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Conference Images
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MWER 2009 Conference Retrospective

Keynote Addresses

Call for Proposals for Fall Conference 2010

Conference Themed Article

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Manuscripts are accepted from faculty, students, and professionals working in educational or non-educational settings. Membership in the MWERA is not required in order to submit a manuscript for review. The editors encourage the submission of revised papers that have been presented at the annual meetings of the MWERA, AERA, and other professional organizations.

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Reflections on MWERA 2009: The Synthesis of Educational Research and Practice

Gordon P. Brooks, MWERA Program Chair
Ohio University

I am writing this reflection within weeks after the end of the MWERA 2009 Annual Meeting in St. Louis. While the meeting started just a couple weeks ago, the preparation began over a year ago. I commented to several colleagues during the conference that “I felt like I should be doing more,” thinking that the lack of turmoil was just the calm before the storm. But the truth is, as several former Program Chairs reminded me, by the time the conference began, most of the work had been done.

Thanks

With that in mind, I need to begin my reflections by going back in time and by thanking many of the people who were so instrumental in helping to make the conference a success—long before it started. In particular, I need to thank people like our Board of Directors, our Journal Editors, members of the Association Council, and the Division Chairs (all their names were listed in the Program), who all helped to promote interest in MWERA and to advertise the Call for Proposals so that we had well over 50 new members join and participate. Indeed, because MWERA benefits so greatly just by our current members spreading the word about MWERA, I need to thank all the members who helped encourage colleagues and students to submit proposals and to volunteer for the conference in a variety of ways. Thank you all.

After the proposals had been submitted, the Program Committee and Division Chairs took center stage by organizing and recommending sessions for the conference. This group of people was the heart and soul of the Program development process. Their efforts organizing reviewers, assigning papers to sessions, and assigning volunteers set the tone for a successful Meeting. But of course, their work was not possible without all the members who submitted proposals, who signed up to review proposals, and who volunteered to serve as Session Chairs and Session Discussants. Thank you all.

As the last major effort required before the conference began, we moved the location of the conference from the Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet to the Sheraton Plaza Tower Hotel due to unexpected renovations at the Lakeside Chalet. The change was confirmed by the Sheraton in late September, requiring a quick turnaround to revise the conference program to reflect the new meeting space. The change also necessitated a number of hotel room reservation changes for conference attendees. Generally, these changes went pretty smoothly, but I know there were some difficulties. Thank you all for your patience and your understanding regarding these late-notice changes—they caught us all by

surprise. And thank you to the Sheraton staff, who were very helpful and supportive with the transition.

Finally, during the conference many folks provided invaluable help with those few issues that did keep me running around. Thank you to Board members, Division Chairs, and especially to Sharon McNeely and Babylon Williams, who kept the Registration Desk organized and who made sure we had LCD projectors in all our conference rooms (and thanks to those who brought LCD projectors with them to St. Louis, helping to save the organization literally thousands of dollars). Most importantly, thank you to everyone who attended and participated in the 2009 Annual Meeting.

Reflections

This year’s Conference Theme was “*The Synthesis of Educational Research and Practice*.” We were excited to see so many proposals for papers and posters that fit the theme, which addressed the synergy that results from the synthetic convergence of research and practice that has resulted in new paradigms for each. These new paradigms can be seen in action research, assessment, and data-driven decision making that have become integral parts of informed practice rather than peripheral activities; in universities that no longer just serve their communities, but rather have become partners with their communities; in the mixed methods used in research and evaluation; and in the adaptation of knowledge and theory from other fields.

All told, we had a total of 236 proposal submissions this year: 211 individual presentations and 25 sessions. This led to the final program of 188 scheduled individual presentations, filling 47 paper sessions and 2 poster sessions. There were 101 total sessions (including also meetings, forums, and workshops). Approximately 340 total people were listed as participants in the program (including co-authors, chairs, discussants, and association officers). These sessions were attended by over 260 total conference attendees. As an aside, all members need to know how important it is to stay at the conference hotel. If we don’t have enough conference attendees stay at the conference hotel—and we’ve come very close several years now, including this year—we can be required contractually to pay rental fees for the conference rooms we use (a very expensive proposition).

The conference began on Wednesday, October 14, with three afternoon workshops, but “kicked off” officially with the Wednesday Fireside Chat and Thursday Keynote Speech by Dr. Ralph Martin, Professor Emeritus of Teacher Educa-

tion at Ohio University in Athens. As he spoke about “*Moving toward a Culture of Inquiry*,” Dr. Martin shared with us some of his experiences in working with teachers through the Southeastern Ohio Center for Excellence in Math and Science (SEOCEMS). He shared some of the struggles they faced, for example, “moving targets” and anxiety about “research.” He also shared some of the successes of the classroom teachers as they attempted to bring that culture of inquiry into their practice (e.g., adaptation of the Japanese “lesson study” model). Finally, Dr. Martin shared some of his vision of this new culture—for example, how much difference might a single word make: “inquiry” vs. “research?” He also shared visions of inquiry-based education, such as “amusement park physics.” If you missed Dr. Martin’s speech, I encourage you to read it in this issue of the *MWER Journal*.

Stimulating paper sessions and various types of forums continued for the next two days and, on Thursday afternoon, we had two successful Poster Sessions where a large number of attendees gathered for a dessert break while discussing the research that went into the development of over 30 posters. The Cracker Barrel social was also a hit, in a wonderful location at the top of the Sheraton Plaza Tower with a beautiful “View” of the horizon. It was great to see so many formal discussions and informal conversations on Thursday, all of it reminding us again how special MWERA is in its collegiality and the relationships among its members. Special thanks are due to Ohio University and the University of Kentucky, who sponsored the Cracker Barrel Reception and the President’s Reception at this year’s conference.

On Friday, we tried a new way to hold Division business meetings that seemed to work well—no meetings were held opposite paper sessions or forums. We’ll be looking at the conference evaluations to get a sense of how well everyone liked the change. If you didn’t complete an evaluation, please feel free to contact me or any Board member with your feedback—it’s never too late. The MWERA Business Meeting went well and we received very strong nominations for the next round of elections, which will take place this Spring.

The Luncheon Keynote Address on Friday was provided by Dr. Ronald Rochon, Dean of the School of Education and Associate Vice President for Teacher Education at Buffalo State University in Buffalo, New York. Dr. Rochon presented an inspiring speech, “*Understanding the Complex Relationship between Communities and the Educational Enterprise*,” in which he discussed the role universities play in their communities, especially in regard to matters of social justice. He shared with us lessons he has learned from his family, in Buffalo, in Ghana, and elsewhere, about

how universities and school districts can work together to improve education. He challenged us to think about the social conditions so many students face outside of school and how that impacts their view of education—how might universities work, sincerely, as a part of their communities to help improve these conditions? He shared with us his vision of “collective improvement” and the “collaborative spirit” that will help us “advocate for all children” to improve these conditions. Again, please read his speech in this issue of the *MWER Journal*.

On Saturday, the conference wrapped up with more sessions and with the Presidential Address provided by Dr. Dimiter Dimitrov, Professor of Educational Assessment and Research Methodologies at George Mason University. Dr. Dimitrov spoke about the “*Contemporary Treatment of Reliability and Validity in Educational Assessment*.” He reminded us all how important measurement reliability and validity are to the work we do, and provided us some new ways to think about them both. Dr. Dimitrov shared a vision for using better methods, more consistently, to support the quality of our research and testing. His speech is also printed in this issue of the journal.

Looking Forward

As this issue of the *MWER Journal* brings to a formal close the 2009 MWERA Conference, you’ll notice that it brings a formal beginning to the 2010 MWERA Annual Meeting (even though the next Program Chair, Cynthia Campbell, has already begun her work). That is, the Call for Proposals for the 2010 conference is included in this issue of the *MWER Journal*.

They say that good research not only provides answers, but that it also raises just as many (or more) questions. Please start thinking now about all those good questions and ideas you developed in St. Louis, work on that research, and get ready to submit proposals to share that research in papers, posters, and forums. Think about the research you were already doing and which projects would be best to submit to MWERA—the submission process will open in March.

Also, think about how you’d like to become more involved in MWERA, as a reviewer, a Session Chair, a Discussant, or even as an elected officer. Share your interests with any Board member. And finally, encourage your colleagues and your students to submit proposals and volunteer to serve for the 2010 Annual Meeting in Columbus, Ohio. I look forward to seeing you all as active participants in October, 2010!

Moving Toward A Culture of Inquiry

Ralph Martin
Ohio University

I am reminded of a story that could take place anywhere, but for our purposes let us set the location in Southeast Ohio. An out of town contestant wished to improve his shooting skills and was traveling the countryside in search of a legendary marksman. He followed the local directions and believed he was near his objective. The sides of several barns were covered with targets and the contestant noticed each showed the bullets had hit on a perfect bullseye. The contestant approached the nearest house and inquired if the marksman was available. A gentleman conceded he was the marksman who had shot all of the targets and agreed to demonstrate his technique. Shouldering his rifle, the marksman took careful aim at the side of a barn, squeezed the trigger, located where the bullet had hit, then picked up a bucket of paint and proceeded to paint a target around the bullet. I sometimes think we are much like the marksman. We know what we wish to accomplish in a project, but later discover the real target is something a bit different. Has this ever happened to you? This was the outcome of several teacher professional development and school improvement projects, and today I wish to share with you the real target that we discovered, and how we wished to improve our chances of hitting the target.

We

Throughout this address I will often refer to “we,” simply because I did not act alone, the efforts were always larger than one person could ever manage, and the intellect that was required certainly exceed my capacity. The “we” refers to teachers, colleagues, graduate students, school leaders and school students, and community members who worked tirelessly to support teaching and learning in our schools so that the next generation of leaders will have an equitable opportunity to grow into those new roles.

Purpose

My purpose is to share some of the efforts, successes, challenges and lessons learned over approximately two decades of professional development projects both large and small. In retrospect it seems that efforts toward change, improvement and advancement were always bumping against culture. So, this address attempts to place the change effort of inquiry into a cultural context with some notion that change is possible, though it may be messy, cloudy and uncertain.

Culture refers to the behaviors, beliefs and characteristics of a particular social group. In this case the group is teachers and their students in Ohio’s Appalachian region. The prevalent culture in our Appalachian schools has been shaped by local interpretations and good intentions about

what kinds of efforts are necessary to drive students toward high passing rates on the high stakes high school graduation test. Every fall teachers are told by their principals to teach the academic content standards (rather than teach toward the standards), and each winter the teachers are convinced to set aside instructional time to prepare middle and high school students for the annual spring tests. “Drill and kill” seems to be the effort and the result. We believed teacher beliefs and teaching characteristics could be influenced, and student mental behaviors could be modified and their eventual test performances could be improved through education and training in the uses of inquiry.

Inquiry refers to activities that rely on cognitive, meta-cognitive, emotional, physical, and social processes to make sense of the physical world, or to construct conceptual understandings of key ideas in mathematics and science. The processes of inquiry typically involve strategic uses of questions to develop testable ideas in order to construct understandings of real-world ideas. In our case the ideas were rooted in mathematics and science. Inquiry involves investigating, analyzing, forming answers and explanations, and communicating outcomes, insights and conclusions (Martin, Sexton, & Franklin, 2009).

Decades of research and landmark meta-analyses in the science education community suggested that using more of the processes of inquiry helps schools and teachers to: 1) boost learner attitudes toward mathematics and science, 2) develop long-lasting thinking and reasoning skills necessary for a changing economy, and 3) improve academic achievement. Research devoted to problem-solving in mathematics suggested similar benefits. We believed the processes and the means for achieving them were clear enough, but we needed to find a way to impact the school culture so that inquiry became understood, valued, embedded, and widely used.

SEOCEMS’ mission and its partnerships

The “we” that I now represent is called the *South East Ohio Center for Excellence in Mathematics and Science*. Called SEOCEMS, the center began in 2003 as a project funded by the Ohio Board of Regents. Ohio University is the fiscal agent, SEOCEMS receives administrative support from the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences. SEOCEMS is a collaboration of faculty from Ohio University, Shawnee State University, the University of Rio Grande and school leaders from the Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools (CORAS)—a consortium of school superintendents. As a regional center, SEOCEMS pursues funding for goals that support improvements in:

- Professional development in mathematics and science for teachers
- Pupils' access to quality mathematics and science
- Teacher preparation programs
- Applied research and evaluation focused on mathematics and science in rural Appalachia
- Recruitment and retention of mathematics and science teachers and faculty dedicated to mathematics and science teacher education

A Context

Our work is focused on helping the teachers and schools in the Appalachian region of Ohio. Generally this area is called South East Ohio, though our region ranges from nearby Cincinnati in a crescent along the Ohio River north and eastward toward Lake Erie. See Figure 1.

This 31 county region is rich in Appalachian culture, a tenacious work ethic, and a diverse economic history in coal mining, timber, transportation, brick making and clay products, farming and light-to-heavy industry. Employment in SE Ohio shifted during the 20th Century, and so did its economy. Now, the largest employers often are hospitals,

school districts, universities, and power companies. To attract new employers a different type of work force is needed than the communities are used to providing, and this requires a different way of thinking and educating. This need motivates the work of SEOCEMS.

According to CORAS (2009), the Appalachian region of Ohio represents about 1/3 of Ohio's geography; population density is low with the number of inhabitants per square mile only 1/3 of the state average. Overall about 15% of the state's population lives in the Appalachian counties and unemployment is higher than the Ohio and national average. Political clout is limited. Many state education requirements spring from an urban context.

Median income is \$5,300 less than the state median and the number of families who receive state aid is 60% higher than the state average. Local property valuation is low, generates limited local funding and typical school districts operate with \$2.5 million per year less than suburban or urban districts of a similar size, though the Appalachian schools face many of the same challenges but with far fewer resources and infrastructure. School districts are larger in square miles than the state average, but significantly smaller in enrollment; huge portions of school district budgets are spent in

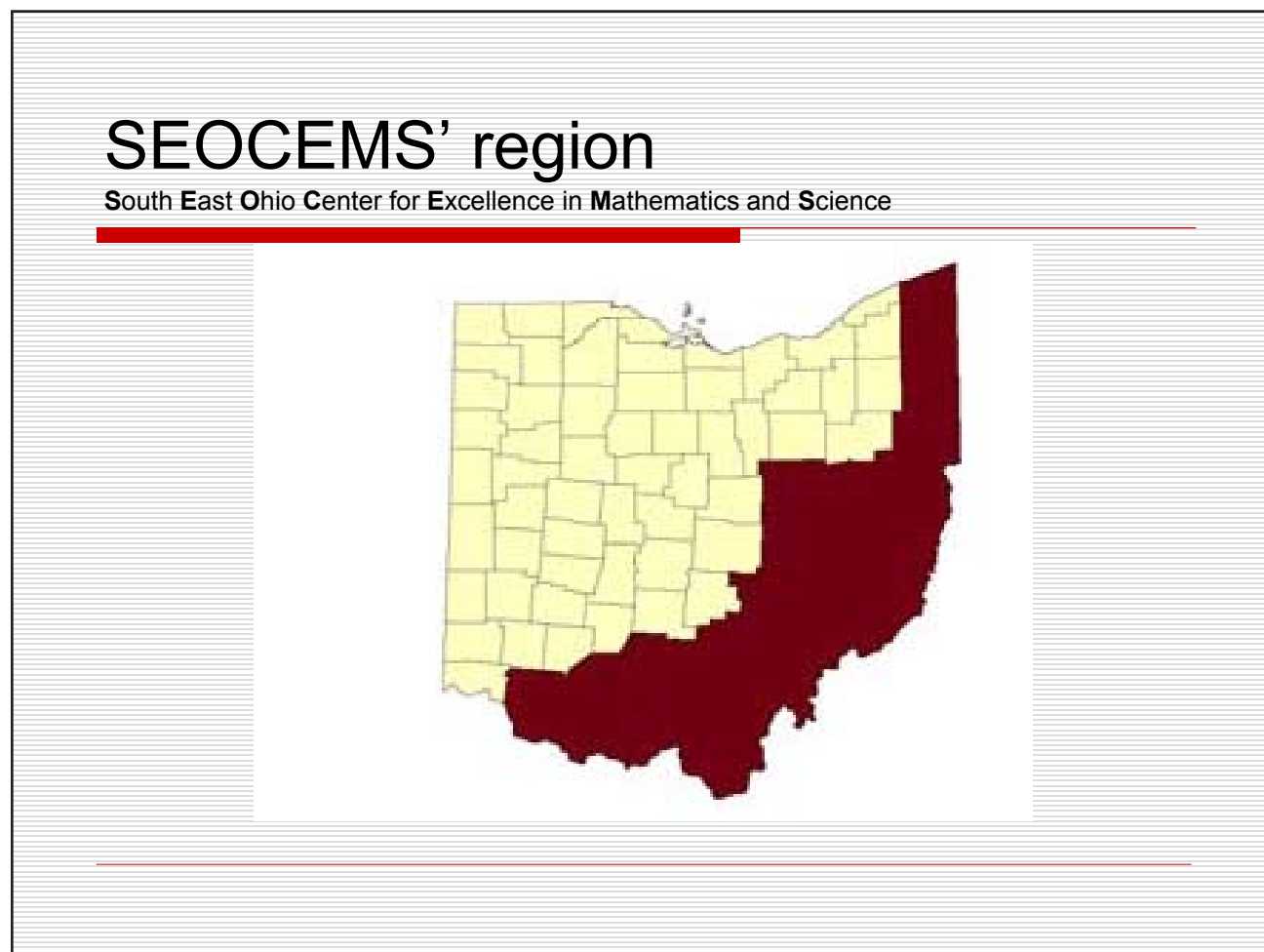


Figure 1.

transportation and it is not unusual for one school district to span an entire county. Some children may have a four-hour round-trip bus ride each school day. Teacher salaries are low to modest and over the course of their careers teachers in Ohio's Appalachian region may earn about \$500,000 less than their urban counterparts. However, the teachers remain loyal to their schools and the children.

Still, despite the dire conditions and dim prospects for improvement, teachers are committed to their communities. Job changing occurs less frequently than in urban schools. Improvement and innovation efforts lack the technology infrastructure and support personnel. There are few specialists in any building. Attempts to consolidate professional development and support requires significant travel, time and effort—a large barrier due to geography. The teachers tend to shoulder additional responsibilities to lead and sustain mandated changes. Within a school, teacher supervision, curriculum and instructional support, and guidance may only be provided by a single school principal whose background, training and experience is rarely grounded in mathematics or science.

