

The 25-Year Odyssey of Educational Research in Hong Kong: Introducing the Special Issue

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The field of education in Hong Kong, like any other disciplines or professions, is experiencing rapid changes in the past 25 years since the founding of the Hong Kong Educational Research Association. These changes are influenced by dramatic ideological, political, economic, and cultural shifts and by recent technological advances. A shift in the intellectual and cultural zeitgeist, for example, has made our traditional school and curriculum structure more vulnerable to challenges from education practitioners and parents, and has raised troubling questions about the need for a language policy and the value of holding on to a specific language as the medium of instruction in different ability groupings of students. In general, waves of education or school reform, and the resulting initiatives and measures, are intended to rise to meet these challenges, with the accompanying changes in learning environments engendered by other changes impacting the social and emotional development of students, such as the more recent bullying and substance abuse in school. Inevitably, educational research is fighting hard to catch up with empirical studies that could inform policy and practice.

The visionary goal of promoting educational research to establish a knowledge base to inform practice starting some 25 years ago received an impetus when our journal, the *Educational Research Journal (ERJ)*, to document these efforts started its first publication in 1986. For 8 years, the journal has been under the nurturance of T. K. Tam and L. F. Lo, and I take up editorship for the next 15 years up to the present. In the first issue under

Table 1 Distribution of the ERJ Articles in Nineteen Content Areas

Area	ERJ	
	(1986–2008)	%
Educational Policy	36	11.39
Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)	1	0.32
Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)	0	0.00
Chinese Language	33	10.44
English Language	12	3.80
Mathematics	10	3.16
Science and General Studies	15	4.75
Physical Education	9	2.85
Moral Education	2	0.63
Civic Education	4	1.27
Gifted Education	4	1.27
Learning Difficulties	2	0.63
Educational Trends and Leadership	17	5.38
Teacher Education	20	6.33
Classroom Research	23	7.28
Assessment and Learning	24	7.59
Thinking Skills	6	1.90
Information Communication and Technology in Education	16	5.06
Curriculum Studies	11	3.48
Unclassified	71	22.47
Total	316	100

Note. ERJ = *Educational Research Journal*

my editorship, I took stock of what we did in educational research in Hong Kong by surveying what had been published in the *ERJ* in the preceding 8 years. I categorized our *ERJ* publications in a number of content areas and commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the *ERJ* contributions by referring to the number of publications in each of these areas. I also drew up a Who's Who list of *ERJ* contributors to see whether certain research areas by specific researchers were more emphasized in *ERJ* publications. Fifteen years later, with a lot of changes, I think it must be of great interest to redo this survey for comparison. Therefore, I have done this similar exercise as an introduction to this special issue of reviewing educational research in the past 25 years in Hong Kong. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these results.

Table 1 categorizes our *ERJ* publications into 19 content areas. These are not the same content areas I used in 1994. I choose these areas for reasons that will soon become apparent as we talk about this special issue. Specifically, we published a total of 316 articles (excluding editorials) during the 23-year history of the *ERJ*. About 78% could be classified, and the largest proportions of publications are in the areas of educational policy and Chinese language, followed by assessment/learning and classroom research. Table 2 shows that these 316 articles, which are contributed by 346 authors and coauthors, are from 14 different countries or places (based on the addresses of the corresponding authors), and the majority (79%) of contributors are Hong Kong authors. While our collection of 316 articles touches on many important issues in educational research in Hong Kong, none of these articles has attempted to review research studies in any salient content areas. In this connection, there is a need for review articles on important areas marking milestones of educational research in Hong Kong.

This special issue on reviewing the milestones of 25 years of educational research in Hong Kong is initiated by the Association to mark its 25th anniversary. A guest editorial board that includes Amy S. Ha, John C. K. Lee, Winnie So, and K. C. Tang was first formed in an afternoon in June 2008, and I joined as the *ERJ* editor. We have deliberated and discussed on the salient content areas and ended up with 19 areas on which we would invite Hong Kong experts in the field to contribute their review papers. I have also used these same 19 areas in classifying our collection of 316 published articles in the *ERJ* because I think the classification results might be helpful when you read the review article of the specific content area in the special issue. Contributors are suggested to include the following in their reviews on the content areas specified for them.

- Major research ideas and concerns, international and local perspectives, with an emphasis on the recent development of knowledge and important findings in this research area, as derived from local educational inquiries within the past 25 years.
- Ongoing debates or controversial issues.
- Reflections on the current situation and on future development.
- View on how the quality and standard of research in this area can be advanced in future.

In the succeeding months, each member of the guest editorial board, together with our *ERJ* editorial office staff, has worked hard to send out invitations, to review as one of the two ad hoc reviewers of manuscripts, and to write his or her contribution that is reviewed by experts and other members of the board. Although we do have experts who choose not to accept our invitation to contribute, the general positive responses to our invitations are very encouraging. Consequently, we have more review papers that could be published in one issue, and we have to decide to publish these papers in this issue and the next issue. Because of the severe page limitation, and our intention to accommodate as many review papers as possible in the special issue, I have decided to introduce this special issue not with commentaries of each article, but with this simple note of general introduction. In this issue, we have included reviews on 25 years of research on English language, mathematics, physical education, gifted education, and curriculum studies, and the review on the special topic of classroom research. In the next issue, more review papers from the 19 content areas are to come. Meanwhile, we will invite you to tolerate some delightful uncertainties. As to the reviews in this issue, I trust that some of us will find that some of these reviews speak powerfully to us, and I hope that all of us will find a great deal to learn from these reviews.

Table 2 Distribution of ERJ Authors' Affiliation Locations

Location of <i>ERJ</i> Author Affiliation	<i>ERJ</i> (1986–2008)	%
Hong Kong	250	79.11
USA	16	5.06
Australia	11	3.48
Singapore	11	3.48
United Kingdom	6	1.90
Canada	5	1.58
Macau	5	1.58
Malaysia	4	1.27
Beijing	2	0.63
The Netherlands	2	0.63
New Zealand	1	0.32
Philippines	1	0.32
Turkey	1	0.32
West Indies	1	0.32
Total	316	100

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