

# AERA Division A Newsletter

## School Leadership News

Issue 8

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### VICE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

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*Editors' Note:* This issue does not include a message from our current Division A Vice President in order to provide space for the address given by the Immediate Past Vice President at the 2004 annual meeting of AERA (below). The Vice President's Corner will return in the Winter 2005 issue.

### DEADLINE APPROACHING!

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Deadline for submitting applications for the Outstanding Dissertation competition is near. See information posted on AERA Web site for more details. Contact Don Hackmann directly if you have questions.

### PERSPECTIVE: Educational Administration Research: Are We Too Broken?

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*This perspective is an edited version of the Division A Vice Presidential Address given by Patrick Forsyth on April 14, 2004, at the annual meeting of AERA in San Diego, CA. Patrick served as the Division A Vice President from 2002 to 2004. His remarks focus on the third element of the 2004 conference theme, Justifying Evidence-Based Claims. Based upon recent calls by scientific associations to improve research in education and a review of literature and proposals by novice researchers, he offers an agenda for action.*

U. S. Representative Michael Castle (R-DE), reporting on meetings relative to the reauthorization of the Office of Educational Research and Support (OERI), proclaimed that “educational research is broken” (Shavelson & Towne, 2002, p. 28). I want to examine that proclamation as it applies specifically to educational administration research. Also, consistent with the 2004 annual meeting theme and my responsibility to review the status and progress of research in educational administration, I address four subjects: (a) the press for science-based research as a remedy for the general claim that educational research is

“broken,” (b) the credibility of the critique that we are weak as a community of scholars, (c) evidence related to our present and future as a community of scholars, and (d) a possible *carpe diem*. These thoughts are biased by my 26-year history as a member of AERA, my service as vice president of Division A, and numerous events that shape my perceptions of research in our field.

#### **Press for Science-based Research**

This section is a selective comment on recent events as they have unfolded in and around AERA and the U. S. Department of Education

(US DeptEd). Richard E. Mayer observed that a “review of the pages of the *Educational Researcher* or the program of the AERA annual convention confirms that our field is actually considering whether or not science is a good idea for educational research” (Mayer, 2000, p. 38). He was reacting to the “promise and perils of alternative forms of data representation” (Eisner, 1997, p. 5), which was a declaration of independence from constraints imposed by science-like methods. The ensuing discussion and debate surrounding Eisner’s piece can be thought of as work by thoughtful members of this association as they came to grips with an evolution—perhaps even revolution—of research orthodoxies that was most conspicuous during the 1980s. The acknowledgment of the demise of science was heralded and embraced by some and decried by others as a harbinger of Armageddon.

While AERA appears to have moved away from science over the period of 30 years beginning in the mid-1970s, a parallel press for the embrace of science and rigorous research in education has been fueled by periodic studies and reports by the National Research Council (NRC) (Atkinson & Jackson, 1992; Kiesler & Turner, 1977; NRC, 1999; Shavelson & Towne, 2002; Towne, Shavelson, & Feuer, 2001). NRC is the 141-year old operating arm of the combined National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine. Several of these studies were responsive to requests by the US DeptEd for assistance. Paralleling the decline of scientific research in education has been the decline of funding for OERI and its predecessor, The National Institute for Education, by 75% between 1973 and 2000 (Shavelson & Towne, 2002).

Ironically, just as AERA’s membership was noting and adjusting to a research environment unconstrained by the prescriptions of scientific inquiry, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was passed, requiring schools and districts to utilize “scientifically-based research” to justify the selection of interventions supported by federal funds. Public and political efforts to tie school reform to evidence of effectiveness are

energized by reports such as that of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRSD). CSRSD has demonstrated that, in the period between 1998 and 2002, school adoptions of reform models given strong or promising ratings by the American Institutes for Research (based on empirical evidence) have declined, while adoption of those models whose effectiveness was attested to by marginal, mixed, or no research evidence have increased. Here is a timeline of seven events occurring in the past two years that have intensified the press for science-based research in education.

