FAU COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Florida Atlantic University

FAUS & COE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Research Reflections

Inside this Issue

The Changing Role of School Research[1]

What is *the worth* of school-level research? Undoubtedly, there are challenging issues and complexities embedded in everyday school practices whether it be diverse pedagogies, curricular reforms, accountability measures, staffing needs, and/or school leadership. Each of these topics cries out for informed debate and better answers to our questions. Is that why we do research? Admittedly, with all the many excellent studies using multiple methodologies, we still have not solved the problems of student achievement, educational equity, diversity, innovation, and/or sustainability. How come? Has research failed us? Or, are policy makers and practitioners not using research in their practices? Most people who answer truthfully would have to acknowledge that research is not the primary source of innovative ideas in education. If that is correct, then what is the future role of school research and why do it?

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[1] This article is adapted from an essay written by the author and published by UCEA, January, 2009. This article as well as the original was framed as a debate between the policy maker (Ben Levin) and the academic practitioner (Ira Bogotch)

According to Benjamin Levin, a former university professor and currently Deputy Minister of Education in Ottawa, researchers have "a special obligation" in our society beyond their role as teachers, professors, administrators, and even citizens. In his words,

> (Researchers) have a … different kind of responsibility from the general duty of active citizenry in two ways. First, researchers should see it as their role to do everything they can to make public debate better informed by evidence. Second, researchers have to ensure that our own views and public expressions as academics are indeed consistent with the evidence, as we know it.

Levin, the academic *cum* politician, however, understands that most educational decisions are based on personal/professional experiences using anecdotal evidence. We know that the media helps to shape public opinion and policy debates. We also know that narrow personal experiences, anecdotes, and the media, while useful in terms of generating passion, often lead to poor educational decisions within and around schools. Conversely, recent studies coming from New Zealand are highlighting the need for a "best evidence synthesis" to inform practice. Likewise, research coming from Victoria, Australia, emphasizes building capacity of teachers and administrators rather than establishing innumerable standards, benchmarks, and data driven measures of accountability (based on a single standardized test) – none of which has closed gaps in student achievement across diverse racial groups or SES categories. For those of us in Southeast Florida, the question remains how might we utilize "best evidence"

and "capacity building" in our own professional practices?

If best evidence and capacity building are research objectives, then we have to figure out how to do this work inside of the Florida public school systems in a laboratory setting. This is important because, for practicing educators, the conduct of research provides us with a political platform that our teaching and leading as separate activities apart from research do not offer. For example, when we – as researchers - speak with children, colleagues, parents, and the community, we can say truthfully that our practices are "research-based." The phrase itself elevates the status of any practice – rightly or wrongly. Others who do not engage in research use this phrase all the time to trumpet pet projects. Just saying a program is "research-based" trumps the opposition, closes dialogue and debate. Again, if this is true, then it is essential for practitioners to engage in research and, at the same time, use the phrase but this time supported by real evidence/data. The point is that wrong-minded policies and practices can and have been hidden behind the phrase "research-based." To counter such practices means, to me, that all educators need to be conducting research on their practices – collecting and analyzing data to demonstrate improved practice. Without this research-engagement, we will continue to be subjected to school level practices/policies that have been found by research to have no educational validity (e.g., student retention).

The fulcrum of research is out of balance forcing practitioners to accept state-sponsored practices they know do not work as well as other practices derived from years of study and experience. Yet without the evidence, those years of study do not have a political chance of being heard in the policy arenas. We do not have to accept this political trade-off. We can create new understandings of what research is – that is, build the capacity for a *culture of research*, - at the FAUS in order to systematically improve our everyday practices as teachers and administrators.

However before we jump to this conclusion, we must ask whether school-university collaborations are the best solutions for building such a culture.

Collaborating with university academics may not always be in the interest of improving school level practices. Again, to quote Levin,

> Not all researchers are actively involved in such efforts and the academy generally does not hold this work in high regard when it comes to important procedures such as promotion and tenure. Most researchers do not make their work readily available to the general public – mostly because they have not thought about it or feel they lack the time to do so. Most universities do a poor job of sharing their expertise with the broader community. Indeed, in many cases an interested person could not even find out what research was being done in a university, let alone be made aware of the implications of that research. The efforts universities make to have their knowledge used in science or engineering have, unfortunately no analogue in the social sciences. Again, this is not opposition, just lack of attention.

