

## About 'research in progress' articles (transcript)

**Eva Heinrich**

Massey University

[e.heinrich@massey.ac.nz](mailto:e.heinrich@massey.ac.nz)

**Geof Hill**

The Investigative Practitioner

[geof@bigpond.com](mailto:geof@bigpond.com)

**Jo-Anne Kelder**

University of Tasmania

[jo.kelder@utas.edu.au](mailto:jo.kelder@utas.edu.au)

**Michelle Picard**

Murdoch University

[michelle.picard@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:michelle.picard@murdoch.edu.au)

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### Abstract

ASRHE has introduced a novel article category named 'Research in Progress'. While the journal's website provides a succinct definition of this category, initial submissions indicate that further guidance is required to highlight requirements and opportunities. The editors have decided to approach this challenge by constructing an audio editorial, recorded in a conversational format, allowing for multiple voices and nuances to come across.

Important aspects of Research in Progress lie in facilitating publication of tentative results, sharing of research approaches and discussion of research designs. The editors emphasize the need for a strong research foundation, as in literature grounding or careful research question design, and open and honest discussion of successes

and failures. Research in Progress is strongly placed to invite collaborations and authors are reminded to be explicit in specifying how they want to work with others to take research forward. The editorial also addresses the situation of research students and how a Research in Progress article might sit alongside thesis writing.

Research in Progress is a developing article category. The editors invite assistance from the higher education research community in shaping this category.

### **Editors' note**

It is the editors' recommendation to listen to the audio version of this editorial.

### **Audio Editorial Transcript**

Kia ora and welcome to our audio editorial. My name is **Eva Heinrich** and I am the executive editor of ASRHE. I will be joined by my colleagues Geof Hill, Michelle Picard and Jo-Anne Kelder. Together we will attempt to shed light on our understanding of the Research in Progress article category.

We have chosen audio as the format for this editorial to be able to bring you multiple perspectives, using multiple voices. This is in line with our approach of exploring new ways of presenting research.

Geof, could you please get us started by highlighting your conception of research in progress.

**Geof:** Research that was currently being done but had not been completed. But had been done enough so that there were some initial findings, and that what you were wanting to do by publishing a research in progress was invite other people to contribute to it. So, move from a solo researcher to a collaborative effort.

Thanks, Geof. I would like to follow up on the understanding of 'initial findings'. For example, can the formulation of research questions already be an initial finding? Can we see the development of these questions already as an integral part of the research process? Is it 'research in action'?

**Geof:** I agree with you. If you, as a result of reading the literature, come up with a series of questions that you want to ask people who are going to be your data, then that is a finding, and that is an initial finding. If others came to join in, they may suggest some additional questions that would be worthwhile asking and they would bring a different perspective. That is the hard thing in doing research – there is no official starting or finishing point to research. It is like we are doing it all the time. And at various points in time, we choose to publicise what we have found or what we are finding. I think a work in progress is about what we are finding, somewhere in the move from being concerned or passionate about something and publishing your contribution to knowledge about it.

You make an interesting point about the ongoing nature of research. Do you think that our research in progress article category can help researchers to make the choice of when to publish? How do we actually ever make this choice?

**Geof:** Just to have something published mid-way, is putting your ideas out into the public and testing the waters with it, and what you could get is a very different view of what is going on. So, it is a combination of choosing to risk putting your ideas out into the public domain, but you are also choosing to move as a researcher from solo researcher to collaborative researcher by inviting other people's comments, and they can shift or clarify what you are investigating.

Michelle, I would like to start our conversation by hearing your views on research in progress.

