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A Companion to Research in Education

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 Springer

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*If I envy her one thing
it is her ease with this epoch.*

– R.S. Thomas

Preface

How are things?

Good, thanks.

That's not saying very much. Would you rather I ask 'how goes it with your soul'?

Well if you want to sound anachronistic, please do.

Ouch! Remind me, what are you up to at the moment?

Still working at the university, in the faculty of education.

Ahh – training teachers.

Some of us prefer to call it 'teacher education'. But yes, that's what most of my colleagues seem to do to earn a living. I'm much more of the 'frustrated researcher' these days.

I thought your ilk called yourselves academics?

Sometimes do, mainly did. I still get to use 'academic' at airport immigration desks when the officials ask for an occupation. I just wouldn't want you to think I've much time for beard stroking with all the paperwork and marking I'm having to do.

Not very twenty-first century, are you? Do you actually like the job you are in?

When was the last time you beat about the bush? I will admit I tended to see it more as a vocation when I started, the bonus being working with smart and curious people with interesting questions and debates that kept me on my toes. You'll be telling me you've plenty of other sources for that since you graduated . . .

Ouch again. But can we avoid descending into a nostalgia fest please? We all know the grass is never any greener, even with rose-tinted spectacles. More to the point, are you actually researching anything interesting at the moment? Are you 'pushing back the boundaries'?

Well, the day job does get me out of bed. But to be fair, a lot of it is pretty tedious. Partly that's because it's become so very technical and technocratic, and must look increasingly esoteric to the uninitiated. It is funny you mention 'pushing back the boundaries'. Nice use of scare quotes and cutting to the chase – again! I'd be less hasty, and for that matter, always seem to hesitate to put it that way.

Really?

Well, you know me; I can't help but think that education and being educated are so intrinsic to what people associate with being able to live a full and fulfilling life. Yet most of our research doesn't seem to be about understanding, questioning or contributing to debates about that, particularly about what creates or sustains let alone challenges a sense of fullness or fulfilment. If I look around – even when I catch myself in the mirror – it seems researching education isn't actually in the hard or worthy category of work. It just seems to keep bouncing between the lanes of too fuzzy or too obvious . . . because we've all been to school, haven't we; you are bound to reply.

You beat me to it, but I'm not claiming to be an expert or academic, let alone a 'researcher'. *Fair point. I guess it's more my sense that most of the people I know who call themselves education researchers seem to spend most of their time preoccupied with something else. It divests the field of any really sustained disciplinary work. To any outsider it must look like most of us are mainly providing footnotes to other disciplines.*

So what does it look like to an 'insider'?

That a bigger purpose doesn't seem to haunt many of us anymore? Admitting that, or perhaps I should say, to qualify that – it won't appear that surprising that I've ended up doing a lot of consultancies, evaluations, projects – that kind of thing – since the last time we spoke. The odds of getting a research grant are increasingly poor, plus there's never much money for really 'researching education' anyway. So a lot of what I do is supposedly marked by being 'practical' and 'useful', and that's about it.

So no real intellectual cut and thrust?

Hmm.

Experiencing a bit of a drought, or you've lost your passion, which is it?

Neither . . .

So . . . is it 'no edge', or a *blunt* one? No mettle? . . . Or not being in the thick of it – is that it? Which bottle do I need to fetch to help cure your despondency?

No need for that – at least not just yet. I'm capable of wallowing a little longer! The nub of it is that I wouldn't call my research philosophically sophisticated or engaging. Or challenging – be that to myself, or my colleagues. So let's agree to say I'm not researching much at the moment by any stretch of the imagination – and none of that needs scare quotes.

Allow me to beg to differ. If I'm not to confuse this with a cartload of carping, it sounds like you still need those scare quotes. Surely there's a lot of 'cognitive dissonance' in this, and you being a 'performative contradiction' . . . At least I think that's some of the jargon you used the last time. Is it really that bad?

Well, when I started – remember when I did my PhD? – you got bored with me saying that research was about generating new knowledge, seeing things differently, challenging the status quo . . . You regularly chided me for acting like I was on some sort of superior plane, walking around with my head in the clouds – 'too smart for my own good' really stung.

Sorry! Please continue . . .

Apology accepted. But I bet you want some form of contrition from me in return?

Be my guest.

Okay. If you really want me to work through some of my baggage, I'll start with the backpack I'm still carrying from my supervisors. They were always banging on about research needing to produce some theory or evidence that was original, groundbreaking, worthwhile – something that would make a difference – even if it was small – 'tiptoeing forwards' was the usual expression. In my case, it always seemed to be tied to how we can understand education 'now', of what happens in education from such and such a 'powerful perspective', of what education is or 'could be' – that's if you really wanted to push the boat out. They wanted so much from research, and wouldn't put up with too little. With each passing semester though, their words are just fading echoes. Of course, I still use some of those lines with my students! I'll even trot them out when I want to pull someone up for being solipsistic – and that seems to be happening too frequently for my liking with some of my colleagues these days. 'Research has to be fresh'. Remember me saying that? I didn't realise it had a shelf life, or applied to researchers too!

Oh dear. I hope your puns are better in class – or perhaps you should reserve them for the senior common room.

