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The Future of Education Research Publishing: Challenges and Responses

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Citation: Post, D. (2014). The future of education research publishing: Challenges and responses. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 22(26). <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n26.2014> This special issue commentary introduces EPAA/AAPE's Special Issue on *The Future of Education Research Journals*, Guest Edited by Dr. David Post.

Abstract: This special issue of *Education Policy Analysis Archives* addresses scholarly production and publishing (the two are intimately related) in the field of education. Worldwide scholars are facing similar global pressures for "excellence," where the personal and institutional production of relevant scholarship is being compared with simple measures. In some parts of the world, these measures of productivity are fast becoming more immediately consequential than whatever else may be produced as a result of scholarship (purpose, critical reflection, insight, meaning, progress, to list some examples). This essay presents the challenges and responses identified by the eight contributions for this special issue on the future of education research publishing.

Keywords: scholarly communications; academic publishing; education research.

El Futuro de las revistas académicas de investigación en Educación: Desafíos y respuestas

Resumen: Este número especial de Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas, aborda la producción académica y editorial (dos procesos que están íntimamente relacionados) en el campo de la investigación en educación. Investigadores/as de todo el mundo se enfrentan a presiones similares para demostrar "excelencia" de sus investigaciones y donde la producción personal e institucional de

conocimientos relevantes está siendo comparada con indicadores simplistas. En algunas partes del mundo, estas medidas de productividad se están convirtiendo rápidamente en los indicadores de mayores consecuencias que cualquier otro conocimiento que se puede producir como resultado de la investigación (ideas, reflexión crítica, visión, sentidos, progresos, para enumerar algunos ejemplos). Este ensayo presenta los desafíos y las respuestas identificadas por las ocho contribuciones para este número especial sobre el futuro de las publicaciones académicas sobre investigación educativa.

Palabras clave: comunicaciones científicas; la publicación académica, la investigación en educación.

O Futuro das revistas acadêmicas de pesquisa em Educação: desafios e respostas

Resumo: Esta dossiê de Arquivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas aborda a produção acadêmica e editorial (dois processos intimamente relacionados) no campo de pesquisa em educação.

Pesquisadores/as de todo o mundo enfrentam pressões semelhantes para demonstrar a "excelência" das suas pesquisas e onde a produção pessoal e institucional de conhecimento relevante está sendo avaliada com indicadores simplórios. Em algumas partes do mundo, essas medidas de produtividade estão rapidamente se tornando nos indicadores de maior consequências do que qualquer outro conhecimento que pode ocorrer como resultado de uma pesquisa (ideias, pensamento crítico, planejamentos, sentidos, avanços, para listar só alguns exemplos). Este artigo apresenta os desafios e as respostas identificadas pelas oito contribuições para esta dossiê sobre o futuro das revistas acadêmicas de pesquisa em Educação.

Palavras-chave: comunicações científicas; publicações acadêmicas; pesquisa em educação.

Introduction

How will future education inquiry be read, published, or valued? And, on what basis will it ultimately be thought to matter? This special issue of *Education Policy Analysis Archives* addresses scholarly production and publishing (the two are intimately related) in one field of scholarship, that of education research. But, worldwide, there are many other research fields with strong national traditions – jurisprudence, social work, philosophy, poetry among others – where scholars now face similar global pressures for “excellence” (competitively defined) and where the personal and institutional production of excellent scholarship is being compared with simple measures. In some parts of the world, these measures of productivity are fast becoming more consequential than whatever else may be produced as a result of scholarship (purpose, critical reflection, insight, meaning, progress, to list some examples). This is so because simple measures of productivity currently are being used by central funding agencies to justify the distribution of financial resources to the researchers’ institutions and the support of individual scholars as workers.

Let me offer a few more words of retrospect in order to underscore the importance of the eight contributions for this special issue of EPAA. All who have observed changes in higher education agree there has been a convergence in the structures and expectations of postsecondary institutions, despite the fact that education systems grew from diverse historical roots. But there are at least two competing interpretations of the apparent isomorphism of universities, degrees, and research production. One interpretation derives from the Weberian idea of bureaucratic authority, and sees the regulation of knowledge as a natural and neutral outgrowth of rationalized systems of production. In this view, the language that spread from the southern half of one North Atlantic island (i.e. England), following the Bible translations and the Shakespearean verse in the 17th Century, is today a convenient, neutral, and universal medium for commerce and exchange, while it remains as the vernacular language among populations of a few powerful counties. This approach deemphasizes the actors, interest groups, and powers responsible for convergence. A competing

perspective sees coercion and contestation by political actors, and deemphasizes the global character of change by emphasizing the dynamic over language in particular contested terrains of nations.