Though problems of geography, teacher isolation (often common to small schools), lack of funding, and lack of personnel and community support often exist, so do pockets of excellence. These pockets of excellence have potential for motivating and sustaining improvement. Mining those pockets of excellence eventually helped to design a more teacher-student centric model for improving teaching and learning, but only after we attempted a defined professional development effort.

*Pockets of Excellence—building blocks
for a strong foundation*

My first large project predates the formation of SEO-CEMS, but provided a foundation for the model we eventually developed. My thinking was based on the notion that SE Ohio schools had pockets of excellence: elementary teachers in each school district who accomplished great things with math and science. The National Science Foundation funded us to recruit 80 teachers (40 math and 40 science) and form two-person school teams (Martin, 1990). The teams of teachers and their school principals were asked to commit to work with us for three years. The effort was called the “Lead Teacher Project” and it was based on a synthesis of the “what works” research in mathematics and science, teaching and learning, professional development, and leadership.

Those teachers dedicated their time to become schooled in instructional leadership, and pledged to work with their school principals and fellow teachers to advance math and science in their schools. We experienced very little turn over. The teachers began with their own classrooms, learned inquiry and problem solving processes, gathered or built highly engaging learning manipulatives and impacted K-8 student learning in magnificent ways. Measures of pupil achievement, process skills and attitudes toward math and science improved to high levels. The efforts were extended to other

classrooms via in-school workshops and in many places the positive impact was felt across school district and county lines. A number of the Lead Teachers developed strong reputations and became consultants for their districts and others. Unsolicited comments wandered back to us claiming the experience was a high point for many teacher careers. The inquiry model we developed in science arose from the most promising research about forming concepts and impacting conceptual change. The model was later modified and became the substance of several editions of college textbooks that shaped the preparation of future science teachers. The Lead Teachers helped us to find effective ways to prepare the next generation of educators.

The political climate shifted and a decade of high stakes testing drove rabid focus on standards. This was not necessarily a bad thing in principle. The positive attention brought initially to mathematics and science was a good thing. However, in practice the natural ways that children learned were stifled by misappropriations of energy and teachers had little time to devote to time-intensive learning opportunities, such as inquiry. A new culture overtook the schools and the notion became: buckle down! Pass the test. Quickly a new concern arose: the students left questions blank if they perceived they had not been taught the exact object of the question; learners had little or no confidence to attempt short answer and extended response items. In many schools' curricula math became a distant second to reading and science was hardly taught at all, and when it was, it resembled an exercise in reading and memorization, and violated all that decades of research had verified as “what works.”

For a science educator the time seemed medieval and we were treated as undocumented aliens who were trying to cross the border into schools. Mathematics educators were tolerated. Though the fixation on testing was a distraction for teachers, the existence of academic content standards was a good thing, overall, though uses could be abused. That focus on standards did tend to narrow the curriculum's content, aroused teachers to discuss similar learning expectations, and provided an opening for applied research beneficial for teachers and learners. But a different approach was needed and the key concepts were found in Japan.

CSI

Fast-forward 10 years. After numerous projects it was clear that the specific needs and priorities within school districts continued to vary, as did the resources available among partners. However, consensus existed across the region to support the global needs for SE Ohio while accommodating school districts' desires to maintain independence, identity, and diversity. A series of regional meetings with focus groups revealed substantial variation among school participants respective to the degree to which the needs are embraced and priorities set. Clearly the participants could not be given a single professional development program or “one size fits all” intervention in order to satisfy perceived needs. We soon realized the school districts' desires as well as the Center's

priorities may be better served through a system of operation that encourages carefully considered, data-driven, locally identified, problem-based inquiry.

We adapted the Japanese Lesson Study as a model we would try. Lesson Study has been used in Japan for decades for teacher professional development (*Lesson Study Research Group*, n.d.). The Lesson Study process typically involves a team of teachers sitting to design a lesson. The team observes while one teaches the lesson, the team then meets to discuss results, the team redesigns and a different teacher “re-teaches” the lesson. The peer collaboration, focus on results and meta-cognitive processes appealed to us. The model we formed relies upon carefully formed and prepared local Collaborative Study Investigation teams. We call them CSI teams. We envisioned those teams using science-like methodology and systematic approaches in identifying and formulating researchable problems of local interest and need, then undertaking deliberate steps to research, develop, implement, revise and disseminate findings and share products that are mutually compatible with the school district and Center goals. We believed the model would meet the urgent needs and priorities of different school districts while addressing

the needs of university faculty, and would use the research interests and mathematical and science talents of higher education faculty in most appropriate ways.

The Model: Modified Japanese Lesson Study

The Lesson Study approach has recently been reported in U.S. journals in pure and adapted forms (Fernandez & Chokshi, 2002; North Central Regional Laboratory, 2002). As a model, Lesson Study is known for its effective professional development through collaborative, reflective, research-based actions, and for its positive effects on pupil learning.

The model, as modified for use in SEOCEMS (see Figure 2), consists of five key activities:

1. Forming and preparing Collaborative Study Investigation teams;
2. assembling and evaluating classroom and district data;
3. developing researchable problems based on local issues;
4. researching development of “treatments” and implementation processes; and
5. disseminating products and findings within and across the Center’s region.

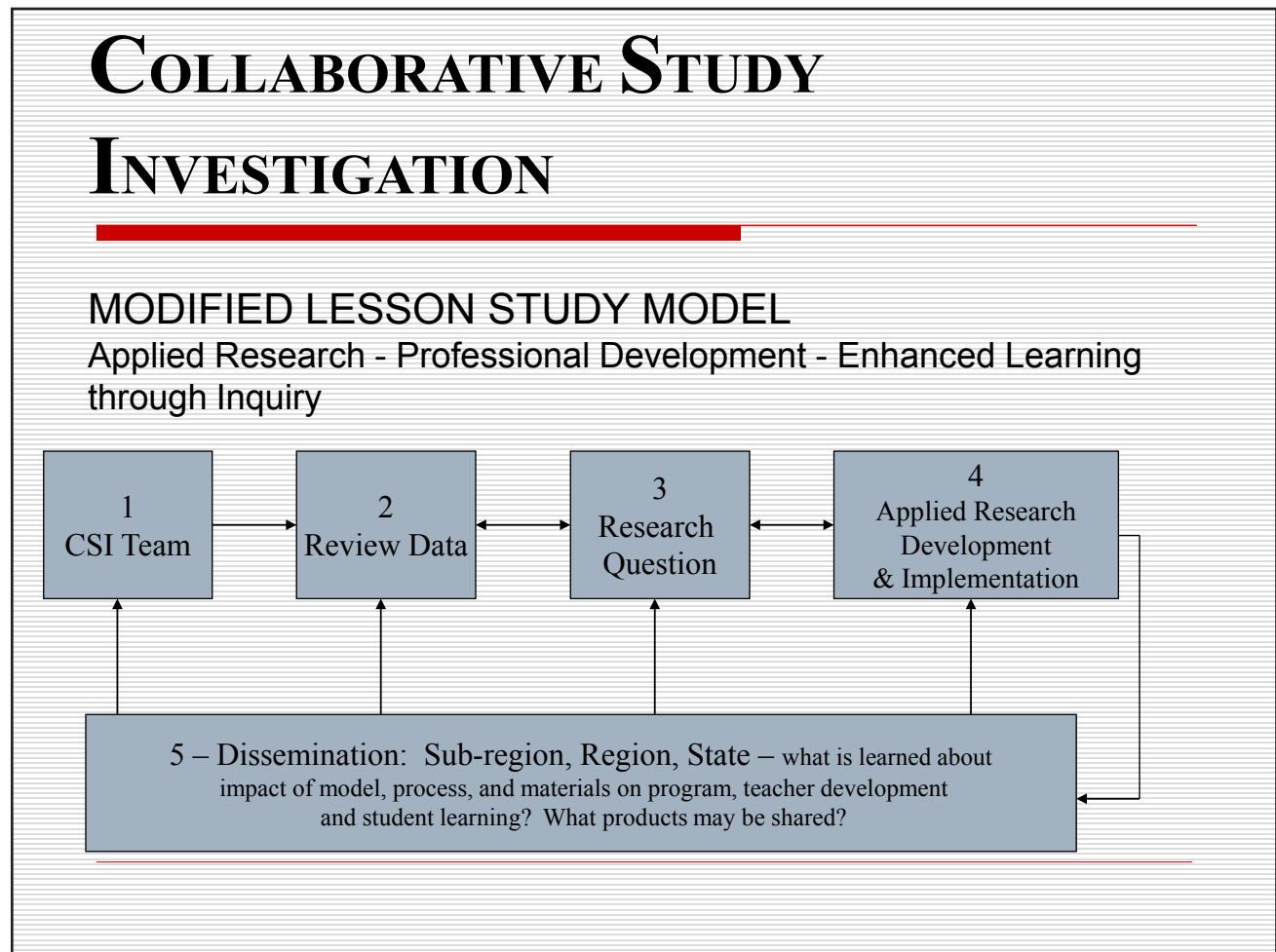


Figure 2.

SEOCEMS issued an RFP to begin the process. Middle and high school teachers were invited to form a CSI team with a university faculty member, whose role would be to become a full participant and offer special talents in support of the team. Grants (\$10,000) were issued to support the work of 14 teams over a 6-year time frame. Money was available for released time, materials, consultants, travel, modest honoraria, equipment, etc. Teams agreed to work for up to two years and were supported by the center in the form of workshops, seminars, on-site support and web-based learning materials. These forms of support helped to guide the teams through the modified lesson study process, which was rich in inquiry. We presumed immersion into the inquiry research processes would bring a positive professional impact from reflection and stimulate professional growth in the spirit of Japanese Lesson Study.

Teams proposed their own problems, which were often based on observed difficulties or perceptions about the district's results shown on state tests. Typically, a team stated its intent to use an intervention as a means to produce immediate gains in annual state test scores without realizing the limits and ramifications of what they proposed to do. So, our intervention was to encourage them to sharpen their problem and consider appropriate sources of data that would shed light on the underlying causes and incremental improvements that may be observed. We found ourselves using much of the same lesson study model for planning our interactions with and providing support for the teams.

Overall, 65 teachers were involved and provided direct services to more than 3,400 students. The CSI teams' research often proposed to use a classical treatment and control group quantitative data design, but after considerable reflection and guidance soon evolved into mixed methods using both quantitative and qualitative data with repeated observations and assessments. Though one may critique the quality of the research, teachers did become passionate about their observations and expanded their professional reflection. Team reports suggest gains in test scores ranged from 8% to 95%. According to the team reports, student test scores typically improved by approximately 15 percentile points on the state test. Teachers regarded this as a large improvement in the number of students who were able to pass the Ohio Graduation Test. Teachers reported additional "softer" benefits such as improved pupil attendance, reduced tardiness, more attentiveness, and more thoughtful questions and answers. These things made the school leaders and the parents happy, and brought positive attention to the teachers' efforts.

What did the teams investigate?

A list of CSI Team Projects is provided in Figure 3. Five teams chose to investigate the effective uses of a chosen form of technology and its impact on student achievement and learning. One team of mathematics teachers leveraged SEOCEMS' modest grant to garner significant additional funding and placed "Smart board" technology in each high school mathematics classroom, and arranged for instruction

in how to use them effectively. Its school leadership was convinced of the potential for learning and encouraged the science teachers to try similar efforts. Another team extended its emphasis on technology by refurbishing old computers to place in the homes of students who did not have them, so that all learners could have seamless ways to extend their school learning. A different team believed its attempts to use the Lon Capa learning system produced better teacher questions and caused instruction to become more focused and purposeful, thus producing increases in test scores.

Three teams investigated the impact of block schedules for improving achievement. This was not a topic we had anticipated and was certainly not a typical lesson study project. However, since the goal of the model was to support teacher-defined projects, we proceeded. One team's motives were to make a case for keeping a block schedule while its superintendent wished to drop it, and they were able to use data to make their case for retaining and expanding the block. Other school teams accumulated academic impact and student attitude data, which convinced additional teachers and principals to expand the practice school wide.

Four teams investigated the impact of specific instructional practices and two of those focused especially on the uses of graphics and organizers for improving student skills. These were crucial areas of low student performance and deemed essential for advancing test performance. The teams were correct; students became more confident in using graphs and were able to glean data from graphical images, and test scores improved.

One team attempted a unique arrangement combining science field studies and mathematics classes. Students in the math classes designed, piloted and revised the surveys and selected the statistical processes to be used to study the achievement, attitudes and process skills of the science students who needed to master the biology of benthic organisms while studying and mapping the water quality of local streams. The biological study was published in the Ohio Division of Natural Resources annual report and presented at a National Science Teachers Association conference. The collaborative inquiry processes are now embedded in the school's science curriculum, and there is a shared understanding across the departments about the mutual benefits to be gained for students when science and mathematics are linked. Another CSI project also discovered the benefits of coordinated math and science topics (e.g., slope in math and rate of change in science) through mutual support for each others' instruction and a clearer, durable impact on learners.

What were the benefits to the teachers?

When asked about the impact the CSI experience may have had on their professional development, teachers most often mentioned the value of the new insights they had formed. These insights revolved around exposure to previously unknown teaching materials, uses of instructional technologies (e.g., student response systems) and ways to conceptualize and improve their instruction. Appreciation

was expressed for expanded skills they gained, again often in learning how to use technology as tools in their classrooms, and for acquiring and using data to make instructional decisions. Collaboration within and across academic disciplines was most mentioned and perhaps most valued.

After all of the teams efforts, what was sustained? Responses were mostly specific to the particulars of the team projects, but in a global sense the instructional improvements that yielded desirable changes in student behavior and achievement were maintained. Teachers continued to use more and different tools, drilled down to focus on student skills development, took appropriate measures, and planned strategic interventions to support learners' opportunities for successes.

When asked about their team projects and what they would do differently if they could have a "do-over," all teams acknowledged their focus questions were too broad, indistinct, overly ambitious or beyond their skills and capacity. Teams still wanted to impact student scores on the state test, but now realized that many intermediate steps could or should be taken in order to build, over time, toward elevating achievement as measured by the graduation test. Teachers confessed their need to understand how to plan and conduct

simple research, and acknowledged their designs often were impractical and did not yield the types of controls they had hoped to put into place. Qualitative data became more respected within a school culture of quantification, and most understood the value of multiple measures. Though not their passions, the majority of the team members did acknowledge the value of doing place-based research and the benefits of using results to inform or drive decisions.

What did we learn about the CSI model that we adapted from Lesson Study? What benefits did the teachers identify from their two-year participation? On-site interviews with team members were conducted throughout their participation and during our annual conferences after their studies had been completed. As well, the teams' final reports provided insight, and these are some of the observations provided by the teachers:

- As tedious as they were to do (and seldom done by oneself), literature reviews and syntheses of research were helpful for discovering potential solutions. Time invested produced time saved as the literature provided concrete roadmaps that might be followed, and inspired perseverance toward change. After all, the teachers reasoned, if other schools had found value in a particular

CSI Team Projects

- **Effective uses of technology**
- **Effectiveness of LON-CAPA for OGT science intervention**
- **How can technology improve student learning: SMART boards in the classroom**
- **Does technology have a positive influence on learning in the classroom?**
- **Does integration of technology into high school science classrooms improve student achievement?**
- **The effects of differentiated instruction on student achievement in middle and high school math and science classrooms**
- **Strategies for math and science based on Ohio academic content standards**
- **Using Japanese lesson study model to develop lessons for 80 minute mathematics classes**
- **Will improving students' skills in using graphic information affect student achievement?**
- **How will improving of graphs, charts, and tables skills affect student achievement across the curriculum?**
- **Developing high-quality field research using a modified lesson study format**
- **Block scheduling**
- **The effect of block scheduling on math and science achievement in the high school classroom**

Figure 3.

technology or practice, might benefits also occur in an Appalachian school?

- Teacher access to an array of tools for assessment helped to reduce some of the stress of the study rather than construct new, untested tools. More confidence was placed in the reliability of the data that may be harvested, and deeper, more thoughtful teacher insights about content, teaching and learning were acquired.
- The dialogues among team members helped teachers to uncover misconceptions about content, and misassumptions about student learning were set aside. The availability of classroom tested resources and peer support systems helped to strengthen teacher confidence in their subject matter and in learning to use a different technology.
- The iterative processes of the model and the need for planned, consistent communication helped teachers to improve instruction.
- Though it was often difficult for teachers to put into words or support with succinct data, qualitatively they perceived important gains in the quality of student classroom and laboratory work.
- The collaborative processes required by the model helped to develop a type of collegial respect and professional understanding that had been missing, and teachers vowed to continue the practice.
- Teacher-constructed assessments improved and the understandings that supported those improvements were linked to aspects of the model.
- Inquiry processes experienced by teachers were modified and used in their own classrooms. Teachers reported improvements in student answers for short and extended response test items, which they attributed to their own more thoughtful approaches to content sequences and to clearer purposes while teaching.
- Teacher dialogue about instruction with other teachers became more centered on effective conditions for learning. This was a large departure from the prior school culture and the residual effects of professional dialogue provided many benefits for learners, according to teacher testimony.

What did we learn?

An honest appraisal of a model is required from its architects. What did we learn and conclude from our synthesis of teacher practice? While it was nice to find that teacher positive comments outweighed any that may be negative, and early teacher “failures” later became successes, we were often nagged by the teachers’ views of research and those of the mathematics and science university faculty. The research methodology of math and science is quite different from the methodology used in the social sciences and education, and the math and science faculty members sometimes had difficulty in advising teams regarding research.

We eventually experienced limits in extending the model to additional schools. School economies, changing political landscapes, limits to our own funding, and growing teacher weariness over high stakes testing eventually became impediments. Yet the teachers’ views of research seemed to spring to the forefront. When oriented to the research aspect of the CSI model, many team members would often appear as deer transfixed in headlights. As we nudged them to share their impressions, we detected an undercurrent of edgy questions like: What value is research? Isn’t that something professors have to do get tenure? Why should I (teacher) do research? I don’t need to publish! Why is research important for me? My concern is getting my students to: _____ (fill in the blank with almost any academic task).

