

Education 3-13

Expert Interview with Mark Brundrett, Editor

Recorded on 23 April 2010 at The Faculty of Education, Liverpool John Moores University

Journal Specific Questions

1. What is the Journal about, what are its aims, what area does it primarily focus upon, and what range of concerns does the Journal aim to explore?

Education 3-13 has existed for over 30 years. It is currently the main publication of the Association for the Study of Primary Education which is based in the UK. *Education 3-13* has the full title of *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, but its main focus is to publish refereed articles of the highest quality of research that analyse practice relating to children between the ages of 3 and 13. Sometimes this can cause a little confusion because readers who are unused to the journal search the internet and think that the journal relates to certain phases of education that have the nomenclature of the title 3-13 but in fact it simply refers to that age range.

So the journal welcomes items that relate to preschool, the early years of education, infants, juniors, middle schooling in the UK, and internationally kindergarten, elementary education and the early years of secondary education. However, having said that, the main focus of *Education 3-13* has always been primary education which in the UK is between the ages of 5 and 11 years. Of course we are very interested in what happens prior to that stage of education and also in the transfer to secondary education and that is why we publish items in that full age range.

2. Who do you feel are your readership, your core audience?

We want the journal to be relevant to academics, students, teachers, advisers, inspectors and of course practitioners in the UK and internationally. The journal has always had a reputation for being of interest throughout the commonwealth so Canada, the whole of North America including the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, some areas of the Middle East, Africa. The journal has always accepted items from all of those areas because of course the British Education system has had some influence in many of those parts of the world and is still of interest to many colleagues there.

So *Education 3-13* is very much an international journal and its scope is increasingly international as we receive items that are from around the world, and we would now quite frequently have items from India, parts of Europe, for instance Greece, Scandinavia and so on. So the journal is not just interested in what happens in the UK but what's happening in primary and early years education throughout the world. And certainly when I write editorials I try to make sure that the editorials reflect that fact, and although I may frequently discuss recent occurrences in policy and practice in the UK and especially in England, I would always try to include an element that discusses major events and developments in the field internationally.

3. What is the range of issues and concerns that the journal aims to explore?

The range of issues that *Education 3-13* focuses on is extremely wide and is one of the great strengths of the journal. Because it's focusing on a fairly wide age group rather than any specific subject or curriculum area, it means that we welcome and see as a real strength of the journal the fact that we have submissions that relate to a really wide variety of topics. So for instance we would have items on all areas of the curriculum, English, Maths, Science, Humanities and so on. But also we welcome items that are on the philosophy of education relating to this particular age group, research methods as they relate to this age group, policy, in particular countries or internationally, relating to children in this set of phases of education. In other words, the whole gamut of issues relating to policy and practice and research in Education from the ages of 3 to 13.

We are very keen that the journal is rigorous in what it does and that we have the highest quality of scholarship included in the journal. For instance we've had submissions and we've published items from many of the leading academic researchers in the field over the years. Some of these researchers have been very good to the journal in terms of supplying us with very interesting items, articles and so on, but also in promoting the journal and assisting the Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE) as well.

But we have to emphasise that we don't just accept items from the very highest level of the academic community, we also welcome items that are from newer academics who are trying to commence their research experience, and also from practitioners. Of course we do insist that all work in the journal is double peer reviewed and that the work in the end [has to] contain the highest level of scholarship that we can possibly attain.

4. During your time as Editor, have there been topics/papers/issues that you feel have been particularly successful?

I've been Editor for about six years now, and during that period we've had items in the journal on an amazing range of topics and because the journal is in that sense a generalist journal and accepts items, as long as they have relevance to the age group that we are interested in, it means that we have this fascinating range of issues. Some of the most popular items have been connected with particular policy events or changes in the policy in education in particular countries. For instance the Every Child Matters agenda which was developed in England was something that was of great interest to our readers and was extremely successful. We've also had very successful items on leading primary schools, on [the] philosophy of education and a whole range of other issues.

I guess the kinds of things that do really capture the imagination of readers though have often been those things that relate to some major event that is influencing the practice of education between the ages of 3-13 in whatever nation is being analysed in the particular paper. So naturally if there's some huge policy change, an enormous change to the curriculum that's going to affect many teachers and academics who will be interested in researching, then that's the kind of thing that is

going to be of a special interest and is likely to gain the most hits as it were in terms of people who are searching the internet and trying to find relevant articles.

