policy happen:



Test data as policy instruments with “a life of their own”

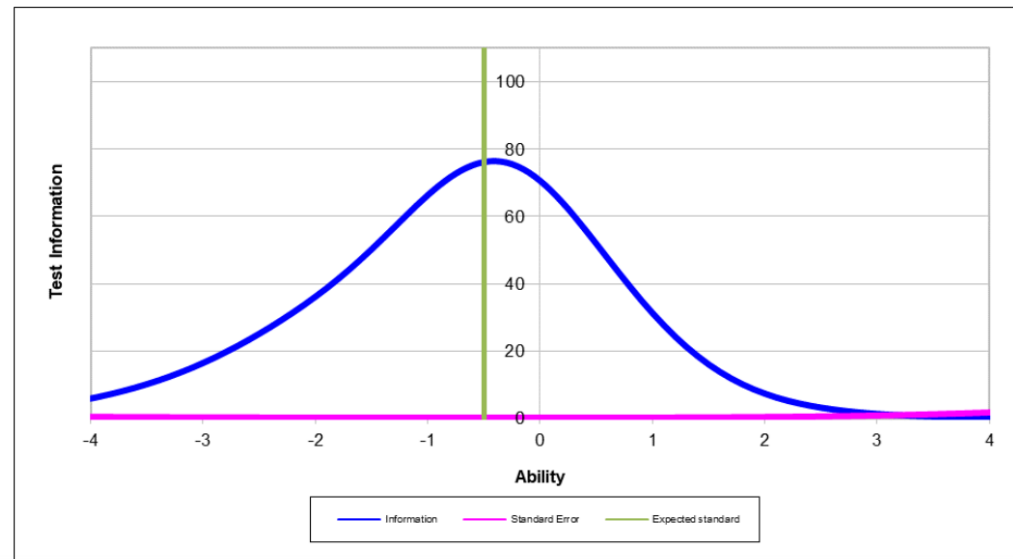
(Le Galès, 2011).

“A device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries.” Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2007

fft education
datalab

*How reliable are
Key Stage 2
tests? (2019)*

Test information function in Key Stage 2 maths test, 2018



Test data and the discourse of “closing the gap” in England. Failure as the prompt for an explosion of activity

Governance through policy instruments:

‘the accumulation of devices and their interaction without clear purpose’

- “Once in place, [policy instruments] stabilized the representation of particular issues,
- they allowed cooperation between actors without a consensus on the direction of the policy,
- they had unintended effects on the policy disconnected from question of goals or effectiveness,
- they created resistance mobilizations, they defined rules of the game for the actors, they enrolled actors,
- and they were more or less codified and sanctioned over time.
- **In extreme cases, the instruments were the policy.”** *Le Galès* 2022 p 96

Applying this perspective to education in England

Whose interests are served by instruments with “a life of their own”?

- Allows for stasis *and* rapid change in the education infrastructure
 - new networks of influence; new players with different roles and responsibilities
- Obscures the differences between policy promises and practical realities:
 - who’s buying and who’s selling in a quick fix market?
- Policy failures and policy gains:
 - subcontracting as a way of ensuring someone else carries the blame
- Disconnects policymakers from dealing directly with practitioners and their communities

A critical case: the effects of Covid on English education 2020-21

3 national lockdowns, with tiered local area restrictions

Effects on schools

2 periods of school closure with only key worker and “vulnerable” children allowed on site: March – July 2020, Jan-March 2021

On site restrictions (on class size/ “bubbles” / masks) to minimize transmission.

