

Editors' Introduction

As editors we continually ask ourselves on what basis we decide whether to accept an article for publication in *RTE*. We have found that articulating the criteria for acceptance is difficult, in part because our field has prepared us better to think about what makes an article *not* publishable. The reviewers we enlist typically base their recommendations on problems in research design, execution, or presentation; that is, reviewers, undoubtedly because they have been enculturated to be highly critical, tend to provide extensive and well-reasoned arguments for why an article is *not* appropriate for publication in *RTE*. As reviewers for other journals, we find ourselves taking the same critical, selective stance. Finding problems with articles and determining why to exclude them from publication suits the critical academic mind quite well.

Much more vexing is the question of which qualities distinguish a publishable article. Each manuscript is problematic in some way, with reviewers making extensive suggestions for revisions in almost every case. Our decisions to publish articles come in spite of these concerns. Putting our finger on the qualities that distinguish those manuscripts that we publish from those that we don't has been a major theme in our ongoing conversation about editing *RTE*. When engaged in public discussions about the qualities that characterize *RTE* articles, we have often described them in terms of the author's establishment of theoretical framework, integrity of design, warranting of claims, and other textbook attributes of research. Yet we have not always been wholly satisfied that, at the end of these discussions, we have answered clearly for others or ourselves what essential traits an article should have in order to be accepted for publication in *RTE*.

To assist us, we have discussed this question with a number of people. One such conversation took place with former *RTE* co-editors Judith Langer and Arthur Applebee. Thinking back to their editorial term, Judith and Arthur said that one defining characteristic of a publishable article was that it be of *archival* quality. While somewhat ambiguous, this term resonated with both of us, seeming to capture what we'd always understood about *RTE* and the articles it publishes. In this editorial we'd like to begin a discussion of how the notion of archival significance can help us clarify what we are looking for in *RTE* articles.

Archives function as the repository of significant public records. They thus serve a historic purpose: Artifacts that are stored in archives serve as landmarks in documenting a community's development. They serve as key reference points in understanding critical moments in a group's history. Like all such critical historical documents, they also provide or

imply a path for future development. They thus are artifactual in a very vital way. Cole (1996) has described the role of artifacts in cultural history: "Culture . . . can be understood as the entire pool of artifacts accumulated by the social group in the course of its historical experience. In the aggregate, the accumulated artifacts of a group—culture—is then seen as the species-specific *medium* of human development. It is 'history in the present'" (p. 110). Those artifacts that a community recognizes as archival have particular influence on cultural history, both that which has transpired and that which now unfolds.

We see this notion of archival quality as being very useful for considering manuscripts for possible publication in *RTE*. It is a notion particularly well-suited to *RTE*'s unique role as the designated research journal of the National Council of Teachers of English. It helps us think beyond the accepted standards for evaluating research. Like any other academic journal, we claim to maintain high standards for what we publish. We have tried to articulate those standards in previous editorials. In the October 1997 *RTE*, for instance, we outlined a set of considerations that reviewers make when reviewing articles for *RTE*. In that editorial we were concerned with issues of genre and how review criteria might vary depending on the author's epistemology and the resultant formal properties of a manuscript. We discussed such areas as the theoretical motivation for research and an author's faithfulness to a theoretical framework across the sections of an article; the responsibility, sufficiency, and ethics of research conduct; and the warranting of claims made from data. These are crucial considerations for authors and reviewers to examine and typically serve as the basis for recommendations for or against publishing an article.

While fundamental, these criteria do not direct our attention to the historical contribution that an article might make to a field. This potential for landmark recognition, we feel, is a critical trait that an *RTE* article should have. An article's potential for contributing to a field's continuing development, long after publication, distinguishes it as having archival quality. Such articles serve as significant artifacts in a field's cultural history. Determining what will have future influence is, of course, a subjective and speculative undertaking. When considering articles submitted to *RTE*, we base our determination primarily upon whether a study is likely to change or extend the way the field thinks about or chooses to investigate an issue of significance.

One trait that characterizes an archival investigation is that the researcher undertakes the study of a significant problem. An issue's significance is not so much a quality of the object of study itself, but instead is a consequence of the way in which a researcher frames and studies it.

Topics only become significant when someone studies them. A study changes the way that other people think about the topic. To claim topical significance without providing a theoretical framework for discussing it do not acknowledge the ways in which social construction. If an article is to serve as a medium of significance suggests that some articles, even when conducted, do not make sufficient contributions to the field. A study that includes a competent design and interpretation but does not include a compelling theoretical perspective does not contribute substantially to the way a field thinks.

