

The New Educational Research Journal: When Madness Inspires and Reason Writes

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André Gide once wrote, “Les choses les plus belles sont celles que scouffle la folie et qu’écrit raison.” (The most beautiful things are those that madness inspires and reason writes.) When you took this issue of the Educational Research Journal (ERJ) out of the mailbox, you probably noticed that you were holding something different, something that qualifies to be called, if you agree with me, one of “les choses les plus belles.” The new cover design in appealingly violet blue fading into bluish white with the forceful ERJ emerging assertively is just the beginning. This is the first issue that the ERJ of the Hong Kong Educational Research Association becomes a joint publication of the Association and the Hong Kong Institute of Educational Research (HKIER). As editor of the ERJ, I am extremely excited about changes that are happening with the journal, especially after the long delay in the publication of this issue. The story that propelled the old ERJ into this new ERJ revealed perhaps the work of “madness” and of “reason.”

When Madness Inspires (or Strikes)

The Association was founded in 1983, and started publishing its first issue of the ERJ in 1986. The tradition of an annual issue has continued up to 1995. Serving as a major outlet of educational research publications in

Hong Kong, the ERJ has enjoyed unrivaled prestige, as it continuously pledges to realize the Association's ambitious mandate of presenting the best of educational research and review of educational activities of practitioners and researchers in Hong Kong. During these years, the ERJ, unlike other education journals of the time, has been known to champion the publication of empirical investigations using quantitative methods and statistical procedures.

When I succeeded Dr. Peter T. K. Tam and Dr. L. F. Lo as editor of the ERJ in 1994, there was burgeoning interest in local educational research and practice. Correspondingly, there was a parallel development of new education journals to meet the rising needs of publication of local research and practice activities. The proliferation of local education and education-related journals has continued even up to the present day. Visionary editors of these journals, with few exceptions, have all vowed to steer their journals into international waters, and raised their journals to become reputable Asian Pacific or international journals in education and educational research. In this connection, I strongly suspect that "Hong Kong" is purposely omitted from the titles of these journals to avoid the impression that these journals are local or regional publications. That is perhaps why we did not name the ERJ as HKERJ, following our counterparts in the U.S. (AERJ) or in the U.K. (BERJ). Interestingly, in sharp contrast, nearly all institutes of higher learning in Hong Kong, including institutes for adult and distance learning and teacher training, maintain to include "Hong Kong" in their names.

Struck or inspired by madness to go international, once I took up the editorship of the ERJ, I vowed to increase its visibility by publishing twice a year instead of annually, to give equal preference in the publication of quantitative and qualitative studies, to invite submission of papers from local as well as overseas scholars, and to tighten further the rigorous blind review process. Supported by the associate editors and members of the editorial committee, I have managed to survive publishing a total of six issues, two annual and four biannual issues. Even though we drew little clerical support from the Association, the publication costs of the ERJ have

multiplied over the years, as the publisher raised the production costs each year. With biannual issues in the recent two years, the Association has plunged into financial hardship, and the continuous publication of future issues had to depend on whether a sponsor could be readily located. Words have even spread that if we were not able to publish the last issue of the 1997 ERJ in time, the Association has not set aside funds and might not be financially capable of paying the publisher.

Working behind schedule as well as with the trepidation that I might be editing the last issue of the ERJ for the Association, I was more than happy to see the 1997 December issue in print, though behind schedule. The editorial team was somewhat unhappy about the “irreducible” typographical errors and misprints that have escaped our scrutiny in proofreading. These errors have been kept down to a minimum since the production team has resorted to working with disk copies of manuscripts. While we felt that we could rest assured that these errors were minor and tolerable, we were reminded that a serious error has been committed in the history of the ERJ in reproducing an unedited invited speech in its entirety, an area that was perceived to be least likely for errors to occur.

After receiving a copy of the issue, Professor Francisco O. Ramirez of Stanford University wrote that he had spotted a serious mistake in our reproducing in the journal his keynote address in our annual conference—“Why compel schooling: Historical legacy and contemporary issues.” A page in his original manuscript was not reproduced, and evidently the missing page was not being scanned to be included in the production, resulting in an “embarrassingly incoherent” paragraph. I share entirely his feeling of being “extremely frustrating and professionally annoying,” and have to agree that this “serious proofreading error on your (the editor’s) part” could be avoided “had proofs been sent to me (him).”