For those pupils at home

- Limited access to online learning
- Limited access to the food that schools provide
- Limited access to the social and physical opportunities that schools provide
- For some, greater exposure to risk at home

Differentiated impacts by social class/ regional incidence of disease

The problems with “governance as normal” in pandemic conditions

- The semblance of control breaks down
- Centrally directed responses were inadequately resourced and misdirected:
 - i) food e-voucher scheme
 - ii) laptops and routers to access online learning
- Poor decision making was fuelled by the absence of proper consultation

“There were repeated assertions that this or that would happen – that test kits would be available in schools in September, ... or that schools absolutely would reopen in January 2021, or that exams would definitely be held in 2021 – up to the point where they did not happen, forcing last-minute U-turns. Timmins, 2021

The e-voucher system “proved unable to cope with the demand... Low-income families struggled to access food.” Timmins, 2021

The first 50,000 of an initial 200,000 order arrived on 11 May, 2020. ... Complaints about shortages of laptops and routers ran on in England into January 2021 Timmins, 2021

“I have never experienced a government decision that has made me so personally deeply angry. It was just incomprehensible.” Timmins, 2021

A narrow policy focus on what has been lost: two dominant motifs and a discourse of blame

- **“Learning loss”** – calculating learning and teaching as time spent

Overall, the typical child was spending just over three hours per day on learning, with 34% spending two hours or less and 38% spending 4 hours or more. However, while 44% of pupils in middle class families reported spending more than 4 hours a day learning, this fell to 33% for those in working class families Montacute and Cullinane 2020

Extrapolating into the future with dire long-term consequences predicted

“34% of pupils are reported to be taking part in live or recorded online lessons, with 23% doing so at least once every day. Pupils from middle class homes are much more likely to have taken part, with 30% doing so at least once a day compared to 16% of working class pupils” Montacute and Cullinane 2020, teacher survey April 2020


- **“Catch up”** to repair – most effort required from those who have fallen furthest behind

A study by the IFS estimated that the loss of school time due to Covid could lead to pupils losing an average of £40,000 each in lifetime earnings Education Select Committee


‘catch up’ provision could ..include students from poorer backgrounds going back to school for catch up sessions later in the summer once it is safe, before other students return in September Montacute and Cullinane 2020

Whose data sets the tone?




Learning loss in the media and in research: two different views of the same study



Understanding Society
THE UK HOUSEHOLD LONGITUDINAL STUDY

 News

COVID-19 survey: 96% of children not at school, 90% getting schoolwork at home

10 Jun, 2020

New data from Understanding Society shows that the vast majority of children were not at school in April, but that 90% were given school work to do at home.

Pressure mounts on ministers as study shows fifth of pupils do no schoolwork at home

**SCHOOLS
WEEK**

Today's IoE study, based on a survey of more than 4,500 households conducted during the last two weeks of April, again highlighted the disproportionate impact of school closures on the disadvantaged.

For instance, the proportion of pupils putting in more than four hours each day (17 per cent) slumped to 11 per cent among pupils eligible for free school meals.

Seeing at a distance with a gap closing lens:

Schools put food parcels before education says Spielman


Ofsted chief says it was 'less obvious to some' schools early in the crisis that they should work on a 'full' remote learning offer

Amy Gibbons
Today at 11:13am

Share this



Ofsted



Guidance for teachers

Best evidence on impact of COVID-19 on pupil attainment

Research examining the potential impact of school closures on the attainment gap

EEF

Another point of view: researching education during COVID from the bottom up

Our observation:

- In a pandemic there is **no ready guidance** on what to do and **no clear agreement** on what matters most.
- Those on the front line discover the issues fastest.
- They begin to grapple with them directly, using the resources to hand

Our approach to research:

- Find out what is going on in primary schools
- using: surveys, literature reviews; interviews.