**Michelle:** I think that's the working progress research article is really, really useful because it does actually make a significant contribution to the literature or contribution to scholarly practice in higher education, just like any other type of research. So, although it might not be a large-scale study or complete study, it still needs to identify how it makes a unique contribution. That could be some kind of new slant on theory, it could be a small scale, empirical study that started. But once you've got that initial piece of work, then what strengthens the researching study paper is reaching out to others, to get them involved in your research. And you need to do that in a very specific way. So, instead of just

saying, I've done the study, and it's almost like a research proposal or I am planning the study, you need to very specifically say I've gained these new insights into research either conceptually, or through a small scale empirical study and I'd like to confirm them by joining with others, and explicitly reach out and explain to other researchers how you want to connect with them. Do you want to, for example, form a large study with other researchers? And in that case, you might suggest that this is the methodology which we'll go about it, these are my initial results. And could you join in that way? Or maybe you might reach out and ask for contrasting or disconfirming results linked with your study another way in which you could reach out and ask for people to contribute to the theory and say, 'This is my initial theory, what aspects of theory could you contribute to the study?' So those are just some of the ways in which you could reach out to other researchers.

You were talking about 'gaining new insights' – how do you know recognise a new insight? How do you do that, especially as a new researcher?

**Michelle:** I think often in terms of, if it's a theoretical or conceptual insight, it is often built on a deep and rich literature review, or some kind of research synthesis. And then you're bringing together some kind of unique insight from that. So, it's different from what other people have done before. And although it's drawing on other research. Or, it's from your lived experience, you can link it with the literature with other studies. So always grounding your research, like for any other study, in what's come before

So, if you have come to the point where you think you have come up with a research question to investigate, a research in progress article would outline some ways of how to approach the research question. Is that correct?

**Michelle:** It definitely wouldn't end with the research question which is, I think, except for the methodology, how you usually end a research proposal, whereas research in progress has the question, and at least gives some insights to answer the question, to start to answer the question, and then reaches out to others to further elucidate and give more information on the question. But you

don't just end with the question. You need to at least try to address the question to some extent.

Michelle, if you have done some investigations and find out that your research question does not work out, is not the right research question – could you write about this in a research in progress article?

**Michelle:** Absolutely, research in progress doesn't have to be successful research. But I would say all research articles don't necessarily all always have to focus on the successes. But research in progress if you come up with a question, and then your initial results don't really elucidate the question in full, then in a research in progress, you can try and unpack the problems with your initial research question, or research. And then again, that's a way in which you can reach out to others to better design or more fully answer your research question.

Welcome Jo-Anne. I would like to start by asking for your reflections on the research in progress submissions we have received so far, and in particular the ones that have not made it into the full review process.

**Jo-Anne:** The submissions that didn't make to the review process, were really in the form of just a research proposal. You need to have more information and more substance beyond a proposal. So, for example, if a conceptual research in progress paper is presented, the ones that that we did not consider sufficiently developed, often didn't have sufficient literature grounding the concepts that were being presented. For empirical research, there needs to be some data. So, if your research in progress submission has no or minimal data, then the problem is that there's not sufficient evidence to warrant any judgments about the next steps that you might be taking in your research. Another lack in a research in progress, were if papers didn't provide analysis of the research to date, for example, discussing limitations or opportunities for further research. And also, what we look for is a paper that identifies opportunities to collaborate. So, the whole purpose of our research in progress category is that it's about presenting research that's sufficiently developed, that other researchers can

think about respond to it in terms of 'Well, I would like to collaborate with you on that' or 'I could add a component to strengthen the research'.

We have talked about issues around data collection. Could we now focus on the interpretation of those data?

**Jo-Anne:** The research in progress paper needs to have a very solid discussion, because you need to write in your discussion, why what you have presented is actually important, why it's worth engaging with, why it matters. And, also in your discussion to point out and articulate really clearly, what you understand are the limitations of the research, because it's in progress. So, one of the limitations is it's not finished yet. But at the point where you're writing and presenting your current status of your research project, you want to be able to say, 'here are the things that we have identified that then perhaps reorient our research from what we thought it would be, or give us impetus to keep going'. And so things like unexpected findings, or if you've identified inadequacies in the research design, so you may have got some data analysed and gone actually this data doesn't help us answer our research question, so we need to reorient. And that a substantive finding that your method, that you thought was going to work, didn't. That's a progression from when you first conceived of the research design.