My initial reactions were to work up my ego-defenses of denial, displacement, blaming, scapegoating, and perhaps projection. Had we not trusted the technology of scanning even though the manuscript was to be reproduced unedited and in its entirety... Had we not left the task of scan-

ning to the production team of the publisher... Had the author sent a disk... Had my assistant read more carefully for content in proofreading... Despite that a long list of reasons could be generated, I have to remind myself not to employ blaming defenses on my overworked team members as an easy way out, knowing that such defenses are not constructive and errors have to be admitted and acknowledged. Interested readers of Professor Ramirez's article unfortunately have now to read the "errata" in this issue that testify to our "humanness" ("to error") and to Professor Ramirez's "divinity" ("to forgive").

When Reason Writes (or Dictates)

As "madness" slowly receded into the background, we started to look for a sponsor who would shoulder the publication costs, yet impose the least interference on the editorial policy and work of the ERJ. Among the contenders who showed initial interest, the HKIER has been most generous in offering an attractive package of five years of collaboration and financial support, with full clerical and editorial assistance. The reaching of the agreement between the Association and the HKIER has been a slow negotiation process. There were lingering doubts among some members of the Association regarding the ERJ's editorial autonomy from the HKIER, and such doubts needed to be carefully and firmly dispelled. There were also suggestions for a change of editorship. It has been reassuring that the ERJ editorship is increasingly valued and no longer looked upon as simply nothing more than a time-consuming job as when I was first drafted to serve the Association. Thanks to the great efforts of Dr. John Chi-kin Lee, the chairperson, and other members of the Executive Committee, the agreement finally came through. The collaboration salvages the ERJ in time, and allows it to continue, without too much interruption, to bring to you cutting edge information about educational research and practice locally and overseas.

Starting from this new ERJ issue, I am happy to introduce our new Executive Editor Ms Carmen Leung. She and her team will handle all day-

to-day correspondence regarding manuscript submission and review, follow up on the review process carefully, and work closely with the production team of the printing office. With their assistance, I trust that we can now keep the interval between submission and publication as short as possible, and can publish on schedule. In our editorial committee, apart from Mr. Paul Sze and Dr. Hong-kwong Chow, we have three new members. Dr. David K. K. Chan of the City University of Hong Kong will assume the role of book review editor; Dr. Esther S. C. Ho of the Chinese University of Hong Kong with expertise in multilevel and multivariate analysis will help strengthen our review on articles using quantitative methods; and Dr. S. C. Yeung also of the Chinese University of Hong Kong with expertise in historical and anthropological research procedures will help strengthen our review on articles using qualitative methods. As they are all new to the ERJ editorial committee, their work may not be reflected in this issue, but will certainly help make a difference in our future issues.

With the new ERJ, our editorial policy remains unchanged. The Association's vision, in conjunction with the HKIER, is to reach as many teachers and educators as possible, to inform them of advances in educational research and practice, and to ask them to participate in the advancement of the field of educational research. The goal is to make the ERJ truly interdisciplinary and international. Our note for contributors has been slightly modified, to take into account omissions cited in the *Handbook of Contribution Guidelines for Academic Journals in Education* published in 1997 by the Hong Kong Institute of Education. Specifically, we have specified that manuscripts should be typewritten with double spacing in A4 size paper and of length not more than 7,000 words. Disk copies are now required once the manuscript is accepted for publication.

Apart from the changes in the front cover, the physical size of the journal has been reduced, the page format has also changed from two columns to one column, and the font size and type are also different. All this will make the ERJ easier to read. The table of contents will now appear on the back cover as well as inside, to make it even easier to see what is new in

every issue of the ERJ. The ERJ will now truly be a biannual publication in Summer issue and Winter issue. Because of the delay in the publishing of this Summer issue, we do have some catching up to do for the Winter issue, and we intend that the two issues in 1998 will be published in close succession. I presume that by 1999, we will be publishing on schedule. Hopefully, what can be dreamed of can be achieved.

Incidentally, I start writing this editorial with a quote from André Gide about madness and reason, and would like to end it with another quote from the same writer to provide some visionary directions for contributors of future issues of the ERJ:

“Il faut demeurer entre les deux, tout près de la folie quand on rêve, tout près de la raison quand on écrit.” (We should stay between the two, close to madness when we dream, close to reason when we write.)