



Volume 11
Number 1 *Is "Best Practices" Research in
Education Insufficient or even Misdirected?*
AN INVITED ISSUE DEDICATED TO JOHN G.
RICHARDSON

Article 7

2016

Is "Best Practices" Research in Education Insufficient or even Misdirected? AN ISSUE DEDICATED TO JOHN G. RICHARDSON

Lorraine Kasprisin
Western Washington University, lorraine.kasprisin@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/jec>



Part of the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kasprisin, Lorraine (2016) "Is "Best Practices" Research in Education Insufficient or even Misdirected? AN ISSUE DEDICATED TO JOHN G. RICHARDSON," *Journal of Educational Controversy*: Vol. 11 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/jec/vol11/iss1/7>

This Dedication is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-reviewed Journals at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Educational Controversy* by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

DEDICATION

Volume 11: Is “Best Practices” Research in Education Insufficient or even Misdirected?

AN ISSUE DEDICATED TO JOHN G. RICHARDSON

Lorraine Kasprisin
Editor

This special issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy* is dedicated to the life and work of John G. Richardson in recognition of a lifetime of scholarly contributions to our understanding of the sociological and historical origins of common schooling in the United States with recent emphasis on the institutional expansion of special education from a global, comparative and historical perspective. John is professor emeritus in the field of sociology of education at Western Washington University, and associate editor of this journal since its beginning in 2006.

This issue is somewhat different from our other issues. The issue not only attempts to break new ground, but it is also a personal expression, on behalf of this journal, of John’s commitment to both the journal and to the world of scholarship.

Dr. Richardson has conceptualized the theme for this issue and has invited four scholars to join him on a journey that will bring cutting edge research to a critical re-examination of our current educational and social science methodology. His introductory essay places the articles within a conceptual framework that raises deeper questions about what it means to make claims to understand something – a question that I particularly appreciate as a philosopher. For me, John is one of those rare scholars who can bring a larger philosophical and historical perspective to his solid empirical research agenda. To the scholars whom he has invited to contribute to this issue, it was one of those rare moments, as one put it, to “recognize the shoulders we stand on.”

We hope that this issue will initiate a wide discussion around some pivotal and fundamental questions about the ways we conduct the research that shapes our understanding of schooling in America.

Because John has invited our authors to partake in this pursuit of new understandings, I asked our authors for their insights on the significance of the questions John has raised in this issue and in his lifetime of scholarship.

Below are comments from the contributors who share their insights on the significance of John’s ideas and lifetime work, followed by a compilation of his scholarly work.

Comments from the Invited Contributors to this Issue of the Journal on the Significance of John Richardson’s Life and Scholarly Work

BERNADETTE BAKER:

In the 21st century changes are occurring so rapidly that the educational field barely has time to process what has already come down the pike, let alone what is coming. It takes a scholar of courage, with both historical awareness and foresight, to raise important, salient and far-reaching questions about what has come, is on the horizon and might be on the way. This is especially the case in an academic context that appears to be narrowing in its toleration for asking difficult questions and generating meaningful dialogue around them. The *Journal of Educational Controversy* is to be congratulated for keeping open this space that is so important to the sustenance of a democracy, so integral to honouring epistemological diversity and so central to offering a site for the wide variety of gifts that people have to be thoughtfully shared. To this end, I want to underscore here just some of the many gifts that I believe John Richardson has given the educational field, both in this special edition and in his prior remarkable oeuvre.

Among the many theoretical, historiographical and epistemological reorientations of the field that John has generated, three stand out in regard to providing springboards for contemporary debates in curriculum studies and in this special edition. One is his insight, meticulously documented, that special education as it used to be labeled played the role of enabling and 'purifying' the space that public schools then took up in many western contexts. John was the first scholar to ask about and then to document how the chronological founding of asylums and schools and centres for children labeled blind, deaf or delinquent preceded and then helped to constitute the nature of what and who could count as 'the public' in public schooling. This is a game-changing insight, for to understand public schooling as less than universal, as outside the usual celebratory narrative of generic child rescue, and as part of a different 'demographic' moralisation challenges much received wisdom. Second, John's intricate understanding of the links between history and sociology, between institutionalism, practices of governance and 'making people up' has changed the way the field sees not just institutions-as-bureaucracies but the idea of nation itself. In his analysis of the different versions of 'frontier' mentalities - the east coast, the south, the midwest and the west coast and Pacific northwest, John has sensitised us to how debates over the scientific versus the humanistic curriculum concerned a far broader impulse - the struggles over which region of the nation was to be THE nation's image, to represent the USA of the early 20th century. This innovation changes forever how one understands the value sets pedagogically inscribed in different regional policies. It again de-universalises those terms, phrases or concepts that might otherwise so easily roll off the tongue as unvariegated entities. Last, but not least, is John's work on understanding the historic impact of different kinds of (religious) forms of benevolence as they structured the possibilities for schooling and its different modes. Historically, it may seem banal to note but potent to realise: not every culture has found it necessary to invent something called asylums, schools and universities, nor has every culture forced children by law to attend institutions outside of family life. The historical trajectories that inform that move in some places and not others, far from being seen automatically as progress and 'civilisation' remains an open question - one about the mentalities and practices that 'made sense' to certain groups of people at certain times - and not without contestation by other of their peers. John's unearthing of the religious heritages entailed in secular inventions is of such quality that it was awarded an AERA Outstanding Book Award in Curriculum Studies. One cannot understand nationalism after Richardson without understanding now

the integral role of special education around a dis/ability line, around benevolence and around assumptions about humanity at large. The qualitative and quantitative evidence he marshals to careful, rigorous and patient arguments is a worthy model and deserving of such an honour.

