

# Increasing Engagement between WERA and Higher Education



*Report by Karen Banks and Peter Hendrickson*

*February 28, 2014*

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## Executive Summary

The WERA Board has indicated a strong interest in increasing engagement between WERA and higher education. This reflects a belief that both educational practitioners and their higher education colleagues can be more effective when they work together, rather than in isolation from one another. By focusing on the topics, issues, methodologies, and content areas where the benefits of collaboration are most likely, both WERA and higher education institutions across Washington will be better able to advance educational practice and knowledge.

For a variety of historical and contextual reasons, WERA participants from higher education currently represent a small percentage (around 10%) of presenters, conference attendees, and members, and they are not currently represented in leadership or highly active roles in WERA. This project represents an initial, two-pronged approach towards increasing the engagement between colleges/universities and the diverse WERA membership. The two components of this project were: 1) serving as "ambassadors" who developed and shared information about WERA with deans, department chairs, and key faculty members in Washington colleges and universities, and 2) conducting a program evaluation that included interviewing key stakeholders and analyzing a variety of other data sources. The project team has developed several findings and recommendations for Board consideration.

## *Major Findings*

1. Prior to the contact with our project team, knowledge about WERA was limited or non-existent among many of the deans, department chairs, and faculty members we interviewed. In addition, many deans and chairs were new to their positions and/or to Washington.
2. Deans, department heads, and faculty we interviewed were generally positive or even enthusiastic about greater engagement. While it is difficult to gauge their true commitment, it is likely that the most enthusiastic among them would be willing to take an active role on their campus to help foster engagement with WERA.
3. WERA members, past and present, were somewhat more mixed than their higher education colleagues, in terms of their support for increasing engagement, but the majority saw this venture as positive. Furthermore, all were willing and able to provide suggestions for increasing engagement. The reservations and concerns of the skeptical or unsupportive WERA members could help provide guidance in "doing this right."
4. A large disconnect exists between practitioners and their colleagues in colleges and universities. Practitioners perceive their colleagues in higher education as out of touch or lacking understanding of the "real world" of schools. In fact, some of the college and

university interview subjects would agree with those perceptions and would like to change the status quo. We saw evidence from our interviews that some colleges and universities are very interested in better understanding that real world and in making their research more useful.

5. OSPI is a major partner for WERA, and this partnership is highly visible. Colleges and universities reported that OSPI "has not been a friend of higher ed." The situation poses both a challenge for WERA, and a tremendous opportunity to build bridges.
6. Some of the hurdles to increasing WERA's engagement with higher education are somewhat intractable; e.g., the limits placed on travel funds at colleges and universities, and the higher standards for "publish or perish" in Tier 1 universities, where WERA involvement would actually dilute the ratings faculty would receive on rigor.
7. Other hurdles seem easier to overcome:
  - The December timing for the annual WERA conference is problematic. Similar state and regional ERAs in other states hold their conferences in November or, occasionally, in late October or January.
  - Some academicians perceive a climate at WERA conferences that makes them feel unwelcome. They indicated that it would help if WERA strengthened the research focus of WERA, provided a conference strand that would appeal to people from higher education, and arranged opportunities for them to network, both with each other and district-level researchers or practitioners.
8. College and university faculty at Tier 2 institutions would find presenting at WERA conferences or publishing in WEJ to be both acceptable to their institution and rewarding to them personally, as they get feedback on their work and have a greater chance of making a difference in educational practice.
9. Graduate students and junior faculty are the life blood of some other state and regional ERAs. They often seek their first opportunities in regional associations to present and publish, and they appreciate comments, critiques and conversations about their work.
10. Many WERA leaders and members were not aware of WERA's membership in the AERA affiliate Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations; the exception was some members who had served as WERA Presidents.
11. Current WERA policies and procedures do not foster collaboration with colleges and universities; i.e., no specific language makes it clear that higher education is a valued partner. For example, there is no attention to their Board membership, including grad student representatives, and participation in planning committees. Some academics would take leadership and supportive roles in WERA, if offered (e.g., WEJ reviewers, board members, conference planners.)
12. There was unanimity among those we interviewed that WERA's emphasis on program evaluation has decreased in recent years. Evidence from the interviews suggests that increasing the focus on program evaluation might lead to increased participation by colleagues in higher education.
13. Both school practitioners and higher education faculty noted that personal relationships are

one of the keys to professional collaboration. Members will stay with WERA to maintain and grow those relationships.

## ***Recommendations***

1. Both planning and sustainability will be important for success in any WERA initiatives to increase engagement. It would be easy to try too many things and not be able to sustain them all. Many with whom we spoke framed this as a long-term challenge, requiring both short- and long-range planning, and of the need to make efforts that will be maintainable and consistent. For example, adding a graduate student poster session one year, and then dropping it the following year because of limited planning time or volunteer support, will actually make it harder to drum up interest in the future.
2. WERA will need to make systematic efforts to track the (few) higher education members. Allowing current higher education members to drift away would be a costly mistake, but this could easily occur unless a conscious decision is made to monitor the situation. We are a research organization, and we must track our data!
3. WERA should seek to understand the calendar, fiscal, career, workday and other realities that impact our colleagues in higher education and our opportunities to partner with them.
4. At least one WERA conference per year needs to have a significant proportion of the agenda devoted to a strong research and program evaluation component. This should include peer review of proposals. Solicit presentation discussants and provide training. "Case studies" of single-site initiatives should include qualitative or quantitative evidence to support claims—move beyond the sharing of new "innovations" that are unproven.
5. Beginning with the 2014 conference:
  - Implement strategies to increase graduate student involvement (e.g., poster session, scholarships, and distinguished paper award.)
  - Develop a "College and Career" strand for the 2014 conference. Two past presidents have pledged support.
6. Success is about relationships. And "rainmakers." Previous successes in WERA—times when there was active participation by more than just a few people from higher education—have been fostered by a couple of WERA members who were particularly dedicated and gifted in drawing in colleagues from colleges and universities. Key support should come from those few existing WERA members who currently work in higher education, WERA practitioners who have a track record of collaboration, and some individuals we interviewed in higher education leadership roles who were particularly enthusiastic. Also consider including adjunct faculty members from WERA ranks.
7. Use the leverage that could be provided by WERA publications. Make WEJ, TSD, and White Papers all open source, as do comparable organizations. Other potential examples: Extend membership to new WEJ authors who are not members. Send the call for WEJ papers to each campus or create a "college beat" columnist in the TSD to spotlight college and university collaborative projects.

8. WERA can also seek and promote existing examples of collaboration benefiting both school practitioners and other seekers of knowledge. Increase the support and focus on partnerships between schools or districts and higher education, using a comprehensive approach that includes grant awards (requiring attendance at a conference or an article for WEJ), conference sessions, SIG development, etc.
9. While the potential benefits of networking opportunities were frequently mentioned as ways to increase engagement—both by those in higher education settings and by WERA leaders and members—these opportunities will need to be thoughtfully constructed. To be effective, such initiatives must go well beyond sitting in the same conference sessions or even across the same large lunch table in a noisy room. Within the networking offerings, also create chances for higher education colleagues to network with one another.
10. Make engagement with higher education a priority that is infused into almost every decision. For example, the architecture of the new Hi-Cap SIG could yet include higher education researchers in this content area, who might have expertise that would benefit districts. Develop new SIGs with attention to those that will engage graduate students and junior faculty.
11. Teacher preparation provides numerous possibilities for engagement with colleges and universities. For example, The Evergreen State College faculty takes tremendous pride in producing teachers who actually understand the realities facing teachers in "the real world." WERA's practitioner focus and contacts with principals would be a natural fit.
12. Advocate for including WERA members in university and college affairs. For example, WERA members should sit on teacher education advisory boards.
13. Comb through policies and procedures to find areas for increasing inclusion and collaboration. Include faculty and graduate students on board, conference planning, publication editing and other positions of importance. White papers, model policies, and policy/procedures would benefit from bringing university people together with practitioners.
14. Increase the focus on program evaluations through professional development, resource listings, and presentation/publication exposure. This could involve program evaluations from school district staff, higher education, and other organizations. Such efforts will attract people with a common interest in both the methodology and the results of the study.
15. Consider coordinating with WACTE (Washington Association of College Teachers of Education) and other groups, in terms of meeting times and locations. (See the Arizona Educational Research Organization model in the full report.) As an alternative, consider sponsoring a joint, eastside conference with colleges and universities to find common ground and build fruitful, ongoing relationships.
16. Do not worry excessively about the people in higher education who will not work with us, or about WERA practitioners whose animosity towards higher education does not allow them to work with those colleagues. Discover the ones who are interested, and work with them.

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## **Background**

### ***Project History***

Based on discussions at the 2013 annual retreat of the WERA Board, a request emerged for one or more WERA members to serve as ambassadors to help strengthen the organization's connection with Washington colleges and universities. The intent was for these ambassadors to provide leaders in higher education with more information about WERA, while also exploring through these conversations some possible ways to enhance collaboration and involvement between WERA and institutions of higher education.

As readers will note from later examples, individual school districts in Washington sometimes have effective, collaborative relationships with colleges and universities. The challenge was that WERA, as an organization, did not have the same types of relationships found in those districts and elsewhere, including the collaborative relationships found in other states' AERA affiliates. Why? Would pursuing closer relationships with higher education even be a good idea for WERA? How might that best be accomplished? When the authors of this report were approached concerning the potential ambassador effort, we offered an expanded vision of what was needed. Specifically, we proposed to add a program evaluation component to the ambassador role. An evaluation could provide objective information on the current status of the relationship, examine advantages and disadvantages, assess the support for making such a change, and provide other contextual information to help the WERA Board as they approach this issue. In late September, 2013, the WERA Board approved the proposed, expanded approach to the project; the result of that endeavor is reflected in this report.

### ***History of WERA and Higher Education***

WERA will be 50 years old in 2016. Born in 1966 as the Puget Sound Educational Research Council, the group was founded by educational researchers and evaluators, as a regional replica of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). The first conference in 1972 was followed by another the next year, with a name change to WERA. Funding came largely from managing grants from the Washington Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and a federal grant in cooperation with the University of Washington-Seattle (UW). Providing workshops around the state brought WERA into many school districts. For a time WERA held joint meetings with the fledgling Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA). In the first two decades, all active WERA members would easily fit in a hotel board room. Few teachers or principals attended, and speakers were largely national luminaries from higher education.



In 1985, a major change occurred in the annual conference, with new, joint sponsorship by OSPI and a name change to the Washington State Assessment Conference. The conference was a venue to both release state assessment results to the public and for members to meet with one another. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction announced results to conferees and the press. Duncan MacQuarrie stated it well in the WERA History (Winchell, 2011):

“Beginning in January of 1985 and continuing each December since, OSPI and the Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) have jointly sponsored the Annual State Assessment Conference. Nationally recognized specialists in curriculum and assessment are featured and various seminars/in-service sessions are conducted to help district staff improve their skills in areas such as reporting test results to local boards and the media, using assessment results to develop school improvement plans, incorporating state assessment results into local needs assessments, using standardized assessments to validate local information, and improving classroom assessments.”

That conference provides the single most important revenue stream for WERA and it also helps us understand the rich and varied relationships with OSPI. At the same time, it likely contributed to the diminished engagement of WERA with colleges and universities. Conference planning committees are co-chaired by an appointee from WERA and another from OSPI.

Another major event occurred when budget cuts forced OSPI to eliminate a popular and powerful January OSPI conference, beginning in the 2009-2010 school year. When it ceased, attendance at the WERA/OSPI Winter Assessment Conference increased, and the attendance increase was primarily among school-based practitioners.

In the early 1980’s the two or three-day Annual WERA Spring Conference focused on research and evaluation, a place where graduate students and other researchers could present. That conference has changed, too, to a single day focus on more narrow topics with a heavy “professional development” flavor.

The dominant focus on assessment at the December conference brought testing companies into the fold, including two past presidents, Paul Shook (CTB) and Frosyne Mensendick (Pearson). With a board position reserved for an OSPI person, there have been several presidents (George Pliant, Gordon Ensign, Duncan MacQuarrie, Kathleen Plato, Bob Silverman, and Pete Bylsma) and board members from the state agency. (Strictly speaking those board members are individually invited and do not officially represent the agency.)

In our interviews, both OSPI administrators and some university deans described OSPI as "very protective of their turf" and not very focused on a higher education.<sup>1</sup> WERA’s close ties with

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<sup>1</sup> Public agencies do not always respond to data requests in a timely manner, when they have limited staff and mandated priorities. This includes OSPI, school districts, and recently the P-20 Education Research and Data Center, under the aegis of the state Office of Financial Management. An opportunity exists for WERA to convene a group in the future to address these challenges among colleagues in different agencies and roles.

OSPI may signal to colleges and universities that higher education is not a valued partner.

Finally, a past president commented that WERA is primarily a Professional Development organization and should not attempt to be a “junior AERA,” but rather should “leave research to AERA.” Another commented that teachers are now the “bread and butter” of WERA.

### ***Regional and National Context***

An examination of other organizations can provide context for considering the possible approaches, policies, and procedures WERA might choose to follow. Within the state of Washington, we looked at:

- PDK Washington
- Washington ASCD
- Washington Association of School Administrators
- Washington School Directors Association

While we will provide detailed information on our exploration of these organizations in the relevant sections of this report, it is worth noting here that there are some areas where WERA seems to be an “outlier.” The other organizations generally make their publications available to the public, regardless of membership status, and when they publish journals, the editors serve on their organization's boards. Conference scheduling also more closely reflects the needs of their target audiences. Within Washington, it is also important to note that WERA is unique in at least one area: WERA has *research* as part of its title and mission.

We also considered educational research associations in other states and regions (SRERAs.) Looking more closely at these SRERAs, we noted that several are similar to WERA, with strong representation by district administrators, assessment directors, and research/evaluation professionals among the most active members, but without the contingent of teachers and principals. Some SRERAs are quite different from WERA, however, and are aimed primarily at academics, including graduate students. WERA is also unusual, if not unique, across the practitioner-focused SRERAs in WERA's efforts to bring in national speakers—made possible by WERA's fiscal soundness and probably facilitated by the partnership with OSPI.

### **Methodology**

The project was comprised of two, integrated components. The first was an “ambassador” component, which included face-to-face meetings (13) and telephone discussions (6) with 19 college and university deans or department chairs. Prior to and during these meetings, we provided two documents that described WERA and some of the benefits of WERA participation (e.g., the annual conference, grant opportunities, the WERA Educational Journal [WEJ]). Please see Appendices A and B for short and longer versions of these documents. We also provided an electronic copy of the August 2013 issue of WEJ, currently located at:

<http://www.wera-web.org/3member/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/FinalTheWERAEd-August-2013.pdf>

The second, program evaluation component of the study included the following data sources:

- WERA conference and other event programs over the previous decade
- Historical documents concerning WERA
- Lists of WERA awards and grants
- WERA directory information and AERA membership data for Washington
- Structured interviews with sample groups:
  - representatives from several state and regional educational research associations (SRERAs) that are AERA affiliates
  - current and former WERA leaders
  - active WERA members (most drawn from State Technical Advisory Committee members)
  - current and former OSPI assessment staff members
  - college and university deans or department chairs
  - editors/board members from PDK WA and WSASCD, both of which publish journals

The interview data was intended to provide data on levels of support, possible advantages and challenges, and ideas for how WERA might work more closely with higher education. Responses to the structured interviews were compiled into a single document for each sample group. A full list of the individuals interviewed is contained in Appendices C and D. Common themes from the interview responses, both within and across sample groups, were identified. Both evaluators analyzed the interview data separately, before comparing findings, to ensure neither evaluator biased the findings.

## **Current Status**

We were interested in analyzing WERA and AERA membership rosters, WERA conference and symposia participation, and other data on WERA's awards, grants, and leadership positions. The intent of these analyses was to identify areas of opportunity, as well as possible explanations for the current low levels of engagement between WERA and higher education.

### ***Membership analysis: Who is involved and who could be?***

Faculty and graduate students who are members of AERA might be a natural target for attempts to increase engagement between WERA and our higher education colleagues. As part of our analyses, we compared a file containing all names in the WERA directory (1,063 names)<sup>2</sup> and an AERA file of members with Washington addresses (381 members)<sup>3</sup>. Not all names in the WERA directory are members, but most are members or have had some type of recent involvement in WERA. The biggest challenge in compiling and comparing the data files resulted from a lack of

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<sup>2</sup> from October , 2013

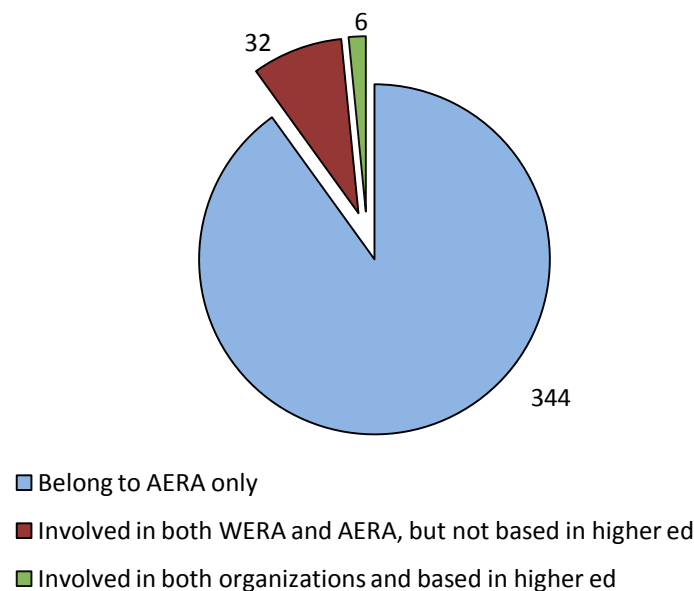
<sup>3</sup> dated approximately April 2012

unique identifiers for each person, which required matching the files based on names (e.g., Peter vs. Pete Smith.) Ultimately, the analyses required a complete cross-check by hand, to verify and supplement the computer generated matches.

