

Editorial

Broad versus Narrow

As *ajer* enters its 47th year of publication, the perennial issue of eclecticism versus specialization again emerges. A perusal of educational resource databases such as ERIC, Ebscohost, and the NEOS catalogue, reveals that although many educational journals are published, comparatively few are based in Canada. Of those, fewer still are journals with an eclectic orientation. Given the growth and maturation of specific disciplines in education, is the age of eclectic scholarly educational journals approaching a natural conclusion in favor of specialized journals?

When *ajer* began in 1955, most faculties of education at Canadian universities were struggling to establish themselves, and those already extant were attempting to gain legitimacy in the larger university context. To this end, unlike the Normal Schools that they replaced, faculties of education encouraged staff to engage in research and to publish their findings. Eclectic educational journals emerged as appropriate vehicles by which scholars, usually at universities, could have their research published. Beyond this goal, *ajer* and other eclectic journals were also convenient forums for debating the merits of particular issues, philosophies, or positions. In this way scholarship in education became manifest not only to other educators, but also to the older disciplines of the universities. Moreover, eclectic educational journals became a convenient means by which professionals could gain a sense of what research was going on and in which directions it was heading.

As faculties of education expanded, specialized areas in education emerged and developed. In many instances individuals in such areas created "niche" journals that considered research methods, findings, and issues particular to that area. In this way scholars in the field might keep current with research relevant to their field without having to wade through a welter of articles in a more general journal, most of which might not be of interest. Is concentrating on specialized journals in one's own area primarily, as Voltaire's character Dr. Pangloss was wont to say, the "best of all possible worlds," or is it the educational equivalent of the Tower of Babel, where fields in education move away from rather than toward one another?

Although we believe that it is important for the well-informed scholar to read widely, the constraints of limited time often mean that we read what will be of greatest relevance to our specific area or interest. Although it is true that specialized journals are able to include articles on the more arcane aspects of a field, articles that might not be accepted in an eclectic journal because of their narrow focus, this feature has led to some specialized journals developing a "dark side." Some fields in education remain small. In consequence, scholars are often aware of the work and writing style of other publishing scholars in the field. As such, conflicts between persons can lead to prejudicial treatment of work believed to be that of an adversary, whether a "blind" review process is employed or not.

Occasionally, a particular view, epistemology, or even orthodoxy may predominate among the individuals who control a niche journal. For as long as the clique maintains control, the journal publishes articles that state the same basic principles and findings. Often this is accomplished by individuals within the chosen group writing articles that cite and are often complementary as well as complimentary to the work of others in the group. This happy state of affairs is maintained by never publishing any submissions that challenge the orthodoxy or that propose or even dare suggest something different. This "fool's paradise" is disturbed only when an outlet for such submissions is found elsewhere.

An example of this sort of disturbance is the work of Judy Cameron (a former Editor of *ajer*) and David Pierce (1994). By means of a meta-analysis, Cameron and Pierce challenged a long-held position regarding the effects of tangible reinforcement as a motivator. No specialized educational journal concerned with learning or motivation would accept the submission because it challenged a position that had been established more than a quarter of a century earlier (at least to the satisfaction of those in control of the specialized journals) that tangible reinforcement in education is a detrimental practice. Moreover, the method of inquiry Cameron and Pierce employed, meta-analysis, was often dismissed as not being a "genuine" or a "valid" research method. Again, such criticism enabled niche journals to exclude their work.

It was a well-known United States eclectic scholarly journal, *Review of Educational Research*, that ultimately published their research. In addition, that journal also served as a scholarly forum where opposing views and rebuttals were presented (Cameron & Pierce, 1996; Lepper, Keavney, & Drake, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 1996). Whatever position one favors in the debate is not important here. What is important is that the nature of eclectic journals makes them usually more open to publishing views that challenge a "tradition" or an orthodoxy than specialized journals.

In addition, where can new research methods be reported and discussed? Narrative inquiry, although not accepted universally as being in the pantheon of educational research methodologies, is nevertheless accepted in many quarters as a legitimate and rigorous means of educational inquiry. Specialized journals dedicated to purely quantitative research methods probably would reject works of narrative inquiry as mediocre writing at best and heretical fulmination at worst. Similar treatment would probably be meted out by journals that define research differently, but by equally narrow boundaries. Like other research methods adapted to education such as some postmodern approaches (Constas, 1998), narrative inquiry became known about primarily through articles in eclectic journals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Although specialized educational journals are important to enable a delving into the specifics of a field, they are not a replacement for eclectic educational journals. Indeed, it may be contended that they are needed more than ever to help prevent further fractionating in the discipline of education and to ensure that there is a forum for research that challenges tradition and orthodoxy.

George H. Buck

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