Expert Interview with Frances Brill and Felicity Fletcher-Campbell, Co-Editors of *Educational Research*

1. For researchers or students who have never encountered *Educational Research*, what is the journal about in a nutshell?

Frances Brill: Hallo, I’m Dr Frances Brill

Felicity Fletcher-Campbell: And I’m Dr Felicity Fletcher-Campbell.

Frances: And together, we co-edit *Educational Research*. We’re really pleased to have the opportunity to tell you a little about the journal, its aims and scope, and also offer some guidance to those of you who might be considering making a submission.

*Educational Research* was established in 1958 by the National Foundation for Educational Research, where it is still edited today. The NFER’s purpose is to provide independent evidence which improves education and training. The journal supports this aim by bringing to publication high-quality educational research from all areas of the education field. It’s also a leading forum for informed thinking on issues of contemporary concern in education. The journal has a broad scope, and contains research studies with both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analyses.

We also publish reviews of research, discussion pieces, short reports and occasional book reviews. The journal has an international readership, and welcomes submissions from all over the world.

Felicity: Because of its broad scope, *Educational Research* is sometimes described as a ‘generalist’ journal, but this is perhaps not the most helpful of terms. So it might be useful to explain further what this really means. We know that many of our readers expect to be able to turn to *Educational Research* for accessible but, nonetheless, scholarly articles on topical educational issues in which they themselves may not be specialists. So, the challenge for prospective authors is to present their work in clear, non-technical language which makes it easily understood by our wide readership.

2. What aspects of educational research does the journal represent?

Felicity: We should say that we interpret education very widely and we are not just thinking of education in schools or in some formal education system. We are thinking of informal learning, learning that happens at all ages, learning that happens in the workplace and sometimes we have articles actually on professional learning - for example, it might be related to nurse education. So Educational Research does cover a wide range of situations and learning support and the learning that goes on in contemporary society.

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

Frances: Our readership includes other academics, policy makers, practitioners and students. We are very much aware that we have an international audience. It’s very important for submitters to understand that contextualisation of their writing is going to be extremely important because of this wide audience and the fact that, obviously, it is then not possible to take things for granted. So we
would like to recommend that our submitters think about the context of their work - for example, the educational setting that they are describing in their study. It is going to be important for our international audience to have a quick and efficient way of calibrating that against a situation that they may be aware of.

**Felicity:** We should say that although we are thinking of this range of readers, the articles that we publish are not a sort of digests as it were; one of our quality criteria is that they must add to the literature and they must be innovative pieces of work and they must offer a new contribution to knowledge in the field. Of course, having done this, the readers will actually read them differently, as it were. So your reader who is maybe a specialist in this area and knows the literature will recognise the literature which the author presents in the article and that is as it were a sort of check that the author is referring to the most appropriate literature.

Another reader may actually not be familiar with the literature: and so, the article will serve to give that reader some guidance as to what the reader might like to go off and read, in order to be familiar with that article. So, I think our different readers read the articles in different ways. A policy maker, for example, might be chiefly interested in the recommendations and then work back from there to see how those recommendations were derived.

4. **Are there any recent topics, papers and/or issues which you feel have been particularly successful? What do you see as the strengths of Educational Research as an academic journal compared to other titles in the field?**

**Felicity:** Well, we think one of the strengths of Educational Research is our annual special issue. Each year, we invite guest editors to produce an issue on an area of education which is particularly innovative or topical at the time. Recent special issues have covered education and neuroscience, assessment in education, virtual worlds of learning and, this year, citizenship and human rights education. These special issues have generated international interest and have brought knowledge of specialist educational areas to a wider audience.

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 researchers who would like to be published in your journal?
   - What advice would you give practitioners who are thinking of writing an article?

**Frances:** We’re always keen to receive new submissions to Educational Research. If you are thinking of offering a paper, you will find detailed information on submission procedures on the Educational Research homepage. All papers go through careful initial editorial screening, and selected papers are then rigorously peer reviewed by at least two anonymous referees. When reviewing submissions, our reviewers will be looking for studies that are methodologically sound, statistically robust where appropriate, that do not use technical jargon, and are sufficiently contextualised. By this final point, we mean showing awareness that the educational setting of the study may not be shared by the reader.

