



Theoretical Analysis

A historical review of *Contemporary Educational Psychology* from 1995 to 2010Anita Witt Mitchell^{a,b,*}, John Robert McConnell III^a^a Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Research, University of Memphis, 100 Ball Hall, Memphis, TN 38152, United States^b Department of Occupational Therapy, University of Tennessee Health Science Center, 930 Madison, Suite 620, Memphis, TN 38163, United States

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ABSTRACT

The major themes and trends represented by the articles published in *Contemporary Educational Psychology* (CEP) from 1995 to 2010 are reviewed in this paper. Included are the major topics, theoretical perspectives, participant characteristics, research methods and statistics used, and highly cited papers. The most frequently occurring topic category was individual differences, with motivation being the most common focus of these articles. Academic subjects, particularly reading and math, were also prevalent topics. The two most common theoretical perspectives were cognitive and social cognitive. This article discusses the many contributions of CEP over the past 16 years, including research in the areas of cognitive processing, teaching and learning, motivation, self-efficacy, and learning contexts and the potential for future contributions to theory development, public policy initiatives, and classroom practices. This information could assist authors considering submission of their work and consumers of educational psychology research considering the purchase of journal subscriptions. Researchers and practitioners in the field of educational psychology may also find this information helpful as they choose professional journals for routine review.

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1. Introduction and background

In order to produce meaningfully original research, it is essential that researchers know what has been studied, how it was studied, and the directions previous studies might provide. Based on the themes and trends of past research, researchers can determine where and how to make their contribution(s) to their field of study. Yet, they face a paradox: to be both relevant and original at the same time. Realize too little of what is known and risk redundancy or claim something beyond the scope of what is sought or cared for and face irrelevance. Thus, careful deliberation must be undertaken by researchers to push the boundaries of human knowledge. This historical review of *Contemporary Educational Psychology* (CEP) from 1995 to 2010 highlights recent themes and trends in the journal so that researchers in general, and prospective authors in particular, can appreciate how their niche in the field has evolved, gain a sense of the direction it is taking, and recognize how it might impact the field in the future.

The information contained in this article may be of benefit to new and established readers alike. Technological advances and the knowledge explosion that have occurred during this information age create challenges for those attempting to stay abreast of the latest findings in a particular field. A number of journals are

available to help researchers and practitioners meet the goal of staying current; however, the limits of time and financial resources often require professionals to make choices as to which journals they will review on a regular basis. The information in this article could assist authors considering submission of their work as well as consumers of educational psychology research considering the purchase of journal subscriptions. Researchers and practitioners in the field of educational psychology may also find this information helpful as they choose professional journals for routine review. Further, frequent readers of CEP may find the historical trends identified in this paper informative, and they may recognize opportunities to contribute to the future direction of the journal and the field of educational psychology.

CEP is a peer-reviewed journal first published in 1976 for the purpose of disseminating research and review articles relevant to educational psychology. Articles published in CEP include both classroom and laboratory research related to learning processes, educational methods, and instructional strategies (Alexander, 2010; Edwards, 1976; Royer, 1996). CEP is a scientifically rigorous journal (Smith et al., 2003) that currently has a journal impact factor of 1.057 and a 5-year impact factor of 2.209 (Elsevier, 2010). Journal impact factor is a measure of the influence of a journal in its particular field, taking into account both the average number of citations per article published in the journal and the recency of the citations. Variations in journal impact factor are expected across disciplines, types of journals, and from year to year; however, the most prestigious journals generally have high impact factors (Garfield, 2005). A search of the educational psychology category

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in the ISI Web of KnowledgeSM database (Thomson Reuters., 2010) reveals that, of the 44 journals listed in the category, CEP ranks nineteenth in terms of journal impact factor. The highest ranked journal, *Child Development*, has a current impact factor of 3.631. Among the five educational psychology journals sometimes considered the “Big Five” (*Cognition and Instruction*, CEP, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *Educational Psychologist*, and *Educational Psychology Review*) (Smith et al., 2003), *Educational Psychology Review* has the highest impact factor, at 3.477, the second highest impact factor of the 44 journals in the educational psychology category.