The outcomes of these contests, adoptions, and regulations of language matter hugely because of the close relation between language and thought. While one could cite European post-modernists to make this point, I want to mention a Connecticut Yankee fire insurance inspector working during the 1930s, an American writing in my own vernacular language, Benjamin Lee Whorf, who created the field of psycholinguistics. In summarizing his linguistics research on the cultures native to Central America, the Southwestern United States, and Alaska, Whorf wrote:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages.... We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, but its terms are absolutely obligatory; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees. (In Carroll, 1956, p. 212–213)

Whorf was talking about individual communication, but, at a different level, the agreements (voluntary or otherwise) that are accepted about the organization and classification of ideas on what is important are what make intercultural communication possible. Defining these agreements and making them explicit can help both potential users and producers of research recognize the limitations as well as the opportunities for the scholarship generated and published in the field. And, in post-secondary education, the repercussions of Whorf's simple point are being felt in unanticipated ways.

The chief implication comes from the global drive for “world class” universities, which is associated with a movement to create research quality assessment indicators. These related developments foretell different futures for higher education. On the one hand, and very positively, globalization increases the contact and sharing of information, values, and questions (exactly as we are doing here in this special issue). Globalization also promotes competition, and this may increase productivity on shared research agendas. Less positively, this drive increases the risk of homogenization by promoting a single common language of scholarship (usually English), and by prioritizing certain research journals in research assessment exercises (nearly all “ranked” journals are published in North America and Europe). In many countries with centralized research funding, journals are classified as either “domestic” or “international.” By awarding local journals lower assessment scores, this classification may have the unintended consequence of discouraging research that is inherently difficult to communicate to English-language readers – for example, research about Cantonese versus Mandarin Chinese media of instruction in the case of Hong Kong, Japanese anthropology, or Sinhalese literature. Are non-English literatures and topics of less interest to non-English speakers, being supported in a publishing regime that prioritizes publication in English?

The first three contributions to this special issue could be read as a conversation about what should be done by three different types of agents: editors, individual scholars, and scholars as organized collectives. Kathryn Anderson-Levitt writes from her perspective as the former editor of *Anthropology of Education Quarterly*, and from her current coeditorship of *Comparative Education Review*. Her essay problematizes the myopia of many U.S.-based journals, which are unable to discern the questions important to users of vernacular languages other than English. This is a loss for English monolinguals. Anderson-Levitt offers advice for bringing non-English scholarship to US readers, while simultaneously helping scholars in other countries by coaching them in the expectations of international journals – a practice that a few very good English-language journals have publically committed to do.

Next in the special issue, Suresh Canagarajah documents the lived experiences of young scholars in a Southeast Asian university where he was invited as a distinguished visitor and a “literacy broker” (to use the terminology by two other authors we include, Mary Ann Curry and Theresa Lillis). Canagarajah tried to do exactly what Anderson-Levitt advised, educating his mentees to the norms of publication in the dominant journals. At the same time, he collected critical insights about how the expectations of publication in those journals were affecting the agendas of his mentees. To Canagarajah's surprise, this critique was subsequently deemed so sensitive that some participants decided they did not wish even to be indirectly referenced (hence the anonymity of the university and even the name of the country in the article). As he explains, “the scholars felt that even pseudonyms and anonymity will not provide them sufficient protection, as the details in their drafts and journals can reveal the context and identity.” A conversation between Anderson-Levitt and Canagarajah might focus on the power asymmetry between journal editors and the prospective authors to their journals (who are also potential authors for merely “local” journals).

But not all responses to power imbalance are individual responses alone; some are collective. This is the example of Taiwan, where Chuang Prudence Chou has analyzed the consequence of a central higher education policy that incentivized social scientists to publish in a list of journals recognized by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), nearly all English media. In response to these incentives, in 2010 over 3,000 Taiwanese university faculty (mostly from the social sciences, not natural sciences) signed a petition demanding that the government discontinue the use of SSCI journals as the indicator for university productivity. In addition this petition urged funding agencies to expand both the quantity and the variety of acceptable academic journals including many local journals published in Chinese. Finally, as signatures increased, top government officials agreed in 2012 to make changes in the listing of acceptable journals. A conversation between Professors Chou, Canagarajah, and Anderson-Levitt might turn to the reasons that collective responses are more or less likely, and more or less likely to have an effect, in some countries rather than others.