Teacher walks hundreds of miles to hand-deliver 7,500 school meals to his hungry students

Zane Powles, assistant headteacher at Western Primary School in Grimsby, said he has been 'inundated with support' during the pandemic



Exploring the disconnects between policy and practice

4 rapid turnaround research projects

Researchers: Gemma Moss, Becky Allen, Alice Bradbury, Annette Braun, Sam Duncan, Sinead Harmey, Rachael Levy, Rob Webster

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/covid-19-research-ucl-institute-education/research-related-covid-19>

1. A duty of care and a duty to teach: educational priorities in response to the Covid19 crisis. May-Sept 2020

- Survey, representative sample, May 2020
- Rapid evidence assessment, Aug 2020
- Funder: ESRC



2. Teacher Assistant Survey. Unison. Jan-Feb 2021

3. Learning through Disruption. May-July, 2021

- Purposive Case Studies
- Funder: ESRC



4. Rapid Evidence Review: Harms and Mitigations. May/June 2021

- Systematic Review
- Funder: DfE

Researching the impacts of COVID on Education:

Aims

- To document schools' responses to their communities during COVID, looking beyond "learning loss"
- To assess whether and in what ways schools' priorities might disturb the current accountability settlement
- To set an agenda for change in education in the short term (recovery strategies post COVID) and the longer term (system change)

Research questions

- 1) How did primary teachers weigh "a duty of care" and "a duty to teach" during the pandemic in their interactions with families?
- 2) To what extent is the crisis challenging and reshaping shared understandings of the purposes and values of primary education?
- 3) Can any new thinking re-set the terms of the public conversation about what matters in education post COVID?

Findings: Schools care for their pupils they don't just teach them...

Question: Thinking about YOUR school community, which of these had highest priority in communicating with families during lockdown? Please tick just THREE responses

Statement	All
Checking how families are coping in terms of mental health, welfare, food	72%
Providing information about how parents can support their children's learning at home	63%
Checking how families are managing with the schoolwork	46%
Providing information on how free school meal vouchers are being distributed	35%
Providing information on where families experiencing hardship can find additional support	35%
Reassuring families that learning will be maintained	17%

A duty of care places a greater burden on schools serving the most disadvantaged

Statement	Q1 (affluent)	Q2	Q3	Q4 (deprived)
Checking how families are coping	68%	72%	72%	78%
Info on FSM vouchers	18%	24%	41%	51%
Support for families experiencing hardship	22%	31%	40%	42%
How to support children's learning at home	75%	68%	60%	52%

Question: Thinking about YOUR school community, which of these had highest priority in communicating with families during lockdown? Please tick just THREE responses.

Local circumstances matter

- **Huge variation in local impacts of Covid**, depending upon:
 - rates of infection; economic impact; patterns of employment; household structure; physical space at home

'Our free school meals now has increased and increased [...] Those jobs just imploded and many of them were there on temporary contracts'
(Head S2).

- **Schools responded in multiple ways:** food banks, welfare check-ins, providing clothing and toiletries, access to safe space

'there were times when ... we just had to go around to the homes. ... when you've been trying to get in contact with families, and they're not responding [...] and you know they need to have breakfast. ... It's just something you just have to get on and do'
(Head S2)

Primary schools in England recognise that they play a vital role in supporting their communities. Policy does not:

We are much more aware of [family poverty] now because during the pandemic we've had to signpost families to foodbanks, we've had to take packs of learning to certain families because they don't have internet access at home, they don't have computers [...]
the pandemic has first of all enabled us to know our community in different ways, in more meaningful ways and probably more accurate ways. (Head A S5)

we're not saying we're going to focus on their wellbeing to the detriment of the academic. We're saying we're going to focus on their wellbeing to ensure that we can focus on the academic.
... Every school should be focusing on this (Head S1)

Differences in the logics at work: policy holds fast to the accountability instruments in place

1. Curriculum delivery as the object of measurement
2. To benefit, all children must keep to the same pace and sequence - deficits escalate and jeopardy follows
3. Those who fall behind are to blame

“The aim of education is to deliver a high-quality curriculum so that pupils know more and remember more.

