The pragmatics of education journals: The case of the
*International Journal of Educational Development*

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Abstract
This article discusses some of the pragmatics and politics of academic journal publishing within the context of the contemporary higher education and publishing political economy. The case of the *International Journal of Educational Development (IJED)* is considered, and some implications drawn for the *Southern African Review of Education (SARE)*, given that the latter shares a focus on educational development with the former. The authors, who are editors and board members of both journals, conclude that SARE would probably benefit in many ways by seeking a partnership, such as IJED has, with an established and highly regarded international academic publishing house.

Key words: *International Journal of Educational Development, Southern African Review of Education, academic publishing, journal editing, higher education and publishing political economy*

Introduction
This special issue of the *Southern African Review of Education (SARE)* is an unusual and welcome one, providing a series of largely Southern African perspectives on the poetics, politics and pragmatics of the production of education journals. In this paper, we provide a different perspective on these issues from our vantage points as Editor-in-Chief and Regional Editor (Asia and Pacific) for a journal, the *International Journal of Educational Development (IJED)*, which has a focus on the South but which is published and managed in the North. From those perspectives, we argue that the poetics and politics of journals discussed elsewhere in this special issue may be of less practical importance than the pragmatics of journal writing, editing and publishing. We shall suggest furthermore that these pragmatics in turn are strongly shaped by the broader political economy of academic knowledge production. We go on to advocate the cultivation of an ‘art of the possible’ that draws on a better understanding of what is required for performativity alongside personal commitments to advance particular ideological stances.

As noted above, we write this paper from our particular positions, but also on the basis of certain claims to knowledge and authority that arise from those positions. In the case of the first of us, these claims are two-fold: derived from knowledge gained as Editor-in-Chief of the journal for the past four years, i.e., as someone
based in an English university and editing a Dutch-owned but largely English-run journal; and from more than 20 years of professional engagement with education in Southern Africa, including as part of SARE’s International Advisory Board. In the case of the second author, these claims are based on 25 years in the field of education, about half of them in South Africa and the balance abroad, and for the past decade as editor, associate editor or editorial board member of up to 10 journals and book series, including as Regional Editor (Asia and Pacific) of *IJED* and as Associate Editor of *SARE*.

The rest of the paper proceeds through an outlining of the case of *IJED*. This leads on to a consideration of the poetics and politics of *IJED*’s ambitions, which are contrasted with a consideration of how this is constrained by the broader political economy of academic knowledge production both in the journals business and in higher education. Throughout these sections we offer a critical analysis of how these conflicting tendencies are resolved, albeit imperfectly, in the pragmatics of editing the journal. The implications of this case for the wider discussion of this special issue are then considered in a concluding section.

**The case of the International Journal of Educational Development**

This is a particularly opportune moment to be writing this paper as 2010 marked the thirtieth volume of *IJED* and prompted an article that sought to review the experiences of that period and to look forward to future challenges and opportunities for both the journal and the field of international and comparative education (McGrath 2010). Moreover, we are fortunate in that this account was not the first published reflection on *IJED*, having been preceded by Vulliamy (1988) and Watson (1990), which considered the journal’s first decade.

The term ‘international’ in a journal’s title often denotes little more than a claim to status, and many such claims seem rather hollow given either the poor quality of the journal (particularly many of the new online, pay-to-publish offerings) or a parochialism that suggests that international means, for example, British and American. However, for *IJED* we are confident that international does mean more than this in two crucial ways. First, the focus of the journal is on international education and development. To quote from our statement of aims and scope:

> The purpose of the *International Journal of Educational Development* is to foster critical debate about the role that education plays in development. *IJED* seeks both to develop new theoretical insights into the education-development relationship and new understandings of the extent and nature of educational change in diverse settings. It stresses the importance of understanding the interplay of local, national, regional and global contexts and dynamics in shaping education and development.