Writing from Japan, Mayumi Ishikawa documents the sensitivity not only of scholars but of entire countries to global pressures. In 2010, as she relates, there were new rankings of universities produced by a commercial firm, *Times Higher Education* (THE) in collaboration with Thomson-Reuters. Only five Japanese universities were listed among the world's top 200, compared with eleven in the previous year. Also, as Ishikawa explains, Asia's top position went to the University of Hong Kong, replacing the University of Tokyo. While Japan's response is still evolving, there is a “bipolarity,” a tension between the orientations of the broadly identified STEM sciences and the social sciences and humanities. Both responses may be necessary. As she writes, “there is no doubt that raising English-language paper productivity in the humanities and social sciences matters for Japan's future. It is a critical step on the path to promoting globally engaged research, while ensuring connectivity and fostering dialogue with international scholarly communities. Doing so while upholding the scholarly commitment to local society means that researchers play dual roles, a demanding task, to say the least.”

Also in this special issue, writing from his position as both a South African university leader and as a scholar of comparative education, Crain Soudien identifies the national responsibility to attend to recognize “the need for academics to attend to problematiques available in their own local spaces.” This may sound easy, but Soudien's documentation of journal publication patterns shows that it is not. As he writes, “there is real difficulty facing those who develop and implement policy in crafting reward and incentive systems that nurture the conditions for the achievement of both rigor and relevance.” Surely one complexity is that the authors themselves are far from passive victims of global pressure. This is one point explicitly made by Mary Jane Curry and Theresa Lillis, based on their past work and on experiences of multilingual scholars in their use of language related

tactics in “pursuit of their own interests and objectives, particularly in cases where these do not align with official objectives and strategies.” These coauthors show that these tactics include publishing in multiple languages and genres as well as developing English-medium national journals. A conversation between Professors Ishikawa, Soudien, and Curry & Lillis might start with the question about what makes the optimal response from Japan different from those in England and South Africa.

Two final pieces included in this collection offer more abstract insights based on two different strategies. Writing from the U.S., Leslie D. Gonzales and Anne-Marie Núñez share an exhaustive literature review about what they call the “ranking regime.” Their work enriches our understanding of the ways that ranking has been understood in the literature to influence scholarly work by influencing its evaluation. Gonzales and Núñez synthesize much emerging writing on the area to show that there are four key processes believed to shape the production of scholarship under these ranking regimes: individualism, standardization, commodification, homogenization. Editors themselves are not bystanders in these processes (as Anderson-Levitt acknowledges, and as I myself fervently agree). Based on his experience in Spanish-language countries of the Americas (and now writing from the USA), Jorge Delgado has done a true service to our thinking by offering the first full model I have seen about the ways that higher education institutions support (or do not) journal production. [Delgado's diagram](#) is a step forward in testing out the varied ways that higher education institutions themselves can differ cross-nationally in their responsiveness to the new homogenizing pressures for publication as a commodity (Delgado has done another service by parallel publishing a [Spanish version of his essay](#))

These essays raise persistent questions, some of them normative and some empirical. Independent of this special issue, four contributors (in addition to myself) are collaborating in a project supported by the World University Network to document the changes inside higher education as a consequence of quality assessment based on ranked journals and rank scholarship. We hope to report to you in the near future how publication patterns and topics have changed over the past 20 years, and we plan to record the retrospective appraisals by scholars across different countries. My introduction concludes with a note of gratitude to the dozens of external reviewers who made possible the improvement of the pieces selected for this issue. I also thank my many colleagues in the U.S. and in UNESCO for their patience and support. Most of all, the inspiration for this issue – though jointly shared – was enabled only through the instigation by, and a collegial kick in the pants from, Mr. Gustavo Fischman, whose stewardship of the EEPA has been inspirational to so many authors and editors worldwide.

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David Post is Senior Policy Analyst with the Global Monitoring Report of Education For All, and is currently based at UNESCO in Paris. He also is a Professor of Comparative and International Education who is on leave from Penn State University in the USA. He has researched and published about educational stratification, about child labor issues, as well as the politics of educational mobilization. He also investigates the impact of concurrent employment on student academic achievement. He has been a visiting professor at the Colegio de México, at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, and at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Finally, David served for ten years as editor of *Comparative Education Review*, where he became concerned about the commodification of scholarship and the possible responses to it by intellectuals, for example through peer-reviewed, open access publication of studies like those in this special issue. Last year, the EPAA printed the Spanish version of his commentary, “Los Rankings Académicos.” <http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1347>

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