As an influential journal in the field of educational psychology, CEP reflects the overall trends in the profession. A review of the historical trends in the research published in CEP from 1995 to 2010 could provide insight into the importance of these trends and the priorities for future research. As authors and researchers reflect on what has been learned and consider how best to contribute to further knowledge and understanding of learning processes, educational methods, and instructional strategies, the future needs of the profession may become apparent.

2. Method

All of the articles published in CEP from 1995 to 2010 were reviewed, with the exception of corrigendums, subject and author indices, obituaries, and calls for special issue papers or other editorial pieces deemed non-substantive. These volumes were selected due to the limits imposed by the electronic availability of articles on the *ScienceDirect*[®] website. For each article, the year, volume and issue, author(s), title, topic and/or key words, theoretical base(s), characteristics of participants, and central issue(s) were recorded. The use of qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods was also noted, as well as the application of the more sophisticated latent variable modeling techniques (e.g., structural equation modeling and item response theory procedures). Special topic issues were considered as part of the ordinary publication cycle, and frequencies for the coding dimensions were calculated using the same approach as was used for other issues.

Initially, titles and abstracts were examined. When these failed to provide necessary details, the bodies of the articles were searched manually and/or electronically. Topics were identified by noting main subjects and ideas in the titles and abstracts as well as key words listed in the articles when they were provided.

First, a list of topics was generated based on the initial survey of the articles. This list was used to perform electronic searches and determine the frequency of major topics for each year. Each author then coded the topics according to one of five categories: (1) individual differences, (2) teaching and learning, (3) cognitive processes, (4) academic subjects, and (5) methodological and professional considerations (see Table 1). Most articles included more than one topic; therefore, a single article may have been represented in more than one topic category.

The articles were also classified according to six theoretical perspectives, including behaviorist, cognitive, constructivist, information processing, metacognitive, and social cognitive perspectives (see Table 2). The three major categories of learning theories—behaviorist, cognitive, and constructivist—were selected *a priori*. As the review proceeded, it became apparent that the addition of information processing, metacognitive, and social cognitive perspectives would also be appropriate, based on the number of articles that included these theoretical foundations. Further, a “Not Applicable,” or N/A, category was also necessary to accommodate articles regarding productivity of faculty, certain editorials, and methodological articles. Some of the articles did not explicitly state the theoretical base(s) on which they were grounded. In those cases, introductions and discussion sections were examined, and a judgment was made based on theoretical descriptions and information included by the author(s). Each author of this review individually coded the theoretical perspective(s) of a random sample of 15% of the articles to determine interrater agreement. The first author coded the remainder of the articles. Many of the articles described more than one theoretical basis or perspective and delineated more specific theories that fell under one of the major categories (e.g., cognitive load theory, which was classified under cognitive theory).

Research study participants were classified into the following grade- and age-related categories: preschool, kindergarten,

Table 1
Definitions and examples of topic categories.

Topic category	Definition	Examples
Academic subjects	Common school subjects studied in typical classrooms	Math Reading Science Writing
Cognitive processes	The performance in mental activities related to thinking and learning	Attention Cognitive load Comprehension Memory Reasoning Metacognition Transfer
Individual differences	Personal characteristics or individual performances of students	Academic performance and achievement Creativity Gender differences Motivation Self-efficacy Test anxiety
Methodological and professional considerations	Approaches and methods for analyzing and reporting data, trends of interest to the profession of educational psychology	Data analysis techniques and methods Faculty productivity Trends in the profession
Teaching and learning	Techniques and methods used for teaching and learning, as well as classroom characteristics which may affect teaching and learning	Argumentation Aspects of the classroom context Collaborative learning Group discussion Note-taking Studying methods

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