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MID-WESTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER

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University of Wisconsin - Whitewater

On The Cover

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Mid-Western Educational Researcher

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Effectiveness Testing Practices

Educators' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Their Schools' Standardized Testing Practices

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Abstract

This study was designed to collect and then to compare teachers', principals', supervisors', and testing directors' (N=484) ratings of the effectiveness of selected standardized testing program management practices in their schools. It was found that these educators, who were selected for being knowledgeable about their testing programs, rated their schools' performance in standardized testing higher than in meeting other district responsibilities. The highest rated testing practices were use of quality tests and materials, maintenance of pupil records, and use of understandable scores and reports. The lowest rated testing practices were the use of test results to evaluate instruction, availability of written policies, and use of publisher instructional guides accompanying achievement batteries. Comparatively, educators assigned to secondary schools tended to rate the testing practices lower than did their elementary school cohorts; just the ratings of the teachers differed significantly among the various job assignment groups; and the job assignment groups provided similar relative ratings of the testing practices with most Spearman Rho coefficients being +.73 or higher.

Educators generally do not have a high regard for standardized testing despite the increased use of these tests in recent school reform efforts (Haney & Madaus, 1989). For example, many classroom teachers appear to have an unfavorable to indifferent attitude toward standardized testing (Borg, Worthen, & Valcarce, 1986), and school administrators tend to view standardized testing as being a relatively unimportant administrative function in their schools (Sproull & Zubrow, 1981). Additionally, assessments of the research literature reveal that testing and evaluation practices receive less attention from educational researchers than many other aspects of education (Crooks, 1988).

This less than positive regard for standardized testing is also revealed in what many educators believe about testing. Classroom teachers commonly believe that standardized testing skills are less needed than are other testing skills (Marso & Pigge, 1988); many teachers perceive the primary benefits of their school districts' standardized testing programs accrue not to themselves but to the school administration (Salmon-Cox, 1981); building principals typically do not perceive the need for testing specialists to be involved in the selection of standardized tests (Kinney, Brickell, & Lynn, 1988); and school counselors frequently feel testing services dominate too much of their time (Miller, 1977).

Furthermore, this less than positive attitude of educators toward standardized testing may be having an undesirable impact upon standardized testing practices in the K-12 schools. For example, many teachers report very limited use of the results from standardized testing in their classroom instruction (Linn, 1990), and educational administrators frequently do not convey the results from standardized testing to their teachers (Wood, 1982). Further curtailing

the effective use of the results from standardized testing, the results of this testing, if made available, typically are not available to educational staff until six or eight or more weeks after test administration (Hall, Carroll, & Comer, 1988).

Additionally, some researchers have attributed the rather recent movements toward alternate pupil achievement assessments to the belief that existing standardized measures are too narrow in scope and may even have a negative impact upon classroom instruction (Miller & Legg, 1993). Other research findings have suggested that recent pressures in schools to show improved achievement scores have led to questionable, if not unethical, methods of raising test scores (Nolen, Haladyna, & Haas, 1992). For example, observations of classroom instruction have revealed that external testing programs may substantially reduce time available for instruction and reduce teachers' use of the variety of instructional materials and methods available to them (Smith, 1991). Surveys of teachers reveal the existence of perceived pressures, particularly in lower socio-economic schools, to improve test scores by planning instruction around tests, by increasing time spent on reviewing previously presented content, and by teaching various test-taking strategies (Herman & Golan, 1993). Relatedly, surveys of adolescent pupils indicate that they have become suspicious and cynical about standardized tests and commonly do not respond with positive test-taking strategies when being tested (Paris, Lawton, Turner, & Roth, 1991).

In brief, the existing research literature does not specifically address the effectiveness of K-12 schools' standardized testing practices. This existing research literature has indicated, however, that educators do not hold standardized testing in high regard, that limited management attention is

veys (85%) completed by the testing directors. A check of school district size indicated that size in itself did not influence whether or not a testing director participated in the study (Marso & Pigge, 1990). Also, just those teacher supervisors employed by selected school districts were included in the supervisors group. Several school superintendents reported either that no formal teacher supervisor positions existed in their district or that teacher supervisory services were provided through their county offices of education.

The respondents were employed in schools organized by city district (42%), local county district (44%), and exempted village district (14%), in schools located in geographic settings described as rural (37%), suburban (57%), and urban (6%), and in small schools (11% with fewer than 1,000 pupils), moderately sized schools (34% with 1,000 to 2,000 pupils), moderately large schools (34% with 2,001 to 4,000 pupils), and large schools (21% with more than 4,000 pupils). These proportions of respondents representing different types of school settings were judged to be approximately similar to the composition of all such schools as reported in the Ohio Education Directory.

The focus of the present report is upon these educators' responses to 10 survey items related to their school district's practices associated with the management of standardized testing. They responded to each of the 10 testing practices by rating the "relative effectiveness" of their school district's testing practices or procedures during the past year or two. The reference to this time period was provided to create a common time period for the ratings and to avoid consideration of proposed, but yet to be implemented, state-mandated high school proficiency testing in the schools. The data collection for this study was completed during spring term of 1989 prior to the initiation of state-mandated standardized testing programs; therefore, the directions to the respondents as to which standardized tests to consider in their ratings were not necessary. Previous surveys of the public schools in Ohio had indicated that group standardized testing primarily consisted of the scheduling of reading achievement, achievement batteries, and scholastic aptitude tests in the elementary schools and of interest inventories, multiaptitude tests, and very limited use of subject area achievement tests in the secondary schools.

In addition to the time reference, the educators also were provided with a second common rating reference. They were directed to rate their schools' effectiveness in performing the 10 testing practices compared to their schools' overall performance in meeting responsibilities as educational institutions. It was assumed that most respondents would lack a common comparative performance reference across school districts but that they would possess knowledge of the overall performance of their own schools. It was determined, therefore, that the overall district performance reference point would provide much more meaningful ratings than would allowing the respondents to bring to the rating task whatever unspecified reference point that occurred to them at that moment.

A five-point scale with narrative descriptions at each scale point and with an accompanying "DK" response option, defined as "I really do not know," was provided with each of the 10 testing practices items. The "I really do not know" response option was added to discourage ratings of testing practices about which the respondents might feel uninformed. This was deemed to be consistent with the researchers' goal of seeking ratings just from educators knowledgeable of their schools' testing practices. This scale ranged from "we perform well below our average" (1) to "we excel" (5).

Three sets of statistical analyses of the collected data were completed. One and two-way ANOVA procedures were used to identify significant rating mean differences among the teacher, principal, supervisor, and test director respondent groups and among these groups when classified by secondary or elementary school assignments. The job assignment and grade level interactions were also tested and discussed. An alpha level of .05 was selected for the ANOVA's while a .10 level was selected for the pair-wise post-hoc Scheffe tests. This pair-wise procedure readily handles unequal *n*'s and is the most conservative of these procedures to the extent that Scheffe recommends use of the .10 level (Hinkes, Wiersma, & Jurs, 1994). These ANOVA procedures were completed on the data derived from respondent ratings of each of the 10 testing practices. In addition, Spearman Rho correlations were completed between the various groups of educators' ranked rating means for the selected testing practices to ascertain the extent of agreement among the educators as to which of their schools' testing practices were rated to be more or less effective.

Results

Each of the four groups of educators, testing directors, classroom teachers, teacher supervisors, and principals rated their school's performance of the selected 10 testing practices about average or somewhat higher (3 or higher on the five-point scale) compared to the performance of their schools in meeting their overall responsibilities as educational institutions. Only when the teachers, principals, and supervisors were classified by elementary and secondary school assignments were any rating means found below the "about average performance for us" or '3' level. Just two of the rating means of the secondary teachers and one of the rating means of the secondary supervisors were below this average, whereas none of the mean ratings of the secondary principals, the testing directors, and the elementary level educators were below the "about average" or '3' level.

The testing practices rated more effective by the educators were management of pupil records, use of quality tests and materials, selection and administration of tests, and use of understandable scores and reports (items 8, 3, 1, and 5, respectively). Practices rated less effective were use of the results of achievement battery testing to evaluate district classroom instruction, provision of instructional guides ac-

The one-way ANOVA procedures indicated that elementary and secondary teachers as a collective group rated test selection and administration (item 1) significantly lower than did the combined groups of elementary and secondary supervisors, principals, and directors. These teachers also rated test scheduling at times to aid decision-making and prompt return of testing results (items 2 and 4) lower than did the supervisors and directors. In contrast, the teachers rated the provision of criterion-referenced data from achievement batteries (item 9) higher than did the testing directors. When these means were rank ordered, the directors' ratings were found to be highly related to those of the principals ($Rho = +.93$) and the supervisors ($Rho = +.93$), but somewhat less so with the teachers ($Rho = +.73$).

The one-way ANOVA and Scheffe procedures just for the directors and the elementary educators indicated that the elementary teachers' ratings were lower than the directors' ratings of practices related to test selection-administration (M 's = 3.57 & 4.01), test scheduling (M 's = 3.40 & 3.90), and prompt return of test results (M 's = 3.13 & 3.70), items 1, 2, and 4, respectively. In contrast, the elementary teachers' ratings were higher than the directors' ratings for the provision of criterion-referenced data (M 's = 4.05 & 3.29) and the handling of pupil permanent records (M 's = 4.41 & 4.03), items 9 and 8, and the elementary teachers' ratings were higher than the directors' and elementary principals' ratings of the provision of instructional guides (M 's = 3.79, 3.20, & 3.23, respectively) and the availability of written school policies regarding pupil records (M 's = 3.65, 3.10, & 3.00, respectively), items 6 and 7. The Spearman Rhos between the rank ordered rating means of the testing directors and the three groups of elementary educators indicate that the elementary teachers perceived their schools' relative performance of the various testing practices somewhat differently than the other educators but that considerable agreement existed among the other groups of educators. Positive Rhos of +.49, +.55, and +.60 were obtained between the elementary teachers and directors, elementary principals, and elementary supervisors, respectively; whereas Rhos between the elementary principals and supervisors, directors and elementary supervisors, and directors and principals were +.80, +.85, and +.93, respectively.

The one-way ANOVA procedures just for the directors and the secondary educators indicated that the secondary teachers' ratings were lower than the secondary principals' ratings of the use of understandable scores and reports and of the use of achievement batteries to evaluate district instruction (items 5 and 10). The secondary teachers' ratings were lower than both the directors' and secondary principals' rating of the practices of test selection-administration

(M 's = 3.51, 4.01, & 3.97, respectively), test scheduling (M 's = 3.36, 3.90, & 3.87, respectively), test and materials quality (M 's = 3.81, 4.17, & 4.25, respectively), and promptness of test results (M 's = 3.14, 3.70, & 3.67, respectively) items 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Additionally, the ratings of the secondary teachers ($M = 2.42$) were lower than both the directors' ($M = 3.20$) and supervisors' ratings ($M = 2.92$) for the provision of instructional guides to aid instruction (item 6). Unlike the elementary teachers' ratings, all of these ratings of the secondary teachers were lower than those of the other noted groups. The secondary teachers, however, perceived the relative effectiveness levels of their schools' performance of the selected testing practices more similar to the other secondary education groups than did their elementary teacher cohorts. The Spearman Rhos between the rating means of the secondary teachers and directors, secondary teachers and principals, and secondary teachers and supervisors were +.87, +.94, and +.92, respectively. The related Rhos among the secondary pairs of directors and principals, directors and supervisors, and principals and supervisors were +.95, +.79, and +.84, respectively.

The two-way ANOVA procedures, completed without the directors but with the elementary-secondary assignment classification of the remaining groups of educators, revealed that the elementary school educators (combined principals, supervisors and teachers) rated higher the provision of instructional guides for instruction and use of scores for evaluation of district instruction (items 6 and 10) than did their secondary cohorts (see Table 1). The job assignment main effect comparisons identified significant differences in the ratings of the teachers, principals, and supervisors for test selection and administration (item #1), test scheduling (item #2), and making test results available promptly (item #4). In each case the rating means of the teachers were the lowest of the three groups; however, the Scheffe pair-comparisons identified a difference among the rating means just for the test selection and administration practice.