That said, university professors/researchers and practitioners/researchers can come together as *public education intellectuals* who willingly share their on-going knowledge by learning-in-practice. True, the learning may be tentative, hypothetical, experiential, but these still allow for all of us to continuously learn and improve. So long as we use data collection methods systematically, we can derive new ideas, however tentative, on what we are doing right and wrong and set a new course for school improvement at the level of classrooms and whole schools. We are fortunate here at FAU to have the intellectual talent as well as access to multiple laboratory settings for experimentation that encourages testing of new ideas in teaching, learning, and leading. But, in 2009, we are only just at the beginning, whether it is at Henderson, Slattery, Pine Jog, or Palm Pointe. It is an exciting time, but we must proceed with care.

While Levin himself sits at policy making tables, he forgets that we in schools and universities are not even welcomed guests in this policy arena. His solutions for researchers to aid in policy making ignores that the policy makers have already come to the conclusion that teachers and school administrators are the *problem.*

Therefore, in my mind, you and I must consider alternative strategies as educators in the context of our lack of status. Thus, our professional challenge is that, on the one hand, we want to be at the policy tables to join with governments and state agencies; and, at the same time, we want to develop valid school reforms, freely write and publish our research findings, and serve our profession with the same academic freedom of speech as other professions have in and out of the academy. Our lack of status forces us, I believe, to develop strategies – including counter-insurgent, covert strategies – to overcome the tensions of working inside a tightly controlled state university/public school environments in order to serve the public better than policymakers have served the public.

Right now, in 2009, we are facing serious professional challenges in trying to transform the negative perceptions of public education held by elites in our society (who generally do not send their children to public schools or public universities). Unless we reconceptualize how to conduct meaningful research inside this difficult context, our work will remain on the margins of school and societal reforms. In other words how do we stop being perceived as the *problem* and demonstrate with "best evidence" that we are essential to the *solutions*? And how do we develop this capacity for research and leadership?

In my own school leadership graduate classes, I teach aspiring administrators to make the familiar strange, to question and change mindless routines of their daily practices, to muck around, explore and build relationships, and to try to become everyone's leader including those difficult colleagues and students who resist conventional school practices. Through research, defined here as *learning leadership through everyday activities* (little "l"), I want to create new conditions for educators to make classroom and whole school improvements. Our research efforts – with others – extend voices and empower us to participate in making changes. In so doing, we continuously confront what Seymour Sarason described as the intractability of schooling. Our integration of practice and theory - including our own outside readings on critical theory, social power, dialogic leadership, multiculturalism, moral leadership, learning communities, critical race theory, queer theory, social justice, etc. are meant to deliberately push intellectual boundaries of educators who must learn how to successfully confront structures, cultures and hierarchies which have made failure all too predictable.
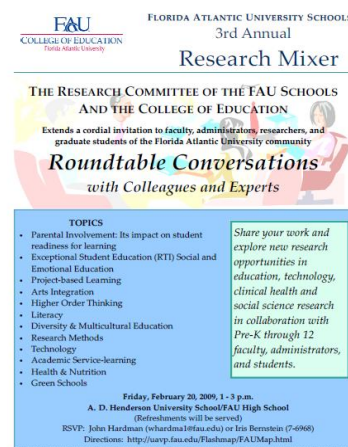
Activist teaching/research is designed to create spaces for developing leadership in everyone from students to colleagues by sharing research knowledge and visions inside or out of schools. Today, we must learn research from Spike Lee who handed out cameras to New Orleans' students, post Katrina, and had their video images appear on CNN. Anyone who has seen the independent movie *Trouble the Water* immediately understands what Jean Baudrillard and Mark Poster have been telling us about our post-Marshall McLuhan world: images shape realities. You and I with our passions, commitments, and storytelling skills cannot compete with these media images by falling back on traditional research methods. Instead, we need to expand the role of research and develop new teaching skills that utilize media and technology so as to make public what we do as transformative agents of change; and we have to do this (and more) as part of how we define ourselves as teachers, administrators, and education professors; and, we must learn to do this without others defining such activities as anti-intellectual. The world's problems in 2009 are considerable. To continue to teach and lead as we have for decades will consign us again to the status role of *problem.* Instead, let us resolve to recapture our role as educators and learners, not as voiceless victims. One positive step is to begin *doing* research as part of our pedagogy/leadership and service to education within the FAU Laboratory Schools. In doing classroom/school-level research, we can literally build our own platforms to promote school and societal changes.