We currently have an edition that is focused on [research methods in primary education](#) and so naturally since many of our readers are academics, that's something that again we expect will be an especially interesting whole edition. Having said that it's not just those very big topics that interest our readers and we find that individual submissions that have come in as part of the general submissions can be extremely successful and sometimes head the list of the items that get the most hits in terms of people looking for topics. We have to remember that there are many academics out there wanting to find out about a particular topic, using the internet, using search engines, and also there are hundreds or thousands of students studying on doctoral courses, masters degree courses, and undergraduates who are training to be teachers and the journal is of great interest to those groups and we find that many of our colleagues who work in teacher education institutions find the journal to be extremely useful and we would thoroughly encourage that students, people aspiring to come into the profession, would read the journal. So topics that are of interest, both to those academics in terms of things that are about teacher education itself, or topics that are relevant to students and student teachers or academics who are undertaking higher degrees all those kinds of papers and issues are extremely successful and so we encourage the submission of an extremely wide variety of material. For an example of the wide range of material available, take a look at the recent Special Issue on [International Perspectives on Outdoor and Experiential Education](#)

Traditionally of course primary education has had a strong focus on what's sometimes called the basics of the curriculum, things like maths and English, and so it's quite common that items that are submitted in those areas are extremely successful.

So really there is no one area that is particularly strong or successful in the journal, a great many topics are successful, it depends on what is of particular interest at the time and also of course the quality of the individual paper that is submitted.

5. What do you look for when considering articles and submissions? How do you spot a good article, what are the most common mistakes, what advice would you give to researchers who would like to publish in the journal?

When we are looking for articles and considering articles we do have a certain set of criteria in our mind and as someone myself who would see the vast majority of items and indeed tries to look at all the items that are submitted to the journal I certainly have an ideal of the shape and the nature of an article and a very good idea of what I'm looking for the journal, and I guess that's probably true for all journals.

Many journals in the field of education in my experience, having published in a number of journals myself of course, have a fairly similar set of expectations. There are no absolutes in the way a journal article should be structured for education but there is a fairly common framework that we are all familiar with that often relates to research and research publications, PhDs, masters degrees and so on, the basic structure of all of those things, research reports, research degrees, theses and dissertations and articles is often very similar. What I mean by that is we would typically expect a

strong title, a good title that really expressed what the article was about and made it clear to the reader exactly what the topic was, and it's amazing how often writers neglect to do that. It's quite understandable to some extent because writers are often passionate about the particular topic that they're interested in and they think of some wonderfully creative title for their topic. That's fine but the only problem is that unless the title says very simply and clearly, what the article is about, it's quite difficult for the reader and certainly for the referee and the Editor to immediately judge what the item is focusing on. Now of course they'll find out as they read the article but it does mean that they've got to get into the piece itself before they really see what the topic is. Not only that, but in these days when electronic search engines have become so important, if the title doesn't explain the topic of the article very clearly then that item may well be missed and that's a great shame because it means the research isn't being disseminated widely and of course it also means potentially that the impact of that item and of the journal, is far less than it otherwise would be. So as a headline if you like, it's important to have a really good, clear title that says precisely and simply what the article is about. It may be that you'll then have a colon after that initial simple title and then add something that is as I've suggested, something slightly more creative, but I would suggest that the initial part of the title is extremely clear.

Then after that of course, as with most journals, we require an abstract and that abstract needs to be short, very clear and state exactly what the article is about, what research has been undertaken and the main outcomes of that piece of research. That then means that immediately, the reader, the referee, the Editor, can spot that this is something of genuine interest. There's no point in attempting to hide what you're talking about, or not reveal your topic until later, it's important to really hit the ground running and state very clearly in your title and abstract what it is that you're doing.