These two-way ANOVA procedures also revealed significant job-group and grade-level interactions among the rating means for four items. For each of these four testing practices, understandable scores and reports, availability of instructional guides, presence of school policies, and provision of criterion-referenced test data, the secondary teachers' ratings (items 5, 6, 7, and 9, respectively) were sharply lower than those of the elementary teachers. Additionally, the ratings of the elementary supervisors and secondary supervisors differed sharply on the effectiveness of the provision of criterion-referenced analysis from achievement batteries (item #9). Figure 1, the graph of the rating means for the provision of criterion-referenced data, illustrates the elementary and secondary teachers' differences common to

elementary educators. The ratings of the testing directors, supervisors, and the principals did not differ significantly one from the other for any of the 10 testing practices, and the Rhos between the ranked rating means of these groups all exceeded $+ .90$. Also, few differences were identified between the respondents when grouped as secondary and elementary educators, and when these differences were identified they resulted from differences between the ratings of the elementary and secondary teachers with but one exception.

The differences found between the ratings of the elementary and secondary teachers may simply reflect the differences in the focus of standardized testing in the elementary as compared to the secondary schools. In the elementary schools, the focus of standardized testing is upon the guidance of pupil instruction with reading tests, achievement batteries, and scholastic aptitude tests being most frequently administered. In the secondary schools, achievement batteries and general aptitude tests are less frequently scheduled as typically the focus of standardized testing has changed from instruction to career selection with the administration of multiaptitude batteries, vocational interest inventories, and college admission tests (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1987). Consequently then, one might expect secondary teachers to perceive standardized testing programs to be of less use to them than do their elementary school cohorts as was the case in the present study.

Similarly, the statistical interactions identified between the job assignment and the job grade level classification in the present study might also be explained by differences in the focus of the standardized testing programs in the secondary and elementary schools. For example, the nature of score reports, the practices related to the storage of cumulative pupil records, the availability of instructional remediation guides, and the provision of criterion-referenced data after achievement battery testing are all practices likely to vary considerably between elementary and secondary schools. The elementary grade aptitude and achievement test reports tend to be less complex than the secondary school vocational aptitude and interest test reports; remedial instructional guides accompanying achievement batteries are less commonly used in secondary schools than in elementary schools; cumulative pupil records typically are stored within self-contained elementary classrooms but typically are stored in central locations in secondary schools; and typically criterion-referenced data are available just for achievement batteries which are more frequently administered in elementary schools than in secondary schools.

The pattern of high and low rating means for the 10 testing practices noted in the present study suggests pos-

sible implications for the management of standardized testing programs. Certainly, first and foremost, the ratings of these educators suggest that standardized testing programs are perceived to be functioning effectively as compared to the overall performance of the schools in meeting their overall goals as educational institutions. Each of the groups of educators in the present study appeared to be satisfied with the quality of the tests, testing materials, report forms, and the management of pupil records. On the other hand, these educators appeared to be less positive about the effectiveness of the use of achievement battery scores in part to evaluate classroom instruction. The teachers appeared to be less satisfied with test selection, test administration and scheduling, and the prompt availability of the results from testing than were the other three groups of educators. Conversely, the elementary school teachers appeared to be more satisfied with the effectiveness of the guides for remedial instruction and of criterion-referenced data accompanying achievement batteries than were the other three groups of educators.

Practicing testing directors might prudently build upon the present satisfactions of their administrative cohorts but strive to enhance interactions with classroom teachers related to the operation of their testing programs. In particular, it appears that these testing directors along with the other educational administrators ought to work more closely with teachers in the selection, administration, and scheduling of tests; in the prompt dissemination of test results; in preparing written policies for school testing programs; and in making available to teachers remedial instructional guides accompanying achievement batteries to better enhance classroom instruction. The differences in typical standardized testing in the elementary and secondary schools and the present findings suggest that these collaborative efforts might be more essential in the elementary as compared to the secondary schools. Lastly, it would seem that testing directors should investigate the major discrepancy that appears to exist between elementary teachers' and elementary teacher supervisors' perceptions of the effectiveness of criterion-referenced data in linking testing results with classroom instructional activities. Measurement specialists typically expect those educators and administrators most directly responsible for classroom instruction, such as elementary teacher supervisors, to be the strongest advocates of the provision of criterion-referenced data to support classroom instruction (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1987), but it appeared that this may not have been true of the elementary supervisors in the present study.

Appendix: Rating Form

SECTION IV. School Standardized Group Testing Program Practices or Procedures.

Please rate each of the following group testing practices or procedures in terms of the relative effectiveness of what happens in your school(s). Please respond to each item the best you can although you may be more or less informed about some of these practices. Please circle your rating of effectiveness using the code below.

Relative Effectiveness* Response Codes

- '1' We perform well below our average* here
- '2' We perform below our average here
- '3' About average performance for us
- '4' We perform somewhat above average here
- '5' We excel here
- 'DK' I really do not know

* Your perception of your school's performance on this practice relative to its overall performance as an educational institution.

<u>Practice or Procedure</u>	<u>Relative Effectiveness</u>					
	LOW				HIGH	(?)
1. Effective test selection/administration/scheduling for standardized testing program (overall)	1	2	3	4	5	DK
2. Tests are scheduled at times to aid decision-making	1	2	3	4	5	DK
3. Quality tests, materials, and reports are used	1	2	3	4	5	DK
4. Results of tests are available promptly to aid use of results	1	2	3	4	5	DK
5. Understandable scores, narrative reports and pupil profiles are used to report performance	1	2	3	4	5	DK
6. Teachers' instructional guides are made available to all teachers to aid instructional use of achievement battery results	1	2	3	4	5	DK
7. Written school policies are available for access/dissemination/storage of test results	1	2	3	4	5	DK
8. Student permanent records are updated periodically (dated information removed, new added, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	DK
9. Criterion-referenced achievement battery results are provided as well as norm-referenced scores	1	2	3	4	5	DK
10. Achievement battery scores are used in part to evaluate district classroom instruction	1	2	3	4	5	DK

Educational Reform Through the Implementation of National Standards: A Response

Richard J. Reynolds
Eastern Connecticut State University

Abstract

At this writing, federal initiatives for education reform seem to be taking their last gasps. There is a question as to whether Goals 2000 will make it to the year 2000. The development of voluntary, national standards has generated considerable debate both as to the desirability of such standards and the enlarged federal role in education. What is killing these initiatives and are they worth saving?

Background

Federal initiatives in education have constitutional, social (including economic) and political implications. These implications concern us as policy makers attempt educational reform based upon the implementation of national standards.

It can be argued that schools already have the resources, flexibility and, indeed, the responsibility to implement the necessary reforms. Why then do we need federal intervention in the reform process? The 1994 Goals Report provides this answer:

Public dissatisfaction with low levels of student performance, increased global economic competition, and consistently poor showings on international assessments led policy makers to conclude . . . that the United States had been spending too much time merely practicing and had not devoted sufficient time to improving performance. The National Education Goals were created to reverse that trend (Vol. 1, p.12).

It appears that federal reformers are working from an assumption of general public dissatisfaction. They believe that schools have gravitated toward a minimum competency curriculum and that most state standards, where they exist, provide a floor, not a goal, for practice. In this scenario many, if not most, schools are below standard, a situation which the federal reformers view as politically intolerable.

The United States has never had explicit, national content or performance goals, thus the establishment of standards represents a profound shift in educational practice. Not until recently have individual states set challenging, absolute standards for their student populations. While the absence of common standards has not prevented some schools from setting their own ambitious goals, many schools set their sights too low. In the absence of common, specified, demanding content standards and high expectations for students, schools have gravitated toward a minimum competency curriculum. This trend has been so marked that some observers have suggested that what we now have is a 'de facto' national curriculum of basic skills.

The notion that standards are integral to educational reform has been at the forefront of the educational and political debate since the publication, in 1983, of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The document recommended that "schools, colleges and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards" (p. 27). This popular, and in some respects seminal, document set a national agenda for education. Its major thrust was that all children can learn; schools must have high academic standards; for a school to achieve its goals, texts, tests and curricula must be tightly coupled; test scores will ensure that schools and teachers are held accountable (Cuban, 1993, p. 25).

President Bush gathered the state governors at the Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989 where they embraced the concept of national goals and performance measurement and called for a greater sense of direction, combined with competitiveness, accountability and results in education. These themes were contained in the Bill, *America 2000: Excellence in Education Act* sent to the Congress in May, 1991 (Mulcahy, 1995).

A Nation at Risk and *America 2000* were the result of a consensus forged among national political and business leaders. Players included the National Governors' Association (NGA), the Business Coalition for Education (an umbrella organization for corporate America), and the National Council on Educational Standards and Testing (NCEST). They concluded that tougher and better schooling would boost a sagging economy and that a fragmented and failing education system needed centralized guidance as well as incentives and penalties to motivate students and teachers to work harder.

In 1993 President Clinton's Bill, *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* may have softened the emphasis on accountability and competitiveness, but the commitment to standards remained (Mulcahy, 1995). The Act gave educational standards a statutory institutional existence in the form of the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council, NESIC.

Driven by the logic behind the standards movement educators and policy makers have sought to give renewed direc-

tion to the very fragmented system we know as public education. Standards may be a start in the right direction, but they leave us pondering. There are unanswered questions, uncharted directions and uncharacteristic emphases that require thought and processing. Are national standards ever feasible in a nation as diverse as the United States and in an education system with a long history of local control? Are standards simply a way to blame the teacher and the learner for the failure of the system? Are American schools failing because teachers and students aren't trying hard enough? Have we entirely given up the Deweyan notion of making the school fit the learner? What will these new standards do to disadvantaged school populations who are just now beginning to show marginal gains in educational achievement?

What Standards are We Speaking of?

The Reagan and Bush plans involved a performance-based, accountability model with clearly defined outcomes for schools, i.e. standards for content, performance, and teaching. Clearly, the purpose was quality and excellence. The Clinton model expanded the concept of accountability to include delivery standards which provide assurance that each student has a fair opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills set out in the standards. The addition of this element shifts the focus and ensures that inputs as well as outcomes are accounted for. Delivery standards explicitly introduce equity into the equation.

It is important to account for both inputs and outcomes in any measure of educational achievement. Almost a century ago John Dewey told us that what the learner brings to the learning process is as important as any content that we may wish to instill. The affective and social objectives of education are every bit as important as the curriculum content. A century of research has borne out the truth of Dewey's assertions. Any measure of educational outcomes judged against national norms must, realistically, account for local differences (inputs) as they impact opportunity to learn.

The Pros and Cons

Typically, supporting arguments equate the international standing of the United States and competitiveness of its economy with the optimal development of the nation's human capital. Supporters argue that national educational standards will ensure the nation's preeminent position in trade, technology, and world affairs.

Proponents hold that many states have insufficient resources, both human and fiscal, to establish their own standards and assessment systems. They maintain that the establishment of challenging national standards will encourage states and school districts to raise educational expectations; that standards will help improve both the quality of schools and teacher professional development by providing a clear, common set of challenging goals; and that national

standards, applicable to all children, will help to provide the impetus for equalizing equality of educational opportunity across the nation (Smith et al. 1994, p.18).

Contesting the position are an equally explicit set of arguments. The collective national experience with centrally established standards, in education and in other sectors, has not been promising. Standards, generally, are "minimum standards" that serve to drag down the entire system. If such were to be the case with education standards, the entire nation would suffer. Relatedly, the establishment of national standards would draw attention away from the many, very positive state and local initiatives now underway. Opponents worry that if challenging national standards are established but the enabling strategies and resources are not available, the result will be a disservice to students. Other arguments depict national standards as too narrow and restrictive. Critics posit that national standards will lead to a national curriculum, inhibiting local and state creativity and initiative. Finally, the assertion that the great cultural, ethnic and regional diversity of the nation makes it unlikely that a common set of educational standards would enjoy widespread acceptance.

Are Standards the Answer?