Everything we know about what a quality curriculum looks like still applies. The remote curriculum needs to be aligned to the classroom curriculum as much as possible. ..

it needs to be carefully sequenced and ensure that pupils obtain the building blocks they need to move on to the next step” Ofsted, 2021

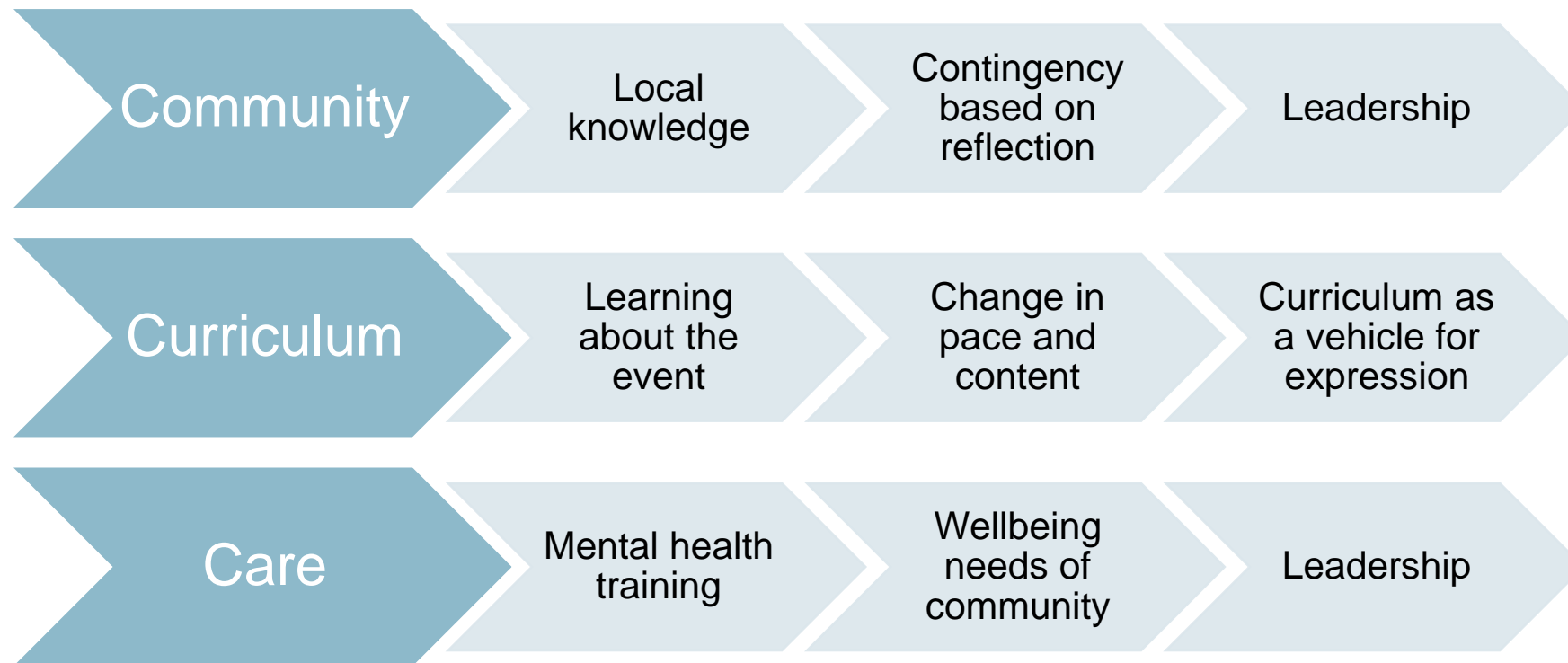
Differences in the logics at work: school logics adapted to meet wholly novel circumstances

1. Prioritising safety and basic welfare needs
2. Thinking in the round about children and their families
3. Taking into account resources on the ground
 - Access to technology – devices but also data plans
 - Physical space
 - Siblings and family structure
4. A focus on children's willingness to learn; parents' potential to support in novel conditions
5. Reimagining pedagogy & staff deployment in response

School priorities are in line with the research literature:

Findings from a Rapid Evidence Review of the literature on how schools had handled recovery post other sustained episodes of disruption caused by natural disasters.