Don't joke – you realise we don't have one of those anymore. Didn't I tell you? It went along with a load of other 'restructurings' we have had to make at my esteemed employers: in this

case, to make better use of ‘the space’. Perhaps it doesn’t actually matter as I’m finding it so much harder to juggle all the demands on my time, across my life at work and what’s left of it for home. More to the point, the internet traffic I have to avoid being crushed by is becoming increasingly unmanageable – I often wonder how you cope with it in your line of work. I wish I could just stick to switching that off, and keeping it off, like in the good old days of closing the covers of a book.

Sounds to me like you are whingeing again. But prescribing finding some routine and adopting some basic ‘time management principles’ is hardly going to help given your mood. Come on, tell me about a good idea you are working on, or about what you are reading that ignites a spark.

I wish I could, but it seems like there’s always some distraction getting in the way, with more and more papers to read and process. The notions of an end of the working week are something of a blur these days. And now there’s even alerts in our ‘online academic community’ about the latest doctoral theses uploaded from some distant shore on this great big world of ours, just waiting for me to download into my very own file space! I wish I had a bung to block the pipe! Online community – what about a real community of scholars? –

– Touché. But before you rant on, I have to ask if all this venting is actually cathartic?

Ask me later! Look, the point I was trying to make was even when I do find the time to write, I’m finding myself increasingly stuck: about what to write, about who I’m writing for, if not how best to represent what it is I want to express. I know what it is that I’m wanting to say, I just seem to need to learn a bit more about how I will need to communicate it to new audiences. On the one hand, there’s all that paying your dues to appear scholarly, and ‘sticking to the template’. It seems so incredibly constraining in these days of social media, if not stifling – if you can detect the difference. On the other, do you remember when people used to ask what ‘are you reading at university?’ Being well read is rightly assumed but you’ve got to be able to make regular investments and not just trade on the interest, if that still makes sense. And then they have the gall to ask what have you written in the last term, or should I say, month.

Give me a real example rather than another generality about your faceless administrators . . . *Sure; what incensed me about a week ago was a bit of a to do with my work-appointed ‘mentors’ in my ‘performance appraisal’. It wouldn’t be far from the truth to say that the professors in question have made a great name for themselves digging in the same quarry of ideas, year on year. No time for wider reading, or fresh writing. Their ‘outputs’ seems to amount to a little updating of the argument, a little tidying up around the edges. And no one calls them on it.*

And you don’t do that!

Of course not! Oh, I see. . . . Okay, but my point is, they think that’s the way to make your reputation as a researcher – become a professor even – because it worked for them! I beg to differ, even if it is only to myself, and you. It is so very uninspiring. I can’t think of the last time they wrote or said something truly original, but I don’t think that’s the point for them anymore – or for many in the community of education researchers I inhabit, particularly on my darker days. The academics at the university seem to have to see themselves as working more and more as if they were in industry, promoting and protecting a brand, but it’s all a façade for a rotting core. I want it to be a place, a nexus, a crucible perhaps, I’m struggling for the right words . . . for developing and refining brilliant ideas – ones that could really make a difference.

Sounds to me like you’re simmering away, hashing and rehashing old tropes. More importantly, you seem to have lost both the time and commitment to making room for the things you actually enjoy, let alone want to be able to enjoy in academia. Why don’t you hand in your notice? You always used to say we were privileged and enlightened folk, responsible for our choices and actions: have you given up on all that? The next thing you’ll tell me is your annual

leave ‘entitlements’ and a bomb-proof pension are the only things stopping you . . .
Ever the cynical realist! You know I like most of the people I work with, the students, the conferences, the sabbaticals – particularly the international ones . . . But these days we seem to spend so much of our time talking and worrying about research income, quality, accountability, ‘outputs’ and ‘impacts’, even if all that is leavened with the occasional joke about ‘how was it for you?’ I think we’re missing the point about developing our research together, being part of ‘a community of scholars’ and thrashing out a ‘generative research programme’. Perhaps it is simply some of us can’t see much point in much of what we do anymore, and have got so very good at pretending in all this game playing.

Go on . . .

Well, to put it bluntly, which is so un-academic of me, most weeks I don’t actually feel I’ve researched anything of consequence, whether that’s of consequence to me or my colleagues, let alone education or educators. If you want me to feel really depressed, I’d even have to say most semesters.

I’ll feign sympathy by offering a ‘poor you’ . . .

Thank you kindly! Received with a due modicum of courtesy proportional to that with which it was offered. Honestly, my problem is I don’t think I’ve done anything that I would count as real research since my doctoral days. Okay, I can tick all the right boxes, jump through the hoops, meet the requirements for our ‘research performance exercises’. But the itch remains. It’s a bit of a sob story when I come to think of it.

And you want to be a Professor of Education at which university?! Doesn’t sound like you’ve much to profess, let alone have managed to develop a strong sense of belief in the power or value of your research, or that of others . . . Telling you to buck up your ideas will only run aground on the irony. Come on, let’s talk about something more uplifting, or at least find you another companion to help dispel some of your woes. Are you at least up for that? –

Clayton, VIC

Alan D. Reid

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Introduction

Everything good has been thought before
one has only to try, to think it again.
(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe)

If researching education can be likened to working on a wiki – that is, a continuous, participatory, distributed work in progress – it has its particular forms, versions, updates, edits, inaccuracies, disputes, and most importantly, an abiding sense of incompleteness. We often assume the researching of education is practiced because it promises the production of new knowledge, that is warranted, of various kinds and qualities, about the phenomena, experience and concepts of ‘education’. Against Goethe though, research is unlikely to be primarily about the act of recovery, as if research were about looking again, as in putting the stress on *re*-searching. Rather, as with the old French, *rechercher*, it speaks of a need to inquire deeply, intensely, systematically and regularly, into the various realities and possibilities of educational ‘things’ across a range of contexts and situations.