It's very important to have potential insights and potential for collaboration and even a quite specific invitation to collaborate, which sets out what is the form of collaboration that will help the research to be stronger, more relevant, and more worthy of people paying attention to it. And so you might say, 'Well, I have quite a strong data set for this specific instance, but it would really help if I could have several other collaborators who can repeat what I have done in different contexts, and we can compare and see if there's a level of generalisability that I can't demonstrate, because my data set is only for one context'.

Thanks for those thoughts, Jo-Anne. We have talked about the importance of extending beyond the research proposal, the importance of a solid discussion section and the need for explicitly stating collaboration opportunities. Does anything else comes to mind?

**Jo-Anne:** The other thing, I think, for beginning researchers, is the huge value of being involved in research projects with people who are more experienced than you. So, the mentoring opportunity is also quite high. And for more experienced researchers, the joy that you can have in helping a novice researcher to extend and grow their capabilities is very significant and, I would argue, good for you, as well. It keeps your research fresh and invigorated as well. So, I think collaboration is one of those things that takes time, takes effort. International collaboration has its additional layers of complexity and difficulty, but the benefit is very real. And it's not just in terms of the quality of research that you produce, but it's also the quality of the relationships and the learning experiences that are engendered through engaging with each other.

In reflecting on the contributions of my colleagues, I note that everyone has emphasized the opportunities research in progress articles provide for facilitating collaboration. In particular, I appreciate Jo-Anne's words about the value collaborations can add to the life of a researcher.

Implicitly, all published research invites collaboration, yet for a research in progress article we suggest that it is of particular importance to be explicit, to not just assume or have a generic statement, but to state what you would be interested in collaborating on. You can facilitate this by adding material to your article in an appendix; for example, providing your interview protocol or your survey questions. This can require forward thinking in the planning of your research. If you plan to make your data available to other researchers, you need to make sure that your ethics application and informed consent allow for this.

We briefly touched on novice researchers and in this context a question regarding PhD students might come up – Is there a risk for PhD students in publishing research in progress articles? Is early sharing problematic for these researchers? I suggest it is not. To a degree, publishing research in progress is a continuation of a process around publication of thesis research that has started many years ago. The traditional approach was to complete the PhD and then publish in journals. This has shifted towards publishing journal articles in parallel to working on the PhD research, via a traditional thesis or via thesis by publication. The step towards research in progress

publishing continues this direction of earlier sharing. I do not see this as problematic for the PhD candidate. If the candidate has something to share with the research community at an early stage, this only demonstrates the value of their approaches. After all, getting the work through a thorough peer review process is no easy feat. If others build on this early work, it shows to an even greater degree of the value of the work, and, the originality and authorship are publicly documented. I might refer to my colleague Geof who talks about ASRHE being part of a revolution. Publishing is evolving, PhD research is evolving and even collaborative ways of doing PhD research are now developing.

As my final point I want to talk about research in progress articles and openness. I refer back to a point made by Michelle about research that does not work out as planned, for example requiring reworking of the research questions. There is valuable learning in research that did not work out as planned and research in progress articles can play an important role in being open, in sharing those research projects. In a way all research is 'in progress', especially in a discipline like education that works in an area with so many moving parts, with so many influencing factors.

Our category of research in progress articles encourages researchers to be more open about this. I suggest that in many cases the research community can gain more from an article that provides a thorough examination of why something did not work as planned than from an article that glosses over challenges or hides weaknesses in approach or findings.

To conclude, thank you to my colleagues for joining me in the adventure of creating an audio editorial. This was an interesting experience and we welcome feedback from the ASRHE community. Regarding research in progress articles – we assume that at this stage we are only scratching the surface of what might be feasible. We encourage authors to challenge us, to extend our understanding, to push the boundaries we have set so far. Let us be guided by how we can be constructive in enabling research, in facilitating sharing and collaboration, in adding knowledge and serving teaching and learning in higher education.



Music in the audio version: Track 'Earning happiness' by John Bartmann,  
<https://www.chosic.com>.