

The NERA Researcher

Inside this issue

The President's Message: Fairness!



Darlene Perner

This is my last President's Message and I have a number of messages!

1) I am amazed at how much work has been done behind the scenes. To start I want to thank the NERA Board of Directors, the NERA members in appointed positions including our newsletter editors, Maureen Ewing and Bo Bashkov, who produce an excellent newsletter every time, the NERA committee chairs and committee members, and the NERA members who contribute to the conference as reviewers, chairs and discussants. Your strong leadership and commitment make NERA a great organization! I also want to extend a special thank you to the conference co-chairs, Steven Holtzman and Jennifer Randall, for their exceptional work

in providing NERA members with an outstanding program. In planning the conference, they listened to NERA membership and, as a result, the workshops, invited sessions, keynote speakers, special events and entertainment are exceptional and sure to please everyone! Soon you will see in this issue and at the conference that Steven and Jennifer's teamwork and enthusiasm are inspiring!

2) Before I introduce the theme of this year's conference, I want to extend our appreciation to our kind and generous sponsors. They help to support our excellent invited speakers and make it possible to keep costs down for our members. THANK YOU SPONSORS!

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The NERA Researcher

The NERA Researcher is the official newsletter for members of the Northeastern Educational Research Association.

Message from the Editors

Greetings NERA Members! As the summer comes to a close and we approach the fall, we hope you are thinking about your plans for the 44th annual conference! This issue provides you with important information to help you get ready for the conference.

You will find details on how to register for the conference and reserve a hotel room as well as the preliminary program that showcases the hard work our program co-chairs, Steven Holtzman and Jennifer Randall, have put in to ensure yet another successful conference. Also don't miss Felice Billups' article on focus groups and Jennifer Kobrin's article on learning progressions.

Graduate students, be sure to check out the Graduate Lounge (p. 18) and read about the great sessions the Graduate Student Issues Committee have put together for this year's conference. See you in October!

Maureen & Bo
The Editors

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(Continued from page 1)

3) The theme of the conference is FAIRNESS! Everyday this concept permeates what we do in education and in society. As I write this article, I am in awe of the recent court case that struck down Section Three of the Defense of Marriage Act not only because of the outcome but also because of Justice Kennedy's sensitivity to children and families who have been affected by this law. Simply, the recent court decision is about fairness and promoting equity and dignity! This has taken many, many years to achieve; we are progressing! The same promotion of equity and dignity has been going on for many years in special education. And, although there have been many historical achievements, we still have a long way to go! For example, there continues to be great racial disparity in the proportional representation of students receiving special education and students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than students without disabilities. As well, there is a lack of dignity and respect given to persons with disabilities as demonstrated in language usage, and in the depiction of individuals, particularly in the media and, now, in the accountability and funding changes recently written in legislation.

On July 19th, the U. S. House of Representatives passed the Student Success Act (HR 5), the rewrite of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), which is the largest special educational organization, has indicated their concern over this legislation, particularly as it relates to the lowering of accountability for students with disabilities, and the lessening of the federal government's role for the education of students with disabilities. As Congressman George Miller stated, "It [HR-5] lets down students with disabilities by allowing schools to lower their standards for educating these children" (<http://www.policyinsider.org/2013/07/house-passes-cec-opposed-esea-rewrite-contains-major-accountability-loopholes-for-students-with-disabilities.html>). Is it fair to lower standards and have less accountability for some students, particularly those with disabilities? I expect that this legislation will continue to go through changes as it moves through the Senate. In the meantime, we must continually ask what is fair in education and what preserves equity and dignity of all our students, no matter what their similarities or differences are. We must be passionate and advocate for the rights of children.

The 2013 NERA conference offers that challenge! We look forward to the research and the discourse related to FAIRNESS!

My time and space are up so do review the conference details in this issue. And please attend the conference, the annual meeting, and all the social events. Also, share in our enthusiasm! I look forward to meeting you at this year's conference.

Respectfully,
Darlene



Membership Update

Reminder: The 2013 NERA Membership Committee is working hard to increase NERA membership and conference attendance this year. We ask each of you, as NERA members, to do your part by personally inviting two friends or colleagues to attend NERA this year as new members. The member who brings the most new members will win a small prize!

Member News

Nicholas Hartlep published the following three pieces:

Hartlep, N. D. (2013). *The model minority stereotype: Demystifying Asian American success*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Hartlep, N. D. (2013). *The model minority stereotype reader: Critical and challenging readings for the 21st century*. San Diego, CA: Cognella Publishing.

Hayes, C., & Hartlep, N. D. (Eds.). (2013). *Unhooking from whiteness: The key to dismantling racism in the United States*. New York, NY: Sense Publishing.

Jennifer Kobrin is now a Senior Research Scientist in the Center for College & Career Success, part of the Research and Innovation Network at Pearson. In her new role, she will lead research efforts related to the development and validation of learning progressions.

