

Editorial 2024

Re-engaging theory, rethinking policy, reanimating practice

A brief history of Research in Education

Research in Education celebrates its 55th year, having been in continuous publication since 1969. Over this period it has changed shape, appearance, and editorial makeup many times and with each iteration the Journal has sought to reflect the needs and interests of the education community to which it speaks. In this editorial we wish both to reflect back on the enormous contribution that many before us have made but also clearly articulate the changed direction that Research in Education seeks to take under its new editorial board.

Research in Education was founded by H.J. Butcher, Professor of Higher Education, and H. Hoyle, Lecturer in Educational Sociology, both at the University of Manchester and, in fact, for the first twelve years all the editors were drawn exclusively from that institution, including Tony Edwards, Jim Rushton, Thomas Christie, Frank Musgrove, and David Hargreaves. In 1981, however, Ivan Reid took up the mantle as the first editor from outside of the University of Manchester and was, over the years, joined by Hilary Constable, Roy Griffiths and David Hustler. As the longest serving editor, Ivan Reid offered his valedictory editorial in 2016 following 25 years and a considerable contribution in shaping and maintaining the journal over that period.

In 1993, Research in Education changed its name to add the subtitle: 'An interdisciplinary, International Research Journal'. In doing so it sought to make explicit its evolution from a largely domestic journal with a focus on psychology and sociology of education to a publication more varied in content and global in scope. This has since been reflected, over the years, both in the diversity of authorship but also the Editorial Board which currently reflects thirteen countries from around the world. Thirty years on, we again announce a change in the name in order to signal a shift in focus for the journal.

A manifesto for RiE:

As of Issue 96, published in 2016, the Journal modified its name to Research in Education: Theory, Policy and Practice. These keywords offer an invitation for researchers to submit work that explicitly engages with education as it appears in and through at least one of these domains. For instance, we are interested in research that asks questions about the constitutive role of these domains. What do policy, theory and/or practice do to manifest education and its research? How is education made? Additionally, we invite more critically-oriented questions that address concerns over the roles of theory, policy and/or practice in making education and educational research. What are the limits of practice, theory and/or policy in making education? For instance, if we understand education as a culturally specific phenomenon, what obstacles appear for a multi-cultural theory of education, or a theory that purports to be universal, thus acultural?

We are also keenly aware of the changing contexts of education and education research as our new editorship begins. Teachers and teacher education have become a focal point for education reforms promoted by governments internationally, often to the detriment of both in consideration of the closures of teacher education programmes that do not follow government directives and the firing of teachers on the basis of poor student achievement, a firing justified by educational research that misuses statistical correlations to link student achievement with teacher performance.¹ In this problematic alone we encounter the weaving of practice, theory and policy: policy endorses practices of teachers and teacher educators to raise student achievement based in part on theories of pedagogy that reduce education to the efficient delivery of curricula.

Additionally, education policy research is undergoing a change in focus that is similar in magnitude to the changes it witnessed with the rise of critical policy studies. This paradigmatic shift emerged as developments in poststructural and critical theory gave rise to concerns about the technocratic assumptions of education policy and research. More recently, we notice a proliferation of indigenous, rhetorical, psychoanalytic, post-critical, new materialist and other contemporary theories questioning the instrumental assumptions of education policy and research in both technocratic and critical approaches and thereby rethinking the nature, limits, and possibilities of policy.

Educational theory too involves questioning the foundations of education as well as recognising their absence. This doesn't necessarily have to – though it may – entail engaging with 'high theory', for instance Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge, discourse or governmentality, Bourdieusian notions of habitus, field and capital, or Butlerian ideas of performativity, heteronormativity, or grievable life. What it does require is an element of awareness and reflexivity about the working assumptions and assertions operating in any piece of research and a willingness to subject these assumptions and assertions to scrutiny, rather than assuming them to be given, natural or obvious. This reflexive theorising can, and perhaps should, involve questioning notions that we typically take to comprise the very fabric of education and educational research. Critically, scholars are questioning the status of learning in and as education, as well as whether and why education serves the purposes of remediation, redemption, restitution and repair of society and/or the person. These critical analyses extend beyond epistemological concerns to question the ontological and teleological limits and qualities of education and as such require an ongoing re-engagement with theory.

Practice is perhaps the most complex of our terms. Its meaning ranges from polemics that set practice explicitly against theory and policy, to naming the entirety of education under which both theory and policy are themselves sets of practices. Practice encompasses the work done in schools by teachers, students, and administrators, as well as the methods and activities that comprise education research. The boundaries of policy and its subjects are blurred by practice,

¹ See, for instance, Carusi, F. T. (2022). Refusing Teachers and the Politics of Instrumentalism in Educational Policy. *Educational Theory*, 72(3), 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12537> and Simpson, A. (2018). Princesses are bigger than elephants: Effect size as a category error in evidence-based education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(5), 897–913. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3474>.

as recent research on policy enactment shows. The everyday practices of education that are singular and without prescriptions may serve as a guide for the research we hope to publish here. Methodologies and methods suggest routes for thinking and organizing research, but they do not determine the practices under consideration. Standardised forms of research that proceed according to formulaic subheadings attempt, always unsuccessfully, to efface the contingencies of practice. We are seeking research that attends to these contingencies and recognizes everyday practices in their singularity.

We understand the terms theory, policy and practice as representative of what we are sometimes hopeful about and occasionally disappointed by in education. We wish *Research in Education* to host articles and special issues that push us to remain perpetually uncomfortable with education and invite us to continue to ask probing questions as to its nature, scope and purpose.

In recognition of the contribution that Professor Ivan Reid made to the Journal over so many years, we are delighted to announce the Ivan Reid Prize for Best Paper in Research in Education, which will be awarded annually at the beginning of each calendar year. Nominations can be put forward by members of the Editorial Board and will be judged by the Editors.

- Award details:
 - Freely available for a year
 - Featured on RiE homepage
 - Certificate

The 2024 Ivan Reid Prize for Best Paper in Research in Education is awarded to [Noah Romero](#), [Marta Estellés](#), and [Wairehu Grant](#) for their paper entitled:

[Theorizing Māori-Philippine solidarities through agential realism and punk rock pedagogy](#)

As a reader of *Research in Education*, you can help with the direction of the Journal in three ways. First, if you are doing work that is thematically oriented toward theory, policy, and practice in some of the broad directions that we have made above, *you can submit your work for review!* Second, if you have a background in education research that you think could foster some of the conversations *Research in Education* is looking to manifest, *you can review for us!* Just email any of the editors to let us know your interest in reviewing and areas of expertise. Finally, if you are working on an area of educational theory, policy, and practice which you feel could benefit from more thorough critical and collective interrogation, then we *welcome suggestions for Special Issues*.