For the structure of the rest of the article we would expect an introduction, and I always talk about going from the macro to the micro, you don't have to but we have to remember that this is an international journal and so we have pieces from the UK, from nations all around the world, and readers in all of those places too, and we want to appeal to that readership. That therefore means if you are writing something that is based on the experience of education in Australia, or Greece, or the UK for that matter, it may be that readers in other parts of the world are really not familiar with the education system or any particular initiatives that are happening in those countries. So it's a big mistake not to set out exactly what the context, the policy context, the educational context is. Sometimes writers are a bit reticent about that because they may think that in that introduction if they start talking about the education system it's obvious, but of course it may not be obvious to many of our readers, and we want to disseminate research internationally so I would encourage writers to give a brief outline of the large policy context, that's my term dealing with the macro issues. So if the person writing can give the bigger picture relating to the particular topic that they are researching or writing about over a period of a number of years in that particular country or internationally then that is a great help, and then quite swiftly focus in on a particular topic that they are interested in. And also, quite quickly state their aims, it might be in terms of particular research questions, it might be in terms of fairly general aims or an overarching aim or objectives, but a statement really very early on, somewhere towards the end of the introduction that says 'this is what this article is focusing on, this is what I researched, this is what I'm writing about'. So the reader and the referee is left in no doubt of what they are going to expect that article to be about

and to focus on and it helps them to make a judgment then because they can see later in the article whether those issues have really been addressed effectively.

Progressing from that introduction we would typically but not always, expect to see a something of a literature review. Depending on the nature of the article this may be very extensive, of course this would be particularly true if the article was not based on empirical research but was a very detailed discussion, theoretical discussion, of the topic, but of course we would still expect to see a strong literature review if the item as we would expect with most items, was based on some form of original empirical research. And so that literature review would pick up on the key topics, that overarching aim, set of issues set out at the end of the introduction, it may well be thematic and relate to the themes stated in those original aims. And then after that we would expect to see a strong methodology section, if this was relating to empirical research, that gave very clear details of the methods used by the researcher. That needs to be both theoretical and quite practical in focus. Sometimes people can get rather carried away in the theory and explore the theory of educational research, now that's very important but if that misses out the details of exactly what was done and how and to whom, then it's missed out the critical details that are required by the referee so you really do need to have something that says, 'let me explore the theory here, let me talk about the theory of researching primary education or early years education, or the transfer from primary to secondary, let me talk about the theory of conducting interviews or a particular statistical technique' but as well as that you need something that says absolutely straightforwardly to the reader 'I undertook interviews in this number of schools, this type of schools, my sample was chosen in this way', and something that [shows (if) there's a statistical technique being used] that says 'the questionnaire was distributed to this number of people in these places' and so on. So something that really does say unequivocally 'this is what I did'. And in that way, the reader gets not only a theoretical background but also has a very strong grasp on what actually occurred in this research, how it was carried out.

From there of course we want to find out exactly what was discovered. So some people would offer a presentation of the data initially, which might be data in terms of statistics and various figures that analyse or show some of the details of those statistics. Or if it was a qualitative piece of work it might discuss the things that were said and the discussions that took place and the interviews that happened, and then there might be a separate section that went on from that that analysed the data. But quite frequently, because of course the journal articles are expected to be somewhere between 5000 and 8000 words, those two things would actually be brought together in one section after the methodology that both presented and analysed the data, and so there would be a strong presentation of that data which may include figures or pictures, which we very strongly welcome, or other kinds of representation of the data, quotations and so on, but also would have very detailed discussions of the findings and what was discovered in the course of this research.

It's important to remember that once again we want this to be something that makes very clear what the findings were, and for that reason, every good article ends with a really simply clear, straightforward conclusion that will state the overall findings or the final theoretical construct that has been reached, or recommendations for practice and so on, so that the whole article is drawn together. Of course it's important in those latter sections of the article that you reintegrate some of the literature that has been used earlier on in the literature review and you refer back to that by way of comparison to say whether your research or your theoretical perspective confirms early research

or contrasts with or indeed seems to suggest that early research had some failings or some problems. In that sense that is one of the ways in which to get some kind of structural integrity in an article because structural integrity is something that is really difficult to achieve. When we write articles and academic monographs and so on of course, we are not writing the same kind of narrative that we would if this was some kind of creative piece, and so it can be really hard within that construct of title, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology and so on, to get the piece to hang together. So it's really important to try to think of ways in which we can make articles work together as a whole piece and make them interesting for the reader and make them accessible for the reader. So for that reason it's important that we use the appropriate academic conventions, we think of the appropriate language that is to be used by academics, we key into the discourse on that topic. As well as that we need to think about are we making sure that when we've stated our aims that we've really addressed those aims later in the piece that, when we've referred to some literature in the literature review, that we come back and refer to that again and that it isn't just left sitting in one section of the article and never to reappear.

