

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT IN BRITAIN 1970-1980

Edited by Louis Cohen, John Thomas
and Lawrence Manion

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Educational Research and Development in Britain 1970–1980

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Introduction

It is now almost a decade since the third and what was to become the final volume of *Educational Research in Britain*, edited by John Butcher and Harry Pont, was published. That these three volumes were for so long important and valued sources of reference and consultation for tutors, teachers, students and researchers alike is sufficient testimony to the many and varied needs they met during the early seventies. Indeed, it has been their usefulness to the present editors in their endeavours over the years that has resulted in the current review. The period leading up to the publication of the trilogy had witnessed a considerable proliferation of educational research in this country, so much so that a great deal of the then current work was known only to workers in their own particular fields. Butcher and Pont's original aim was thus to provide a continuing summary of educational research from year to year in order to keep abreast of developments and at the same time meet a recurring need of researchers and other interested parties for information on their specialist and related interests. Sadly, this aim was not to be achieved and in presenting this current review of educational research in Britain since 1970 we are endeavouring to fulfill their intention.

The unprecedented growth of educational research that was such a significant feature of the 1960s and prompted the publication of the three volumes of *Educational Research in Britain* continued to gather momentum in the 1970s, if at times a little fitfully in some areas. That the original restrictive brief given to our contributors in terms of pages and references had in many cases to be reluctantly exceeded eloquently testifies to the numbers of studies and projects undertaken during these years. Correspondingly, the needs of those who thrive on the findings of educational research grew apace also: professional researchers, those pursuing higher degrees in education, teachers on in-service courses, and students in initial training avidly seeking out evidence to flesh out their college projects and school-based assignments. As any one of these people knows, often learning the point retrospectively, the specific need is for a conspectus indicating the main issues in a given area, the problems as currently perceived, the points of contention and the significant recent findings to which he can refer. Not only does such a framework provide a context and offer a sense of direction, thus giving confidence to the experienced and inexperienced alike, it has the added advantage of saving time — a commodity at a high premium for most people in today's helter-skelter world. The general aim of the present volume then is to provide comparatively short and accessible accounts of the more important research studies and developmental projects that took place in the major

areas of education in the 1970s, principally to meet the basic needs of those working in the field of educational research for whatever purpose.

A particular group of individuals whom we hope the present collection of articles will assist are those students attempting their first piece of research. The problems confronting them which Butcher and Pont identified in the Introduction to Volume 1 of *Educational Research in Britain* are of a perennial nature and the editors' original comments are as pertinent now as when they were first written in 1968:

Before deciding upon a topic, they need to have a general idea of what work has been done; and it is by no means easy to obtain access to the breadth of information required. Our experience in supervising a large number of research students in education suggests that this is by far the most difficult stage. Once the topic is firmly and sensibly fixed, its scope limited and an experimental design decided upon, the battle is half won.

Before this can be done, the student must make himself familiar with a considerable literature. The difficulty of this task, even to an intelligent and highly motivated person with access to well-stocked libraries, is usually underrated. To search through the possibly relevant journals and other publications has become a much more difficult undertaking.

The subsequent appearance in the course of the decade to follow of additional educational journals such as *British Journal of Teacher Education* and *British Journal of Sociology of Education* to swell the existing number of professional publications to which Butcher and Pont make reference has made this quest even more daunting for the inexperienced. Our specific aim with respect to those starting out on educational research, then, is identical with Butcher and Pont's — 'not to save the student the trouble of reading the original papers, but to help, guide and evaluate, and especially to cover a wide variety of topics within one volume'.

The coverage in the present volume is extensive and the topics included offer a reasonably comprehensive and, we hope, balanced review of most of the more important areas of education in the seventies. This would seem to be necessary in view of the fact that the book is likely to be a one-off production, with no sequel being envisaged, at least in the short-term. In order to systematize the collection as far as is possible with such a wide-ranging assortment, we have arranged the topics into four broad clusters: the disciplines of education, the educational system, the practice of teaching, and issues in education. Even in a book of the present dimensions, however, it has not been possible to include all the topics we had originally proposed in our initial editorial meetings. Areas were thus included or excluded according to agreed criteria of centrality or topicality.

By the disciplines of education we mean those subjects contributing to the formal and professional study of education as understood in universities, polytechnics, and colleges of higher education. These will consist chiefly of established areas but will also include newer disciplines like the politics of education and the economics of education. Contributions covering the educational system will deal with the administrative aspects, including the provision for education in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as supportive services like counselling and

pastoral care and the educational psychological services. Recurrent education in Britain, another newcomer to the scene, is also included in this group. The practice of teaching examines research undertaken on the teaching of particular age groups as well as on the teaching of individual subjects in the school curriculum. The research reviewed in these articles is particularly wide-ranging in its aims and methods. Issues in education presents a more heterogeneous and arbitrary collection of subjects drawn in the main from topical concerns. Games and simulations in education is the newest arrival among this assemblage.