The national standards approach to educational reform involves both misconceptions and untested assumptions. Built into the Reagan-Bush-Clinton reforms is the assumption that rigorous standards will eliminate a crisis in education and guarantee the achievement of national goals. No such guarantees exist. What is guaranteed is centralized power and control over what will be taught and who will teach in the nation's schools.

The terms "quality" and "standards" are borrowed from industry where they, in fact, denote control. In the context of education, a unified system of quality assurance can be construed as controlling who will teach, what they will teach, and how this content will be taught. In this industrial metaphor for education the curriculum consists of content fields that have standard, measurable outcomes. Surely, education is not mass production; teachers are not in the business of administering uniform treatments and delivering a standardized product!

The view of the new federal reformers may be too narrow. To offer standards as the basis of educational reform may be to miss the point. Are American schools failing because some students and teachers are not working hard enough; because they cannot meet proscribed standards? Do schools, operating in a pluralistic society, have the right (never mind the ability) to create a homogeneous product, while ignoring differences in the cultural and life experiences of learners? Would the new age federal reformers have us revert to strategies rejected long ago by John Dewey, where the learners have to meet the standards set by the school or be labeled laggards? Kenneth Goodman (1994) who takes an uncompromising stand against national standards, claims

that the movement is an attempt to centralize power and privatize education.

The standards movement promises the political power brokers that by controlling outcomes they can control schools while appearing to support local control and they can avoid spending money to deal with the real needs of education. With national standards in place, the laws of the marketplace can be introduced encouraging profit makers to compete with public schools and judging all in terms of their ability to meet standards (p. 39)

In the Face of History

National standards become a question of feasibility in a nation as diverse as the United States and an education system with a long history of local control. The tradition of local control, dating back to the colonial era, has generally confined arguments about what schools should teach, to localities. Populations tended to be fairly homogeneous and participants in such discussions often shared similar beliefs and traditions. As O'Day and Smith (1993) point out, "(e)ven where school populations reflected greater cultural, linguistic, or religious diversity the political disenfranchisement of large groups often resulted in decisions (about how best to educate) being made by fairly homogeneous groups of leaders" (p.293).

In the last half century the situation has changed significantly. As the demand has broadened for social, political and economic equality among groups and as populations within school jurisdictions have become more diverse and educationally aware, debate over curricular content has become more intense. In these newly aware constituencies, arguments linking curriculum and educational standards to issues of political power or cultural legitimacy have erupted, periodically, along racial, religious or ethnic lines (O'Day & Smith, 1993).

Politics and National Standards

The U.S. political system was deliberately designed to frustrate central power. Institutional checks and balances and shared authority within the federal system were constructed to thwart powerful, centrally coordinated action. In education, authority was divided among local, state, and federal governments with the latter having only marginal influence. The very size and diversity of the country cemented the system into place.

State government is the constitutional center of US education. To this point in our history, state and local education authorities have been only modestly constrained by federal initiatives usually stemming from categorical aid or Supreme Court decisions. President Bush, seeking a way around this constitutional obstacle, brought together the state governors at the Charlottesville Summit to forge an agreement. To ensure that the agreed-upon standards remained constitutional, they were deemed voluntary; no school could be required to adopt standards established by the federal government.

Federally instituted standards raise fundamental questions of educational politics and competing public values, more especially in terms of traditional governance arrangements and multiple control. Implicit in the new standards is a critique of the traditional mechanisms that have produced the present fragmented and incoherent standards. These reforms rest, at least in part, on a new balance of power including a pronounced shift, from local and state, to national control. The creation of new consensus building organizations such as the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the National Educational Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) together with a reliance on federal strategies that promote cooperation between the states is bound to effect a power shift from the state capitols to Washington.

There are many who believe that the present decentralized structure is the essence of American education. Conversely, among the reformers are those who admire countries with strong, centralized ministries of education. The differences are rooted deep in the political culture. There is within the nation a deep suspicion of government coupled with a strong democratic desire for popular participation in pursuit of communal goals. Yet, it appears that the nation is ready to recognize that a lack of national standards has cost us dearly; that national systemic reform, in the guise of national standards, is the answer.

The political dynamic of standard setting is a puzzle. To produce the consensus necessary for national standards, it appears that we must change the present governance arrangements. However, experience has taught us that the democratic processes that produce these new arrangements will likely yield a whole new bureaucracy that, inevitably, will distort and perhaps frustrate the best intentions of the reformers. Ironically, the reformers who decry the current lack of structure may find structure their undoing.

A National Curriculum?

Given the above political considerations how far removed are we from a national curriculum? Mulcahy (1995) reasons that it is only through content that content standards can be manifest. And it will be the acquisition of this content that will signal that content standard has been met. Therefore, to specify content standards is to specify content and specified content sounds suspiciously like national curriculum.

While standards may be voluntary, schools that prepare their students to meet such standards may give them an edge when it comes to college entrance and employment. In these circumstances, voluntary national standards may readily become 'de facto' national curriculum.

There are still other considerations that raise doubts. The national goals, as currently constituted, identify nine subject areas - math, science, English, the arts, foreign lan-

guages, history, geography, civics and economics. Originally fewer were presented and one could argue that others could be added. This raises the question as to what knowledge and which performance skills ought to be included and excluded. Why these subject areas and not others? The current legislation does not offer an explanation.

There is an assumption in the Bush and Clinton legislation that what a student should know and be able to do is delimited by the traditional disciplines. It could be argued that conventional academic knowledge excludes from the curriculum much of the non-academic knowledge as well as the attitudes and skills that lead to personal and group fulfillment. Community and workplace skills that build harmony, tolerance, responsibility and cooperation are not necessarily inherent in conventional academic disciplines (Mulcahy, 1995). There remain large segments of the population of school professionals and administrators who are uncomfortable with the whole concept of a national curriculum.

Control and Resources

Both control and resources are at stake in any restructuring of educational governance. Proponents of local control argue that meaningful standards will result from adaptation to local conditions coupled with external support and assistance. The new breed of systemic reformers has a much more business like approach. They view education as public investment. In this scenario, standards serve as a starting point for a complex political process aimed at securing greater resources for education in return for greater accountability. Standards are the political basis for an exchange between public policy makers who control resources and educators who control instruction.

What if national standards are enacted without the provision of necessary resources? Current inequalities in the provision of resources in the nation's schools brings this scenario well within the bounds of possibility. The specter of unfunded mandates coupled with gross inequalities in the provision of resources will lead to resistance, if not rebellion, on the part of teachers.

When high standards are proposed, they are likely to be followed by educator requests for more resources. Policy makers are wary of initiating such a cycle. In the present tight economy, the battle for higher education standards is difficult to initiate and even more difficult to win. Voters are lukewarm and policy makers have reason to be cautious.

Reform and Educational Opportunity

The American school, quintessentially a white, middle class institution must, increasingly, accommodate students from outside this cultural mainstream. These changing demographics point to a sharpening and intensifying of cultural conflicts. Nowhere will this become more apparent than in the contested terrain of school curriculum. Critics fear

that national content standards will not reflect the culture of students from minority backgrounds.

How will minority, low-income and limited-English-proficiency students fare under new national standards? Proponents of national standards answer that well designed, systemic reform intended to improve the overall quality of schooling benefits the entire school population; and that "a rising tide lifts all boats". Standards are a powerful new policy instrument designed to promote and sustain equality of educational opportunity. Minority advocates worry that, just as minority students are beginning to succeed in terms of the standards and tests currently in place, elites are changing the rules of the game. The fear is that this will replicate the cycle of failure and further embed social stratification. Larry Cuban (July 14, 1993) echoes these concerns in an article written for *Education Week*.

With the evidence drawn from big city schools after almost a decade of effective-school programs and tougher state standards and tests, one predictable outcome is that systematic reform will miss the very schools that are most often used to justify the strategy. Thus it is fair to ask Congress: How national can a national strategy be that misses almost half of all schools in the country? (p. 25).

Some advocates for disadvantaged students, frustrated by the failure of 30 years of school finance reform and desegregation in education, hope that national standards will provide the impetus for a new round of court litigation based on substantive equity (Myers, 1994). Those who doubt the value of the present reform movement quote the concerns of poorer, urban school districts which lack the human, fiscal and material resources to achieve higher standards (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Kozol, 1991). We have ample evidence that schools serving low-income, minority students consistently have fewer resources and learning opportunities.

Consensus

Specifying standards can galvanize opposition across the professional, political, and social spectrum. Educators and policy makers are keenly aware of the problems that result when notions of change are not widely shared in the community. As a result, most national standards projects are engaged in a broad review and feedback process to gather diverse input. The hope is that this process will yield a shared vision and a foundation for support and impart legitimacy to the standards (Massell, 1994).

Goals 2000 recognizes the importance of consensus building and speaks of "collaborative efforts . . . that are taking place at all levels of governance and, hopefully, in every community" (1994, Vol. 1, p. 14). More to the point, it is prepared to back the process with federal dollars. It embraces the policy of giving subject matter professional groups a much larger role in shaping the discussion. In December 1995, the National Academy of Sciences released the final version of the

national science standards. Among the diverse groups involved in the delivery of these standards were the National Science Teachers Association, National Science Foundation, US Department of Education, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Institutes of Health (*Education Week*, Dec. 13, 1995, p. 9).

The present policy may give the subject matter professionals a much larger role in shaping the discussion, yet consensus requires more than agreement among professional groups. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which has lead the way in developing standards, went through a lengthy process of feedback and revision following initial development. Their standards, when published, were accompanied by the caveat that professional standards are to “direct but not determine practice; to guide but not prescribe teaching” and that “no tight implications for practice may be inferred” (Ball, 1992, p. 27).

The polarization of the political system, the power of interest groups and the concomitant access to financial resources makes consensus more necessary, yet more problematic. The achievement of ambitious and challenging standards can be at odds with the objective of broad consensus. Juggling public opinion, professional status, and dollars will provide the creators of the standards with their major challenge.

World Class

The 1991 report of the National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP), in language that was incorporated in Goals 2000, sets forth the criteria that national content standards must be “world class”. This requirement emerged out of concern that US students lag behind their counterparts in other countries and the consequent issue of America’s declining competitiveness in global markets. Such considerations have strongly motivated school reformers in the 1980’s and 90’s.

We need to exercise some caution in judging calls for reform based upon our situation relative to other nations. For example the British Education Reform Act of 1990 is sometimes used by reformers as a basis for comparison. This act established national curricula and, although it did leave room for some local input, it is considered to be highly prescriptive. The underlying social values and aspirations which motivated the British legislation may be at odds with the egalitarianism and the social rights agenda which permeates public school education in the United States.

Arguments based upon international comparisons can be of doubtful validity, statistically or otherwise. If, for example, high school exit exams are the basis for comparison, then high school completion rates need to be taken into consideration. Stevenson and Stigler (1992) maintain that school achievement may have more to do with cultural factors than formal standards. They point out that American parents tend

to assume that learning is fundamentally a matter of the child’s innate ability rather than a child’s effort to learn. This widespread attitude is in marked contrast to that of Asian parents who emphasize, to their children, the necessity of applying themselves diligently and who consistently invest their time and resources in supporting their children’s efforts. They point to a further cultural limitation in the manner in which the high or low status of teachers positively or negatively affects the quality of the talent pool from which future teachers are drawn.

Standards: A Narrow View of Education

Are national standards simply a code name for outcomes based education? The standards movement offers political and business power brokers the prospects of control of schools through the control of outcomes. This outcomes based model leaves out the learner. Instead of beginning where the learner is, national standards map out a preordained path for learners as determined by some national committee of experts.

The notion of a standardized product is inappropriate in education. The Common School model of education was designed to empower us to play an informed role as citizens. It was envisioned as the forum where we learned the social skills and strategies necessary to become participants in a democratic society. Meeting national standards does not serve these important goals. They may, however, serve the laws of the market place. Market place competition, as is invariably the case, will define us in terms of “haves” and “have nots” and will lead inevitably to ethnic, economic, and ability segregation.