A related question is that of novelty—that is, should a study contribute something new? Is significance only for studies that do not replicate prior research, or can a study ground and still have archival potential? Again, we see the function of the way in which a topic is conceptualized and formulated. Very few questions have found definitive answers, no matter how exhaustive the research. Certain practices of research instruction that is isolated from usage, presentational teaching, and seemingly conclusive research documenting their ineffectiveness in achieving their goals. Each topic is amenable to a new investigation through a perspective that allows readers to reconsider their previous understanding of the topic.

At the same time, we do not see novelty itself as being a sufficient criterion for meriting publication. Some authors claim that because they are the first researchers to study some problem with some population in a particular context using some method involving some instrument, their study is worthy of publication. No matter how variable, then their studies are worthy of publication. Designing a unique study without a compelling motivation or theoretical interpretation does not make a contribution to a field's development.

An Introduction to the Current Issue

We believe that the articles in this issue will help us to think about what we mean by archival. In "Constructing Multiple Subjectivities in 'Literacy Contexts'" Sarah McCarthy focuses on three case studies of students and what they do in different classroom activities. The reviewer of this article identified a quality that conceivably will enable it to alter educators' thinking for years to come, that being its ability to make complex ways of characterizing students' problems. In the words of the reviewer: "I really enjoyed your paper and am convinced it is worth reading by classroom teachers and academics alike. By applying the various theories (trait theory, social constructivist theory, etc.) to the data, you have

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Topics only become significant when someone studies them in a way that changes the way that other people think about them. Articles that proclaim topical significance without providing a theoretical perspective for discussing it do not acknowledge the ways in which significance is a social construction. If an article is to serve as a medium in cultural history, then it needs to contribute to the culture's way of thinking. This view of significance suggests that some articles, even when competently conducted, do not make sufficient contributions to merit publication. A study that includes a competent design and interpretation of a problem but does not include a compelling theoretical perspective does not contribute substantially to the way a field thinks.

A related question is that of novelty—that is, should an article necessarily contribute something new? Is significance only the province of studies that do not replicate prior research, or can a study revisit old ground and still have archival potential? Again, we see the answer as a function of the way in which a topic is conceptualized and a problem formulated. Very few questions have found definitive answers, no matter how exhaustive the research. Certain practices persist (grammar instruction that is isolated from usage, presentational teaching) in spite of seemingly conclusive research documenting their ineffectiveness at meeting their goals. Each topic is amenable to a revisitation, particularly through a perspective that allows readers to reconsider their prior beliefs.

At the same time, we do not see novelty itself as being a sufficient trait for meriting publication. Some authors claim that because they are the first researchers to study some problem with some population in some context using some method involving some instrument isolating some variable, then their studies are worthy of publication. We disagree. Designing a unique study without a compelling motivation or insightful interpretation does not make a contribution to a field's development.

An Introduction to the Current Issue

We believe that the articles in this issue will help us illustrate what we mean by archival. In "Constructing Multiple Subjectivities in Classroom Literacy Contexts" Sarah McCarthy focuses on three case-study students and what they do in different classroom activities. The reviewers of this article identified a quality that conceivably will enable it to affect educators' thinking for years to come, that being its effort to make simplistic ways of characterizing students problematic. In the words of one reviewer: "I really enjoyed your paper and am convinced of its value—for classroom teachers and academics alike. . . . By applying the various lenses (trait theory, social constructivist theory, neo-Marxist theory & post-