Second, *IJED* is international in practice in that the thirtieth volume, for instance, featured authors based in 20 countries (largely non-OECD) and contained papers focusing on 25 countries as well as regionally focused papers on Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

However, although these points stress the Southern focus of *IJED*, it is important to reiterate that this is a journal that is published by Elsevier, one of the world’s largest publishing houses. Elsevier was originally Dutch but is now global, with education journal management being based in England. Moreover, *IJED* has always been run by a group of executive editors based in Britain, albeit with
regional editors in Asia and North America and a widely dispersed International Advisory Board. Furthermore, the journal is published solely in English. As we shall argue subsequently, the facts that the journal is published by a large transnational corporation, led by British-based academics and available only in English are of great importance to the way that the journal operates. Whilst located within a global political economy of academic knowledge production, *IJED* is profoundly shaped by these matters of context.

The editorial board sees *IJED* as the leading international journal in the field of international education and development. As McGrath (2010) notes, this relatively small academic field can be seen as the offspring of two somewhat larger fields of study: development studies and comparative education. From these, it inherited a belief that education was a central element of modernisation and industrialisation and imbibed a largely positivist and technicist view of the natures of both knowledge production and national development. McGrath suggests that

> This strand has remained powerful over the past 50 years, reflecting commonsense views of the education-development relationship; the perceived moral imperative to 'make poverty history'; and the dominance of the international development industry over the kind of work that international educationalists do. (McGrath 2010: 537)

However, like both of its progenitors, the field of international education and development has been transformed by broader trends in the social sciences such as the emergence of the postmodern and interpretivist traditions. These have resulted in a reshaping of debates about the core relationship between education and development in a significant section of *IJED* submissions that stands rather uncomfortably with a continuation of submissions that reflect the earlier orthodoxy.

Notwithstanding, the particular beliefs of the Editor-in-Chief and the editorial board, it is in the nature of *IJED* to try to avoid taking a sectional paradigmatic position on the relative merits of different approaches to the education-development relationship. This is reflected too in a stance of methodological agnosticism in which the intention is that each paper should be judged on the merits of its methodological approach rather than being required to fit a house view of appropriate approaches and techniques.

**Poetics and politics**

*IJED*'s mission is avowedly developmental in a multi-faceted way. Its statement of its aims and scope makes clear its broad view about the way in which it wants to foster critical reflection on the relationship between education and development:

> Orthodox notions of development as being about growth, industrialisation or poverty reduction are increasingly questioned. There are competing accounts that stress the human dimensions of development. The notion of development itself is highly contested, both as a theoretical construct and in its policy and programme manifestations. Education is prominent in approaches to and critiques of development. Here too perspectives vary. Education is expected to promote competitiveness and productivity; reduce inequality, poverty and disease; mitigate conflict and crisis; and promote human
capability and achieve social justice. At the same time, education is also criticised for fostering hostility; entrenching difference; jeopardising local values and culture; and for its own use of control and violence.

It also has interdisciplinary ambitions in seeking to act as a bridge between education and development studies. It is clearly about “developing countries” and the aims and scope statement explicitly welcomes submissions from “scholars who come from low and middle income countries”. Indeed, there is also a desire to develop emerging authors from these countries, reflected in the past in a variety of activities, including recent writing workshops in South Africa and Turkey.

The political economy of the International Journal of Educational Development

However, IJED’s vision, much of which goes back to its founding 30 years ago, constantly needs interpreting and actualising in the context of both the wider political economy of academic knowledge production and the specific context of the journal’s own production.

At the broadest level, what happens in IJED is influenced by the workings of global capitalism. This includes, inter alia, the rise at both discursive and material levels of globalisation, service industries and the knowledge economy, which are partially manifested in the increased commodification of knowledge. This is linked to the rise of transnational corporations and the particular process of agglomeration that has taken place in the academic publishing field.

The political economy of journals

In the case of journals, this has resulted in the domination of the field by a small number of very large publishers. As early as 2002, it was estimated that Elsevier, Springer and Wiley accounted for 42% of all published journal articles (Morgan Stanley 2002). Although the emergence of open access online journals may have dented this dominance, this needs to be balanced with further acquisitions by these large publishing houses, including that of Kluwer by Springer in 2004 and of Blackwell Publishing by Wiley in 2007. Recent years have also seen the rapid expansion of Taylor & Francis, which now publishes approximately 1 500 journals. As one of 2 000 Elsevier journals, IJED is thus enmeshed in a wide-ranging net of relationships and dynamics within the academic publishing industry.

