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SPECIAL SECTION

WILEY AREA Royal Geographical Society with IBG

GeogEd: A new research group founded on the reciprocal relationship between geography education and the geographies of education

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In 2019, the Higher Education Research Group (HERG) formally became the Geography and Education Research Group (GeogEd). What may appear as a simple change in name masks a renewed understanding of the synergies between geography education (at all levels) and the geographies of education. In this paper we contextualise that change through the relationships between the two inter-related fields. We suggest that these fields are integrally linked, iteratively and reciprocally, and that research across both is vital for a truly holistic understanding of each. We reflect on the discussions and process of forming the new Geography and Education Research Group, which we trust is sensitive to the historic remit of HERG while being inclusive to those working in geography and education beyond higher education. We conclude by looking ahead to a renewed, inclusive, and progressive Research Group, aspiring to be more diverse and enabling fruitful discussions across the geography and education nexus.

KEYWORDS
geography and education research group, geographies of education, geography, geography and education, geography education

1 | INTRODUCTION

In November 2019, the Higher Education Research Group (HERG) of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) formally changed its name to the Geography and Education Research Group (GeogEd). This revision was a response to an initiative, led by Matt Finn (University of Exeter) and Itta Bauer (University of Zurich), which involved consultation across different Research Groups, before and during the 2018 RGS-IBG Annual International Conference (AIC). Matt and Itta wanted to explore the possibility of a space for researchers with an interest in the geographies of education and non-HE geography education. Discussions at the 2018 AIC were followed by 12 months of formal reflection and dialogue within HERG. Under consideration was the potential for HERG to be viewed by (prospective) constituents as inclusive of *anyone* with an interest in geography education and/or geographies of education. To achieve this inclusivity, HERG evolved into GeogEd, the change in name accompanied by a revised and expanded constitutional remit.

The apparent simplicity of a change in name from HERG to GeogEd belies formal acknowledgement that there is a reciprocal relationship between geography education (at all levels – from school to undergraduate/doctoral studies) and geographies of education. The re-constituted GeogEd aims to be inclusive and facilitative, promoting communities of

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research and scholarship and consequent research-informed practice. We hope that expanding the remit of the group will lead to new members, more fruitful conversations, and hence a broadening and deepening of research across the boundaries of geographies of education and geography education.

2 | SYNERGIES OF GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION

From the outset, the group believed it was important to define those interested in geography education and those interested in geographies of education. Geography education research seeks to enhance our theoretical and conceptual understanding of pedagogy, the findings of which can be applied to practice, thus enhancing the student experience. Other terms representing this field may include pedagogic/education research or sit more broadly under the banner of the scholarship of teaching and learning. While some researchers in this field may sit in Geography Departments, others sit in Education Departments with responsibility for teacher education, training, and mentorship in its various forms. Meanwhile, the geographies of education point to research which takes education as the object of its study; in other words, education is studied as a geographical phenomenon. This field of research and enquiry is commonly undertaken by those in Geography Departments but would share affinities with cognate disciplines such as education studies, comparative education and the sociologies of education.

Geography education and geographies of education are complementary intellectual territories. It is hard to escape the politico-economic forces which frame HE as key to economic growth and productivity, or the socio-cultural targets established in government documents for HE to reduce inequality and disadvantage (BIS White Paper, 2016; Higher Education Research Act, 2017) – although this is not to deny any praxis which may be in opposition to such hegemonic discourse. Geographies of education research explores the relationships between the geographical study of education and other processes (Holloway et al., 2010). Put simply, this research seeks to identify, understand, and critique the drivers of change affecting education, educators, and learners, and vice versa. The field of geographies of education is not limited to these definitions; in reality it is diverse and broad in scope. We also acknowledge that geographies of education research is multi-lingual and undertaken within varied contexts (Jahnke et al., 2019). A fuller discussion regarding the geographies of education can be found in Kraftl et al. (in submission, in this special issue).