**Felicity:** We should also say that submitters are requested to supply a structured abstract with their paper, and full details of how to do this are given on the website. For submitters, writing the structured abstract is a good way of checking that key pieces of information have not been inadvertently omitted either from the abstract or from the full paper itself. Educational Research was
one of the first educational journals to use structured abstracts, and we believe that they benefit contributors, reviewers, readers and those conducting literature reviews.

6. Each year the journal publishes a special, focus issue. Could you provide more information on your programme?

Frances: Every year, we publish a Special Issue as part of Educational Research and we are always pleased to consider proposals for Special Issues. It is really important, we think, to be aware that from initial idea to publication it is at least a 24 month process. Proposals must meet our usual article criteria for the journal but we also offer guidance for Special Issue proposals which can be downloaded from the website.

So what are we looking for in terms of a Special Issue proposal? Well, the proposal must actually include a clear rationale for why the topic is suitable for an Educational Research Special Issue and, in particular, it is really important to consider how the papers in the issue would reach out to our international audience. In terms of scope, it must also show a clear idea of how the call for papers would elicit international, high quality material which is suitable for peer review. The Guest Editor must have a relevant background in the area and also be able to undertake the considerable editorial work which is necessary to bring a Special Issue to publication.

7. The journal publishes research studies, reviews, discussion pieces, in addition to short reports and book reviews. All these different types of papers discuss different aspects of educational research; how important is it that the journal includes such a broad spectrum of papers? What do you feel these different types of paper add to the journal?

Felicity: Well, as editors, we feel that the diversity of article types contributes to the journal’s ability to cover a wide range of topical issues and debates. Of course, the publication of high-quality, original data studies is key to the advancement of the evidence base in virtually all areas of education. However, arguably, of equal importance must be the presentation of up-to-date systematic reviews of the literature. We know that literature reviews are used widely by researchers in the field and policymakers alike, and have the potential to provide a basis for decision-making in problematic educational areas. We are very keen, therefore, to bring to publication thorough and rigorous literature reviews.

Frances: Additionally, we view theoretical discussions of educational topics as a vital way of moving on the debate in the field. We are also particularly interested in furthering educational discussion through responses or commentaries on published work. For example, we feel that commentary pieces worked especially well in our Special Issue on Assessment in 2009. The guest editor, Chris Whetton, invited international researchers to read and respond to papers about educational assessment in England: in other words, seeing the system through a series of different lenses. The result was a fascinating series of responses offering new insights and perspectives, as the commentators reflected on the English assessment system by comparing it with that from their own countries.

We’d welcome the submission of papers written in response to papers published in the general issues of educational research.
8. Are there any 'hot topics' or specific fields of study you feel will come to the fore in the next two-three years?

**Felicity:** Well the theme of our Special Issue 2012 - teacher education and the impact of the global recession – is undoubtedly of topical interest. We are delighted to be working with guest editors Joan Stephenson and Lorraine Ling to bring this interesting issue to publication next year. They are particularly interested in the way that changes brought about by the global recession may impact on pedagogy and educational practice.

9. Is there a particularly significant educational issue that you have seen debated in the journal over recent years?

**Frances:** In recent years we have received a notable number of submissions on the sensitive and difficult theme of ‘bullying in educational settings’. It’s an educational issue that’s maintained topicality, has an international profile and has developed as an area of research. We’ve published articles in *Educational Research* that have offered both qualitative and quantitative contributions to the continuing debate on this topic, and furthered the sharing of findings in relation to bullying experiences, prevention interventions and strategies.

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

**Frances:** As we mentioned at the beginning of this podcast, *Educational Research* is edited at the NFER, which is based in the United Kingdom. But we’d like to make the point that we do not see ourselves as a UK-centred journal. Indeed, our Editorial Board and Panel has an international membership. We welcome contributions from all across the globe, and in fact one of our aims for the future is to increase the international reach of the journal.

Whether you are a prospective submitter, or reader of the journal, or both, we hope that this introduction will encourage you to become more involved with *Educational Research*. 