ANNE E. CRAMPTON

I have only recently become acquainted with John Richardson and his work, and I feel very fortunate indeed to have benefitted from exposure to his scholarship, and to his incisiveness and generosity as an editor. Reading the introduction for this special issue, I am drawn to his discussion of Smith’s “invisible hand” with some hope—at this moment when the so-called leaders of the country are undoubtedly pursuing their own interests—to think that there is a possibility and maybe even a likelihood that out of their self-promotion will emerge an unintended consequence: the “promotion of the society” as a whole, perhaps in the form of resistance. Further, Richardson asserts that this emergence is to be expected, despite all efforts to manage and control outcomes through the application of best practices. This is a far more powerful claim than the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft a-gley. The concept of emergence, as developed in Richardson’s introduction, is potentially discouraging for teachers or other authority figures, and thrilling for students, or citizens. It was also a thrill for me; Richardson’s conceptual history links ideas and whole lineages in compulsory schooling, and offers an emergent and therefore “irreducible,” newness, that helps me think differently about classrooms and students, about power and possibilities for agency. I feel like we need work like Richardson’s more than ever right now.

TRACEY PYSCHER

John Richardson’s work and his editorial influence fits the much needed intention of the *Journal of Educational Controversy*, a space where those not so very popular arguments about educational inequity find a home. I am honored to write along with John as well as the topic he poses for this special issue and has posed in his scholarly work for decades. He foreruns the work I hope to continue. The continuation of his courageous and critical work is especially needed now as we move into an even more dangerous Trump era where even factual truth is questionable. Critical scholars like John, now carry a double burden of unearthing deficit in education and fighting back fabricated realities. This special call especially captures Dr. Richardson’s life work as he asks us to consider both the insufficient and misdirected intentions of educational “best practices.” As an emergent critical scholar advocating for different school practices affecting the lives of marginalized youth, I am honored to continue this tradition he has laid in front of us.

While these three pivotal innovations have changed not only where we look but what we saw after having engaged with Richardson’s work I want to conclude here with something of equal import about John’s contributions. John’s generosity, kindness to his colleagues, his selfless mentoring and support for younger scholars and the high standards he has always set for himself reveal the erudite gentleman that he is. It can sometimes seem that in academe in general there are few senior scholars whose behaviour and daily interactions are governed by humility, but John is such a one. John’s modesty lies in inverse proportion to his intellectual sharpness, perspicuity, clarity and big picture vision coupled with rigorous

attention to detail. It is a rare combination intellectually and personally and our field is now better off for having had both the academic contributions of his lifetime and the compassionate contributions of his life force.

JINTING WU

Poignant, philosophical, and multi-everything, John's work opens many paths in sociology and education. When I first met him in an AERA's pre-conference seminar five years ago, John described himself as actively retired, and I soon learned why. For the last four years, our scholarly kinship revolved around a project on the global convergence of vocational and special education. Through ongoing conversations, John nurtured us with the brilliance of his ideas and guided us to dive deeper into uncommon questions and untangle the complex linkages between history, theology, law, disability, education, and the "multiple publics of marginality". John shows how one can bridge the most unlikely realms and turn the promises of each into a gift for sociological writing. Always with a keen analytical eye to see the peculiar in the mundane, a deft sociological imagination to break new grounds, John has inspired me beyond words could describe. To me, he is not only a mentor and colleague, but also a charismatic family member who offers affirmation and advice rich with humor and goodwill. With affection and gratitude, I thank him for his unfailing support and his shining yet unassuming exemplar of scholarship.

Works by John G. Richardson

PUBLICATIONS

Books

The Global Convergence of Vocational and Special Education. Routledge, London: UK. 2017.

Comparing Special Education. Stanford University Press, 2011. With Justin J. W. Powell. Recipient of the Outstanding Book Award for 2011, Division B, American Educational Research Association.

Common, Delinquent and Special, The Institutional Shape of Special Education. New York: Falmer Press, 1999.

Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, Westport, CT: Greenwood/Praeger, 1986. [Editor-in-Chief].

Chapters in Books

"The Moral Career of Intelligence: Pedagogical Practices and Educational Psychology." In Parlo Singh, Alan R. Sadovnik, and Susan Semel, eds. *Toolkits, Translation Devices and Conceptual Accounts. Essays on Basil Bernstein's Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Lang, 2010. Pp. 197-216. With Karen Bradley.