As we reflected on these notions, we thought a different approach may be an improvement and maybe a lesson can be learned from almost any physics teacher in a U.S. school. Students often perceive physics to be very difficult, abstract, mathematically intensive, and driven by complicated equations that must be memorized. Often placed in the senior year of the school curriculum, physics can be avoided by all but the students who most wish to get into a good college with marks earned in rigorous courses or those who wish to major in the sciences. More than 30 years ago an approach to physics was tried that helped to overturn impressions that physics must be difficult, will reduce your GPA, and does not affect “me.” The inventor of this approach is lost to history, but high profile groups (such as NASA and AAPT) now support the approach, and more than 200,000 entries are found when Googled. It probably began like this: how would you like to take a field trip to an amusement park and ride the coasters? Riding the coasters, feeling the forces and energy transformation, and experiencing micro-gravity and then discussing the forces behind the sensations set up real-world questions and those questions became the sources for investigations that eventually layered on some science. After it was all over the teacher could say, by the way, we were doing physics. The label that conjured up images of boredom, irrelevance and difficulty was removed as a barrier and the learners were free to focus on the important stuff and become turned on by the investigations that they helped to design. Images of physics were replaced by exciting experiences through *Amusement Park Physics* programs.

I think we might try a similar approach; remove the words “research” and “research paper.” Just by changing the name of the task we could get past a psychological barrier of doing “research.” As an alternative, we could focus on the teachers’ questions and use those questions to pose more questions about how we might pursue answers, identify what evidence we might need, think about how we might make sense of the evidence, and plan how we might share what we know or think we know. The “we” is the team and supporters from the Center working with the teachers. After a time we could ask, by-the way, do you know what we have been doing? We have been doing “research.”

This process could become similar to the Elements of Research offered by Roberts, Bove, and van Zee in their book *Teacher Research: Stories of Learning and Growing* (2007). The elements of research are embedded in the normal teaching practices of the classrooms, and over time have the potential to become more intentional before becoming more formal in practice like those of us generally use when preparing for a conference, such as this one, or when writing for publication. This type of progression could become natural for educators. Rooted in the elements of inquiry, a curiosity drives a desire to know and eventually produces a culture that does not necessarily think about inquiry simply because of the habits of mind have become a natural way of thinking and behaving. Collaboration and communication becomes a basis for professional bonding. The processes of inquiry are very much in the Sense and Sense-Making standards proposed by the National Council of Teacher of

Mathematics, and remain the core of science standards and 21st Century Skills, which benefit all learners.

In closing, I leave you with an excerpt from Eleanor Duckworth's (1987) essay on *Teaching as Research*. I think she captured the importance of inquiry and its potential for nudging a cultural change when she wrote:

I am not proposing that school teachers single-handedly become published researchers in the development of human learning. Rather I am proposing that teaching, understood as engaging learners in phenomena and working to understanding the sense they are making, might be the sine qua non of such research.

This kind of researcher would be a teacher in the sense of caring about some part of the world and how it works enough to want to make it accessible

Teacher Research: Stories of Learning and Growing by Deborah Roberts, Claire Bove and Emily van Zee (Eds) (2007). Arlington, VA: NSTA Press, p. x

Table 1: Elements of Research

Elements of Research Embedded in Normal Teaching Practices	Intentional Research Practices	Formal Research Practices
QUESTIONING		
Noticing and wondering in the act of teaching	Generating issues to be explored Becoming aware of relevant literature	Formulating a formal research question Developing a theoretical framework within which that question will be examined
COLLECTING EVIDENCE		
Having stacks of student work	Choosing and copying examples of student writings and drawings	Audio- and video-taping instruction
Noting what happened and ideas for changes in a lesson plan book	Keeping anecdotal records of student progress	Archiving lesson plans, student work email messages, and other artifacts
Having students assemble portfolios of their work	Writing a reflective journal	Generating data such as responses on surveys
MAKING SENSE OF THE EVIDENCE		
Thinking about what happened Talking with colleagues	Discussing copies of student work Writing descriptive accounts of what happened Making connections to others' relevant findings	Watching and discussing video clips of students in action Writing analyses of students' actions and utterances Analyzing survey responses Writing about ways that findings support or disconfirm results reported elsewhere
SHARING		
Talking with colleagues	Meeting with a teacher inquiry group Facilitating discussion of student learning during a staff meeting	Presenting at a conference Writing for publication

Figure 4.

to others. He or she would be fascinated by the questions of how to engage people in it and how people make sense of it and would have time and resources to pursue these questions to the depth of his or her interest, to write what he or she learned, and to contribute to the theoretical and pedagogical discussion on the nature and development of human learning. (p. 140)

Inquiry inspires and supports a journey that can change the culture of a profession, particularly if the profession values the habits of mind that are necessary to nurture an ability to think critically.

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Keynote Address

What's in a Name: Learning, Supporting, and Affirming Diverse Histories and Communities

Ronald Rochon
Buffalo State College

Introduction

This past year has been one of the most difficult of my life, both personally and professionally, due to the unexpected passing of my mother, from cancer. Fortunately I have many friends and colleagues who have stood by me and persevered with me—people like Gordon Brooks, an incredible ambassador for the Mid-Western Educational Research Conference. He was patient and tolerant of my inability to always respond on a timely basis. I am thankful for that.

I am also thankful for the opportunity to speak about my work and some things that are on my mind pertaining to teacher education. I am really excited about the graduate students in the audience, about what they are doing with their professional lives and within their communities. I want to encourage students to push the faculty who guide them, in order to bring amazing change to our profession. I urge each of you to work hard to sustain this organization as it moves forward.

Embracing Brilliance

Wherever I go, I talk about my children. My wife, Lynn and I have been blessed with two amazing children. Ayinde and Nia are the loves of my life. Nia has been losing her final baby teeth...just tooth after tooth falling out. My children call me “Baba,” it means *Daddy* in Swahili. Recently Nia came in my home office and said, “Baba, this tooth finally came out.” She was so happy because this tooth didn’t hurt. Later that night I was sitting in my office finishing some work at two in the morning. All of a sudden I remembered that the Tooth Fairy had not arrived. I jumped out of my chair and began to search my pockets, but all I pulled out was a debit card. No money anywhere in my pockets, desk, car, nothing.

So I did something that I normally never do. I do not know about the way you grew up, but I was raised in a household with a mother of African descent who taught me that you never touch a woman’s purse. However, that evening Lynn was already asleep. So I went into her purse.

I picked up my Lynn’s purse as if it had a disease and went into her wallet. All I found was credit cards and no cash. I knew I was in trouble. I began to panic because I did not want to go out at two in the morning to get cash to exchange for this tooth.

Then I remembered that Nia had a piggy bank; and I thought—an unjustifiable justification for my intention—that Nia’s money was MY money. So I went into Nia’s piggy bank—and let me tell you, this child’s got some money. I was impressed—and the smallest bill I found was five dollars. She had a good financial year. So I put that five dollar bill under her pillow and I went to bed.

The next morning I woke up to these big, beautiful, brown, pensive eyes staring at me—they were distraught eyes. Nia says to me, “Baba, good morning.”

I said, “How you doing?”

She sighed, “Not good.”

“Nia, what’s wrong?”

“Baba,” she said, “the Tooth Fairy’s a thief.”

Shocked, I said, “Sweetheart, why would you say something like that? That’s not a nice thing to say.”

She said, “Baba, I know I’m not supposed to say stuff like that, but look! This is MY five dollar bill.” Now at this point, I’m starting to sweat.

“I can prove it,” she continued, “All my money in my bank, I mark up, and this one has my initials on it! The Tooth Fairy gave me my own money!”

Ah, children. So you know who the big, bald-headed, brown, tooth fairy is in my house now. I tell you that story with dear, sincere love for my child. And my child is no different than other children. She’s creative. She tries to please her parents and her teachers. And, she is a community member. The interesting thing is that my child—and I would say all children—came out of their mothers’ wombs at genius level.

Nia learned, at a very young age, the importance of collaboration and how collaboration can help herself and others. She embraces her surroundings and constantly seeks to learn more about the world, as do all children. The frightening and yet exciting piece is that we have the opportunity of fulfilling the dreams of these genius children, by giving them a curriculum that will propel them to new heights. We also have the option to dummy them down and flatten their creativity.

Sadly, in many ways across this nation, we are “dumbing” children down by not affording them the kind of curriculum that encourages them to grow as creative developers and producers of knowledge rather than consumers and trained responders. I found out that Nia marks her money because of her brother. She wants to make sure that he does not get HER money; she refuses to collaborate in making HIS bank account bigger! Brilliance at its finest.

Applications to Community Needs

Buffalo, New York

I have lived in the Buffalo area for the past five years and have developed a strong interest in identifying ways that we, as a community, can respond to some of the challenges that we face in the region. There was an article published last year in the Buffalo News that revealed an unemployment rate of 51% for African American men in Buffalo. Professor Mark Levine, at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee,

conducted a study of 35 urban hubs around the nation and found Buffalo to be number one with regard to the number of unemployed African American men. The cities to immediately follow Buffalo's ranking were Milwaukee, Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago. Each of these cities has a near 51% unemployment rate among African American men. The thing that really hit me the day I read the article was the idea of "community." How can one sustain a community with this kind of unemployment rate? How can one build relationships within this kind of unemployment rate? What variables impact such outcomes?

Examining African American communities with regard to student academic performance, among African American boys in particular, you see a very similar kind of struggle if specific variables are studied. New York State ranked 11 out of 50 with graduation rates among students of European descent; however, it ranked 32 out of 50 for African American students. According to the New York State 2007-2008 district report cards, the city of Buffalo, across races, had only a 46% total graduation rate. The graduation rate was 41% for African American students in Buffalo.

On the other hand, Williamsville, a very affluent suburban community outside of Buffalo, had an overall graduation rate of 94% and 88% for African American students. When one looks at responses to this issue, one variable is quite telling. Free and reduced lunch eligibility for Williamsville is only 4%, compared to 70% in Buffalo.

So one of the things I am interested in finding out, is how we connect these variables—the issue of student performance and relationships among community members while considering a variety of variables. I examine community structures and seek to determine how communities are surviving. Buffalo is struggling economically, in particular, because of a population exodus due not only to a lack of jobs within the city, but also to changes in the ethnic and racial makeup of neighborhoods. Essentially I am talking about White-flight.

Another trend in Buffalo is a major increase in the number of vacant homes. Currently Buffalo has nearly 20,000 vacant and abandoned homes. Further, the areas with the most vacant homes are populated primarily by Latino and African American residents. Dilapidated, hollow homes that were once regal structures, are located right by schools—literally one block, two blocks, three blocks from schools. Children walk past these structures—where weeds are taller than they are, where debris piles up, where drugs are used and sold, where gang activities pervade.

We ask children every morning, to come to school excited. We ask them to be prepared for pedagogical exchange. We ask them to come to school eager and ready to work with their teachers. We ask them to be ready to be taught and to learn. I doubt that any of us, as faculty and students, would be eager or prepared to engage in the academic enterprise, if we had to walk past such areas on a daily basis.

But as one goes throughout the country, in particular through urban hubs, one can see homes that look just like the ones found in Buffalo. One can and will encounter children studying and living and growing within such dismal settings. Based on research and observation we know that we have children who get to the 3rd and 4th grade who never want to see

a school again; they despise school. How does that happen for some children and not for others? How do we address this?

Texas

While traveling a few years ago I visited an area in Texas, where there was a racially and linguistically diverse student body. Outside the high school, seniors were wearing t-shirts designed by the students that said, "Graduation '04. The End of a 12-year Depression," accompanied by an image of a ball and chain. Seeing students wearing this shirt was very disturbing to me. It seemed unbelievable that students would use the word "depression" to describe their K-12 school experiences. I went into that school, I went to the community nearby, and by my analysis those students did not get it wrong—they were enveloped in a crumbling and debris filled school and neighborhood. In and of itself, this should be problematic for all of us. Why should someone else's child attend a school like that if we know for certain we would never want or allow our own children to be there?

But I have a choice. Just as my colleagues do, as most of you do. What options do parents without political empowerment and personal resources have? How can guardians "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," when they are working so hard just to put shoes on their children? What alarms me is that many university faculty and administrators know very little about schools like this, about agencies in such a condition, about that way of living, or rather, surviving.

Wisconsin

For the last 10 years I've been working with students to locate different media imagery and examine the impact of that imagery on relationships and consider how teachers teach students. When I first saw a particular poster of rap artist DMX, at a store window in a predominantly white community, it really gave me pause because it juxtaposed a huge pit-bull with this young man of African descent. The pit bull had a thick chain around his neck and it was obvious he was in attack mode. Anyone seeing that image would not be excited about the idea of touching that dog. What does an image correlating a Black man with an angry, vicious-looking animal say to the viewer? With regard to this particular construct, I think about the connection between how we see African American men and about how these young men are faring in school. These are issues I think we should discuss. These are issues with which we should be concerned.

One of my students in Wisconsin found a collection of posters in a record store. The community was very small and majority White. Most of the posters were of nearly naked African American women in very sexually provocative poses, many in the midst of a very animal or jungle type "theme." The student was shocked to find them so easily accessible by anyone, of any age, in a public shopping center. What struck me was that, as one walked through that particular shopping mall, one could see no African American men, and no African American women. The pictures were quite telling for me as to what my neighbors in Wisconsin would see on a daily basis and what their understanding of African American life and African American men and women might be. I began to question even more, how do images affect the construct we have in our minds with regard to race, gender,

and social class? Do we remember that the men and women we see in images on the internet, in magazines, and on posters, are someone's daughters or sons? Somebody's baby, just like my daughter, Nia.

Another image that greatly affected me was that of an energy drink called Pimp Juice. Initially, I thought it was a joke. Sadly it was a real item, widely promoted to young men in that same majority White community. Seeing this and hearing students, little boys, across race, saying that they wanted to "be pimps" is another construct that I think deserves discussion. What does it mean? How did we get there? Can we move away from this construct? How do we recover?

I'm learning more and more that what we do, how we teach, and who we decide to teach is really connected to what we see on a daily basis, and whether or not we feel comfortable about whom we teach. What we do to create greater discussion about these images is important to me. But my interest is not to censor. I don't think censorship is the answer. Rather, I believe we need to find ways to bring healthy, deliberate discussions into our classrooms and homes about these particular issues. When children have the opportunity to talk openly about the images they see, they will raise incredible questions about how they view themselves and how other people view them and their communities. Policy makers and educators must be prepared to engage these questions and take responsibility for the answers.

Applications to Our Nation's Needs

Days before the election of President Barack Obama, D.L. Hughley's regular show aired on CNN and was focused on the economy. Hughley was talking about Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, as if they were next-door neighbors. Knowing that he's a comedian, not an economist, I wondered where he was headed with his topic about the impact of current financial conditions on African American communities. Eventually I received my answer. D.L. Hughley said, "Listen, we are fortunate because we have Freddie Mac here for an exclusive interview." Then a man came onto the screen—an African American man dressed in purple velour, gold chains, and a gaudy hat. He was clearly dressed to portray the stereotypical image of a pimp. Not only was the image disturbing, but the stereotypical language and jargon that was delivered was equally troubling.

This parody of African American life and culture was quite difficult to see and hear for many reasons. This CNN show was aired on Prime Time television, children had access to it, and women and African American men were being referenced very degradingly. This parody stood alone, without any other viewpoint or example of African American people and cultures. Think about the kinds of stereotypes that we have been fighting against for so long in our communities and as a nation. How does what we see and listen to shape our views of other people? The danger of parodies like this, for uninformed communities, is the reinforcement of stereotypes that are harmful to our view of one another. They affect the ways in which we interact, the ways that we approach others, the ways that teachers instruct children. Again, I think it brings a greater opportunity for discussion.

Over the last 10 years we have seen more and more blackface come forward; students of European descent at Halloween parties, in blackface, pretending to be lynched or beaten. Amazingly, we see this kind of behavior almost yearly on university campuses. It frustrates campus faculty but, again, I do not believe these students came out of their mothers' wombs as racist, classist, sexist, or homophobic. I am convinced these students do not understand the significance of lynching in American history. To see photographs of a student with a big smile while there is a noose around his neck is quite revealing about his lack of knowledge of the history and struggles real people have endured. I believe we have a curriculum and society that reinforces this kind of behavior. I believe educators have a responsibility to directly address these difficult issues and topics with their students and with one another.

What are we doing to reach "all" students? What are we doing to reach our K-12 and community partners? I don't think being angry at students is the answer. I believe that we as educators have an opportunity to bring a different kind of conversation in our classrooms—a different kind of opportunity to create new policy and to discuss where we can go and what we will do to introduce, improve, and promote critical thinking in our classrooms.

Identity Development

I grew up listening to a song called "To Be Young Gifted and Black" by Nina Simone. It was always a reminder, especially to my grandmother, that we were to be extremely proud of our history as African Americans. It was a reminder that the notion of culture had to be a driving factor in my daily life—the way I behaved, the way I carried myself, understanding my connection to community, and my responsibility to family. It is key for me to learn what we are doing within classrooms to convey to students—across race and in a very healthy way—these values. The more I learn about my history, the more I want to learn about other people—their history, their gifts, their developments, their struggles, their triumphs. Diverse voices are exciting for me because they give a better understanding of how important it is that we raise our children to be better—wiser, kinder, stronger—than we have been. Every generation should be prepared to make better decisions and choices than the generation before.

An African Experience in Identity

Over the last eight years I have traveled often to Ghana, West Africa, to do work and research at Ghanaian colleges and historical sites. I have been fortunate enough to develop a collaborative exchange with several Ghanaians and have developed opportunities for students to visit Ghana and to bring faculty from Ghana to the U.S. Learning more about Africa and Africans has been an amazing voyage for me.

One aspect I have concentrated my research on is slave trade structures still standing all along Africa's west coast, the Gold Coast. El Mina is a slave castle that rests on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean and was erected in 1482 by the Portuguese army. About five miles down the road from El Mina is another slave castle called Cape Coast. It is even larger and was erected by the British about the same time.

Men and women were housed in these castles in separate cinder block dungeons. Those who rebelled were many times chained in the court yard to die of starvation, heat, and thirst and to serve as an example and threat to other slaves who could hear their dying cries. Archaeologists working at El Mina have found human remains, primarily of women and children who never received a proper burial, scattered in the main courtyard.

Everything in the slave castles was significant based on the history of the slave trade, but probably the most intriguing for me was learning about the castle governor. The governor of the Portuguese army is basically equivalent to the general of a U.S. army.