The Limitations of Standard Setting

The national standards strategy may, ultimately, fail for it attempts change within the existing education system. So many factors that influence the outcomes of education lie outside of the existing system and as such will not be influenced by setting standards. Education is practiced within a social and economic context. Home and parental expectations cannot be subject to standards; they vary enormously across the socio-economic spectrum.

The national standards movement, in common with all education reform movements, expresses itself in egalitarian terms (e.g. “all students”). It proposes a common structure and measurable national outcomes. However, current curricula feature a maze of structures that differentiate students into tracks, ability groupings, special and regular education, gifted and talented programs, remedial and enrichment experiences, and so forth. How do we set national standards for students in such a differentiated structure?

Proponents of national standards may set their criteria for compliance but students respond to signals from other sources. The labor market sends signals to students about

the connection between their educational achievements and their economic prospects. An economic upturn and the consequent prospect of employment sends a much clearer signal to students than the possibility of meeting mandated national standards.

The legitimacy and effectiveness of the standards approach may depend, ultimately, on the ability of the reformers to strike a balance between the common culture and the needs of the diverse elements within it. In the past, top-down reform with its "cookie-cutter" approach has not been particularly successful for it neglects the diverse infrastructure and the local discretion that are integral to education. Perhaps the US educational enterprise has grown to be so vast, so diverse and so bureaucratic that it is unable to respond to the challenge of systemic change implied by national standards. In 1990, Chubb and Moe concluded that the present democratic governance of education had left the system overbureaucratized and unresponsive. In their view, education is too hierarchical, too rule-bound, and too formalistic. Further, the specific political institutions by which the schools are governed actively promote and protect this overbureaucratization.

In Conclusion

There are signs that educational reform under the aegis of national standards is not about to happen. Some educators are breathing a sigh of relief while others are bemoaning a lost opportunity. The standards - norms - testing approach is a reductionist view of education. It flies in the face of educational theory from the Deweyan, student-centered to the constructivist approach currently occupying center stage in educational thinking. A nation as culturally and ethnically diverse as the United States, with an education system rooted in traditions of state and local governance, is unlikely to reach national consensus over content and performance standards, at least in the short term.

Inevitably, the use of national standards, for accountability purposes, will lead to conflict between levels of educational governance. If local educators are held accountable for performance standards those schools and districts that lack resources will cry foul. The addition of unfunded mandates to the existing gross inequities in the provision of educational resources will prove disastrous.

Finally, the deep suspicion of government that is almost integral to the nation, may prove the undoing of the whole enterprise. The implementation of national educational standards can be viewed simply as public sector officials aiming to expand their authority. National standards take us into

the arena of congressional debate where politics, not education, is the standard fare. Politicos are interested in the 'short term fix'; their lives are bounded by considerations of re-election. The implementation of national standards is, by its very nature, a long term operation. In such a mismatch, Washington will not sustain its interest in education reform.

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How Teachers Connect Research and Practice

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The importance of teacher's prior beliefs and values as influences on teaching practice has become increasingly apparent in recent years. The presence of these ideas raises new questions about the role of research in teaching. If teachers are guided mainly by their own belief systems, for instance, how can we expect research to contribute to practice? To examine the relationship between teachers prior beliefs and their responses to research, I initiated a study called the *Research and Teacher Learning* (RTL) study. As its name suggests, it is about the relationship between research and teacher learning. We were particularly interested in how research can influence teacher learning. The study addresses two very broad questions:

1. What and how do teachers learn from *reading* research studies?
2. What and how do teachers learn from *conducting* research of their own?

Before going into some of the findings from this study, let me describe the study in more detail.

We interviewed a sample of just over 100 teachers, all of whom were selected because they were participating in some form of continuing education or professional development that involved research. Some were participating in a masters degree program and read research in their classes, some were participating in a district-sponsored teacher-research program. All teachers were participating in a program that included some attention to research, but the programs differed in what they did with research and in whether the teachers were novices, working on their initial degree, or experienced teachers engaged in continuing education.

The interview itself consisted of four main parts. First, because we knew that prior beliefs and values were important, we devised a set of questions that we hoped would enable us to learn about these. We asked them, for instance, to describe a teacher whom they admired and to say why they thought this teacher was admirable, to describe a lesson they had done recently that they felt very satisfied with, and to say why they were satisfied with it, and so forth. All of these questions were designed to reveal their beliefs and values about teaching. The second part of the interview probed their beliefs and values about research, and for similar reasons. We thought that their receptivity to research might depend not only on how the study squared with their own their views about teaching, but also on their belief in the inherent value of research and how it could or should contribute to their work.

The third and fourth sections address their experiences conducting their own research and their responses to research other people had done, respectively. About three quarters

of the sample had conducted teacher research as part of their programs and we queried them about what they studied, where their question came from, how they gathered data, how they analyzed it, and what they learned from the whole experience.

To learn their responses to research conducted by others, we actually gave them five research summaries to read. Then, when we met with them again, we asked them their responses to these studies. We spent between 20 and 30 minutes on each piece of research, asking them what they thought the author's purpose was for doing the study, whether the study was persuasive to them or not and why, what they thought the author's conclusions were, whether the study was relevant to their own practice, and whether they thought the study would be useful to other teachers.

The resulting data base has a tremendous amount of information in it. In this paper, I concentrate on only a very small segment of the study that specifically addresses the way teachers connect research to their own teaching, and I do that by focusing on one particular study. My aim in this paper is to illustrate these processes with just two examples of teachers' responses to one study--Lisa Delpit's "Skills and other dilemmas of a progressive Black educator," published in the *Harvard Education Review* in 1986. Before discussing the ways in which these two teachers connected that study to their own practices, let me briefly review the study itself.

As a genre of research, Delpit's paper could be called a teacher reflection. In the paper, Delpit reflects on a tension she feels between the progressive ideals she learned in college and the traditional skills-based education she herself had received in a segregated Catholic school in the south. In college, Delpit was persuaded that students should not spend their time rehearsing meaningless skills, and that she should focus on the writing process for teaching writing. By the time she graduated she was a progressive educator, and when she began teaching she introduced learning stations, activity-based instructional materials, and a carpeted learning area. As time went on, though, she began to sense that, although her White students were learning, her Black students were playing. So she gradually re-introduced the desks, began making students practice handwriting, and in general becoming more traditional. Then she felt guilty because she wasn't as progressive as she wanted to be, and guilty because she wasn't teaching her Black students as much as she wanted.

This story goes on as Delpit returns to graduate school and gets her progressive ideas again reinforced. The pivotal event in the story, though, occurs when she has dinner with an old friend who is critical of the writing process. The friend

claims it was designed by White people to prevent Blacks from learning the skills they need to function in a White society. The friend says Black students are already fluent, and that what they need is skills.

That dinner had a substantial impact on Delpit, and she began canvassing educators of both races to learn more about their views. She learned that Blacks rarely participated in the writing process, and that even when they did it was usually for no longer than a year. She learned that Blacks felt excluded in writing workshops, and felt that their concerns about skills were not heard or addressed.

Delpit closes her narrative by saying that she now feels she can understand both sides of the issue. On one hand, minority students should not be subjected to a daily regimen of rehearsing meaningless, decontextualized subskills. A minority person who simply acquires basic skills becomes a low-level functionary. On the other hand, minority children need the skills that employers and guardians of higher educational institutions demand. Helping them become more expressive in their writing does not necessarily mean that they have acquired the skills needed to improve their social standing once they leave school. So, Delpit says, we need to find a way to teach these skills in the context of critical and creative thinking. She also believes that there is a lot to be gained from opening up the dialogue between advocates and critics of either approach, and that it is particularly important that leaders of the process approach pay attention to the legitimate concerns of minority educators.

Delpit's article is an excellent example of a teacher reflection, in that it is both earnest and penetrating. Delpit's genuine concern is apparent throughout the article, as is her intellectual honesty and rigor. It also is a complex story, for it addresses tensions between structured and open classrooms, between teaching fluency and teaching skills, and between Black and White values. It certainly should stimulate teacher thinking and it certainly should be relevant to most teachers.

To learn from research--or from anything else, for that matter--teachers must do the following:

1. Understand what the main message is from the study.
2. Test the validity of the message somehow.
3. Connect that message to their own situation.

To learn what teachers learn from Delpit's reflection, I first wanted to know what teachers understood Delpit's message to be. One of the questions we asked was what conclusions they thought Delpit had drawn. Some teachers described a conclusion having to do with pedagogy, some a conclusion having to do with race relations, and some listed both types of conclusions. Later, we reviewed the data and grouped teachers' responses into a few main categories, shown in Table 1.

Table 1 suggests that most teachers did correctly understand Delpit's main messages. With respect to pedagogy, the largest fraction understood Delpit to be saying that both sides were right, that teachers need to teach both skills and

fluency. With respect to race, some thought Delpit's main point was that minority views need to be attended to in reform movements, and some thought it was that different races need different kinds of instruction. Interestingly, many teachers, instead of articulating a conclusion, volunteered that they liked, or didn't like, Delpit's treatment of the race issue.

Table 1

Conclusions about Pedagogy Attributed to Delpit

Percent	Conclusion
1	Don't know
14	No conclusion about pedagogy mentioned
56	Both sides are right, need to do both
16	Different kids need different pedagogies
5	Delpit was in favor of (or opposed to) the writing process
8	Other Responses

Conclusions about Race Attributed to Delpit

Percent	Conclusion
40	No conclusions about race are mentioned
20	Minority views need to be attended to
25	Races need different kinds of instruction or have different needs
15	I like/don't like Delpit's treatment of the issue

Examples of "Other" Conclusions about Pedagogy

Ms. Whalon's conclusion:

Delpit wants minority kids to succeed and yet she wants them to keep their cultural heritage.

Ms. Woodland's conclusion:

If minorities are to create changes in society, we have to help them get to that point.

At the foot of Table 1 I've included two examples of "other" interpretations. These make it clear that some teachers did not fully understand Delpit's message. They've inserted some different ideas into the text. These anomalous interpretations are important, I will return to the problem these pose later on.

Once teachers understand the main message from a study, they need to evaluate the validity or invalidity of that message. To learn how teachers evaluated these studies, we asked if they agreed with the author's conclusion or not, and we asked them why. Again, we did not impose any categories of reasons on them, but instead categorized their reasons later on. Table 2 summarizes the main reasons teachers offered for either agreeing or disagreeing with the conclusions they had just attributed to Delpit. In addition, it shows the reasons they gave for agreeing or disagreeing with all the other studies they had read.

Table 2

Reasons for Agreeing or Not Agreeing with a Study's Conclusions		
Reason Offered	Percent giving this reason (across all studies)	Percent giving this reason for the Delpit Reflection
No reason given	9	8
Conclusion consistent with values, beliefs	22	25
Consistent with experience	32	38
Consistent with other ideas or findings	8	5
Evidence supports conclusion	15	11
Critique of evidence	13	14
Study is factual, no agreement necessary	1	0

Two important points can be made about the patterns in Table 2. One is that teachers' reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with Delpit's reflection are not substantially different from the reasons they used to agree or disagree with any other study, even though the studies were quite different. That is, teachers who read Delpit's reflection also read a survey (Applebee, Langer, Mullis, & Jenkins, 1990), an experiment (Collins, Brown, & Holcum, 1991; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Steinbach, 1984), a disciplinary study (Baron, 1982) and an historical analysis (Coleman, 1975). Many would argue that Delpit's reflection is closer to teaching practice than any of the others, but teachers did not use remarkably different criteria for evaluating it.

The second important trend apparent in Table 2 is that teachers used their own values, beliefs or experiences more often than any other criterion to test the validity of these authors' conclusions. Table 2 makes it clear that teachers are *already* connecting the study to their own situations, even at the stage of testing its validity. That is, connections to practice are not a third step in a process, something that is done only after the study is understood and tested for validity. Instead, it is something that is done early on, as part of the process of testing the validity of the study.