So for me and I think for any Editor and reviewer, it's about having an article that's well structured, well presented, follows all the academic conventions and so on. And of course features that we might think of as quite superficial, things like spelling, punctuation, academic conventions in terms of referencing and the references themselves at the end of the text. Although those may be in some senses superficial features of the text, it is very important that they are dealt with well, and that the syntactical structure of the piece is good, the grammatical structure is good and so on. There is absolutely no point in having something very important to say and then to be honest, it's simply badly written. That's why I'd always suggest that articles are proof-read several times before they're submitted. And if someone is submitting to the journal and English is not their first language, then I would always suggest that unless they're absolutely confident that their skills in English are at the right level, that they get someone else to assist them in reading the item before its submitted.

6. What do you see as the strength of *Education 3-13* as an academic journal compared to other titles in the field?

One of the strengths of *Education 3-13* is its coverage, that age range, pre-school, primary education, elementary education, transfer to secondary. There are very few journals addressing that area of education. There are some journals that address early years, some journals that address secondary, some journals that address primary education, and many of them are excellent journals, but there very few others that address that range and therefore give people the opportunity to write about preschool, primary school and the start of secondary education.

The fact that the journal is generalist in the sense that we accept items on any topics relating to that age range is also another strength because it means we can have special editions on policy issues, on play, on outdoor education, on particular subject areas such as Maths, or English, or Science or History, or any of the other subjects, we can have philosophical pieces and so on. That is a real strength of the journal because it means we can have special editions that focus on a particular topic but we can also have general editions that deal with a huge range of things that are of general interest to readers and academics and I would certainly argue that *Education 3-13* is a gold mine of items on the topic, there are very few other journals if any that are able to offer that range of

coverage and that focus particularly on primary education, over such a long period, both in the UK and internationally.

7. What are your aspirations for the future of the journal?

The journal has changed a lot in recent times, we moved to Routledge in the last few years and the journal has developed dramatically. It's moved from 3 editions to 3 larger editions, then 4 editions and it's soon likely to move to five editions. So the nature of the journal just simply in terms of the way it's published, how it's accessed and the number of publications has increased and that means that more and more people can access the journal. Of course it's also accessible online these days which is extremely important and all of the past editions of the journal have now been digitised so there's huge wealth of material dating back over many years that people can examine and analyse. There is some absolutely fascinating material there over a period of a generation of educators.

We want to continue to build on that, we want the journal to continue to give access for publication for a wide range of people; academics, practitioners, people in countries from around the world. We are very keen as part of the mission of the journal, to continue to expand the journal internationally, and we feel that the journal is relevant to people in all parts of the world. If you think about it, for many parts of the developing world certainly, primary education is the only education that children have ready access to. So this is a very important topic and we want colleagues, and practitioners in the developed world and the developing world to have access to *Education 3-13*.

We want it to contain the very highest scholarship; we want people who are the best, the most famous academic researchers in the field to publish in *Education 3-13*. But we also want material that is by and about policy makers and practitioners. We want the journal to be of the highest quality but also to have wide appeal. Now that's a very difficult trick to pull off but it's something that we've been doing and been doing well for a long time and we want to continue to do that and we would strongly encourage submissions from people in all parts of the world and in all types of posts relating to education for children in the ages 3-13.

8. What advice do you have for those looking to get published? What effect does the RAE (REF) have on decisions about where and what to publish?

