

*Editorial*

## **Education: A Journal for Its Time**

**James Albright**

*Founding Editor-in-Chief*, Educational Research Institute, Newcastle (ERIN), School of Education, Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia; E-Mail: James.Albright@newcastle.edu.au

*Received: 4 February 2011 / Published: 10 February 2011*

---

On the face of it, contemporary educational research is significantly different in order and kind from the period after WWII when the esteemed American education psychologist, Harold H. Abelson (1948) [1], wrote his essay, “The Role of Educational Research in a Democracy.” The current conditions under which educational researchers labor foreground national and global challenges are quite unlike those he outlined in that heady post war period just prior to its descent into the Cold War. Since Abelson’s progressive reading of the upward arch of the first half of the Twentieth Century’s educational research history, unprecedented global movements of people, money and ideas, revolutionary and expanding modes of communication, and expeditious growth in knowledge production and dissemination have broadened and complicated educational research, let alone practice and policy. Abelson looked ahead in optimism to a period of American democratic mass education informed by ethical methodologically rigorous research. Today, educational researchers must address issues and problems still within national frameworks but also in increasingly globalised contexts. The pace and demands on research are significantly greater. And, contemporary educational researchers are likely mindful of how and why much of Abelson’s promising vision is left undone.

While, more than 60 years on, Abelson’s faith in educational research’s contribution to the “march toward democracy” may quite understandably elicit skepticism, it is my hope that the inauguration of this new journal, *Education*, reinvests in some small measure significant elements of his appeal. Abelson’s democracy is a Deweyan construct reflecting his own personal and professional history at Teachers College, Columbia University.

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience. The extension into space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. [2]

Abelson wrote, “Education is a crucial weapon in the struggle towards democracy”, but also wisely advised that not just any kind of education and not just any kind of educational research was required. Wary of research that is the “servant” of some ‘predetermined program, our journal also seeks to publish research that reflects genuine inquiry willing to question unexamined education practices and thinking. Like Abelson, *Education’s* editorial board is aware of the “shifting interests, methods and postulates” that mark the history of the field. Similarly, we share his concern about the effect of the proliferation of “small, inconclusive and nondefinitive studies,” the lack of verticality in building on earlier research and scholarship, and a resurgent instrumental logic with the field. Additionally, acknowledging too the “relatively disorganized pattern” of educational research, its generally inadequate funding, and the need to continue to build professional research capacity while developing innovative and timely research programs, *Education’s* goal is to be a scholarly international journal committed to publishing high quality extended full-length research papers that have the scope to substantively address current issues across the entire field of education. Since Abelson’s essay, what constitutes educational enquiry has been greatly broadened. As educational researchers we inquire into an expanded interdisciplinary spectrum of educational problems, framed quantitative, qualitative, or mixed; basic or applied; and descriptive or analytical. Educational problems may be framed as cognitive, philosophical, psychometric, evaluative, curricular, methodological, administrative, sociological, political, historical, *etc.*

In 1948, Abelson was unlikely to predict some of the internal methodological debates that have shaped educational research in the intervening years. And he would likely be surprised by recent statist interest and control in the legitimacy and quality of education research. Abelson understood that education intrinsically normative “connected to notions of human excellence, of the kind of society we want to build, of the forms of human engagement and activity...” [3]. Loosely paraphrasing Bourdieu, educational research is a science like any other, a social practice constructed only in part by the phenomena in question [4].

*Education* will attempt to embrace the field. This journal seeks substantive and lively questioning and analysis. Submissions that synthesize information from disparate backgrounds, place research findings within a broad context, extend our methodological and theoretical understanding, and have the likelihood of informing education policy and practice, are preferred. The journal will publish quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research papers. Extended reviews of substantive research studies and/or technical reports published elsewhere are also welcome. Additionally, *Education* invites commentaries and original opinion pieces and/or analysis of issues and events of concern to education scholars that have international resonance. Its quality may be judged on both technical/methodological and contribution to knowledge factors.

*Education’s* editorship is located in the offices of Newcastle University’s Educational Research Institute Newcastle (ERIN). ERIN provides a productive research environment where leading scholars conduct streams of research that have high national and international impact. ERIN strives to be an instrument of change to advance educational practice, to create inclusive and equitable learning environments and to enhance educational outcomes for diverse learners. Our Institute facilitates collaborative research across disciplines and countries as well as with policy makers and practitioners. ERIN nurtures new researchers to become leading investigators in the field. While attending closely to national and international priorities, ERIN also develops innovative lines of educational inquiry. ERIN

pursues systematic and sustainable research and development, and delivers evidence-based solutions.

Since Abelson's essay, professional outlets for educational research have mushroomed and begs the question, why yet another education journal? Australia, as do an increasing number of countries, has a national system of assessing the quality of university research. The benchmarking of scholarly output may have the effect of narrowing the form and focus of the production of new knowledge. Characterized as part of a broader set of moves toward accountability in the public sector, these measures may run counter to "a serious research culture (that) should include and nurture a wide range of activity, from bluesky and fundamental, so-called 'pure' research; to activity focused on particular more accessible parts of the big agenda, or activity that is trying to solve a problem in the field as commissioned by someone else" [5]. National systems of journal ranking, which includes conference presentations, may also have the unintended consequence of impoverishing the range of options open to research publishing. As a new alternative to conventional journals within educational research, *Education* encourages researchers to publish in as much detail as possible. Journal size limits too often make research accounts contextually or methodologically comprehensible. Full monograph length reports will provide a level of detail and explication unbound elsewhere. Additionally, the affordances of the variety of modalities made possible through electronic publishing, including the use of audio, video, complex or dynamic graphic displays, interactive sessions, performances, and other means to improve the communication of scholarly work should be utilized. Features may be presented as a single article or in serial form.

Harold Abelson understood that educational research is not a neutral technical exercise. 'It is invariably a deeply ethical, political and cultural one bound up with ideas about the good society and how life can be worthwhile' [6]. It is within this spirit that *Education* will strive to publish timely and significant educational research papers and commentary with *the cohesion and convincingness and rigour of the often-complex argument* [3].

## References and Notes

1. Abelson, H.H. The role of educational research in a democracy. *J. Educ. Sociol.* **1948**, *21*, 454-461.
2. Dewey, J. *Democracy and Education*; Free Press: New York, NY, USA, 1916/1944.
3. Gay, L.R. *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*, 2nd ed.; Charles, E., Ed.; Merrill Publishing: Columbus, OH, USA, 1981.
4. Goodyear, P. What does international excellence in educational research look like? Presented at AARE Annual Conference, University of Western Sydney, Penrith, Australia, 30 November 2005.
5. Phillips, D.C. The contested nature of educational research. *J. Philos. Educ.* **2005**, *39*, 577-597.
6. Winch, C.; Gingell, J. *Philosophy and Educational Policy: A Critical Introduction*; Routledge: London, UK, 2006.