Exploring complex multidirectional societal relationships can help to define our epistemological and ontological stances, our methodologies, and conceptual viewpoints. The geographies of education can influence, challenge, deepen, and enrich our pedagogies, practices, and curricula. As a result, the geographies of education shape who we are as educators, how we behave, how we see our students, and what we research in our classrooms and wider learning spaces (Hill et al., 2016a). Equally, our students are also the product of the geographies of education; their outlook and desire to "become a geographer" shaped by socio-economic/-cultural and political forces. With respect to these drivers, geographical societies/bodies are taking positive steps to address inequalities and under-representation among those who study geography, promoting the subject's role in equipping all students with the skills and knowledge to positively engage with the major challenges faced by society and the environment (Blunt & Evans, 2019). As faculty and teachers, we therefore hope that our responsive and evolving pedagogies eventually manifest in changed educational spatialities and materialities, which act to drive wider social-cultural as well as political-economic change, which will require further geographical interrogation. The relationship between geography education and geographies of education is, therefore, integrally linked, iteratively and reciprocally, and is vital for a truly holistic understanding of each (Figure 1).

The field of geographies of education is concerned with education as a geographical phenomenon and so it naturally adopts the registers of space, scale, location, and time. Following this, geographers recognise that the educational journey, from entry to outcomes, occurs differentially and relationally, and is influenced by a variety of political, cultural, and socio-economic factors.

As Jennifer Hill exemplified in her GeogEd launch event keynote, as geography educators we continually research and critically adopt a range of relevant pedagogies (Hill, 2019). We are mindful of addressing attainment gaps (Desai, 2017; Faria et al., 2019) and inequitable social capital and mobility (Donnelly & Evans, 2016; Wellens et al., 2006). We aim to create inclusive learning environments (Hughes, 2016) by critically evaluating normative pedagogic practices in geographical education that may disadvantage some groups (Mol & Atchison, 2019). We are particularly conscious of the importance of decolonising curricula and internationalising our practice (Esson, 2018; Haigh, 2014; Simm & Marvell, 2017). As geographers we teach and assess using innovative formats (Hill & West, 2020; Marvell & Simm, 2018; Morris et al., 2019; Van Loon, 2019) and technologies (Detyna & Kadiri, 2019; Soltis et al., 2020). We encourage our students to act as scholars (Marvell et al., 2013), to undertake and publish research (Hill et al., 2018a, 2018b; Walkington, 2012), and to co-create new learning resources (Healey & Hill, 2019; West et al., 2017). Finally, through our close staff–student relationships, and our inclusive partnership-based pedagogies (Moore-Cherry et al., 2016), we can also allow our students to consciously encounter the emotions in/of education and learning (Hill et al., 2019a).