As only one of 2 000 Elsevier journals, IJED is also not in a strong position to shape Elsevier’s ways of working and so decisions about such things as the move to wholly electronic submission; the structure of the refereeing interface; or the layout of the journal’s website and hard copy, are not matters over which the editorial board have significant power. However, in spite of some concerns about these matters from some members of the editorial board, it is not clear that they have had any discernible effect on how the journal is engaged with by Southern colleagues. Although Elsevier’s decisions regarding formatting may offend the aesthetic sensibilities of some educationalists, this is likely to make no real difference to how the majority of readers read and otherwise use the journal. Although costs of purchasing are high, IJED is part of the HINARI scheme offering
free access to several thousand journals for Southern institutions (www.who.int/hinari). Although an internet connection is needed to submit a paper, it is hard to see how anyone can participate successfully in the global academic community without at least occasional access to the internet.

More significant, but also ranging far beyond the confines of *IJED*, may be issues of language. Although only two of this new ‘big four’ of journal publishing (Wiley-Blackwell and Taylor & Francis) have their headquarters in an Anglophone country, the predominant language of publication for all of these houses, and for journals more generally, is English. This reflects, of course, the dominant role that English plays in international communication and the commodification of knowledge in the present phase of global capitalism.

This existence of a dominant language of journal production inevitably shapes what knowledge is codified into published articles and by whom, thus shaping what counts as academic knowledge. Although the journal is ideologically internationalist, the majority of papers published in *IJED* are at least co-authored by writers based in Anglophone countries: 72% in 2010 (if Hong Kong is included within the Anglophone category; 69% if not). Of those papers published in 2010 that had a specific geographic focus, 57% were on Commonwealth countries.

Any move to linguistic pluralism would require significant resourcing. From an editorial perspective, we would want to know that we had a team of colleagues on whose judgment of the academic merits of a paper in another language we could absolutely rely. This would be a cost to the publishers, as would be the need to employ typesetters and proof readers in multiple languages. Such work is already done in India to minimise costs, but there might well be significant challenges in finding enough suitable proofreaders in that country or elsewhere for all the required languages, thus further inflating costs. Even having abstracts in multiple languages, as in some UNESCO-sponsored international education journals, would bring additional costs. Whilst it can be argued that major publishers are making large enough profits to absorb such costs, one would need to ask why they would want to, particularly if the demand for this were to come from a relatively small number of journals in fields that do not generate overly impressive revenues for publishers, such as international and comparative education. Moreover, whilst an ideological case can be made for publication in more languages, this would inevitably come into tension with pragmatics very quickly. It is worth noting in this regard that journals that offer some form of multilingualism are most likely to be English-French, with a smattering of Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese also to be found. This choice of languages does little to change broader patterns of linguistic imperialism.

Narrow considerations of linguistic competence may well be bound up with more complex matters regarding the nature of acceptable ways of writing academically. Whilst *IJED* eschews the scientific mode of reporting empirical research that is still prominent in some parts of the social sciences, with its standard set of introduction, literature, methods, data, analysis, conclusions, we can justifiably ask whether there are certain ways of writing that are considered to be correct and others that are not. Moreover, we can inquire further whether what is and is not ‘correct’ may be laden with cultural assumptions.

In looking at the evidence of what gets rejected by *IJED*, it is possible to discern three principal categories of papers that get rejected at the first filtering stage in the Editorial Office, which accounts for approximately 40% of all submissions. It may be useful to distinguish these from papers rejected on the advice of referees. As the journal relies on over 750 referees from 70 countries, it would be difficult
to do an analysis of the extent to which these referees have absorbed any hidden editorial position on which forms of writing are acceptable and which not.

The three ‘classic’ types of rejected papers are as follows:

1. Opinion pieces in which the author is highly discursive but provides little or no empirical data and often makes only rather elusive references to existing literature or theories. Many such papers in the case of IJED come from Southern and Eastern Europe.