While the two original data files were not precisely contemporaneous, the findings were robust enough to paint a clear picture. The current level of WERA participation by AERA members in Washington is very low. Comparisons of the two sets of data indicated that only a small percentage of AERA members residing in Washington were also participants in WERA (38 individuals, or around 10 percent of Washington's AERA members). Of those 38, only six listed themselves with a higher education affiliation, while the rest were working for school districts, OSPI, non-profits, or other organizations. See Figure 1 for details.

These data suggest an excellent opportunity for WERA. At least some of the AERA members in Washington are likely to be involved in applied research or have graduate students who are. Others may have strengths in psychometrics, research methodology, or program evaluation. Contacting these individuals, once WERA has a firm plan in place for how to engage them, should help to increase their participation, perhaps through WEJ or mini-conferences devoted to higher education.

**Figure 1: Are Washington AERA Members Involved in WERA?**

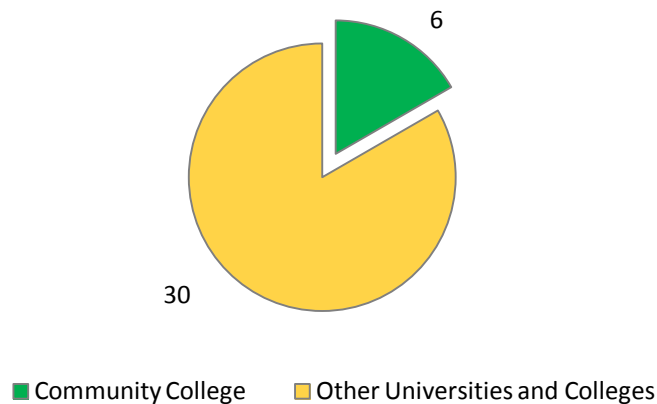


The small overlap between WERA and AERA membership raised another question. Might there be a substantial number of higher education members involved in WERA who were not AERA members? Such individuals might be curriculum specialists for example. Just how serious was the imbalance in WERA's membership? To determine the number of higher education members

participating in WERA, an additional analysis was conducted. This analysis examined email addresses and institutional affiliations of individuals in the WERA directory.

These analyses of the WERA directory file revealed that only 36 individuals (out of the 1,063 names) listed either an email address or affiliation corresponding to an institution of higher education. Of the 36 individuals with such affiliations, 6 were in community colleges.

**Figure 2: Location of WERA's 36 Current Higher Ed Members**



Throughout this report, we suggest a number of reasons for low current levels of engagement between WERA and our higher education colleagues, but two ideas emerged from the close, name-by-name, scrutiny used to check the data files for this analysis. First, we noted that some well-known former WERA members had clearly relocated to college or university settings, or simply missed the conference for one or more years, and were no longer in the WERA directory.<sup>4</sup> WERA might find large benefits from increasing efforts to retain members, including those who miss the conference. Perhaps strategies could include follow-up notices in mid-January about membership renewal. December email reminders are good, but may be not sufficient for retaining faculty members rushing to complete the semester.<sup>5</sup>

The analyses also revealed that, with a few exceptions, faculty members and graduate students who publish in WEJ do not typically belong to WERA. Clearly these authors see a benefit in disseminating their work through WEJ. Perhaps WERA could provide a one-time, one-year membership for non-member, in-state authors of major WEJ articles. (Phone calls with authors had previously indicated that these university-based colleagues do not attend the December

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, one of the authors of this report was once dropped from the list because she had not attended the annual conference for two consecutive years and did not notice that this was the primary way of renewing membership.

<sup>5</sup> In other words, the suggested time-frame of mid-January would be much better for our higher education colleagues than an earlier notice in December or early January.

conference due to schedule conflicts.) This strategy would reflect that WERA appreciates the authors' contributions and membership would expose them to benefits from WERA beyond conference attendance, such as online access to presentations. The WEJ editor could provide a list of the names to the Executive Secretary each December.

### *Awards and Grants Analysis*

While WERA's engagement with colleges and universities differs from most SRERAs, evidence of robust engagement exists in some arenas. Past WERA award winners have come from across the state. Table 1 shows college and university representation compared to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), districts and state agencies.

Table 1: **WERA grants and awards 1999 to 2013.**

<b>Awards</b>	<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Districts</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Higher Ed</b>	<b>Totals</b>
WERA Research		2	1	4	7
WERA Product	2	3	6	2	13
Gordon Ensign Service	1	1	3	1	6
Art Maser Service	1	9	1		11
Outstanding Dissertation				4	4
Distinguished Paper		1			1
Assessment Directors			7		7
Awards Totals	4	16	18	11	49
Awards Percents	8%	33%	37%	22%	
<b>Research Grants</b>					
2001 to 2013	4	12		15	31
Grant Amounts	\$16,375	\$37,375	\$0	\$40,280	\$94,030
Grants Percent	17%	40%	0%	43%	
<b>Grand Totals</b>	8	28	18	26	80

Higher education accounted for the largest percentage of WERA grants, some \$40,280 since 1999 representing 43% of the total allotments. And some of the awards to districts (40%) may have supported staffs who were also graduate students. Excluding research grants, college and university folk received only 22% of the awards, overshadowed by state (37%) and districts (33%).

***Conference and Board Officer Analysis***

Participation in conferences, symposia and institutes over the past 10 years tells a different tale. Presenter tallies show minimal participation by college and university folk. The Table 2 sample includes spring conferences, symposia and institutes from 2004, 2007, and 2012 plus winter conferences from 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 (preliminary).

**Table 2: Number and percent of presenters by affiliation at a sample of conferences, symposia and institutes 2004 to 2014.**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Numbers of Presenters</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>
Education Northwest	8	1%
Professional Associations	6	1%
Educational Service Districts	18	2%
Testing Companies	16	2%
<b>Colleges &amp; Universities</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>11%</b>
Contractors & Other NGOs	97	12%
OSPI / Other Government Agencies	184	23%
Schools and Districts	396	49%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>812</b>	

Clearly, WERA is a professional organization centered about schools and districts with OSPI the strongest external partner. The college and university participation percent would drop a point if

a block of graduate students from a single session (December 2011) was subtracted. The University of Washington (Seattle and Bothell) accounted for engagement in 49 of 87 sessions with 18 other institutions represented. A tally of conference planning committee affiliations further showed only a single college or university person as compared to 16 OSPI staff (65 total accepted). The last university-based WERA President was Cathy Taylor (UW) 1996-97 and the last university-based board member was Mike Trevisan (WSU) ~1997-98.

This sample suggests a trend toward greater presenter engagement (single digit to low double digit percentage) over the past three years. Cautions: (1) Counts were by inspection; (2) presenters in more than one session were double or treble counted; and (3) affiliation coding was guessed in some cases.

## **Levels of Interest and Support for Engagement**

### ***WERA Leaders and Members***

Interviews with WERA members were heavily weighted with current and previous WERA presidents and board members, but the sample also included current and former members of the State Technical Advisory Committee for OSPI's assessment division. Some people fell into more than one category, such as former WERA presidents who had worked for both OSPI and a local school district, a consortium, and/or a university. Thus, the group was comprised of people who were very knowledgeable about WERA, including an understanding of the unique relationship between WERA and OSPI. Interviews covered a range of topics, from whether they thought increasing involvement between WERA and higher education might be advantageous, to describing strategies they thought might work to accomplish that objective.

The subjects of these interviews varied widely in their support for the idea of increasing engagement between WERA and higher education. Two-thirds of those we interviewed were positive about the idea, and some of those were quite enthusiastic. The remaining one-third of WERA leaders/members were neutral, skeptical, or—in a few cases—strongly opposed. It is important to note, however, that all but one of the members who were skeptical or opposed were *still* able to suggest potential strategies and possible advantages for strengthening WERA's ties to higher education. This suggests that—rather than focus on their lack of support—we might consider the content of their concerns and find ways to avoid the negative outcomes they fear. As these members elaborated on the reasons they were skeptical or negative about increasing involvement between WERA and higher education, some themes emerged from their comments:

"WERA should primarily protect and serve our current members, providing professional development and useful information for practitioners."

"WERA meets a need that is not met elsewhere, and that focus should not be diluted. Practitioners need WERA, while academics have many organizations to choose from to meet their needs, such as AERA, ASCD, and PDK."



"Higher education faculty members have been condescending or arrogant in dealing with district staff."

"Faculty members in higher education are not knowledgeable about what is happening in real-world settings. They also spend time on research that does not have any obvious practical value to practitioners."<sup>6</sup>

"Colleges and universities are more interested in theory-based practices. It is not clear that they will be interested in the needs of school districts."

### ***Higher Education***

Prior to the contact with our project team, knowledge about WERA was limited or non-existent among many of the deans, department chairs, and faculty members we interviewed. After learning more about WERA, they were asked if they thought WERA members and preK-12 education in Washington would benefit from greater engagement between WERA and colleges and universities. In 17 out of 18 cases, the deans, chairs and key faculty, answered, "Yes." Just as important, they were able to suggest specific ways that WERA might be of benefit to colleges and universities. In many cases, these positive responses could be characterized as quite enthusiastic.

As previously noted, many people we interviewed in colleges and universities were not very familiar with WERA, and those who were personally familiar often doubted whether their rank-and-file faculty colleagues shared that familiarity. Early in the interview process, one university dean asked us for a one-page flyer to share with faculty about opportunities to connect with WERA for both faculty and graduate students. (See Appendix B for the product of that endeavor.) The flyer was widely circulated and deans were invited to post it for all faculty and students.

The people we interviewed thought many faculty and graduate students would be interested in opportunities to work more closely with their practitioner-colleagues in schools and classrooms. For example, if faculty and teachers who are interested in mathematics education could collaborate, "Amazing side-effects could occur from such partnerships." "They would gain a better perspective on the day-to-day issues that confront schools."

Deans frequently mentioned the three types of effort needed for advancement in their departments or institutions: (1) Research publications and presentations, (2) Teaching, and (3) Service within and outside the college. The relative importance of those three factors in tenure decisions and promotions varied across institutions, with colleges that were devoted primarily to preparing teachers and administrators valuing teaching more highly than research.

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<sup>6</sup> This argument sort of begs the question—how will they know what is going on if we do not include them. And if they are forced to publish or perish, they must do some type of research. Without contacts with practitioners, they are forced to focus on research that fails to address practitioners' needs.

## **Northshore and UW-Bothell**

Northshore School District and UW Bothell currently collaborate to improve teaching and learning. Education Program Director Brad Portin was a Northshore School District principal for 18 years ago before joining the UW Seattle faculty. He noted that faculty advancement portfolios are enhanced by publishing in journals that are read by practitioners and through partnerships in state-level activities. "Building partnerships is positive," he said, including those focused on applying research findings. The Northshore Schools relationship with mathematics education Assistant Professor Allison Hintz has led to co-presenting and co-authoring several documents. WERA member Nancy Young pointed to long standing relationships with UW and UW-Bothell to support professional development and decision making. She referenced a curriculum audit that including interviews, surveys and a report as part of a curriculum adoption cycle. Current research focuses on new teachers. Another research line ties UW-Bothell to a team of Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs).

In some institutions, engagement with WERA could count as service to the field. In other institutions that were primarily focused on teacher and administrator preparation, there was value placed on contact with field-based colleagues. "Everyone learns from each other. Colleges can do a better job of preparing students for current realities."

One area that generated particular enthusiasm at larger, research-based universities centered on presentation and publication opportunities for graduate students, including the chance for graduate students to co-author articles with faculty members. The smaller universities and colleges were also interested in presentation and publication opportunities for junior faculty; e.g., articles for possible publication in WEJ.

WERA's grant and awards programs were of interest to college and university leaders. They also mentioned that WERA could be another vehicle through which college and university graduate programs recruit faculty or become known to potential students; e.g., practitioners seeking additional skills, degrees, or certification. One dean was excited about the potential for lobbying partnerships, so that legislators might hear from diverse K-12 experts in the field.

## **Advantages of Greater Engagement**

Presumably, the WERA Board expected some advantages would accrue to WERA from greater engagement with higher education, but we are including this section for two reasons:

- 1) It is important to expand the discussion to include what may be advantageous to WERA *and* to higher education. Discussions with deans, department chairs, and key faculty provided many examples.
- 2) There will be obstacles, stumbles, or roadblocks in moving forward with this initiative, as in all new endeavors. At such points, it may be useful to have some documentation about the advantages WERA is expecting from this initiative, as both a compass and a morale booster or motivational tool.

Some of the advantages have already been mentioned in this report, while others in this section are new or expanded.

## ***Benefits from Conferences***

For WERA, graduate students who are presenting or attending represent a potential source of *long-term* members and contributors. Existing conferences could provide a venue for greater engagement with graduate students, and these conferences are held in reasonable distance from many colleges and universities. Those same institutions could be sources of presentation discussants, peer reviewers (for both the journal and conference proposals,) and members of planning committees or the Board of Directors.

Graduate students and junior faculty are the financial life blood of some other SRERAs. Not only do they often seek their first opportunities in regional associations to present and publish, they actually appreciate comments, critiques and conversations about their work.

Graduate students and faculty could also gain a better understanding of Washington school realities through presentations and personal contacts formed at conferences. That understanding could lead to more relevant and timely coursework and research projects that benefit everyone.

An Eastern Washington conference jointly planned and hosted by colleges has been proposed by decision makers in that region. Fuller participation east of the mountains could expand both membership and influence across the state.

## ***Benefits from Publications***

Open source WERA publications, especially **WEJ**, would provide higher exposures to the authors and greater impact for WERA. Membership extended to new WEJ authors is likely to endure beyond the current publication as renewals are encouraged (at a highly reasonable price point). A call for papers to each campus may increase somewhat the selectivity and prestige of the journal.

**The Standard Deviation** (TSD), WERA's newsletter of record, could give attention to member news about WERA members based in higher education, or about partnership activities between WERA practitioners and colleges/universities. (Currently, in addition to presidential messages and board activities, TSD provides information on member news, assessment news, data tips, WERA board activities, upcoming events, past events, SIG activities, travel and restaurant reviews, quotations and humor.)

One advantage to both WERA and higher education might be more reporting on the areas of common ground shared by the schools and colleges/universities. Such bridges to common ground could encourage research-based practices in schools/districts, and other articles that might encourage more useful research projects in higher education.

Some college/university leaders we interviewed spoke about the advantages to both types of organizations (WERA and higher education) of partnering to influence Washington education policy. **White Papers**—*jointly sponsored* by WERA and higher education—have potential in this area, and could not only influence policy but also raise the statewide profile for WERA.

(Past White Papers have largely focused on issues of assessment policy and practice. While there has been some involvement with OSPI, college and university faculty have not been major participants.)

### ***Benefits from Stronger Relationships***

For researchers based in higher education, increased involvement with WERA could not only increase their knowledge of "real world" issues, but also build their relationships with district personnel, particularly Directors of Research and Evaluation (DREs) and assessment directors. These district staff members are often the gate keepers for external partnerships for research, program evaluation, college readiness data, transition from high school to college, and graduation follow-up studies. A common understanding of the Institutional Review Boards in school districts and higher education might also lead to stronger relationships overall.

In universities, faculty who teach graduate courses would be in contact with current professionals working in or with schools. This could have a positive, formative impact on graduate courses or other professional development for teachers and future/current administrators. Some of our WERA members teach as adjunct faculty in the areas of measurement, assessment, evaluation, or related topics. A WERA Special Interest Group (SIG) or similar mechanism for those who teach these subjects—either as adjuncts who are normally field-based, or full-time faculty—could raise the level of discourse and collegial support for all concerned, benefitting both types of faculty and their students. Many other potential advantages are scattered through this report, including the quotes from people we interviewed.

### ***More Visibility: Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations (SRERA)***

WERA is among the healthiest, wealthiest and most ambitious of state ERAs. We are also the largest. Greater engagement with SRERAs could raise our national profile and influence, while sending a signal to Washington colleges/universities that WERA makes significant contributions

### **Tacoma Public Schools: the University of Washington and Pacific Lutheran University**

Pat Cummings, Director of Research and Evaluation in Tacoma School District, pointed to several projects that yielded important research findings in education. These included an inquiry into the concept of 9th Grade Shock, which is used to describe how a student's GPA tends to drop when transitioning from 8th grade to 9th grade, which can also predict future dropouts (Charlie Hirschman, UW sociology). Another study, Stepping Up to High School, was a three year study examining how to help families with eighth grade students transition to high school (Alex Mason, Associate Director National Research Institute.) A third example was Children's Belief About Gender, a study of gender concepts and how they change with age (Marianne Taylor, PLU psychology).

that even extend beyond the Northwest.<sup>7</sup>

The SRERA website (<http://www.srera.org/>) states, "The Consortium SRERA unites scholars, practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and others interested in the pursuit of educational research and development at the local, state, regional and national levels. The Consortium SRERA promotes quality research through support of state and regional organizations. It provides a national forum at the AERA annual meeting to present outstanding research from the state and regional associations. The Consortium fosters cooperation among the state and regional associations with AERA."

Appendix E includes a profile of some other state and regional members of the Consortium.

### ***Leverage from Special Interest Groups (SIGs)***

The Test Directors group has been at the heart of WERA for many years, most recently as a formal SIG. Examples where common ground already exists and where new SIGS or other official Working Groups might benefit members in WERA and higher education: Early Childhood, Teacher and Principal Evaluation, Formative and Summative Assessment, Research Methods, and Program Evaluation, Classroom Technology, Data Visualization, and College Readiness/Transition to College. Pre-conference days and other spots within the conferences can provide an opportunity for SIGs to meet.

### **Challenges**

As previously mentioned, even the skeptics and naysayers were able to offer ideas about potential benefits. At the same time, they clearly identified some hurdles. Overcoming these hurdles may require new approaches and ways of doing business, and it may be helpful to WERA leaders for us to enumerate some of the challenges that were mentioned and provide some ideas to address them.