In 2002, the NRC released *Scientific Research in Education*, the 188-page report by its Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research, edited by Richard J. Shavelson and Lisa Towne. The multidisciplinary committee, which included names familiar to us all from the ranks of academe like Margaret Eisenhart (University of Colorado), Eugene E. Garcia (Berkeley), Eric Hanushek (Stanford), and Carol Weiss (Harvard), produced a thoughtful and sensitive treatment of the problem of educational research. This NRC report introduces six guiding principles that underlie all scientific inquiry:

- **Scientific Principle 1.** Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically.
- **Scientific Principle 2.** Link research to relevant theory.
- **Scientific Principle 3.** Use methods that permit direct investigation of the question.
- **Scientific Principle 4.** Provide a coherent and explicit chain of reasoning.
- **Scientific Principle 5.** Replicate and generalize across studies.
- **Scientific Principle 6.** Disclose research to encourage professional scrutiny and critique.

The pursuit of these guiding principles, it is argued, makes research more scientific. This report not only distinguishes science from non-science but also reclaims qualitative methods for science. The experiment is extolled, but not seen as feasible or even particularly effective in the study of many educational questions. This book

is available from the National Academy Press, can be purchased and downloaded instantly, and I recommend it to mature researchers and fledglings, science advocates and agnostics. In October 2002, AERA published the Dewitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Distinguished Lecture by Robert Slavin in which he stridently and enthusiastically observes that "the experiment is the design of choice for studies that seek to make causal conclusions, and particularly for evaluations of educational innovations" (p. 18). He further argues that randomized trials are necessary to build public confidence in our research, but that this research will be costly and requires adequate funding.

Shortly thereafter, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2002) recommended a strategy for the US DeptEd, claiming in its report that little progress has been made in the U.S. toward raising educational achievement during the past 30 years. Its primary strategic recommendations include building the knowledge base through randomized controlled trials and providing incentives for the widespread use of proven, replicable interventions.

In January 2003, the AERA Council adopted a unanimous resolution on essential elements of scientifically-based research. While the statement generally endorses the scientific principles proposed by the NRC, it expresses dismay at the US DeptEd's new focus on randomized trials to the exclusion of other legitimate scientific methods.

In December 2003, the US DeptEd held a meeting to detail the reasoning behind a new emphasis on evaluating programs and projects funded by the Department. The meeting ended with a discussion of the department's proposal to assign a competitive priority to proposals that utilize randomization and controlled trials (RCTs), noting that five programs already assign such priority (AERA, 2004).

That same month, the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy held a two-day meeting with state and local officials to introduce its guide,

"Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide." The guidelines accept randomized control trials that are well designed and implemented as strong evidence of effectiveness. The guidelines accept randomized controlled trials whose quality and quantity are good but fall short of "strong evidence," or comparison-group studies in which the intervention and comparison groups are very closely matched in academic achievement, demographics, and other characteristics (Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, 2003).

Finally, AERA held its 2004 annual meeting in which one of its three themes is titled "Justifying Evidence-Based Claims." The Program Committee encouraged sessions "that promote consideration of what counts as evidence in high-quality educational research" (AERA, 2003-2004).

These events are rather tightly focused on increasing scientific inquiry in education, especially through the most rigorous of scientific tools, randomized trials. In sum, it is clear that we have an ever-growing and already powerful press in the direction of science-based research in education. The press is coming from multiple directions, including other scientific associations, the public, federal government, and to some extent, AERA. Clearly, many believe that a turn to science-based research approaches is the remedy for what is broken.

### **Credibility of Critique: Weak Community of Scholars?**

A response to the strength or weakness of the educational administration community of scholars is a resounding silence relative to the press just described. Acknowledging that I operate in a wheat field in the middle of the Great Plains, hardly mission control of the educational research community, I have heard little talk among local or national colleagues about the implications of the press for science-based research—whether for, against, or even

noting its existence. The meaning of the silence is difficult to interpret.

In their chapter on “Features of Education and Education Research,” Shavelson and Towne (2002) discuss some features that quite possibly contribute to the weaknesses in the educational administration community of scholars. They suggest that

this proliferation of frameworks, coupled with the sheer scope of the myriad fields that contribute to understanding in education, make the development of professional training for education researchers particularly vexing. The breadth and depth of topical areas as well as multiple epistemological and methodological frameworks are nearly impossible to cover adequately in a single degree program. (p. 92)

In education, this complexity is coupled with inadequate preparation and mentoring traditions relative to research skill. In the generation now occupying the chairs of senior scholarship in our field (my generation), research training was very uneven across universities. For the most part, we had little or no training in the philosophy of science or epistemology, limited reading from the canon of sociological and anthropological qualitative literature, and no courses in qualitative methods. My peers probably took a basic statistics course and perhaps some design course related to dissertation writing. My guess would be that most of those of my generation capable of science-like research as described by the NRC are the recipients of rare mentoring by an unusually active scholar, or they are self-taught methodologists.