Su Liang recently published her article entitled *The Development of Teaching Expertise from an International Perspective* as a monograph in the 2013 issue of *The Montana Mathematics Enthusiast: Monograph Series in Mathematics Education*.

Sharon Koch published an article titled *Confidence Using Best Practices to Teach Writing: A Case Study of Community College Professors* in the *National Association for Developmental Education*. See: <http://www.nade.net/site/documents/publications/Digest/Fall%202012web.pdf>.

Betsy McCoach and **Bob Gable** published the third edition of their instrument development book. See: McCoach, D. B., Gable R. K., & Madura, J. P. (2013). *Instrument development in the affective domain*. New York: Springer.

Kathleen Roney (along with Richard Lipka) edited a new book entitled *Middle Grades Curriculum: Voices and Visions of the Self-Enhancing School*. See: <http://www.infoagepub.com/products/Middle-Grades-Curriculum>.



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44th Annual Conference October 23 – 25, 2013 Rocky Hill, CT

Conference Theme: ***Fairness!***

Hello NERA members! We hope you have enjoyed a productive summer and are looking forward to a new academic year. We are especially excited about this year's NERA Conference in October.

First, we want to thank NERA members for a strong response to both the call for proposals and the call for volunteers. We received proposals for 131 individual papers, 29 individual paper discussions for early research, 14 individual posters, 18 theme-based symposia, and 3 working group sessions. Each proposal was reviewed by at least two of our 92 volunteer reviewers. It is this level of commitment and enthusiasm from so many NERA members that will ultimately lead to the success of the 2013 meeting.

In this issue you will find a listing of highlights planned for the 2013 conference. The conference will begin with pre-conference workshops on Wednesday at 10 AM with concurrent sessions starting at 1:30 PM. We will enjoy receptions on both Wednesday and Thursday evenings, including the addition of NERA's first ever *Work Fair, Play Fair Game Show* and *karaoke party* on Thursday. The final program will be available on the NERA website at the end of August.

We urge all NERA members to visit the NERA website today to register for the conference and make your hotel reservation at the Hartford Sheraton South Hotel in Rocky Hill. As always, we can answer any questions about the conference at NERA2013@gmail.com.

See you in October!

Steven Holtzman

Jennifer Randall

NERA 2013 Conference Co-Chairs

Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award

Educators are encouraged to submit a 15-20 page original research paper on any educational issue of interest for the Lorne H. Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award. The paper must be accepted for and presented at the NERA 2013 conference. There may be single or multiple authors. The submission will be peer reviewed and rated on a thirty point rubric. The winner(s) will be notified by both email and post in the beginning of January. The author of the winning distinguished paper will receive a stipend of \$500 and present at the American Educational Research Association conference in Philadelphia, April 3-7, 2014. Papers may be submitted in blind and authored copies via email after the NERA Conference in October to Claire Mastromonaco at mastrodance@aol.com.

The 2013 winner of the Woollatt Distinguished Paper Award was Nina Kositsky of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Her paper entitled, *Teachers, technology and digital natives: Building a reading culture in a secondary school* discusses the useful benefits of electronic books for high school students. Ms. Kositsky's research showed that English language learners and students with learning disabilities gained significantly with the speech-enabled Kindle. She concluded that "student-driven, on-demand book acquisition, almost instantaneous access to the desired content, and the availability of eReaders allow [students] to capitalize on the momentum opportunity to reinforce a student's intrinsic interest in reading."

The Lorne H. Woollatt Award was renamed in 1990 to honor this New York educator who published, *The evolution of state-local governmental relationships in New York State (Staff study of the fiscal policy for public education in New York State)* in 1948. Woollatt was an active member of NERA.

Registering for the 2013 Conference

To pay your membership dues and register for the conference:

- Go to the NERA website: <https://www.nera-education.org>.
- You may complete the online membership and conference registration form and submit payment using PayPal. If you prefer, you may download a membership and registration form, print it, complete it, and mail it along with a check to the address indicated. **To register for the conference, you must also become a member, or renew your membership if already a member.**
- If you are already a paid member for the current year (October 15, 2013-October 14, 2014), you can click "Login" on the right side of the page and log in using your primary email address. If you have forgotten your password, you can have it sent to your primary email address by clicking on "Email me my password". Once you have logged in, if you are a current member you should see a message thanking you for your support. You can then continue on to "Annual Conference/Event Registration" and either print a downloadable form or fill out the electronic form and pay via PayPal (preferred).
- If you are not a current member, please click on the "Join NERA/New Member" link on the right side of the Annual Conference page. This will allow you to sign up and pay for both membership and conference registration. Both forms can be downloaded and printed and sent with payment, or they can be filled out electronically and paid for using PayPal (preferred).
- Please note that to receive the regular registration rate, you must register for the conference by October 1st! After this date, a late fee will be added to the regular rates. As a reminder, the following are the registration fees for this year:

2013 Conference Registration Fees - On or Before October 1st (after October 1st):

- Professional member - \$85.00 (\$100)
- Full-time student - \$30.00 (\$40)
- Retired member - \$20.00 (\$20)

Membership Dues (October 15, 2013 - October 14, 2014)

- Professional members - \$40.00
- Full-time student members - \$15.00
- Retired members - \$15.00

Reserving Your Room and Meals at the Sheraton Hartford South Hotel

NERA has negotiated affordable room rates for conference attendees. To receive these special conference rates, please call Toll Free # 855-277-5708 between 9am – 5pm (EST) Monday – Friday. If you are calling off hours, please leave your name and phone number, and Hotel Contact will call you back; or send an email to Karen.bakowski@sheratonhartfordsouth.com to make your guestroom reservations. All reservations must be made by Tuesday October 1, 2013. Please mention that you are attending the NERA Conference when you call or e-mail the hotel.