structuralist theory), you offered a rich, layered account and effectively challenged the deterministic, reductionist and essentialist tendencies of the 'learning styles' movement." McCarthey's analysis provides a way to use different theoretical perspectives in complementary ways to help understand students' performance as they move across contexts, an analytic approach that may become increasingly useful as studies examine microgenetic events across contexts to help explain situated performance. In "The ESL Teacher as Moral Agent" Bill Johnston, Andrea Juhász, James Marken, and Beverly Rolfs Ruiz analyze the categories of moral influence in a number of ESL classrooms. Although the reviewers were impressed that the study raised questions that were seldom asked about ESL teaching, their praise for the study extended beyond its novelty. As one reviewer noted, "By combining moral inquiry with a species of qualitative research, the authors potentially can offer both a fine-grained analysis of the smallest of teaching acts as well as critique the false hopes that many of us have about conservative, liberal, or radical pedagogies." Their study convincingly demonstrates both the extent to which morality and teaching are intertwined in ESL classrooms and the usefulness of their analytical framework in making that realization. Their willingness to look hard at their own practice demonstrates a kind of reflection we feel will be evocative for teachers in a variety of contexts. In "Grammar as Resource: Writing a Description" Mary Schlepppegrell takes a functional grammatical approach to analyzing students' texts. At a time when many educators accept the axiom that grammar instruction does not improve writing, Schlepppegrell argues that grammatical knowledge of a certain sort is crucial when writing in unfamiliar genres. The reviewers of her paper noted that her method has potential not just as a research tool but as a pedagogical tool as well. In the words of one of them: "The study shows the diagnostic tools that a functional approach to grammar makes possible, at least for teachers: The theory relates linguistic forms to the functions they serve and makes salient the crucial forms that realize a given genre; thus it provides the teacher with a critical focus when introducing new genres of school writing." By asking an old question in a new way, Schlepppegrell's study will, we feel, energize the conversation about the importance of direct instruction in language for the teaching of writing.

The authors studied different topics using different methods. They call upon different theoretical frameworks. Yet they are similar in that they offer literacy educators tools that will allow them to see students, teachers, and classrooms in new ways. We hope that our readers will find those ways of seeing as compelling as we and the reviewers did.

In this editorial we have tried to share a crucial type of contribution that we think the field needs. We do not expect agreement on what is significant. We do wish, however, to identify areas for future research. We look for in articles we publish. We offer the hope that our readers will begin to consider and discuss the ways in which our thoughts public may do so. We welcome your ideas in the RTE website. We welcome your ideas in the personal and collective understanding of how we can make stronger, more robust, more vital, and better. P.S. M.W.S.

RTE Web Site

Please note that the RTE Web site will move to a new home in July 1998. The RTE World Wide Web site [rtehome.htm](http://www.rtehome.htm) has been designed as a resource that complements the print version of the journal. Through the use of a number of services that we hope will encourage researchers to help acquaint RTE readers with the web site, we will highlight an area of possible interest.

In this issue we feature the RTE/Assembly for Research accessible from the home page of the RTE World Wide Web site. The RTE/Assembly for Research Directory is designed to help other people who share interests so that they can find papers and ideas, and otherwise connect with people with whom they wish to develop professional relationships. The directory is by typing in key words such as a name or a topic to share your interests. To contact someone, simply click on the name provided a window that you can use to send a message.

We encourage you to visit the RTE Web site and to add your name in the RTE/Assembly for Research. If you have suggestions to improve the web site, please use the Suggestion page or e-mail them directly to ou-rte@ou.edu. P.S. M.W.S.

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In this editorial we have tried to share our developing thoughts about a crucial type of contribution that we think *RTE* articles will make to the field. We do not expect agreement on which articles have archival significance. We do wish, however, to identify this trait as among those we look for in articles we publish. We offer these thoughts in the hopes that our readers will begin to consider and discuss the issue. Those who wish to make their thoughts public may do so at the Reader's Forum at the *RTE* website. We welcome your ideas in the hopes of developing our personal and collective understanding of how research can contribute to a stronger, more robust, more vital, and better informed field.
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RTE Web Site Feature

Please note that the *RTE* Web site will move to <http://www.ncte.org/rte/> in July 1998. The *RTE* World Wide Web site <http://members.aol.com/RTEngl/rtehome.htm> has been designed as a resource tool that supports and complements the print version of the journal. Through the web site we provide a number of services that we hope will encourage the development of research and researchers. To help acquaint *RTE* readers with the web site, in each issue we will highlight an area of possible interest.

In this issue we feature the **RTE/Assembly for Research Directory**, which is accessible from the home page of the *RTE* Web site and from the Web site of the NCTE Assembly for Research at <http://www.lfc.edu/education/NCTEAR/>. The *RTE/Assembly for Research Directory* is designed to help researchers locate other people who share interests so that they can develop networks, exchange papers and ideas, and otherwise connect with people throughout the field with whom they wish to develop professional relationships. You can search the directory by typing in key words such as a name or a topic to help locate people who share your interests. To contact someone, simply click on the name and you'll be provided a window that you can use to send an e-mail message.

We encourage you to visit the *RTE* Web site, where we hope you will enter your name in the *RTE/Assembly for Research Directory* and search the directory for researchers who share your interests. If you have any suggestions about how to improve the web site, please use the Suggestion Box you'll find on the home page or e-mail them directly to ou-rte@ou.edu.
P.S. M.W.S.