In the generation following my own, my observation is that we also have great unevenness of a different sort. Science-trained researchers came from shops like The University of Chicago (supported by grants and centers), The Ontario Institute-University of Toronto (supported by Kenneth Leithwood’s grant factory), and The Ohio State University (supported by the Fawcett Professorship). These

graduates were trained by experienced researchers who operated in a heady research environment not typical of programs graduating researchers in educational administration. These few are science oriented and methodologically sophisticated and flexible.

The more common pattern of preparation for the new generation of educational leadership researchers was not nearly as impressive. Schooled during the disillusionment with science-like research and the embracement of anti-science qualitative methods, this generation waded through epistemological chaos and often experienced weak or inadequate training in any research methodology. As Pallas (2001) notes, “Today, quite a few beginning scholars embrace postmodern perspectives without fully understanding what they claim to be rejecting” (p. 10). This research-training chaos has had consequences for scientific research in education. For example, Slavin (2004) reports,

I examined *AERJ* over the period 2000-2003 (Volumes 37-39 and Volume 40, No. 1). Out of 112 articles, six (5.4 %) reported experimental control comparisons. Of these, two were brief (4 weeks and 2 hours, respectively), and one used a matched design, leaving three (2.7 %) randomized studies of extended treatments. (p. 27)

Critique of our weakness as a scholarly community may be justified, as evidenced by findings of McCarthy and Kuh (1997). Most professors of educational administration who participated in multiple studies over two decades indicated that they consider teaching as their primary professional strength. And despite having no undergraduate responsibilities, they devote less time to research than their peers in other disciplines.

In addition to examining problems of research training, we could assess the strength of our research community by asking what it has produced that is useful for practitioners. We can cite work around important topics in educational administration: school climate, class size, school

organization, leadership style, and such. I would argue that, while we have accumulated evidence on topics like these, our ability to explain these findings is very limited because theory development and synthesis in our community is weak—and the exposure of our future researchers to theory is even weaker. Moreover, much of what appears in educational administration journals is marginally relevant to practitioners and often devoid of theoretical underpinnings.

### Evidence Related to Scholars of the Future

As a way of assessing our preparedness to meet a call for science-based research and random trials, I examined the research proposals of the 40 doctoral students (out of approximately 65) invited to the two most recent David L. Clark Graduate Student Seminar sponsored by Division A and L and by UCEA. My analysis is tainted by the limitations of the proposals (each only three single-spaced pages) and my own biases in the process of interpreting the content of the proposals. Here is what I found.

*Year one.* Four of the 40 proposals appeared to be quantitative studies (3 based on surveys, 1 utilized a large national data set). Two of these research designs were not very clearly described; none was experimental or quasi-experimental. All were *ex post facto* designs: Two appeared to be strong and possibly could be argued to be science-relevant, according to the suggested NRC standards. In my view, two of the studies were seriously flawed or inadequately described.

Thirty-six of the 40 proposals appeared to be qualitative studies utilizing an extraordinary breadth of methodological and epistemological approaches. The case study and comparative case study were most common, comprising 15 of the 36 qualitative proposals. Two or three proposals used the following designs: critical feminist theory, critical ethnography, mixed methods, unclear methods, or action research. One proposal each came from constructivist grounded theory, grounded theory, ethnography, critical race theory, policy analysis, evaluation research,

and oral history. Many of these proposals appeared to be atheoretical, including one-shot case designs involving brief interviews with a few people. Few acknowledged a conceptual framework tied to any major line of inquiry. My estimation is that between four and six of these proposals might be argued to be science-relevant by suggested NRC standards; that is, they were interested in some form of causality.

*Year two.* Twelve proposals appeared to be quantitative. Two were correlational studies, and one was experimental but with a small sample ( $n = 15$ ). Nine were *ex post facto* studies (five with very small samples; two with nested techniques, applying highly sophisticated statistical modeling; and two simple surveys free of either theoretical guidance or explanatory outcomes). Thirteen of the 29 qualitative studies were primarily ethnographic cases or interpretive cases. The remainder were distributed over a great variety of approaches: policy analysis, grounded theory, legal/historical, feminist post-structuralist, meta-analysis, explanatory case, mixed methods, historical, critical race theory cases.

