

Editorial

Milestones and Challenges: AJER's First 50 Years

This issue of the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* marks the 50th anniversary of this journal. Fifty years is insignificant in geological time, and even when considering the lifespan of a human being, 50 represents the middle to latter portion of life. Nevertheless, for a Canadian scholarly journal that is not funded through membership dues in an educational organization, *AJER's* survival is remarkable. In addition, the changes that have occurred in education not only in Alberta, but in Canada and beyond during the last 50 years are equally remarkable.

Although the Faculty of Education of the University of Alberta was 13 years old in 1955, it was comparatively small, and many of its faculty had been instructors in the provincial normal schools prior to their closing in 1945. The landscape of scholastic education was also in a tremendous state of flux, as the hundreds of small, rural one-room and two-room schools had been closing at a phenomenal rate. The small schools, with a single teacher responsible for teaching many grades simultaneously, were replaced by large centralized schools, usually located in towns and cities. Changes were also occurring in teacher preparation and related research. Whereas the tradition in normal schools had largely been the craft of teaching, the role of education in the university was much more than either preparing teachers in the manner of a trades apprentice or adopting innovations developed elsewhere. It was expected that in faculties of education all aspects of education would be examined, questioned, and researched, and that the findings of such research would not only inform practice, but would also advance knowledge. Indeed, in the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, research was considered to be on a par with teaching.

Herbert E. Smith, who was Dean in 1955 and was one of the first faculty hired by the University of Alberta for education (Buck, 1993) wrote, "Research and teaching are properly regarded as twins, mutually assisting, reinforcing and supplementing each other. Even in education, where research must frequently be the collection and collation of facts, this is undoubtedly true" (Smith, 1955, p. 6). Clearly, then, research was important at that time, but unless research is disseminated, it does little good outside of a small circle of influence. Although educational journals were being published in 1955, few were Canadian, and virtually none was particularly interested in research and developments in western Canada. The *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* provided a research outlet until then absent.

From its start *AJER* strove to be an eclectic scholarly journal. Submissions about all aspects of educational study were welcome, but these could not be mere opinion pieces without references or a clear methodology. Although the review process has been expanded and refined during the past 50 years, peer review has been a consistent policy for *AJER*. Rather than fostering a particular orthodoxy or reflecting the *Zeitgeist*, the commitment to peer review and eclecticism has had the effect of helping ensure that articles published in *AJER* not

only inform educational researchers and practitioners, but often push the boundaries of educational thought and practice.

From the perspective of 2005, one might believe that the initial articles published in *AJER* were either local in nature or arcane in relation to current issues. Such was not the case, and it is somewhat surprising that much of what was being researched and written about continues to be of importance in education today—and not only in Alberta. For example, the first issue included an article by Robert Kimmitt (1955) comparing the advantages and disadvantages of public and private ownership of school buses. With the demise of the rural one-room school in much of North America, the conveyance of students and the related policies were of widespread interest and concern. Although concern now extends far beyond school buses, the issue of privatization in education continues. Controversy was no stranger to *AJER* 50 years ago.

A series of articles by Everett Ooley (1955) that began in the second issue of *AJER* sparked much controversy, not because of the subject matter, but because of the research methodology used. Ooley, who was a high school principal at the time as well as being a master's student in the Faculty of Education, employed a novel research methodology that invited the participation of those potentially affected by the study, treated participants and researchers as equals, made changes as a result of collaborative findings, and continued the process through several such cycles. The methodology was participatory action research, and Ooley employed it with the teachers in his school. He came to know of the approach through his thesis supervisor, H.E. Smith, the Dean. Nevertheless, adverse reaction came from several quarters. Some school administrators condemned Ooley for encouraging the destruction of teacher discipline and organization by treating teachers as equal partners in the studies. Other researchers, both within the Faculty of Education and without, criticized the methodology variously as either not being rigorous and well defined, or simply that what had been done could not be considered research. Some critics condemned *AJER* for publishing such work, and a few went so far as to drop their subscriptions. On the other hand, many individuals found the presentation of new research and new research methodologies refreshing and encouraged the journal to continue in the manner established.

Although housed in the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, *AJER* was not a "house organ" for the Faculty. In consequence, *AJER*'s financial survival has depended on others. Of course, money from subscribers is essential, but from its beginning subscriptions did not cover editorial and production costs. Unless subscription rates were elevated to exorbitant levels, additional funds were and are needed. From the outset the Alberta Teachers' Association has supported *AJER* in part through funds provided by its Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies. In the past 20 years considerable funding has been obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council by means of grants. Canada Post has contributed through its Publications Assistance Program, which defrays some of the cost of mailing issues. To be sure, *AJER* has not always enjoyed a smooth ride. Occasionally, unforeseen circumstances have resulted in financial binds, and the demands of the journal have sometimes proven excessive to individuals. Fortunately, *AJER* has escaped the fate of many Canadian journals that have fallen because of finances, narrowness, or limited exposure.

The appearance of *AJER* has changed over the years. Initially, the journal was smaller in dimensions and the cover was a textured buff-colored stock. Beginning in 1970, the current size and different colored covers for each of the four issues per volume were adopted. Many people recognize the journal by its stylized initials, *ajer*. Over the years, however, name changes have been suggested to reflect the progressively widening scope of the journal. For better or worse, the name of the journal is recognized widely, and it is indexed extensively, much like the *New England Journal of Medicine*. *AJER's* fare is no more restricted to research done in Alberta than the *New England Journal of Medicine* is restricted to publishing only research carried out in the New England states. Moreover, it is likely that changing the *AJER's* name would result in loss of *brand recognition*, a condition that has led to the demise of several other journals.

Other changes have been made to *AJER* over the past 50 years besides size and appearance. Whereas all editorial correspondence and production were carried out in hard copy, the process today is almost entirely electronic. The journal itself remains paper-based because of subscriber demand and because the cost of offering both a paper-based and on-line journal remains beyond *AJER's* finances. Nevertheless, some current technologies have emerged from behind the scenes to assist *AJER*. The profile of the journal was raised considerably with the advent of its Web site. Individuals far removed from Alberta and North America came to know of the journal by means of the Web site. The arts-based research theme issue that appeared in fall 2002 contained a CD-ROM with articles that could not be reproduced in hard copy. This particular theme issue has proven to be the most sought-after issue in *AJER's* history. In spite of double the normal production run, the issue has sold out. As the cost of reprinting the hard copy portion is prohibitive, the arts-based theme issue remains available in its entirety, but solely in CD-ROM format.

What, then, of the future? Although individuals from clairvoyants to business forecasters try to predict the future, most predictions are either completely inaccurate or are so vague as to be meaningless. However, if past behavior is a predictor of future behavior, it is safe to say that as long as submissions to the journal continue, and as long as there are subscribers and sufficient funds, *AJER* should continue for many more years. A major component of *AJER's* longevity has been its flexibility: adjusting to changes in the educational world and adopting new technology where possible and feasible. Reflecting the prevalent "global community," *AJER* now serves as a venue for educational research from many geographic areas and perspectives. How *AJER* may change in the future is debatable and will depend on a variety of factors. Whatever form *AJER* takes and what changes it reflects, it will be interesting to follow along.

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References

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