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Rates

As with previous years, each night's stay at the hotel during the conference includes three full meals. Specifically, each NERA hotel guest receives dinner on the night of their stay and breakfast and lunch on the following day. That means if you reserve a hotel room for Wednesday and Thursday night all of your meals will be covered from Wednesday dinner to Friday Lunch.

- All guest room rates are quoted exclusive of applicable state and local taxes, currently 15%.

Pre-conference stay (Tues. Oct 22nd)

NERA attendees can stay at the hotel the night before the conference for a reduced rate as well. The Tuesday night conference rate does not include any meals (i.e., Tuesday dinner and Wednesday breakfast or lunch).

| | Single | Double | Triple | Quad |
|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Tue, Oct 22, 2013 | \$131.00 | \$131.00 | \$131.00 | \$131.00 |

Conference stays (Wed. Oct. 23 and Thurs. Oct. 24):

Occupancy rate is based on number of guests per room and per person price includes the meals as indicated under the rates.

| | Single | Double | Triple | Quad |
|---------------------|----------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Wed, Oct 23, 2013 | \$222.00 | \$337.00 (\$168.50 PP) | \$447.00 (\$149.00 PP) | \$557.00 (\$139.25 PP) |
| Thurs, Oct 24, 2013 | \$222.00 | \$337.00 (\$168.50 PP) | \$447.00 (\$149.00 PP) | \$557.00 (\$139.25 PP) |

For doubles, triples and quads:

Only one person should call and make room reservation and provide all of the roommate's names under the same reservation, so that the hotel will be able to charge the correct amount and furnish individual bills for reimbursement purposes.

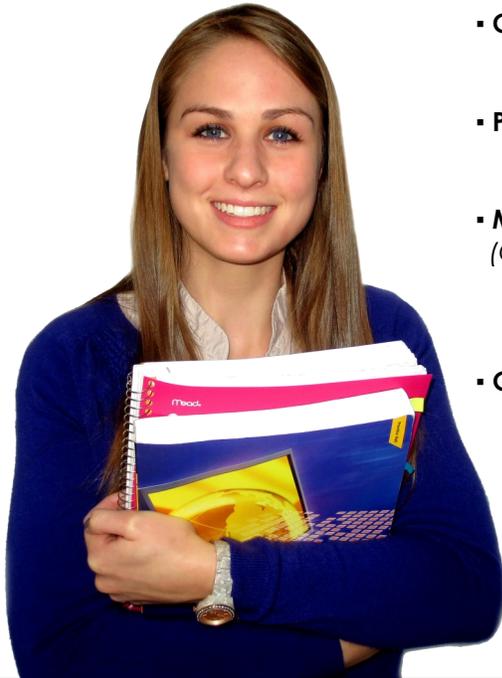
Graduate student "Quad room"

NERA continues to be an affordable choice for students. The Sheraton Hartford South Hotel is offering a special Graduate Student quad rate of \$557, which includes meals and accommodations for four students per night, and comes to about \$139.25 per student per night. This special rate is available for students ONLY. Graduate students are responsible for finding their roommates. One student will have to use a credit card to reserve the room for the quad. Each graduate student must also register for the conference individually. (Conference registration requires a separate online form available through the NERA website.)

If you are from James Madison University, please do not reserve your room directly with the Sheraton. Please contact [Andee Henriques](#) at your university in order to coordinate room reservations.



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JWU alum **KARIN EDWARDS**

has worked at public and private two- and four-year institutions for the majority of her career in education.

Edwards has served in several leadership positions including nine years as senior student affairs administrator and nine years as a senior-level administrator outside of student affairs.

She currently serves as the dean of student development at Three Rivers Community College in Norwich, Conn.