Having exposed myself to these proposals with some care and with a particular analytical purpose in mind, I permit myself some observations that may go beyond the available data:

1. Topical analyses suggest that few or no proposals came from doctoral students who are active participants in an on-going, institutional, or sponsored research agenda or project.
2. For the most part, these proposals are idiosyncratic; they appear to derive from practical problems students have observed and are often uninformed by existing lines of inquiry that we as a community of scholars have inherited.
3. These doctoral students seem to have a single research method in their repertoire, that is, preferred methods dictate how problems are studied.
4. This generation of researchers is not trained, and possibly not disposed, to tap into the

national science-based research programs or their funds.

5. Many of these studies would be excluded by NRC Scientific Principal 5 because they are anchored in advocative or relativist epistemologies that explicitly embrace unreliability in the primary measurement instrument, the researcher, and hence deny replicability and generalizability across studies.

In sum, the upcoming generation of scholars, judged by science capacity criteria, has tipped out of balance to a point where without specific intervention, it is not prepared to respond to the press for science-based research. Whether this research community is disposed to intervene is at least questionable. My own biases cause me to hope that we might act aggressively and soon to do just that.

**Carpe Diem: Action Plan for Scientific-based Research**

My comments have been and continue to be addressed to those in our research community who believe in and attempt to practice scientific inquiry. We have before us an opportunity, perhaps a mandate, to improve. Perhaps we also have the potential resources to accomplish this burst of improvement. Shavelson and Towne (2002) argue that the “scientific enterprise depends on a healthy community of researchers and is guided by a set of fundamental principles” (p. 2). I use their principles to muse about and recommend changes directed to the specific community of scholars who make up Division A.

***Scientific Principle 1: Pose Significant Questions that Can Be Investigated Empirically***

I observe that those of us who study school leadership and schools as instructional organizations could push ourselves to ask better and more critical questions. However, our capacity to ask more significant questions could also be improved if a number of barriers were removed.

First, the NRC recommendations to the broad education community are, in my view, illogically restrictive, ruling out significant research questions of great import to us. AERA cannot permit to stand arguments that evidence of causality can be drawn from randomized trials alone. Many, and perhaps the most important educational phenomena, cannot be studied in this way. On the point of causal explanation and qualitative research, see Maxwell’s (2004) article. For the US DeptEd to assign preferential priority to research proposals *simply* because they are capable of being studied experimentally may indeed bias acceptance toward the trivial. I say this not to diminish my dismay that virtually *no* experimental studies of educational interventions are carried on by doctoral students or researchers in the field of educational administration. Kerlinger (1979) discussed the weaknesses of experiments in terms of artificiality and lack of generality. However, he does finally argue that

conclusions obtained in ex post facto research are not on as firm ground as conclusions obtained in experimental research because of the inevitable lesser control of the effects of independent variables and of the research situation. The lack is sometimes compensated by greater realism and stronger effects. (p. 114)

Second, since 1974, fallout and interpretations following the National Research Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act have increasingly and for the most part unnecessarily constrained our abilities to conduct no- or low-risk research and to ask significant, researchable questions. As a research community, we must insist that AERA fully and actively support the NRC recommendation exempting most educational research from the regulations governing the study of human subjects, freeing scholars from the largely irrelevant and tyrannical interference of the Federal Government and our own insufferable, local Institutional Review Boards.

### ***Scientific Principle 2: Link Research to Relevant Theory***

At least from the point of view of those who identify themselves with a science-based epistemology, this community has squandered its richest research resource, the doctoral dissertation. As a possible remedy, doctoral research teams (including several active, perhaps multi-disciplinary senior scholars) fully schooled in theory and supported by an established, ongoing, on-site line of inquiry, should replace the solo, wildly idiosyncratic dissertations with larger investigations and shared data collection responsibilities. I want to make the point that the diversity in research methods and strands of dissertation study constitute a strength of our field. On the other hand, the limitations of our scholarly community and the paucity of resources suggest a value inherent in developing fewer promising lines of inquiry over time, supported by literally generations of dissertations.