3rd Annual Research Mixer flyer

This year's 3rd Annual Research Mixer brought together over 80 participants, including faculty and administrators from the FAU Schools (Karen Slattery Educational Research Center for Child Development, A. D. Henderson University School/FAU High School, Palm Pointe Educational Research School @ Tradition, and Pine Jog Elementary School), the College of Education and Department of Psychology at FAU. Dr. Camille Coley, Assistant Vice President of Research, offered the keynote address, which highlighted the university's current research agenda and the importance of the role of research at the FAU schools within this broader context.

The mixer program resulted from a broad consultation process that sought to identify school and college faculty's research interests.

This led to the development of 13 roundtable topics:

- Parental Involvement: Its impact on student readiness for learning
- Exceptional Student Education (RTI)
- Social and Emotional Education
- Project-based Learning
- Arts Integration
- Higher- order Thinking
- Literacy
- Diversity & Multicultural Education
- Research Methods
- Technology
- Academic Service-learning
- Health & Nutrition
- Green Schools

Roundtable Collage (Photos by to Aaron Gilbert)

The dynamics of the afternoon's session consisted of a rotation of roundtables facilitated by university and school faculty. Participants were provided the opportunity to sign up online for four of these. The facilitators were charged with presenting a brief overview of their current research and then to invite participants to share their own research interests with the intention of establishing collaborative projects among faculty across schools and colleges, and developing a shared online research database, currently under construction.

Feedback on the mixer was elicited through an online survey. This brought back comments that highlighted the enthusiasm and interested generated by an opportunity to engage in conversations of this nature, and requested that the committee increase its support for faculty through training in research methods, identifying funding sources and grant writing, and preparation of effective proposals for IRB approval. A research training day addressing these interests is under development for Slattery, Henderson, and Palm Pointe for August 2009.

CURRENT RESEARCH

**Karen Slattery Educational Research Center for Child Development**

Palm Pointe Educational Research School - Tradition

Palm Pointe Educational Research School @ Tradition has formed their first Research Committee. They have established their protocol for educators at Palm Pointe who wish to engage in classroom research. Plans have been made for teacher education to be conducted throughout 2009 – 2010. This will include courses in Action Research, IRB Training, CITI Training, and networking via roundtable sessions in house as well as Research Mixers with educators from FAU, Pine Jog, Henderson, and Slattery Research Center.

Gaggle.net – Use of Student E-mail, Blogs, and Discussion Boards

Investigator: Cindy Harrison

Purpose: The current research is designed to investigate how seventh grade Reading students use of blogs, e-mail, electronic homework drop boxes, and online message boards affect motivation and critical thinking skills in the classroom. Students will convey personal responses and opinions about a text reading through blogging, online and classroom discussions, foster language skills, develop critical thinking skills, recognize differing viewpoints and use the compare and contrast technique to analyze varying opinions, and work cooperatively.
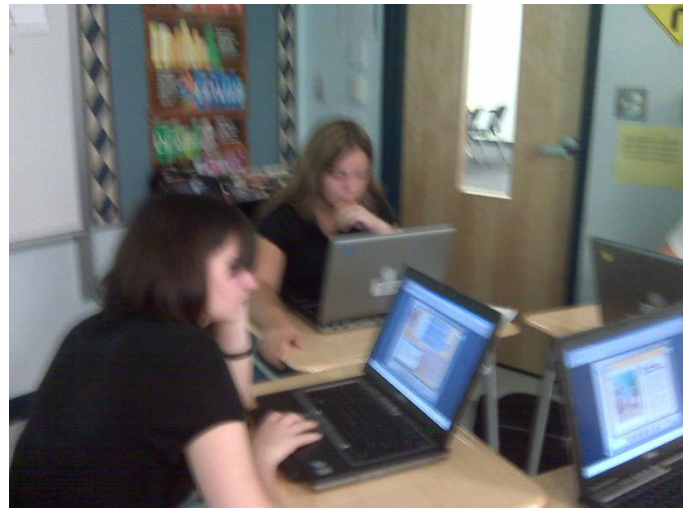
Using Gaggle.net with students