This creates an interesting question, for if studies are perceived as valid mainly when they are consistent with teacher's prior beliefs and experiences, how can teachers ever learn something new from research? Clearly, teachers need to do more than simply accept or reject studies. They need to draw some implications from them. We also asked teachers what implications the study had for their own practice, and Table 3 shows teachers' responses to that questions. Here again, I have aggregated across the five studies in the language arts package, but I have also given their responses to Delpit's reflection. Since Delpit's paper was explicitly aimed at provoking thought and dialogue, we might expect teachers' responses to it to differ

somewhat from the others. However, the implications teachers drew from Delpit's reflection were not noticeably different from the implications they drew from entire set of studies.

Table 3

Implications Teachers Saw in Delpit's Reflection		
Implications Mentioned	Percent of Teachers Responding to all studies	Percent of Teachers Responding to Delpit
No Influence	18	14
Gives new information	4	3
Validates existing beliefs	26	29
Sharpens thinking	17	23
Raises questions, provokes thought	15	18
Suggests a new goal to strive for	4	2
Suggests changing practice	3	8
Will try it out	10	3
Can include it in my curriculum	3	0

These findings suggest that teachers connect research to their practice in two very different ways. On one hand, they use their own beliefs, values, and experiences to evaluate the validity of the study, but on the other hand, they also take something new from the study, as it stimulates their thinking and prompts them to reinterpret their own experiences and to reconsider their practices.

Taken together, these tables suggest that teachers are quite able to connect research to their own practices. But they do not explain the fact that some teachers misconstrue the conclusions from research. In fact, our evidence suggests that these misconceptions derive, at least in part, from the fact that they are interpreting the studies in light of their prior beliefs and experiences. Teachers in this study were more likely to generate unusual or idiosyncratic interpretations of an author's conclusions when they used their prior beliefs and experiences to evaluate validity than they were when they relied on the evidence in the study, as Table 4 shows. Table 4 lists again the main reasons teachers agreed or disagreed with a study's conclusions, and then shows the fraction of teachers who used each reason *who also generated an idiosyncratic interpretation of the conclusion*. That is, of all the teachers who evaluated a study on the basis of its consistency with their own prior beliefs and values, 15 percent offered an idiosyncratic interpretation of the study's conclusion. Of all those who critiqued the evidence as a way of saying why they agreed or disagreed, only two percent offered idiosyncratic interpretations of the conclusions.

Table 4

Percent of “Other” Interpretations of Conclusions as a Function of Reasons for Agreeing or Disagreeing

Reason Offered	Percent of Conclusion Statements that were “Other”
No reason given	25
Conclusion consistent with values, beliefs	15
Conclusion consistent with experience	12
Consistent with other ideas or findings	12
Evidence supports conclusion	4
Critique of evidence	2
Study is factual, no agreement necessary	0

Table 4, then, suggests that the teachers who relied on their prior values and beliefs or on their experiences were more likely to formulate idiosyncratic interpretation of the study’s conclusions than were teachers who relied on the study’s evidence or on how consistent the study was with other research or ideas they were familiar with. So we have an ironic finding here: We know that, in order to learn from a study, teachers need to connect it to their own situations, but we also see that when they do that they are more likely to interpret the study idiosyncratically.

To illustrate how teachers connect research to their prior beliefs and experiences and how these connections influence their interpretations of the study, I have developed a strategy for graphically representing these connections. I include here two such graphic representations, one from a teacher whose interpretation of Delpit’s conclusions seemed very close to Delpit’s intention, and the other from a teacher whose interpretation was idiosyncratic. These schematics are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

In these figures, the different shapes represent different parts of the reasoning process. The figure in the center represents Delpit’s reflection, and the ovals represent the teachers’ interpretation of Delpit’s conclusions. The clouds surrounding the study represent the teachers’ thoughts, and the rectangles represent particular experiences that the teacher has related to the study.

The first figure shows Ms. Foss’s responses to the Delpit reflection. There were three clusters of ideas in Ms. Foss’s discussion. One, shown in the upper right, includes her experiences, which she defines as similar to Delpit, her thinking that she and Delpit are in the same place, her realization that her Black students are more fluent orally, but her interpretation of Delpit’s conclusion that we have to teach skills in the context of critical thinking. The second cluster of thoughts is shown in the lower right, where Ms. Foss realizes that she has not actually taught in a more structured way, and so doesn’t

Figure 1

Ms. Foss’s Interpretation of Delpit’s Article

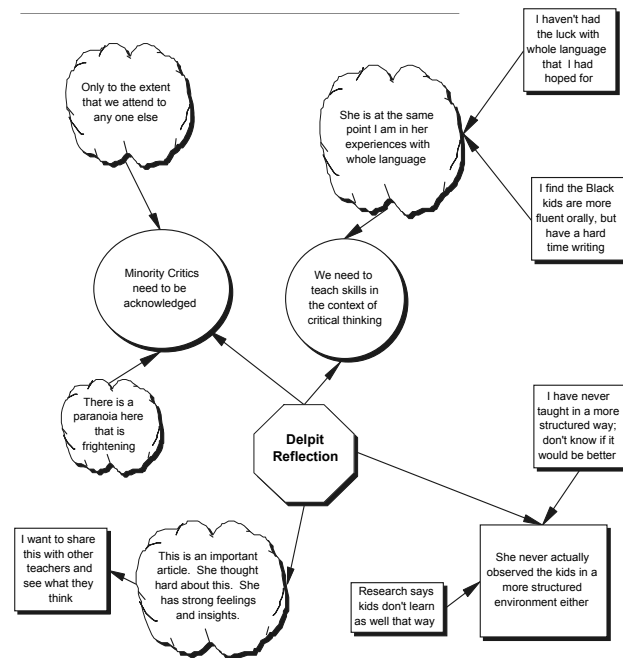
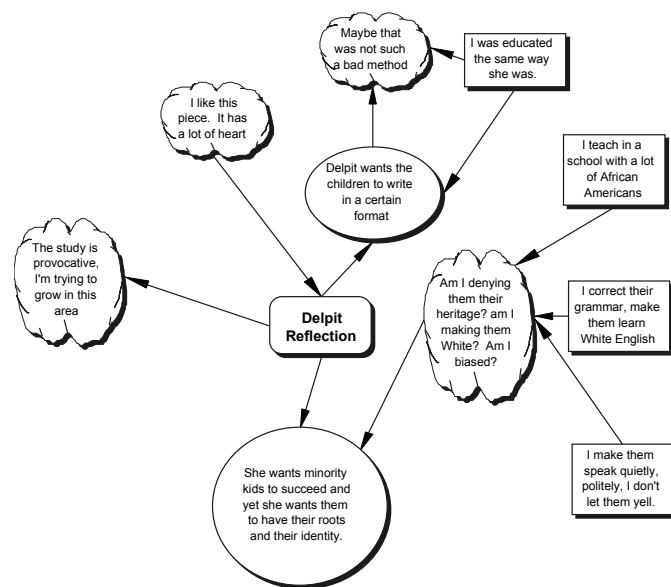


Figure 2

Ms. Whalon’s Interpretation of Delpit’s Article



really know if these particular students would do better with that approach to teaching. In this cluster of thoughts, she also notes that research indicates that whole language is a more effective teaching method, and she realizes that Delpit has also not shown any evidence that Black students would do better in a more structured situation. This second cluster of ideas, then, suggests that Ms. Foss has evaluated Delpit's reflection for its evidence, and has realized that Delpit lacks an adequate comparison group.

Finally, in the upper left corner are Ms. Foss's ideas about race. She is dismayed to discover that Blacks are suspicious of the process writing, and comments on the level of paranoia she perceives in the article. She correctly interprets Delpit's argument that minority views need to be attended to, but offers a qualification of her own to the effect that they should not be listened to any more than any one else's views are.

After considering all of these things, Ms. Foss draws implications for her own practice, and these are shown in the lower left portion of the figure. She says this study is an extremely important article and that she plans to share it with colleagues, particularly her Black colleagues, because she wants to learn their views on this issue.

So Ms. Foss has done all three of the tasks: She has correctly understood both aspects of Delpit's conclusion, she has evaluated the validity of Delpit's evidence, and she has drawn some implications from the article for her own practice.

Now let's consider Ms. Whalon. Recall that I first referred to Ms. Whalon's interpretation of Delpit's conclusion in the context of Table 2, where her interpretation was listed as an example of an "other" interpretation. That conclusion is shown in this figure in two ovals. In the upper oval, Ms. Whalon says that Delpit wants children to write in a certain format. In the lower oval, Ms. Whalon says that Delpit wants minority children to succeed and yet she wants them to have their roots and their identity. This second interpretation is the one I listed as an "other" in Table 2, for Delpit never said anything in her paper about maintaining Black children's cultural heritage. She was much more concerned about assuring that they learned the skills they would need to succeed in a predominantly White society.

Now let's look at the beliefs and experiences that Ms. Whalon brings to this study, and see if they help us understand her misinterpretation. At the top right of the page is a cluster in which Ms. Whalon mentions that she was educated in the same way Delpit was, and she thinks, in retrospect, maybe that was not such a bad method after all. From there, she moves to interpreting Delpit as wanting students to write in a "certain format," by which I think she means standard White English.

The most important cluster, in terms of Ms. Whalon's interpretation of Delpit, consists of the experiences described in three boxes on the right side of the figure. In these boxes, Ms. Whalon tells us she teaches in a school with a lot of African-Americans; she corrects their grammar and tries to teach them White English; and she also makes them speak quietly and politely and doesn't let them yell. At the same

time, she tells us in the cloud that she is worried that perhaps she is biased. Perhaps she is trying to make them into White people and denying them their cultural heritage. She is very unsure of her role as a White teacher of Black students when it comes to teaching language conventions. Ironically, she is probably teaching the kinds of skills that Delpit wants to make sure Black students get, but she is doing it with a great deal of personal angst. Her anxieties about her own role influence her interpretation of Delpit, such that she thinks, although Delpit wants Black kids to succeed, she also wants them to have their roots and their cultural identity. When we viewed Ms. Whalon's interpretation in the context of Table 2, it seemed idiosyncratic and inexplicable relative to the interpretations of other teachers. But when we view it in the context of her own experiences, values, and beliefs, this misinterpretation is not difficult to understand.

Interestingly, Ms. Whalon also has less to say about the validity of this article and less to say about its implications for her practice. With respect to the validity of Delpit's study, Ms. Whalon's assessment, shown in the upper left section of Figure 2, is more informal than Ms. Foss's. She likes the article because it "has heart." She does not really critique the article closely at all. With respect to its implications for her practice, she says it is provocative and that she is trying to grow in this area, but indicate anything in particular that she has drawn from the article or that she intends to do with the article.

So Ms. Whalon has mis-read the main message of the article, and evaluated it more informally than the other teacher, and her connections to her own experience occur more when she is interpreting the article than when she is drawing implications from it.

These two teachers, then, have responded to Delpit's reflection in very different ways. They differed in how accurately they understood the main message, in how carefully they evaluated the validity of the argument, and in how fully they teased out implications from the study for their own practice. They illustrate for us the importance of teachers' prior beliefs and experiences in interpreting research findings, not just in drawing implications from research, but in assessing its validity as well.

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Schedules and Plans and Things You Should Know

Sharon McNeely, MWERA President
Northeastern University

The Association Council and the Board of Directors of MWERA have been busy dealing with a number of issues and trying to meet the needs of association membership. In the past few years a number of important initiatives have taken place that I would like you to know about. There are also a number of other upcoming events you should mark on your calendar and be sure to attend!

AERA is in Chicago this year. We are hoping that MWERA membership comes to AERA, and shows everyone what high quality work our members do. At the last Board of Directors' meeting, we agreed that we should have a social hour at AERA that is hosted by MWERA. In addition to attendance by MWERA members, we hope that we will attract potential members, and friends from other regions! Watch your AERA schedule for the time of this event.

The Holiday Inn Mart Plaza has been kind enough to agree to provide comparable room rates for AERA. The hotel may not be listed in your AERA program. Call them directly at 312-836-5000. Please make sure you use this number and not the number that was listed in the program. That was a bad typo! If you were thinking that the Bismarck might be a spot to stay, you need to know that the Bismarck is closed for business as of January 1997. I am not sure if and when they will reopen. They are dealing with a number of building-related issues.