In writing and review of new scholarship, our community of scholars would do well to increase expectations related to literature review including the explicit linkage to theory and rigorous examination of both the relevance and trustworthiness of cited empirical work. Going beyond the mere citation of convergent findings by evaluating both the external and internal validity of key citations will foster convergence of theory and empirical evidence. Literature review, as a critical skill for fledgling scholars, should be given a great deal of attention in preparation and our own professional development.

### ***Scientific Principle 3: Use Methods that Permit Direct Investigation of the Question***

This principle argues that “scientific claims are significantly strengthened when they are subject to testing by multiple methods” (Shavelson & Towne, 2002, p. 3) and urges the use of multiple methodological approaches. I think this requires the re-establishment of qualitative methods in the service of science. Here is what the current best-

selling text in educational research says about qualitative research:

Qualitative research methods are based on different beliefs and purposes than quantitative research methods. For example, qualitative researchers do not accept the view of a stable, coherent, uniform world. They argue that all meaning is situated in a particular perspective or context, and, since different people and groups often have different perspectives, and contexts, there are many different meanings in the world, none of which is necessarily more valid or true than another. (Gay & Airasian, 2003, p. 9)

This position is nonsense. While it is true that *some* qualitative researchers hold such views, it is also true that the history and importance of qualitative methods in scientific sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education research predates such views. Qualitative methods continue through their unique characteristics to shape our first understandings of complex phenomena and to explain, interpret, and apply what is learned generally through causal methods. Science-oriented scholars must reclaim qualitative methods, restoring them to their time-honored position in the scientific study of education. Qualitative methods are essential to the scientific cycle of induction and deduction: They are the seed corn of theoretical capital and the *sine qua non* of meaningful explanation and application of social science.

### ***Scientific Principle 4: Provide Coherent and Explicit Chain of Reasoning***

### ***Scientific Principle 5: Replicate and Generalize across Studies***

### ***Scientific Principle 6: Disclose Research to Encourage Scrutiny and Critique***

The last three NRC principles speak to the particular strengths of scientific inquiry that require a research community climate dedicated to intense scrutiny of its members' work; hence, I combined them into one section. Committed to the view that rational approaches to the

understanding of regularities in an objective world outside of ourselves are best tested in a vibrant and skeptical community of scholars, these principles can be advanced and strengthened in several ways. I offer my recommendations for consideration.

AERA should facilitate the processes needed by scholars who identify with the study of causality and scientific approaches in the following ways. First, provide peer review of claimed science-based research proposals by scholars who are experts in the scientific paradigm and methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and eliminate out-of-paradigm review. Second, institute voluntary, science-based sessions at every annual meeting to restore the organization's function as critic. Finally, through its Research Advisory Committee, explore for science-based members of AERA the adoption of standards or expectations related to topics such as standardized reporting of confidence intervals for effect sizes (Thompson, 2002) or new classification systems for non-experimental research (Johnson, 2001). These and other innovations are directed to problems in educational research pointed to by the National Research Council.

Institutions of higher education need to strengthen support for education researchers. For example, universities might establish a science-based track where students who so choose would study advanced research methods and design (both qualitative and quantitative), including structural equation modeling and hierarchical linear modeling. Rather than just be elected by only a few, such a track would be expected of those considering research careers. This approach could be coupled with a research internship including full-time engagement with an active research team of senior scholars—at a rival university, if necessary.

Those of us nearer to the completion of our research careers than their genesis must also improve our research skills. Ideally, this continuing professional development would include high expectations and aggressive,

financially supported programs of self-improvement such as release-time to take courses and conduct experiments and interdisciplinary inquiry. Such arrangements need to become part of the reinvestment of overhead charges made by university foundations.

The political climate is ripe for the reorganization of college of education research efforts through the establishment of research cooperatives with states and school districts. New organizational structures could foster the vitality of ongoing lines of inquiry and multidisciplinary teams of doctoral students and senior scholars.

### **Conclusion**

My intention is four-fold: (a) to establish the scope and seriousness of the current call for science-based research, (b) to explore the credibility of the critique of education research on which this call is based, (c) to examine the readiness of current and future scholars in our field to meet the press for science-based research, and (d) to propose some ideas about how this press can be exploited to improve our community and the research it produces.

With respect to the first point, the press for science-based research is a powerful one and not dependent on who is in the White House. This movement will have significant implications for research in the foreseeable future: We will learn either to ride this train or be crushed by it.