The Effects of Podcasting on Student Engagement

Investigator: Hillary Cruz

Purpose: The current research will study how the use of podcasts (digital audio files in an MP3 format made available for download on the Internet) in a 7th grade World Geography classroom affect students' motivation to participate in online discussions. This study will give further insight into use of technology in the classroom, specifically podcasting, the relationship between the use of podcasting, and student motivation/participation in the classroom will be observed and analyzed.

Podcasting as a valuable tool for student engagement

The Investigation of Students' Ability to Identify and Restate Factual Text

Investigator: Laurie Boyer

Purpose: The current research will study how third grade students' ability to identify and restate factual text be impacted by using a summarizing teaching method. I began this inquiry after realizing my students were unable to clearly understand the information in a passage and then put it into their own words. They tend to look up and/or read information and then copy it exactly as it is written regardless of whether it makes sense or not. Summarizing is a high yield strategy which when implemented and applied properly can increase student achievement.

The Investigation of Students' Ability to Identify and Retell Fiction

Investigator: Kathleen Melrose

Purpose: The current research will investigate how third grade students' ability to identify and retell fictional text, including character, setting, plot, problem and solution, be impacted by using a summarizing teaching method. I began this inquiry after realizing a skill weakness in my students. I found that my students did not understand the purpose of a summary and instead of translating the information into a synthesized form they simply copied information from the text. Summarizing is an essential skill for students to acquire and has been identified as an instructional strategy that

has a high probability of enhancing student achievement.

Computer-Based Testing vs. Paper and Pencil Testing

Investigator: Heather Davis

Purpose: The current research will study how will Computer-Based Testing vs. Paper and Pencil Testing for Reading Comprehension affect 2nd grade student's motivation and assessment score. With the growing use of technology, more assessments are beginning to be given on the computer rather than the old fashion way, with paper and pencil. Technology has made the distribution of reading assessments much more convenient. Tests are scored and saved in a portfolio with only a click of a button. Traditionally, students have taken Reading assessments with paper and pencil. This research will consider how motivation and assessment scores may differ by method of assessment.

Student Success Skills

Investigator: Dr. Greg Brigman / Laura Taylor

Purpose: This study will investigate the relationship between student success skills/parenting success skills and how it impacts student behavior and student achievement. This program will investigate the necessary skills needed for success. Students will develop skills such as academic, social, and self-management throughout the six week program.

An Analysis of the Reading Skills of K-8 Grade Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Investigator: Dr. Jack Scott

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to assess the level of reading skills in elementary students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Students will take reading tests which measure comprehension and fluency. The benefits of this research are to allow the teacher and parent to gain a greater knowledge of the students reading ability which will allow for more direct teaching in specific need area.

A. D. Henderson University School/FAU High School

Does Altered Presentation Style Impact Students with Auditory Processing Dysfunction?

Terry L. Clark

Purpose: To find the correlation between changes in a teacher's presentation and the behavior and response accuracy in students with auditory processing difficulties.