1. Much of the WERA identity is currently defined by the large, December conference and the dates of this conference are not feasible for most academics who teach courses or supervise graduate students. Other SRERAs tend to meet earlier in the fall, or in some cases, in early January.
2. Practitioners feel that universities "turn a blind eye on what is needed by practitioners,"

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<sup>7</sup> Both veteran and new WERA members were unclear about a relationship between WERA and AERA. Some thought we might be (or once were) a state affiliate, but were unclear about any details. There has been a sporadic practice of submitting a Distinguished Paper from WERA but that practice lapsed until 2013. The 2011 updated WERA history (p.20) states, "In 2007-08 a Distinguished Paper Award was initiated. This award was intended to recognize an outstanding paper on an important educational topic, and could be submitted by WERA for presentation as an outstanding Washington State paper at the annual American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting. To date, this award has not been given." Some SRERAs actively solicit papers.

and there is a concern that academicians will be unwilling or unable to provide useful information to WERA members. "Sometimes, they are even out-of-date about what will be of practical value."<sup>8</sup> Universities are also perceived as too theoretical at times. And finally, even those academicians we interviewed acknowledged that they (members of higher education) are "sometimes in an ivory tower, or at least in narrow silos." Yet, some colleges and universities do *primarily applied research* (e.g., UW-Bothell). Some have a better track record of working with WERA already (e.g., WSU main campus.) Others prefer an interdisciplinary approach to breaking down silos (Evergreen) or have indicated that they are willing and very interested in working with WERA (Pacific Lutheran.) WERA can start in these places and build from there.

3. There is a big gap in meeting the needs of professional educators in the field, and WERA helps these underserved practitioners. "Weakening the focus of WERA on professional development for these individuals could be a disservice." Of course, WERA can try to ensure that professional development opportunities continue, while adding additional emphases.
4. Sometimes the goals of higher education and most WERA members are very different. Academicians face "publish or perish" for tenure and promotions. One dean stated, "Rarely are those areas of interest consonant with the needs of K-12 schools." Yet, focusing on those institutions where applied research is valued and on publication/presentation opportunities for institutions that would value WERA experiences may be a key to success.
5. Colleges have cut support for travel to conferences. Make certain that presenters know that there is an option to attend free on the day of their presentation.
6. Publication in regional journals or presentations at regional conferences do not help faculty in getting tenure at the major universities. If WERA improves the quality and reputation of the conference and the journal, this concern might be addressed for all but the very top tier of Washington universities.

## Recommendations and Strategies

The Executive Summary of this report has a succinct list of major recommendations. This section contains more detailed ideas about some of the recommendations, along with additional recommendation, strategies, and ideas to consider. A key point to remember is the need to consciously think, in every decision, about how to engage higher education, until that approach is so infused in the decision making that it becomes an unconscious habit that is self-sustaining.

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<sup>8</sup> This argument sort of begs the question—how will they know what is going on if we do not include them? And if they are forced to publish or perish, they must do some type of research. When lacking contacts with practitioners, they are forced to focus on research that fails to address practitioners' needs.

## ***Target Planning and Focus on Sustainability***

Both planning and sustainability will be important for success in any WERA initiatives to increase engagement. It would be easy to try too many things and not be able to sustain them all. Many with whom we spoke framed this as a long-term challenge, requiring both short- and long-range planning, and of the need to make efforts that will be maintainable and consistent. For example, adding a graduate student poster session one year, and then dropping it the following year because of limited planning time or volunteer support, will actually make it harder to drum up interest in the future.

## ***Measures of Success***

WERA will need to make systematic efforts to track the (few) higher education members. Allowing current higher education members to drift away would be a costly mistake, but this could easily occur unless a conscious decision is made to monitor the situation. We are a research organization, and we must track our data!

Demographic and other data can be very useful. For example, the WERA Board is already considering collecting information similar to that requested by AERA or PDK, including information about areas of interest, highest degree earned, etc. Conference and other event feedback surveys could include demographics on affiliation, position and length of engagement with WERA.

## ***Make Program Evaluation a Major Bridge***

There was unanimity among those we interviewed that WERA's emphasis on program evaluation has decreased in recent years, and most regretted this loss of focus. Interviews suggested that increasing the focus on program evaluation might lead to increased participation by colleagues in higher education. Ways of increasing the focus on program evaluation include:

- Providing professional development in program evaluation,
- Posting an annual listing of program evaluation practitioners. This could include individuals, as well as agencies, and college/university departments or bureaus set up for this purpose. (Post a disclaimer to make it clear that there is no endorsement of particular contractors by WERA.)
- Giving public exposure for presentations and publications in this topic area, whether WERA based or not. (Many of these could involve program evaluations from school district staff, higher education, and other organizations.)
- Offering grants for evaluations, with a requirement for a presentation at the WERA annual conference or an article in WEJ.

Such efforts will attract people with a common interest in both the methodology and the results of the study.

Another strategy that could dramatically further the idea of partnerships, is to create a Research

and Program Evaluation Grants Committee, with representatives from both higher education and practitioner ranks. This would support high-quality evaluations that are often more expensive than school districts or faculty can fund from their own budgets.

### ***Awards and Grants***

In addition to supporting program evaluation partnerships and requiring all grantees to publish or present through WERA, priority for grants and awards could be given to projects with partnerships, in general. Announcements about the awards could be sent to colleges and universities, explicitly mentioning the priority given to partnerships.

"Even small amounts of money really help, and it can be used for things like necessary language translations, postage, or printing of materials. It can make a huge difference."

### ***Leverage the Impact of WERA Publications***

WERA publications could be a critical component in engaging with higher education. As noted earlier, *making WEJ, TSD, and White Papers all open source, as do comparable organizations, is important*. Other potential examples: Provide a one-time, one-year membership for non-member, in-state authors of WEJ articles. Send the call for WEJ papers to each campus or create a "college beat" columnist in the TSD to spotlight college and university collaborative projects.

### ***Strengthen the Quality of the Conferences***

At least one WERA conference per year needs to have a significant proportion of the agenda devoted to a strong research and program evaluation component. This should include peer review of proposals. Solicit presentation discussants and provide training. "Case studies" of single-site initiatives should include qualitative or quantitative evidence to support claims--move beyond the sharing of new "innovations" that are unproven.

### ***Make the Conferences More Appealing to Graduate Students and Faculty***

For 2014, the conference dates were set well in advance, but there are other strategies that can support more engagement with higher education. In addition to strengthening the quality of the conferences, here are other suggestions (some repeated) that came from our interviews and our review of strategies used in other organizations:

- Renew WERA's focus on research and evaluation or, at a minimum, include as a strand within conferences
- Implement strategies to increase graduate student involvement (e.g., poster session, scholarships, and distinguished graduate student paper award.)
- Identify graduate students attending the conference with a name tag ribbon so that WERA stalwarts can give them deliberate attention and support.
- In addition to free hors d'oeuvres at the reception, find a sponsor to underwrite one or two



drink tickets per registered person.

- Develop a "College and Career" strand for the 2014 conference. Two past presidents have pledged support.
- Create a strand for conferences that features university/school research partnerships.
- Offer a regular graduate student seminar; topics could include job searches, publishing your research findings, a fireside chat with experienced professionals. AERA provides many examples. It might help to provide or find a sponsor for the seminar.
- Consider moving future conferences to earlier in the fall or January, rather than December. This is consistent with other SRERAs.
- In engaging a keynote speaker, seek college or university co-sponsorship, which might include the keynoter conducting a seminar at a nearby campus.
- Provide structured opportunities at conferences for higher education researchers to talk to LEAs and to network. LEAs could meet potential evaluation consultants from higher education. Market the chance to "form personal relationships with (the other group)."

While the potential benefits of networking opportunities were frequently mentioned as ways to increase engagement—both by those in higher education settings and by WERA leaders and members—these opportunities will need to be thoughtfully constructed. To be effective, such initiatives must go well beyond sitting in the same conference sessions or even across the same large lunch table in a noisy room. Within the networking offerings, there must also be chances for higher education colleagues to network with one another.

### ***Facilitate Partnerships***

An example of how collaboration can work is found in the Hawaiian experience, in which the SRERA brought together public and private universities, schools, the SEA, NGOs, and others to set a state-wide research agenda. The partners pledged to give attention and support to those research proposals which addressed the agenda's priorities.

Although WERA has a long history of working cooperatively with OSPI, state content area groups, and other professional organizations, it does not generally work with our college and university colleagues in a formal way. (Individual faculty members have previously been active members and served on the WERA Board, although this is not the case at present.) Yet colleges/universities have *many* partnerships with schools, districts and other NGOs across their regional landscape. Meanwhile, WERA seeks to work with many of the same partners and other regional and professional associations focused on education (e.g., Washington ASCD, Washington PDK and early childhood agencies). This would indicate a major opportunity to formalize partnerships with higher education groups. Many college and university leaders we interviewed expressed an appetite for a closer relationship with WERA. Conversations with college and university leaders generated several suggestions for engagement:

- Consider coordinating with WACTE (Washington Association of College Teachers of Education) and other groups, in terms of meeting times and locations. (See the Arizona

Educational Research Organization model in Appendix E and see Appendix J for a Fall, 2013 WACTE agenda.) As an alternative, consider sponsoring a joint, eastside conference with colleges and universities to find common ground and build fruitful, ongoing relationships.

- To augment professional development, ask a provider from the field to join with an academic who has expertise with the current research literature and/or a national perspective.
- Invite academics to be partners in the planning and the delivery of conferences, white papers, and professional development.
- Develop a policy for becoming a WERA partner that includes fiscal or in-kind support and benefits to the partners, such as recognition.
- Increase support and focus on partnerships between schools or districts and higher education, using a comprehensive approach that includes grant awards (requiring attendance at a conference or an article for WEJ), conference sessions, SIG development, etc.
- Several curriculum content areas or academic disciplines are fertile areas for working together. Disciplines like science, health and physical education, special education, counseling, school leadership, and teacher and principal evaluation were also suggested.

Faculty are also interested in common ground on topics such as TPEP, Common Core, Smarter Balanced, special education, leadership and grants to support that work. They also seek opportunities for their graduate students to find jobs, publish, present, and find collaborators with financial support, when available.

Finally, teacher preparation provides numerous possibilities for engagement with colleges and universities. For example, The Evergreen State College faculty takes tremendous pride in producing teachers who actually understand the realities facing teachers in "the real world." WERA's practitioner focus and contacts with principals would be a natural fit.

### **Cleveland High School (Seattle) and UW**

Former UW Associate Professor Marge Ginsberg won an AERA Relating Research to Practice Award (2013) for her work with Seattle's Cleveland HS. In addition, the district awarded her a Friend of Cleveland HS award (2010). With her "Leadership for Learning" graduate students, Ginsberg helped shape redesign of CHS to become a STEM school. Graduate students conducted a series of action research projects at CHS (<http://www.aimcenterseattle.org/action-research-projects>). She co-authored a WEJ article with CHS Assistant Principal Chris Kinney and UW Research Associate Julia Zigarelli (<http://www.wera-web.org/links/Journal/TheWERAEd51811.pdf>).

## ***Cultivate Relationships***

Even a cursory review of WERA's history reveals that a few individuals can often make a big difference, and personal relationships count. Such relationships are often both the spark and glue for continuing engagement with WERA. In the course of our work, we spoke with many people who seemed particularly willing to help WERA on this issue, and we have also observed a few others at WERA conferences who have a particular knack for this type of work.

As a strategy, consider the idea of "rainmakers" for WERA's initiatives around increasing engagement. Previous successes in WERA—times when there was active participation by more than just a few people from higher education—have been fostered by a couple of WERA members who were particularly dedicated and gifted in drawing in colleagues from colleges and universities. Key support can come from those few existing WERA members who currently work in higher education, WERA practitioners who have a track record of collaboration, and some individuals we interviewed in higher education leadership roles who were particularly enthusiastic. Also consider including adjunct faculty members from WERA ranks.

An attachment to the transmission letter with this report will provide WERA Board members with the names of people we interviewed who seemed likely to help WERA with the goal of increasing engagement. One notable absence was a specific person on the main campus of the University of Washington-Seattle campus. We have included the position, rather than a name in that list, to indicate a vacancy that needs to be addressed.

## ***Use SIGS as a Strategy***

Many professional organizations use Special Interest Groups (SIGS) or similar structures to ensure that professionals with common interests can find a "home" together. WERA now has two SIGs, plus an active Early Childhood group. The formation and existence of these three groups changes the landscape within WERA and could allow for expansions through adding other SIGs. SIGS have the advantage of being fairly autonomous, and do not normally place a burden on other parts of the professional organization to which they belong.

How might this work in WERA? In the past, there have been benefits to graduate students and university psychometricians when they formed relationships through WERA with school district assessment leaders. Meanwhile, the psychometricians have provided useful professional development to WERA practitioners. A SIG focused on specific areas of mutual interest, such as psychometrics, program evaluation, or content-specific areas, holds great promise.

The recent formation of a Highly Capable SIG is an example. Although the Hi-Cap SIG was formed to resolve operational and policy issues that districts had encountered in implementing new mandates, there is an opportunity for future SIGs to include members from *a variety of settings*, including higher education, which could lead to better program implementation, research, and evaluation partnerships. For example, the architecture of the new Hi-Cap SIG could yet include higher education researchers in this content area, who might have expertise that would

benefit districts. In other words, develop new SIGs with attention to those that will engage graduate students and junior faculty.

### ***WERA Constitution, Policy, and Procedures***

Current WERA policies and procedures do not foster collaboration with colleges and universities; i.e., no specific language makes it clear that higher education is a valued partner. For example, there is no attention to their Board membership, including graduate student representatives, nor mention of their participation in planning committees.

It would be useful to review all policies and procedures to find areas for increasing inclusion and collaboration. For example, WERA could include faculty and graduate students on board, conference planning, publication editing and other positions of importance. White papers, model or sample policies, and policy/procedures would benefit from bringing university people together with practitioners. Consider re-dedicating one board position, for college faculty, and appointing a non-voting position for a graduate student. If this happens, WERA should also consider providing telephone conference-call access to board meetings. Travel, teaching load and graduate student supervision are significant obstacles for many college and university folk.

WERA's purposes are spelled out in Article I, Section 2 (A):

“The purposes of the association are to:

- A. Promote, support, and improve the quality and effectiveness of educational research, evaluation, assessment, and related services;
- B. Identify and define educational issues and provide a forum for their discussion;
- C. Assist in the dissemination of research and evaluation findings;
- D. Promote professional development experiences for personnel who are engaged in educational research, evaluation, assessment, instruction, and related activities.”

WERA's membership could grow with graduate students and faculty by giving more attention to the less prominent purposes. A detailed, section by section discussion is found in Appendix G.

### ***Other Ways to Involve Graduate and Even Advanced Undergraduate Students***

Since graduate students can be such a key component of increasing engagement with higher education, we are including some ideas that could serve as a springboard for discussion among a team of people working on this issue.

One strategy, with multiple components, is to have a merit-based graduate student paper session at the annual conference currently held in December. This could begin by soliciting graduate student papers, then assigning them for blind review. The session would provide a discussant, which would provide useful information for all participants, and there could be a winner and runner-up for the awards. Awards might include partial grants for AERA registration and travel

expenses. (Limit entries to early scholars.) Publish the winning paper (and others?) in WEJ after the AERA conference.

Other ideas:

- Raise awareness of WERA opportunities including the \$10/\$25 membership fee. Graduate bulletin boards invite timely postings.
- Open peer reviewer positions for both the journal and conference proposals to graduate students.
- Provide discussant opportunities at conferences.
- Provide coaching on academic writing.
- Provide a press release including a photo with the WERA President and WERA Logo to the winner's university, allied regional organizations, OSPI and the media.
- Create a graduate student planning committee. Consider a graduate student SIG.

### ***Focus Some Attention on the Consortium***

The section on Advantages (for greater engagement) makes the case for increasing WERA's focus on the Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations. Strategies might include:

- Making our affiliation with the Consortium more apparent. This could include links on the WERA website, as well as mentioning it through our publications.
- Highlighting the distinguished papers WERA submits to the AERA annual conference.

### **Conclusions and Cautions**

There are many advantages—for both WERA and higher education—of increasing their engagement. This report provides some ideas about how to accomplish that, drawn from our interviews and things we have learned from other organizations.

WERA has a strong record of success across many endeavors, and other SRERAs have indicated an interest in how WERA approaches the challenges of increasing engagement with higher education. WERA will need a plan, and that plan should be designed to be feasible, sustainable, and include both short- and long-term strategies. Do not worry excessively about the people in higher education who will not work with practitioners, or about WERA practitioners whose animosity towards higher education does not allow them to work with those colleagues. Discover the ones who are interested, and work with them.

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[See Appendix I. Authors from REL Northwest address the importance of developing personal relationships to promote "mutualism" between educators and researchers.]

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[See Appendix H. This special section of five, brief papers provides a fresh perspective on thinking about research that may be useful to practitioners. See in particular, Guitierrez and Penuel: Relevance to practice as a criterion for rigor.]

## About the Authors

Peter Hendrickson, Ph.D., is a WERA Past President and founding editor of WERA Educational Journal. Currently a Western Washington University graduate instructor, he worked nearly 40 years as teacher, principal, curriculum director and testing director. Grandkids, mountaineering, medical research, and farming fill his days. He can be reached at [p.hendrickson43@gmail.com](mailto:p.hendrickson43@gmail.com)

Karen E. Banks, Ph.D., is the former Assistant Superintendent for Evaluation & Research in Wake County Public Schools (Raleigh, North Carolina.) Currently, she serves as editor for the WERA Educational Journal, conducts program evaluations for various clients, and serves as a consultant with low performing school districts. She enjoys her role as chair of the Social Action Steering Committee at her Unitarian Universalist church. She can be reached at [datadetectives@comcast.net](mailto:datadetectives@comcast.net)

## List of Acronyms

AERA	American Educational Research Association
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, WSASCD parent
CTB	CTB... formerly California Test Bureau
ERA	Educational Research Association or organizations, either state or regional
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
Hi-Cap	Highly Capable, also known as gifted
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NWEA	Northwest Evaluation Association
OSPI	Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the SEA
PDK	Phi Delta Kappa, parent of Washington State PDK
PDKWA	Washington chapter of PDK
SEA	State Education Agency
SIG	Special Interest Group
SRERA	State and Regional Educational Research Associations
TOSA	Teacher on Special Assignment
TPEP	Washington State Teacher/Principal Evaluation Project
TSD	The Standard Deviation, WERA's newsletter
UW	University of Washington
WACTE	Washington Association of College Teachers of Education
WEJ	WERA Educational Journal, WERA's peer-reviewed journal
WERA	Washington Educational Research Association
WSASCD	Washington ASCD branch
WSU	Washington State University

## Appendix A



### Washington Educational Research Association (WERA)

The Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) is an AERA state affiliate. WERA is governed by Executive Board members who serve 3-year terms, and has approximately 700 members (the largest of any state affiliate). Find WERA at <http://www.wera-web.org>.