Three themes stand out:



They also capture more accurately the multiple impacts on pupils : Findings, systematic review summer 2021

- On **Learning** – due to changes in amount or modes of teaching and learning in the home context; inadequate access to technology;
- On **Mental health and wellbeing** – affected or exacerbated by the conditions the pandemic created;
- On **Nutrition, physical health, and development** - from restricted access to the social context of the school/ outdoor space;
- From **Increased exposure to risk factors at home** – familial risks of domestic violence, physical abuse; material disbenefits of living in poverty (poor housing, overcrowding; inadequate resources; limited access to outside space); reduced access to support services.
- **A mixed picture** - Some evidence for benefits as well as harms

What have we learned since: uncertainties in the data

- **Modelling of impacts on attainment** at the start of the pandemic overestimated “learning losses”
- **Regularly collected test data** showed attainment dipped during closure periods, repaired when schools re-opened
- **Comparing pre/during pandemic data** on same tests shows:
 - modest impacts on literacy (0.2); and on maths (0.3); greater losses for younger children (DfE/ Renaissance Learning & EPI, 2021)
- **Evidence on widening disadvantage gaps unclear (0.05)**
 - Some studies suggest that: *“disadvantaged pupils are recovering at around the same rate as non-disadvantaged pupils”* (Twist et al. 2022)
- **No strong relationship between outcomes** and school actions during the pandemic, or after
- **Still lacking evidence** on likely interactions between harms
- **Little research** investigating school-based mitigation strategies

What can we conclude:

- Schools play a crucial role in promoting community resilience and cohesion
 - The social support schools give pupils and families needs building into the calculations about their role
- Communities hit hardest are those where material poverty is deepest
 - More generous funding needs to schools working with our poorest communities to fix the problems that poverty creates.
- Rebuilding a sustainable and resilient education system means recognising the value of school-generated knowledge
 - Local knowledge has greatest value in planning appropriate support in context
 - Fidelity to prescription from afar militates against intelligent change
- **Research needs to decide whose side it is on**

From research back to policy and practice:

Recommendation 1:

Schools operating in areas of high disadvantage need substantially more generous funding to address those aspects of poverty that directly impact on children's education.

Recommendation 2:

Schools need time to reflect on what has been learnt at the frontline during the crisis. Building in stronger, locally-based networks of support would address the current fragmentation in the system and the inequalities it creates

Recommendation 3:

Education needs a fully costed investment plan for the longer term, much more urgently than short-term "catch-up" initiatives. This will lay the foundations for a more sustainable recovery that works for all

Making findings accessible for those who need to know: translating research into practice

Institute of Education

Learning through disruption 1: why school plans for recovery from COVID must be locally led

COVID has disrupted children's education in multiple ways. Primary schools are best placed to assess the precise effects of disruption on their pupils and their communities. To aid recovery, the most immediate priority is a national recovery fund that schools can draw on and tailor to meet local needs.

The Covid pandemic has led to a prolonged period of educational disruption with few precedents from the recent past to guide recovery (Barnes and Moss 2020; Moss et al. 2021). Our project, *Learning Through Disruption*, set out to explore the knowledge schools have acquired from working with children and families during the crisis. We found that schools adapted what they were doing as they became more aware of local circumstances and found new ways to address the diversity of pupils' and families' needs. In the process they have developed a deep and sophisticated understanding of their communities. This provides the basis for deciding how teaching and learning can best rebuild going forward.