Second, our preparation as scholars has been and continues to be less than ideal. Many, if not most of us, were not trained primarily as researchers. Our understanding of the philosophy of science, especially epistemology, of complex and proliferating research methods and the variety of theoretical literatures that underpin education is not what it could be. Education research has not been well funded, and the great bulk of it is conducted without dedicated resources. From the science-based perspective, I think it is fair to call our research community

weak. This claim is verified in my analysis of research projects proposed by two years of competitively selected graduate students, arguably the top students in our field. Their doctoral work shows virtually no experimental research projects, relatively few strong ex post facto studies, and a very large number of case studies that fall by epistemological choice outside the stream of scientific explanation.

Finally, I think it is time for us as a division of AERA and as a professional association to “heal ourselves” in some ways. I proposed some interventions for AERA debate and activity, for research preparation reform, and for university action. We may not be broken, but surely are a bit bent. I hope that we can join together and seize the day toward addressing the critically important issue.

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## **FROM THE EDITORS**

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The editors invite members to respond to Patrick Forsyth’s perspective by submitting manuscripts in which they share their viewpoints about the call for greater scientific-based research in education and the action plan offered in this address. Manuscripts will be edited to conform to the Newsletter layout.

### **Call for Support**

Our goal continues to be expanding the content and distribution of the Division A newsletter. To make our Newsletter a “must read” for our entire membership, we seek

- commentaries that focus on topical issues
- perspectives that provide readers with insights about Division A concerns
- critiques and recommendations to improve the newsletter content and format
- information and announcements to include in future issues
- volunteers to serve as reporters, historians, and so forth

Suggestions for improving the newsletter should be sent to Rodney Ogawa ([rtogawa@ucsc.edu](mailto:rtogawa@ucsc.edu)) or the editorial team. Specific suggestions to improve the newsletter layout should be sent to Tricia Browne-Ferrigno ([tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu](mailto:tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu)). Anyone wishing to assume responsibility for one or more of the content areas should contact Rod Muth ([rodney.muth@cudenver.edu](mailto:rodney.muth@cudenver.edu)). Copy and other contributions should be sent to all three editors. Please help us keep each other well informed about Division A and our fields.

### **Highlights of the Fall 2004 Issue**

This issue includes a second installment in our **Listening to Leaders** interview series (page 11). The current **List of Appointments for 2004-2005** appears on page 15. Please notify Tricia Browne-Ferrigno ([tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu](mailto:tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu)) for correction and updates to that listing. If you would like to volunteer or become involved in Division A activities, then please contact Rodney Ogawa ([rtogawa@ucsc.edu](mailto:rtogawa@ucsc.edu)) immediately.

**Send your announcements for the Winter 2005 issue to us ASAP!  
Deadline: January 31, 2005**

## **LISTENING TO LEADERS: Leading Other People's Children: A Conversation with Lisa Delpit**

Jeff Brooks

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*Lisa Delpit is the Executive Director/Eminent Scholar of the Center for Urban Education & Innovation at Florida International University in Miami. Her research focuses on the education of children of color and perspectives, aspirations, and pedagogical knowledge of teachers of color. Among her numerous scholarly publications is *Other Peoples Children*, which received the American Educational Studies Associations Book Critic Award and Choice Magazines Eighth Annual Outstanding Academic Book Award. It was also named a Great Book by Teacher Magazine and has sold over 100,000 copies. Lisa Delpit was interviewed by Anthony Normore, Assistant Professor of Educational Administration, Florida International University.*

**Anthony Normore (AN): From your perspective, what do you see as the most pressing issues in leadership preparation programs in school districts?**

**Lisa Delpit (LD):** My guess is that school administrators have not been taught how to learn about the community and the students, how to best find the resources and mine these resources to establish what is important for the learning of children. Schools often appear to be separate entities, not part of a broader community. It reminds me of an experience that helped me understand what occurs in many of our schools.

As a professor at the University of Alaska, I would often go into the Alaskan villages. I talked to the principal of one particular school, located in a very isolated community. The principal was an ex-Marine. After conversing with him on several occasions, I finally figured out his undergirding analogies: Students were the foot soldiers (enlisted personnel), teachers were the officers, and he was the commanding officer. The parents were the enemy. Every time parents came into the school, he thought they were there to critique and criticize. In his view, the biggest issue was to get the kids to do what teachers told them to do in spite of the influence of the parents. He seemed to think that parents were a bad influence because they allowed and encouraged their kids to steal and fight: "If somebody hits you, you better hit back." That thinking exists in many of the schools that I visit in urban settings.