2. Highly empirical papers with respectable sample sizes that often borrow an American research instrument without discussion in order to test quite a small question of psychology and which avoid any criticality, particularly about policy. Such papers are particularly likely to come from Iran, Turkey, Arabia and Taiwan.

3. Professionally constrained papers that typically consider an inadequate sample (e.g., the researcher’s undergraduate class) and engage with a very partial and/or outdated review of the literature before going on to offer recommendations to national policy makers. India and Nigeria are currently the main sources of such papers.

There seem to be potentially different factors operating in the decision to reject in each of these three cases. In the first, this may well be a matter of different cultural approaches to writing. This seems also to be partially true in the second case, although here the problem is exacerbated by the conflict engendered with one of the strong editorial beliefs that does operate in IJED, and in international and comparative education more widely: that it is not acceptable to borrow a social science research instrument from another context without a serious discussion of the challenges of so doing and, preferably, some attempt at contextualisation. In the third case, this seems to be more straightforwardly a case of quality. However, in countries such as Nigeria, if less so for India, it is far from easy to separate such failings of quality from the issue of limited resources, with its links back to wider questions of global political economy. This clearly contributes to the additional factor of the relative absence of a culture of writing for international journals – something that may itself be further shaped by the presence of a number of national journals, as is the case in larger countries such as India, Nigeria and Turkey.

Whether the Anglophone way of constructing an article (in the broad sense that there is a generalisably single approach) is superior to others or simply a cultural preference may of course be debated, but it is clear that this is the dominant mode of writing in the dominant form of high status academic production. It is clear, furthermore, that this dominance is grounded in the position enjoyed by English in the commodification of knowledge in current forms of globalisation. This is then further reinforced by the location of the journal’s Editorial Office in an English university.

However, it appears that the forms of cultural and social capital that are required to write in this way can be acquired in other settings. In the case of IJED, Turkey stands out as an interesting example. Although it is one of the countries with the highest level of rejections annually from IJED, it is also one of the countries with the highest level of acceptances. These acceptances are largely concentrated in a small number of elite (both public and private) English-medium institutions where staff are encouraged and expected to publish in international journals. However, Turkey is also striking on account of the recent appearance of three Turkish-medium journals on the ISI-accredited list of education journals.
After Britain and the USA, the three main sources of accepted *IJED* articles in recent years have been China, South Africa and Turkey. It seems likely that the relatively high level of national income and resourcing for higher education in these countries has been significant in this. However, in the Turkish case, it is noteworthy that high quality papers are far less forthcoming from many of its neighbours on either the European or Middle Eastern sides, a number of which are wealthier than Turkey. Further explanatory factors, therefore, might have to be found, such as the legacy of the Turkish Republican tradition, which has long privileged elements of Westernisation and modernisation, or more recent attempts at integration into the European Union and the manner in which these have shaped Turkish practices of higher education performativity.

Whilst China is clearly a very large country that enjoys high levels both of intellectual tradition and current dynamism in some of its universities, it is also noteworthy that it is a far more fertile source of papers for *IJED* than, say, India or Japan. Again, this may be something about conscious national and institutional strategies for participation in the global academic industry. Moreover, the presence of Hong Kong as a partially Anglophone special autonomous region with world class English-medium universities does appear to have an effect on Chinese scholarship in English, sometimes through joint authorship of papers.

It appears, furthermore, that there are aid effects regarding what gets published in *IJED*. We are proud of a tradition of senior agency staff publishing papers in the journal that reflect on their time at these agencies or in development work more generally (e.g., Frederiksen 1981; Heyneman 2003; Psacharopoulos 2006; Castro 2011), but we also value being a site for robust critique of agency policies and influences (e.g., Bennell 1996; Kees 2002; Mundy 2002; Cassity 2010). More significantly for the concerns of this paper, a large number of *IJED* papers arise directly from work funded by donors. For instance, in 2010 and 2011, at least a quarter of all articles in *IJED*, including two special issues, will have come from three research programme consortia funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). As has long been realized in the field, the work of DFID and other agencies has important impacts on what is and is not researched in the South and what of this finds its way into academic journals.