I am so glad that we decided to change hotels this past year. I know that it was a bit of a problem for some of our members, but I think that the vast majority were pleased with the change. I also am really glad that we aren't trying to hotel-hunt right now, with the Bismarck closing. Quality, inexpensive hotel space for an organization our size is so limited in the downtown Chicago area! I don't want to rehash the numerous problems that we were having in dealing with constantly changing managements at the Bismarck, or the lack of space, or the issues of security, etc. Rather, I would like to take a moment to dwell on the positives. After our membership told us that they want the convention to stay in downtown Chicago, we began a number of initiatives. We toured numerous hotel in the Chicago area, and sought information about rates, space, etc. We considered the ease of membership traveling to hotels, parking, safety, and cost. We also wanted a place where the person we talked to one week would be available the next week, and our contract would still be valid and on the books! We were blessed with the wise guidance of the years of Charles Anderson working with the Bismarck to tell us what issues we needed to clarify up front, and what problems we might anticipate. When we found the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, we felt we had the best of all worlds.

Chicago is an expensive city to visit. The average hotel room rates are typically 50 to 75% more than what we are able to book for the conference. Few hotels have meeting space that is not outrageously priced. Few hotels would let us bring in equipment, use the lobby for exhibits, etc. Few hotels would hold rooms so late before a conference because so many of our members get materials after their semesters or quarters start. The Holiday Inn provided us with the best offer. Yes, we now have to pay for meeting space. However, if we have enough sleeping rooms used by our membership, that cost is minimal. There were some problems this first year at the Holiday Inn with booking rooms. The problem was one of getting the word out that the hotel phone number was printed wrong, and getting membership to meet the deadline. The deadline for booking rooms is important. The number of rooms booked by deadline is part of what goes into figuring the total cost of using the hotel for the conference. PLEASE book your room early. In fact, now would be a great time to make that reservation for the 1997 meeting.

Yes, we are locked into the hotel for 1997. Mark your calendar for October 15-18! Call the hotel and make your reservation! Also, we are moving to lock in the next few years. Mark your calendars for MWERA to be October 14-17 in 1998, and October 16-19 in 1999. We'll let you know about the year 2000 shortly!

The Board of Directors knew that the move to any hotel would be expensive for the organization for the first couple of years. We have new costs to consider, and have to find some new ways to cover those costs without raising the rates of membership, registration or dues. I hope that if you have some ideas, you will share them with us. One of the hidden costs to us that is not a large problem, but is also one that we want to acknowledge and try to deal with, is the problem of cancellations and no shows for the program. We know that we will have to cancel certain workshops, etc., based on enrollment. However, for the regular program, we really do expect all of those people who have submitted presentations, been reviewed and accepted, to show up or make arrangements for their presentations to be given. The submission rate for various Divisions has been high enough that we have to reject some quality work. It is a shame that there are rejections and yet some accepted works are not presented. I know that people get ill at the last minute, have family crisis, etc. However, when someone signs the proposal and agrees to present, he/she needs to follow through. The Board of Directors has been continuing discussion about how to be supportive of our membership and yet deal with this issue. If you have suggestions, we welcome them!

A couple of years ago the Board of Directors asked Terri Strand to develop the history and archives of MWERA. We knew that there were records in many places, and that we needed to pull this together before we got too much further along in our development. Terri has done an outstanding job of gathering materials, organizing, archiving, and establishing a system for retrieval of key documents. The Board of Directors recently received a report from Terri, and we anticipate that you will be hearing more about this in the near future.

The Association Council may also be meeting at AERA. We are working on dealing with some important By-Laws changes, and may need the time to finish this up, although I am hoping we will be done before then. The change in the By-Laws that we are considering has to do with moving the election of the Vice President-Elect ahead by one year, bringing that person "on board" a year earlier. As you know, the Vice President is in charge of the conference program. This is a huge job. Currently, the election of that person happens a year in advance, and when he/she is VP-Elect, that year is used for learning about how the organization works, and planning for the conference. There is very little time, actually, as conference planning goes, to get on board and make plans. Let me use this year for an example. Tom Parish was elected in the spring of 1996. His first Board meeting and conference was this past October. He had a couple of weeks following the meeting to get his program committee organized, get his call for papers done, and plan his main speakers. He reports to the Board in January, and we move ahead to deal with issues from there, for him to have the 1997 meeting in place. Tom is new to the Board, and there are a great many procedures and policies for him to learn and implement in a very short period of time. I know that he will work very hard on this.

The proposal for the change would have elected Tom the year before, using the example, in 1995. That would allow him more time to plan, to meet with the Board, to lock in speakers, to go to AERA to meet with people, etc. It would also give the membership more of an opportunity to know who they were working with, and to make plans for meetings that best met the multiple needs of our membership.

At the Association Council meeting there was some discussion about changing the By-Laws so that we eliminate the position of President-Elect, or have the President-Elect be the program chair. I am not in favor of either of these because it puts MWERA at risk. The President is the person who is ultimately in charge of the financial affairs of the organization. The President must work with the Executive Officer, and oversee the expenses of the program chair. If the position of program chair moved to immediately (later in that program) become the president, he/she could potentially spend whatever he/she wanted to and then sign off on it! We could potentially ruin the organization in one swoop! I cannot and will not support this position. Some people asked me this past year what I did as President-Elect. There are a lot of things that the Board oversees on an ongoing basis, and a lot of things that have to be taken care of for the program. The President-Elect ends up doing a great many small, but important jobs for the organization. I never realized how many things there were to be done!

A few years ago, when we knew that Charles Anderson would be stepping aside as the Executive Officer, we all worked hard at trying to make the transition go smoothly. There were many policies and procedures that had been in place, but were not written down. Additionally, the organization was growing at a tremendous rate, and many new members probably had no idea about the day-to-day operations (nor did they probably want to know)! I have worked with previous presidents and Charles to draft a policies manual. The current Board of Directors is working to refine that manual. When we are done, we will have a working document that should be helpful for our membership and future leaders to keep the organization running in the professional, well-developed manner that it now works.

The Association is you, the membership. I am delighted to have the opportunity to serve you, and to try to meet your needs. I am hoping that you continue to provide input to all of your elected officers, and will be patient as we move ahead with trying to help the organization grow. I am also hoping that you will take this opportunity to share the call for proposals with others, and to bring new members into the association. We know that our membership joins us because other members take the time to share, to tell about MWERA, and to encourage others

I wish you the best for a great year, and hope to see you soon!

AERA ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION

MWERA ASSOCIATION COUNCIL MEETING

Wednesday, March 26, 1997

8:15 - 10:15 a.m.

Addams Room, 3rd Floor, West Tower

Hyatt Hotel

MWERA RECEPTION

Thursday, March 27, 1997

7:00 p.m.

Erie Room, Level 2

Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Tower

Conference Highlights

Mid-Western Educational Research Association 1996 Conference

Kim K. Metcalf
Indiana University

The Holiday Inn at Mart Plaza, Chicago, played host to the 1996 annual conference of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association. The 1996 conference, in addition to the new hotel, featured a variety of expanded session formats and offered both first time conference attendees and returning MWERA members the opportunity to experience research, scholarship, and ideas from a wide range of topics.

Three noted educational scholars were featured across the 3 ½ days of the conference. Dr. Herbert Walberg, research professor at the University of Illinois - Chicago, was featured in the opening Wednesday evening session. Dr. Walberg's presentation on educational productivity provided an interesting, thought-provoking, even unsettling contrast to speakers featured at MWERA conferences in recent years.

Dr. Carolyn Evertson of Peabody College at Vanderbilt University provided the Thursday morning keynote address. Dr. Evertson, widely recognized for her research, on classroom management and effective teaching, addressed her most recent line of scholarship in which she examines what it means to "teach for understanding." Her work with teachers in the Nashville area and with the Blue Ribbon Schools panel provided the context within which she has discovered much about the unique approaches and ways of thinking required by teachers when they attempt to help students understand content at higher levels.

Friday afternoon's luncheon speaker was Dr. Mary Kennedy of Michigan State University. Dr. Kennedy's most recent work and that on which she spoke focused on innovative ways of analyzing, organizing and reporting qualitative data on teachers' thinking.

MWERA Past Presidents

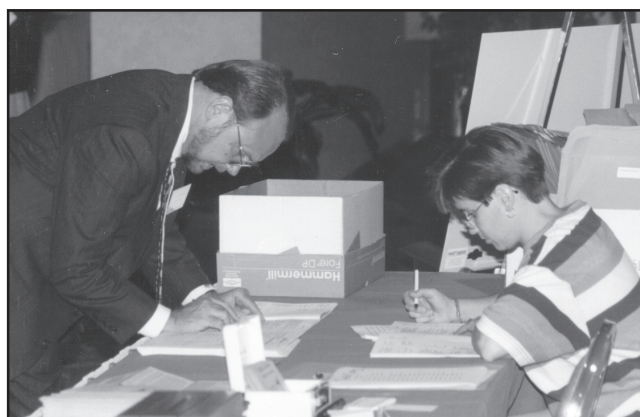


(from left) Ayres D'Costa, Ralph Darr, John Kennedy, Jean Pierce, Ken Kiewera, Isadore Newman, Richard Pugh, Greg Marchant, Tom Andre, Charles Anderson

In addition to notable speakers, the 1996 conference featured a much expanded series of round table presentations. The new facilities at the Holiday Inn enabled over 65 authors the opportunity to spend extended time explaining their research to interested individuals and interacting with those individuals about the specific aspects of their work. Invited speakers and special sessions included a panel discussion by past MWERA presidents, an intriguing discussion of successful educational researchers by Ken Kiewera, "The Virtual Library" by Molly Nicaise and Humphrey Loe, and a "Meet the Editors" session with the incoming editors of the *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*.

Attendance at this year's conference was surprisingly high in light of the numerous changes from past years. In addition to moving from the Bismarck to the Holiday Inn, MWERA members dealt with a substantially earlier deadline for proposals and conference dates approximately one week earlier than in past years. Among the most exciting highlights of this year's conference was the surprisingly large proportion of proposals submitted and presented by first time MWERA conference participants. Roughly 60% of all conference presentations were made by authors who had not before attended or participated in an MWERA conference.

Conference Program Chair, Kim Metcalf, repeatedly expressed his thanks and appreciation to the many individuals who helped make the 1996 conference a success. Dr. Tom Parrish, Program Chair for the 1997 Conference, invites individuals interested in assisting in preparing next years program to contact him directly.



Vice President Kim Metcalf and staff



Sharon McNeely, President-Elect and Isadore Newman, Past President



Carolyn Everson, featured speaker, and Greg Marchant, MWERA President



Tom Parish, Vice President-Elect



John Surber and Ayres D'Costa, outgoing MWERA editors (Susan Brookhart, not shown)



Charles Anderson, Executive Office Emeritus, and Jean Pierce, MWERA Executive Officer



Mary Kennedy, featured luncheon speaker

Top 10 Issues Facing Teacher Education

Gregory J. Marchant, Ball State University
with Gary Griffin, University of Arizona

For efficiency of reading and clarity, I have always appreciated articles that contain brief lists which in single statements encapsulate the main points of the article. Coming from Ball State University, the alma mater of David Letterman, I also have a certain predisposition to “top ten” lists. With this in mind, a little more than two years ago I sat down with Gary Griffin while meeting at Educational Testing Services in Princeton, New Jersey. A year later we continued the discussion of issues problematic to the education of teachers. What follows are the ten points we discussed that served as basis for discussion during my presidential address at this years annual meeting. I have added some possible approaches for each issue. I welcome your comments.

Number Ten: Negative public perceptions of the quality of U.S. education

Criticism of the U.S. public schools was documented in a *Nation at Risk* and hit extreme political tones during the Reagan and Bush administrations. Much of the well publicized decline in public education and its inadequacy relative to other countries was refuted in *The Manufactured Crisis* (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), and presented by David Berliner and Gerald Bracey at last year’s MWERA annual meeting. Although this year’s presentation by Herb Walberg echoed the old themes of the generic woes of public education, those findings were again questioned by the audience. Regardless of whether our schools are in academic disrepair or not, the impact of the perception is evident. The status of teaching, teachers, and teacher education has taken a beating. Universities often view schools of education as cash cows with high enrollment, but low scholarly value. Concern has been raised over the quality of college students attracted to the field and the quality of their teaching when they graduate. Funding and policy decisions in education often reflect more of a punitive than a supportive approach.