44th Annual Conference Preliminary Program

Please note that the following represents a tentative outline of some of the highlights of the 2013 program. The conference program, which will be available online, will have final dates and times.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23RD

10:00 AM – 12:30 PM: Pre-Conference Workshop A
(J. Weeks, ETS), *Psychometrics in R*

10:00 AM – 12:30 PM: Pre-Conference Workshop B
(B. Wilson & C. Starkey, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania), *Strategies for Differentiating Instruction in Higher Education Classrooms*

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM: Invited Session
(H. Marx, Southern Connecticut State University; C. Terwilliger, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania; B. Garii, SUNY Oswego; D. Stoloff, Eastern Connecticut State University; D. Moss, University of Connecticut), *International Experiences in Higher Education*

1:30 PM – 4:45 PM: In-Conference Workshop
(F. Billups, Johnson & Wales University), *Taking the Mystery Out of Qualitative Data Analysis*

3:15 PM – 4:45 PM: Invited Session
(C. Morrison, National Board of Medical Examiners; A. Jones, American Board of Surgery; J. Rubright, American Institute of CPAs; L. Grosso, American Board of Internal Medicine), *Fairness in Licensure & Certification Testing: Thoughts on Test Development, Standard Setting, & Score Use*

5:45 PM – 6:45 PM: Keynote Address
Charlotte Danielson
Getting Teacher Evaluation Right in a High Stakes Environment

6:45 PM – 7:45 PM: Dinner

8:00 PM – 10:00 PM: NERA Welcome Reception

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24TH

8:15 AM – 11:30 AM: In-Conference Workshop
(L. Keller & J. Rios, University of Massachusetts), *Generalizability Theory and Applications*

8:15 AM – 9:45 AM: Invited Panel
(M. Ware, Commonwealth Academy; K. Mayfield, University of Massachusetts; B. Juarez, University of Massachusetts; M. Gonzalez, University of Massachusetts), *Questioning the Beauty of Fairness*

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM: Invited Panel
(M. Krezmien, University of Massachusetts; J. Travers, University of Massachusetts; M. Faulkner-Bond, University of Massachusetts; M. Peters, University of Massachusetts), Invited Session: *Apartheid in public and higher education: Issues, policy, and research affecting historically marginalized students (in public and higher education)*

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24TH (Cont.)

10:00 AM – 11:30 AM: GSIC Invited Session
(S. Sireci, University of Massachusetts; D. Bandalos, James Madison University; D. Moss, University of Connecticut), *Navigating the Publication Process*

11:45 AM – 12:45 AM: Keynote Fairness Panel
(T. Patelis, College Board; K. Huff, USNY Regents Research Fund; D. Moss, University of Connecticut; B. Helms, Community Training and Assistance Center of Boston; T. Levine, University of Connecticut)

2:00 PM – 5:15 PM: In-Conference Workshop
(D. Bandalos & J. Gerstner, James Madison University), *SEM Methods for Assessing Measurement Invariance*

2:00 PM – 3:30 PM: In-Conference Workshop
(R. Woodland, University of Massachusetts), *Social Network Analysis & the Diffusion of Innovation in K-12 Education*

3:45 PM – 5:15 PM: Invited Panel
(R. Gable, Johnson & Wales University; D. Alba, Calcutt Middle School), *School Safety*

5:15 PM – 6:45 PM: GSIC Sponsored Panel
(J. Horst, James Madison University; K. Huff, USNY Regents Research Fund; T. Patelis, College Board; J. Young, ETS), *Where is the Field Going & How Do I Get There*

7:45 PM – 8:30 PM: Presidential Address
Darlene Perner, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania

8:30 PM – 11:00 PM: Presidential Reception

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25TH

8:00 AM – 9:15 AM: NERA Business Meeting – all members are encouraged to attend

9:15 AM – 10:45 AM: In-Conference Workshop
(J. Young, ETS; B. Nordtveit, University of Massachusetts), *Scientific Peer Review*

9:15 AM – 10:45 AM: Invited Session
(J. Steinberg, ETS; L. Keller, University of Massachusetts; R. Courtney, ETS; D. Leusner, ETS; D. Pastor, James Madison University), *Promoting Fairness Throughout the Entire Research Process*

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM: Poster Session

12:00 – 1:00 PM: Closing Remarks

Focus Group Research: What Makes a Focus Group...a Focus Group?

Felice D. Billups, Ed. D.
Johnson & Wales University

Focus group research is an increasingly popular qualitative data collection strategy, and used effectively by many educational researchers. One of the common pitfalls, however, is that many novice researchers (and even some experienced ones!) may be unclear about what constitutes a focus group. There are several defining characteristics that distinguish a true focus group from other types of group interactions. As Krueger and Casey (2009) note, a focus group is “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 2).

Origins and Purposes

Focus group interviews, long accepted as a data collection strategy in social science research, originally surfaced in the 1940s as a method to test the public’s response to World War II propaganda (Barbour, 2007). After years of residing in business and marketing domains, focus groups have gained increasing acceptance and popularity in educational research. As a qualitative research method, focus groups remain an ideal strategy for obtaining in-depth feedback regarding participants’ attitudes, opinions, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors (Barbour &Kitzinger, 1999; Fern, 2001; Liamputtong, 2011; Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2002; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). As Morgan (1997) notes, focus groups are useful when it comes to discovering not only *what* participants think, but *why* they think as they do.