Consultancy work for international agencies has long been a vital source of income for university education departments, schools and faculties, North and South (Arthur et al. 1996; McGrath 2001). Gmelin, then of the German Foundation for International Development, warned 15 years ago that consultancy already dominated research and that it “places a premium on the qualities required for contract work: speed [and] confidentiality – qualities inimical to scholarly values” (Gmelin 1995: 2). Moreover, as Preston and Arthur (1995) and Pirrie (1997) argued at around the same time, the fragmented experiences common to consultancy constitute a weaker base for systemic understanding and reflective practice than might a continuum of experience. It seems inevitable that the pressures towards and effects of consultancy work have intensified since these concerns were stated more than a decade ago.

More seriously, as that literature argued, consultancy tends to reinforce a particular worldview, methodology and developmental discourse (Preston & Arthur 1995, 1997; Samoff 1995, 1996; Preston 1996; McGrath 2001). Furthermore, its impacts are likely to be greatest on Southern scholars, operating in resource-poor environments. Thus, Mwiria (now a Minister in the Kenyan government) has argued that research in many countries is effectively dominated by agency needs (Mwiria 1995). Similarly, a number of writers who have spent considerable parts of their careers outside Africa have pointed to an intellectual as well as spatial nomadism and a lack of rootedness of researchers in the needs
of their own societies as a result of the domination of research by aid (e.g., Namuddu 1983; Kajese 1991; Mamdani 1993).

Being thus highly dependent on external funding, educational research in the South is prone to following trends set by others: this can be discerned in the various waves of research that *IJED* has seen over the past 30 years on themes such as vocational education and training, access to primary education, quality, etc. (McGrath 2010). The papers emanating from the three DFID consortia – on access to education, the quality of education, and educational outcomes – are thus part of a wider tradition.

**The political economy of higher education**

The interplay of the poetics, politics and pragmatics of academic journal production cannot be understood independently of the dynamics of higher education, given that the vast majority of journal authors, referees and editors are employed within the higher education sector. We have touched on the rise of performativity in higher education in some countries. Globally, the rise of international league tables of universities is linked to wider processes of increased competition for students and funding. In many developing countries, there has been a fundamental shift in the past 20 years from a single national, public university to a more diverse system of public and private providers. Developed countries too have seen a significant rise in the number of providers, whilst the past decade has seen the rapid development of the internationalisation of higher education, both through the technologically-facilitated increase of full and partial distance modes and the rise of both student migration to attend university and the emergence of offshore campuses. For instance, at the time of writing, the University of Nottingham was celebrating the tenth anniversary of its programmes in Malaysia, since added to by a further campus in China.

With all of this has come increased pressure on public providers to be more business-like and the widespread introduction across many public sectors internationally of a discourse and practice of performativity. Crucially for our discussion, one key metric of academic performance has become the production of journal articles. To be appointed today to an academic post at a ‘respectable’ university in England, a candidate must be ‘REF ready’: either already having four articles of sufficient quality published since 2009 or under consideration, or a clear and plausible plan for completing this set of articles in the next two years – this for their submission as part of the Research Excellence Framework, which provides an important element of university funding and the clearest available indication of a university’s research standing. For existing staff, the development of their REF portfolio is a central element of their performance management. Different variants of this performativity culture pertain elsewhere. In Turkey, for instance, academic promotions are closely linked to publication in international journals. In South Africa, publishing in an accredited journal brings income to the university and to the academic and is also clearly important to decisions regarding promotion.