Possible approach: Teacher education programs should exercise damage control over misinformation about our schools and teaching. Sound educational theory and research should be used to inform those inside and outside of education as to the real problems and likely solutions. Teacher education programs need to be the banner wavers for what is good about teaching and teacher education.

Number Nine: Lack of foundations in education

Education as a field has history and philosophy; a foundation. For those who make the field their career this foundation should be part of their knowledge base. Unfortunately,

far too often everything old is new again without the insight that the old has been tried. Dewey is rediscovered without the knowledge that he was discovered in the first place. Teachers need to be able to reflect on why they use or should not use certain approaches. Foundations in education provide foundations for professional decision making.

Possible approach: Reverse the trend of reducing and eliminating foundations courses. Better still, infuse foundations issues throughout the teacher education curriculum.

Number Eight: Lack of teacher/scholar orientation of college faculty

Few, if any, colleges support a true teacher/scholar model even in a traditional sense, let alone in the Ernest Boyer *Scholarship Reconsidered* sense. Quality teachers are dismissed from universities due to lack of scholarship (research and publication), and conversely research is not expected or rewarded at some colleges emphasizing teaching. Undergraduate education students are often left with few, if any, models of inquiring, reflective, innovative, quality college teachers. Without these models, education students are left to conceptualize action research and reflective practice on their own and often after they leave the teacher education program.

Possible approach: Colleges and universities must reconsider their notion of scholarship and give more than lip service to the types of models they wish to support. College faculty will not and should not involve themselves in activities which will leave them without a future in the profession. Colleges need to recognize and reward the teacher/scholar model.

**Number Seven:
Student prior knowledge and experience**

There are few things that a college student has more of than experience as a student. This is both a blessing and a curse. The knowledge and experience gained as a student can serve as the basis for considerations of teaching and learning. Reflecting on past teaching and learning experiences can be a useful exercise. However, this knowledge and experience may also set expectations and biases. Often education students feel they know how students learn best because they know (or think they know) how they learn. They feel they know how they should teach because they know the kind of teachers they liked. Their subjective interpretations of teaching and learning can undermine efforts to provide contemporary approaches that take into account a variety of aspects of learning.

***Possible solution:** Challenge the education students' conceptualizations of teaching and learning with examples and simulations. When appropriate, college courses should model alternative effective teaching approaches rather than rely on lectures.*

**Number Six:
Failure to experience meaningful diversity**

A college course in multicultural education does not begin to deal with the issues of diversity that teachers face. This is often the extent to which diversity issues are addressed, if at all. Teaching is about dealing with diversity; twenty or more children, all with different backgrounds, creating different constructions of the world. Teachers try to find the right connections and bridges to help children learn. Central to that task is understanding the variety of worlds the children come from and the different forms the connections and bridges might take.

***Possible approach:** Consider diversity as a theme running throughout teacher education: diversity in familial and cultural background of children, diversity in learning and learners, diversity in teaching and teachers.*

**Number Five:
Inadequate and inappropriate field experiences**

Education students have long held field experiences, especially student teaching, in high regard. This respect has often come at the relative discrediting of college course work in education. The field experiences tend to be viewed as the real world, and course work viewed as information to be memorized for a test. One possible suggestion is that courses need to be more practical; however, another implication

might be that education students face too many inconsistencies in field experiences without the support to make connections to course work. Specifically, education students are usually asked to observe in classrooms without knowing what or how to observe. Brief unguided exposure to certain types of classrooms, such as urban and inclusion classes, can do more to reinforce stereotypes than to provide insight. The amount of involvement and responsibility expected in practicum placements can vary greatly, as can teaching approaches (and potentially the quality of teaching) of the cooperating classroom teacher. The amount of responsibility that the college assumes for the training and monitoring of cooperating teachers varies, but in most cases is minimal.

***Possible approach:** The number of field experiences may need to be increased in most teacher education programs. These experiences need to be better structured, strategically planned, and monitored for quality and content.*

**Number Four:
Student maturity**

In few other fields, does the trip from high school student to a fully functioning professional occur in four short years. Education students must mature in terms of ability to comprehend the multitude of complex variables necessary to make professional teaching decisions and must be able to assume a level of responsibility unheard of in other fields. Developmental psychology and personal experience tell me that the typical college undergraduate may not be ready for much of what we are attempting in most teacher preparation programs. The Holmes Group recognized the need for a firm foundation in an undergraduate major prior to teacher education, and Martin Haberman has repeatedly called for alternative teacher certification programs as a means of attracting more mature, experienced people to teaching. Economics suggests that the expectation of significantly longer training prior to employment in teaching may not be a practical solution, and alternative certification programs have demonstrated limitations that make them less than desirable.

***Possible approach:** Teacher education programs must be carefully structured to give undergraduate students knowledge and skills, but especially experience; because these students must not only gain knowledge and skills, they must "grow up" and gain professional experience. Teacher education programs should also adopt a role in the continued professional development of the teachers they produce, especially for the first few years they are in practice.*

Number Three: College turf and tradition

College courses are traditionally viewed as the income generating properties of college departments, the currency being student credit hours generated. Because jobs and power are often at stake, battles and compromises are made with great concern by departments. The political battles to get and keep courses are legendary in some colleges. Illogical arrangements and ownership of courses are frequently explained with history rather than with what is best for the education student.

***Possible approach:** Reevaluate the teacher education program strictly in terms of how the education students might be most efficiently and effectively developed into quality teachers, then look at the real limitations of the college rather than the other way around (i.e., with these limitations, what can we do?).*

Number Two: Discrete courses

In contemporary elementary school curriculums, subject areas are often linked and integrated through thematic instruction and reading or writing across the curriculum. Increasingly, secondary curriculum is being thought in terms of blocks of time and related subjects with team teaching taking place at all levels--all levels, that is, except the college level. At the college level curriculum continues to be thought of in discrete units of courses, taken once and possibly forgotten. Two themes which have consistently emerged in professional education standards are learning and development. Yet, these are areas that are typically offered as a course offered early in the teacher education program (these are also the courses which are on the chopping block at many colleges). Other areas of importance receive much the same treatment, if offered at all. It is not unusual for courses in multicultural education, special education, and reading to be offered once, if at all, in the teacher education program. The inherent message to education students is to learn what is needed for the course (which may or may not be related to anything else in teaching or learning), pass the exam, and move on to the next course. Little coordination exists across departments and sometimes even across courses within departments, leaving some content ignored because it is assumed to be covered elsewhere while other content may be redundant. The end results are programs that are fragmented with no overall sense for the development of the future teacher.

***Possible approach:** Open up lines of communication and coordination within and across departments. Administration needs to be open to providing compensation for coordination time and to be willing to recognize these efforts within the reward system. Colleges need to consider blocks of courses and the integration of areas across the program with teams of instructors working with cohorts of education students. Among other things this will help build accountability for the overall program and the teachers it produces.*

Number One: Failure to understand the nature of the teaching-learning process

Although I receive much gratification from student comments concerning how my course in educational psychology helped them, I also feel some satisfaction when students inform me that they are changing their major from education because they hadn't realized what all was involved in teaching. The teaching-learning process is very complex. Efforts to oversimplify the process do a disservice to the future teachers. Teaching is not a collection of activities or lectures. It is the interaction of form and content with learner constructions occurring within social contexts. It is curriculum, psychology, and sociology; to name a few. Lee Shulman once described pedagogy as the highest level of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain. This begins to get to the difficulty of the task of effective teaching. To successfully execute the task of teaching requires an incredibly high level of knowledge, skill, and reflection. To be a good teacher is a very difficult and time-consuming endeavor; to be a great teacher, a master teacher, requires a competent experienced individual at the top of the profession. In the teaching of educational psychology we often discuss the conflict between the breadth of content we need to cover versus the need to cover concepts with a level of depth that is meaningful for the education students all within a three-credit hour course. The answer, of course, is simple (actually simply impossible): we must do both, but we can't.

***Possible approach:** Teacher education programs must be viewed not as a collection of courses, but as one step in the development of a good teacher. It is not the first step. Education students enter the program with a wealth of knowledge and experiences that will impact their ability to grow through the program. It is by far not the last step. Teaching must be viewed as a developmental process that continues throughout practice. Professional development must be viewed as internal rather than inservice offerings.*

Fulfilling Its Promise, a Content Analysis of 20 Years of Research at MWERA

Thomas Andre
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Abstract

Twenty years ago, an ethnographic research study of MWERA was initiated. A team of ethnographers, posing as educational researchers, began attending MWERA and engaging in participant - observation research. Artifacts, in the form of papers, and field notes on the interactions and activities of members were collected. The present paper represents an attempt to summarize the twelve major research conclusions that have emerged from that study.

Introduction and Method

This study reports a long term study of MWERA that I have been conducting. Starting at the first convention, I arranged to have ethnographic colleagues attend MWERA and pose as educational researchers. Over the past twenty years, this team has randomly and representatively sampled sessions from 95% of the meetings. Artifacts, in the form of papers, and field notes on the interactions and activities of members were collected. This study focuses on the relationship between presentations and the educational ideas they promote. It also represents a content analysis of the major conclusions of presentation given over that interval. The present paper shares the 12 most important results of this study with you.

Results

Listed below are 12 major conclusions from 20 years of research at MWERA.

Across the sample of papers obtained and examined:

1. 100% of presenters concluded that further research was needed.
2. 99.34% of MWERA research presenters failed to take advantage of successful instructional procedures they investigated or any successful instructional interventions to enhance the participatory experience of the audience in their session.
3. 88.34% of presenters that reported a non-significant finding that was in the direction of their hypothesis interpreted and discussed that finding as if it supported their hypothesis.
4. Only 14.72% of the researchers in the point above cautioned that the result was non-significant.
5. 86.95% of presentations that contain overheads had an overhead typed in elite or 10 point font that was impossible to read at a distance of more than 20 inches from the screen.

6. 82.2% of the presentations were self-described as reporting preliminary findings, apparently in support of conclusion 1.
7. 71.35% of presentations that contained no statistically significant findings orally reported significance statistics to 4 decimal places.
8. 70.70% of presenters brought fewer copies of their paper than recommended by MWERA. The number of papers brought was inversely related to the likely popularity of the topic.
9. In 68.34% of oral research presentation sessions, a researcher was in the middle of his/her method or results section and stated words to the effect: "One minute left?! But I am only in the method/results section!"
10. 58.23% of qualitative researchers said in their talk that qualitative research is about the specific cases it studies and is not intended to be generalized.
11. 88.3% of the researchers in the item above then discussed the transferability of their findings.
12. 34% of MWERA presenters did not look at their audience more than three times during their presentation.

Discussion

In honor of the twentieth meeting of MWERA, it seems appropriate that we consider the humorous aspects of our own behavior. While the serious nature of the research reported at MWERA is well documented, it is clear that occasionally laughing at ourselves clears our collective heads and provides a proper perspective in which to further pursue the goals of life, liberty, statistical significance, construct validity, or triangulation. With this I mind, the author wishes: Happy data to all and to all a good night!

¹This paper is a pack of nonsense and lies that should only be used in the humorous manner it was intended. Any use of the present report in situations other than those intended by the author represents a serious ethical violation that may be investigated by the Guardians of Endore or the Fellowship of the Ring.

Voices from the Past

Deborah L. Bainer
Christine S. Halon
The Ohio State University, Mansfield

This year's annual conference of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) in Chicago was a milestone: the organization's 20th conference. Already, MWERA has a rich and productive history. The organization has established itself as a notable regional body committed to building collegiality, sharing and stimulating research interests, and mentoring graduate students and new faculty. While MWERA limits its efforts in contacting members to 13 midwestern states and Canadian provinces, its actual membership is spread throughout the United States, Canada, and other countries.