This twin impulse, to take education seriously and continually inquire of it, is hemmed in by a simple recognition that horizons change. Be they informed by, for example, matters political, economic, cultural or social, what have become historic and contemporary educational priorities can be seen to get stuck as much as change, and can be challenged if not occasionally overturned. Complications in the ‘common sense’ of the field of education inevitably arise from the interplays of such broader factors and events, translated as these are into the enduring and newer configurations of the moments and momentums affecting education today, and in the days hereafter. Again, amid all this, we commonly expect both competent researchers and critical users of educational research to be capable of understanding and testing the claims made from the researching of education. Why does this seem to matter so much?

Research, from both empirical and theoretical perspectives, is widely expected to have a bearing on public debates about education, and thus be available for public scrutiny. Mindful of these expectations, reflexive researchers, we will argue, are those that produce insightful inquiries in and about education that are attentive to the needs of the field’s various audiences – not just their immediate and distanced (be that by time and space) ‘research community’. In our view, reflexivity about research in education is best served by researchers adopting an attitude of humility towards the confidence that can be attributed to claims making and meaning making. In other words, we are likely to stand firmer when we engage with a community of disciplined minds and considered scholarship, and in so doing, become better able to withstand the strong winds of academic critique and public criticism as we work shoulder-to-shoulder with others, remaining both attentive and subject to various rebukes and encouragements.

We raise these ‘personal’ matters early on in our Introduction because we recognise that the company one is able to keep in terms of other researchers, ideas, data, and theories, is always circumscribed by limitations of one sort or another. In fact, who is it that has the time to always be reading more, writing more, critiquing and re-analysing? As noted in our Preface, some may squirm and squeal in the face of a performatively-driven academic life, while to pretend it

is otherwise may also limit the public discourse on what researchers both claim and pretend to understand and know. Really, yes, really: *understand and know*. Isn't most of research debate about that which is compelling and worthwhile as educational research questions, practices and findings, including how these are developed, advanced, communicated, accommodated, discredited and even rejected?

Given such initial remarks, our purpose in preparing this *Companion* has been to provide the inquisitive reader with access to a range of contemporary conversations and debates about researching education, including those concerning its recent histories and challenges, framings and dynamics. *Because not doing so risks misconstruing what it has been, has become, or might even be*. Across the *Companion's* various parts, we offer three main contributions to advance this purpose. First, its chapters and supplementary materials offer distinct perspectives on how researching education is variously conceptualised, characterised, contextualised, legitimated, and represented. To achieve this, each part traces and assesses developments in relation to each thematic and juxtaposes these with contemporary expressions and debates regarding different aspects of that selfsame theme. Second, it demonstrates how pressing issues and problems pertaining to the researching of education are brought to bear in current concerns and debates concerning the quality and qualities of educational research. In particular, contributions examine the implications of not just how research in education is framed given a diversity of possibilities and options, but also how it is nevertheless constrained as *educational* research, given the philosophical, political, pragmatic and pedagogical pressures on this field – and as again, with a brief nod to our Preface, in preparing, inducting, developing and sustaining the field's researchers. Third, through each part's introductory chapters, we aim to identify some specific directions, priorities and prospects for future deliberations on researching education, that we hold might better contribute to and advance the dialogues and debates about how researchers of education are sensitised, equipped and become competent, particularly in addressing the rigorous demands and dynamic challenges of researching education in these times.

Some of our assumptions in pursuing such goals inevitably require clarification. We hold that research in education is well served by both impassioned reasoning and systematic instruction on the themes and frameworks of conversations and debates about research *and* education. In fact, this is what we hold to be the standard fare of conference proceedings, monographs, journals, handbooks and textbooks on education and its research. Yet as the volume of text and transaction grows, considered reflection that takes stock of core issues always seems to be dwarfed by the noise accompanying the latest innovation or fashion in researching education, if not to recognise the digging in of some heels, in some quarters, in the face of all this 'change'.

Despite the hyperbole lacing the above, as distinct modes of communication about research in education, there remains the serious risk that any particular text on educational research (and the reading thereof), ends up 'falling between two stools'. On the one hand, authors might rightly assume there is a case for specialist knowledge and needs in research experience and expertise on the part of the reader; on the other, generic knowledge and a familiarity with the requisite terms and terrains of the debate in question may recede from view.

The peril we discern here is that the bandwidth of discussions of educational research framed in the most conventional of ways becomes ever locked into polarised sets of expositions and appraisals of research by people working either too far within a discipline or subfield, or conversely, too far across them. And thus, such disciplinary and transdisciplinary dispersions both create and recreate silo mentalities that offer little to the reader by way of a substantive and engaging middle ground.

If this gambit holds some truth about how we communicate and engage educational research activity and priorities, what might be possible if we attempt to rework it via the frame of a collection on researching education, such as in a *Companion*? Clearly there are many useful ways of offering substantive commentary on research undertaken in the name of education. But it does not have to default to the reference work of a more standard kind,

let alone mimic the work of a research catalogue, dictionary or encyclopaedia. Numerous education research handbooks have attempted to provide openings and guidance to students, teachers and supervisors of research in education, as they seek insights (and answers) to complex research questions from what appears to be an ever-widening pool of methods and methodologies. As researchers and educators with a wide range of experience, questions and challenges, we see a need to address these – yet also the issues that overlie or/and underpin particular genres, principles, outcomes and perspectives. Thus our conviction has been that researchers, academics, practitioners and research users would value a *Companion to Research in Education* that engages both the broader and deeper aspects of theorising, critiquing and advancing thinking and practice across the fields and claims of educational research.

