

Alternative Education

Main activities and events of the SIG in the past year.

Between January- February 2021, the SIG had planned to host a face-to-face event in collaboration with the Arts Based Educational Research SIG in March. This event was postponed due to Covid 19. In September, SIG hosted an online webinar (comprised of previously accepted papers for the BERA 2020 conference): 'Within and beyond the mainstream: realising alternative possibilities across educational stages', this event was well attended: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/media/within-and-beyond-the-mainstream-realising-alternative-possibilities-across-education-webinar> In addition, SIG members contributed a podcast and Blog to the ever growing BERA digital resources archive: Podcast: Merrett (2020): <https://www.bera.ac.uk/media/missing-grades-missed-opportunities-the-impact-of-exam-cancellation-among-elective-home-education-families> Blogs: Fensham-Smith (2020) <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/should-we-really-call-this-home-schooling-reflections-from-the-research-field>

What are the key issues currently affecting your Special Interest Area?

Alongside most educational researchers, the context of the pandemic has significantly reconfigured past, present and planned research methodologies and planned projects. This has reconfigured a new ethical, theoretical and practical considerations. The timely resources and contributions of other SIGs (now housed within the Digital Resources platform) on the BERA website will be of value to our members as progress through 2021 and beyond. Local and national lockdowns throughout the four nations, 2020 also signalled temporary periods of 'school assisted' learning at home for parents and families. This reopened discussions and public interest in elective home education. The Freedom to Learn Project and the Radical Education Forum hosted several well-attended activities and self-organised events between May-September 2020. The momentum to broker further connections and knowledge exchange between practitioners and researchers within the broader field of alternative provision was also visible in recent online event hosted by CreatED at Leeds Beckett University in December 2020 (180 delegates). Establishing further partnerships within and beyond this SIG and wider research networks is a priority for 2021 and beyond.

Are there any particular developments for your SIG on the horizon, e.g. newsletters, publications, blogs, events, projects?

Harriet is nearing the end of their three-year term as convenor of the SIG. The SIG will be looking to appoint one additional convenor in from 2021 to work alongside Amber and Harriet to plan events and activities for the remainder of 2020-2021 and beyond. In these uncertain times, the SIG intends to make further use of the opportunities and reach afforded through the BERA podcast and Zoom as a platform for hosting online meeting opportunities for SIG members. A priority for 2021 is to establish a longer-term partnership between the SIG and the Alternative Provision Research Network, Carnegie School of Education, Leeds Beckett University.

What other organizations does your SIG collaborate with?

• The Freedom to Learn Network • Phoenix Education Trust • Progressive Education, UK • The Children's Research Centre, Open University • The Centre for Personalised Education • Light on Ed. Researcher Network • The Centre for Social Mobility, University of Exeter • The Radical Education Forum • The Alternative Education Research Network, Leeds Beckett (2021- planned)

How has your SIG worked to encourage diversity amongst your membership? How do you plan to encourage diversity in the future?

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In previous face-to-face events, we have intended to offer relatively low delegate fees and discounts for practitioners and ECRS. The reach afforded through online events is likely to further extend how accessible our future events are to practitioners and ECRS across the four nations, but also internationally (as was evident in the 'Within and beyond the mainstream: realising alternative possibilities across educational stages', event with speakers joining us from Australia and Israel). We will continue to reflect on how the programme (speaker selection), scheduling and modes of access could be further enhanced to increase the participation and inclusion of a variety of groups and communities with an interest in alternative education research.