These systems of assessment tend to value journal articles over books, in part because of the dominance of academic performance models by science and the comparative economics of producing academic articles and books, but also because articles are seen as allowing easier judgement of quality. Moreover, they contain within them views of which journals matter. This may be as crude as is an ‘international journal’ in some countries, but more sophisticated systems identify which journals count through having an approved list, a ranking model,
rejection rates or reference to the journal’s impact factor. Authors are increasingly encouraged to focus their efforts, and often now do this through self-regulation, on journals that matter. In the British system, for instance, the emphasis on ‘excellence’ in the new performance system appears to be beginning to have the effect of sending more powerful messages that quality rather than quantity of output matters, which may reduce the overall flow of British papers over time and direct it more narrowly to high impact factor journals. All of this, of course, means that a key performance management task of an editor is to ensure that his/her journal performs well against the important indicators of journal quality. Thus, in IJED’s case, being on the approved South African list; being accredited by the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI); getting an A ranking in the draft European system; having a high rejection rate (a common question in tenure applications in the USA); and, above all, having a rising impact factor, have been major editorial concerns and are indicators of continuing success.

However, for an editor the challenges of managing journal performance have to be balanced against managing personal performance in core academic tasks such as teaching/supervising increasing numbers of students; raising more income through funded projects and consultancies; and, of course, one’s own research and publications. In the case of IJED, this has to be done in the face of a rapidly increasing number of submissions, which have doubled in three years to approximately 350 for 2010.

This leads to the further challenge of managing the pressure on referees, who often themselves are also feeling wider performativity pressures that make refereeing an increasingly unattractive element of their work. This increased volume of submissions and the decline of referee availability have the significant effect of necessitating more editorial filtering of papers so that referees are not lost through their frustration at receipt of too many poor quality papers. Thus, at IJED, it is part of the Editor-in-Chief’s role to read each paper before deciding whether it merits being sent to referees. This results in some 40% of papers being rejected at this point after what is inevitably a very quick reading.

Of course, many of these papers come from scholars in developing countries and a tension arises with the journal’s original concern with promoting papers from such countries. However, with an overall rejection rate of above 80% and almost a paper a day being submitted, there is no realistic prospect for working developmentally with more than a handful of authors, particularly as journal editing time is typically not included in increasingly closely monitored workload calculations. Thus, what little that can be done in this regard involves identifying papers on countries and/or topics that are under-represented in the journal and the wider literature, and which have some academic quality. This could then justify a request to a senior, typically retired, colleague that they referee this paper in a consciously developmental way and be prepared to see more iterations of the paper than would be normal. In this way it is possible to do something towards continuing the journal’s initial mission, but it is necessarily governed by a strong sense of the pragmatic possibilities. Indeed, the process can sometimes feel rather like triage in a battlefield medical unit: a quick assessment of which papers need to be left to die whilst resources are directed at those that could pull through.

The way that national and institutional systems of performance management deal with interdisciplinarity is also of considerable significance to how IJED works. If a system rewards publication simply in journals of sufficient quality, then there is scope for academics to explore work across disciplinary boundaries, confident that quality matters more than focus. However, with a unit of assessment (quasi-disciplinary) approach such as operates in Britain, there is a tendency for
research managers to question the desirability of publishing outside disciplinary mainstreams and, even more so, across disciplinary boundaries. Such a system does little to facilitate IJED’s ambition to promote a dialogue between international and comparative education and development studies.

Towards an art of the possible: the Southern African Review of Education

The political motivations behind the establishment of both IJED and SARE should not be forgotten. Nor should the fact that writing and editing in the field of international and comparative education is often born of a wider commitment to social justice and a belief in education’s potentially positive role therein. We would want to continue to ensure that a journal such as IJED seeks to do everything possible to promote Southern voices and perspectives as well as Northern accounts that seek to ‘speak truth to power’. Nonetheless, it is neither in our interest or capacity to seek to isolate IJED from the context of the international journal business, from the performativity culture of higher education or from the wider system of global capitalism.

Rather, we need to maintain a regular dialogue between the pragmatics of survival and success in such environments and the ongoing poetic and political ambitions of the journal. For IJED, part of the regular review process undertaken through reporting to the board continues to be a focus on questions of where papers come from; who accesses them; and what topics and countries they address. This is reflected too in the decision-making process about potential special issues. It is also seen in a commitment to a day-to-day editorial practice in which some attempt is made to support emerging authors, particularly from the South, and to direct limited personal, editorial and referee resources of time to those who seem to have a real potential to make a valuable contribution to the journal and the field. However, this continued commitment will always have to be balanced with the twin imperatives of maintaining journal performance against the dominant quality standards and protecting the well-being of editors and referees through managing the demands the journal makes on their commitment and collegiality. This itself needs to be seen as an ethical act, rather than simply a pragmatic abandonment of political engagement.