WERA's mission is to support professionals working at all levels of education in order to:

- Promote, maintain, and improve the quality and effectiveness of educational research, evaluation, assessment, and related services;
- Identify and define educational issues and provide a forum for their discussion;
- Assist in the dissemination of research and evaluation findings; and
- Promote in-service experiences for those who engage in educational research, evaluation, assessment, instruction, and related activities.

#### Engagement Opportunities for College and University Faculty

#### PUBLICATIONS

WERA supports the peer-reviewed *WERA Educational Journal* (WEJ) and *The Standard Deviation*, the association's newsletter. See website guidelines for submitting manuscripts. WERA also sponsors white-papers on relevant topics of interest. Publications are posted.

- The twice yearly WEJ features academic papers, professional reports, and commentary of general significance to the Northwest educational research and practitioner community. WEJ invites research and evaluation oriented feature articles, reviews/essays, and briefs. WEJ also publishes commentary including reviews, letters to the editor and essays. Manuscripts are reviewed by at least two knowledgeable peers. Seeking authors, reviewers, section editors. Contact Editor Karen Banks at [WEJEditor@gmail.com](mailto:WEJEditor@gmail.com).
- *The Standard Deviation* is published three times per year and includes short articles on key topics, summaries of keynote presentations at WERA conferences, and updates on WERA activities. Seeking news of interest to WERA members. Contact Editor Jack Monpas-Huber at [jack.monpas.huber@shorelineschools.org](mailto:jack.monpas.huber@shorelineschools.org).

#### GRANTS AND AWARDS

WERA sponsors competitive grants (\$5,000 maximum) for studies lasting up to 18 months. Studies should focus on instructional improvement, classroom assessment, educational measurement at both the district and state level, or the evaluation of education programs. Research and evaluation proposals focusing on issues associated with school reform that include partnerships with school districts are particularly encouraged. Preference to applicants who are current WERA members and have not received a previous WERA grant. Submissions are due in February. The Executive Board also provides non-competitive grants for work on high-priority projects. WERA provides several types of awards for outstanding publications, products, research, and service. See website.

#### PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES

WERA hosts several conferences each year, including the Annual Assessment Conference in December that is jointly sponsored by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These events feature well-known experts as keynote speakers. Seeking proposals, reviewers, session chairs and discussants. See the website for deadlines.

#### MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to any member of the public. Annual membership for WERA is \$25 (\$10 for full-time students). Members receive the newsletter and journal and are listed in a membership directory. Seeking members to serve 3-year Executive Board terms and planning committees. Annual Conference registrants receive a one-year WERA membership.

For information or to become a member, contact Executive Secretary Sharon Rockwood at [weraoffice@gmail.com](mailto:weraoffice@gmail.com).



## Appendix B



### Washington Educational Research Association (WERA)

The Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) is the state affiliate of AERA. It was established in 1973 as a non-profit organization, is governed by members of an Executive Board who serve a 3-year term, and has approximately 500 members (the largest of any state affiliate).

WERA's mission is to support professionals working at all levels of education in order to:

- Promote, maintain, and improve the quality and effectiveness of educational research, evaluation, assessment, and related services;
- Identify and define educational issues and provide a forum for their discussion;
- Assist in the dissemination of research and evaluation findings; and
- Promote in-service experiences for those who engage in educational research, evaluation, assessment, instruction, and related activities.

WERA produces various publications and white papers, provides grants and awards, and provides professional development through conferences and other focused training activities.

#### PUBLICATIONS

WERA has two publications, the peer-reviewed *WERA Educational Journal (WEJ)* and *The Standard Deviation*, the association's newsletter. Guidelines for submitting materials for these publications are provided on WERA's website. WERA also sponsors white-papers on relevant topics of interest. All of the publications are posted on WERA's website.

- The WEJ is published twice per year and contains academic papers, professional reports, and commentary of general significance to the Northwest education research and practitioner community. WEJ encourages submissions of three types of research articles—feature articles, reviews/essays, and briefs. In addition, WEJ publishes commentary articles such as reviews, letters to the editor and essays. Manuscripts are reviewed by at least two peers who are appropriate for the topic and content of the article submitted.
- The *Standard Deviation* is published three times per year and includes short articles on key topics, summaries of keynote presentations at WERA conferences, and updates on WERA activities.

#### GRANTS AND AWARDS

WERA sponsors competitive grants (maximum award of \$5,000) for studies of educational issues. Studies lasting up to 18 months may be proposed. The purpose of the awards is to support studies that focus on instructional improvement, classroom assessment, educational measurement at both the district and state level, and the evaluation of education programs. Research and evaluation proposals focusing on issues associated with school reform that include partnerships with school

districts are particularly encouraged. Preference will be given to applicants who are current WERA members and have not received a previous WERA grant. Submissions are due in February. The Executive Board also provides non-competitive grants for work on high-priority projects.

WERA provides several types of awards for outstanding publications, products, research, and service. These awards and the nominating process are described on the WERA website.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

WERA hosts several conferences each year, including the Annual Conference in December that is jointly sponsored by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). These events feature well-known experts as keynote speakers.

Here is a list of the main speakers from 2000 to 2013.

- 2013 Bob Pianta, Dylan Wiliam (Dec. 2013 David Berliner, Kenji Hakuta, Margaret Heritage)
- 2012 Tom Guskey, Charlotte Danielson, Jim Popham, Brian Gong, Damian Betebenner, Dan Goldhaber
- 2011 John Medina, David Lohman, Doug Fisher, Bena Kallick
- 2010 John Hattie, Lorrie Shephard, Jan Hasbrouck
- 2009 Doug Reeves, Dylan Wiliam, Bill Daggett, Bill Schmidt, Larry Ainsworth
- 2008 Jim Popham, Henry Levin, Carl Cohen, Dean Fink
- 2007 Rick Stiggins, Ken O'Connor, Lynn Sawyer, Tony Alvarado
- 2006 Pedro Noguera, Kati Haycock, Steven Constantino, Ann Conzemius, Bill Schafer, Pete Goldschmidt
- 2005 Michael Fullen, Larry Cuban, Lorrie Shephard, Andy Hargreaves
- 2004 Gerald Bracey, Bob Marzano, John Bransford
- 2003 Pedro Noguera, Alan Schoenfeld, Phyllis Hunter, Jeremy Kilpatrick
- 2002 Ron Brandt, Tom Guskey, Jeanne Paratore, Jeremy Kilpatrick
- 2001 Linda Darling-Hammond, Rick Stiggins, Elliott Eisner, Leland Wilkinson
- 2000 Richard Rothstein, Ann Lieberman, Jose P. Mestre, Rich Shavelson

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership is open to any member of the public. Annual membership for WERA is \$25 (\$10 for full-time students). Members receive the newsletter and journal and are listed in a membership directory. Members are eligible to serve on the Executive Board and planning committees for WERA events. Those who register for the Annual Conference in December automatically receive a one-year WERA membership.

For more information about WERA or to become a member, contact:

Sharon Rockwood, Executive Secretary  
Washington Educational Research Association  
P.O. Box 15822  
Seattle, WA 98115  
Phone: 206-417-7776 ext. 2

Fax: 206-417-4525  
Email: [weraoffice@gmail.com](mailto:weraoffice@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.wera-web.org](http://www.wera-web.org)

## Appendix C

### Representatives from Higher Education Interviewed For This Project

\* Indicates interview was conducted in person. All others by telephone.

<i>College or University</i>	<i>Persons Interviewed</i>
1. Bellevue College	Leslie Heizer Newquist*
2. Central Washington University	Connie Lambert
3. Eastern Washington University	Marion Moore*
4. Gonzaga University	Vincent Alfonso*
5. Pacific Lutheran University	Frank Kline*
6. Saint Martin's University	Steve Siera*
7. Seattle Pacific University	Rick Eigenbrood*
8. Seattle University	Deanna Sands
9. The Evergreen State College	Sherry Walton*
10. University of Washington	Cathy Taylor (recently retired)
11. University of Washington	Joy Williamson-Lott*
12. University of Washington-Bothel	Brad Portin
13. Washington State University	Mike Trevisan*
14. Washington State University- Vancouver	Paul Goldman (recently retired)
15. Washington State University- Vancouver	Linda Mabry*
16. Western Washington University	Francisco Rios*
17. Western Washington University	Chris Schaefer
18. Whitworth University	David Cheney*
19. Whitworth University	Corey McKenna*

## **Appendix D**

### **WERA Leaders and Members, Including OSPI Members, Who Were Interviewed For This Project**

Note that many people interviewed for this project fell into multiple categories, such as former OSPI employees who had also worked in school districts or universities, and vice versa.

\* Indicates interview was conducted in person

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Nancy Angello         | 32. Joe Willhoft*    |
| 2. Pete Bylsma           | 33. Ric Williams*    |
| 3. Deb Came              | 34. Leonard Winchell |
| 4. Pat Cummings          | 35. Nancy Young      |
| 5. Phil Dommès*          |                      |
| 6. Linda Elman           |                      |
| 7. Gordon Ensign         |                      |
| 8. Christopher Hansczrik |                      |
| 9. Emilie Hard*          |                      |
| 10. Mike Jacobsen        |                      |
| 11. Nancy Katims         |                      |
| 12. Jim Kiefert          |                      |
| 13. Gary Kipp            |                      |
| 14. Jim Leffler          |                      |
| 15. Jerry Litzenberger   |                      |
| 16. Duncan MacQuarrie*   |                      |
| 17. Froseyne Mensendic   |                      |
| 18. Jack Monpas-Huber    |                      |
| 19. Robin Munson*        |                      |
| 20. Michael Power        |                      |
| 21. Geoff Praeger        |                      |
| 22. Brian Rick*          |                      |
| 23. Nina Salcedo Potter  |                      |
| 24. Don Schmitz*         |                      |
| 25. Gene Sementi         |                      |
| 26. Gene Sharratt        |                      |
| 27. Paul Shook           |                      |
| 28. Bob Silverman        |                      |
| 29. Kathryn Sprigg*      |                      |
| 30. Paul Stern*          |                      |
| 31. Dawn Wakeley         |                      |

## Appendix E: Consortium Distinguished Paper Details, Profiles of Selected SERAs, Consortium Members Listing, and Spring 2013 Consortium Paper Sessions Program Listings at AERA, San Francisco

Below are three examples of SERA approaches to distinguished papers.

—**Arizona:** *The Best Paper award is given to a graduate student in support of scholarship and presentation of their work at the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Annual Meeting. Best paper submissions should be submitted to Debby Zambo by email at [Debby.Zambo@asu.edu](mailto:Debby.Zambo@asu.edu). Please note that full dissertations will not be considered; however shortened versions (15-30 pages) are accepted. The Best Paper award will be presented at the conference during the lunch session. The deadline for submitting papers for consideration is Nov. 08, 2013. The committee selects a winner but all submitters present during the conference and the winner is not announced until the end of the conference, Joe O'Reilly, Treasurer and Past President reported.*

*The Best Paper Award winner receives a \$500 stipend to present their paper at AERA during the Distinguished Papers Session of the Consortium of State and Regional Educational Research Associations. The 2014 Annual AERA meeting will be held in Philadelphia, PA. from Tuesday April 3 - Monday April 7, 2014, details are available at [www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net).*

—**California:** You are invited to submit an original, unpublished research manuscript for CERA's annual Outstanding Paper award. The absolute last day for submission is August 30th, 2013. *Each year, CERA honors one of its members or a conference attendee with the Outstanding Paper award. A CERA board member presents the award along with a brief description of the research during Thursday's lunch.*

*The Outstanding Paper award goes to the conference attendee who receives the highest numerical ratings from each of the reviewers. A CERA board member notifies the award winner in late August. In addition to the conference announcement, the recipient of the CERA Outstanding Paper receives paid conference registration to BOTH CERA's Annual Conference and to AERA's Annual Meeting.*

—**Hawaii:** *HERA members are encouraged to submit their research for HERA's Distinguished Paper Award. Submissions are due every calendar year in September to [herainfo@hawaii.edu](mailto:herainfo@hawaii.edu). Stay tuned for the specific date in 2013. The award winner is announced at the annual conference and receives an honorarium as well as the opportunity to present at the [American Educational Research Association](http://www.aera.net).*

### Profiles of Selected SERA Associations

**Arizona ERO**, with 60 to 80 at a one-day conference, has strong assessment component reflecting membership. There are few principals or teachers unless in

doctoral programs. Higher Ed collaborates with AERO, meeting with them through a sponsored lunch and independently in the afternoon. No particular program evaluation focus. They had Arizona State Superintendent candidates speak on issues concerning research and development. Board positions include university faculty representing the state geography. They attempt to accept all papers with posters as an option. The graduate students seem to think the conference status is higher because it is one of their first conferences. They face about 30 without a discussant, but they always get questions and comments.

**California ERA**, modeled on WERA, consists of mostly DREs at different levels. A SEA Assistant Superintendent gives a keynote address, and they used to have a day-long SEA pre-conference session. The new, part-time executive director is charged with outreach to universities. A stipend is awarded to graduate student to present a distinguished paper at AERA. The board has reserved a university position. Most presentations focus on practice. They publish no journal. They seek high profile keynoters. For graduate students, *"It can be life-changing to hear some people talk."*

**Hawaii ERA**, with a membership of 80 to 100, has three annual research events including the conference. Graduate students are key participants, and poster sessions are not cross-scheduled. The distinguished paper awardee receives \$500 for AERA expenses. Competitive mentorships (five per year) are also awarded. Deans generally attend the major conference. A statewide educational research consortium sets priority areas. They partner with PDK Hawaii on implementation and practice issues. Membership is about one-third program evaluators. Many are in AERA, about half in Division H or K. HERA sometimes provides letters of support for grant or other proposals. Their educational journal is bi-annual. The state IRB backs up proposals for six to eight months after university IRB screening.

**New England ERO**, with over 250 members. draws from universities through health and social agencies with special invitations to graduate students and provides many opportunities for collegial discussions through workshops, sessions, formal receptions, and informal gatherings. In most respects the conference reflects an AERA format. Note that proposals are limited to 1,000 (individual) or 1,500 words (group). Acceptances arrive after 2.5 months' review.

**North Carolina ARE** is purposed to *"serve as a bridge between the research community, the educational practitioner, the public and policy makers."* The website further states, *"The Association shall engage in activities which stimulate and improve the quality of research and evaluation; which facilitate communication between the members of the Association, practitioners in education, and the general public; which use the competencies of the membership, enabling it to address special issues relevant to the improvement of educational practice; and which stimulate the allocation and use of resources for education and evaluation."* Six officers are from higher education, two from LEAs, one from State DPI, and one from a non-profit. A journal is planned for this year. Graduate students have a poster session.

**Northeast ERA** which covers from the University of Massachusetts south to DC, has around 150 members with a strong professional measurement component. There are no SEA or LEA representation. About one-third of the members are graduate students. Graduate students seek career development and mentoring. Face-to-face conference contacts are preferred to online media for making effective contact. Tier 2 conference works for many new academics—many come from the schools. There is a blind peer review with greater than 80% acceptance. NERA has a newsletter, but no journal.

**Rocky Mountain & North Rocky Mountain Associations** are completely affiliated with higher education. NRMEA has an online journal, peer reviewed and open to the public. Journal editor is non-voting board member. Rocky Mountain ERA conference presenters were all academics.

### **Consortium Members**

Below is a complete listing of Consortium members.

