

Editorial

Seeing Ourselves in Perspective

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At both the 1994 and 1995 conferences of the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia, Special Interest Groups were charged with the responsibility of planning towards the publication of a 4-yearly summary of mathematics education research in Australasia. This publication will be launched at the International Congress on Mathematical Education in Barcelona in July, 1996. In the 1992 review *Research in Mathematics Education in Australasia* (Atweh & Watson, 1992), the research summarised included 13 chapters and spanned 268 pages. Current planning suggests that the 1996 review will have 17 chapters.

Clearly, then, a substantial research base for mathematics education has been established in Australasia. On the international scene, similar research bases have been developed in other countries. At the 1994 annual conference of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education, for example, mathematics education researchers from some 25 countries gathered to share and discuss their research.

Rapidly expanding electronic networks make it possible for mathematics education researchers to access data bases and research reports from around the world.

But have researchers matured enough to read research as research, regardless of the country in which it originated? For example, in articles which have appeared in recent issues of the *Mathematics Education Research Journal*, how many citations were made to the work of European-based mathematics education researchers? How many citations do European-based articles have to Australian-based research? And how many citations do Australian-based articles have to US-based or UK-based research—and vice versa? White (1990) discussed the balance of citations from different countries in a range of areas of education. For example, he referred to the chapter on mathematics education in the *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (Wittrock, 1986), in which 174 out of 183 citations were from the United States.

The June *Newsletter* from the Mathematics Education Research Group of Australasia included a list of University subscribers to *MERJ*. One cannot help but speculate whether one of the reasons why Australian research is not cited as much as might be expected in Australian mathematics education research reports is that many Australian University libraries do not subscribe to *MERJ*. I would urge readers of this *Journal* to encourage their libraries to subscribe to *MERJ*.

Why ... ?

It could be argued that some research is of particular relevance to the local context and to a particular country or culture. In reports of such research, authors may have decided that it would be irrelevant and indeed distracting to refer extensively to research carried out in other contexts, countries or cultures. I

suspect, however, that it is this very excuse which is often used to rationalise the absence of more broadly-based citations.

One can look at this as a form of "reverse colonialism," in which the long-term recipient of colonial support has adopted a psychological dependence on the colonising "power." Ellerton and Clements (1989, p. 72) referred to this in their definition of colonialism when they wrote:

For us, "colonialism" is an attitude of mind accepted by both the leaders and the representatives of the colonising power and by those who are being colonised, that what goes on at "home" should also take place in the colonies. While this "acceptance" is sometimes a conscious act, more often it is unconscious—people behave in a colonialist way simply because that is the way they have learnt to behave.

It will need conscious action on the part of mathematics education researchers to establish a broader base for their citations. And, of course, it is not just the lack of balance in citations which concerns me. Rather, it is the fact that other research which may be even more relevant than the research cited, lays neglected on library shelves.

Research Grants—A Similar Story?

It is interesting to speculate whether a similar mental set is guiding decisions concerning the awarding of major research funding. Are we so bound by our personal images of what constitutes "good" research, "good" researchers, and "good" research institutions that we are locking out excellent research by relatively little-known researchers from institutions which have only more recently become known for their research? The current Australian Research Council, for example, does not use blind reviews to inform its decisions on the awarding of research funds.

A genuinely blind review system would be likely to produce important changes to the current balance of recipients of major research grants. Such a system would place very high emphasis on the quality of the research proposals funded. Sceptics are likely to suggest that the reputation of researchers proposing the project must also be taken into account. But this kind of argument means that the pool of researchers gaining funding remains stagnant, and can result in promising new researchers finding it difficult to obtain their first large research grant.

Pointing Towards Change

Change comes about in part by the recognition that change is needed. How many mathematics education researchers believe that change is needed in the balance of citations presented in their research? How many reviewers are conscious of this attitude when they review research grant applications?

My call, then, is for contributors to *MERJ* to make a conscious effort to base the papers they submit on as broad a research base as is both possible and appropriate. I believe that the effort made by researchers to achieve this will be more than rewarded by the enrichment gained by confronting research which has previously been set to one side or largely ignored.

The consequences of ignoring this call effectively condemn mathematics education research to be based largely on research which emanates mostly from a

few people attached to a few tertiary institutions located in only a few countries. Not only is this a waste of human resources and the products of human endeavour, but it is colonialist in the extreme. Mathematics education researchers around the world deserves better than this.

References

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