Focus groups are *not* intended as a way to consolidate individual interviews into a single, more efficient interview (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). They differ from groups whose purpose is otherwise, such as therapy (patient-centered), presentations or debates (group-centered), or meetings/decision-making (leader-centered). The interaction of this specialized group discussion helps participants further understand the topic of interest, yielding information not otherwise available in other data collection strategies. Unlike other types of groups, focus groups capitalize on the nuances, ideas, and individual perceptions that surface as a result of a moderator-guided discussion.

Applications of Focus Groups

Although generally viewed as a self-contained explor-

atory, qualitative data collection strategy (Pizam, 1994), focus groups often supplement other data collection methods such as survey questionnaires, observations, and interviews (Morgan, 1997). Focus group interviews can be integrated into a research design for three different applications: 1) exploratory/emergent designs, used when little is known about a topic or issue, and when focus groups can uncover the context, language, ideas, and expectations in more detail; 2) self-contained designs, used when focus group results can provide the sole source for data collection, viewed as a phenomenological strategy to explore personal narratives, experiences, and shared ‘lived experiences’; and, 3) supplemental designs, used when focus group results inform instrument design or serve as triangulation devices in mixed methods research designs. In this role, focus groups probe findings, corroborate similarities or differences, and/or reveal bias or inconsistencies in the preceding or subsequent findings (Pizam, 1994).

Focus Group Features

In general, focus groups comprise several distinct features. Small in size, they can range from 6-12 participants; participants are purposefully selected, based on their commonalities, and often include participants who comprise pre-existing groups. The discussion is focused, with a specific sequence of questioning, beginning with icebreaker and opening questions, followed by transition and key content questions, and concluding with a debriefing question. Sessions typically last between 60-90 minutes, and are structured in their design, particularly seeking consistent questioning across multiple groups.

As Morgan (1997) stresses, focus groups are collaborative interviews designed to capitalize on the group’s evolving interaction. In this sense, the focus group differs from one-on-one interviewing in that each group generates its own outcomes and responses by virtue of ‘being together’. Yet, while the synergy of the group experience is ideal for cultivating rich and descriptive information about the topic under exploration, the process of designing and conducting these group interviews can also be challenging, especially for the beginning researcher.

Types of Focus Groups

A wide variety of focus group types are available to the educational researcher. The most common types in-

clude the single purpose type, where there is a sole topic to be explored and the group(s) explores only that topic with a single facilitator. Other types that may be useful, given the research objectives, include the dual moderator group (one moderator runs the session, the other ensures that all content is covered), the dueling moderator group (two moderators deliberately take different sides of an issue to generate debate among participants), comparison groups (multiple groups intentionally designed for comparison of findings), a double layer design (similar to stratified sampling for quantitative designs, where different levels of criteria are established for participant selection), and online or virtual focus groups (an increasingly common design whereby a moderator directs discussion via online connections). Depending on your research questions and your topic, one of these focus group types is ideally suited for your project (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999).

Pros and Cons

There are benefits and challenges associated with focus group research. Focus groups allow for collective synergy to create and direct responses among participants; the give and take of the conversation brings issues to the surface resulting from the group's interactions. This process allows for extensive sharing, comparing and elaboration among participants, offering the researcher an excellent and rich source of primary data. Conversely, focus groups may not provide an opportunity for sufficient depth of emotional responses, and may sometimes yield only superficial results on a given topic. In this way, a researcher must be careful to determine if a topic is appropriate for focus group designs, especially if a topic is sensitive in nature and may not provide a safe environment for participants to fully or openly disclose their feelings on a subject. Additionally, some groups suffer from dominant or disruptive personalities overtaking the conversation, in which case the moderator must take care to carefully manage the discussion. Finally, focus group results are not intended for generalizability and are often more suited to pairing with other data collection strategies.

Additional Resources

While the intention of this brief overview is to help the reader better understand the defining qualities of focus group research, the myriad steps in designing and implementing these sessions requires careful planning. Several excellent texts exist on the subject of focus group research, including Krueger and Casey's most recent edition of *Focus Groups* (2009), and Barbour's (2007) *Doing Focus Groups*. The following reference list includes additional resources,

ranging from comprehensive texts (Liamputtong, 2011; Morgan & Krueger, 1998) to specialized handbooks (Fern, 2001; Vaughn, Schumm, & Singabub, 1996).

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The Promise of Learning Progressions for College and Career Readiness Assessment

Jennifer Kobrin Ed. D.
Pearson Center for College & Career Success

Learning progressions (also sometimes called learning trajectories, or progress maps), are “descriptions of the successively more sophisticated ways of thinking about a topic that can follow one another as children learn about and investigate a topic over a broad span of time” (National Research Council, 2007, p. 205). Learning progressions are developed based on research in cognitive and learning science about how students acquire knowledge in a particular domain. So, learning is not seen as a series of discrete events, but as a progression or trajectory with clear connections between levels. Learning progressions offer a strong basis for describing the interim goals that students should meet if they are to reach the Common Core standards and other college- and career-readiness standards. If the standards are the ultimate destination, learning progressions describe the pathways that students take to reach that destination.