AERO Association of Educational Research Officers of Ontario <http://www.aero-aoce.org/>

AERO Arizona Educational Research Organization <http://www.azedresearch.org/>

CERA California Educational Research Association <http://cera-web.org/>

EERA Eastern Educational Research Association <http://www.eeraonline.org/main/index.cfm>

FERA Florida Educational Research Association <http://www.feraonline.org/>

GERA Georgia Educational Research Association <http://ceps.georgiasouthern.edu/conted/GERA.html>

HERA Hawaii Educational Research Association <http://hawaii.edu/hera/>

IEREA Iowa Educational Research and Evaluation Association <http://www.iera.org/>

LERA Louisiana Educational Research Association <http://leraweb.homestead.com/>

MERA Michigan Educational Research Association <http://merainc.org/>

MSERA Mid South Educational Research Association <http://dtm10.cep.msstate.edu/>

MWERA Mid-Western Educational Research Association <http://www.mwera.org/>

NEERO New England Educational Research Organization <http://neero.org/>

NCARE North Carolina Association for Research in Education <http://coedpages.uncc.edu/ncare/>

NERA Northeastern Educational Research Association <http://www.nera-education.org/>

NRMERA Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association <http://www.nrmera.org/>

OREC Ontario Educational Research Council

PERA Pennsylvania Educational Research Association <http://www.mid-atlantic-era.org/>

RMERA Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association <http://rmera.net/>

SCEPUR Southern Carolina Educators for Practical Use of Research <http://scepur.org/>

SACCR Southeastern Association for Community College Research <http://www.mgccc.edu/factbook/saccr/>

SERA Southwest Educational Research Association <http://sera-edresearch.org/>

VERA Virginia Educational Research Association <http://va-edresearch.org/>

WERA Washington Educational Research Association <http://www.wera-web.org/>

## **Spring 2013 Consortium Paper Sessions, San Francisco AERA**

Below is the complete listing of distinguished papers from Consortium associations:

### **SESSION I**

**Sunday, April 28 4:05—5:35, Westin St. Francis/Kent**

Chair: Malinda Hendricks Green, University of Central Oklahoma

Discussants: David Berliner, Arizona State University and Christa Winter, Springfield College

- Southwest Educational Research Association
  - ***Finite Mixture Modeling with Nonnormal Indicators***
    - Grant Morgan, Baylor University



- Aaron Bagget, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor
- Northern Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association
  - ***A Comparison of TIMSS Scores Using Cognitive Domains***
    - Ryan Nixon, University of Georgia
    - Katie N. Barth, Brigham Young University
    - Jeffery S. Young, Brigham Young University
    - Nancy Wentworth, Brigham Young University
- South Carolina Educators for Practical Use of Research
  - ***Preliminary Psychometric Evidence of the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System Teacher Rating Scale – Preschool***
    - Fred Greer, University of South Carolina
    - Jin Liu, University of South Carolina
    - Christine DiStefano, University of South Carolina
    - Brandy Wilson, Appalachian State University
    - Leia Cain, University of South Carolina
- Mid South Educational Research Association
  - ***Faculty Administrator Relationships***
    - Franz H. Reneau, Florida Agricultural University

## SESSION II

**Monday April 29, 8:15 am—9:45 am , Westin St. Francis/Hampton**

Chair: Keith Kershner, Research for Better Schools

Discussants: J. Thomas Owens, University of Central Florida and Tony Onwuegbuzie, Sam Houston State University

- Virginia Educational Research Association
  - ***The Contribution of Standards- Based Teaching Practices to Fourth Grade Mathematics Achievement for High and Low Achieving Classes***
    - Eileen Merritt, University of Virginia
- Georgia Educational Research Association
  - ***Candidate Surveys on Program Evaluation: Examining Instrument Validity and Program Effectiveness***
    - Ruchi Bhatnagar, Georgia State University
    - Jihye Kim, Georgia State University
    - Joyce Many, Georgia State University
- Iowa Educational Research and Evaluation Association

- ***Value-Added Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness Using Three Different Growth Metrics***
  - Paula L. Cunningham, University of Iowa
  - Catherine J. Welch, University of Iowa
  - Stephen B. Dunbar, University of Iowa
- Northeastern Educational Research Association
  - ***Teachers, Technology, and Digital Natives***
    - Nina Kositsky, University of Massachusetts

### SESSION III

**Tuesday April 30, 12:10 pm—1:40 pm, Westin St. Francis/Yorkshire**

Chair: Michael Green, Hudson Valley Community College

Discussants: Mike Nelson, University of Central Oklahoma

- Pennsylvania Educational Research Association
  - ***Curricular Mobility in Early High School Mathematics: Evidence from the post-NCLB Era***
    - Elizabeth Farley-Ripple, University of Delaware
- Hawaii Educational Research Association
  - ***Developing a Statistical Model to Analyze Algebra Preparedness***
    - Linda Venenciano, University of Hawaii
- North Carolina Association for Research in Education
  - ***Statewide Developmental Growth Curves in Reading and Mathematics: A Practical Strategy to Lengthen Empirical Trajectories***
    - Gary Williamson, MetaMetrics, Inc.
    - Mary Ann Simpson, MetaMetrics, Inc.
- Southeastern Association for Community College Research
  - ***Implementation of Predictive Analytics for Student Retention in a Community College Setting***
    - Rhonda Tracy, West Virginia University at Parkersburg
    - Robert Westbrook, West Virginia University at Parkersburg

### SESSION IV

**Tuesday, April 30, 2:00pm—3:30 pm Westin St. Francis/Yorkshire**

Chair: Harry Bowman, Council on Occupational Education

Discussants: Rosa Cintron, University of Central Florida and Keith A. McNeil, New Mexico State University

- California Educational Research Association
  - ***Seeing Eye-to-eye: A Study of After School Alignment and Academic Achievement***
    - Tracy Bennett, University of California, Irvine
- New England Educational Research Organization
  - ***At Risk means minority kid: Deconstructing Deficit Discourses in the Study of Risk in Education and Human Services***
    - Cinzia Pica-Smith, Assumption Colleg
    - Carmen Veloria, Suffolk University
- Rocky Mountain Educational Research Association
  - ***Muslim at Early Career Faculty: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of Navigating the Tenure Process***
    - Amneh Al-Rawashdeh, New Mexico State University
- Florida Educational Research Association
  - ***Estimating program effects with the short interrupted time-series design and multilevel models***
    - Francisco Jiminez, University of Florida
    - Walter Leite, University of Florida

## **SESSION Business Meeting/Reception**

**Saturday April 27, 6:15pm – 7:45 pm, Hilton Union Square / Continental 1**

- Kathleen Berg, University of Hawaii
- Virginia Shipman, University of New Mexico
- Edith Carter, Radford University
- Malinda Hendricks Green, University of Central Oklahoma
- Michael Green, Hudson Valley Community College
- Harry Bowman, Council on Occupational Education
- Truc Nguyen, University of Hawaii
- Walter M. Mathews, Evaluation Associates of New York
- John Enger, Nova Southeastern University
- Keith Kershner, Research for Better Schools

**The Consortium would like to thank the following for their support and assistance with the 2013 SRERA Annual Meeting and the 2013 AERA Distinguished Papers Sessions.**

AERA – Samara Wolf Fetner

Nova Southeastern University—Abraham S. Fischler, School of Education

University of Central Oklahoma, College of Education and Professional Studies,  
Staff of Print Central—Craig Beuchaw, University Relations; Karrie Jo Terrell,  
Executive Assistant to the Dean

**See you in 2014 in Philadelphia!**

## Appendix F

### Previous White Papers

[Procedures for Managing Parent Refusals to Take State Tests – February 2013 revision](#)

—Nancy Katims (Edmonds SD) and others have provided annual guidance to test directors.

[Guidelines for Reviewing Test Preparation Materials](#) (2004)

—Gordon Ensign (OSPI, Ret.) edited this joint project of WERA and the Oregon Program Evaluators Network (OPEN).

[Ethical Standards in Testing: Test Preparation and Administration](#) (Rev. 2001)

—Jim Nelson (Past WERA Executive Secty) was principal author for this paper following a series of 1988-99 seminars attended by district and OSPI leaders. This work influenced OSPI policy.

[District Level Assessment Director Competencies in Washington State](#) (2002)

—Michael Power (Mercer Island SD, now Tacoma Housing Authority) and Geoff Praeger (Central Valley SD, Ret.) developed competencies in consultation with many districts. The document has helped shape some Assessment Director job descriptions.

[Scaling Running Records Passages for Precise Reading Assessment](#) (1998, 2000)

—Carl Hauser (Olympia SD, now NWEA) was Principal Investigator of this collaborative study involving five Olympia area school districts with consultative support from NWEA. This paper was the only classic, quantitative research study.

## **Appendix G: Commentary & Suggestions on Constitution and Policies & Procedures**

### **Purpose Article I, Section 2 (A) states,**

“The purposes of the association are to:

- A.** Promote, support, and improve the quality and effectiveness of educational research, evaluation, assessment, and related services;
- B.** Identify and define educational issues and provide a forum for their discussion;
- C.** Assist in the dissemination of research and evaluation findings;
- D.** Promote professional development experiences for personnel who are engaged in educational research, evaluation, assessment, instruction, and related activities.”

Some respondents have claimed that WERA is all about “D,” professional development and the assessment component of “A.” No small part of the evaluation speaks to “A,” “B” and “C.”

### **Membership Article II, 1 (B)**

This section fully supports student membership for those who are not full time employees. Are we able to identify those graduate students who are full time employees but pursuing an advanced degree? One author developed and led a support group for those employees in a large, urban district. The activity was motivated by a long association with WERA and AERA, but not associated with either organization.

### **Officers, Article II, 3(E) Ex-Officio Members.**

“The Executive Board may appoint a non-voting, ex-officio member to represent an important constituent group not elected to the Board.” The Board could appoint university faculty and/or graduate students to serve prior to any regularized creation of more permanent college or university positions.

### ***Comments on WERA Policy and Procedures***

Notes on WERA policies and procedures are based on January 2014 documents which are currently under revision. More than the Constitution, these well-constructed and largely up-to-date documents provide remarkably clear guidance to WERA Board members and others close to the organization. Remarks below are made through the lens of seeking greater engagement with colleges and universities.

## **01 Awards**

In many cases, there could be a premium or special consideration given to those endeavors which are collaborative partnerships between practitioners and academics. For example, a distinguished paper with co-authors from the field and the academy could be recognized. Consideration could be given to recognizing outstanding examples of rigorous scholarship in service of improved practice. Many associations and organizations recognize “friends.” A college or university friend of WERA could be recognized. [Note: The SRERA is no longer an AERA SIG; it is a consortium.]

Co-sponsors for awards to academics could seek matching support from the college and other WERA partners to dispatch a graduate student to AERA.

## **02 Conferences**

The practice of conference Co-Chairs from WERA and OSPI could be mirrored with conference or other event co-chairs from a college or university. The Joint Conference language enables these relationships. It is not explicit about inclusion on a planning committee and the co-sponsorship language implies that other organizations make the request rather than WERA seeking the partnership.

The present December conference timing, a vestige of state test results released some 25 years ago, is perfectly ill-suited to college and university participation as it falls at the end of the quarter or semester. At a different time, there could be rich opportunities for both cost-sharing and exposure of distinguished keynoters at academic institutions.

The large group discount may be significantly attractive to graduate students, particularly those associated with a particular lab or advisor. Might there be business sponsors who would like to also underwrite graduate student conference attendance?

The practice of WERA Board members helping with morning registration duties pulls them from up to three possible meeting times for SIGs and other groups which could include college and university people. Graduate students are often enlisted for similar tasks in exchange for highly reduced conference fees.

The Business Sponsorships language implies that the business, perhaps a 501(c) (3), does not have a legitimate professional seat at the conference table, only a profit or marketing interest. AERA and SERAs frequently invite sessions from professionals testing and other companies. For example, local curriculum developers may have considerable professional talent at hand.

The Pete Dodson Symposium hiatus has removed a forum for discussing topics of significant interest to both the schools and colleges/universities. That said, efforts to recruit panelists from colleges and universities sometimes resulted in no-shows.

### **03 Executive Board**

Board member's attendance is an expectation. Other state or national organizations recognize the difficulty and expense of convening in person more than once or twice per year. Academic travel budgets are notably penurious. Teaching or other academic responsibilities may leave teaching faculty with less mobility than the school administrators who fill so many Board of Directors positions. If participation included routine conference call capability for both regular and committee/planning meetings, academics might be able to better attend.

The Past President position assumes an interest in the Assessment Directors Network. Might there be some other position with an explicit tie to colleges and universities? There is ever the question of tomorrow's leadership, and a graduate student position could advance the interests of future school leaders.

### **04 Executive Secretary**

There is no specific reference to maintenance of membership records.

### **05 Finances**

### **06 Publications**

Policy is silent regarding The WERA Educational Journal editorship and supervision. Other regional and national flagship publications provide board membership to the editor. Co-editors from the field and the academy could provide many opportunities for collaboration.

Web site content was seen by some academics as thin on content which might engage those in colleges and universities. One interviewee noted that hiding the WEJ rather than prominently featuring the articles signals a low value on scholarship from members.

Publication co-chairs could open another avenue for inclusion of college and university faculty or staff. Joint White Paper authorship also promotes collaboration across institutions.

### **07 Research [and Program Evaluation] Grants** The policy states,

The purpose of the award(s) is to support studies that focus on instructional improvement, classroom assessment, educational measurement at the district and state level, and the evaluation of education programs. Research and evaluation proposals focusing on issues associated with school reform that include partnerships with school districts will be encouraged.

Here lies the opportunity to engage college and universities in setting a research and program evaluation agenda. For example, school and district leadership does not appear



to be a current, favored focus, nor does the physical, mental or social health of students, nor the place of charter or private schools in the education of Washington's youth.

Here also lies the opportunity to designate co-chairs of a Research and Program Evaluation Grants Committee with one from colleges or universities. We have observed that the research life of school leaders is primarily around program evaluations (mandated or chosen) and reviews of the literature to find the strongest evidence to guide selection of programs or initiatives. Far less frequent is the pursuit of knowledge gained from high quality experimental or quasi-experimental studies. The design, staffing and execution of those studies are shockingly expensive, and actionable results are often long in arriving. Efforts to improve the practice of program evaluations and literature reviews correspond more closely to the needs of most WERA members.

High quality research and program evaluations deserve wide distribution and promotion through presentation, journal publication, and web accessibility. There is no current policy expectation that the awardee(s) present or publish. Some may require mentoring to prepare them for making the steps from report to professional presentation and refereed journal publication.

#### **08 Training—Professional Development**

The purpose statement is clearly oriented to test director and supervisory functions. An expanded or re-directed focus on program evaluation, literature reviews, and (less salient) high quality research would signal that WERA is broader than a core group of test directors. Conference pre-sessions offer expanded opportunities in those areas. There is a cadre of Institutional Researchers in community and four-year colleges who might be interested in sessions directed at their work. At the margin of high school and college we may likely find cross-over interest and need.

#### **09 Special Interest Groups**

The Board continues to move forward to promote SIGs and this policy should resound clearly with college and university personnel. It is familiar territory. Shared leadership with college and university faculty or staff would provide a sense of ownership and belonging to WERA.



# Editors' Introduction: What Should Count as Quality Education Research? Continuing the Discussion

Sherry A. Southerland<sup>1</sup>, Vivian L. Gadsden<sup>2</sup>, and Carolyn D. Herrington<sup>1</sup>

This special section is directed to a continuing conversation as to what counts as quality research in education. For any field of science and scholarship, serious reflection on the elements of transparent and well-warranted research merits ongoing attention. In this section, that dialogue is extended to further exploring what constitutes “high-quality” research. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) formally addressed some of these issues in issuing “Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Sciences Research in AERA Publications” in 2006, followed by issuing a second set of standards in 2009 focused on humanities-oriented research. Continuing to engage with such questions reflects the editorial team’s premise: that high-quality research should be fundamental to the improvement of educational policy and practice.

## The Search for Criteria of Quality in Research

The commentaries in this special section respond to the continuing need to define within our various academic and research communities the criteria of rigor so that we can be better positioned to share these criteria with other communities, including policymakers and educators. They also point to the importance of understanding how policy decisions shape research that is conducted in education. Assessments of what constitutes rigorous research shape what policymakers choose to support, what educational researchers hold as valuable, and what educational practitioners choose to implement.

The possibilities for sound research and inherent tensions in responding to both the formulation of research and theory and the significance of practice are reflected, in part, in the recent (August 2013) report titled “Common Guidelines for Education Research and Development,” jointly released by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES; 2013a) and the National Science Foundation.

Likewise, the most recent call for proposals (May 2013) from IES (2013b) raises some of the issues:

Education has always produced new ideas, new innovations, and new approaches, but only appropriate empirical evaluation can identify those that are in fact improvements. Taken together, work across the various goals [of the call for proposals] should not only yield information about the practical benefits and the effects of specific interventions on education outcomes but also

contribute to the bigger picture of scientific knowledge and theory on learning, instruction, and education systems. (IES, 2013b, p. 11)

## Special Section Content

For this special section, we have invited five scholars to offer their views on this call for “scientific knowledge” in education and how scientific knowledge is understood and perhaps misunderstood. The scholars come from a variety of research fields and draw upon a range of research orientations, including those who focus on history, philosophy, learning, and the needs of traditionally marginalized learners as well as a researcher from the natural sciences who is also known for his work in physics teaching and learning.

The conversation begins with D. C. Phillips’ commentary, “Research in the Hard Sciences and in Very Hard ‘Softer’ Domains.” Phillips, a philosopher of education and social science, argues that all “competent inquiries” share basic features. He also draws our attention to the problematic nature of the term *scientific* and argues for a greater need for “ecological validity” in our work.

Carl E. Wieman, in his commentary titled “The Similarities Between Research in Education and Research in the Hard Sciences,” extends this comparison, writing that “the nature of research in the two areas is far more similar than researchers in either community recognize” (p. 12). Wieman, a physicist, suggests that cutting-edge science is often “much messier, complicated, and less precise” (p. 12) than is commonly acknowledged—and in this way, it bears remarkable similarities to education research. Wieman argues that “the predictive power, and corresponding new insights, that a research study will provide is a more meaningful measure of its rigor and value than what particular research design it uses” (p. 13).

This emphasis on understanding the nature of scientific inquiry continues with John L. Rudolph’s commentary, “Why Understanding Science Matters: The IES Research Guidelines as a Case in Point.” Rudolph, who focuses on the history of science

<sup>1</sup>Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL

<sup>2</sup>University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

education in his research, describes the problematic nature of what is often termed the “experimental model of science.” He suggests that this standard risks casting other research traditions as deficit. Rudolph also notes that “methods of inquiry are highly contextual, contingent, and emergent over time” and that many may “fall outside the narrow band of those recognized as experimental. This fact, however, makes them no less scientific” (p. 16).

Kris D. Gutiérrez and William R. Penuel continue in the vein established by Rudolph in their essay titled “Relevance to Practice as a Criterion of Rigor.” Drawing on their expertise from literacy education, learning sciences, and educational psychology, Gutiérrez and Penuel argue that if education research is to be meaningful—that is, if it is to allow us to understand substantive and equitable change in education so that we can better organize conditions for learning—relevance to practice must be an explicit criterion of quality research. In their contribution to the conversation, these authors consider what this new criterion, “relevance to practice,” means for the conceptualization, design, and conduct of programs of education research.

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## AUTHORS

**SHERRY A. SOUTHERLAND**, PhD, is a professor and codirector of FSU-Teach at Florida State University, G119 Stone, Tallahassee Florida 32306-2540; [ssoutherland@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:ssoutherland@admin.fsu.edu). Her research focuses on the influence of culture in the learning and teaching of science, equitable practices in science teaching, teacher professional development, and barriers and affordances to the reform of science teaching.

**VIVIAN L. GADSDEN** is the William T. Carter Professor of Child Development and Education, professor of Africana Studies, and director of the National Center on Fathers and Families at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education; [viviang@gse.upenn.edu](mailto:viviang@gse.upenn.edu). Her teaching and research focus on the social and cultural contexts of learning and literacy across the life course, children and youth placed at risk, fathers and families, and intergenerational learning within families.

**CAROLYN D. HERRINGTON** is a professor of educational policy and director of the Educational Policy Center in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy at Florida State University; 1204H Stone Building, C4604 UCC, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4450; [cherrington@fsu.edu](mailto:cherrington@fsu.edu). She served as president of the Association for Education Finance and Policy from 2011 to 2012. Her teaching and research focus on the politics and policies of educational reform with a particular emphasis on the role of the state. She has examined issues concerning accountability, school finance, school choice, and comprehensive children’s services, among others.