So, rather than fit this *Companion* to the usual regimen of texts on researching education, we have endeavoured to take a fresh approach in how we might understand educational inquiries to be designed, critiqued and developed.

About the Companion

The notions of frames and framing remain important throughout this *Companion*. The terms offer vivid metaphors as well as organising principles for the conceptual underpinning, organisation and content of each of its parts. The noun speaks of the structures used wittingly or not to variously view, enter, weave, print, enclose, surround, mould, and imagine our inquiries. Some speak of our bodies having frames, some extend the notion to the universe too. Both senses invite reflection on constitution and form. Closer to home, perhaps we might consider the ‘frames’ in our pictures, photographs, and movies – particularly as we consider what is kept in and out of the fragments, moments and stories before us. Or we might entertain the notions and applications associated with a frame of mind, frame of reference, or being framed. Shuffling towards the verbal sense, our attention may be drawn to matters of how one might prepare, create, formulate, and articulate research in education. We might even trace these senses back to their Old English origin – *framian* – which stresses a notion of ‘usefulness’. Consequently, we might ask ourselves, what might it mean for a particular research frame to be useful to education, or have research made ‘ready for use’?

With such conceptual and linguistic sensitisers to hand then, as the self-appointed editors of the emerging idea of a *Companion* text, we might also recognise that a general research text framed by chapters that rehearse how we design, plan and practice research has become an all too conventional framework. But also, and for our immediate purposes here, it does not have to be that way. Do we really need another text surveying and appraising research choices, methods, technologies and techniques in education? There are many excellent handbooks, textbooks, journal articles, and monographs available for those who wish to consult such texts further. Rather, for this *Companion*, might we invite the reader to pursue a road less travelled, so to speak, with our point of departure being that of reflecting on some of the enduring and recurring questions we seem to now face in our lives as practitioners, teachers and students of research in education?

Discussing an initial idea for a *Companion* with our Masters and Doctoral students in three distant continents, we seemed to be increasingly asked a similar set of questions. Why was it that some researchers of education didn’t always seem to think about particular relationships between educational theory and research in their particular projects? Must educational researchers and teachers of education research privilege certain values and ethics in the research process and some rather than other ‘research designs’? Is the ‘curriculum’ of research training too haphazard so to speak, more a matter of chance (who’s hired or available to teach the course, say), rather than a deliberately (and deliberately) strategic set of ‘conversations’? And finally, why is it that some seek generative intersections in, for example, participatory or holistic methods for generating research questions, the data collected and its analysis – before

or beyond the invitation, or requirement, to demonstrate ‘fitness of purpose’ or ‘sound design’?

In response, we might well have agreed these and other such questions are important matters, and set assignments accordingly. Of course, researching education requires drawing from a repertoire of conceptual and craft knowledge and skills to prosecute a timely and worthwhile inquiry. But then again, we know – yes, really know – this is not the be all and end all of ‘research training’ and ‘professional development’. In other words, we simply cannot accept that ‘methods and methodological talk and work’ is an all-sufficient frame for developing our judgements and priorities concerning what counts in research, particularly as this relates to establishing the quality and qualities expected and contested in researching education.

Thus the maelstrom out of which the framing of this *Companion* grew was an on-going sense and appreciation of the critique of such recognitions, noting their frequent resurfacing in our teaching, scholarship and discussions about the histories and uses of educational research in a range of contexts. What, indeed, could be said for classrooms to staffrooms, national policy frameworks to international education research conferences, and for local initiatives to UN-sponsored ‘Decades of Education’?

Emerging from this, we recognised that the prevailing focus on research process and phases of inquiry in preparatory and introductory graduate research texts could help raise awareness and debate about perspectives and traditions in methodology, but usually in ways that eclipsed those of epistemological and ontological considerations. Moreover, the approaches we saw in many Masters and Doctoral courses did not necessarily engage wider questions about the axiological, historical or cultural; that is, ‘typically’, a standard preparation and commentary on education research wouldn’t be that which necessarily dwelt for long on questions of the nature of the researchable, and what is (to be) valued and pursued as research, whether that be *in*, *about* or *for* education. In other words, we saw much contemporary discourse and practice on research in education as serving to either overly sharpen or increasingly blur distinctions about objects, subjects and relations, particularly in borrowing ideas from other fields to reinvigorate the concepts and values that influence and come to inform the conduct of education and research, if not their mutual constitution and evaluation.

Again, roughly speaking, if preparation and accounts of research in education come to focus on (even grind through) a range of alternative frameworks for what we want to find out about some particular aspect of education – such as by identifying key choices in setting or as a sample in an educational context (typically institution or a text), collecting appropriate data (often from its ‘primary stakeholders’ or ‘records’: students or teachers or policy makers; via transcripts, documents, images, etc.), and analysing the data to write up the results with a practice or policy focus in mind – then we could, and arguably should, consider reframing this account of the activity, in more compelling and fresher ways, within the form of a *Companion*.