Method: Subjects included seven first graders and two third graders identified with three subtypes of auditory processing disorder (APD). Data was taken both in the classrooms and the speech-language resource room.
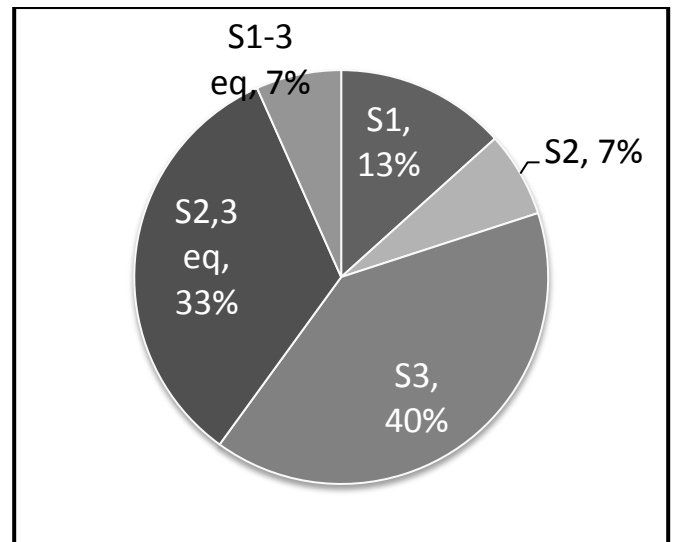
Results: The most effective strategy impacting student behaviors was the use of chunking with word stress. Regarding accuracy of response, word stress was most effective in the resource room; however, word stress alone or chunking alone were equally effective in the classroom. Regarding APD subtypes, there were minimal differences in "most effective" strategy. For children with language processing difficulties and/or language and phonemic processing deficits, chunking with word emphasis and chunking alone were more effective than word stress alone. For students exhibiting phonemic awareness and memory difficulties chunking with word stress helped the most.

Conclusions: For children exhibiting auditory processing dysfunction, a teacher's use of any of the three strategies of presentation elicited a better overall average than in the baseline (no strategy). Among APD subtypes; there was little difference regarding which of the three strategies was best. However, knowing which type of prosody to use when presenting lessons was vital for involvement in the learning process; and, knowing which presentation style would increase a student's ability to respond with accuracy was also of benefit from both teachers' and students' perspectives.
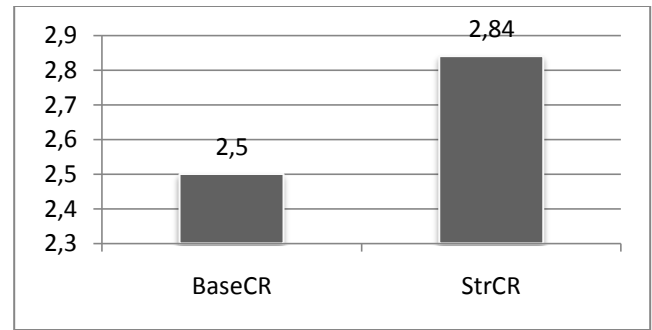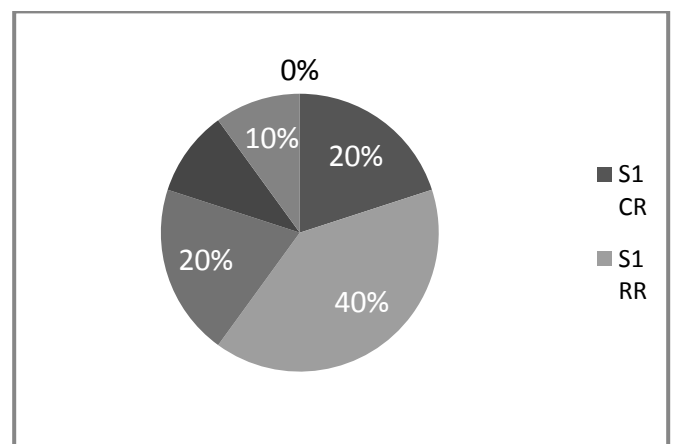

Source: Clark, T. (2008). Action Research; CR = Classroom

Figure 18. "Mean response accuracy baselines compared with strategies in the classroom", p. 24.

Source: Clark, T. (2008). Action Research; S-1, S-2, S-3 = Strategies 1, 2, 3

Figure 19. "The most effective strategy impacting behaviors", p. 26.