**AN: Do you feel that leadership preparation programs in school districts and universities need to focus more on issues related to urban settings?**

**LD:** I would say there are two things in particular that are missing. I am going to focus mostly on urban schools because that's what I'm most familiar with. Getting an expanded view of who the kids and the people in the community are and where the resources exist are vital.

Universities seldom bring people from the community to meet the teachers. I believe those are the folks that can help administrators and teachers to reflect on answers to questions such as these: What do we need to know if we're going to come into this urban setting? What are the problems that people have had teaching here in the past? What can we do as teachers and administrators to avoid some of those problems? Who do we need to talk to? These are important questions to ask community folk. Sometimes those individuals who run programs in a community—after school, at churches that support what schools are doing, or even the medical clinics that are run by the city or the state—have a lot of knowledge about the needs of a particular community. But we don't include them in helping to educate teachers, and I'm presuming, to prepare school administrators either. I think that is one thing [in the preparation of teachers and school leaders] that is lacking.

**AN: Do you have insights you could share on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and how leadership is impacted by this act?**

**LD:** Yes. Some aspects of NCLB are necessary, but insufficient. Without [appropriate] tools of accountability, it is very easy for schools to dismiss certain groups of children as being unimportant, or even uneducable. Sadly, if NCLB components are put into place in punitive ways, then children and families are destroyed rather than supported. For example, at one high school here in Miami, only 37 out of 400 seniors passed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test [the required test for graduation]. The remaining students were not allowed to graduate or given a high school diploma! The message being relayed here to those kids is that they have no future. That makes little sense to me.

Teachers and principals get so focused on numbers that they literally forget about educating children. You can get fairly good scores without having a very good education, but you cannot have a good education without also getting fairly good scores.

How do we get families involved in these kids' education and how do we get the resources needed so that kids can get the good education they deserve—and consequently score well on mandated tests? Students from poor communities are scoring at the top of their districts on high-risk tests. In their schools, the focus is improving education, not raising test scores. I know of several schools like that. The problem is that it's hard to get that perspective across to principals and teachers who are under the gun to raise test scores. They think doing test drills is a quick fix. It isn't.

**AN: How should we be preparing school leaders to improve working relationships with teachers?**

**LD:** When we work with teachers in graduate programs, we separate them from administrators. One the most exciting classes I ever taught was in Alaska. I happened to have superintendents,

school administrators, and classroom teachers in the same class. It was energizing to have conversation across levels. The teachers began to understand some of the pressures that principals and superintendents were feeling and vice versa. I think we just don't do enough of that sharing in education. We act as though each role is very, very different. I think we need to provide more opportunities for educators to work together. It works a little better if they're not all from the same school because then everybody can speak a lot more plainly without feeling there will be repercussions. A lot of knowledge gets shared.

**AN: How do we prepare school leaders to promote learning and success for *all* children as they lead schools into the twenty first century?**

**LD:** I'd like to share one final experience with your readership to demonstrate the importance of humility. A teacher with whom I worked in a Georgia teacher leadership program was asked to conduct teacher research. She had just been transferred into a school that was located in the middle of a housing project. The school was literally surrounded by the buildings of the housing project. The principal, as well as all the teachers, were very much afraid of the setting. The tension between the school and the community was apparent. Each day everybody, including the principal, left promptly at 3:00 PM. The teacher shared an interesting story about her new school.

The teacher asked a second grader to do something. When the youngster refused to do it, the teacher told her that she would be visiting the principal's office. The student replied that she would see the teacher after school. That afternoon the second grader came to the classroom, bringing along four sixth graders that were the same size as the teacher, and just stood there in a threatening way. The teacher was able to diffuse the situation, but was left shaken. She arranged a meeting with the child's parent and proceeded to tell the parent that the child was totally out of control and was not listening to

anybody. The parent told her, “Look lady, you’re in our backyard now.” She was taken aback by the comment and decided she needed to find out more about the “backyard” where she worked.