My advice to those who are looking to get published maybe for the first time or the first two or three times in their publishing career is to make sure that you develop an article that meets all the kinds of things that I've been talking about before, that it is well structured, has a good title, uses the appropriate academic conventions and so on, and that you submit it to the journal. But that is of course easier said than done and of course many articles in whatever journal will come back either asking for minor revisions, or major revisions, or will be rejected, and what I would say to people when that happens is that there is almost no academic who hasn't had an item rejected, or had many items rejected, and that's just the way it is. Hopefully as you get more used to writing and publishing and knowing what journals are about and what editors and referees are looking for, that will happen less and less. But it will still happen a little later in your career, so don't be put off, that's the message, just don't be put off. If something comes back and revisions are asked for, revise the

piece, look carefully at what the referees have said, develop the piece along the lines that you've been asked to develop it. Sometimes you may disagree with what the referees are saying and then you have to make a judgement about whether you wish to change the article in that way or whether you're not going to submit again or go somewhere else. But generally speaking referees, good referees, are trying to be helpful, and that's certainly the case with *3-13*. We take pride in trying to be helpful and to assist people who are submitting items to the journal. If we have to say that we don't want an item we only do that because we genuinely feel that the item is not suitable at that stage for the journal. Quite often what writers will do is they will address particular issues, they may highlight in a different colour or whatever the additional elements that they've put into a piece to make it clear when the item is resubmitted, what they've done. And also many writers will offer a fairly detailed, not too lengthy, but a fairly detailed covering note saying how they've changed the item. That's not essential and referees won't always see that, but it can be helpful so that's worth considering.

To come back to my initial point of not being put off, if you submit and you're rejected or if you submit and resubmit and the item in the end doesn't get published then think about whether it's worth trying with another journal, or, think about whether there is something else that you can move on to and start to write about or think about or whether you can adapt that piece in some way.

I'm not always keen on formal processes that many institutions, universities for instance, provide or offer, in terms of structures to help people to write, because I think sometimes those formal processes, (things like formal mentoring schemes and so on,) can be a bit artificial. But sometimes they can be of use and if your university or your institution or an institution you're associated with offers some kind of mentoring scheme, then it's certainly worth exploring. But very often, the most helpful thing to do is work with other successful academics who you simply come to know, who you meet either on courses or programmes of study of one kind or another, people you work with, and you'll find that some people have a writing style or an academic style, or a personal style that is sympathetic to your own, and you can work with them and if you find that kind of person then they are gold, work with them, co-write, write with them if they will let you, let them see your work, and that kind of person, to get someone who you really do get on with and can write well can be quite rare, and if you find someone like that stick with it, develop it, and enjoy that relationship because it's important. And of course as you get more experienced hopefully you will reciprocate by helping others who are perhaps aspiring in the way that you were, that's really important.

In terms of considering the research assessment exercise, that's now become known as the REF in the UK, of course we can say 'well it doesn't matter' in a sense because whether or not something is going to be submitted to the REF, you want to be published. Being published is important, academic life, scholarly activity should be important in its own right. But having said that, we all know that the RAE (REF) is very important to academic institutions and to individual scholars and can determine the success of institutions, promotions prospects, and so on, so there's no point in dismissing it. In terms of the REF, people who are writing need to think about the quality of their writing, they need to think about who they are writing with, the journals that they are submitting to, and so on. *Education 3-13* is a journal that's very often used and cited by people when they're making their submissions to the RAE and now the REF, so it's certainly the kind of journal that people do want to get in to for those purposes. In terms of bosses, referees and editors, individual submissions that

come to us are not considered against the RAE or the REF, that's not something that we consider when we are publishing an item, we simply consider the quality and the academic quality and the interest in the individual piece. So we have a set of criteria that we are familiar with, but we would not be thinking about the RAE or the REF when we're making that decision.

However in the bigger picture for the journal, of course these things are of importance because we know that if the journal is successful and people are citing the journal and its been used in terms of the research assessment exercise and the REF, then that may will mean that more people will read the journal and the journal will have greater success which is what we are all about. So we do aspire to have a journal that is successful and is relevant to these research accountability processes, and it is, and we want that to develop as years go by. For those individuals who are therefore thinking about the journal and want to submit and are thinking will this item be suitable for the REF, the answer is almost certainly 'yes'. It will be up to you and your institution to decide whether the item will be one that will feature in your submission, but certainly there is no reason why you shouldn't be submitting to *Education 3-13* with that kind of process in mind. Although I would say at the time of an individual submission, that shouldn't be at the forefront of your thinking, it should be about the quality of that piece, your own profile, how you want to develop as an individual and if you like the REF should be the servant of your scholarship and not the other way around.