This is because our advanced level students increasingly expected to reject a cookbook approach, to be ‘as chefs’; that is, able to make sound and leading-edge decisions about research and researchers in education concerning:

- Where conceptualisations, problems and questions *about* and *for* research in education come from?
- How aims, purposes and rationales for instances of research are established?
- Why which epistemological, ontological, axiological and methodological approaches might be taken or (best) avoided given their research questions?
- How and why research projects are influenced, designed and conducted in particular ways?
- For whom and how is research reported and communicated amid a range of audiences?
- What might happen to a research inquiry once it has been completed?

Moreover, as in other fields of inquiry, while an instance and aggregate of research in education can be as broad as it is narrow, or shallow as it is deep, in the specific case of educational research we also noted that many entering the field are (or were) mid- or

late-career educators or education administrators. For research to count to them intellectually, professionally and practically, it is often assumed that it must make good sense and be trustworthy as research *for education*, as well as in relation to its implications for the research community, directly or indirectly.

This is not a wholly unproblematic position to base a research handbook upon, let alone form a basis for the self-description of research and researchers (experientially or conceptually). Why? We reasoned that whether educational research is conventionally conceived, or in ways that demonstrate a requisite variety of possibilities, what is at issue is what might be regarded as ways in which to examine the essentially socio-cultural habits of researching education, including the dispositions and agendas of researchers, and their – even our – ‘habits of mind’. A person is formed as a researcher, not born as one. Given this, we should invite reflection on associated and particular histories, and the identities and purposes at work in the people that have come to labour in this research field – and of course, when and where we or they are able to enjoy the fruits of such labours.

Furthermore, based on our experience with academic colleagues, research students, existing literature and ‘research methods training’, it is our view that many existing texts used on educational research courses (whether as manuals or resources), do not necessarily promote careful and structured critique of the *role and contexts* of traditions, possibilities, and decisions – or their *shapings and consequences* – particularly when practitioners and administrators or policy-makers (and others) are engaging with, and in, researching education.

For example, in straining at the ‘academic’ equivalent of ‘political correctness’, some research training and professional development courses may provoke much (purported?) genuflection amongst new and seasoned scholars; but the sessions on these can also be off putting and limit users’ and novices’ engagements with the backgrounds and trajectories of the researching of education. On the one hand, we become all too familiar with the problems of studies that resort to positioning research methods as largely decontextualised and ahistorical tools deployed from a toolkit or recipe book that (not?) ‘everybody uses’; on the other, we may be presented with what appears to be a never ending labyrinth of ideas and critiques that all but the most dedicated initiate wishes to fathom or traverse.

To us, the importance of traditions, possibilities and decisions to the texts we read and engage for researching education will always be more than simply about attending to matters of craft, technique or quality assurance in research design. Equally, concepts of research professionalism must eschew checklists for successfully prosecuting a particular kind of research project, as much as others bridle over emphatic or unthinking declarations that ‘this inquiry’ counts as an instance of ‘this’ or ‘that’ kind of research because it has invoked, for example, such or such a ‘big name’. Rather, in navigating how we might reconfigure the ways in which a reference text operates as a manual and resource, we find ourselves asking how, as a *Companion*, such a text is designed to engage theoretical frameworks and core substantive issues associated with various approaches to, and examples of, researching education, as *educational research*.

So for this *Companion*, firstly, we considered this might be achieved through preparing a collection of contributions that prompts deliberation about how, either singly or together, authors manage to address a number of key dimensions and problematics within broader concerns about, and settings for, researching education. As we illustrate in the Introduction to each part, in this *Companion*, we focus on, *why, in terms of research purposes, evidence, authority, representation and legitimation, some traditions and practices have come to count, and others are disputed* – and hence, *how it is, and on what and whose grounds, the theorising, critique and advancement of thinking and practice has occurred, and hence might otherwise take place in educational research*.

Relatedly, we then sought to capture and express the changing contexts of this field of inquiry, and its burgeoning diversity and eclecticism. We have focused on what we might broadly count as social and political contexts in this *Companion*; others close to our hearts

concern the ecological and relational (these will have to wait for other publishing opportunities!). Suffice to say, educational research is now recognised as focusing on a broad field of ideas and practices that extends far beyond the terrain and narrower confines of the traditional introductory undergraduate and graduate courses about researching the classroom and curriculum, or even more simply, inquiries about learning and teaching. It has thus been important for us to show that interests in researching education extend to a range of perspectives, settings, organisations and institutions which are beyond conventional educational contexts, like schools, as well as the topics of traditional foundations courses in education. Thus there are a range of issues, themes, and topics in this *Companion* not commonly found on the aforementioned educational programmes: the question of their selection here remains though, in terms of how these have traction on contemporary ‘concepts’ and ‘characterisations’ of educational research, as much as the ‘contexts’ for inquiry, their ‘legitimation’ and indeed, their ‘representation’.

For us, this attempt to broaden interest and debate in these ways was never simply a question of whether to inject yet more philosophy, psychology, sociology, history or anthropology into the body of educational scholarship (where the list is often expressed in terms of a return to matters of foundations, or establishing new ones, even under the guise of post-foundationalism). Rather, it has required us to grasp the nettle of whether it might be better conceived as a question of how educational research and researchers address the impact, problematics and challenges of researching educational phenomena in informal and non-formal contexts and settings (be those spatially and/or temporally delimited).