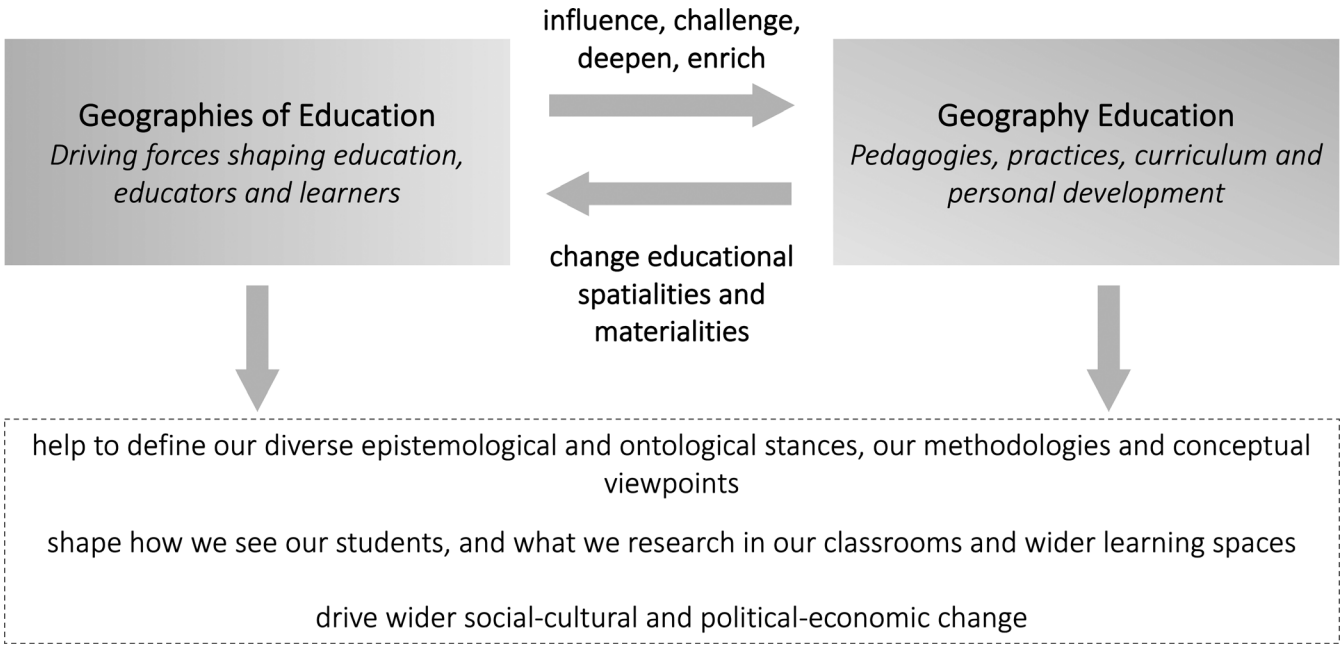

FIGURE 1 The reciprocal relationship between geographies of education and geography education.
Source: Hill (2019)

When designing our curricula we consider the balance of signature pedagogies and broader learning experiences (Spronken-Smith, 2013). The heart of geography is our signature pedagogy of fieldwork (France & Haigh, 2018; Gold et al., 1993; Shulman, 2005), which is often perceived as one of the more challenging yet enjoyable aspects of geographical education (Fuller et al., 2014). In 1994, the Higher Education Study Group of the IBG (today the newly formed GeogEd) identified the various objectives of fieldwork, including the "hidden agenda" of socialisation and personal development (Kent et al., 1997, p. 320). We are also acutely aware of the need to ensure that our fieldwork is accessible and inclusive (Bhakta, 2019; Mol & Atchison, 2019; Tucker & Horton, 2019).

Geographers examine education across the life-course, from school-level geography (Catling et al., 2010; Lambert & Jones, 2013), to undergraduate study and transitions in-between (Ferreira, 2018; Hill & Jones, 2010), and on to postgraduate education (Caretta et al., 2018; Foote et al., 2012; Meadows, 2012). As geographers, we promote life-long learning (Kolnik, 2010; Matthews & Livingtone, 1996) and research into the development of graduate attributes and capabilities through our practice (Hill & Walkington, 2016; Hill et al., 2016b; Horswell & West, 2018; Spronken-Smith et al., 2016; Walkington et al., 2018). Naturally, we are mindful to educate for sustainable development (Scott & Gough, 2006), to develop students' ethical/critical thinking skills (Bearman et al., 2016; Healey & Ribchester, 2016), and their ICT/digital capabilities, especially concerning mobile technologies in fieldwork (France et al., 2020; France et al., 2016; Welsh et al., 2015). Accordingly, we have tended to diversify our teaching methods to prepare students to recognise and work within the heterogeneity and change they will encounter in local, regional, and global contexts (Hall et al., 2004; Horswell et al., 2019; Skelton, 2019).

We need to be mindful, however, of "pedagogic frailty" (Kinchin et al., 2016; Kinchin & Francis, 2017), where we find the cumulative pressures of an increasingly metrics-based and transparent academy inhibiting our capacity to change practice, causing us to maintain conservative pedagogies. Pedagogic frailty can curtail creative teaching practice and the scholarship of teaching and learning. We need to adopt courageous pedagogy (Hill et al., 2019b) to reflect on and challenge this frailty, and to challenge our students with inclusive, engaging, innovative, and relevant experiences.