This seems like an appropriate time to reflect on MWERA's past, and to ponder the future. To identify benchmarks and aspirations of the organization, past presidents were contacted and asked to respond to two questions. Their responses are reported below.

1. What were the highlights or memorable events during your year as president of MWERA?
2. What suggestions "from the heart" do you have for the organization and its future?

Jean Pierce, 1983-84 ***Northern Illinois University***

"Perhaps the most memorable event was the creation of an electronic forum for mid-western educational researchers, the first of its kind in the nation. The EdResearch Forum was located on CompuServe, since the Internet had not yet started to grow. The idea worked fine for a handful of MWERA members, but in 1983 computer networking was a few years ahead of its time. More use by network-literate researchers was needed to keep the space available to us. By 1985, EdResearch Forum came under the sponsorship of AERA. As Mid-West goes, so goes the nation!

"Periodically reexamining our mission and prioritizing our goals as an organization are crucial. Currently, a top priority is the mentorship of graduate students and new faculty. Perhaps we need to ensure that student voices are represented on decision-making committees. If the main goal is to create a feeling of stability and 'family,' then perhaps we should not put a lot of time and effort into membership recruitment, and we can consider five-year presidency track (Conference Co-Chair, Conference Chair, President-Elect, President, Past President). If a major goal is to promote communication and collaboration among researchers throughout the region, then we could make a stronger effort to ensure that members from a wide variety of states, provinces, and cultures are nominated for leadership positions. If a primary purpose is to promote the implementation of research in classrooms, more could be done to attract elementary and high school educators and to facilitate communication between practitioners and researchers."

John Kennedy, 1984-85 ***The Ohio State University***

"I remember bringing the conference to the Bismarck Hotel in Chicago for the first time. The conference had been held in various places up until then. At that time it was easy

to get accommodations in Chicago but the plane fares were expensive. Plane fares have gone down so it is now a tradition for MWERA to be held in Chicago.

"Also, I launched a membership drive that brought in some key people such as Bob Brennan, Isadore Newman, Don Cruickshank, and Ayres D'Costa. The conference that year was attended by about 250 people.

"MWERA should stay in Chicago. Furthermore, I encourage the organization to maintain its commitment to the presentation of data-based research. Avoid being overly enamored with newer non-empirical research strategies, as quality will suffer. Non-data-based research is like intellectual cancer: we have to live with it for a while, but eventually we must get rid of it. It must be contained and quarantined to limit the degree of its penetration. MWERA must keep, promote, and expand a forum that presents data-based research. Respect for MWERA will grow, unfortunately at the expense of AERA and other organizations, which are being clutched by vacuous, non-data-based research."

Isadore Newman, 1988-89 ***University of Akron***

"I don't know if this is a highlight (to some it may be). As Program Chair, it was the first time I experienced total and complete academic panic. I totally closed down for a couple of hours. It was from this experience that I learned to be more appreciative and sensitive to what program chairs have to do and less critical of minor errors. I learned that people like Dennis Leitner, Ayres D'Costa and Greg Marchant are some of the most supportive people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. Another highlight was the conceptualization of the MWERA journal in its present format by Greg and myself. I believe it would not have come to fruition without the support of the Executive Committee, especially Dennis Leitner.

“I think the MWERA is a wonderful organization to mentor students as well as new faculty into the research culture, introducing them on a first name basis to some of the leading figures in the world. I would like the organization to support these informal get-togethers--dinners, conversations, and chat hours between such figures and our membership, especially new mentees.”

Dennis W. Leitner, 1989-90
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

“Sometime during my ‘tour of duty,’ I got tired of receiving the annual *billet-dous* (rhymes with ‘bill-is-due’) from our distinguished Executive Officer, Charles Anderson, requesting my annual dues. So I simply threw him a check for ten times the annual dues and told him to save the postage. If you know Charles, you know how much he anguished over where to put the money. After two or three years and a revision to the MWERA by-laws, we now have the opportunity for LIFETIME membership in MWERA and 37 people (as of October 1996) have taken advantage of it. Hopefully this will provide a type of financial security for MWERA for many years to come.”

Ayres D’Costa, 1990-91
The Ohio State University

“MWERA has evolved through some little-publicized crises over the years, although its good qualities have persisted despite these crises or perhaps because of them. One MWERA crisis had to do with its journal. The old membership dues were insufficient to support a journal and it was also a newsletter. This issue had caused many a heated debate among Board members and prior presidents. During my tenure on the Board, we presented our needs to the membership and received strong support to increase dues and to continue support for a professional journal under the able leadership of the new editors, Isadore Newman and Greg Marchant.

“The money allocated to the Journal was usually not sufficient, and it was therefore up to the editors to find ways to supplement their budget. Incidentally, this was also a problem faced by incoming program chairs. It would seem that one of the skills needed by editors and program chairs was creative financing. Izzy found a supportive dean at the University of Akron, each of the two editors found other support in their respective departments, and a brand new journal concept was born. Incidentally, the idea of selling a cover photo and write-up to a university for a small fee was part of this creative financing scheme. Also emerging was the raising of money through publisher ads in the Journal and exhibits at the conference, a scheme that Sharon McNeely (current president) made successful through her contact work with publisher representatives.

“In my term as editor, I found similar financial support for the Journal, most prominent of which was Dean Zimpher’s (The Ohio State University) grant to MWERA’s journal. I hope that the concept of a professional journal will be em-

bedded in MWERA and continue to receive support in the future. We deserve to hold our heads high among our professional communities, and our journal will help us do that.

“One of the endearing privileges I enjoyed as an officer of MWERA was the trust and support that I received from members and other officers. As Program Chair and later in another leadership role as President, there was never a concern in my heart that my motivation or dedication were ever questioned. Past presidents would come to tell me that they felt good about what we were doing for MWERA, and that a cardinal rule was for the old guard to give way to the new so that creativity was never stifled. This is the essence of my suggestions to the new Board. Develop this trust in your newer officers so that they can pass on this wonderful torch of faith to their colleagues. Trust will beget trust, and I pray that MWERA will remain small enough to retain this trusting and supportive environment as its primary organizational quality.”

Barbara S. Plake, 1991-92
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

“I recall the transition of our research publication to the *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, thanks in great part to the creative ingenuity of Isadore Newman and Greg Marchant. The quality and appearance of the publication improved dramatically!

“Also, we implemented a plan to encourage more participation by graduate students in the annual business meeting. We offered a free year of membership through raffle at the business meeting with the goal to encourage more graduate students to attend the meeting. However, the person whose name was drawn wasn’t at the business meeting! It seemed counter-productive to the goal of encouraging more graduate students to attend the meeting to award the prize to someone who wasn’t in attendance. But we did anyway!

“What sticks in my mind about the organization is the people who constitute the organization. So many supportive folks! During my term as an officer, I suffered some very severe family crises and the members of the organization were wonderfully supportive and helpful. One time the Board of Directors met in Lincoln, Nebraska, in the dead of winter to accommodate my restrictions on travel due to family constraints.

“I like to encourage my graduate students to attend the meetings because I know they will be treated with respect and they will get an excellent orientation into attending and presenting at conferences.”

Ken Kiewera, 1992-93
University of Nebraska, Lincoln

“What was most memorable was organizing the conference with the Executive Committee. We made some changes and tried some new things. Typically, we had a keynote speaker and guest speaker. We wanted to have a slate of invited speakers so we invited Carol Ames, Michael Pressley, and Joel Levin. It’s nice to see that many of the new things we tried have continued. Also, I had a hand in assembling a

team of editors and I felt really good about that. They did a great job of taking over the responsibility from Izzy.

“We should keep MWERA our own. We should keep it intimate, unassuming and down-home. It’s a place for grad students the cut their teeth. On the other hand, we need to bring in the Big Guns, the role models who will both inform and inspire us. I remember my having a beer with Michael Pressley in the lounge and learning so much about his work. I like that we’re concerned about taking care of ‘our own’ but we need to get a sense of prominent ideas that are out there and how the people behind these ideas go about doing their work. MWERA is where we rub shoulders with the big names in our field.”

Richard Pugh, 1993-94
Indiana University

“My memories of my year as President are many and were very professionally rewarding. The number-one highlight during my year as President was launching the historical study of MWERA. I remember writing the RFP and publishing it in the *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*. I remember appointing a review committee to consider the proposals which we received. I remember notifying Terri Strand that her proposal was the one selected by the Review Committee. The presentation from the study by Terri at the recent annual meeting and the scheduling of a symposium on the historical study followed.

“The second event that I remember the most was receiving a phone call from Charles Anderson one day. He called to tell me that he had become ill and could not continue as Executive Officer. After our conversation, it was evident that we needed to move ahead and identify a new Executive Officer. I gave a sigh of relief when I checked the by-laws and found that the MWERA constitutional representatives had anticipated such an event and had included in the by-laws the procedural steps for identifying an Executive Officer. Following these procedures, the President and MWERA were permitted to move smoothly through the process of appointing Jean Pierce as the new Executive Officer. I wish to thank the constitutional representatives who had developed the procedures and thank Jean Pierce for accepting the offer and skillfully handling a transition period as the responsibilities shifted to her.

“My suggestions ‘from the heart’ are to keep the invited speakers in the program. They are the standard-setters. Keep the sessions which fall under the category of social: the Cracker Barrel, President’s Reception, and luncheon. These are part of the MWERA icon. Finally, always try new things at the annual meeting. Take a chance; be a risk taker!”

Thomas Andre, 1994-95
Iowa State University

“The major event was the change in hotel. The Bismarck had been our home and, more importantly, offered cheap hotel rates in the downtown area. As MWERA is a second and unfunded conference for many people, keeping

the expense down was important. Many people had strong feelings for the nostalgia of the Bismarck, but others viewed it as a run down sleaze pit. Thus the change was accomplished with much soul-searching. It turns out to have been a good decision, especially since the Bismarck is closing, I hear.

“The IRS-tax fiasco was also a traumatic experience. Essentially we thought we might be liable for considerable back taxes. As it turned out, we had tax exempt status all along. The import, maybe, of the event was, don’t worry too much until you are sure of the facts.

“The most memorable events of the past few MWERA conferences for me have been the quality of the invited speakers. Mike Pressley, Joel Levin, John Bransford, Jere Brophy, Carol Shakeshaft, Carol Ames, Robert Slavin, and many others have given exceptionally fine talks which extend the members’ knowledge about currently important events and issues in educational research. After the trials and tribulations of committee meetings, faculty meetings, territorial battles, and the other minutia of faculty life, it is nice to be reminded of the intellectual elegance that attracted one to this profession.”

Greg Marchant, 1995-96
Ball State University

“Six years ago the first issue of the *Mid-Western Educational Researcher* was published as a journal instead of a newsletter. Isadore Newman and I took on the task as editors to create a journal that contained articles and features that would be ‘user-friendly’ to our membership. Three years later Ayres D’Costa, Susan Brookhart, and John Surber took the reins. It fell upon me, as my first major decision as President, to appoint the next editors. After careful review of proposals and approval of the Board of Directors, I appointed the team that produced this, their first issue: Deb Bainer, Richard Smith, and Gene Kramer.

“Probably some of the most memorable events for any MWERA President actually occurred two years earlier during the term as Vice-President/Program Chair. The conference which I organized two years ago included some of the biggest names in educational research and attracted over 400 members, the largest attendance ever for a MWERA annual meeting. It was also during that conference that the need to change hotels became solidified. It was gratifying to have the first annual meeting at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza during my presidency, and for it to be such a success.

“I guess my suggestions for MWERA is not that different than those I would have for any organization, department, or group. Know and respect your history, but dare to be bold in new attempts. Work to facilitate inclusion, rather than practice exclusion. Trust people to do their best and what is right until they prove otherwise. Never underestimate the possibility that things can go wrong; but if it isn’t broken, don’t fix it. Remember that people are people, to be respected as professionals and cared for as friends. I believe that MWERA already operates with these suggestions in mind. It is my hope that the Association will continue to attract members who will carry on this tradition.”