Learning progressions focus on qualitatively different ways of thinking about a topic, as opposed to a dichotomous view where a student is either correct or incorrect. They pay great attention not only to correct ideas, but also to students’ misconceptions that may be preventing them from developing more sophisticated knowledge of a topic. Another key point is that although learning progressions focus on how students’ knowledge actually develops, this learning is not developmentally inevitable. Instruction is needed to move students to higher levels.

It is this last point that gives learning progressions great promise for helping teachers understand the most common paths that students take to attain knowledge and skills. Assessments and curricula can be explicitly linked to learning progressions so that teachers will know where their students are located on the pathways, and if some students are off-track for attaining standards. If a teacher knows exactly what their students are missing, and why they are not progressing, that teacher can provide timely and focused intervention to get the student back on track. This is what Furtak and Iverson (2013) describe as assessments that are “instructionally actionable.” That is, these assessments can be designed to: elicit specific information about what students know; provide information that easily supports teachers in making inferences about what students know; and provide that information in a timely manner such that teachers are able to act upon the information to help students advance in their learning (p. 2).

In 2008 and 2009, the Center on Continuous Instructional Improvement (CCII), part of The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), convened two working groups of scholars with experience in research and development of learning progressions in science and learning trajectories in mathematics. Both panels met to review the current status of thinking about the concept of learning progressions/learning trajectories, to assess their potential usefulness for instructional improvement, and to recommend areas for future work and development (CPRE, 2011, p. 5). Among the key

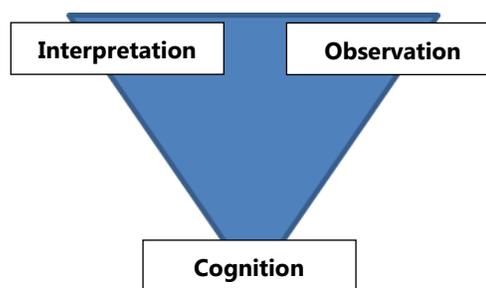
areas for future work:

- new research and development to fill critical knowledge gaps;
- consolidation of existing learning progressions;
- integration and connection of existing learning progressions;
- studies on students from different cultural backgrounds and initial skill levels;
- translation of learning progressions into usable tools for teachers;
- validation of existing learning progressions in classroom settings;
- development of assessment tools based on learning progressions; and,
- more collaboration among researchers, assessment experts, cognitive scientists, curriculum and assessment developers, and classroom teachers.

I will touch on just a few of these areas in the remainder of this article.

Validation of Learning Progressions

The validation of learning progressions requires an iterative approach. Researchers and scholars doing work with learning progressions commonly refer to the “assessment triangle” described in the seminal report by the National Research Council, *Knowing What Students Know* (NRC, 2001) and shown in the figure below. The triangle’s vertices are cognition, observation, and interpretation. *Cognition* is a theory of what students know and how they develop competence in a subject. This is represented by the learning progression. *Observation* consists of the tasks or assessments used to collect evidence about student performance on the learning progression. *Interpretation* is the method for drawing inferences from those observations, usually through the use of statistical modeling.



National Research Council's Assessment Triangle (NRC, 2001)

(Continued on page 14)

The validation of a learning progression involves interplay between the three elements of the triangle. The assessment (observation) is designed based on the learning progression (cognition). The data from the assessment is subjected to rational examination and the application of statistical models to see whether patterns of performance are consistent with the learning progression (interpretation). Lack of fit does not in itself invalidate the assessment, but indicates the need to revisit both the learning progression and the assessment to investigate where adjustments are needed. Thus, data from the assessments are used to revise both the learning progression and assessments, and the cycle continues until it converges.

Developing Assessments Linked to Learning Progressions and Making Inferences from Those Assessments

There are several different types of assessment tasks that may be linked to a learning progression. The key goal in assessment development is to create items or tasks that do not simply evaluate whether students have mastered a particular concept, but that elicit the nature of students' thinking (i.e., their level of sophistication and misconceptions) about that concept, so that their performance can be mapped to a level of the learning progression.

Ordered multiple-choice items (OMC, Briggs, Alonzo, Schwab, & Wilson, 2006; Briggs & Alonzo, 2009) are a type of assessment where each of the possible answer choices is linked to a level in a learning progression. Another possible assessment approach is a more informal approach that involves teachers' classroom-based or embedded assessments (i.e., assessments that are integrated into instructional materials and are part of day-to-day classroom activities). For example, Mohan, Chen, and Anderson (2009) developed open-ended assessment tasks to correspond to a learning progression on carbon cycles and developed exemplar workbooks based on the responses that represented the levels of the learning progression.

To draw appropriate inferences from an assessment, the statistical or psychometric model should be aligned with the theory underlying the learning progression (West et al., 2010). An appropriate model would provide information that differentiates adjacent levels of the learning progression in a consistent manner. It is important to select an appropriate psychometric model because a poorly chosen model might mask problems with the assessment items, the underlying learning trajectory, or both (Briggs & Alonzo, 2009).

