

Re-naming and re-framing: Evolving the 'Higher Education Research Group' to the 'Geography and Education Research Group'

In recent years a number of different Research Groups (RG) across the RGS-IBG have reflected upon their constitutional 'thematic remits' and/or the name of their group as part of a recasting and review of focuses and interests. This includes the change from the Developing Areas RG to the Development Geographies RG, and the Women and Geographies Study Group evolving into the Gender and Geography RG. The latter of which was accompanied by a special section in *Area* (Brickell & Browne, 2013). In 2019 the Higher Education RG (HERG) undertook a similar evolution to become the Geography and Education RG (shortened to GeogEd). This *Area* special section marks the HERG to GeogEd evolution, and this introductory commentary briefly introduces the change and some of the rationale for it which is picked up in the proceeding papers co-authored by a range of colleagues across the geography and education nexus.

Evolving HERG

At the HERG AGM on the 29th August 2018, just moments after we were elected to the positions of Chair (Ruth) and Secretary (Harry) of the Research Group, Matt Finn (University of Exeter) presented a proposal (co-authored with Itta Bauer - University of Zurich) that the Research Group might consider broadening its remit to consider a wider context of geography education and formally include the geographies of education. It was noted by long-standing HERG Committee Members and former Chairs, that in the past, as evidenced through sponsored RGS-IBG Annual International Conference sessions (explored in more detail in Healey *et al.*, in submission and West *et al.*, 2020), HERG had frequently gone

beyond its HE applied pedagogic research focus and explored both geographical education beyond HE (and transitions between educational levels) and the geographies of education. Throughout these 'explorations' beyond HE geography there was an understanding of the integrally linked nature of geography at all levels of education (and transitions in between), and the geographies of education. Essentially, research across these themes is vital for a full and holistic understanding of each. The nature of the relationship between these disciplines and their resulting communities of practice is explored throughout this special section (West *et al.*, 2020 and Finn *et al.*, in submission).

Whilst many of those involved with HERG understood its uncoded engagement with a broader geography and education field, for many the name of the group alone was perceived as exclusive or a barrier to participation. Some potential members and contributors to the group had even sought permission from former HERG Chairs to engage with the group if their own field or interests weren't strictly 'HE geography education'.

Following the HERG AGM, early discussions took place over the 2018 RGS-IBG International Conference in Cardiff (Wales) including a lunchtime meeting chaired by Matt Finn and Itta Bauer and attended by Harry West and Alan Marvell on behalf of HERG amongst others with interests across the geography and education nexus. On the back of Matt and Itta's initial proposal and these productive discussions emphasising much of the above, a small working group was formed which led to the final proposal to re-frame the work of the Research Group around two key areas – geography education (notably at all levels) and the geographies of education. These fields were subsequently used as the basis for the new constitutional aims of the group:

1. Pedagogic research and evidence-based practice in geography education

Pedagogic research & evidence-based/reflective practice in geography education

The Geography & Education Research Group supports geographers interested in pedagogic research and the scholarship of teaching and learning across a variety of educational spaces. Central to the group's focus here is enabling and facilitating high quality research in pedagogy in geography. This forms the basis for exploring the application of current research to practice enhancing the teaching and learning of geography. We also encourage reflective and reflexive practice of those contributing to geographical education; linked to professional frameworks such as the UKPSF. The group therefore provides a platform for international conversations about the value, the process, and the outcomes of such practice.

2. Research and inquiry into the geographies of education

The Geography & Education Research Group supports research to promote geographical understandings of education, teaching and learning. This includes the spaces of education and learning across the life course – both formal and informal, emplaced and mobile, contemporary and historic – and the place of education in society, the nation-state, and a globalised world. This work recognises the diverse and often unequal experiences of learners and educators and the implications of education for their current and future lifeworlds. The group provides a platform for international conversations between communities of practioners, educators (including geography teachers and lecturers), learners/students, activists, and researchers.