"Institutional Sequences and Curriculum History: Classical vs. Scientific Knowledge and the Formation of a New Nation." In *New Curriculum Histories*, edited by Bernadette Baker. Sense Publisher, 2009.

"Institutional Sequences, Pedagogical Reach, and Comparative Educational Systems." In *The Impact of Comparative Education on Institutional Theory*, edited by David P. Baker and Alexander W. Wiseman. Elsevier, 2006.

"The Variable Construction of Educational Risk." In *Handbook of the Sociology of Education*, Maureen T. Hallinan, (Ed.), Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2000.

"The Institutional Genesis of Special Education: The American Case". In *Interpretación de la discapacidad, Teoría e historia de la educación especial*, Barry F. Franklin (Ed.). Ediciones Pomares-Corredor, Caspe, Barcelona, 1996.

"Montesquieu's Trilogy and the Institutionalization of Civic Consciousness." Prepared for the Mozart Conference, Western Washington University. Published in *Centuries Ends, The Collective Papers of the 1990-1991 Mozart Festival Lecture Series*, Western Washington University, 1994. Edited by Rodney Peyton and George Mariz.

"Historical Expansion of Special Education". In Richard Rubinson and Bruce Fuller (Eds.), *The Political Construction of Education*, Praeger, 1992.

"Historical Sequences and the Origins of Common Schooling in the American States," Chapter 2 in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, John G. Richardson (Ed.), Westport, CT: Greenwood/Praeger, 1986.

"The Emergence of 'Mental Retardation' As A Social Problem" with Jane R. Mercer; prepared as a chapter for *Issues in the Classification of Children*, Nicholas Hobbs, General Editor, Jossey-Bass Publishers, Vol II, 1975, pp. 463-496.

Articles in Professional Journals

"Wife Occupational Superiority and Marital Troubles: An Examination of the Hypothesis," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1979, Vol. 41 (February): 63-72.

"Perceived Social Status of Husbands and Wives: The Effects of Labor Force Participation and Occupational Prestige," *Sociology and Social Research* 1979, Vol. 63 (January): 354-73. (with E. R. Mahoney).

"The Case of Special Education and Minority Misclassification in California Education," *Educational Research Quarterly* 1979, Vol. 4 (Spring): 25-40.

"Historical Change in School Classification," *Educational Research Quarterly* 1980 Vol. 5 (Fall): 50-62.

"Variation in Dates of Enactment of Compulsory School Attendance Laws: An Empirical Inquiry," *Sociology of Education* 1980, Vol. 53 (July): 153-63.

"Sex Status, Mental Health Referral Processes and Involuntary Disposition," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 1980, Vol. 8(August): 443-453.

"Perceived Social Status of Husbands and Wives in Dual-Career Families as a Function of Achieved and Derived Occupational Status," *Journal of Sex Roles* 1981, Vol. 7 (December): 1189-94. (With E. R. Mahoney).

"Social Change, Parental Values and the Salience of Sex Education," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1981, Vol. 43 (August): 547-57. (With Julie E. Cranston).

"Gender, Descriptive Language and Scientific Reporting," *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 1981, Vol. 53, pp. 483-89. (With Elayne Damron).

"Children, Gender and Social Structure: The Analysis of Letters to Santa Claus," *Child Development* 1982, Vol. 53, pp. 429-36. (with Carl Simpson).

"The Feminization of Public School Teaching: 1870-1920," *Work and Occupations* 1983, Vol. 10 (February): 81-99. (with Brenda Wooden Hatcher).

"Belief in an Afterlife as Symbolic Sanction," *Review of Religious Research* 1983, Vol. 25 (December): 163-170 [with Georgie A. Weatherby].

"Settlement Patterns and the Governing Structures of Nineteenth Century School Systems," *American Journal of Education* 1984, Vol. 92. (February): 178-206.

"The American States and the Age of School Systems," *American Journal of Education* 1984, Vol. 92, (August): 473-502.

"Town vs. Countryside and Systems of Common Schooling," *Social Science History* II (Winter 1987): 401-432.

"The Institutional Genesis of Special Education: The American Case". *American Journal of Education*, August, 1993.

"Common, Delinquent and Special: On the Formalization of Common Schooling in the American States." Vol. 31, Winter, 1994, *American Educational Research Journal*.

"A History of Student Grouping in American Education, 1890 - 1970." Prepared for the National Center for Educational Statistics, Working Paper.

"Historical Context, Professional Authority, and Discourses of Risk: Child Guidance and Special Education." *Teachers College Record* 104 (2002): 563-585.

"Compulsory Attendance Laws in the United States". Invited essay published in the *Encyclopedia of Childhood*, (Paula S. Fass Editor-in-Chief). Macmillan Reference.

*“Millowners and Wobblies: The Event Structure of the Everett Massacre of 1916.” *Social Science History, Fall, 2009.**

*“The Intergroup Dynamics of a Metaphor: The ‘School-to-Prison Pipeline’.” *Journal of Educational Controversy, 2013. (with Douglas Judge).**

*“The Moral Construction of Educational Psychology: The American Case.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 4 (2), January, 2014. With Karen Bradley.**