Some learning progression assessments have been empirically validated using item response models. These models make it possible to draw probabilistic inferences about unobserved (i.e., latent) states of student understanding (Briggs & Alonzo, 2009). The attribute hierarchy method (AHM) has been studied as an alternative to IRT to model OMC items. AHM assumes that constructs of measurement are comprised of attributes that have an ordered, hierarchical relationship. Briggs and Alonzo (2009) and Briggs, Circi, McClarty, and Wang (2013) have demonstrated the utility of this approach, but more work needs to be done to establish whether this approach could be used on a large scale. Latent class analysis and Bayesian approaches have also been used in the context of learning progressions. These approaches carry the assumption that students belong to one of several theoretical latent classes that account for observed response patterns, and do not require assumptions about the existence of an underlying continuum like IRT approaches. Steedle and Shavelson (2009) and West et al. (2010) provide examples applying these approaches.

The Importance of Involving and Empowering Teachers

As the pilot testing and validation efforts for a learning progression are underway, efforts should focus on developing tools for teachers to understand where their students are on the learning progression and what they can do to move them to the next level. These tools would include student and classroom-level reports, and curriculum materials designed to move students from one level of the learning progression to the next. As described earlier, the goal will be to develop tools that provide information that is clear and "instructionally actionable" (Furtak & Iverson, 2013).

The CPRE (2011) emphasized that it is the knowledge of the education research and the learning progressions that will empower teachers, not just the data from the assessments. Thus, it is crucial that all research efforts related to learning progressions be focused on the goal of empowering teachers. One potential approach to involve and empower teachers is through action research. By engaging teachers in action research with the learning progressions in their own classrooms, they can gain valuable knowledge about how students learn and acquire knowledge in a particular domain, and how targeted assessments or instructional interventions can move students from their current level of knowledge to the ultimate standard of performance.

Pearson's [Center for College and Career Success](#) is planning a research agenda on learning progressions and we are currently assessing the current state of research and development in this area. The CPRE, as well as many others writing about learning progressions, agree that there should be more collaboration among the various stakeholders to advance the development of learning progressions and to provide tools for teachers to use these successfully in their classrooms. Thus, we are seeking collaborations with researchers and institutions who are interested in doing this work. If you are interested in more information about Pearson's research agenda on learning progressions or would like to discuss a potential collaboration, please contact me at Jennifer.kobrin@pearson.com.

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NERA Communications Committee Report

Jonathan Steinberg
Educational Testing Service

To begin this article, I am pleased to welcome our new committee member, Mary Taft, of American International College. I also wanted to provide an update on our progress with our committee objectives for this year. In efforts to better facilitate communications within the NERA membership, we now have an established protocol for getting messages out from our committee heads and board members. When you have a message you would like to get e-mailed out, the sender completes a short form for me to approve and then with the thanks of 2013 NERA conference co-chair Steven Holtzman and Jenny Bach at Palisades, we can get e-mail messages out usually within a day or two. This has been a very efficient process so far, especially during the recent 2013 conference proposal submission period.

Jeanne Horst and Mary Taft have helped compile a list of higher education organizations, state departments of education, state higher education councils, and other administrative organizations to whom we may want to contact as part of future outreach efforts. Jennifer Merriman of the College Board, who leads the Membership Committee, has also provided a list to us so that between our two committees we can work on expanding our network through a single list. This will also be beneficial for reaching out to those interested in submitting to or attending future NERA conferences who may not already be members.

We are still hoping to develop a tri-fold brochure showcasing our mission, our substantial graduate student body within our membership, some of our areas of research, and headliners from previous annual conferences. The current plan is to develop a few different designs, so that the NERA membership can help decide which design is most appealing and may be most effective in marketing and outreach efforts.

If you have any suggestions about how the Communications Committee can better serve you as NERA members, please feel free to contact me at jsteinberg@ets.org. I hope to see as many of you as possible in Rocky Hill this October!

Mentorship Program Update

Pamela Kaliski
The College Board

Ross Markle
Educational Testing Service

The application window to participate in the NERA Mentorship Program in 2013 as either a mentor or mentee has closed. We received many applications from mentors and mentees. Thanks to all mentors and mentees who signed up to participate in the 2013 NERA Mentorship Program. We will be notifying all mentors and mentees with their assignments in early September. We are very excited to implement this program this year, and are looking forward to this program being continued at NERA in future years.

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Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award 2012 Winner

The Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) would like to congratulate **Georgina Tsangaridou** from Southern Connecticut State University and her co-authors for winning the 2012 Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award. The paper abstract appears below and a copy of the full paper will be available on the NERA website. The GSIC would also like to recognize the runner up **Amanda Soto** from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The GSIC would also like to thank our 14 raters who volunteered their time and expertise to select our winner; their names will be featured on the GSIC page of the NERA website.

After last year's conference, papers were submitted for consideration by 8 graduate students representing 5 different institutions. We encourage all graduate students to submit their papers for this year's 2013 Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award. The deadline for submission will be within one week of the end of the 2013 NERA Conference. Start preparing your papers now!