Although these points are made specifically about IJED and are written from the point of view of enmeshment in developed systems of performativity, they have salience for others seeking to edit journals in other settings such as Southern Africa. Several leading Southern African journals across the social sciences have taken the decision to work with major publishers and will find themselves increasingly shaped by the ways in which these large publishing houses operate. It is clear that these moves bring very significant advantages, not least in terms of quality and timeliness of production, on the one hand, and shifting much of the technical and financial burden of publication to large companies and away from academics and universities, on the other. This shifting of production concerns away from academics may do much to free them up to do more intellectual work, and should accordingly be welcomed.

More generally, as the processes of international competition and performativity in academia are likely to continue for the foreseeable future, a more thorough engagement with the international business of journals, including availability online and participation in ISI, may be essential if Southern journals are not to become increasingly marginal. There is a real danger that such journals become places for either the less academically important papers of established authors, salving their consciences with the occasional Southern-published paper once their
quota of high status ‘international’ papers is filled, or for authors who cannot (yet) get their papers into higher status journals. With the increasing availability of international journals (both of high quality and poorer pay-to-publish but free-to-read varieties), this could spell the slow demise of traditional Southern journals, as they are unlikely to be able to attract sufficient readers and, hence, income.

It is accordingly our view that the editors and Board of SARE, and the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES), which owns the journal, would do well to consider very seriously the advantages of seeking a partnership, such as IJED has, with an established and highly regarded international academic publishing house. These advantages are many, and we have discussed some of them above. Some of the more salient ones might, again, be: that the journal attracts more high quality submissions from a wider pool of established researchers in the field because of its publication by a respected academic publisher; that the journal is more widely marketed and distributed globally, and hence more widely read and its authors more frequently cited; and that it is more efficiently managed, given the effectiveness of the online manuscript management systems used by most major international academic publishers today, with the ensuing advantage of more timely publication of the papers submitted by researchers.

Some potential counter-arguments to such a partnership might be that editorial control and independence are lost to the interests of wealthy, powerful and business- and profit-oriented media conglomerates whose first responsibility is to the interests of their share-holders; that ownership and control of one’s academic research and intellectual property are transferred to the journal’s publisher; and that a focus on indigenous knowledge is forsaken or at least lost in the dominance of Western ways of knowing or Northern research interests and foci.

We suggest that the first counter-argument is a red herring. The control of television news channels, for example, by large media conglomerates, is not analogous with regard to questions of editorial control and independence. There are clear political agendas behind the control of the likes of Fox News by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, the control of much of the Italian media by Silvio Berlusconi and, at the other end of the political spectrum, behind the efforts of Hugo Chavez to gain control of Venezuela’s media. Certainly, Reed Elsevier have publishing interests wider than just the academic (their corporate website claims, for example, that “Reed Business Information is a leading provider of business information, online data and marketing solutions”), and these wider publishing interests may come with their own sets of political issues, but it is surely safe to say that any good business-man or -woman involved in academic publishing knows that the best and most credible – and therefore, at least potentially, the most profitable – academic publishing is that in which the academic editors enjoy absolute editorial independence. Were there any political interference by the publisher in the academic content of any respectable academic journal, the editors would surely be the first to let their Board, their readers, their research community and the professional society with which they might be associated know, and the Board of that journal would surely be very quick to dissociate that journal from that publishing house. In short, large international and profit-oriented academic publishing houses have far more to gain from the editorial independence of their journals than otherwise.