To bring these introductory remarks together then, in this *Companion* our frame has become that of presenting a range of perspectives and discussions on how researching education has been, is, or could be understood in relation to our five sensitising constructs. These are, how research in education is variously *conceptualised*, *characterised*, *contextualised*, *legitimated* and *represented*. While each aspect can be used as a differential, each also cascades into further questions and themes prompted by the others. Thus we prefer to imagine the parts referenced to each sensitiser as kaleidoscopic (rather than telescopic or microscopic) lenses for reflecting on educational inquiry. Readers might then trace themes via a ‘structured multi-lensed’ reading strategy, regarding diverse perspectives as to what seems to count and why, as compelling research purposes, theories, evidence, and approaches.

To illustrate, one might enquire about the *contextualisation of research* in discussing the background, history, social formations, policy settings, and so on, of a study or research programme in education, but equally this dimension might also invite us to consider how and why researchers establish that this should be the case. Similarly, considering how we *conceptualise research in education* might prompt questions and reflections about the (competing?) purposes, procedures and authority of methods for a particular inquiry, such as how meaningful or justifiable a particular research design (process) might be for a research question, even as it might also set out to trace the warrant for argumentation within particular epistemes. Furthermore, discussing *research representations* might well engage considerations of how researchers articulate aspects associated with the ‘livedness’ and ‘embodiedness’ of gathering and analysing ‘evidence’ from a variety of sources, such as people’s stories and impressions, documents and records, situations and datasets, particularly but not exclusively in terms of the (in)visibility of encounters between the researcher and researched in empirical studies of education. But this might also be alongside that of, say, considerations of the ethics and politics of the research process, and how these are (not?) recounted and represented in the ‘final text’. Thus, questions of *legitimising research* might, amongst other things, speak to matters of how a project is justified or legitimated as educational research, such as in terms of its lifeworld coherence, relevance or depth, as well as the conceptual adequacies of the study’s design, warrants for its claims, ontology and/or epistemology.

Expressed in such kaleidoscopic ways then, it becomes clear that the key dimensions to our *Companion* can be imagined and made to *cut across and interact* with a range of instances that disrupt approaches typified by the conventions, traditions and approaches to discussing

research in education as found in many standard approaches to research texts. Put bluntly, it is not simply a case of choosing between quantitative, qualitative or mixed approaches. But we might also expect another layer, asking what might this all look like in reality? In more detail, for each part:

- **Conceptualising Research in Education** addresses key themes from critical accounts of the various traditions, disciplines and approaches involved in conceptualising research in education. It encourages us to appraise the purposes and foundations attributed to research in education across quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches, in relation to questions raised here and in other parts on establishing and debating purpose, philosophy, tradition, discipline, rigour, language, argument, theory and evidence – and their transformation as educational research.
- **Characterising Research in Education** addresses the values, logics and principles of what is deemed to characterise research in education as a researching of education, if not *educational research*; for example, considering the purposes and underpinnings across approaches (in the classroom, experimentally and non-experimentally, with and by teachers, etc.), alongside matters of research regarded as science, problem-solving, innovation, creative, holistic, philosophical, quality and/or standard, through reference to examples of current educational research projects and initiatives – and debates.
- **Contextualising Research in Education**, as a lynchpin to the *Companion*, questions the trends, challenges, and problematics of how research in education is contextualised, and in so doing, how contexts might work with or against the grain of educational research, be that politically, socially, culturally, economically, personally, philosophically, theoretically, ideologically, and so forth.
- **Legitimising Research in Education** returns us to questions of our responsibility as educational researchers to attend to issues such as what counts as knowledge or evidence within and across various traditions of educational inquiry, as these pertain to notions of quality, who judges, on what basis, and in whose interest it is to engage arguments about, say, objectivity and subjectivity, and whether criteria in reflexive dialogue can direct us toward the improvement of research practice in education.
- **Representing Research in Education**, which again, refracts and reframes the preceding contributions, to raise various issues regarding the decisions education researchers might make on what, who and how research in education is presented and represented, from start to unfolding and concluding, alongside the practical, ethical and political implications of those decisions for researchers, participants, research users and audiences with differing research traditions, perspectives and expectations.

To illustrate further the kaleidoscopic nature of these many and varied concerns, when researchers are invited to formulate and articulate a good research question, a fundamental expectation is typically that of appraising what is already known about the research area, what is researchable (which implies some limit to the research), and what is reasonable given the timeliness, logistics and scope of the project.

This is often discussed in ‘textbook terms’ in relation to how to ensure one’s literature review is systematic, comprehensive and relevant. Important as those qualities are, an underlying issue here is not to let ‘the tail wag the dog’. Working backstream, the qualities of the reviewed studies, and their actuality as examples of ‘good educational research’ necessarily interact with matters of how the inquiries were conceptualised, characterised and legitimated, e.g. epistemologically in terms of a range of perspectives on what counted as knowledge about the educational phenomena in question, and how that might be gathered and combined, is contested, if not how knowledge is produced and made to count in and across various contexts.

Here then, we are inevitably invited to reflect on the intellectually-driven purposes for the data collections and the spatio-temporal conditions within which that happened, before we can attempt to generalise studies from one setting or context to another, i.e. discerning what is crucial to how the research might be contextualised and represented here or/and elsewhere.