2012 BEST PAPER BY A GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD WINNER

Title: Promoting a Humane and Democratic School in Cyprus: Principals' Reflections on Policy and Practice

Author: Georgina Tsangaridou, Southern Connecticut State University

Co-Author: William Diffley, Southern Connecticut State University

ABSTRACT:

This explanatory mixed methods study draws on the Stages of Concern (SOC) dimension of the Concern-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2006) to identify and explain principals' concerns during a curricular innovation. Twenty-eight principals from elementary schools in Cyprus completed the SOC questionnaire (George, Hall & Stiegelbauer, 2006) and 10 of them participated in follow-up interviews. Data revealed that the innovation remained a challenge for Cypriot principals as they expressed intense self, impact, and task concerns. The limited supportive resources, the multiple interpretations among key stakeholders, the practical discrepancies between theory and practice and the lack of a clear orientation in leadership practices were the main reasons for these concerns. Since teaching is also part of principals' duties, principals experienced an orientational dualism in their effort to lead in a culture of change, which caused confusion with respect to the interpretation of the innovation's objectives. This orientational dualism did not allow them to fully appreciate their potential to influence the innovation and created a gap between intended and implemented outcomes. The study makes recommendations for addressing principals' concerns. Recommendations apply to curriculum innovations in general as well as to Cyprus specifically.

Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award 2013

If you are the first author on a paper you present at NERA, please consider submitting your paper for the Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award. The recipient will be given a monetary award. If you want to be considered for the award, papers must be submitted by Monday, November 4th, so start preparing those papers now!

NERA 2013 Conference

The Graduate Student Issues Committee (GSIC) would like to encourage all graduate students to attend the 44th Annual NERA Conference in October. We have some great sessions planned for everyone! In addition to two sessions geared towards graduate students, we will once again be hosting the Graduate Student Social on Wednesday evening.

Session #1: Navigating the Publication Process

In this invited panel, individuals with a wide variety of experiences will provide advice on the publication process. Topics will include working with co-authors, submitting your work, and surviving the peer-review process. Publishing in journals and books will be discussed from the perspective of both an author and an editor/reviewer. At the end of the session, there will be time set aside for questions from the audience.

Panelists:

Deborah Bandalos, *James Madison University*
Robert Gable, *Johnson & Wales University*
David Moss, *University of Connecticut*
Stephen Sireci, *University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Session #2: Where is the Field Going and How Do I Get There?

As a student and young professional, you might be asking yourself, "Where is the field going and how do I get there?" In this invited panel, leaders from educational research, assessment, and academia will discuss how their respective fields are changing in regard to job qualifications, responsibilities, and recommended experiences. Panelists will also discuss advice for obtaining a job in their area and what students can do *now* to successfully break into these fields in the future. At the end of the session, time will be allotted for audience questions.

Panelists:

Jeanne Horst, *James Madison University*
Kristen Huff, *USNY Regents Research Fund*
Thanos Patelis, *The College Board*
John Young, *Educational Testing Service*

GSIC Call for New Members

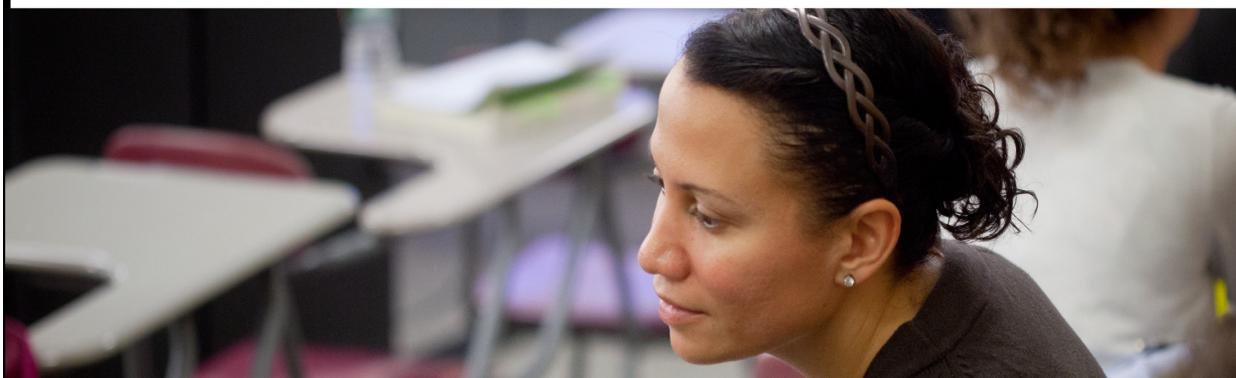
Serving on the GSIC is a great way to get involved with NERA and build relationships with other graduate students. Responsibilities include organizing the Best Paper by a Graduate Student Award and planning GSIC sponsored conference sessions. New members are selected annually after the Conference.

For more information on how to apply and get involved, please contact neragraduatestudents@gmail.com.

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