



Research Journal of the Month  
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## The Journal of Educational Research.

The Journal of Educational Research (JER) is not a publication devoted to physical education. The journal does, however, publish studies from our field when they are submitted (and survive peer review). Among those reports have been some that constituted important contributions to the physical education literature. As illustration of that point I have appended below citations for a sample of such studies, including the most recent which is a thoughtful review of empirical research dealing with "Goals, Interests, and Learning in Physical Education" prepared by Ang Chen and Catherine Ennis for the special issue entitled "Student Motivation Across Subject-Area Domains" (July/August 2004).

From its initial issue, 84 years ago in January of 1920, JER has marched to a drummer different from the one that drove many other journals in the field of education. It is precisely its distinctive characteristics that have always made me wonder why physical education researchers have not made more frequent use of it as an outlet for some of their reports.

The original editors dedicated JER to "the uses which have been made and are capable of being made of results and methods of investigation. It (JER) will emphasize applications rather than abstractions, and practice rather than theory." It is impossible to miss the point that the founders wanted to create a journal that always would seek to be relevant to educational practice. That this ambition has survived across 97 Volumes into the present is evidenced by the most recent definition provided for prospective authors. "The Journal of Educational Research publishes manuscripts that describe or synthesize research of direct relevance to educational practice in elementary and secondary schools. Special consideration is given to articles that focus on variables that can be manipulated in educational settings (emphasis mine)."

What better venue could be imagined for reaching an audience of empirically-minded educators who might be interested in (and concerned about) what goes on in the gym? What vehicle could be superior for informing school practitioners and educational researchers that there is a great deal going on in the gym that might be interesting, and even important?

Of course, there are sound reasons to publish physical education research where it is most likely to be read by our own colleagues. Nevertheless, when we communicate only with each other, we create the risk of becoming so isolated from the main stream of conversation about educational inquiry that we become invisible. Whatever the virtues of The Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, The Physical Educator and The Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, they ultimately are parochial in nature. In contrast, whatever may be the limitations of JER, it represents for us an opportunity to assume a more cosmopolitan role in education.

That same leaning toward the practical has another advantage. Many of the reports are about topics that are generic to the work of schools. They immediately inspire such reader reactions as: "How would that work in the gym?" and "I bet the same thing applies in learning golf." If any graduate student (or young assistant professor) is looking for a new and potentially useful line of inquiry, I defy them to peruse a few volumes of JER and not come away with several possibilities.

The journal is issued bimonthly by Heldref Publications, the publishing division of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation (a nonprofit educational and charitable agency). Individual subscriptions presently are \$66/year (the institutional rate is a still modest \$138/year). Other Heldref titles include The Journal of Motor Behavior, The Journal of Experimental Education, and the familiar The Clearing House, all of which regularly publish articles of interest to physical educators.

A full-service website is maintained at <http://www.heldref.org/>. JER is indexed or abstracted in 20 different resource outlets, including Current Contents, Education Digest, Education Index, the PsycINFO Database, Psychological Abstracts, and Social Science Citations Index. There certainly should be no problem in finding a convenient way to monitor the content of JER. The entire collection is available in microform from ProQuest, so a suggestion for acquisition by your local library might not be viewed as an invitation to bankruptcy.

As you might expect, reports in JER continue to give much attention to the basics: reading, mathematics, writing (even penmanship), testing, grouping, grading, curricula, student motivation, and just about anything else that impacts the work of schooling. Special topical issues appear from time to time, and the pages have been illuminated by some famous debates about theory and practice (the blood sport of academics). Today, the vast majority of authors now are resident in universities (very few are school personnel or specialists from state and federal agencies); the number of women whose names appear on reports has grown remarkably (they now sign 39% of all articles), and multiple authorship has grown from 5% in 1920 to 82% today.

A few points from the history of JER might be instructive and certainly will be useful for understanding some of the problems that beset other research journals, including those in physical education. Although its early relationship with the National Association of Directors of Educational Research and, later, with the fledgling American Educational Research Association served to attract initial contributions from some of the most famous names in education (among them, Terman, Thorndike, Charters, Gates, and Cuban), over the longer haul the strong bias toward applied research did not serve to encourage submissions from senior scholars. In consequence, for many years JER had the reputation of being the journal of choice for new PhDs. Close inspection reveals that to no longer be true (if it ever really was), and the evolving lines of inquiry from some respected and highly productive researchers can be tracked in the pages of the journal.

In addition to problems with academic image, financial difficulties dogged the publication from the outset. The solution of charging authors a page fee for publication was tried for a period of time only to end up inspiring the reputation of being a "vanity press." Finally, after years of hard-scrabble survival, the journal was sold to the Helen Dwight Reid Foundation in 1974 where it has been happily sheltered ever since.

JER remains a sturdy advocate of utilitarian research. The editors, for example, still worry in print about such things as the degree to which arcane forms of statistics increasingly serve to obscure the readers' understanding of data analysis (and findings). They are openly concerned, too, about how the drive for publication of ever more rigorous studies has led to an increasing focus on method, too often at the expense of the quality of questions being addressed. With leadership like that, I suspect that JER will both retain its distinctive voice and continue to offer a lively source of facts and ideas concerning how education really works.

The following physical education items represent the kind of reports and reviews that appear in JER. Note that all three reports run eight pages or more in length, indicating that the journal does not stint in providing space for descriptions of research and theory in physical education.

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Chen, A., & Ennis, C.D. (2004). Goals, interests, and learning in physical education. The Journal of Educational Research, 97, 329-338.

Grant, B.C., Ballard, K.D., & Glynn, T.L. (1989). Student behavior in physical education lessons: A comparison among achievement groups. The Journal of Educational Research, 82, 216-226.

Silverman, S. (1993). Student characteristics, practice, and achievement in physical education. The Journal of Educational Research, 87, 54-61.

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