We raise this because we cannot but see research and researching as mindful endeavours, even if this is not always communicated in a set of ‘findings’. Whatever form these take, they are characterised by a particular set of qualities for the project, for example, owing to the participants in the study (e.g. researchers and researched and their relations), as well as its logistics and precedents. It may be a trite example, but consider studies of playground learning; ‘climate’ matters: in most summers it differs from that of most winters – be that because of geographical and other contextual factors such as whether you are in some part of Canada or Australia, at low or high altitude, in elementary or high school, part or not part of a particular social group, and so forth. Equally, there might also be important questions to ask of the grounds established for being able to share, conceptually and linguistically, the accounts and constructions of the knowledge of education offered, if not legitimate criticisms and uses to which such research is subjected or put.

Similarly, we might speculate as to why traditions of thinking about conventions and principles in research ethics so often seem to have been traduced to questions of anonymity and confidentiality in Anglo-American domains, or more recently, to considering the rights and responsibilities of researchers to the researched, research community and stakeholders in guidelines or codes of ethics (as in the American Educational Research Association’s guidance). In our view, there are other questions and movements that can be productively pursued here, if we adopt a critical historical perspective. This is because, as noted quite vocally in post-colonial contexts, in some quarters there is resistance to research, or research is co-opted. Contemporary instantiations of participatory research, student voice research, and so forth, might enable us to see the issues from different angles and standpoints, if not to show pursuit of a ‘correct method’ largely extinguishes attention to many ethical issues, despite protestations otherwise. This speaks to us again of matters of contextualisation, legitimation and representation of ‘research ethics’ – indeed, of recognising and interrogating the voices, positions and frames that have become dominant, powerful and compelling in ‘researching education ethically’.

Taken these aspects together then, we invite the reader to consider the constellations and layerings of conceptualisation, characterisation, contextualisation, legitimation and representation in and across educational inquiry. This ‘turning aside’ from a more prototypical preoccupation with methodology was prompted because we do not accept that research practitioners are fundamentally privileged to provide an account of the field, but often act as if they are by focusing their accounts on method. Rather than try to eliminate privilege though, perhaps we might first gain greater purchase and traction in comprehending the multifaceted aspects of education through inquiry, by illuminating some of the connective tissue of all manner of inquiries through these five lenses? Thus, considering how we both approach and understand the importance, fullness, variety and pace of experiences, practices, concepts and claims of researching education – including the ambitions and attentions researchers put their minds to in prosecuting their inquiries – can return us swiftly to the ongoing matter of frames.

Framing the Text

Any account of research in education, including this one, has limitations as well as strengths. Just as surveys always evidence a selection (in that because of the action of sampling, they are never exhaustive of phenomena), so too must we acknowledge *and show* that alternatives are possible in the *Companion*. Responses and critical commentaries to each chapter were deliberately commissioned and are presented to offer some ‘writing back’ on the lead contributions. Read together, these may help us further wrestle with aspects of the coercive, hegemonic, quotidian, normative, and ipsative, in our accounts of, and lenses for, researching education. Similarly, while the treatments of the themes in each part are distinctive in the various subsections and transactions between authors, the deliberate inclusion of a range of response formats is to signal, however modestly, that we do not suggest a matter is settled or

staid, but rather, some further light can be cast on the content, practice and challenges that the theme or topic presents.

This practising of reflexivity in our ‘table of contents’ then is largely to show how researchers of education can generate, modify and criticise their own arguments, whilst engaging and remaining open to ideas and discourses external to it. For example, in the last chapter of the final part of the *Companion*, John Willinsky explores a perceived openness within current educational research, flowing from the ‘open access movement’. Well aware of debates concerning the scientific nature of scholarship, authors of chapters and commentaries on issues of representing educational research struggle with researcher responsibility within this openness. Moreover, as fields of social science and educational inquiry continue to expand, these issues remain far from resolved across diverse research genres where quality is differentially defined. So it seems crucial that amongst major issues of conceptualisation, characterisation, contextualisation and legitimation, perennial questions of knowledge construction and, ultimately, educational praxis are underscored, and that issues of representation maintain a firm place within the *Companion*. However, questions remain, particularly on what seems important in times of ‘paradigm proliferation’. Perhaps it is not so much what the changes are but how we think and talk about them?

The purpose of the final part of the *Companion* can therefore be understood as about creating conditions for thinking about the (im)possibilities of mimesis, that is, how we think we can represent the world(s?) of education in words and actions. Within the social sciences, where faithfulness in representation is perhaps not as straightforward as some would like, the route now seems to be much more philosophical than scientific, and hence a politics of inquiry has evolved around talk of methodologies and methods. Researchers increasingly look beyond assumptions of a unitary epistemology to inquiry and learn how to find their ground within a complex of highly contested onto-epistemic positions. Representation becomes a crucial issue where educational research involves bridging or respecting incompatibilities of world and words/actions through interpretation. Contributors to this part of the *Companion* discuss their struggles to become more conscious and reflexive in addressing concerns of representing people and their lives across genres that interact in complex ways within theoretical perspectives.

John Schostak, for example, illustrates several historically based concerns about who has the right to represent others in educational research. His chapter creates space for discussion of methodological diversity that, in response, Georgina Stewart wants expanded further into the identity politics implicated in issues of social justice from critical, indigenous, feminist and poststructural frames. In other words, Stewart asks for ‘more please’, – via a deeper grounding of representational issues within complex ethico-political spaces. And if these spaces and places for educational research are ‘inscribed’, as Roth’s chapter proposes, then issues of scale concerning levels of abstraction might become more conscious to education researchers who are working to become more articulate about how they make strategic choices. What is key here, it seems, is awareness of both cultural and various forms of media discourse so that their representations of associated phenomena such as emotion and voice remain credible. Such sensitivities and unsurprisingly, choices, become crucial in the world of visual representation as Pozzer-Ardenghi’s vignette reminds, where the subjective nature and aesthetic impact of representations are manifestly obvious.