A word about presentation and style. The articles making up the complete collection are presented without commentary by the editors. In this respect we have adopted the policy of Butcher and Pont, and for the same reason — that it is now, as then, much too difficult for individuals to have more than a passing acquaintance with the ever-developing areas of educational research, other than their own, that are represented in this volume. Only in this brief editorial introduction in which we set out our broad purpose in producing this collection do we allow ourselves the liberty of identifying trends and interesting developments in selected areas. In this way, then, the authors of the articles speak directly to the reader. Our brief to the authors as regards actual style was minimal and therefore the articles in this respect are as diverse and varied as the topics themselves. Nevertheless, we hope that the language used will be sufficiently clear and intelligible to reduce the occasions for knitted brows to a minimum. Indeed, although the reviews are addressed primarily to professional educators and researchers of one sort or another, their comprehensibility should bring them within easy reach of others working in the sphere of education and possibly the informed general reader as well. For ease of reference, each article concludes with its own bibliography, unlike the original Butcher and Pont series, where bibliographies were presented collectively at the conclusion of each volume. Originally, we had hoped that each contributor would confine the number of references in his or her article to about 20. However, this figure proved to be unrealistically low for many areas and our plans of achieving fairly standardized bibliographies went hopelessly awry.

In using the term *educational research* in the title of this volume, we imply the broadest of connotations. This can make for difficulties, of course, but as editors we felt that although the term in the sense we are using it lacks precision, it at least gives us a convenient organizing focus. The term will thus not only cover the numerous activities normally associated with empirical research, such as rigorous experiments, surveys and clinical studies, but also school-based investigations of a more practical kind as in Schools Council projects together with advancements of a theoretical, speculative or abstract nature. It was our original intention to confine contributors to reviews of exclusively *British* research. In so doing we betrayed our own naiveté in not taking into account the inescapably international character of some disciplines and their research base. Child development and statistical methods are striking examples of this. Otherwise it has been possible to give the bulk of the contributions a distinctly national flavour.

Although from an educationalist's point of view not the most stable or constructive of periods, the 1970s will probably be judged by historians as one of the most eventful decades in recent educational history. The move to introduce comprehensive education, for example, continued, if neither uniformly

nor consistently, against a mixed chorus of yeas and nays from the population at large. Changing perceptions of the nature and purpose of the school resulted in new approaches to the curriculum. Hand in hand with comprehensivization came the introduction of mixed-ability teaching and the challenges it offered to the imaginative and resourceful teacher. There was a growing awareness of the educational needs of ethnic minority pupils along with disturbing reminders of the social consequences of not meeting them. Developments in the provision for the education of the mentally handicapped that Butcher and Pont identified as a significant feature of the 1960s continued against a background of growing social awareness of the plight of the handicapped generally. The use of language in education became an important focus of attention and its role in teaching and learning across the curriculum, barely acknowledged earlier, began to attract the interest of the researchers. The technological age continued to make its presence felt in education with the increasing use of computer hardware in educational research and selected subjects in the school curriculum. On a more negative note, the increasingly stringent economic climate affected educational resources and provision across the whole spectrum of education, shock waves being felt particularly in the job market. The impact of falling school rolls devastated the teacher education sector with the ensuing closure of colleges and mergers between institutions. It is against this somewhat volatile background that the researches reviewed in this volume were conducted, some indeed into the very features noted above. To conclude this introduction we touch briefly on trends and points of interest in a selection of the articles that are to follow.

Inter alia, Aspin's comprehensive review of philosophy of education raises the fundamental question, 'What counts as philosophy of education?' Increasing interest in moral and political philosophy and in the 'hard' issues with which they grapple have important implications for advances in the philosophy of education.

Dent's review of the history of education in the seventies, though regretting its diminished contribution to teacher education, points to the positive gains – the increased awareness of historians to the implications of their work and the way the subject has overcome its insularity. Brown, writing on the psychology of education, refers to two significant publications that appeared in 1978 – the *British Ability Scales* and the Warnock Report. Reviewing work in the area of child development, Fontana justifies the continued attention of psychologists on the early years of life with a systematic account of the significant research on this period in the life cycle. He also refers to studies indicating a need for further appraisal of Piaget's work. In her overview of developments in the sociology of education, Banks carefully maps out the changing emphases and methods that were such a feature of the seventies and includes reference to the 'new' sociology of education and the neo-Marxist influence. She also shows how, more recently, the impact of women's studies and the concept of gender have challenged the earlier preoccupation with social class. Writing on comparative education, Raggatt recounts a major study initiated in 1970, a three-year, five-nation investigation of the social and educational consequences of rapidly increasing enrolments in the 16–20 age group. Whitaker, in the article on politics of education, highlights the voluminous research into decision-

making at the local level; and in reviewing research in another comparatively new area, the economics of education, Hough identifies the major advances in the discipline and shows how in the latter part of the decade educational policy became increasingly to be dominated by economic considerations. Preston's account of curriculum theory relates the principal curriculum development researches of the period under consideration and refers to seminal studies that dominated discussion throughout it. A major rethinking of the nature of special education during the past decade is identified in Gulliford's chapter. Writing on statistical methods in education, Selkirk refers to the techniques of multivariate analysis that have been adopted by researchers and also to the impact that the computer has had on educational research since 1970.