# Research in the Hard Sciences, and in Very Hard "Softer" Domains

D. C. Phillips<sup>1</sup>

The author of this commentary argues that physical scientists are attempting to advance knowledge in the so-called hard sciences, whereas education researchers are laboring to increase knowledge and understanding in an "extremely hard" but softer domain. Drawing on the work of Popper and Dewey, this commentary highlights the relative similarities between hard sciences and education research in their rhetorical nature, while acknowledging the divergent paths of these two fields of inquiry with regard to prediction and generalizability. The author suggests that given the highly contextualized nature of educational processes, embedded in shifting complex social settings, and the relevance of all variables, very little education research is able to pursue predictive power.

**Keywords:** educational policy; educational reform; research methodology; research utilization

I have been invited to reply to the prompt crafted by the editors of *Educational Researcher*—a prompt that, hopefully mischievously, embodies the sickness known as "physics envy." To my mind, it raises the question of why education researchers should envy physical scientists and would want to be like them. Apart from higher status, higher salaries, fancier-looking lab equipment, and sparkling white lab coats, they are just like us! But yes, of course there is a pertinent difference: Physical scientists are attempting (with notable success) to advance knowledge in the so-called hard sciences, whereas we in education research are laboring (with possibly indifferent success) to increase knowledge and understanding in an "extremely hard" but softer domain. And in the course of doing this work, we face great difficulties—epistemological, methodological, and practical, liberally seasoned from time to time by the economic hardship of underfunding and by uninformed interference by governmental agencies issuing ideologically based methodological strictures. Given these travails, it makes perfect sense that we would never ask a group of physicists to respond to a prompt that suggests their field should be more like education research!

Personally, I regard this general issue as moot—the issue of whose field should be taken as benchmark and whose should be a copy—and it is moot because (with an important proviso) all competent inquiries (to use John Dewey's [1938] felicitous expression from *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*) have the same features. Leo Tolstoy famously remarked, in the opening sentence of *Anna Karenina*, that all happy families are alike—and they probably are, *providing that* one looks at them from afar, from a

sufficient level of abstraction where individualizing details have become indiscernible. The same is true of the many families of happy (competently pursued) research or inquiry, spanning the physical, biological, and social sciences; education research; and possibly the humanities as well.<sup>1</sup> The philosopher Dagfinn Føllesdal (1979) showed that the hypothetico-deductive method (often argued to be the logical pattern underlying the "scientific method") is used in the far-off field of hermeneutical or interpretive literary inquiry (the examples he analyzed in depth were commentaries on *Peer Gynt*). John Dewey (1916) and Karl Popper (1972) argued (in surprisingly parallel analyses) that productive inquiry always followed the same general logical pattern—that started with engagement with a problem and eventually resulted in the trying out, the testing, of a hypothesis about the likely solution to the initial perplexity (which might end the inquiry or result in a further bout of activity; see also Dewey, 1933). Popper was specifically discussing research across the sciences, whereas Dewey had his eyes on all problem-solving inquiry (his examples included homespun scientific inquiries, such as a child investigating the production of soap bubbles, and everyday problem solving, such as deciding on the mode of transport to use in order to be on time for a cross-town meeting). Dewey even made the point that Popper became famous for canvassing (although Popper probably does deserve the credit as he made it in an extremely powerful way)—namely, researchers must ensure that they do not focus their efforts on proving that

<sup>1</sup>Stanford University, Stanford, CA

they are right; they must not, in the terminology sometimes used in the educational methodology literature, adopt a “confirmatory orientation.” Popper argued that it always is possible to find some evidence that one’s favored hypothesis is right, but this counts for little—what is crucial is that one attempts to find evidence that it is wrong.

The features discussed so far barely make inroads into the long list of similarities that philosophers, and empirical researchers themselves, have seen across the vast domain of competently pursued human inquiry (I provide a slightly less “hit-and-run” discussion in chapter 5 of my *The Expanded Social Scientist’s Bestiary*; Phillips, 2000). I will mention only one other—one that I have been particularly taken with since I pointed to it in various papers about a decade ago. I gave it the label “the platinum standard” to mark its superiority over the “gold standard” (the use of randomized controlled experiments), which was supposed to be the distinguishing feature possessed by all rigorous, scientifically oriented research. In brief, I have argued that research across many if not all fields can be thought of as attempting to make a *compelling case* for a hypothesis, by marshaling evidence of various types and crafting arguments, which taken as a whole warrant a conclusion about this hypothesis; the case, of course, has to be able to withstand critical scrutiny. In short, research is an exercise in argumentation, or in rhetoric (in the traditional and not the modern sense of the term, in which it implies nefariousness). Charles Darwin (1859) put it well when in the concluding chapter of *Origin of Species*—almost certainly the most important book ever written in the field of biology—he pointed out that the preceding chapters constituted a complex *argument*, and in this concluding chapter, he was setting about recapitulating the case that he had made. In similar vein, I argue that it is fruitful to regard inquiries into gender differences in moral development, the authorship of *Hamlet*, the relationship between time on task and learning, whether or not Richard III was a monster who murdered his own nephews in order to safeguard his grasp on the English throne, and so on as all being attempts to make a compelling case one way or the other.

So much for similarities between the hard and the very hard fields of inquiry. A brief comment needs to be made about differences between the fields, ones that refuse to vanish even when we look at the domains from afar. Actually, I will mention only one of these that I regard as particularly significant and especially challenging because—like Baroness Orczy’s *Scarlet Pimpernel*—it has the capacity to crop up in various disguises (prediction, generalizability, and contextualization). To start with prediction.

Perhaps the feature that has been most responsible for the astounding progress of the physical sciences over the past few centuries is its ability to put its hypotheses (and the cases that were made to support them) to the test, by making precise predictions that can then be subjected to empirical verification or refutation. In this way, the justificatory story goes, the truth is preserved and error is eliminated (faulty cases are discarded, or at least recalled for major revision). The soft field of education research is held by many to fare poorly here, for the making of precise predictions is vanishingly rare, and as a result,

progress and error elimination are occurring extremely slowly (if at all).

The issue here, of course, concerns *predictive power*, or—what is a closely related, if not exactly the same, thing—the issue of *generalizability* of the findings of a research study. This issue is of enormous complexity and obviously cannot be pursued satisfactorily in the current venue. But it is undoubtedly the case that very little research in education can be regarded as being of high quality if the making of precise predictions (comparable to those made in the lab of a Nobel laureate in physics) is a key criterion. Some very fine pieces of education research aim to achieve in-depth understanding of a single, specific context of educational significance, with all of its relevant particular, individualizing features taken into account. (Anthropological or ethnographic research comes to mind here, as do mixed-method in-depth classroom studies and the like.) Such work can be rigorous and not only can shed light on the situation that is the focus but also can illuminate other phenomena in the same social/cultural setting and also situations in other more remote contexts. However, rarely if ever do researchers operating in this mode aspire to make *predictions*.

In other forms of research, large data sets are collected from large samples of subjects (who often have been randomly assigned to treatments), and statistical analysis is applied to produce findings that are probabilistic in nature and that apply to the group or population but not to individuals (findings such as “the average gain of the treatment/experimental group, compared with the average score of the control group, is statistically significant at the 5% level”). This type of finding provides no valid basis for predicting what the treatment would achieve with a single individual, nor indeed is it straightforward to generalize to a different population—one, for example, that differs with respect to gender and ethnic distribution, socioeconomic profile, quality of educational facilities that have been available, number of incidents involving firearms, and so on. In the hard physical sciences, confounding variables can eventually be controlled, but in research in educational settings, these factors are not nuisances but are of great human and educational significance—control here removes all semblance of ecological validity.

Learning *is* a phenomenon that involves real people who live in real, complex social contexts from which they cannot be abstracted in any meaningful way. Difficult as it is for researchers to deal with (especially if they are suffering from physics envy), learners are *contextualized*. They do have a gender, a sexual orientation, a socioeconomic status, an ethnicity, a home culture; they have interests—and things that bore them; they have or have not consumed breakfast; and they live in neighborhoods with or without frequent gun violence or earthquakes, they are attracted by (or clash with) the personality of their teacher, and so on.<sup>2</sup> It probably is the case, as some physical scientists have noted, that in a mature field of research, like physics, “it is obvious which variables are important and how to control them”; the problem is that in education, just about all the variables are relevant, and controlling them (even if possible let alone desirable) yields

results that are difficult or impossible to generalize to the other almost infinite number of settings where these variables do, indeed, vary. I am not denying, of course, that physical scientists have to struggle to determine which variables to control, and to find out how actually to control them. But dealing with temperature, pressure, magnetic fields, and the like is one thing; dealing with culture, gender, socioeconomic status, human interests, and the like is quite another! This is why, while physics is a “hard science,” education research is a very hard—an extremely hard—one.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is important to note that a piece of research can be performed competently but ultimately be unsuccessful. Those of optimistic disposition stress that we still can learn much from such work.

<sup>2</sup>My debt to my late colleagues Lee Cronbach and Richard Snow, and their work on aptitude-treatment interactions, should be obvious at this point. Cronbach also added the further complexity that the nature of these interactions was changing over time—they each had a “half-life.”

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## AUTHOR

D. C. PHILLIPS is professor emeritus of education, and by courtesy of philosophy, in the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305; [dcpphd@stanford.edu](mailto:dcpphd@stanford.edu). He is a philosopher of education, with special interests in philosophy of social science, philosophical issues in educational research, and history of 19th- and 20th-century thought.



# The Similarities Between Research in Education and Research in the Hard Sciences

Carl E. Wieman<sup>1</sup>

In this commentary, the author argues that there is a considerable degree of similarity between research in the hard sciences and education and that this provides a useful lens for thinking about what constitutes “rigorous” and “scientific” education research. He suggests that the fundamental property of hard science research is its predictive power, a property that can equally be applied to large- and small-scale and quantitative and qualitative research in education. Although variables may differ and methods of collection may not be the same, researchers do their best to measure and/or control those variables that matter, and design experiments and subsequent tests to ensure that those that can neither be measured nor fully controlled are unlikely to change the results in significant ways. He concludes that although fields like physics or chemistry are mature sciences, the “cutting-edge” work in these fields is often “messy,” as researchers struggle to determine which variables are important. He suggests that education research often resembles the patterns seen in cutting-edge research in the “hard” sciences, as researchers are struggling to identify variables that are important to the problem.

**Keywords:** educational policy, educational reform, research methodology, research utilization

The criteria listed for federal education research funding again raises the question over what constitutes “rigorous educational research” and “scientific knowledge” in education, and what research designs meet these standards. Frequently these discussions focus on the distinctions between the “hard sciences” (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.) and education, and why these distinctions are important. Here I would like to offer a different perspective, how there is a considerable degree of similarity between research in the hard sciences and education, and how this provides a useful lens for thinking about what constitutes “rigorous” and “scientific” education research. I will also explain how the nature of research (as opposed to “scholarship” writ large) in the two areas is far more similar than researchers in either community recognize, largely because the nature of research in the hard sciences is often misunderstood and mischaracterized. True research in the hard sciences, when it is exploring fundamentally new ground, is much messier, complicated, and less precise than is usually recognized and, thus, more similar to education research. The errors that lead to flawed research also have much the same origin across the different fields.

My perspective on this subject comes from first spending 25 years as a physicist, doing “tabletop” scale experiments that involved working closely with small groups of graduate students. Those interactions led me to try to better understand how my graduate students developed from struggling novices in the lab

to expert physicists within a few years. It was particularly puzzling to me that their success in physics courses was such a poor predictor of a student’s ultimate success as a physicist. That puzzle led me to start systematically studying research on learning in general as well as specifically the learning of physics. What I learned convinced me that the explanation of the puzzle lay in the shortcomings of undergraduate teaching, and this also fueled my interest in exploring different teaching methods and making comparative measures of learning. That interest grew into my having two parallel research groups for many years, one in experimental atomic physics and the other in research in science education.

A fundamental test of research in the hard sciences is, does the result have predictive power? By that, I mean can one use the results to predict with reasonable accuracy what will happen, or what will be observed, in some new situation (at a minimum in a replication of the experiment as described by the original researcher)? This standard has served the hard sciences well over the years and, I argue, is correspondingly useful to use for education research. Even “unsuccessful” experiments can have value and predictive power. Consider for example, the result that “if you control this particular set of variables and introduce this intervention, there turns out to be no effect on the behavior of

<sup>1</sup>Stanford University, Stanford, CA

the atoms (or, equivalently, educational outcomes).” This is rigorous research and an important contribution to the knowledge base, if that result is correct, particularly if many people would have predicted a different outcome.

Applying this standard to the research does not mean it is necessary to accurately control and predict how every specific student will behave or learn, any more than we can control and predict how every single atom will behave in a physics or chemistry experiment. It means only that one should be able to predict some meaningful measurable outcomes. This is also not a criterion for the importance of the research. Importance depends on a number of other criteria that vary with field and personal opinions.

Considering the predictive power, and corresponding new insights, that a research study will provide is a more meaningful measure of its rigor and value than what particular research design it uses. For example, a good qualitative study that examines only a few students or teachers in depth will allow one to recognize, and hence more accurately predict, some factors that will be important in educational outcomes and important in the design of larger quantitative experiments in similar populations. Such qualitative research provides an important contribution to the knowledge base, albeit of a different sort than a randomized controlled trial that tests the impact of a large-scale intervention on multiple school districts. Similarly, research designs that provide good predictive power when used in the context of learning in university physics courses could be worthless if applied to experiments in diverse elementary school classrooms, because the latter context has so many additional variables that will impact the outcomes.

The way research goes bad is also quite similar between the hard sciences and education. Here, by “bad research,” I mean that which provides incorrect or useless predictions. The serious errors in hard science research occur when important variables are overlooked, and this is also true in education research. Usually these variables are overlooked for the same reasons in all fields; the researcher is just sloppy, or more often, the researcher is failing to adequately address his or her inherent biases. Every researcher in every field has a result he or she wants to see and a belief as to what does and does not matter. In all types of research, it is essential to recognize these inherent biases and to have tests and procedures to prevent those biases from unduly influencing the results and conclusions.

Although the common perception is that experimental research in something like physics is much more controlled and precise than in education, and hence such errors are inherently easier to avoid, I do not believe that is actually the case. It is true only if one looks at some area of physics that is very mature and so has been so well studied that all the complications have been sorted out and controlled for. In such situations, there also is no room for significant surprises or breakthroughs, and the research is, at best, incremental. When an area of physics research is truly cutting-edge, pushing advances in very new directions where the behaviors and likely outcomes are quite unknown, that is a very different situation. Then, just like in education, the researchers are struggling to figure out what factors are important and how to control or adequately measure what they hope are the relevant

factors. There is the messiness of having many, many quantities that “might” be important, and the experimental results obtained in such circumstances, more often than not, turn out to be irreproducible (or to put it less technically, “wrong”). Everything is much more complicated before you have figured it all out, and the results are far less precise. It is also much messier than usually presented after the fact.

Physics and chemistry are quite mature sciences, and so most of the research that gets presented in textbooks, classes, and even in the media has all this messiness understood and cleaned up. It is much like seeing a child only through official portraits taken after they are grown, cleaned up, and dressed in formal wear, rather than seeing them as they really were, climbing trees and splashing through mud puddles. However, that clean situation comes in an area of physics research only after long exploration. Many of the complications that at one time were tremendous intellectual challenges have been sorted out long ago and are now largely forgotten.

Only a small fraction of what I did in my 30 years of physics research falls in this cutting-edge “messy and complex” category, and my fraction is probably larger than that for most physicists or chemists. In contrast, much of modern biology is working in much less well-studied and less understood areas of research, and there, the results tend to be far less incremental and correspondingly less reproducible, because the complexities of the systems involved have not yet been so well studied and understood. In general, education research is more like biology research. In some respects, I found these differences make education research more fun and in some ways “easier” than my physics research. Fun and easier in the sense there is so much unplowed ground, so many unanswered questions, and so many potential experiments and possible surprises. Of course, in other respects, it is harder; for example, we know a lot more about the contextual influences on the behavior of atoms than on students and, hence, what contextual elements do and do not have to be controlled in designing experiments. Also, atoms do not require institutional review board approval and consent forms.

In cutting-edge research in the hard sciences, there are always things that one wants to know or measure or control that one cannot, just as there are in education research. I have found that the basic intellectual challenges of designing and executing good cutting-edge research that meet these criteria of predictive power are much the same across fields. There is an enormous number of ways to get the wrong answer by overlooking some relevant variable, and the mark of a good researcher is to recognize, with limited information, which variables are relevant. Figuring out what to measure, and how well to measure it, is critical in all fields. The best researchers do their best to measure and/or control those variables that matter, and they design experiments and subsequent tests to ensure that those that can be neither measured nor fully controlled are unlikely to change the results in significant ways.

On the other hand, it is possible to be too careful. If a researcher is determined to examine, measure, and carefully control every conceivable variable, he or she will be a failure, be it in hard sciences or education, because he or she will never finish



anything. The measure of a great researcher is the one who understands how to do enough, and only just enough, to obtain important results that are reproducible and have adequate predictive power to advance the field. Although the specifics for how to do this are different between physics and education, the basic methods are much the same. One must have a complex model of the system that is used to analyze which factors are important or not and sophisticated criteria for testing one's model and biases.

The difference in how extensively the different research areas have been studied also leads to a difference in terms of what types of research are publishable. This difference in publication standards contributes to the inaccurate perception of the nature of hard-science research. Although there is descriptive, hypothesis-generating research/observations carried out in all fields, in fields like physics or chemistry, such work is seldom considered publishable until it is followed up by quantitative controlled experiments, typically with proposed mechanisms and explanations. Many areas of both biology and education research are similar to where many areas of chemistry and physics were 100 to 150 years ago, in that descriptive observations

that generate new hypotheses for basic models of phenomena: recognized as valuable and necessary and hence publishable as stand-alone results. They are seen as necessary precursors to more extensive controlled experiments that may require many further investments to carry out.