The governor resided in an extremely spacious suite of private rooms. Every morning he could open up his shutters and look out at the Atlantic Ocean, while his breakfast was brought to him. Near his bedroom was a stairwell. It went down to a landing; just below the landing was the women's dungeon. The governor lived in a suite of rooms that spanned a space larger than the dungeon beneath that caged hundreds of enslaved women. Standing on a platform the governor was able to look down and see captured African women—Ibos, Yoruba, Ashanti—women of different ethnic groups from all over Western Africa. He could decide which woman or women he would have, which women he would give to the men in his army. Rape was rampant in these facilities, though in much of the historical data that was shared with me from Ghanaian scholars, I also learned about the wives and families these men had back in Europe.

The female dungeon is quite difficult to visit. The room is long and narrow with a floor, walls, and ceiling of concrete. The dungeon doesn't look much different than it did when in use, no furniture or windows. An opening was added for tourism and when I went in the very first time with just a few others it was incredibly stuffy and dark. I was told that there would be at least 200 or more women in these dungeons for months at a time; for months at a time in a dungeon with cement walls, cement floors, and only one tiny window high up. Women ate their food in this dungeon, women drank their water in this dungeon, women urinated in this dungeon, women defecated in this dungeon. Many women died in this dungeon. We don't know their names. We know very little about their history, about their gifts, about their aspirations, about their dreams for their children.

I have visited six different slave castles in Ghana and have found that many of these cells went down into the bowels of the building. The men's dungeon was quite similar to the women's dungeon: no windows, four sides of concrete. In several of the castles, women were kept on one side of the facility and men kept on the other side. They could not see one another, but knew that their spouses, children, parents, and friends were nearby suffering. They could only connect with their voices, deciphering their collective pain, though their cries were multilingual. They could not see or touch one another.

It is imperative that we consider the psychological torment these individuals endured. I consistently ask teachers, what can we do to bring this history forward? Instead of talking about Africa as downtrodden and jungle-like, how can

we talk about the history of Africa and Africans with regard to resiliency and struggle? How can we talk about the ways people worked through this particular period of history? The mere fact that I am here, an ancestor of these individuals, tells you that resiliency is alive and well in our community. So how do we create that kind of discourse?

Kunte Kinte and Identity Development

My return to Africa is quite significant for many reasons and each year I go back or talk about what I have learned, it becomes even more significant.

In the film series *Roots* there is a scene with Kunta Kinte, the slave who had run away several times, who had been caught yet again. The overseer had strung Kunta Kinte up and had beaten him almost to death because Kunta Kinte refused to accept the name his slave owners gave him, Toby. I remember very clearly, as a young boy watching the beating, wondering why would he not say what they wanted him to say, that his name was Toby. Why would he not accept that name?

What I came to understand is that Kunta Kinte had amazing vision; he understood that by accepting the name Toby, he may one day see himself as less than, just as the slave owner saw him. He understood that he may one day decide that he no longer liked his nose or his lips, that his skin color was wrong. He may see himself as a student belonging in special education as a result of faulty premises. He might denounce his community, denounce his creator, and denounce his mother. He would stop knowing himself as Kunta Kinte, a proud Mandinka warrior. Instead, he would call himself Negro. He would call himself big-lipped, flat nosed, nappy headed, ugly, and uneducable. In fact, one day, he might come to use the "N" word to describe himself and others in his community. His children's children might use that word in their music, use it in reference to their friends and their enemies.

Instead of accepting all these concepts lurking within the name Toby, he said, "My name is Kunta Kinte." He understood that if he went to the place of releasing his name and his ancestry, the ability to come back to the way he was—appreciating, loving, and affirming himself—might not be a possibility.

Our Collective, Collaborative Responsibility

Viewing Kunta Kinte's situation, especially from faculty perspective, I wonder what we are currently doing to reach children, to provide them a healthy sense of truth about history. When you talk to students about renowned African Americans, do not simply have them look at pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr. and listen to "I Have a Dream." Rather, make sure that they can talk to you about the lives and struggles and accomplishments of the many African American women and men who influence our history, our policies, our beliefs, and our future. Can your students talk about the impact of Langston Hughes? Can they tell you about the importance of Mae Jemison? Do they know about Dr. Ben Carson or Dr. Keith Black? Can they share stories about Fannie Lou Hamer and use history as a way to reflect on contemporary communities and collaboration?

What's In a Name?

After taking office, President Obama visited Africa's west coast and went to one of the same slave castles where I have done research. Having the President identify himself as a friend of Ghana, and hearing him talk about his own children and how much the trip to Africa means to his own family, was extremely important. It was especially touching to me, because I took my son with me on my last trip to Ghana this past summer. Ayinde is 12 years old and his name is West African, a Yoruba name. Everywhere we went the Ghanaians were so affirming of his name. This made Ayinde light up with pride. To watch my son being affirmed by his elders in Ghana, men and women saying to him, "Ah your name is so strong. Your name has such powerful meaning," was something I took incredible pride in as well.

There has never been a child that I have met, across race, who has had difficulty saying my son's name, never. Only adults struggle. So many adults, many teachers, have asked me, "What's his nickname? What can we call your son?" They want to be given something "normal" to call my son, some name that they are comfortable saying. But Ayinde doesn't have a nickname—his name is not Toby—his name is Ayinde.

One of Ayinde's first school-like experiences was a YMCA kickball camp in Wisconsin. I introduced my son to his teacher and joined the other parents to watch the children practice. At the teacher's instruction, the children lined up to take turns kicking the ball. And as children came to the front, she would call out their names to encourage them. "Heather, you're next. Nice. Beth, good job. Ok, Charles, go ahead. Sam, wonderful! OK, next, You, go ahead..." As I heard her say "You" that first time, in reference to Ayinde, I knew I had to be mistaken. She did not just call my son, "You," did she? I decided, with my wife's urging, to calm myself and anticipate the best from this teacher. She clearly cared for the children and was serious about her job. Perhaps she was simply nervous using his name the first time; I had to believe she understood the potential damage in calling a child, You. She would surely respect him the way she did the other children. But she didn't.

The children were scattered and she began calling them forward to line up again. "Alex, Sam, Theresa, step in line right here. Ok, Charles, you're next. Then Matilda, Heather. Ok, You, right here, You..." I had to talk to the teacher at the first free moment; it was important to me that Ayinde hear his teacher use and affirm his name. This was not about anger or shaming the teacher; rather, it was the need for me to protect my child.

Additionally, it was an opportunity for this teacher to develop a stronger perspective about the importance of identity, confidence, and dignity.

What is in an Educator?

I am an educator and I believe in teachable moments and facing challenging situations and issues—facing them with respect, honesty and the realization that every individual has a unique set of notions and viewpoints that must be considered as we share our own ideas and expectations. My talk with Ayinde's YMCA teacher was the first of many healthy

conversations I have had with the teachers and guardians of my children over the years. Your name is your identity; the one thing you can carry with you no matter what changes, where you go, or what is lost. Learning and using a person's given (or chosen) name is, to me, equivalent to looking her or him in the eye. It is an indication that one matters and is recognized. In contrast, asking people to adjust something as essential to their being, a name, so that others can feel more at ease, seems dismissive and marginalizing.

I have been blessed with an opportunity to travel frequently across the United States as well as many countries overseas. When introduced to locals, particularly in China and Ghana, people would generally give me their Anglo name. I was taken aback that all these new acquaintances, living across the world from me, had names that sounded like those of my U.S. neighbors. I expected the language and names to be different from those in my country so far away. I quickly learned that many people overseas choose an English-based name to make it easy and undemanding for tourists and guests to their country. They change their identity so that foreigners do not have to step out of their comfort zones or learn new, "strange" words. But I wanted to know the native names of the wonderful people I met and requested this during introductions. At first my hosts would decline, apologize for the differences, and again offer the Anglo name. With respectful persistence they would eventually share their true name and I could sense, each time, the pride they felt in saying it as well as a level of appreciation that a visitor was affirming their individuality.

Assimilation or Collaboration

Each of these experiences continues to strike me with the power of assimilation, the ways in which we are willing and coerced to change ourselves to be accepted. Assimilation crosses oceans, defies international borders, and evades neighborhood boundaries.

So, I pose this question to faculty, staff, and administrators at the university level as well as in our schools: What are you doing, right now, to affirm one another? To affirm your students? What are you doing to enhance collaboration and encourage a healthy discourse among your constituents? How are you moving forward to build and cooperate rather than reduce and dictate?

Transformative Community Building

At the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse I worked with a close friend and colleague to develop an organization called the Research Center for Cultural Diversity and Community Renewal (CDCR). Clif Tanabe, now a professor at the University of Hawaii, and I wrote several grants to establish CDCR and we were fortunate enough to get nearly three million dollars for a project to provide scholarships for people of Hmong descent to become PK-12 teachers.

When I first came to La Crosse I noticed that there were large numbers of Hmong people in the schools serving as paraprofessionals, but none teaching in classrooms, none who had the autonomy and ability to develop curriculum and policies for classrooms. In conversations with school administrators, we were told that these Hmong staff mem-

bers wanted to remain paraprofessionals, they did not want to become teachers.

At one point we invited a group of the Hmong paraprofessionals and Hmong leaders to share a meal and conversation on campus. During that meeting we talked about schools and students and, on an impulse, asked if anyone in the audience wanted to become a teacher, to raise her or his hand.

Nearly every individual in the room raised a hand. It became obvious that there were misconceptions and categorizations threaded throughout the educational community, that needed to be addressed. The key thing we learned, however, was of the importance of working “WITH” the community. We needed to step out of our comfort zone and listen to the individual voices and collective desires.

I was a man of African descent going into a community of men and women of Southeast Asian descent, seeking ways to assist them in bridging a stronger connection to the university world. Certain elders were very direct with me, “What are you doing here? What do you want?” I understood these as fundamental questions and appreciated the importance for these community members to understand what I was going to bring, take, expect, and change. They wanted to know how I was going to help, understand, lead, and follow.

Clif and I spent much time building relationships with our new colleagues and, as we showed ourselves to be advocates rather than authoritarians, we were seen as allies and friends to many in the Hmong community, in La Crosse and surrounding cities. We were fortunate to secure several additional grants to assist with our initiatives. I am proud to say that many new teachers of Hmong descent graduated with the help of CDCR, including the first Hmong principal in the history of Wisconsin and, quite likely, the nation.

What we learned from this experience, and the idea that became most important to us, was the need to develop a collaborative model for communication. Through our many years in academia we had learned that most projects have a traditional model where one individual serves as the principal investigator and administrator. That person decides to help another, dictates what the other needs, and decides how the other should receive the assistance. The traditional model does not include investigative conversations with members of the group seen as needing assistance, but rather involves a stale, distanced process of watching and researching and analyzing before implementing a “solution.” Perhaps we talk with our university colleagues and other campuses, we talk ABOUT students and children and community groups; but generally traditional models involve so-called experts who decide what is needed without much input from real stakeholders.

Instead of using this traditional model, Clif and I wanted to create a collaborative model of understanding and work that brought representatives from stakeholder groups to the table. We wanted them to be part of the conversations and decision making, to be part of the narrative and part of policy creation. All constituents would be a real part of that dynamic.

Our model placed PK-12 children and teachers and area communities in the center; we saw these groups and their opinions as the real synergy of our work. Without them we did not exist and could not discuss what was happening in

the community. Surrounding the nucleus of our model we visualized a network of universities and colleges and relevant community organizations all working directly with parents and guardians, school administrators, and educators. We envisioned and facilitated opportunities for open and honest dialogue, culminating in collaborative decision-making and the implementation of initiatives designed by the very people we wanted to assist.

Conclusion—Collective Improvement

I close with an endorsement for *collective improvement*. Collaboration is hard work, but I believe it is the most significant step we can take as policy makers, educators, and university faculty. Every day we need to consider how we can bring a more collaborative spirit to our communities. We need to understand that the notion of the Ivory Tower—of US speaking down to THEM—is not acceptable. Regardless of credentials (or lack thereof) it is necessary for us to view one another as equals. We must truly consider *their* voice, *their* plan, *their* experience, as worthy of our attention and worthy of our pause.

I end this address the way I began it, with children. Nia continues to teach me as a result of her growing wisdom and character. I did, by the way apologize and give my baby the money due her for that lost tooth. In fact, we had healthy conversations about the power of children to teach and in loving ways hold their parents and elders accountable. I thanked her for her patience and love for me as her Baba.

The people of Ghana have several Adinkra symbols and one I love is that of the two crocodiles who share a stomach. The Ashanti people say that if crocodile number one fights crocodile number two for food, or vice versa, they both wither away and die. But, when each crocodile recognizes that, because they share a common stomach, when the other eats he also eats, then they both will thrive.

To the Ashanti people, the stomach is a metaphor for children. When we fight over resources, over who is most important, who’s curriculum is most significant, who should get acknowledged; it is our children who suffer. Children will replicate our behavior; they will all wither away and die, so to speak.

When we do not acknowledge all histories as equally important, we too will “wither and die.” But when we acknowledge and share, we will all grow and thrive like the crocodiles who share a common stomach.

The Ashanti also say that when two elephants tussle, only the grass suffers. Today I am asking you to stop allowing our children to suffer. Stop allowing them to walk past abandoned buildings. Stop hiding them from the diverse histories of all people and communities. Will you provide them with an opportunity to thrive in your classrooms? Will you serve them in a way that will protect and support them intellectually, socially, and spiritually? Will you advocate for all children?

I am so thankful because I can dedicate my words today to my mother, Alice Rochon. My mother taught me early on in life that regardless of where you go, the most important gift that you can give and receive is a person’s time. You have provided me your time today. For that, I say, Asante-Sana, thank you very much.

Mid-Western Educational Research Association

33rd Annual Meeting Call For Proposals Proposal Deadline: *May 1, 2010*

October 13-16, 2010
The Westin Great Southern Hotel, Columbus, Ohio

Cynthia Campbell, Program Chair
mwera2010@niu.edu

The 2010 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWERA) will be held in Columbus, Ohio, with an exciting program of invited speakers, workshops, and peer-reviewed papers presented in a variety of session formats. The 2010 program will center upon this year's theme: Advancing Educational Policy and Decision-Making Through Research and Assessment, and will feature dynamic speakers of interest to both researchers and practitioners. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are especially invited to come and share their school-based research and experiences at the 2010 MWERA conference.

We will be meeting at the historic Westin Great Southern Hotel in Columbus. The hotel has excellent meeting facilities, and the location is only a short walk from the quaint shops of the German

Village and one block from the Columbus City Center. The hotel has recently undergone a major renovation, including the improvement of all guest rooms, wireless Internet, meeting spaces, and other amenities. Columbus is home to numerous theaters, a symphony, wonderful restaurants, Ohio State University athletics, shopping, and fun nightlife!

If you are looking for a place to sit down and chat with colleagues from schools and universities about your ideas and perspectives, the Mid-Western Educational Research Association provides that opportunity with its supportive and collaborative environment. Both new and veteran educational researchers, practitioners, and students from across North America return annually to MWERA to renew acquaintances, make new contacts, and engage in exciting conversation in a collegial atmosphere.



Come and be a part of MWERA in 2010!

General Information

The 2010 MWERA Annual Meeting will be held **Wednesday, October 13 through Saturday, October 16** at the Westin Great Southern Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. This year's theme, *Advancing Educational Policy and Decision-Making Through Research and Assessment*, examines multi-disciplinary approaches for investigating and addressing complex issues in education. The current era of data-driven decision making and evidence-based practice underscores the need for increased dialogue among researchers and practitioners, with research informing practice and practice informing research. In this way, bi-directional communication can both enhance the effectiveness of practice and advance the boundaries of research.

Attendance at the Annual Meeting

The 2010 Conference Program will consist primarily of presentations selected through a blind peer-review process. In addition, there will be invited speakers and symposia; panel discussions; special sessions for graduate students, new faculty, and new members; as well as a luncheon and other social events open to all attendees.

All sessions listed in the Conference Program will be open to anyone who has registered for the Annual Meeting; however, enrollment may be limited for some workshop sessions and business meetings are intended for members. Tickets for the Friday luncheon and speaker are available to all pre-registrants *but ticket availability is not guaranteed for late or on-site registrants*.

Membership and Conference Registration materials for the October 2010 Annual Meeting will be published in the Summer 2010 *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*, are available on the MWERA website, and can be obtained by contacting the Program Chair.

Ways to Participate

Any education professional may **submit a proposal** for the MWERA 2010 Annual Meeting, whether or not that person is currently a member of MWERA. However, before the Annual Meeting, ***all presenters MUST be members in good standing*** with MWERA (that is, non-members must join MWERA as soon as they are notified that their proposal was accepted). To promote broader participation in the program, no one person should appear as a presenter on more than three proposals.

Division Chairs are also seeking MWERA members to serve as **proposal reviewers**, **Session Chairs**, and **Session Discussants**. Please contact a Division Chair or the Program Chair if you are willing to serve. Finally, you can participate simply by **attending the conference** and **encouraging** colleagues and students to participate in any way (share this *Call for Proposals* with others). All forms of participation are necessary to ensure a successful Annual Meeting!

Questions about proposals, the electronic submission process, or the meeting in general should be directed to the Program Chair:

Cynthia Campbell, PhD
MWERA—2010 Program Chair
Department of Educational Technology,
Research and Assessment
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
Phone: 815-753-8471
Fax: 815-753-9388
Email: mwera2010@niu.edu

Guidelines for Submitting a Proposal

While it is desirable for proposals to address the theme of the Annual Meeting, it is not required. Proposals **MUST be submitted electronically** over the Internet, using the submission process available through the Meeting website (proposals may **NOT** be mailed or e-mailed to the Program Chair or to Division Chairs). Specific instructions for submission can be found at the MWERA website:

<http://www.mwera.org>

Deadline for Proposal Submission

All proposals must be submitted no later than **midnight EST on May 1, 2010**. Submissions will then be forwarded to Division Chairs, who will coordinate a number of volunteers in a system of blind review of proposals (i.e., proposals should be submitted without author identification).

Criteria for Proposal Review

Appropriate criteria, depending on the format and type of scholarly work being presented, have been developed and are used for the blind review process. These criteria include: (a) topic (originality, choice of problem, importance); (b) relevance of the topic to the Division and to MWERA membership; (c) contribution to research and education; (d) framework (theoretical/conceptual/practical rationale, literature review, grounding); (e) analyses and interpretations (significance, implications, relationship of conclusions to findings, generalizability, or usefulness); and (f) overall written proposal quality (clarity of writing, logic, and organization).

Papers presented at MWERA are expected to present **original scholarship** conducted by the author(s) that has not previously been presented at any other meeting or published in any journal. Further, it is a violation of MWERA policy to promote commercially available products or services (except as exhibits) that go beyond the limits of appropriate scholarly or scientific communication. Individuals who wish to display educationally-related products or services should contact the Program Chair.