Turning to contributors on the educational system, Cherrington sees a great need for continuing research into the cognitive capacities of pre-school children despite the advances that have been made in this area over the past decade and the effects that such advances have had in curriculum developments in the pre-school education sector. Two interesting trends emerge in Blyth and Clayfield's account of primary education – the revival of political interest in primary education and classroom processes as a research focus. Dancy, reviewing developments in secondary education, writes on secondary reorganization and the 'Great Debate' of the late seventies, among other notable features. Despite the many books, monographs, articles and discussion documents in the field of further and higher education, Roberts and Cantor note the limited number of empirical studies, especially at the institutional level, that have come to fruition or made continued impact during the period under review. Writing on adult education in the period, Stephens draws attention to the increasing number of initiatives in the area, a significant one being the establishment of a Centre for Research into the Education of Adults. Specific issues identified by Webster in his account of education in Wales include the problems of bilingualism and language teaching and also the problems for rural education caused by continuing depopulation and the falling birth rate. As well as identifying major initiatives during the decade, Grant points to several serious omissions in the provision of education in Scotland. Fulton's contribution on education in Northern Ireland notes an enormous increase in educational research projects during the seventies compared with the preceding twenty-five years. Writing about teacher education, Thomas concentrates on the system and its history. The article identifies significant contributions to the literature and includes a discussion of the James Report. In describing the work of counselling and pastoral care, Hamblin identifies a number of problems and difficulties, including the counselling of inarticulate, unmotivated and disadvantaged pupils. He subsequently goes on to clarify the confusion surrounding the concept of pastoral care. Writing on recurrent education in Britain, Cantor notes that the mid-seventies witnessed the beginnings of the first substantial British literature in the area. Among key issues he later discusses is one of increasing topicality, recurrent education for those in retirement. Finally, Wedell writing on the educational psychological services discusses the effects of Local Government reorganization in 1974 on the services and identifies the trend away from solving children's problems by removing them from the setting where the problems manifested themselves.

The particular problems facing mathematics teachers in the seventies are discussed by Selkirk. Secondary teachers especially had to confront problems associated with syllabus content, teaching methods and organization. An emerging problem for them stems from the introduction of calculators and micro-computers into school studies. An underlying theme in developments in English teaching identified by King has been the search for flexibility of practice and a concern with the role of language in contributing to personal growth. Hodgkinson identifies factors influencing the emergence during the seventies of new approaches to presenting history in schools. He goes on to show how research was to play a significant part in this transition. Concerned with reviewing the reconstruction of another subject is Bailey in his article on geography teaching. Starting in the universities in the mid-sixties, the new geography spread through the schools in the ensuing years. In his article on modern language teaching, Rothera shows how during the decade the learner and his needs have been the chief focus of interest and how this has influenced both the theory and practice of teaching. Eggleston's contribution on the teaching of art and design stresses the range of approaches to art and design teaching that the decade witnessed and the importance of the relationship between teacher and student.

As Day explains in his review of religious education teaching, work in the 1970s was influenced by three concerns: the content of religious education teaching; the style, approach and intention; and the role of the church and Christianity in the educational system. In writing on the teaching of the physical sciences during the period under scrutiny, Terry and Williams describe the pressures placed on science teachers by changing circumstances, the competing claims of alternative versions of their subject, the examination debate, and the integration of the sciences. Ayres, writing on the teaching of the biological sciences, sees the clarification of aims and values inherent in biology teaching as one of the important outcomes of the period. A particular feature of music education in the seventies identified by Manion was the growing awareness of the musical needs of the non-specialist pupil together with the emerging strategies of music educators to meet them. The paucity of research into the teaching of physical education is a major revelation of Almond's review of the field. And finally in this domain of school subjects, McKenzie writing on home economics, assesses the impact of factors such as social change, increased wealth and improved technology on the teaching of the subject.

Finally, issues in education. Of the many issues presently concerning educational researchers, Sockett contends that accountability surely has the highest political profile. It's arguable however that Craft's topic, multicultural education, might not currently pip Sockett at the post. Cohen writing on research methods in education describes the emergence of a competing perspective to the established traditional view dominating the social sciences. Wragg, reviewing research on teacher education, points to the unevenness of studies in this area: some topics are researched consistently; others, not at all. Johnson's account of research into home/school relations discusses three main themes – reciprocal partnerships, educational disadvantage and parental rights. Beswick, reviewing school libraries and resources, discusses resources for learning, school library resource centres and the impact of the Bullock Report. A comparatively new

area, games and simulation in education is reviewed by van Ments who traces its rapid and widespread development in a short period of time. Kerry, in his article on mixed-ability teaching, stresses the point that mixed-ability teaching is an advanced teaching skill. The teaching of reading during the seventies is covered by Roberts who outlines the important and significant work done in all the major areas connected with the skill. Writing on moral education, May identifies a growing need expressed by adults and pupils alike for the subject to become an established part of the school curriculum.

It only remains for us as editors to thank our contributors sincerely for their work and, on their behalf, to acknowledge the secretarial assistance that they received in preparing their manuscripts.

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