Geographies of education has taught us that educating geographically extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom into informal/alternative spaces (Kraftl, 2013; McEwen, 2013; Mills & Kraftl, 2014). These spaces include numerous components of the built and natural environment, progressing, for example, from workplaces, through community woodlands/parks, to the more intimate spaces of the home and even the family car (Card & Thomas, 2018; Mills, 2016; Mills & Waite, 2017; Pimlott-Wilson & Coates, 2019). Immersed in such environments, students can feel less intimidated than they do in formal settings, guided by experiential learning that is shaped by inter-connections between a multiplicity of peers. But there remain for geographers many questions concerning the spatialities, materialities, and pedagogic practices that result from alternative learning environments.

3 | PROPOSING THE GEOGRAPHY AND EDUCATION RESEARCH GROUP

The question initially posed by Matt and Itta was whether there could be a formalised space within the RGS-IBG to unite those working on research into geography education and those who work on geographies of education. This included those working on the geographies of education but who do not focus on children/young people (who would therefore not identify with the Geographies of Children, Young People and Families Research Group – GCYFRG) and those working in education beyond HE (and who may therefore not naturally associate with HERG). In response, a small "GeogEd Working Group" was established, comprised mainly of HERG members who were present at the AGM in 2018 (see the Acknowledgements). Its goal was to explore the possibility of creating such a space, providing the opportunity to explore topics and challenges at the interface of the geography education and geographies of education fields. However, the group was conscious that to be recognised as inclusive to the broader geography and education field, both the group's name and constitutional remit would need to be revisited.

It should be noted that historically the HERG committee has taken a broad view of its constitutional aims (see Healey et al., in submission, in this special issue). Reviewing HERG Annual Conference sessions over the last two decades reveals several "non-HE geography" themed sessions. Looking across educational levels, in 2008 HERG sponsored sessions exploring lifelong geography education, which included speakers such as Rita Gardner (RGS-IBG), David Lambert (Geographical Association), Alun Morgan (University College London), and Gary Atterton (Castle School/Local Geographical Association President). And in 2015 Eleanor Rawling convened a session with a focus on the impacts of changes to the school geography national and GCSE curricula. Exploring HERG's conference session sponsorship in the past also reveals engagement with geographies of education. In 2010, Kathy Reilly and Kirsten Purcell convened a day-long series of sessions exploring the theme of "Education Geographies." In 2011, co-sponsored sessions by HERG, the Geographies of Leisure and Tourism RG and the Biogeography RG, discussed geographical education beyond the traditional classroom, exploring nature- and community-based learning, and home/virtual schooling. More recently in 2018, Itta Bauer and Matt Finn convened a session (co-sponsored by HERG and GCYFRG) that aimed to stimulate discussions around Geographiedidaktik and young people's geographies.

The sessions above, alongside many more, reveal HERG's engagement with the broader geography and education field, and a willingness to be inclusive. Nonetheless, it had become clear through conversations between former HERG chairs and session convenors that the perceived HE focus of HERG was off-putting to some academics/practitioners. As a result, some felt the need to ask the group whether they could convene a HERG session without a specific HE focus. Therefore, even when those involved in HERG understood it to have a broader remit, the title alone could be seen as exclusive.

It was important to the Working Group to seek a name that removed any sense of exclusion for anyone identifying as either/both a geography education or geographies of education researcher/academic/scholar/practitioner. Individuals working within or across these fields needed to feel the newly constituted group offered them a natural home, manifesting in a sense of community and belonging. The Working Group wished to remove any sense of "othering" that results in the need for individuals to "seek permission" to identify with and be part of the group. Many variations around geography and education as a name were suggested. Those that were most popular and discussed at greater length are presented in Table 1.