Expectations of Presenters

All persons, including graduate students, presenting at the 2010 Annual Meeting are expected to be **members in good standing and to pre-register for the full meeting.**

Presenters whose papers have been accepted to a session with a Session Chair and/or Session Discussant are **expected to upload** a completed version of their conference paper through the MWERA website **no later than September 13, 2010.** Papers not uploaded to the website by this date may be dropped from the program. Presenters must also provide complete copies of their papers to attendees at their sessions (some form of handout is expected in most session formats).

LCD projectors and screens will be provided by MWERA in presentation rooms. Presenters needing additional computer or audio-visual equipment **must make their own arrangements** for such equipment (rental from the hotel may be possible at the presenter's own expense).

MWERA reserves the right to reproduce and distribute summaries and abstracts of all accepted proposals, including making such works available in a printed Program Abstract, through the MWERA website, and in press releases promoting the Annual Meeting and the organization. *As a condition of acceptance, all authors of papers accepted to the 2010 Annual Meeting explicitly grant MWERA the right to reproduce their work's summary and/or abstract in these ways.* Such limited distribution does not preclude any subsequent publication of the work by the author(s).

Authors of accepted proposals assume the ethical and professional responsibility to appear at the Annual Meeting and to participate in their presentation or assigned session. When circumstances preclude the author(s) from doing so, it is the responsibility of the author(s) to arrange a suitable substitute and to notify the Program Chair in advance, or as soon as possible.

Content Required for Proposals

Abstract

The abstract should be 100-150 words. The abstracts of accepted papers will be published in the *MWERA 2010 Annual Meeting Abstracts* book, and may be available on the MWERA website. Use clear, precise language, which can be understood by readers outside your discipline.

Summary

Summaries for **Paper** and **Poster** proposals should be **approximately 2500 words, or about 4-6 pages in length** and explicitly address as many of the following as appropriate, preferably in this order: (a) objectives, goals, or purposes; (b) perspectives and/or theoretical framework; (c) methods and/or techniques (data source, instruments, procedures); (d) results and conclusions; and (e) educational and/or scientific importance of the work.

Summaries for **Symposium**, **Workshop**, **Alternative Session**, and **Best Practices Forum** proposals also should be **approximately 2500 words, or about 4-6 pages in length** and explicitly address as many of the following as appropriate, preferably in this order: (a) descriptive title; (b) objectives, goals, and purposes; (c) importance of the topic, issue, or problem; (d) explanation of the basic format or structure of the session, with a

brief rationale for the format; (e) listing of the presenter(s), by number not name for blind review (e.g., "Presenter 1"), with an explanation of each person's relevant background and role in the session; and (f) anticipated audience and kind of audience involvement. Limited program space may be available for these types of sessions.

Important Dates

Proposal Submission Deadline	May 1, 2010
Notification of Acceptance	July 20, 2010
Hotel Reservations	September 13, 2010
Join MWERA	September 13, 2010
Annual Meeting Registration	September 13, 2010
Papers Uploaded to MWERA website	September 13, 2010
MWERA 2010 Annual Meeting	October 13-16, 2010

Session Descriptors for Proposals

Please be certain to use the approved MWERA descriptors in completing your proposal. These descriptors are located on the "Annual Meeting Information" tab of the MWERA website (<http://www.mwera.org/information.html>) and as part of the submission process.

Session Format Descriptions

Paper Presentation

Paper sessions are intended to allow presenters the opportunity to make short, relatively formal presentations in which they summarize their papers to an audience. Three to five individual papers dealing with related topics are grouped into a single session running 1 hour 20 minutes. Each paper presentation is allowed approximately 15 minutes (depending on the number of presentations in a given session) to present the highlights of the paper. In addition, a Session Discussant is allowed approximately 10-15 minutes, following all papers, for comments, synthesis, and/or constructive feedback. A Session Chair moderates the entire session. Presenters are expected to provide complete copies of their papers to all interested audience members.

Poster

Poster sessions are intended to provide opportunities for interested individuals to participate in a dialogue with both the presenter(s) and other interested individuals. Presenters are provided an area in which to display a small, table-top Poster, ancillary handouts, or other table-top A/V materials. Interested individuals are free to move into and out of these poster presentations as they wish. Presenters are expected to make available complete copies of the paper on which the poster was focused.

Symposium

A symposium is intended to provide an opportunity for examination of specific problems or topics from a variety of perspectives. Symposium organizers are expected to identify the topic or issue, identify and ensure the participation of individual speakers who will participate in the session, prepare any necessary materials for the symposium, and facilitate the session. It is suggested, though not required, that the speakers or

symposium organizer will provide interested individuals with one (or more) papers relevant to, reflective of, or drawn from the symposium.

Workshop

Workshops are intended to provide an extended period of time during which the workshop leader helps participants develop or improve their ability to perform some process (e.g., how to provide clinical supervision, using the latest features of the Internet, or conduct an advanced statistical analysis). Organizers may request from 1½ to 3 hours, and are responsible for providing all necessary materials for participants. Most workshops are scheduled for Wednesday afternoon, although others may be scheduled throughout the conference.

Alternative Session

The form, topics, and format of alternative sessions are limited only by the imagination and creativity of the organizer. These options are intended to afford the most effective method or approach to disseminating scholarly work of a variety of types. Proposals for alternative sessions must include a brief rationale for the alternative being proposed and will be evaluated on their appropriateness to the topic and audience, their ability to meet the limitations of time, space, and expense for MWERA, and the basic quality or value of the topic. The organizer of alternative sessions is responsible for all major participants or speakers, developing and providing any necessary materials, and chairing the session.

Best Practices Forum

The “Best Practices” sessions provide opportunities for individuals or groups to present “best” or “promising” practices impacting both K-12 and higher education. These sessions highlight unique and innovative programs that have demonstrated promise for improving and enhancing educational practice. Presenters will be grouped by similar topics to facilitate discussion among the groups and audience. Presenters are expected to make available complete copies of the paper on which the “Best Practices” session focused.

Division Chair Contact Information

A - Administration, Organization, & Leadership

This division is concerned with research, theory, development, and the improvement of practice in the organization and administration of education. *Division Chair: Judy Zimmerman*, Bowling Green State University, 511 Education Building, Bowling Green, OH 43403, judithz@bgsu.edu

B - Curriculum Studies

This division is concerned with curriculum and instructional practice, theory, and research. *Division Chair: Bridget Stuckey*, Northern Illinois University, 2526 Alpha Court West, DeKalb, IL 60115, bstuckey@ccc.edu

C - Learning & Instruction

This division is concerned with theory and research on human abilities, learning styles, individual differences, problem solving, and other cognitive factors. *Division Chair: Greg Montalvo*, Western Illinois University, Educational and Interdisciplinary Studies, GP-Montalvo@wiu.edu

D - Measurement & Research Methodology

This division is concerned with measurement, statistical methods, as well as both quantitative and qualitative research methods, as applied to educational research. *Division Chair: Xin Liang*, University of Akron, 301H Zook Hall, Akron, OH 64258, liang@uakron.edu

E - Counseling & Human Development

This division is concerned with the understanding of human development, special education, and the application and improvement of counseling theories, techniques, and training strategies. *Division Chair: Tracey Stuckey-Mickell*, Moraine Valley Community College, 459 Yorkshire Square, Bolingbrook, IL 60440, stucmickell@yahoo.com

F - History & Historiography

This division is concerned with the findings and methodologies of historical research in education. *Division Chair: Nathan Myers*, Ashland University, 401 College Ave, 228 Schar Ed. Bldg, Ashland, OH 44805, nmyers@ashland.edu

G - Social Context of Education

This division is concerned with theory, practice, and research on social, moral, affective, and motivational characteristics and development, especially multicultural perspectives. *Division Chair: Lina Zhang*, Miami University, Room 200 McGuffey Hall (EDP), Spring St., Oxford, OH 45056, zhangl2@muohio.edu

H - Research, Evaluation, & Assessment in Schools

This division is concerned with research and evaluation to improve school practice, including program planning and implementation. *Division Chair: Beverly Dretzke*, University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, 1954 Buford Ave, St. Paul, MN, dretz001@umn.edu

I - Education in the Professions

This division is concerned with educational practice, research, and evaluation in the professions (e.g., medicine, nursing, public health, business, law, and engineering). *Division Chair: Chris Simpson*, Ohio University, Athens, OH, 45701, simpsonc@oucom.ohiou.edu

J - Postsecondary Education

This division is concerned with a broad range of issues related to two-year, four-year, and graduate education. *Division Chair: Sharon Stevens*, Western Illinois University, 1 University Circle HH 115, Macomb, IL 61455, SR-Stevens2@wiu.edu

K - Teaching & Teacher Education

This division is concerned with theory, practice, and research related to teaching at all levels and in-service and pre-service teacher education, including field experience supervision and mentoring. *Division Chair: Angeline Stuckey*, Northern Illinois University, 2526 Alpha Court West, DeKalb, IL 60115, astuckey@niu.edu

L - Educational Policy & Politics

This division is concerned with educational policy as well as political, legal, and fiscal matters related to education. *Division Chair: Jeff Abbott*, Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne, 2101 E. Coliseum Blvd, Neff Hall 250K, Fort Wayne, IN, abbottj@ipfw.edu

Contemporary Treatment of Reliability and Validity in Educational Assessment

Dimitar M. Dimitrov
George Mason University

Abstract

The focus of this presidential address is on the contemporary treatment of reliability and validity in educational assessment. Highlights on reliability are provided under the classical true-score model using tools from latent trait modeling to clarify important assumptions and procedures for reliability estimation. In addition to reliability, indices of measurement precision that provide information about error tolerance are also discussed. Regarding validity, the focus is on moving from the discrete construct-based model of validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), which still seems to dominate education assessment research and practices, to the unified construct-based model of validity (Messick, 1989, 1995).

The topic of this presidential address was motivated primarily by my work as the editor of *Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development (MECD)*—the official journal of the Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education (AACE). A particular concern in my editorial experience has been that, despite the availability of contemporary approaches to evaluating scale reliability and validity, a large number of manuscripts still involve outdated methods that yield potential threats to valid interpretations and decision making in education, psychology, and related fields. I will leave to your judgment whether this is also the case in some (if not most) dissertations at graduate schools of education nationwide. Typical problems relate to a lack of testing for assumptions in evaluating reliability, limited perspective on measurement precision, and methodological drawbacks in validation processes. I hope that this presentation will provide highlights that can be useful to researchers in studies that involve evaluation of scale reliability and validity for assessment in education.

Highlights on Contemporary Treatment of Reliability

What is Reliability?

In general, the **reliability** of measurements indicates the degree to which they are *accurate, consistent, and replicable* when (a) different people conduct the measurement, (b) using different instruments that purport to measure the same trait, and (c) there is incidental variation in measurement conditions. That is, the reliability of scores shows the degree to which they are “free” of random error. Before I comment on limitations of traditional approaches (e.g., using Cronbach’s *alpha*) and advantages of some contemporary approaches to evaluating scale reliability in the classical (true-score) framework, the introduction of some basic concepts seems appropriate.

True-Score Model

A basic assumption in the classical (true-score) model of measurement is that the observed score, X , is a sum of a true score, T , and random error, E . That is,

$$X = T + E. \quad (1)$$

In general, a person’s *true score*, T , is the mean of the theoretical distribution of scores that would be observed in repeated independent measurements using the same test. Clearly, T is a hypothetical concept because it is not practically possible to test the same person infinity times in independent repeated measurements, given that each testing could influence the subsequent testing (e.g., due to “carry over” effects of practice or memory). From the definition of true scores, it follows that the variance of the observed scores is a sum of the variance of the true scores and the error variance (e.g., Zimmerman, 1975). That is,

$$\sigma_X^2 = \sigma_T^2 + \sigma_E^2. \quad (2)$$

As to the error scores (residuals), E , it is assumed that they are random and follow a normal distribution with a mean of zero and a variance σ_E^2 , that is $E \sim N(0, \sigma_E^2)$.

The *reliability* of a measurement scale, denoted here ρ_{XX} , is defined as the correlation between the observed scores on two *parallel tests*—i.e., tests with equal true scores and equal error variances for every population of examinees taking both tests. Equivalently, ρ_{XX} indicates what proportion of the observed score variance is true score variance. That is,

$$\rho_{XX} = \frac{\sigma_T^2}{\sigma_X^2}. \quad (3)$$

Perfect reliability ($\rho_{XX} = 1$) can theoretically occur when $\sigma_T^2 = \sigma_X^2$ or, equivalently, when $\sigma_E^2 = 0$. The error standard deviation, σ_E , referred to also as the *standard error of measurement (SEM)*, is typically estimated as

$$\sigma_E = \sigma_X \sqrt{1 - \rho_{XX}}. \quad (4)$$

The assumptions underlying scale reliability and its estimation involve the concepts of congeneric measures, parallel measures, tau-equivalent measures, and essentially tau-equivalent measures. To better understand the meaning of these concepts, they are defined here in a latent trait framework. For simplicity, let's consider the case depicted in Figure 1, where three test items, X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 , serve as indicators of a single latent trait, η , being measured by the test (e.g., η can be reading ability, test anxiety, etc.)

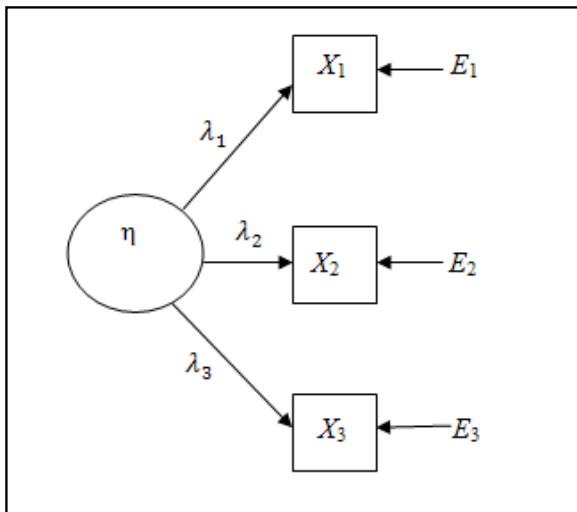


Figure 1. A unidimensional construct η , as measured by three indicators X_1 , X_2 , and X_3

Analytically, the observed scores X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 in Figure 1 can be presented as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} X_1 &= (\lambda_1\eta + a_1) + E_1, \\ X_2 &= (\lambda_2\eta + a_2) + E_2, \\ X_3 &= (\lambda_3\eta + a_3) + E_3, \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

where the expression in parentheses ($\lambda\eta + a$) represents the predicted value of the observed score, X , from the latent trait, η , via a simple linear regression, and E stands for the error term. As the predicted value of an observed score is, in fact, the true value for this score, T , we have:

$$\begin{aligned} T_1 &= \lambda_1\eta + a_1, \\ T_2 &= \lambda_2\eta + a_2, \\ T_3 &= \lambda_3\eta + a_3. \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

Thus, the true scores T_1 , T_2 , and T_3 on the three items that measure a single latent trait, η , are obtained by regressing the observed scores (X_1 , X_2 , and X_3) on η . The regression coefficients, referred to also as *factor loadings*, are λ_1 , λ_2 , and λ_3 , and the intercepts are a_1 , a_2 , and a_3 .

Congeneric Measures

Congeneric measures represent the most general case of unidimensional measures in the sense that they may have different scale origins, different units of measurement and may vary in precision. In the context of Figure 1 (see also

Equations 6), (a) different scale units means that the regression coefficients (λ_1 , λ_2 , and λ_3) may differ, (b) different scale origins means that the intercepts (a_1 , a_2 , and a_3) may differ, and (c) variation in precision means that the variances of the error terms, $\text{VAR}(E_1)$, $\text{VAR}(E_2)$, and $\text{VAR}(E_3)$, may differ.

Parallel Measures

Parallel measures represent the most restricted case of unidimensional measures in the sense that they have the same units of measurement, scale origins, and error variances. In the context of Figure 1, X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 would be parallel measures under the following restrictions

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda_1 &= \lambda_2 = \lambda_3, \\ a_1 &= a_2 = a_3, \text{ and} \\ \text{VAR}(E_1) &= \text{VAR}(E_2) = \text{VAR}(E_3). \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

As one can also notice, parallel measures have equal true scores and equal error variances.

Tau-equivalent measures

Tau-equivalent measures have the same units of measurement and scale origins, but their error variances may differ. In Figure 1, X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 would be tau-equivalent measures under the following restrictions

$$\begin{aligned} \lambda_1 &= \lambda_2 = \lambda_3 \text{ and} \\ a_1 &= a_2 = a_3. \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

Essentially tau-equivalent measures

Essentially tau-equivalent measures have the same units of measurement, but dissimilar origins and unequal error variances. In Figure 1, X_1 , X_2 , and X_3 would be essentially tau-equivalent measures under the following restrictions:

$$\lambda_1 = \lambda_2 = \lambda_3. \quad (9)$$

Limitations of Cronbach's alpha

It would be fair to say that Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) is still the most commonly used index of internal consistency reliability. It should be emphasized, however, that Cronbach's alpha is an accurate estimate of the population scale reliability only under the assumptions that (a) the measures are essentially tau-equivalent and (b) there are no correlated error terms. In case that the latter assumption is in place, but the measures are not essentially tau-equivalent (i.e., the measures may differ in units of measurement), Cronbach's alpha underestimates the population scale reliability (e.g., Novick & Lewis, 1967; Raykov, 1997). In case of correlated errors Cronbach's alpha typically overestimates the population scale reliability (e.g., Zimmerman, Zumbo, & Lalonde, 1993). Correlated errors may occur, for example, with adjacent items in a multicomponent instrument, with items related to a common stimulus (e.g., same paragraph or graph), or with tests presented in a speeded fashion (Komaroff, 1997; Raykov, 2001). Thus, Cronbach's alpha cannot be in general considered a dependable estimator of scale reliability. Presented next is a contemporary approach

to evaluating reliability in the general case of congeneric measures (i.e., measures that may have different scale origins, different units of measurement, and unequal error variances).