IPPO NEWSLETTER

Education has much to learn: how the relationships between research, policy and practice need to change in light of COVID-19

FEBRUARY 10, 2022

The Director of the ESRC's forthcoming Education Research Programme offers a personal view of how education researchers in England have grappled with the many challenges raised by the pandemic – and considers their interactions with decision-makers in both policy and practice

Gemma Moss

Institute of Education

Learning through disruption 2: schools serving high poverty communities need funding that fully reflects the work that they do

The pandemic has shown how important primary schools are as networks of support for children and families. Our project, *Learning Through Disruption*¹, also shows that schools have a particularly vital role in addressing the needs of high poverty communities, both directly and indirectly. Yet this work goes largely unrecognised and underfunded. This needs to change.

Findings

1. Schools are a vital source of support for children living in poverty. During lockdown, schools monitored the wellbeing of children intensely, using regular phone calls and visiting the homes of the most vulnerable children not on site. In many ways, schools are at the frontline in dealing with deficiencies in the current welfare system that place children living in poverty at risk.

¹Learning Through Disruption: Rebuilding primary education using local knowledge. Funder ESRC/RCUK. Grant number ES/S003386/1. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ieo/departments-and-centres/international-literacy-centre/duty-care-and-duty-teach-educational-priorities-response-covid-19-crisis>

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<https://covidandsociety.com/education-learn-relationships-research-policy-practice-change-covid-19/>

Institute of Education

Learning through disruption 3: schools engaging with families and communities during COVID

During the COVID pandemic, primary schools have found new ways of working with children and, crucially, their families. This has far-reaching implications for how schools and policy-makers consider home-school communication as a means of developing parental and community engagement in the future.

Our project, *Learning Through Disruption*¹, explored schools' communication with children, families and communities during the pandemic, and the nature of the home-school relationships that have been so crucial across the different phases of the crisis. As part of

our research, we asked parents² about their experiences of the periods of home-schooling, as well as the range of challenges that families faced within their reconfigured home contexts. Parents told us about balancing home-schooling with paid work, managing financial strains and coping with illness and anxiety while also looking after younger children and/or siblings of different ages. Parents reflected on the challenges of lockdown life, including not being able to see wider family or visit places they might usually visit, and the task of trying to reassure and encourage children amid the uncertainties of the shifting situation. Parents spoke of the school routines that children missed and the new routines they

¹Learning Through Disruption: Rebuilding primary education using local knowledge. Funder ESRC/RCUK. Grant number ES/S003386/1. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ieo/departments-and-centres/international-literacy-centre/duty-care-and-duty-teach-educational-priorities-response-covid-19-crisis>

²Throughout this document we refer to 'parents', and these we speak to as part of our research here (parents on behalf of their mothers), but the points we are making apply more widely to those in comparable roles and their relationships with the school.

Institute of Education

Learning through disruption 4: building a more resilient education system post-COVID

COVID has highlighted significant weaknesses in how the primary education system in England is currently managed and resourced. We need to build a more resilient education system post-pandemic.

Our project, *Learning Through Disruption*¹, set out to explore what headteachers, teachers, other school staff and parents in English primary schools had made of keeping education going during the pandemic, and whether any more general lessons could be learnt for the education system going forward from their experiences. In a context where a relatively modest amount of funding had been

committed for recovery in English schools we also wanted to understand whether such funding had been targeted at the issues that schools and parents considered most important.

Findings

1. The emphasis in policy on 'Catch-up' does not adequately reflect primary schools' concerns. The funding is for 2021-22 only, and for interventions that in one year are designed to catch children up with where they would have been, had the pandemic never happened. By contrast, primary schools are looking across the range of pupil needs and reviewing what

¹Learning Through Disruption: Rebuilding primary education using local knowledge. Funder ESRC/RCUK. Grant number ES/S003386/1. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ieo/departments-and-centres/international-literacy-centre/duty-care-and-duty-teach-educational-priorities-response-covid-19-crisis>

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Responding to COVID-19, Briefing Note 2: Learning after lockdown

Responding to COVID-19, Briefing Note 2: Resetting educational priorities in challenging times

IOE - FACILITY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

Research evidence to support primary school inspection post-COVID

Authors: Gemma Moss, Alice Bradbury, Annette Braun, Sam Duncan, Rachael Levy and Sinead Harney, IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society

Introduction

This policy briefing is intended to inform discussion on how Ofsted inspections might best resume at an appropriate time, given the extensive disruption COVID has brought and continues to bring to English primary schools. The briefing draws on findings from a series of research projects based at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society and conducted between May 2020 and September 2021, using surveys, systematic literature reviews and case study methods¹.