I have argued that the similarities between research in education and research in the hard sciences are greater than usually recognized, largely because of a mischaracterization of the latter. In both cases, a basic standard for research should be the predictive power of the results; and in both cases, the underlying basic intellectual challenges in experimental design, and reasons for flawed research, are much the same.

#### AUTHOR

CARL E. WIEMAN is a professor in both Department of Physics and the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305; [cwieman@stanford.edu](mailto:cwieman@stanford.edu). His research has focused on atomic physics, problem solving and attitudes about science, and the effect of different pedagogies on learning science. In 2001, he won the Nobel Prize in Physics, along with Eric Allin Cornell and Wolfgang Ketterle for fundamental studies of the Bose-Einstein condensate.



# Relevance to Practice as a Criterion for Rigor

Kris D. Gutiérrez<sup>1\*</sup> and William R. Penuel<sup>1</sup>

The authors argue for a reconceptualization of rigor that requires sustained, direct, and systematic documentation of what takes place inside programs to document how students and teachers change and adapt interventions in interactions with each other in relation to their dynamic local contexts. Building on promising new programs at the Institute of Education Sciences, they call for the formulation of collaborative research standards that must require researchers to provide evidence that they have engaged in a process to surface and negotiate the focus of their joint work, and to document the ways participation in this process was structured to include district and school leaders, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and, wherever possible, children and youth. They close by describing how this new criterion—"relevance to practice"—can ensure the longevity and efficacy of educational research.

**Keywords:** educational policy; educational reform; research methodology; research utilization

When Congress passed and the president signed the Education Sciences Reform Act in 2002, it called for scientifically based research that would "apply rigorous, systematic, and objective methodology to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs" (Pub. L. No. 107-279, p. 116). That same year, the National Research Council (2002) produced a report and *Educational Researcher* published a related article, "Scientific Culture and Education Research" (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002), written by several of the report's authors. There is much with which we agree in both of the publications. However, there was and still remains a concern from the field about the narrow set of criteria used to define rigor. Erickson and Gutiérrez (2002) questioned the publications' call for a "scientific culture" that prescribed and relied primarily on "gold standard" random assignment studies of program effects as the remedy for the failures of education research to offer credible guidance for policy and practice. As we (Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2002) argued then, *rigor* in studies that aim to draw causal inferences about policies, programs, and practices requires in-depth qualitative research. In particular, scientifically rigorous research on what works in education requires sustained, direct, and systematic documentation of what takes place inside programs to document not only "what happens" (cf. National Research Council, 2002) but also how students and teachers change and adapt interventions in interactions with each other in relation to their dynamic local contexts.

Today, we see even greater need for the field to take up broader questions about what works to include questions about a study's relevance to transforming practice. Studies of "what

works" should be concerned with the specific mechanisms by which outcomes for teachers and students are accomplished within specific structural and ecological circumstances. Rigorous research on "what works" also must take up seriously the questions, "Who does the design and why?" (Engeström, 2011, p. 3), "How can practice and research inform one another?" "What are the unintended consequences of change?" and, importantly, "Who benefits?" (Erickson & Gutiérrez, 2002; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010; O'Connor & Penuel, 2010). For us, consequential research on meaningful and equitable educational change requires a focus on persistent problems of practice, examined in their context of development, with attention to ecological resources and constraints, including why, how, and under what conditions programs and policies work.

## New Programs at the Institute of Education Sciences

Recently, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education created new promising programs of research that address important problems of practice and provide the time to build relevance into the design of research and development projects.<sup>1</sup> These and other IES studies have begun to incorporate more direct observation into research on policies and programs, in ways that have generated productive insights

<sup>1</sup>University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

\*Kris D. Gutiérrez is a current member and vice chair of the National Board of Educational Sciences.

into what works where, when, why, and for whom. For example, Continuous Improvement Research in Education grants fund well-established partnerships to adapt, study, and iteratively refine tested interventions for improving teaching and learning. The Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships in Education Research program provides funding for developing new research-practice partnerships. As director John Easton (2013) recently noted, through these and other initiatives, IES is “promoting research use, but not in a unidirectional ‘research to practice’ sense but in a more reciprocal ‘practice to research’ pathway” (Easton, 2013, p. 18). This new research program calls for “empirical tinkering” (Morris & Hiebert, 2011) in which partners collaborate “to fine tune programs, interventions or regimens of activities through iterative processes that rely heavily on measurement, quick studies and refinement” (Easton, 2013, p. 18). This approach represents a significant move toward meeting IES’s charge to support research that is “relevant to education practice and policy.”

For these new programs to be successful, relevance to practice must be an explicit criterion for judging the quality of research proposals. For example, there should be documentation that the problem of focus is perceived by multiple stakeholders to be significant, persistent, and worthy of investigation. Standards must also require researchers to provide evidence that they have engaged in a process to surface and negotiate the focus of their joint work, and to document the ways participation in this process was structured to include district and school leaders, teachers, parents, community stakeholders, and, wherever possible, children and youth.

Developing such evidence of relevance for a research proposal is not likely to be easy. The problems that researchers initially think important to address are not likely to be the same ones that diverse education stakeholders perceive as important. What is needed are specific methodologies for bringing relevant stakeholders together and *deliberating* about the problems that can and should be addressed through research and development projects. The process is time-intensive, and it must begin well before the final weeks before researchers submit proposals to IES.

### Interventions as Contested Spaces

Educational systems have multiple layers of infrastructure that have accumulated over time and that must be engaged directly if they are to support, rather than obstruct, transformation (Penuel & Spillane, in press). As Engeström (2011) reminds us, interventions take place in complex and multilayered activity systems rife with recurring problems that are conceptualized as contradictions inherent in the structuring of the system. Interventions themselves are contested spaces, filled with tensions and resistance from a range of stakeholders. Supporting and engaging more diverse stakeholder engagement in defining the focus of research and development will require researchers and reviewers to rethink the nature of educational interventions. In contrast to closed or top-down notions of designed collaborations, the approaches to interventions we discuss here are systems that are subject to revision, disruptions, and contradictions (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). This dialectic of “resistance and accommodation” in practice is what Pickering terms “the mangle of practice” (Pickering, 2010, p. 10).

We want to generate and support robust teaching and learning practices, but we want to do so by addressing this dialectic and redesigning functional systems that open up new pathways and social futures for youth, particularly, youth from non-dominant communities (Gutiérrez, 2008; O’Connor & Allen, 2010). An emphasis on what is happening in the day-to-day life of participants in those systems helps make visible the structural contradictions historically existing inherent in complex activity systems, like schools, and refocuses our analytical lens on the objects of design. Studying the “social life of interventions” moves us away from imagining interventions as fixed packages of strategies with readily measurable outcomes and toward more open-ended social or socially embedded experiments that involve ongoing mutual engagement.

As education researchers committed to studying persistent problems of practice, we step into the messiness and uncertainty that problem-oriented work and rigorous scientific inquiry requires. Following Erickson (2006, p. 225), rigorous and consequential study of the efficacy of educational interventions involves sustained firsthand observation, sharing in the action and cognition of practitioners (Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). Studying “side by side” with research partners jointly engaged in work to transform systems is more likely to produce more sensitive and robust measurement and ecologically valid accounts of cultural production and institutional change.

### *Need for New Approaches to Research and Development*

The success of projects within new programs at IES will depend on the development of new approaches to research and development as we describe above. These approaches must encompass participatory design tools and practices for deliberating about and negotiating problems of practice and for engaging in iterative design. They must also make use of findings from implementation research to improve interventions.

There are extant models of this kind of formative intervention research in the field. The “change laboratory,” for example, involves the collaboration of practitioners and researchers around an important and consequential problem of practice within an existing activity system (Cole & Engeström, 2006; Engeström, 2008; Engeström, Virkkunen, Helle, Pihlaja, & Poikela, 1998). Within this approach, researchers observe everyday practices and conduct interviews with stakeholders to identify contradictions within and across the various levels of the system under study. The researcher, then, is a collaborative partner and a reflective “observant participant” who helps make visible the practical meanings, and contradictions that often become invisible to those closest to the action (Erickson, 1986, p. 157; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010). The researcher is then positioned to report what is learned to a design team as part of an iterative process.

A number of scholars are hard at work developing and testing other approaches to collaborative research and development that are consistent with the principles of change laboratories. Some of these approaches are place-based efforts in school districts and communities that engage in collaborative design to improve teaching and learning at scale (Cobb & Jackson, 2012; Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011). Other approaches highly

the value of engaging in rapid cycles of iterative design and research to improve practice across networks of geographically dispersed institutions (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). Still others engage historically excluded communities in efforts to reclaim connections between cultural and disciplinary forms of learning (Bang, Medin, Washinawatok, & Chapman, 2010), and transforming practice across multiple systems of activity, while attending to people's history of involvement in practices (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, in press).

These models do not require researchers to specify ahead of time all the elements of an intervention, since practitioners participate in design, and implementation data inform an iterative design process that often transforms interventions. It is important to ask, What is a partnership if the research plan is fully predefined by researchers? And how might we address the emergent tension between the importance of starting with a "germ cell"—an emergent model that is examined experimentally and analytically and elaborated across iterations with and by participants—and the push for a fully developed design?

This is a particularly relevant dilemma for education researchers who rely on extramural funding to support their empirical work. Addressing this problem requires far more elaboration than we can provide here. However, we believe that there is some middle ground that funding agencies might consider, as we understand that review panels need criteria to ensure rigorous, systematic examination of an educational problem with a probability of success in its execution. Our basic argument here is that funders could demand more attention to the process side, asking researchers to address what research would look like and what methods and co-designing processes are relevant to the study at hand.

### Generalization in Theory as Organizing for Relevance to Practice

IES recently indicated its intent to support work across the agency that yields knowledge about the effects of specific interventions and that also contributes to "the bigger picture of scientific knowledge and theory of learning, instruction, and education systems" (IES, 2013, p. 11). For us, this represents an important advance for the agency, because greater weight is given to the importance of *generalization* from research findings. The challenges to generalization in education research are many (Berliner, 2002); here we highlight two challenges that strike us as particularly challenging for IES, given the kinds of projects the agency has funded in the past.

First is that efficacy and even effectiveness trials engineer contexts that are not easily replicable without sustained funding beyond the life of a research project. Research projects focused on curriculum design typically provide teachers with materials that must be replenished and updated, with professional development, and grant-supported incentives for implementation. When the research ends, teachers may discontinue programs found to be effective with a wide variety of students. What is more, the teachers who discontinue use may disproportionately serve students from nondominant backgrounds who stand to benefit from these programs.

An instructive example is the SimCalc study, funded through the Interagency Education Research Initiative at the National Science Foundation. SimCalc aims to provide middle school students with access to key foundational ideas related to the mathematics of change (Roschelle, Kaput, & Stroup, 2000). Evidence from a large-scale randomized controlled trial showed that students of diverse backgrounds can learn from SimCalc (Roschelle, Pierson, et al., 2010; Roschelle, Shechtman, et al., 2010). Analyses of the generalizability of the treatment effects indicated, too, that findings could generalize to most counties in the state where the research took place (Roschelle, Hedges, Tipton, & Shechtman, 2012).

When the initial scale-up study concluded, however, not all students of teacher participants in the study continued to have access to SimCalc MathWorlds, even though the teachers still had the materials (Fishman, Penuel, Hegedus, & Roschelle, 2011). About half the teachers used the materials the year following the research. Some teachers discontinued use of the materials because of perceived policy pressures from within their school or district to adopt different materials and approaches to teaching mathematics. Low-income students were less likely to have access to materials because their teachers discontinued use of the materials. This particular finding is not unique to SimCalc; the story echoes decades of policy and program implementation research.

Our point is neither to criticize programs like SimCalc nor to diminish the potential value of research on the effects of programs like SimCalc. Evidence indicates that SimCalc is a potentially powerful program, and there is strong evidence that a wide range of students can benefit from it. In our view, sustaining nearly any robust intervention will require ongoing work, work of the kind that went into making the SimCalc study a success and the program a good temporary fit to the goals of teachers for their students in the study. This includes work to craft professional development, curriculum, and technology into a coherent "curricular activity system" that could be used in a wide variety of classrooms, work to align this system to standards, and work to support implementation of the system in the field (Roschelle, Knudsen, & Hegedus, 2010).

The work of mutual adjustment of powerful interventions and local contexts does not end when the research ends, but sustaining an intervention requires uptake by schools and districts (Coburn, 2003). For us, we define the *generalizability* of findings and theories developed through research as contingent on the uptake of research by local actors who must sustain programs. Local actors' productive adaptation of interventions or use of theories from research and the documentation of the work they must do to sustain change are important sources of evidence for generalizability.

This uptake may include researchers as part of the activity, or it may be sustained entirely by practitioners. Researchers can continue to partner with schools and districts to adapt and test which supports are most needed (Penuel et al., 2011). Alternately, professional communities inside schools and districts can sustain programs through frequent, deep interaction, provided they have sufficient access to expertise relevant to program implementation (Coburn, Russell, Kaufman, & Stein, 2012).

We also need to understand the limits of generalizability by answering questions of what works, under what conditions, and for whom. The challenge is that the effects of any instructional program as estimated in an efficacy trial are likely to vary widely, as is implementation, requiring identifying and mastering variation. In this connection, “mastering variation” does not mean attempting to minimize variation in implementation but, rather, to learn from of productive adaptations teachers make with learners from variety of backgrounds. It means developing and testing supports to broaden capacity of teachers to make such productive adaptations themselves, to increase the effectiveness of programs, and to promote equity.

This requires a shift in focus of research and development efforts, away from innovations designed to be implemented with fidelity in a single context and toward cross-setting interventions that leverage diversity (rather than viewing it as a deficit). It also suggests the need to focus some research and development projects on the design of new organizational routines and infrastructures for improvement (Bryk et al., 2011; Penuel & Spillane, in press). It also implies the need for efficacy and effectiveness research that addresses how to *make programs work* under a wide range of circumstances and for all groups (Bryk, 2009; Bryk et al., 2011).

With Engeström and Sannino (2010), we view the ultimate benchmark for any program or learning theory is how well it helps us to organize conditions for learning in a way that takes up present and future problems society faces. Making relevance to practice a key criterion of rigor is an important step toward more equitable and consequential research. This is a high standard, but it is not just up to researchers to accomplish. We see the aim of intervention research as facilitating participants in activity to deal with the historically accumulated tensions and contradictions of the systems within which they work in order to transform the activity of teaching and learning.

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## AUTHORS

**KRIS D. GUTIÉRREZ** holds the Inaugural Provost's Chair and is professor of learning sciences and literacy in the School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder, Education Building 124 249 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0249; [kris.gutierrez@colorado.edu](mailto:kris.gutierrez@colorado.edu). Her research focuses on learning in designed learning environments, with particular attention to students from nondominant communities and English learners.

**WILLIAM R. PENUEL** is a professor of educational psychology and learning sciences at the University of Colorado, School of Education, UCB 249, Boulder, CO 80309; [william.penuel@colorado.edu](mailto:william.penuel@colorado.edu). His research focuses on teacher learning and organizational processes that shape the implementation of educational policies, school curricula, and after-school programs.

# Lessons Learned

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## Addressing the Challenges of Building and Maintaining Effective Research Partnerships

By Rhonda Barton, Kari Nelsestuen, and Christopher Mazzeo

The use of research and data in decision making has become a popular mantra in education circles, but putting it into practice presents some real challenges. Often, educators and policymakers may not have the time or skills to identify, access, analyze, and apply data, or the capacity to use analysis to inform policies, programs, and resource allocation decisions. In addition, they may find that the available research evidence doesn't specifically address their problems, fails to relate to their specific context, or isn't presented in user-friendly language.

A popular and growing approach to overcoming these challenges is the creation of partnerships between educators and researchers designed to promote data and evidence use. Such partnerships, whether organized around the work of districts, states, or cross-regional networks, have proliferated in recent years. Research partnerships bring practitioners, policymakers, and researchers together to develop questions, share data, conduct analyses, and use results. Across the country, diverse partnerships are

working together to solve problems and bridge the worlds of practice, policy, and research.

REL Northwest, one of 10 regional educational laboratories supported by the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (IES), is working with eight research partnerships in our five-state region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington). The goal is to build the capacity of our partners to identify, access, and apply data and research to make sound decisions that improve educational outcomes. Our ongoing collaboration with alliance members has yielded a range of initial lessons about building and maintaining effective research partnerships. These lessons are intended to inform others as they engage in this work.

### Lesson #1 Establish a shared purpose and maintain focus.

Research partnerships are motivated by big problems (e.g., increase graduation rates, decrease

the achievement gap, prepare all students for college). They're also driven by the expectation that research and evidence can help solve these problems. It is critical that partnerships keep this shared purpose in mind and ensure that each activity is connected to that purpose.

In our experience, the road to a shared purpose has not always been quick or direct. Initially, some of our research alliances constructed their purpose too hastily or without the involvement of all members. In other cases, there was broad initial interest in a topic, but over time members found little traction around the issue. Digging deeper into a topic, some alliances uncovered competing agendas that stalled their efforts. In all of these cases, the research alliances regrouped and revisited the focus of their work.

### Engage key decisionmakers

The shared purpose must also be supported by key agency decisionmakers. Without their understanding and support, a research partnership may lack the power to affect change. Recognizing this need, one of our alliances started their work at the leadership level; seven superintendents formed a research alliance and articulated the shared purpose. The superintendents then identified the stakeholders who should

### Lessons Learned About Effective Research Partnerships

1. Establish a shared purpose and maintain focus.
2. Communicate efficiently and strategically.
3. Ensure membership expectations are well-defined.
4. Anticipate the challenges involved in obtaining and using data.



## The Prime Directive: Build Trusting Relationships

"In the universe of *Star Trek*, the Prime Directive, Starfleet's General Order number 1, is the most prominent guiding principle of the United Federation of Planets. The Prime Directive dictates that there can be no interference with the internal development of alien civilizations" ("Prime Directive," 2013, para. 1).