Based on the sometimes perceived exclusivity of the HERG name, in order to be inclusive of the two different, but related, geography and education themes it was decided that the group would also need to be re-named. After some discussion the name 'Geography and Education Research Group' was decided upon (see West et al. 2020, in this issue). A proposal was shared with the existing HERG membership and members invited to comment on the proposal before it was put to a vote (11 responses were received during this time, all in support of the proposal). In May 2019 the membership was given a month's period to vote on the proposal. With a response rate of 35% (just over one-third of members resulting in quoracy), 98.1% of those that voted were in favour of the change. The name and constitution was subsequently changed to reflect this outcome and formally ratified at the HERG AGM on 28th August 2019 (just under one year from the initial proposal) and received final sign-off by the *Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)* on 7th October 2019.

To re-launch the Research Group we held a conference on 16th December 2019 to discuss the overlap and distinctions between the different themes of the Research Group. We followed this by facilitating a writing workshop on the 17th December 2019 focused on writing a series of comment/discussion articles narrating the Research Group changes to a wider disciplinary audience and to provide a long term record of the discussion and decision to expand the focus of the Research Group. This special section includes the articles that came out of that process. Each article contributes to a narrative charting where the *Higher Education Research Group* (HERG) has come from, and where it is now going as the *Geography and Education Research Group* (GeogEd).

The first paper, led by Ruth Healey, charts the history of HERG from its formal ratification by the *Institute of British Geographers* as a Study Group in 1980 through to its evolution as GeogEd in 2019. This paper identifies four key 'phases' of the Research Group, each which ran for approximately ten years. This paper explores the changing influences and overarching activities by the group during these different periods. Importantly this analysis of the history of the group recognises the significant influences of wider work on geography education research and connections with the *Geographical Association* that, whilst not always explicit in the aims or name of the group, have consistently played a role in the developments and activities of the work done by the group since its formation.

The second paper, led by Peter Kraftl, chronicles the rising status of the 'geographies of education' by considering a specific journey through geographical research into the spaces and processes of education. Providing an overview of the field the paper examines some of the key roots, routes and traditions underpinning the development of the area, noting the importance of different linguistic traditions. The authors go on to consider why geographies of education have expanded and the different responses to this.

The third paper, led by Harry West, draws together key ideas underlying both Healey et al. (in submission) and Kraftl et al. (in submission). The paper explains the background to Matt Finn and Itta Bauer's original proposal to expand HERG's remit and explores the reciprocal relationship that exists between geography education and the geographies of education. Finally, the paper discusses the GeogEd evolution process, the choice of name, and a re-iteration of the hope that GeogEd will be inclusive to *anyone* with interests across the geography and education nexus.

Paper four, co-authored by Alan Kinder (*Geographical Association*), Steve Brace (*Royal Geographical Society*) and Joe Smith (*Royal Geographical Society*) brings together these two key organisations in British Geography to consider their responses to this development in the Research Group (Kinder *et al.*, in submission). Here the authors provide a critical discussion of the links between school and higher education geography. The paper raises thought-provoking questions as to the relationships between those interested in geography education research in the future whilst also identifying future directions for research and debate.

Finally, the fifth paper, led by Matt Finn, focuses on what's next for the re-focused and re-named group. This paper artfully considers the challenges that shape the geography-education nexus that the research group faces. They consider the potential for the Geography and Education Research Group to create spaces of productive exchange between the three broad 'communities of practice' that the Research Group now aims to support: geographers of education, geography educators and those involved in pedagogic research.

This is an exciting time for the Research Group with a whole range of new opportunities opening up. We were delighted by the wide engagement from across both of themes of the group at both the re-launch conference and the writing workshop in December 2019. We look to build on this momentum and invite people to join the Research Group and work with us to move our new agenda forward. For more information about joining the group please see our website: <https://geogedrg.org/about/membership/>.

References

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