The research projects have highlighted just how much schools' experiences have varied. They also show just how resourceful and resilient schools and their communities have been in navigating a way through the many difficult dilemmas the pandemic has raised, even when there have been no obvious roadmaps to follow.

The research evidence we present and the recommendations that follow are intended to inform conversations in the field about the best ways forward in education. They build on the knowledge and experience that primary schools have acquired from dealing with the pandemic first hand.

Key points from systematic literature reviews of the research evidence on harms to pupils from the pandemic and their mitigations:

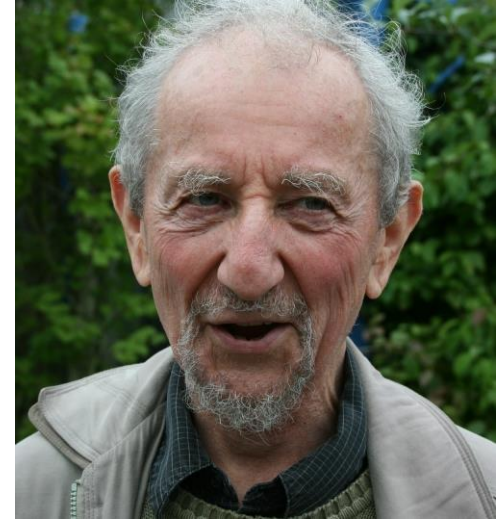
Disruptive research: tactics and strategies

1. Using the data in a data rich system to argue back
 - challenging interpretations and/or the data's fitness for purpose
2. Making visible the differences between professional knowledge gained at first hand, and policy and research knowledge created at a distance
 - identifying “knowledge gaps” not recognised in the system
 - making these the focus for new (co-partnered) research
3. Reinventing more democratic means of defining what matters in education, for whom, and why
4. Remembering and revisiting how to use research for democratic purposes

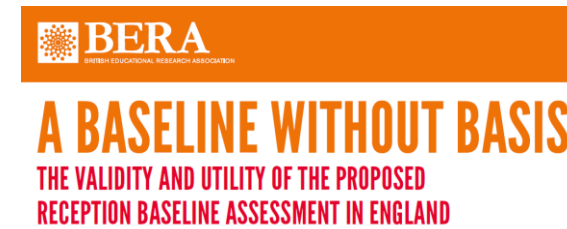
Researching the drawbacks to test-driven accountability systems in (English) education

1. What's wrong with the English test architecture from a technical and political perspective
 - **A BASELINE WITHOUT BASIS**: The validity and utility of the proposed reception baseline assessment in England.

2. A proposal to re-engineer a more productive and deliberative relationship between research, policy and practice
 - **HIGH STANDARDS, NOT HIGH STAKES**. An alternative to SATs that will transform England's testing & school accountability system in primary education & beyond



Harvey Goldstein



A proposal to replace SATs (primary school tests):

1. **A longitudinal national sample**, collecting data on how learning develops over time
2. **Use of assessment and survey data in combination** to provide a better understanding of contextual issues that impact on children's learning
3. **Schools and communities** able to suggest topics to explore
4. **Data to support system improvement**, with national reports to aid system monitoring and identify where resources are needed
5. **Research-informed inspection** alert to place-based differences
6. **A bank of national assessment instruments** that schools can use to map children's progress and report to parents
7. **A new organisation to implement the system** acting independently of government and reporting direct to parliament

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