Source: Clark, T. (2008). Action Research; S-1, S-2, S-3 = Strategies 1, 2, 3; RR = Resource Room; CR = Classroom

Figure 20. "The most effective strategy impacting accurate response", p. 27.

Developments

FAUS – COE Research Committee Research Report (2005 – 09)

This comprehensive report offers a summary of research projects conducted at the FAU Schools over the past 5 years. Available at
http://www.adhus.fau.edu/meetings/FAUSCOEResearch/Default.htm

FAUS-COE Research Training Day
Date: August 17, 2009
Venue: Pine Jog Environmental Center

Draft Program

- The Research Process
- Grant Writing and Funding Sources
- IRB/CITI Training
- Oral language in ages 6-10
- Research methods: active research (design and methods); using data
- How school leadership influences a culture of research
- 21st century school buildings and classrooms
- Controversial topics while teaching multicultural novels

Longitudinal Study of the FAU High School, 2004-2009
Principal Investigators: Dianne Wright and Ira Bogotch

The FAU High School is a unique innovative model for a dual enrollment high school. It began in 2004 and continues in operation today. During this period, the principal investigators have collected archival data supplemented with interview and survey data from students, parents, staff, FAU faculty, and FAU administrators. To date, the research has resulted in one national publication, *High School: Erasing Borders* in the *Journal of College Admissions,* 193 p18-24, fall 2006.

Palm Pointe Educational Research K-8 Participates in St. Lucie County School District Inaugural Teacher Inquiry Showcase

On May 28, 2009, Palm Pointe teachers participated in the District's first research showcase. Teachers presented classroom research in action during two roundtable sessions. Teachers first presented the research they conducted and then participated in lively question and answer sessions. The first session consisted of administrators from all over St. Lucie County. Then, teachers from around the county joined everyone for the second session.
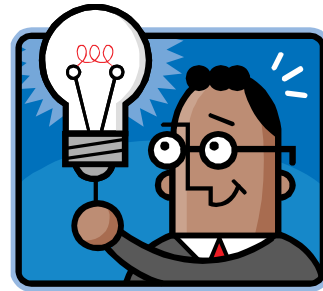
Presenters included :
Laurie Boyer and Kathleen Melrose presented the details of using Marzano Teaching Strategies and how it helped third graders better understand what they are reading, how to identify key information in fiction and nonfiction material, and then create summaries that helps them retain and retell the information.

and the effects of each on student motivation and achievement.
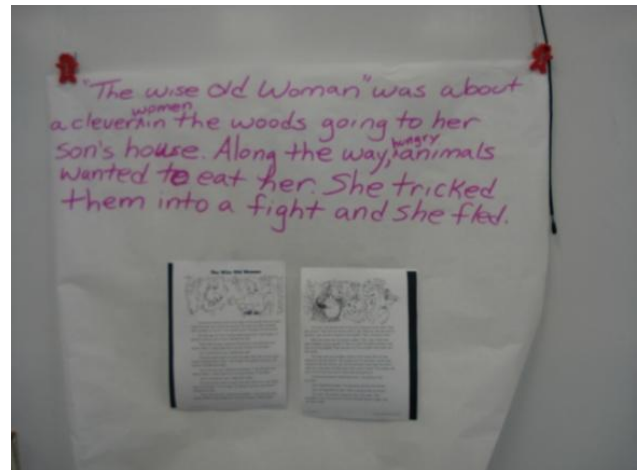
Hillary Cruz presented how she used Podcasting in her 7th grade World Geography class. She relayed the details behind what she found in the relationship between the use of podcasting and student motivation/participation in the classroom, and overall effects on student achievement where students listened to weekly podcasts and responded.

Cindy Harrison presented her use of an online learning environment titled Gaggle.net in her 7th Grade Reading class. She presented how students became active learners in their Reading class with the use of blogs, e-mail, electronic homework drop boxes, and online message boards. She conveyed how the program aided students in further development of language skills, critical thinking skills, and technology skills.

Heather Davis presented her study of analyzing computer vs. paper testing in her 2nd grade Reading class. She discussed the different assessment methods