Several contributions to our final part also work to extend these arguments for voice, emotion and aesthetics within forms of educational inquiry, as deeper tests for the onto-epistemic groundings of forms of arts-based performative text in researching education. Kathy Nolan’s study of preservice teachers’ images of mathematics and science portrays participants’ voices as aesthetic-emotional images that gain credibility through participant involvement in representations of their experiences that are sometimes uncomfortable as well as disruptive. Wanda Hurren’s response further disrupts readers’ assumptions of standard text form by combining place-based text with personal experience of place. She attempts to

represent the ‘word in the world’ in wilful contradiction of both the fixed nature of place and identity. She personifies place through levels of abstraction beyond simple interpretation. Nolan’s and Hurren’s contributions are also suggestive of ways in which various other ‘turns’ – corporeal, material, temporal and spatial – may be implicated in the philosophical and theoretical construction of perspective (as artform) that challenge orthodoxies of representation within the researching of education.

Creative thinking in the onto-epistemic ground of research representation is also evident in Leggo and Sameshima’s openly active argument for the use of fictional writing in narrative identity work. Their intent is to change their own voice to that of storyteller in order to change the way their research participants are represented, that is, as actors in a research narrative (rather than have one codified, objectivised, and fragmented) – and (how all) this makes for a political statement. Thus in trying to create spaces for ‘artful ways of knowing’, their work is consistent with Stewart, Nolan and Hurren’s search for critical onto-epistemic discussion spaces that remain sensitive to the conceptual, characterful, contextual and justificatory processes implicit to a necessary politics of representation. As boundary work that attempts to move the history of the fields of education inquiry, these authors are amongst the next generation of scholars that will decide ‘what counts’, as both commentators testify. In fact, Guiney Yallop and then Wiebe explore writing as research, using fictionalised narratives generated by themselves and others as ‘participants’ as ways of capturing complex experiences in storied and poetic images to present their own challenges of representation.

We draw our Introduction to a close by briefly considering the final set of chapters in the *Companion*, which attempt to perform and challenge (re)presentation across the ‘digital divide’. Lisa Korteweg engages the changing dynamics of educational research within the spaces of social media, in that these make users into producers of educational research, reducing the ‘double(d) hermeneutic’ with a revised form of participatory inquiry. Her work represents a worldview that questions notions of the academic within the public sphere. It asks serious and new ethical questions about the democracies and unfinishedness of digital participation/representation as necessary issues of quality in educational research that cross traditional frontiers. M. J. Barrett’s frontal assault on the inertia of the research regulations at her conferring university raises similar questions about how researchers learn to go about seeking better justification for developing and maintaining a particular, if not alternative, perspective. The ‘game of representation’ is obviously one of deepening scholarship and of challenging foundational thinking. Rapoport’s use of open access software, Barrett’s poetic hypertext, Korteweg’s digital or web-based generation and the critical narrative work of several other authors, consciously seek to disrupt linear readings of their work, in order to construct a particular presentation of self in the taken-for-granted assumptions about people-world connections expressed as ‘educational research’.

Willinsky’s optimistic notions of a new openness within educational research, then, seems to foreshadow changes in thinking about representing the researching of education as represented in the experiences of many authors in this part, if not elsewhere. Each contribution serves to remind readers about the challenges of being responsible within (and occasionally perhaps, beyond) those horizons that claim a new openness in scholarly inquiry. The part’s authors, in their own ways, view inquiry (framed onto-epistemically) as multiple, yielding differences that yield differences in ways of ‘prosecuting’ and ‘representing’ educational research. Each retains a certain pragmatic response to critique in creative acts of reflexive self-examination at all stages of the inquiry process. While onto-epistemic difference, rather than the search for commonality, is the message, acknowledging obvious problems of representational adequacy is crucial to serious scholarship. Coming to representation issues with a fuller consciousness of ‘it depends’-type issues embedded within layers of subjective consciousness, these researchers of education are left to construct meaningful and useful accounts of their work within diverse knowledge cultures.

Understandably, the authors in the concluding part of the *Companion* are acutely sensitive to the power inherent in the production of knowledges about others. So too are many of the contributors to the preceding parts. Researchers of education hold privileged positions by reasoning and deciding what are the important questions, and in directing the methodological process, the interpretive acts and the flows of discourse. Thus in contributing to the *Companion*, these authors recognise questions of authority, communication and representation as onto-epistemic, and thus inherently political too – they want to work towards a critical politics of knowledge generation. Many in educational research are looking for strategies of methodological engagement and representation that work to shift and displace interpretive authority through the proliferation of knowledges, well grounded within the serious work of scholarship. As Gillian Rose (1997) once said, we cannot know everything, but by acknowledging our uncertainties, perhaps we can do something more modest, and real. We can inscribe in our educational research practices and representations some elements of critical reflexivity that acknowledge our struggle to understand what it means to know, teach and learn.

Finally, it remains that an editorial partnership remains as much ‘an act of courage’ as compromise. The three of us came to this project with diverse passions, histories, priorities and experiences in engaging and explaining the researching of education. Collaborating on this project has deepened our vision of what is deemed sufficient as well as what can be signified when we encounter and evaluate educational inquiries. We hope the *Companion* might afford something similar for its readers.

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