Evaluation of Scale Reliability Using Latent Variable Modeling

For specificity, consider again the unidimensional test model depicted in Figure 1 (see also Equations 5 and 6). In this context, if $X = X_1 + X_2 + X_3$ is the total test score, Equation 3 for the reliability of X , ρ_{XX} , can be translated as follows (e.g., Bollen, 1989):

$$\rho_{XX} = \frac{(\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3)^2}{(\lambda_1 + \lambda_2 + \lambda_3)^2 + VAR(E_1) + VAR(E_2) + VAR(E_3)}. \quad (10)$$

With correlated errors (assuming model identification), the right-hand side of Equation 10 needs to be extended by adding twice the sum of error covariances in the denominator (Bollen, 1989, p. 220). This extension assumes that the model with the added error covariances is identified.

A readable discussion of the latent variable modeling approach to evaluating reliability through the use of Equation 10 is provided by Raykov (2009). He also provides a syntax code in the computer program *Mplus* (Muthén & Muthén, 2008) for point and interval estimation of scale reliability of congeneric measures. A different approach to point evaluation of reliability for scales with binary items is proposed by Dimitrov (2003). This approach allows researchers to evaluate the reliability of the composite scale for a test, as well as the reliability of individual test items, based only on estimates of the items parameters obtained with the one-, two-, or three-parameter model in items response theory (IRT). Using formulas developed by Dimitrov (2003), Raykov, Dimitrov, and Asparouhov (in press) applied the latent variable modeling approach to point and interval estimation of reliability for scales with binary items.

Multiple Aspects of Precision in Measurement

In a seminal article on precision of measurements, Kane (1996) argued that the standard error of measurement and reliability coefficients are very useful, but do not capture all aspects of the precision of measurements. He noted that “a more fundamental way to evaluate precision is to compare errors of measurement with the tolerance for error in a particular context. The tolerance for error specifies how large the errors can be before they interfere with the intended use of the measurement procedure and is based on an analysis of the requirements for precision in that context” (Kane, 1996).

Error-Tolerance Ratio (E/T)

To address the evaluation of tolerance for errors, Kane (1996) introduced the *error-tolerance ratio* (E/T). In the context of the classical true-score model, he defined E/T as the ratio “error standard deviation to true-score standard deviation,” that is

$$E / T = \frac{\sigma_E}{\sigma_T}. \quad (11)$$

The rationale behind this definition of E/T was that “the tolerance for error for each individual can be defined as the individual’s true deviation score, and in this context, the root mean square tolerance is simply the standard deviation of the true scores” (Kane, 1996).

Signal-to-Noise Ratio (S/N)

The inverse of the E/T is referred to as *signal-to-noise ratio* (S/N), that is

$$E / T = \frac{\sigma_T}{\sigma_E}. \quad (12)$$

The signal-to-noise ratio (S/N) provides somewhat different perspective on precision in the sense that differences among examinees in the population are taken as the “signals” to be detected, and the true-score standard deviation is taken as an index of the overall strength of this signal. On the other hand, the errors are viewed as noise, and the standard error is taken as an index of the potential impact of this noise in obscuring the signal (Kane, 1996).

It is important to note that the scale reliability can be represented as an explicit function of the error-tolerance ratio (E/N) or the signal-to-noise ratio (S/N). Specifically,

$$\rho_{XX} = \frac{1}{1 + (E/T)^2} = \frac{(S/N)^2}{(S/N)^2 + 1}. \quad (14)$$

Relative Errors within a Margin of Tolerance

As noted earlier, Kane (1996) argued that a more fundamental way to evaluate precision is to compare errors of measurement with the tolerance for error in a particular context. He also indicated that “the tolerance for error for each individual can be defined as the individual’s true deviation score” (Kane, 1996). In the original metric of measurement, this view on precision translates into the ratio $E/(T - \mu)$ which shows what proportion is the measurement error for an individual from the true-deviation score for that individual. In this ratio, E and T are the error and true score, respectively, for an individual, whereas μ is the population mean of true scores (which is also the population mean of observed scores, X). That is, $E/(T - \mu)$ represents the *relative error of measurement* (*REM*) for an individual true deviation score.

An important question is then what percent of the population scores have *REM* which is smaller in absolute value than a prespecified *margin of tolerance*, δ . In probability parlance, this question translates as follows “What is the probability that a randomly selected score will have *REM* between $-\delta$ and δ ?” (the margin of tolerance is a positive number, $\delta > 0$). Denoting this probability $PREM(\delta)$, Dimitrov (2009) showed that

$$PREM(\delta) = P\left(-\delta < \frac{E}{T - \mu} < \delta\right) = \frac{2}{\pi} \arctan\left(\delta \frac{\sigma_T}{\sigma_E}\right), \quad (15)$$

where π is the well known mathematical constant ($\pi \approx 3.1416$), $\arctan(\cdot)$ stands for *arctangent* — the inverse of the trigonometric function *tangent*, $\tan(\cdot)$, and δ is a prespecified margin of tolerance for the relative error. By representing the signal-to-noise ratio (σ_T/σ_E), which appears in Equation 15, as a function of the reliability, ρ_{XX} , Equation 15 becomes

$$PREM(\delta) = \frac{2}{\pi} \arctan \left(\delta \sqrt{\frac{\rho_{XX}}{1 - \rho_{XX}}} \right). \quad (16)$$

Thus, given the scale reliability, ρ_{XX} , researchers can determine what percent of the population scores have a tolerable relative error, $100 * PREM(\delta)$, which will allow them to better generalize the precision of measurements in making validity judgments. Moreover, $PREM(\delta)$ can be computed using hand-held calculators that have the $\arctan(\cdot)$ function; (\tan^{-1} is used to denote \arctan in some calculators).

The margin of tolerance, δ , is selected by the researcher based on his/her judgment about how much relative error is tolerable to allow for valid interpretations of the measures within a specific context. Interestingly, if we select $\delta = \sigma_E / \sigma_T$ i.e., the Kane's (1996) error-tolerance ratio (see Equation 11) and use Equation 15, we obtain $PREM(\delta) = 0.5$. Thus, 50% of the individual relative errors, $E/(T - \mu)$, are smaller than the Kane's E/T in absolute value. In other words, E/T represents the population median of the distribution of absolute relative errors (Dimitrov, 2009).

From another angle, suppose the scale reliability is $\rho_{XX} = .90$ and we want to know what percent of the population scores have a relative error, $E/(T - \mu)$, smaller than 0.1 in absolute value. Replacing δ with 0.1 and ρ_{XX} with .90 in Equation 16, we obtain:

$$PREM(\delta) = \frac{2}{\pi} \arctan \left(0.1 * \sqrt{\frac{0.9}{1 - 0.9}} \right) = 0.1855.$$

Thus, $PREM(\delta)$ indicates that 18.55 percent of the relative errors in the population of individual scores are smaller in absolute value than the prespecified margin of tolerance ($\delta = 0.1$).

It is important to note that the relative error of measurement, $E/(T - \mu)$, remains invariant across linear transformations of the scores thus allowing to generalize findings about the percent of relative errors within a margin of tolerance, $PREM(\delta)$, across such transformations.

Highlights on Contemporary Treatment of Validity

What is Validity?

While reliability of scores deals with their accuracy and consistency, *validity* has to do with whether an instrument measures what it purports to measure. One validates not a test, but an *interpretation of data arising from a specified procedure* (Cronbach, 1971). Historically, there are three major stages in the development of validity models:

1. *Criterion-based model* (e.g., Cronbach & Gleser, 1965) in which validity of measures is viewed as the degree to which these measures are consistent with (or “predict”) the measures on a specific “criterion,”
2. *Construct-based model* (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) which considers three different types of validity— content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity, and
3. *Unified construct-based model of validity* (Messick, 1989, 1995).

Under the **criterion-based model**, the validity of test scores was depicted as the degree to which these scores were accurate representations of the values of a specified *criterion*. A major drawback of the criterion-based conception of validity is that (a) it is too limited and does not capture some basic (e.g., content-related) aspects of validity and (b) it is not possible to identify criterion measures in some domains.

While the **construct-based model** of validity does a better job in this regard, it's major problem is that content validity, criterion validity, and construct validity are depicted as different types of validity. This can mislead test users to believe that these three “types of validity” are comparable or, even worse, that they are equivalent and, thus, collecting evidence for any of them is sufficient to label a test as valid. Messick (1995) argued that the different kinds of inferences from test scores require different kinds of evidence, not different kinds of validity.

The **unified construct-based model of validity** is based on a definition of validity provided by Messick (1989): “Validity is an integrated evaluative judgment of the degree to which empirical evidence and theoretical rationales support the *adequacy* and *appropriateness of inferences and actions* based on test scores or other modes of assessment” (p. 13). This conception of validity represents a *unified construct-based model of validity*, by providing a comprehensive view that integrates content-related and criterion-related evidence into a unified framework of construct validity and empirical evaluation of the meaning and consequences of measurement.

A comprehensive **definition of the construct** under validation allows one to identify the behavioral boundaries of the construct, differentiate the construct from other (similar or dissimilar) constructs, and specify relationships between the construct and other constructs. For example, the construct measured by the reading comprehension section on the verbal part of a large-scale standardized test is defined as “one’s ability to reason with words in solving problems,” and it is expected that “reasoning effectively in a verbal medium depends primarily on ability to discern, comprehend, and analyze relationships among words or groups of words and within larger units of discourse such as sentences and written passages” (ETS, 1998).

Typically, the core definition of a construct is embedded into a more general theory and then refined and operationalized in the context of the theory and practice in which inferences and decisions are to be made based on assessment

scores. Based on the adopted construct definition, instrument developers should build a detailed *construct model* that specifies (a) the internal structure of the construct—i.e., its componential structure, (b) the external relationships of the construct to other constructs, (c) potential types of indicators (items) for measuring behaviors that are relevant to assessing individuals on the construct, and (d) construct-related processes—e.g., causal impacts that the construct is expected to have on specific behavior(s).

Messick (1995) specifies six aspects of the unified conception of construct validity—content, substantive, structural, generalizability, external, and consequential aspects. In addition, *responsiveness and interpretability* aspects of validity were proposed by the Medical Outcomes Trust (1995) to complete these six criteria under the unified construct-based model of validity.

Content Aspect of Validity

The *content aspect* of validity includes evidence of content relevance, representativeness, and technical quality. In educational assessment, evidence of content validity is gathered primarily through curriculum analysis and inquiry into the nature of knowledge, skills, and other characteristics targeted with the assessment.

Substantive Aspect of Validity

The *substantive aspect* of validity refers to theoretical rationales for the observed consistencies in test responses, including process models of task performance along with empirical evidence that the theoretical processes are actually engaged by respondents in the assessment tasks. Evidence about the substantive aspect of validity can be collected through cognitive modeling of the examinees' response processes, observations of behaviors exhibited by the examinees when answering the items, analysis of scale functioning, consistency between expected and empirical item difficulties, and other relevant procedures.

Structural Aspect of Validity

The *structural aspect of validity* appraises the fidelity of the scoring structure to the structure of the construct domain at issue. Typically, evidence of the structural aspect of validity is sought by correlational and measurement consistency between the constructs and their indicators (test items). This is done primarily through the use of factor analysis. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is used when there is not enough theoretical or empirical information to hypothesize how many constructs underlie the initial set of items and which items form which factor. EFA is typically used earlier in the process of scale development and construct validation.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is used in later phases of scale validation after the underlying structure has been established on prior empirical and/or theoretical grounds. Thus, CFA is employed when the goal is to test the validity of a hypothesized model of constructs (factors) and

their relationships with a set of observable variables (items, indicators).

Generalizability Aspect of Validity

The *generalizability aspect of validity* examines the extent to which score properties and interpretations generalize to and across population groups, settings, and tasks, including validity generalization of test criterion relationships. To collect evidence related to the generalizability aspect of validity means to identify the boundaries of the meaning of the scores across tasks and contexts. Typical procedures for collecting such evidence deal with testing for invariance of targeted constructs across groups and/or time points, item bias, consistency of predictions across groups, contextual stability, and reliability.

External Aspect of Validity

The *external aspect of validity* includes convergent and discriminant evidence from multitrait-multimethod comparisons, as well as evidence of criterion relevance and applied utility. The operational definition of a construct is based on a specific theory and, therefore, the validity of the measurable indicators of the construct depends on the correctness of this theory. For example, if we adopt Rosenberg's (1965) theoretical argument that a student's level of "self-esteem" is positively related to participation in school activities, high positive correlation between students' scores on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and measures of their involvement in school activities will provide convergent evidence of the external aspect of validity for the self-esteem scale.

Consequential Aspect of Validity

The *consequential aspect of validity* appraises the value implications of score interpretations as a basis for action as well as the actual and potential consequences of test use, especially in regard to sources of invalidity related to issues of bias, fairness, and distributive justice. Both short-term and long-term consequences should be evaluated. It is important to make sure that negative consequences have not resulted from drawbacks of the assessment such as (a) *construct underrepresentation*—the assessment is too narrow and fails to measure important dimensions or facets of the construct, and/or (b) *construct-irrelevant variance*—the assessment allows for variance generated by sources unrelated to the target construct (e.g., item bias).

Responsiveness and Interpretability Aspects of Validity

Responsiveness and interpretability are proposed by the Medical Outcomes Trust (1995) to complement the six criteria described by Messick (1995) under the unified construct-based model of validity (see also Wolfe & Smith, 2007a; 2007b). While responsiveness is considered for support to the external aspect of validity, interpretability is considered as an aspect of validity which reveals the degree to which

qualitative meaning can be assigned to quantitative measures. Thus, the *interpretability aspect of validity* indicates how well the meaning of assessment scores is communicated to people who may interpret the scores but are not necessarily familiar with the psychometric terminology and concepts in assessment. For example, the proper communication of *norm-referenced* versus *criterion-referenced* assessment scores is critical for their valid interpretation by a relatively large audience (e.g., practitioners, clients, parents, social workers, policy makers, etc.).

Conclusion

I hope that this presentation provides some important highlights on the contemporary treatment of reliability and validity in educational assessment. In addressing reliability issues, I tried to focus your attention on two major issues. First, researchers should be aware of potential problems and limitations of the (still) commonly used Cronbach's alpha as an index of scale reliability. A more accurate and flexible approach to evaluating scale reliability, which works in the general case of congeneric measures (i.e., different origins, units of measurement, and error variances), is available in contemporary treatments of scale reliability using latent variables modeling (e.g., Raykov, 1997, 2009; Raykov, Dimitrov, & Asparouhov, in press). Second, I tried to emphasize the argument that, along with reliability and standard error of measurement, important aspects of the precision of measurements are addressed via evaluating error-tolerance ratio (E/T), signal-to-noise-ratio (S/N), and proportion of relative errors of measurement that are smaller in absolute value than a prespecified margin of tolerance, $PREM(\delta)$. Researchers can use information on the precision of measurements provided by E/T, S/M, and $PREM(\delta)$ in making validity judgments.

Speaking of validity, my concern is that the contemporary treatment of validity, based on the unified construct-based model of validity (e.g., Messick, 1989, 1995), still does not seem to dominate designs, procedures, and terminology involved in developing, validating, and using instruments for assessment in education. I hope that this presentation will sharpen the focus of educational researchers and practitioners on this issue and will help them in reaching higher standards of quality in education.

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Adolescent Girl Writers: “I can be good at it, if I like it”

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Abstract

A common perception that girls are good at writing may lead educators to overlook girls. This study examined the writing engagement of three sixth grade girls and how their writing self-perception affected their attitudes in a writing classroom. Using a qualitative case study methodology, three themes emerged: the importance of writing tasks, the influence of reading interests on writing, and time as an external factor. Although these themes are important, the participants of this study alluded to a greater underlying factor; that of writing volition, i.e., desire to write. Volition was the key in engaging the girls as writers.

Introduction

If girls are perceived to be good writers, does this indeed make them good writers? There have been numerous research on gender differences in self-perception and self-efficacy (Meece & Painter, 2008; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; 2001; 2006). These studies show that there is a difference in the writing achievement of boys versus girls. However, these studies are quantitatively driven, relying solely on self-reported questionnaires. There is a void in the voices of the participants—their actual behaviors in comparison to their self-reported beliefs. The purpose of this study was to give voice to three adolescent girl writers through interviews and classroom observations. In this way their attitudes and engagement could be examined in comparison to their perceived beliefs as writers.

Having time to write and the overemphasis on the mechanics of writing can be major roadblocks in a student's journey to becoming a writer. These hindrances can influence a student's engagement and willing participation in the writing classroom. Lorty (1992) asserts that learning to write is an issue of time: time to process and brainstorm, time to write and rewrite, time to read and think. All too often, writing centers upon an end product and writing, as a process, is forgotten (Murray, 2001). There is also an overemphasis on the mechanics of writing—grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006). Although lessons targeting specific aspects of grammar and spelling are important, these elements alone do not constitute the writing process. Graham, MacArthur, and Schwartz (1995) assert that superficial revisions have little to no impact on improving the quality of children's writing. Students rewrite final copies simply for the purpose of fixing various mechanical errors; “Writing, for too many students, is not a critical exploration but a hollow, pointless chore” (Owens, 1994, p. 25). In essence, writing that does not hold personal meaning may lead to disengagement (Ivy, 1999). Students need a real purpose (Fletcher, 2006);

an authentic reason (Lensmire, 1994); a personal investment (Allen, 2006) in becoming successful writers.

Literature Review

Writing is more than the act of putting thoughts and words down on paper. According to the National Commission on Writing (NCW, 2003), writing also functions as a *threshold skill* that allows access to higher academics and employment success. Writing has become a tool for assessment (NCW, 2003). Standardized tests now include a written response item on every test for all content areas (NCW, 2003; National Writing Project (NWP) & Nagin, 2006). The writing required on standardized tests is often a complex and detailed synthesis of the content being tested. Students, who know the subject and content materials but do not write well, may have difficulty being academically successful. Cole (2007) ponders, “Might we conceivably predict, then, that students who have trouble with writing will have difficulty in every subject that is tested through writing?” (p. 2). Writing has become elevated to the status of an academic gatekeeper. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2002) revealed that on the national writing examination, more than two out of every three fourth graders scored below the proficient level. For eighth graders, nearly two out of every three scored below the proficient level. This is disconcerting as writing is “taught” at every grade level beginning in first grade and is utilized in all content areas. Whether students are prepared to write and write well for their futures is repeatedly called into question.

Writing in Schools

The importance of writing can be felt in all content areas across all grade levels because writing is used as the primary tool for assessment purposes (NCW, 2003, NWP & Nagin, 2006, p. 15). Writing instruction is heavily concentrated on the development of writing skills, the mechanics and

grammar usage, and the basic conventions of writing: i.e., spelling, sentence structure, organization, form, etc. (Wang & Odell, 2003). Traditionally, writing in schools is taught by the Language Arts teacher. The Language Arts teacher's focus is predominantly centered on expressive forms of writing (Dornan, Rosen, & Wilson, 1997).