She created a research project where she talked to parents and other people about their thoughts on the school, what their experiences had been there. She listened intently, which nobody had done before for these parents. The parents told her that some of the people who were teaching there had taught the parents’ mothers. The teachers were disrespectful to them back when they were students. The teachers disliked the grandparents and parents and transferred their feelings to the children, telling them how they would never amount to anything “because I knew your grandmother and your grandmother never amounted to anything.” The parents felt their kids were not being given a chance. They felt that a lot of the teachers didn’t believe the students could learn anything. They also thought that the teachers and administrators were afraid because whenever a parent came to see them, they would avoid them or try to push them out of the building as soon as possible.

This experience of listening to the parents changed the teacher enormously. She set up a meeting with other teachers to share what she had discovered. As a result, she and several other teachers created a place for parents to come in and just talk. She provided ways for the parents and teachers to work together to help the kids succeed. Unfortunately, the school administrator did not take advantage of the work the teacher was doing as a springboard to change the climate of the entire school because he was focused on answering to the central office as opposed to answering to the community.

I think it is important to listen and try to understand people’s perspective about things. Aspiring school administrators need to have opportunities in their leadership preparation courses to visit schools and study real-life settings, to just listen and figure out ways to really hear people. They need to learn how to be proactive in making schools places for great teaching and learning, with the communities’ assistance.

**Do you know someone who we should interview for the Listening to Leaders column? Please contact Jeff Brooks.**

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **In Search of Good Humor**

Do you ever have amusing encounters on your job and wish you could share them? *The School Administrator* publishes a monthly back-page humor column, “Leadership Lite,” and the editor eagerly solicits your stories: short, humorous anecdotes, told generally in no more than four paragraphs, that relate some telling aspect of life in educational administration, including university classrooms. Anecdotes should be based on the contributor’s experience—something seen or heard—in a school setting, administrative office, school board meeting, educational administration course, and so forth. *The School Administrator* will credit the source by name or withhold it, if requested. Please contact or e-mail or mail your stories to Jay P. Goldman ([jgoldman@asa.org](mailto:jgoldman@asa.org)), Editor, *The School Administrator*, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209.

**Support the work of Division A! Contact Rodney Ogawa to volunteer.**

## FUTURE ISSUES

Deadline for submitting material to be included in the Winter 2005 newsletter **January 31, 2005**. Please send copy to the all three editors: [rodney.muth@cudenver.edu](mailto:rodney.muth@cudenver.edu), [tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu](mailto:tricia.ferrigno@uky.edu), [jbrooks@mail.coe.fsu.edu](mailto:jbrooks@mail.coe.fsu.edu)

### Submission and Publication Schedule

Issue Date	Deadline for Submissions	Submitted to AERA	Published Online	Announced Via E-mail
Winter 2005	January 31	February	February	February 10
Spring 2005	February 10	March	March	March 10
Summer 2005	May 10	June	July	July 10
Fall 2005	August 10	September	September	September 10

### Regular Newsletter Features

**Vice President's Corner:** A regular feature, the Vice President provides commentary about Division A events, business and expectations for the Division.

**Secretary's Report:** An occasional item, the minutes of Division A's annual business meeting are featured in the summer issue.

**Graduate Students Update:** News and announcements from Division A's graduate student representatives.

**From the Editors:** This section appears regularly and supplies notes about the current and upcoming issues, requests input, and discusses other editorial concerns.

**Listening to Leaders:** Interviews with leadership educators, researchers, policy makers, and others.

**Perspective or Commentary:** Papers considered for inclusion will be trenchant and of interest to Division A members. Restrictions for publication will apply (preferably no more than 1,000 words or 5 to 7 pages of double-spaced text) in order to meet newsletter page limitations (2-3 pages). The editors reserve the right to edit for style and length. Suggestions for articles will be accepted from Division A officers, committee chairs and members, and members of Division A and related Divisions or SIGs.

**Member News and Notes:** This section includes information about members: what people are doing, what they have accomplished, what they plan for research and with whom, what they are discovering about teaching that others might find of interest, and so forth. Books and articles, special recognitions, and the like are appropriate. If you are interested in helping with this column, please contact the editors.

**Regular Features** (as appropriate and as available, based upon newsletter publication dates)

- information about Division A committee work supplied by committee chairs
- announcements of calls for papers, dissertation award submissions, and other information
- listings of SIG contact information relevant to Division A members
- listings of annual award winners

**List of Appointments for 2004-2005**

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