In our experience, if research partnerships have a Prime Directive, it is: Partners must establish, build, and guard trust. A partnership cannot flourish in an environment in which motivations are suspect, commitments are unclear, and capacity and capabilities are not employed fully to achieve the desired goals.

participate. While most of the day-to-day work was done by those stakeholders, the superintendents were kept updated and involved at a leadership level. Another alliance started by trying to reach consensus across all members, but reconfigured their structures to form a steering committee made up of one leader from each participating agency. Because of the political context in which the alliance operates, it is important to remain neutral and to ensure equal leadership representation.

### Establish concrete goals

All of our alliances have made purpose tangible through written goals. For example, one research alliance composed of six districts has a goal to "decrease discipline disparities among student groups and decrease overall suspensions and expulsions." All member districts share this goal, although each district sets their own specific, measurable target (e.g., decrease the overall student

suspension rate by 30 percent). Every alliance activity has been directly related to the overall goal: Products have included a descriptive research study of discipline disparities in member districts, a systematic review of district discipline policies, and a summary of research-based practices that can reduce disproportionate discipline.

Our alliances have also established goals that articulate *how* they work towards their shared purpose. As a regional educational laboratory, we are charged with "...increas[ing] the capacity of education policymakers and practitioners to use the knowledge generated from high-quality data analysis, research, and evaluation" (Easton, 2010). Therefore, our alliances have goals such as:

- Build common awareness and knowledge of research evidence about college and career readiness
- Increase the use of evidence and research in making education policy decisions
- Develop the capacity of the state's rural schools to use existing state and local data for decision making and program improvement

Finally, it is important to stay focused on the shared purpose. There are so many pressing issues, interests, and agendas that it can be easy for a research partnership to veer off course, change the agenda, or suggest activities that aren't aligned with their purpose. Consequently, keeping the goals at the center of the work is critical. Other strategies that have helped our research alliances stay focused include establishing a clear work plan, using a logic model, revisiting goals at each meeting, and using clear communication (described in Lesson 2).

## Lesson # 2 Communicate efficiently and strategically.

While it's important to share the work of your research partnerships with a broad range of external audiences, we've found that it is equally—if not more—important to pay attention to how you communicate with partnership members themselves.

At the outset, partnership organizers should clarify expectations about how frequently communications should occur and determine the preferred methods. The goal should be to update members and receive their feedback often enough to maintain interest and connections, but not so frequently as to become burdensome. Our alliance members have stressed to us the need to make communications "purposeful" and "meaningful"; to follow through on commitments; and to communicate realistic time lines about the progress of the work. Through member surveys we've also learned that we need to "be smart" about how we use online communications platforms, particularly to engage members of our region who live in remote, rural locations with limited bandwidth. And, while most communications will occur virtually because of financial and time constraints, in-person contact remains the most powerful way to connect with alliance members.

### Tailor communications to fit the alliance's structure

Dealing with alliances that range from a half dozen principals scattered across two states to administrators and policymakers from more than 30 institutions and agencies, we've discovered there's no one-size-fits-all approach. To be effective, communications strategies must reflect the size of the partnership, the geographic dispersion of members, and the complexity of



the group's agenda. For example, some of our larger alliances with representatives from many diverse organizations use robust, web-based Extranet sites that members can access with a password. The sites offer an interactive platform to pose discussion questions, solicit feedback on work in progress, post resources, maintain a record of meeting notes and activity plans, and announce upcoming events. One alliance lead hosts a monthly blog on the Extranet that summarizes recent activities and allows members to catch up if they aren't able to participate in meetings.

Another alliance with members drawn from a large network of school districts and partner organizations publishes regular updates in the network's biweekly newsletter that goes to 40 stakeholders. Alliance members also give presentations at twice yearly network institutes that attract up to 300 people from school districts impacted by the alliance work.

Smaller alliances have found success staying in touch through regular phone calls and emails that supplement virtual and in-person meetings. In one alliance made up primarily of personnel within a state department of education, a single "champion" serves as the main point of contact. Alliance staff conducts phone conversations with this individual every two weeks to plan and report progress and to gather input. These calls offer an opportunity to touch base in between monthly meetings, reflecting on the past month's work and planning future activities. Alliance staff report that identifying one "go-to" person is an efficient way to move things forward and also helps build buy-in from members who are communicating with and through a trusted peer.

While it may not be practical or desirable to use a single champion as the main contact, we have found

that the frequency and intensity of communications can vary depending on the alliance members' participation levels. Almost all of our alliances have tiered memberships, with communications tailored to each tier. Some information (e.g., announcements about upcoming in-person meetings, webinars, and evidence events; the publication of studies; and the availability of external funding) are broadly communicated to all alliance members. Information pertaining to meetings and ongoing studies conducted with advisory subgroups is communicated only to those involved in the work. The most frequent, in-depth communications occur between alliance staff and a select group of core members who provide strategic direction.

### **Seek input from members to create useful products**

The need to establish two-way communications has been a common theme in surveys of our alliance members and in problem-solving sessions such as those held during REL Northwest's convening of alliance representatives. As one alliance member stated, "Researchers need to listen ... not just guess or tell [people] what the researchers think is important." This requirement helps to reinforce the ultimate purpose of research partnerships to forge strong partnerships among practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to work together and address the partners' self-defined problems of practice or policy.

In addition to coconstructing research agendas, we have tried various strategies to ensure alliance

### **Supporting Early Warning Systems in Montana An example of creating "useful products"**

Every 26 seconds a teenager drops out of school in the United States, according to a report by America's Promise Alliance. Montana is tackling that problem through Graduation Matters Montana, an ambitious statewide initiative that seeks to decrease dropout rates, particularly for non-White students.

As part of that effort, the state is developing an early warning system (EWS) to identify at-risk students while there is still time to provide the necessary supports to get them to the finish line. REL Northwest and its Montana Data Use Alliance are playing an important role by providing research, tools, and training in EWS implementation.

At the state's request, the alliance produced a report that examines different early warning systems across the country and highlights their structures and implementation practices. In response to alliance members' needs, REL Northwest developed a series of four, interactive, online modules that help districts systematically organize EWS teams, develop data reporting mechanisms, track interventions, and evaluate the system's effectiveness.

The online format is particularly well-suited to alliance members' needs: Montana districts are geographically far apart and some parts of the state are highly rural and remote. The modules allow members to work through materials at their own pace. Regular check-in calls by REL Northwest technical assistance experts help the districts customize the resources to their own contexts and a planned online chat room on a password-protected website will enable members to share their experiences as they use each module.

members' needs and wants drive the work. For example, as part of one alliance's regular meeting, REL Northwest staff conducted a focus group to elicit comments on useful data displays. A PowerPoint presentation set the stage, posing questions that small groups of members should ask themselves as they did a gallery walk of three stations featuring displays (e.g., pie charts, bar graphs, pictograms, etc.) drawn from actual research reports. At each station, a staff member recorded detailed qualitative feedback about which audiences would find the displays most useful, whether there was too much or not enough detail, and how the titles could be more meaningful. The group's preferences will guide how we present findings in an upcoming report for the alliance.

A final takeaway about communications: Document the evolution of the research partnership so that you will be able to reflect back on critical junctures. By tracking important ideas, progress, challenges, and opportunities on a regular basis, you will be able to paint a more complete picture of what it takes to successfully lead this work. And, you will be able to share with members the

**By tracking important ideas, progress, challenges, and opportunities on a regular basis, you will be able to paint a more complete picture of what it takes to successfully lead this work.**

important contributions they are making to this still-emerging field.

## Lesson # **3** Ensure membership expectations are well-defined.

The new vision of research partnerships emphasizes *mutualism*, a term that means practitioners and researchers authentically work together toward a common goal, common aims, shared values, and equal authority (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013). This way of working is quite different from the past, when practitioners were often the recipients of, not partners in, educational research. In many of the alliances we support, the transition to mutualism has not happened automatically. Defining the expectations of membership for *both* researchers and practitioners has been an important step towards mutualism.

To illustrate the concept of mutualism more concretely to our partners, we used a race car analogy. In the "old" partnership model, the researchers drove the race car while practitioners waited for the results at the finish line. In the new model, the practitioner drives the car, with the researcher team serving as "support crew," supplying the research tools that help the driver around the track. While this analogy was well-received, it did not immediately result in a transformation to the new model: Both practitioners and researchers were somewhat set in their existing roles. It took time to build explicit expectations for membership and for the roles of specific members.

For example, one alliance established a work flow plan with explicit tasks assigned *in between* bimonthly meetings. Members agreed to identify specific data variables that should be available across all departments. The next month, they checked the status of their progress

by asking each other questions such as: What have you done? What challenges have you encountered? Members brought their variable lists to the next in-person meeting for discussion. The cycle was then repeated, reinforcing the expectation that members would participate in alliance-driven work between meetings.

### **Find strategies for making time**

Lack of time remains one of the toughest challenges to achieving mutualism. We have tried multiple strategies to address this barrier. First, we schedule a minimal number of meetings and try to keep them short and focused. "Short" can mean as brief as a 15-minute phone call or a webinar when members are really pressed for time. These check-ins keep the work flowing, without requiring a substantial time commitment. When half-day or full-day meetings are necessary, organizers gather member input on the agenda. The meeting organizers also hold practice sessions, seeking feedback from colleagues to help ensure that the agenda is precise and well-organized.

We've learned that not all alliance members can participate at equal levels all of the time. Therefore, membership expectations need to be differentiated to meet various types of involvement. In many alliances we have established "tiers" of membership. For example, members in one large cross-district alliance who choose tier 1 participation are active in work groups and help shape the alliance's direction, activities, and products. Members choosing tier 2 do not participate in work groups, but receive and discuss the products and lessons learned from the tier 1 cohort.

### **Expect change**

Membership changes are also inevitable: Retirement, promotions,

**Personal relationships with members,** outreach through individual phone calls, and on-site visits are labor-intensive but contribute to reinforcing mutualism and developing a well-defined, active partner membership.

or transfers result in turnover and new members who must be briefed on the alliance history, goals, and membership expectations. This was the case in an alliance where half of the district leaders changed after the first year. The alliance coordinator relied heavily on returning members from those districts to keep momentum going. She also individually briefed each new superintendent on the purpose and structure of the alliance. And, the first alliance meeting with all of the new members was restructured so there was time to revisit the purpose and expectations of the partnership.

The above example illustrates a final lesson we have learned about establishing well-defined expectations: It takes time and resources. Personal relationships with members, outreach through individual phone calls, and on-site visits are labor-intensive but contribute to reinforcing mutualism and developing a well-defined, active partner membership.

## Lesson # **4** Anticipate the challenges involved in obtaining and using data.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has called data “the road map to reform” (Duncan, 2009). Finding and using the most salient data sources to address educational issues is at the heart of what research partnerships do. In some instances, however, this may be easier said than done.

One potential issue is simply securing data in a timely manner. Our various alliance partnerships require us to develop and maintain data-sharing agreements with more than 40 state and local agencies. Not surprisingly this can be a time consuming and frustrating exercise for everyone involved. To address this challenge, we now engage the relevant state and local data staff in alliance deliberations from the beginning. If data administrators are not part of the alliance membership, extra communication may be needed to explain which data are required, when they’re needed, and how the secure transfer of those data will be accomplished.

Likewise, alliance members need to be kept updated on how long it may take to obtain and clean data, complete the analysis, and ultimately disseminate the findings. Consider incorporating useful, shorter term activities that yield more timely results.

Working with your research partners to identify data sources across different institutions can be one helpful approach to building members’ ability to find and use the data they need to inform policy and practice. For example, we worked with one statewide alliance of higher education, state education agency (SEA), and governmental representatives to gather information about relevant data on college and career readiness that are currently available

in the state, their quality, and their potential usefulness for answering specific education policy questions.

Through a series of small-group meetings, alliance members

### **Reaching Out to a Wider Audience**

In our lessons we focus on communications within research partnerships. It’s important, also, to consider communicating about the partnerships and their activities to a broader audience. Members can be the most effective ambassadors for the work. Consequently, they need well-crafted products that reflect local contexts and appeal to an array of audiences.

Both research (Nelson, Leffler, & Hansen, 2009) and an independent evaluation of our alliance work stress the need “to produce useful and timely things.” Among the specific recommendations of our alliance members are:

- Create shorter publications such as data briefs that can be shared quickly
- Focus research reports on answering questions that more directly inform policy and practice
- Seek feedback from stakeholders on the utility of reports
- Develop materials with broad cross-audience appeal that schools and districts can use with parents, students, policy-makers, business leaders, and others
- Consider creative dissemination methods such as videos and organize forums timed to precede legislative sessions

Your research partnership members comprise a valuable focus group to help you target dissemination efforts for maximum impact.

developed a definition of college and career readiness and discussed the indicators to measure it. These technical assistance activities led to an annotated data codebook that describes the availability and quality of data elements in different systems—from individual school districts to the SEA, to postsecondary institutions, to the state labor and workforce agency. Included in the codebook is a list of specific policy questions and where to find the answers.

### Framing actionable questions

Another challenge of partnership work is identifying questions that are meaningful to practitioners and policymakers in the partnership, and can be answered with the available data. Often partnerships produce research questions and agendas that are too broad, too general, or cannot be answered through available data (Roderick, Easton, & Sebring, 2009). To address this challenge, researchers may need to develop their own capacity to facilitate productive conversations about potential research topics and questions and help partners develop clear and succinct questions that are specific to policy and educational needs. Much of our own internal professional development with staff has focused on building their capacity to facilitate conversations with practitioners and policymakers that produce actionable research questions that are enthusiastically owned by alliance members. We also pay intense attention to this skill set in hiring researchers and technical assistance experts.

## Summary

Using relevant data and research evidence to improve decision making is a core value shared by most educators, policymakers, and researchers. Yet, living up to this value can be devilishly difficult, owing to time, knowledge, and the professional cultures and relationships that too often wall off these communities from each other.

In our experience, research alliances and similar partnerships offer a highly promising strategy for bringing these worlds closer together and realizing the ambitious goals that bring us to this work. We hope these lessons ring true to those engaged actively in partnership work, and provide food for thought to those just setting out in this challenging and rewarding space.

## References

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For almost 50 years, Education Northwest has served our region's schools, districts, and communities by providing comprehensive, research-based solutions to the challenges they face. Four priorities frame our work: supporting educators; strengthening schools and districts; engaging families and communities; and conducting research, evaluation, and assessment. Access additional issues of *Lessons Learned*, a series that distills our experience and research, in the Resources section of [educationnorthwest.org](http://educationnorthwest.org).

101 SW Main St, Suite 500, Portland, OR 97204-3213  
503.275.9500 | 800.547.6339







*The Washington Association of  
Colleges for Teacher Education*

**Fall Meeting Agenda**  
**WACTE, October 30 & 31, 2013**  
**Seattle Pacific University**

**Wednesday, October 30**

- 1:00           **Welcome and greetings from Seattle Pacific University**
- 1:15           **Overview of the agenda**  
Connie Lambert, Central Washington University, WACTE President
- 1:30           **PESB Update**  
Connie Lambert
- 2:00           **AACTE – Frameworks to Improve Practice**  
Jim DePaepe, Research Analyst  
Jane West, AACTE (Skype from WA D.C.)
- **Ed Prep 3.0:** Four main components:
    - Candidates experience practices in their preparation
    - Candidates work collaboratively in their coursework and clinical placements
    - Teachers and administrators are trained to work on the problems of practice and work on these together to engage students in real-word problems and teach them to work collaboratively on solutions
    - Candidate knowledge is assessed in authentic and formative ways that culminate in a capstone event; candidates demonstrate how they commit themselves to student development, provide evidence that they are skilled in constructing meaningful learning experiences for students, and display critical reflections on the impact of their work.
- More info at: <http://aacte.org/news-room/the-presidents-perspective/introducing-ed-prep-30-pedagogy-is-job-one.html>
- 3:15           **BREAK**
- 3:30           **Group Brainstorming Session**
- This is an opportunity to promote the good things you are doing in your program that are not necessarily in response to any legislation
    - Identify one of the four areas above on which your institution would be willing to share information – what are YOU doing that you are excited about?
- 4:30           **Report on group discussions & sign-up to share information in anyway you like (poster, group discussion, bring guests, etc):**
- Winter 2014: Candidate 1) Field experiences and 2) Collaboration
  - Spring 2014: 3) Collaborate on solutions and 4) Assessment
- 4:50           **Preview of Tomorrow's Meeting**
- 5:00           **Adjourn**
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Thursday, October 31 – **HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!**



8:30           **Continental Breakfast**

9:00           **Welcome, Overview of Day**  
Connie Lambert, President

9:15           **WACTE Sound Bytes**

- CWU Teacher Study (Jim DePaepe)
- Legislative Preview (Bob Cooper)
- Charter Schools (Margit McGuire)
- TAC Report (Patrick, Margit, and Steve)
- Audit Committee (Pat Naughton)
- Institutional Grants (Each shares a sound byte)
- New Education Declaration (handout)  
<http://educationopportunitynetwork.org/declarationpress/>
- WACTE Directory (please update the hard copy)
- Secretary & Treasurer Reports

10:30          **BREAK**

10:45          **Table Discussion**

- edTPA/TPEP documents
- Based on the edTPA, TPEP, Common Core and others.....how are you transforming your program? How are you helping your students?

11:30          **Table Reports** – Share great ideas from your table

12:00          **Lunch and Speaker: Rep Kristine Lytton**, Deputy Majority Floor Leader and Member of the House Education Committee

1:15           **Conversation with 3 ESD Superintendents**

- Questions that were posed.....
  - How do you see yourselves helping principals and teachers to understand the benefit of the edTPA for both mentor teachers and candidates?
  - How do you see yourselves supporting principals and teachers in understanding the connections among the edTPA, TPEP, ProTeach, National Boards, and the new PGP process?
  - How can we strengthen partnerships between the ESDs and WACTE members?

2:45           **Overview of the Winter Meeting**

3:00           **Adjourn**

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**WINTER MEETING: SAINT MARTIN'S UNIVERSITY**  
**Tuesday, Jan. 21, 1:00-5:00 & Wednesday, Jan. 22, 9:00-3:00**

**SPRING MEETING: WHITWORTH UNIVERSITY**  
**Wednesday, Apr 23 & Thursday, Apr 24, Whitworth University**