Obstacles in Learning to Write

There are several factors that hinder students from learning how to write: time, emphasis on mechanics, and an issue of identity. These obstacles greatly influence students' growth as writers, their willingness to successfully complete writing tasks, and fully engage and participate in the writing process. Many teachers require students to complete weekly writing prompts. Although the writings may coincide with readings, activities, and/or holidays, the writing is often a stand alone assignment (Lensmire, 1994). Teachers may model the structure of the writing that is desired and may have students brainstorm together, however once the writing time begins, students are on their own with the deadline looming. As a result, students are under great pressures to produce a finished writing product that meets the specifications set by the teacher. Time is of the essence and, simply put, teaching writing as a process is just too time consuming.

Teachers emphasize the mechanics of writing—grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. (Gottschalk & Hjortshoj, 2004). Many students struggle with writing because of a common misconception that writing *is* grammar and spelling (Emig, 1997; Graham & Harris, 2005). There is a lack of understanding the subtle nuances of the writing process—word choice, phrasing, language subtleties and such (Graham & Harris, 2005). The emphasis on mechanical and surface error corrections does not enable students to understanding how to write, let alone improve their writing.

Gendered Research on Writing

If girls are more linguistically inclined, does this make them more confident writers? Numerous studies identify differences between the achievement of boys and girls in gendered research on writing (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Connell, 1996; Junge & Dretzke, 1995; Meece & Painter, 2008; Pajares, Miller, & Johnson, 1999; Pajares & Valiante, 1999; 2001; Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996). In a 1999 study of students in upper elementary grades, Pajares, Miller, and Johnson found that gender differences affected students' confidence, writing apprehension, and feelings of self-worth associated with writing. The study found that in general, girls had lower writing self-confidence than their male peers. The researchers further state that although there was a lower level of writing confidence by girls, elementary school teachers generally rated the girls as better writers than boys.

Pajares and Valiante (1999), in a follow up study, sought to find the gender differences in writing confidence beliefs and ability for middle school students. Their findings show

a significant rise in the writing self-perception of middle school girls versus boys. The perceived writing competence of girls was not only significantly stronger than their male counterparts, this was dramatically higher than compared to the prior findings of elementary girls and their writing self-confidence. Perhaps the significance of the findings can be attested to the continual positive feedback they received from teachers in their elementary school years, but it is unclear from the study.

Lastly, Meece and Painter (2008) assert that stereotypes greatly impact student's self-conception of feminine and masculine tasks in school. The stereotypical conceptions drive children to embrace and conform to gender role expectations (i.e., writing is girly). This perception of feminine/masculine influences academic achievement and drives active participation or passive withdrawal (Meece & Painter, 2008). Rather than debunk misconceptions, many teachers reinforce stereotypic standards. They perpetuate the gendered notion that girls are more linguistically inclined, therefore are better writers than boys.

Theoretical Perspective

It is known that self-perception, self-regulation, and motivation are interconnected (Bandura, 1977; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008). Social learning theory attests to this correlation. A positive self-perception leads to a more controlled self-regulatory behavior and practice (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Positive self-perception aids in establishing high motivation through positive attitude and effort (Winne & Hadwin, 2008). Positive self-perception can lead to the successful completion of tasks whereas low self-perception often results in low motivation and a negative attitude towards tasks (Eccles, 2004). In addition, self-perception beliefs affect volition, or one's will to persevere (Ach, 2006). A writing classroom is one particular place where the self-perception of adolescent girls as writers can be greatly tested. Statements by students such as: "I am a good writer" or "I am a bad writer" determine the amount of effort a student is willing to put forth. Positive writing self-perception allows a student to view a writing task as an accomplishable goal, thus leading to an increase in effort and a more positive attitude towards the writing task (Pajares & Valiante, 1999; Shell, Colvin, & Bruning, 1995). When encountering a writing problem, students with positive self-perception are more apt to put in more effort because they view themselves as writers and obstacles as mere bumps in the road. Struggling adolescent writers with low self-perception often display a negative attitude towards writing. When struggling students encounter the same obstacle, they see it as an enormous wall and easily become disengaged and resistant (Jones, 2006; Olafson, 2006).

Volition is synonymous with one's will or desire in participating in a specific task or activity (Audi, 1993). It can affect motivation, attitudes, and self-perception by directly

influencing an individual's course of action. If I have the volition to write, I will do so regardless of how I feel as a writer, my positive/negative attitude towards writing, or if I am motivated or lack motivation to write; my volition brings forth action. The impact of volition on students' attitudes, interests, and self-perception beliefs can alter the will of the student (Audi, 1993) and may lead to the successful completion of tasks and assignments. The impact that volition has enables a student to persevere through hardships and remain motivated in accomplishing goals that are set forth. Volition is a conscientious choice that can be instilled as a habit over time (Ach, 2006).

Methodology

Qualitative research provides a way to “understand situations in their uniqueness as a part of a particular context and the interactions” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The contextual framework of this study gives insight into the attitudes and engagement towards writing by three adolescent girls in Mrs. Lund's sixth grade writing class: Laura, Hallie, and Mina (pseudonyms). Merriam (1998) states that meaning is embedded in the experiences of people, thus in understanding writing self-perception, case study methodology enables a holistic picture to be painted. Understanding the process through monitoring via observation allowed me to gain insight into the self-perception of the three girl writers. This study presents the writing self-perception beliefs through their stories and their voices.

Social learning theory asserts that students' self-perception aligns with their beliefs and affects their learning outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Self-perception impacts how individuals think, feel, and ultimately what they believe to be their potential (Bandura, 1986). The Writer's Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ) (Bottomley & Henk, 1997/1998) was utilized as a tool in aiding in the selection of focal students from all the participants in Mrs. Lund's class. The WSPQ is based on Bandura's (1986) self-efficacy framework. The five point Likert scale gauged the four points of self-perception: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal and social persuasion, emotional and mental state (Bandura, 1977). The questions were grouped into five categories: general progress, specific progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological state.

Table 1
Writer's Self-Perception Questionnaire (WSPQ) Categories

WSPQ 5 Domains	Example Question
General Progress	“Writing is easier for me than it used to be”
Specific Progress	“My sentences stick to my topic.”
Observational Comparison	“I write better than the other kids in my class.”
Social Feedback	“My teacher thinks my writing is good.”
Physiological State	“When I write, I feel good about myself.”

Participants

The three case studies arise from the twenty-eight students in Mrs. Lund's sixth grade writing classroom. Based on the results from the WSPQ, students were placed into five categories: high writing self-perception, average high writing self-perception, average writing self-perception, average low writing self-perception, and low writing self-perception. The three focal students represent the high (Hallie), middle (Mina), and low (Laura) writing self-perception beliefs. Hallie possessed the strongest writing self-perception among all the students in the classroom. Laura rated herself as the lowest female student and second lowest when compared to all her classmates. Mina's score floated in the middle average range. Table 2 displays the breakdown from the self-reported questionnaire.

Table 2
Class results from the WSPQ

Mrs. Lund's 6 th Grade Students WSPQ Results	
High writing self-perception	2 students (1 girl, 1 boy)
Average/high writing self-perception	4 students (2 girls, 2 boys)
Average writing self-perception	8 students (4 girls, 4 boys)
Average/low writing self-perception	5 students (2 girls, 3 boys)
Low writing self-perception	8 students (2 girls, 6 boys)

Bottomley and Henk (1997/1998), the designers of the WSPQ, utilize a Likert scale of one to five: one = strongly disagree, two = disagree, three = undecided, four = agree, and five = strongly agree. Based on the raw score, the totals for each category were then compared to a score interpretation guide that identified the classification for each category. Scores were identified as high, average-high, average, average-low, and low writing self-perception. Table 3 below displays the scores of each of the three girls.

For example, in observational comparison, the maximum raw score was 45, consisting of nine questions each worth five points. As the students answered questions regarding how they felt about themselves as writers as compared to their peers, the score interpretation guide identified 37 and above as high, 30 as the average middle score, and 23 and below as being the low range. Within this category, Hallie identifies that she is a better writer as compared to her peers based on her self-reported scores of threes, fours, and fives, equaling 33. Mina, with the mid-score of 26, consistently gives herself threes which identifies her as predominantly undecided in regards to how she rates herself as compared to her peers. Giving herself ones and twos, Laura self-reported that indeed her observational comparison was extremely low as compared to others in her class. Her score reveals that she identifies others as being better writers than herself. With the lowest possible score for this section being nine—one point per question—Laura self-reports her observational comparison score at 14 points for this section, well below the low self-perception range.

Table 3
Focal student's WSPQ results

	General Progress	Specific Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological State
Hallie	44	34	33	34	29
Mina	40	24	26	22	25
Laura	24	24	14	16	19
Raw Score (maximum raw score)	45	35	45	35	30

Data Collection

After utilizing the WSPQ to select the three focal students, data was collected in three different ways. Field notes were taken during Mrs. Lund's writing class. Notes on student engagement and attitudes, interactions between student and teacher, student and student, and student and researcher were noted. Interviews were conducted with individual students and in small focal group setting. The focal groups contained three students of which one of the students was a focal student. Last, the collection of student artifacts consisting of student journal entries, rough drafts and final copies.

I utilized open coding to break the data apart to "see what's there" (Merriam, 1998, p. 148). Coding for themes through convergence of the different data sources allowed me to find recurring regularities that became patterns and commonalities between Hallie, Mina, and Laura. Constant comparative analysis allowed me to identify and categorize similarities and differences between the three girls. These patterns resulted in categories that I utilized for sorting and organizing my field notes and interviews.

There is a certain issue of transferability, considering that this is a case study of only three sixth grade girl writers. I strove to represent the wide range of girl writers by selecting students who represent this spectrum of very high writing self-perception to very low writing self-perception as well as a student in the middle. The second issue of transferability lies in making the case studies visually rich and descriptive. Although these are three specific individual cases, the characteristics, actions, and words of the three girls are not uncommon in many classrooms across America.

Three Case Studies

Case studies allow for an opening into the lives of people and situations, since they are grounded in the understanding "that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 3). In seeking how writing self-perception impacts engagement and attitudes in a writing classroom, I share three case studies that reveal the writing self-perception of sixth grade adolescent girl writers. I begin with Laura, a student with low writing self-perception. She reveals herself as a struggling writer and classroom observations reveal that indeed she is a disengaged student. On the other extreme, Hallie maintains a high self-perception as a writer. Hallie is supported by her peers, family, and teacher who help to maintain her high writ-

ing self-perception. Last is Mina, who at times may struggle with writing, but regards herself as an "average" student.

A Case Study of Hallie

Small with a slender frame, Hallie is nearly four feet eight inches in height. She loves her family, school, and books. Hallie loves to read. Her long brown hair falls forward as she encompasses the book she is reading with her arms. She can be seen throughout the day with a novel in her hand or on a desk. Her love of reading greatly influences her writing. She states, "I always liked to write. I get a lot of ideas from when I would read. I guess when I was littler, I loved reading and I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write stories that people would want to read, so I started writing stories" (Interview 5/14/08). Her writing volition stems from her experiences with good writing models, specifically, the books and novels she reads. There is a connection between strong readers being strong writers (Ackerman, 1989). Hallie's self-perception as a writer stems from her connection to books and her love of reading. As she states above, she perceives herself to be a good writer because she is a good reader.

Hallie's self-perception as a writer:

Hallie's WSPQ results show that she has a positive self-perception as a writer. In fact, Hallie's self-reported questionnaire score presents the highest self-perception rating as compared to her classmates. Observations further reveal that Hallie's positive writing self-perception is apparent through her engagement in the writing classroom. Always smiling and involved, Hallie is an engaged writer. She makes eye contact with the teacher and displays excitement during the writing class regardless of the writing prompt. Always helpful to her peers, other students identify Hallie as being one of the best writers in the class. Throughout the study, her classmates made such comments as: she always has great ideas, her format's good, she has a good imagination, and she just has everything right. These positive comments build on her self-perception as a writer via positive social feedback. Social learning theory states that self-perception is in part created and established by the social feedback received from others (Bandura, 1977). Not only does Hallie receive positive social feedback from her peers at school, it is reinforced by her family and home social network.

Hannah: Do you think you're a good writer?

Hallie: Yeah. Um I guess it's cuz my dad and his friends say that I'm a good writer. (Interview 5/14/08)

Interactions and positive feedback from others is an interlocking determinant of one's beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Hallie's belief that she is a good writer is reinforced by the support she receives from the people around her. Belief in herself as a writer helps to establish her engagement and motivation in the writing classroom and is the basis of her strong volition to succeed as a writer.

Hallie's writing engagement.

Hallie is an engaged writer. She self-regulates and works towards continual improvement on her writing. She can be seen at times carrying a notebook in which she jots down ideas as it comes to her. She says she uses these ideas for future writing. Hallie is not only conscientious of external expectations (i.e., teacher and peers), she works hard on self-regulating her learning. Hallie's writing engagement goes beyond school writing. She comments that she used to create newsletters for her family. She states that she began doing this because it was just fun. She and her five year old sister play school where she is working on teaching her little sister how to write. Hallie states that when they play school, she assigns writing for her sister and then grades the writing. She tells her what to fix and work on. These examples reveal that Hallie is an intrinsically motivated and engaged in the writing process.

Hallie identifies that the biggest challenge she faces as a writer is enlarging and expanding her vocabulary. She states that she wants to use different and bigger words. She sees vocabulary as inextricably linked to becoming a good writer. When asked why this was important, she states so that she can become a better writer. Hallie recognizes that mastery of words and language is an important skill in becoming a fluent writer (White & Bruning, 2005).

Hallie's attitude towards writing.

"I like to write about things that pretty much don't exist. Because I like to think of the world as somewhere else and sometimes, sometimes the world isn't that great and I want it to be. So writing, it's like a way to make it like that. It's like kind of like your escape from the world. Like if you're having a bad day or something. It's like hmmm, what can I do to make it more interesting?" (Focus group interview, 7/7/08)

The statement above displays Hallie's attitude towards writing. Hallie uses writing to create her own perfect world. Not only does writing serve as a mode of communication but writing is fundamental in Hallie's self-expression and creation of her ideal world. She states that writing is an outlet that gives her voice. "Like if I'm having a bad day at school or like I'm mad at someone, I just write it down. I can't really say it to anybody, but like if I write it down, it's like I'm talking to myself and telling myself about it. Writing makes me feel better" (Focus group interview, 7/7/08). Writing serves as a mental release in which Hallie can express her full emotions

to herself. Hallie is a writer who writes, not only in school but also at home. Writing serves as a mode of self-expression that gives her voice and soothes her mind and soul.

A Case Study of Mina

Mina is a shy adolescent with long wavy brown hair. At approximately four feet, eight inches in height, Mina is soft spoken and timid. Although Mina is shy to speak out in the classroom, she becomes more vocal when in a small group setting or one-on-one situations. Mina states that when she is interested in what she is writing about, she can be a good writer. Daniels (2007) identifies authenticity and personal interest as being an important motivating factor in getting kids to write; "Students are motivated to write when they believe their writing has an authentic purpose or if they have a compelling need" (p. 17). Mina states, "Like if I have a topic on the top of my head that I want to write about, giving me a chance to write about it" would enable me to write better (Focus group interview, 3/7/08). Mina's self-perception in many ways is strongly correlated to how engaging the writing task is and her understanding of the prompt.

Mina's self-perception as a writer.

Mina perceives herself as an average writer; "I'm okay. I'm not the best in the class and I'm not the worst in the class. I'm middle" (Interview, 5/14/08). WSPQ results show that in fact, Mina is in the middle as compared to her classmates. She perceives others as being better writers and is quickly able to identify several students who she feels are good writers as well as several students who are not good writers. In comparison to the students in her class, Mina perceives herself as an average writer.

Mina's engagement in a writing classroom.

In her writing class, Mina is an engaged student. She may struggle with certain writing that she "doesn't really get" (Focus group interview, 3/7/08); however, she does her best to do what Mrs. Lund asks of her. "Like when it's like a topic that we just don't know what to write about. Like you just can't think of anything. Or like you can think of only a few things and you can't write a story that's so short" (Focus group interview, 3/7/08). For Mina, engagement and involvement in writing is directly dependent upon "getting" the prompt.

Another factor that impacts Mina's writing engagement is the issue of choice. Mina repeatedly comments that students should be given the freedom to choose their own topic for writing.

Hannah: So when your teacher gives you topic to write about, does that make it easier or harder to write?

Mina: It depends. I like it when she gives us choices and then she lets us pick. That's better than writing about something that I don't have a clue what to write about. If I get to pick, I can have an idea. (Focus group interview, 3/7/08)

This example shows that she is often at a loss of what to do when she is given a prompt rather than being given choices from which to write. Although Mina is generally an engaged writer, providing choices that are meaningful and authentic would enable her to be more invested and engaged as a writer.

Mina's attitude: An issue of time

Mina identifies time as an important factor that impacts her attitude towards writing. She desires more time to think and practice. "Maybe if we could work on a piece of writing for like one or two months..." she quietly comments. Mina reveals that in extending writing prompts to a longer time frame, she could improve her writing. She sees time as being a solution for improving her writing. Not only for the purpose of writing better stories, Mina views time as a general solution that can change her attitude and feelings toward writing. She states that good writers "write stuff that other people like. You're a good writer if you take your time and everything... Like you take your time and you plan everything out real good" (Focus group interview, 3/7/08). Lorty (1992) states, "If we pause to examine the qualities of time that shape our work in school, then we notice that this clock-driven experience of time controls virtually all aspects of our daily life" (p. 4). In schools, time is of the essence and writing, being a complicated and recursive process (Murray, 2001), does not fit neatly into the small chunks of time set aside for writing. Mina identifies good writers being good because they can control the amount of time they have to work on their writing. "Like if Mrs. Lund asks for 2 pages, and you get to the end of the 2 pages, and instead of writing more, I just like wrap up the end. I don't want to go beyond. Sometimes it's like a short time and I don't have time to finish it" (Focus group interview, 3/7/08). Unfortunately, she has no control over the use of her writing time thus does not think positively of writing nor herself as a writer.

A Case of Laura

Laura is a sixth grader who loves sports, particularly basketball. Although she remains a tomboy in many ways, she is well aware of the budding feminine beauty of her close friends. At nearly five foot two inches in height, she is semi-slender with an athletic build. When asked what she likes about school, she is quick to respond with "hanging out with my friends and P.E." When asked if she is a writer, she states with much force "No!" Laura is quick to state that she does not like writing because it hurts her hand. Laura is a student with low writing self-perception. "I don't like to write" basically sums up how Laura feels about writing.