The second counter-argument, that ownership and control of authors’ academic research and intellectual property are transferred to the journal’s publisher, might both be and not be an issue (more than it already is). It might not be more of an issue than it already is because SARE’s current policy is to take ownership of the
articles it publishes: “Papers that are accepted become the copyright of SARE, unless otherwise specifically agreed”, its Notes to Contributors clearly state. Would it be more of a problem that copyright of one’s paper transfers on publication to the likes of Elsevier or Taylor & Francis rather than to SARE? Possibly, yes, in that, should it become necessary for whatever reason to negotiate the return of copyright to the author, one might perhaps enjoy more success in negotiations with one’s research community colleagues than one might with the royalties department of a profit-oriented media conglomerate. In this sense it is perhaps more of an issue that copyright transfers to a large academic publisher, but this is part of a larger question that cuts across almost the entire domain of the contemporary academic publishing industry: why should these large publishers take copyright of the products of our blood and sweat as researchers? Should a small academic publisher in a developing country wish to translate and re-publish our work so that it is accessible to the research and policy community in that country, why should royalties, which can often be quite steep, be payable to the original publishers – particularly when no royalties were paid to the author in the first place? One of the authors of this article has for many years edited a leading book series in this field, co-published by the university-based research centre of which he has been the director and by a huge and highly regarded academic publisher and media conglomerate. The research centre jealously held onto the copyright for every book, so that when researchers in other countries sought to translate and arrange publication of any of the books in the series, permission was readily given without charge by the research centre, not least because the centre is not profit-oriented but focused instead on making high quality research available to the research community globally. One of its volumes has, for example, been published in seven languages: English, French, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Farsi. In truth, however, for that research centre to be not profit-oriented, seeking only to sell enough books to cover the cost of employing a senior research assistant who works mainly as a production editor, demands hours and hours of the time of the three academics who serve as the editor and associate editors of the book series.

We have two responses to the third counter-argument that, should a Southern journal be published by a large Northern publishing house, its apparent focus on indigenous knowledge might be forsaken or at least lost in the dominance of Western ways of knowing or Northern research interests and foci. The first is that, from IJED’s perspective, this would simply not be true. As we described earlier in this article, IJED is expressly committed to seeking out knowledge and experience in educational development that are indigenously generated, and to making that knowledge and experience available, through its publication by the author in the pages of the journal, to the global research community in the field. We have acknowledged that many of the articles published in IJED are indeed the result of research funded by Northern agencies; and we have acknowledged some of the problems associated with this – not least that research problems in developing world contexts tend all too often to be conceptualized in terms of Northern frameworks and priorities. But in these acknowledgements we have also made it clear that IJED seeks more perspectives from researchers in developing countries, and does what it can, obviously within the constraints (mostly of time) operating on its editors, board members and referees, to nurture such perspectives towards publication.

That said, our second response to this issue of the potential loss of indigenous knowledge raises the question of the very definition and nature of indigenous knowledge. This is, again, an issue that runs much wider than SARE’s possible concerns in this regard. We would suggest that the way the term tends to be used in these arguments frequently trivializes its real meaning, and hence to undermine the efforts of those communities seeking to protect the intellectual
property associated with their genuinely indigenous knowledge. In discussions as part of a forum organised at the last conference of SACHES around this broad question of the poetics, politics and pragmatics of journal publication, one of the authors heard claims being made that the construction for launch into orbit of a satellite by researchers at a South African university constituted an example of indigenous knowledge. We would have thought that this was rather an example of the employment of theories developed by the likes of Newton, Planck and Einstein. By analogy, to suggest that research findings in educational development in the Southern African context constitute indigenous knowledge is, in our view, to trivialize what might be genuinely indigenous knowledge and seriously in need of protection of its associated intellectual property. And, again, to suggest that Southern research findings in educational development would be marginalized or otherwise abused by a publishing process such as that followed by IJED and Elsevier simply doesn’t, in terms of IJED’s ideological commitments and Elsevier’s obvious awareness that journal profits come, first and last, from respect for the integrity of the research, make sense.

Even for Southern journals like SARE, which are tied to professional associations, there is accordingly an important debate to be had as to how the journal reflects both the needs of its members and the mission of its organisation, on the one hand, and the challenges of being a quality and financially viable journal attractive to other readers and authors, on the other. Thus, the ideological project of SARE needs to be understood and interpreted, like that of IJED, in the context of the wider environment in which it operates and through a clear and conscious practice of marrying poetics, politics and pragmatics.

References


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