Jennifer Hill (former HERG Chair, 2012–2015) proposed the name "Geography and Education Research Group" (shortened to GeogEd) as the most parsimonious means of capturing the two areas to be united. It was agreed that this title was broad enough to welcome those working across the different sectors of education research and the geographies of education. The Working Group also believed that GeogEd would serve as a name sensitive to the historic HERG remit and membership, and be inclusive across geography and education in a broader and forward-looking sense. It should be noted, however, that during the evolution of HERG to GeogEd, there was a small number of Research Group members who felt some concern at the potential loss of the pedagogic/HE focus. To ensure the continued promotion of geography education research, alongside geographies of education research, the group's constitutional aims were updated to emphasise support for promoting and developing research across the geography and education nexus. These aims can be found in Healey and West (in submission, in this special issue).

4 | LOOKING AHEAD

We conclude by looking ahead to a future as the Geography and Education Research Group. Geographers are in a strong, and maybe unique, position to work together and utilise their interdisciplinary skills to undertake pedagogic research, engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning (Hill et al., 2018c), and research the socio-economic and political influences related to education through a geographic lens. We hope that by uniting the fields of geography education and

TABLE 1 Evaluating different "geography" and "education" research group titles

	Arguments in favour	Arguments against
Education Research Group (ERG or EdRes)	Some felt that this offered an "elegant" and simple solution and provided some form of continuity from HERG.	Even with the dropping of "higher" there was potential for this to be misread/perceived as being equally exclusive. Some felt that ERG emphasised pedagogic research and not the geographies of education.
Geographies of Education and Learning (GEL)	Proponents of GEL suggested that the title provides a clearer emphasis on the geographies of education.	Both GEL and GoEK were seen as less obviously inclusive of pedagogic research and work by those in schools/other spaces. There was concern that these names may exclude those historically in the centre of the Higher Education Research Group remit.
Geographies of Education and Knowledge (GoEK)	GoEK suggests a clear emphasis on the geographies of education. GoEK also indicates a research emphasis for the group.	

geographies of education we can enhance our understanding of teaching and learning, of the contexts in which they take place, and the outcomes of our scholarly-informed practice. We also hope that by exploiting the synergies discussed in this paper we can expand our appreciation about who we are and what the discipline can become, (re)producing our chosen future(s) from a more encompassing perspective. As a result, we can enable critical, radical, and liberatory pedagogies and geographies, encouraging creative (and sometimes necessarily disruptive) evolution and development.

As GeogEd started to evolve, we were keen to ensure that the group worked alongside others with interests in geography and education. The hope was to present the change as additive and constructive. This included RGS-IBG Research Groups and the Geographical Association. Looking forward, we hope that GeogEd can exploit the opportunities posed by its evolution to work alongside and in partnership with other geography and education groups (see Kinder et al., in submission). We are conscious, however, of potential thematic and membership overlaps between groups, and we acknowledge that working in parallel may require re-evaluating practices and boundaries. Historically, a pre-requisite for HERG membership was RGS-IBG Membership/Fellowship, which may exclude some groups such as teachers/teacher educators, who might naturally gravitate more towards the Geographical Association. Under GeogEd this pre-requisite has now been removed, potentially allowing for a more diverse membership across the geography and education nexus.

While the distinction made in this paper between geography education and geographies of education has proven useful for the evolution of GeogEd, and for a consideration of the possibilities of bringing such research together, we acknowledge that it may not always be possible, or appropriate, to attempt to categorise some work as being either/or. Indeed, as we look ahead to the future, we hope that the benefits of GeogEd will manifest in research looking across the complexities of the geography and education nexus and thinking beyond a more simplistic polarised framing.

Finn et al. (in submission, in this special issue) discuss and reflect on the future of the Geography and Education Research Group following its evolution from HERG. We therefore conclude by reaffirming the hope that GeogEd will be an inclusive space for anyone identifying with either/both/the synergies of our composite areas, looking across the learning life-course and learning spaces to holistically understand what might broadly be termed the student experience. We aspire to be outward-looking but not strategically decentred, embracing multi-scale sites and multi-temporal periods of knowledge production. Achieving this would allow us to establish more meaningful connections and deeper ways of knowing in the classroom, over our campuses, and in communities across the world.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

No new data were created for this paper.

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