Laura's self-perception as a writer.

Laura does not identify herself as a writer. Her disengagement and dislike towards writing is apparent in her posture and silence during the writing class time. Not for a lack of ability nor intelligence, Laura most often completes her assignments with the bare minimum requirements set forth by

her teacher. On those rare occasions when the writing topic is of interest to her, it is then and only then that she completes more than the minimum required. For example, in a journal entry about Earth Day, Mrs. Lund asked the students to write more than a couple of sentences. Laura wrote exactly three sentences. Laura is quick to state that if it's a good prompt, she will write, but "if I don't like it and don't get into it, then I just quit" (Interview 5/14/08).

Laura's engagement in a writing classroom.

With her medium brown hair pulled back into a pony tail, she scowls at her paper and works quietly on the task of writing the list of ten places her story might take place. After five minutes, Laura has her list of ten places. Mrs. Lund then asks the students to share their most creative place from their list. Laura never makes eye contact and situates herself diagonally away from the teacher and the task at hand. With her face and body turned so that she is awkwardly facing the door that leads outside to the freedom of the hallway. She does not participate in the conversation. During the several months of observation, Laura never raised her hand in participation; only when called upon does she speak.

Laura's attitude towards writing.

Although Laura completes the minimum writing, she consistently displays a negative attitude toward writing both in her words and action. What follows is a typical interaction between Laura and her teacher.

With 20 minutes left of the writing time, Laura raises her hand and Mrs. Lund walks over.

Laura: What do I do when I'm done?

Mrs. Lund: Are you sure you're really done?

L: Well, I finished the ending (shows her the last page of the story).

Mrs. L: Are you sure you don't want to go back and add anything?

L: But I'm done (pointing to the ending with the words "The End" written in large letters). Mrs. L shrugs her shoulders and gives her a questioning look.

Laura promptly asks to go to the bathroom and gets a nod from Mrs. Lund. She exits the classroom taking the hall pass as she leaves. When she returns approximately 8 minutes later, she shuffles the pages of her story, gets up and staples it. Another two minutes go by as she sits there with a blank expression on her face. She then puts the story into her folder, gets out her planbook and proceeds to fill it out. She quietly sits for a minute when done, then gets out a worksheet from another class and works on it for the remaining time. (Field Notes, 3/11/08)

This example shows that Laura has completed her story but will not review, revise, or revisit. Laura simply removes herself from the writing situation. During a follow-up interview I asked Laura how she knows when she was done with a piece

of writing. She replies, “when I have nothing else to say, I’m done” (Focal group, 1/1/08). When Laura is done, she is done.

Hannah: Do you like to write?

Laura: No!

H: Why not?

L: Because I’m not a good writer.

H: How come? Why do you think that? (Laura shrugs her shoulders) You write all the time in class.

L: But that’s because I HAVE to.

H: What do you want to do?

L: Play volleyball. That’s it.

H: So what if your teacher said you could write a story about volleyball, or any sport, would that get you interested in writing?

L: No. (shakes her head resolutely) It’s not the subject, it’s just doing it. (Focus group interview, 3/12/08)

Laura’s attitude shows that she has an issue with doing writing. Rather than increase her effort and self-regulation, she opts to do only as much as will get her by. Laura has a low self-perception of herself as a writer and her engagement in Mrs. Lund’s writing class reveal that she is uninterested and disengaged. She does not see the purpose or importance of school writing. Cole (2007) asserts that writing is an unexamined gatekeeper in educational practices. Writing remains a primary tool for assessing knowledge in all content areas and is the primary determinate of the academic success or failure of students (NAEP, 2000). How students feel about writing and themselves as writers greatly impacts their academic futures. For Laura, her negative self-perception and attitudes toward writing presents a highly problematic situation for her academic future.

Cross Case Analysis

Hallie, Mina, and Laura present very different pictures of engagement in the writing classroom. Each girl’s engagement closely reflects their attitude towards writing and their self-perception as writers. Hallie, the engaged writer with high writing self-perception, has a positive attitude towards writing and appears to enjoy all writing activities. Laura, the writer with low self-perception, sums it up by stating that she does not like to write. Mina is the student in the middle, who, depending on context and situation, can be an engaged writer if she so chooses.

Engagement in a Writing Classroom

“I think that like if the writing doesn’t make any sense then it’s not going to be a good writing” (Mina, focus group interview, 3/12/08).

“Like if I don’t like it and don’t get into it, then I just quit” (Laura, interview, 5/14/08).

Engagement issues in a writing classroom: The writing task.

For Laura and Mina, their engagement in writing was directly linked to the writing tasks assigned by the teacher. Their volition was determined by their feelings towards a particular writing task; if the writing was meaningful, they were willing to put forth more effort. What they deemed as “a good prompt” impacted their volition and resulted in more positive attitude and stronger engagement.

Hallie states that she is an engaged writer because the writing she does is personal and meaningful to her. She states, “sometimes you write things just because it makes you feel better. Like if I’m having a bad day at school or like I’m mad at someone, I just write it down. I can’t really say it to anybody, but like if I write it down, it’s like I’m talking to myself and telling myself... Writing to me is an outlet” (Focus group interview, 5/7/08). This passage expresses the importance of writing in Hallie’s life. The type of writing Hallie participates in is personal and meaningful; an outlet for her self-expression.

It is important that writing tasks are meaningful; however, what is meaningful varies from student to student. Laura and Mina have the potential to grow as writers and they repeatedly state that when they like the writing and when they “get it,” they can be successful writers. When writing is meaningful, their volition to write positively increases. Hallie similarly shows that when writing is meaningful, an outlet for her self-expression, she enjoys writing and is further motivated to continue her writing events. Defining and framing what is meaningful presents a challenge for classroom teachers.

Engagement issues in a writing classroom: The connection between reading and writing.

“I guess when I was littler I loved reading and I wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write stories people would want to read, so I started writing stories” (Hallie, interview, 5/14/08).

“I think I’m okay. Like, when I start writing and I get into it... I liked the poetry ones (poetry unit) because I like reading poetry books” (Laura, interview, 5/14/08).

Writing engagement and writing self-perception is in part fueled by reading interest and reading engagement. Smith and Wilhelm (2006) assert that students who love to read are more likely to be better writers. Hallie’s writing has been greatly impacted by her love of reading and books. She epitomizes the strong connection between reading and writing (Ackerman, 1989). Just as Hallie has a wide array of books she enjoys reading, so her writing interests are vast and expansive. She is willing to try all different types of prompts because her strong volition and positive self-perception has prepared to be motivated and engaged. She is simply willing to try because she is supported by past successes.

When it comes to reading, Laura enjoys only the books she gets to select. Similarly, she states that she likes to write about topics and things that she gets to choose. In order to engage students in literacy events, students must be provided with meaningful choices and literacy experiences that connect to their lives; again the importance of meaningfulness arises (Smith and Wilhelm, 2006). Laura points out that what she is interested in reading directly relates to what she is interested in writing about because it is meaningful to her. This reinforces the interconnectedness between reading and writing (Ackerman, 1989).

Engagement issues in a writing classroom: An issue of choice.

“It’s pretty fun when you get to do what you want to do and not get told what you have to do.” (Mina, interview, 5/14/08).

“Like if I have a topic on the top of my head that I want to write about, give me a chance to write about it.” (Mina, interview, 5/7/08).

Laura is working on her pen pal letter. She is coloring and decorating. When done, she asks if she can get a piece of construction paper to make a birthday card for a friend. She proceeds in writing a birthday poem in the card. (Field notes, 4/16/08).

Choice appears to be an important issue for Mina and Laura. While Mina verbalizes the importance of choice, Laura shows during an observation period that when given freedom and choice, she is an engaged and self-motivated writer. Giving students a choice in self-selecting independent reading materials may be easy enough for a classroom teacher, however, the way in which teachers can provide a similar type of freedom and flexibility in the writing classroom is difficult. In many ways writer’s workshop provides a path in which students can be provided choice and flexibility. Just as all students do not have the same set of experiences, knowledge, and interests, they cannot be engaged in the same writing task, in the same way. Graves (1983) states “Children want to write... We ignore the child... We underestimate them... Instead, we take the control away from children and place unnecessary road blocks in the way of their intentions.” (p. 3). Just as writing choice and control over writing are important to Mina and Laura, so it may be an important issue to many adolescent girl writers.

It can be heard in many teacher’s lounges that girls are not difficult to engage and their best writers are girls. Past studies present numerous examples of the difficulties in engaging boys as writers (Dutro, Kazemi, & Balf, 2006; Fletcher, 2006; Newkirk, 2002; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). They re-affirm the notion that girls are more linguistically inclined, thus they are successful writers. It is important to recognize that not all girls are linguistically inclined, nor view themselves as successful writers. Engaging girls as writers may be less of a challenge than boys in some ways, but this assumption should not be used to categorize all girls.

Attitude towards writing

Social learning theory identifies perception as directly correlated to attitudes. Bandura (1977) identifies this interrelationship as bidirectional. Hallie has a positive attitude towards writing because she has positive writing self-perception. Laura has a negative attitude towards writing because of her negative writing self-perception. This relationship between attitude and self-perception is further driven by external factors, namely social feedback that reinforces positive or negative self-perception and attitudes. Hallie receives positive reinforcement from her friends, classmates, family, and teacher; Hallie perceives herself as a good writer. Social learning views interactions between external and internal influences as interlocking determinants (Bandura, 1977). The notion that each part influences and is influenced by one another. The external influences of social feedback on writing self-perception became a prominent theme that positively or negatively established attitudes towards writing.

Attitude towards writing: Influence of social feedback.

Bandura (1977) asserts that social feedback serves as a reinforcement to motivate and alter attitudes towards a specific task, acts, or events. Students need critical but supportive reinforcements that support their learning and strengthen their volition. Specific comments and feedback can positively reinforce students’ growth as writers, however, writing is a subject in which students often receive vague or non-specific comments that don’t help them improve their writing (Graham, MacArthur, & Schwartz, 1995). Hallie embodies the student whose positive self-perception and attitude is largely influenced by the support from her peers and family. Many students in Mrs. Lund’s class state that Hallie is one of the best writers, if not *the* best writer in the class. Hallie reveals that not only does her dad comment positively on her writing, “then my dad will go and read things to his friends at the firehouse and they’ll say it’s good so umm, I thought I was a good writer.” (Interview, 5/14/08). Hallie positive self-perception as a writer is greatly impacted by the social reinforcements she receives. This positive impact strengthens her writing volition.

Laura and Mina were not identified by their peers as being good writers, nor did the girls identify themselves as being good writers. Both girls have the potential to become good writers, but their lack of writing volition prevents them from being highly motivated and engaged like Hallie. Although there is insufficient evidence from this study, the lack of positive reinforcement can be a factor in their less positive attitudes and lower self-perception as writers. Both girls attest that when the writing prompt was good, they could be good writers. Rather than attributing their writing ability to themselves, they referred back to the quality of the writing prompt as the primary factor in enabling them to be good writers. This was problematic in that neither Mina nor Laura were able to define what a good prompt was or how

a good prompt enabled them to be good writers. Both girls asserted that they simply know it when they see it, and when they see it, they will be good at writing.

Attitude towards writing: Issue of time.

Time is an issue that people, adults and children alike, often struggle with. The time crunch can influence and affect student's attitude towards a task or activity (Lorty, 1992). In situations where blocks of time are dedicated to a single content subject, writing does not fit neatly into the structure of the school day. Mina comments "I don't have time... to be good (at writing);" Hallie comments that she stopped writing her family newsletter because it became too time consuming; Laura comments that she often rushes through assignments because she doesn't have time for sports and other things. All three girls allude to a certain lack of time in their writing efforts, however when further analyzed, the statements reveal a lack of volition; the desire to invest the time and energy into writing. For instance, Hallie had created a weekly family newsletter, yet when her volition to continue the weekly process diminished, she referred back to a lack of time thereby releasing her from the obligation of continuing on with the family newsletter. Laura is willing to make time for her sports, her writing however, she does not have time for. It may seem like time is a major factor on writing, but the issue of time is not simple. Students are able to make time to complete the things that they deem as important even when there is insufficient time. Laura rushes to complete her homework assignments before she leaves school because she knows she has a basketball practice later that day and won't have time for her homework. Positively or negatively, time is influenced by the desire that students have towards the specific task. Lorty (1992) identifies that in modern society, time is a critical factor in all activities both in and out of school. I add that volition causes students to create the time to write and produce. Rather than being pushed by the clock, volition allows students to push the clock and dedicate their time and effort to their writing. As writers, we shape and re-create reality with our words (Burnham, 2001); similarly we create the time we need to create the writings we deem as important.

Discussion

In my initial analysis of the data, I identified three major themes: writing task, reading interests as an influence on writing, and time. Upon a closer examination, I discovered that although the three girls continually referred to their likes/dislikes regarding the writing task, e.g., how the things they liked to read influenced what they wanted to write about. This is the underlying issue of volition that permeated the main themes. Whether the task was meaningful, the successful completion of the writing depended upon their desire to do the writing. Even when given the choice to write on any topic of their choice, their volition controlled whether they successfully completed the writing task. Regardless of how

much time was given, if they had desire to do the writing, they found ways to make time to successfully complete the writing task. Volition permeated all three case studies and became the overriding theme that moved motivation and engagement.

Volition Impacts the Writing Task

Engagement and motivation towards the successful completion of a writing task is framed by the volition that students have towards the writing task. Whether the writing assignment was engaging or students were given a choice, if they so desired, they could indeed be successful writers. Hallie identified that reading greatly influenced her writing, however when she stopped desiring to write the newsletter, her motivation waned and she ceased immersing herself in similar reading materials, e.g., reading Reader's Digest and local newspaper. In this case, her volition negatively impacted the reading of news sources and the writing the family newsletter.

Graham and Harris (1997) identify meaningful tasks as a major factor on the development of writing motivation and self-regulation. They state that when tasks are meaningful, students can be highly motivated. When tasks were meaningful, students may be motivated and engaged, however, this study found that whether meaningful or not, students' desire to do or not do the writing was the ultimate factor. If the student did not have high volition, the meaningfulness of the writing did little to impact motivation or influence students towards a positive writing self-perception.

Graves (1991) asserts that teachers can make writing more engaging by tapping into the interests of the students. The three girls in this study demonstrate that their desire trumped their engagement regardless of how interesting or engaging the writing task. When Laura was asked if she could be a better writer if the teacher allowed her to write about sports, Laura quickly stated, "It's not the topic, it's just doing it." Laura demonstrates that her interest in sports and the possibility of writing about sports was trumped by her lack of desire to do the task of writing. Hallie ceased publishing a family newsletter not because she stopped being interested or invested in her family, rather, because she simply lost the desire to do so. This concept of volition, i.e., "if I want to, then I can," was the underlying factor that guided motivation, engagement, and ultimately impacted the writing self-perception of the three adolescent girls.

Volition Impacts Time

The girls bring up the issue of time as a major factor in writing success. All three girls attest that time directly influenced their ability to be successful writers, yet when they desired to do the writing, i.e., when their will superseded their lack of classroom writing time, they found or made time to successfully complete the writing at home. Bomer (1995) states "*More time* is a meaningless idea... time just is. What we are really complaining about is our difficulty in

both controlling and choosing what to do with the time we have.” (p. 2). Laura identified that although she made time to play basketball, there was no time to be had for writing. When Mina stopped desiring to write, she states, “I just ran out of time”. Hallie states that she was going to put more details in her shrinking story, but chose to stop after page 4 because she simply ran out of time. The three girls display how the amount of time they spent was influenced by their volition. How we allocate our time, the purpose for our time determines our time as meaningfully spent. Things that are a priority, we allocate more time; this is driven by our desire to participate in the particular activity because it is important to us. In essence, our volition drives how we allocate our time and results in our engagement and motivation with specific tasks.

Social learning theory identifies that the locus of control for an individual’s attitude is in part determined by the continuous reciprocal interactions between the external and internal influences on the self (Bandura, 1977). In this case, desire or will to write, i.e., writing volition, influenced the locus of control and guided external motivation. The attitudes that students have towards writing was shaped by both external and internal influences as social learning theory asserts, however this study found that successful completion of a writing task was under girded by a writer’s volition.

The findings of this study present three influences on writing: the writing task, interest in the task, and time. All three factors were extrinsically motivated, yet the underlying key issue that under girded the study was that of volition, i.e., desire to do the writing. Volition, an intrinsic motivator, superseded the external factors and ultimately drove the engagement and motivation of the three adolescent girl writers positively or negatively.

Conclusion

If volition is the key that guides student writing motivation, engagement, and self-perception, then is desire to write intrinsic or extrinsic? Furthermore, can desire be measured quantitatively or examined qualitatively? These are questions that need to be further explored in a future study. Teachers need to address the misconception that all girls are strong writers. The need for future studies on struggling girl writers is clear; the issues that many girls face as writers and how their volition impacts their writing motivation and writing engagement in a writing classroom. This study provided a window into the writing engagement of three adolescent girls; Hallie, the student with high writing self-perception, struggling Laura with the low writing self-perception, and Mina, the student with the average self-perception. The story of the three girls and their writing engagement is not atypical. The girls point educators to the fact that there is a need to engage and motivate adolescent girls as writers. The assumption that girls are more linguistically inclined; as such, all girls are good at writing. Hallie is the model student that is the basis of this assumption. Of the 11 female students in Mrs.

Lund’s classroom, there was just one Hallie. The assumption that the other ten female students were like Hallie is a misconception indeed. The voices of Mina and Laura reveal that there are many girls who struggle with writing. Not for lack of mental ability, but for a lack of the desire to write. The question of how teachers can engage struggling girl writers and raise their volition can be in part addressed by turning to the writer’s workshop model. Through conferencing, teachers can provide individualized attention and support the girls in their writing endeavors. By providing individualized attention and external reinforcements, students can receive direct comments that can guide their writing and can help strengthen their understanding of the writing process; thereby increasing writing self-perception and motivation. Volition guided the girls to produce writing that they deemed as worthy and good. It is imperative that teachers provide a supportive classroom environment in which to think and write. “Writing is primarily not a matter of talent, of dedication, of vision, of vocabulary, of style, but simply a matter of sitting. The writer is the person who writes” (Murray, 1996, p. 5).

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